

**COLOMBIAN IMMIGRANTS IN VANCOUVER:
THE MAKING OF ETHNOGRAPHIC VIDEO,
"VANCOUVER: THE LONGEST JOURNEY OF
OUR LIVES"**

by

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ABSTRACT

COLOMBIAN IMMIGRANTS IN VANCOUVER:
THE MAKING AN ETHNOGRAPHIC VIDEO,
“VANCOUVER: THE LONGEST JOURNEY OF OUR LIVES”

The crisis in Colombia in the 1990s was so acute that many members of the middle and upper classes opted to leave their country rather than risk their families' safety. This project focused on upper-class Colombian families immigrating to Vancouver in 1999 when violence escalated: eight were interviewed in 2003-4 and two families spoke in detail on camera. I analyzed the effect of displacement on the structure of these families in terms of redistribution of power, changing gender roles, and adaptation to new lower status occupations. This research includes an ethnographic documentary, and this accompanying report discusses how it was made.

These Vancouver cases are atypical of most immigration to Canada since they are whole families and wealthy families. Though little critical attention has been paid to the socio-psychological aspects of migration, this study shows how it profoundly affects individuals within families.

DEDICATION

Para Felipe

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This thesis could not have been written without the input of many friends and mentors.

First of all, I am indebted to the generosity of all the members of the Fonnegra and Ponce de León families: their dedication and courage made this ethnographic study possible. I also want to thank all the Colombian families I interviewed in the course of this project for their trust in sharing their own migration experiences.

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CHAPTER I

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND

AN INTRODUCTION

Colombia is a country in crisis. From being a cradle of democracy in Latin America, it has degenerated into one of the most violent societies in the world. The prolonged internal guerrilla-fighting and, specially, the ever-increasing powerful drug cartel have reduced the nation's productivity and propelled a wave of unemployment and geographical displacement which affects some two million people. The crisis is of such magnitude that it also now impacts vast sectors of the middle and upper classes that, until quite recently and due to their privileged status, had been able to escape its effects. However, many of these privileged individuals (by birth and by education) have opted to leave their high positions in their country rather than risk their own and their families' safety.

Within the broad context of the subject of international migration, the purpose of this research is to do an in-depth study of two upper- class Colombian families that immigrated to Vancouver during 1999 to 2003 when violence had escalated in Colombia. In so doing, we will be able to analyze the effect that the displacement had

on the very structure of these families as shown by such markers as redistribution of power, changing roles, and adaptation or rejection of new mores. The dissemination of this research is by means of an ethnographical documentary video, a visual form mainly chosen because of its immediacy and effectiveness as a teaching tool. The two aforementioned families are in turn representative of a larger sample discussed in the body of the research but not included in the video.

It has been argued that host countries tend to discriminate against the highly skilled well-educated immigrants. The local population only relinquishes those low-prestige jobs that either involve hard labour or are poorly paid. The result is that many immigrants are overqualified for the jobs they hold. This discriminatory process is constant in nearly all immigration cases but is exacerbated when different races, languages, religions, or physical appearances are involved (Watenberg 2000). Given the fact that most Latin American international migration involves only one person, usually a young male in search of economic advancement, the Vancouver case is quite atypical since it involves whole families and, even more exceptional, families belonging to the upper-middle class (Franco 2002).

Furthermore, little critical attention has been paid to the psychological aspects of the migration movements from Latin America. The process of immigration not only transforms both the country of emigration and immigration it also affects individuals. This project uses qualitative research to investigate the give-and-take, the push-pull among the different family members during their long process of adapting to the new

Canadian reality. It is hoped that the project will contribute to a better understanding of the challenges present in the making of the Vancouver multicultural society and clarify the causes underlying the international Colombian exodus.

I. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As a preamble to the discussion of our *corpus*, I will provide a short overview of the theoretical and structural points informing our thesis. I will first discuss some fundamental concepts for the case study (migration, family and gender) as well as the key factor for the emigration of these families: violence in Colombia. We will then finish the chapter with the analysis of the technical questions arising from the use of an ethnographical video as a research tool.

1. Migration

I define international migration as the movement of people who leave their country in order to settle in another. I exclude population movements that do not imply a change of permanent residence. Although population exchanges have happened through out human history, the frequency and high volume of current displacements has meant that international migration has become one of the major forces of global change because it transforms the nature of the societies and accelerates the process of global integration (Wartenberg 2000).

The motivating factors of international migration vary. They may be political, such as the case of those refugees who must escape their country because of persecution where their fundamental human rights are violated, either by reason of religious or political beliefs or because they belong to discriminated ethnic groups or nationalities. (UNHCR.org/country.col) They may be for academic reasons: to study or do research abroad due to the precariousness of conditions in the country of origin. They may also be socioeconomic. This last reason is most important in international migration from the Third to the First World since people of underdeveloped countries are desperately searching for economic survival and material stability. According to Castles and Miller (1993), the most decisive factor of the South-North migratory flux is the increasing social inequality between developed and underdeveloped countries. Although political, demographic and ecological pressures have also to be taken into account, many of the inhabitants of the Southern Hemisphere are driven to move north mainly motivated by the prospect of a better economic opportunity and a higher standard of living.

Most developed countries are in need of a greater number of young working people to contribute to the economic security of the aging population. The United Nations Population Division considers that this demographic imbalance is becoming the main engine of migration. Based on the 1995-2050 projections, the United Nations are asking developed countries in need of a young labor force, capable of guaranteeing the pensions of an older population, to consider replacement migration as an important alternative within viable economic systems (United Nations Population Division 2000).

Rich countries which offer better possibilities of welfare – most of them in Europe – register a demographic crisis expressed in a declining population or, as in Canada or Australia, in a demographic deficit with possible employment vacancies.

According to *Ciro Martínez*, the demographic models of international migration show some stable profiles. Migration between developed countries is related to economic possibilities and education; that is, when someone from a developed country emigrates, the reasons have to do with a rational decision taken after having analyzed available possibilities and conditions, or after having found valuable educational opportunities. In contrast people in the underdeveloped countries emigrate thinking in terms of exploring possibilities. In the developed countries it is families who emigrate; in the underdeveloped it is mainly young men alone, planning to bring their families later (*Martine and Hakkert 2000*). The fact that whole Colombian families have immigrated to Vancouver makes them exceptional within the context of the rest of Latin America.

Immigration policy in Canada does not place much value on how immigrant families assist their members in settling economically or socially. Studies suggest that family networks may be particularly helpful to immigrants without a high level of education or skill in their pursuit of economic opportunities (*Li, 2003*). But families may also provide the sustenance and support for immigrants who come to Canada as entrepreneurs or as skilled workers. In crossing borders, immigrants may use family resources and networks that enable them to be flexible (*Ong, 1999*).

Globalization is a process of free circulation of merchandise, capital and production between countries that activates movement between and across borders. However, analysts of international migration argue that “the only factor of production that has no free transit between frontiers is human capital” (Martine, Hakker and Guzmán 2000). The research group of Technical Support of the Population Fund of the United Nations argues that the existence of exclusionary and/or selective migratory politics limits the actual reach of globalization and excludes some countries from its beneficial aspects. Migratory politics, and particularly the politics of naturalization, directly influence the management of migratory fluxes. They have an impact on the immigrants themselves as well as on the receiving countries. Within this world-wide demographic context, Latin America is in a so-called “bonus of demographic opportunity” situation since it has more people of a productive age than retirees, yet the former group remains unemployed or without prospects of employment in their own countries. This is a significant motivation in the processes of international migration (Massey, Arango, Graeme, et al 1998).

Most recent studies show that all temporary migration tends to become permanent. Once the group has been established, the process continues and intensifies in spite of all official efforts to control illegal immigration. Besides, it has been confirmed that the level of barriers to migration in the receiving countries depends on the citizenship laws. The policies and actions of the receiving countries are fundamental in the process of assimilating immigrants. The best way to prevent social conflict is to acknowledge the presence of immigrants, to recognize their condition and to grant them a series of rights

allowing their eventual naturalization with the extension of all legal rights and obligations possessed by citizens. (Martine, Hakkert and Guzmán 2000).

As we shall see in the following chapter, the Colombian families of our study, in spite (or because) of their privileged educational status and their being used to a high standard of living, encountered great difficulties integrating into the Canadian society. It required reshaping their self-image, a new set of rules in the dynamics of the family relationships and, in most instances, acquiring a whole new career.

On the other hand, their privileged position may have allowed the families to draw on financial and cultural resources to pursue their opportunities, whether in Vancouver, Colombia, or elsewhere internationally.

2. Family and gender relations

Family is the space where social reproduction is established. Families can be shaped in different ways according to the number of the members, the gender and the relations between the members. In this research, I interviewed the typical nuclear family (male and female with or without children) as well as single parents both male and female, and multigenerational extended families.

In the last 50 years, Colombian society, and, by extension, the Colombian family has undergone profound changes. Based on a rigid hierarchy, it has slowly been

understood that the sexual division of labour is based on cultural assumptions and on a pattern of patriarchal domination. The rupture with this conception is marked in the second half of the 20th century by the massive incorporation of women in the educational system and in the work force (Páez and Ocampo 1989).

Equally important is the progressive distancing of many social groups from the religious precepts and practices of the Catholic Church. After the 1960s, substantial sectors within the Catholic Church started to accept free union of couples, outside the proscribed religious marriage (Cifuentes Ramírez 2000). Religious moral precepts give way to an ethical humanistic approach. Within this new paradigm the reproductive function of the family is not solely under the unique control of Catholic doctrine and becomes a private, conscious and consensual decision of the couple. However, although there is positive advance in the nature of the relations between genders, the predominantly violent situation of the country makes this new level of consciousness difficult to be fully realized. I therefore paid special attention during the course of the interviews to possible personal crises among the members of our families during the different steps of integration and adaptation in their migration process.

I define gender as a social construct that includes not only the sexual differences based on biology but also those culturally determined and manifested in the roles performed by men and women in a given society with special attention to changes in the female role and their influence on the changes in the Colombian family (Díaz López 1998). Feminist groups have actively investigated the women's roles in society historically and

in the present in Colombia, and they have fought for the economic, social and legal rights of women. Their influence has been increased by supporting new female aspirations. In their critique of the female condition in society they have searched for emancipatory alternatives, including out - migration.

Birth control brought a new freedom of choice. The world of sexuality acquired a greater social importance. The female body has become a source of pleasure, not only of maternity (Paternostro 1999). Today the decision to procreate is increasingly taken jointly by the couple: there is discussion on the option of maternity or abortion. Since the 60s there is a tendency to accept free unions and civil marriages that register the couples in a code of specific rights and duties which are legally acknowledged (Viveros, Olavaria and Fuller 1998). The religious sacrament of the indissolubility of marriage gives way to the possibility of its dissolution with an increment of second unions. Other results of social scientific research are starting to penetrate the symbolic space of family life. In this context, the socialization of children of both sexes is changing and creating new educational guidelines (León 1997) in the school system.

These modifications have impacted the various sectors of society with different intensity. In the lowest levels there is more resistance to changes: the female and the family follow religious tradition. Within the values of the patriarchal society, woman's fulfillment must solely rest on her role as wife and mother. The new positions for females in society causes conflict in the traditional family structure: it induces role changes, separation of couples and increased intrafamily violence (Robledo 1998).

However, restrictive roles in the relationships between sexes are losing social influence and the new practices and discourses are formally being adopted. As a result, these ideological changes in the family values have transformed the configuration of the whole society.

When only the male head of the family emigrates, leaving wife and children behind in the native country, family life is greatly changed, especially in more patriarchal families. But also, as we shall see in my case study in which whole families emigrated, migration deeply affects the structure of immigrant families since they have to adapt to new circumstances and to a different set of values from those that they had held before.

3. Violence in Colombia

No matter how important changes within the family structure, no factor has had more impact on the very fiber of Colombian society than the present violence. It has reached unbearable levels and it is being experienced by all social classes in all areas of the country. Violence in Colombia is relentless and unavoidable. It is an every day occurrence and has become part of a way of life.

Colombia is a country which covers an area of 1,400,000 km², a population of 40 million inhabitants with an estimated 40 thousand illegally armed people. The guerrilla groups (mainly FARC [Fuerzas Armadas de Colombia /The Colombian Revolutionary

Forces], EPL [Ejército Popular de Liberación/Liberation Popular Army] and ELN [Ejército de Liberación Nacional/National Liberation Army]) began organizing with a political revolutionary agenda in the 1950's. Due to the inefficiency and scarcity of the governmental armed forces and to the fact that the guerrillas mainly attacked rich cattle rangers and landowners, in the 1960s the latter began employing small vigilante armed groups to defend themselves and their investments. These private mini-armies eventually became integrated in the 1970s under the AUC banner (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia/Colombian United Self-defenses) (*El conflicto 2003*).

To the chaotic situation resulting from the constant in fighting between the 25,000 members of the guerrilla and the 18,000 of the paramilitary, one must add the overriding destructive power exerted by the omnipotent drug cartel. In the rural areas, because of the incentive of high returns and the threat of extortion and death, thousands of small peasant farmers abandoned traditional agriculture for the sole cultivation of coca, leaving them totally dependant on their drug bosses. In the cities, the narcotics traffic created numerous ruthless youth gangs that, besides being in charge of the national and international distribution of the processed coca, are ready and willing to eliminate anyone perceived by their bosses as a threat to their enterprise. In an ironic turn of events, by the 90s both the guerrilla and the paramilitary, abandoning their initial ideals and goals, found it far more economically advantageous to join the flourishing drug business.

During 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, the endemically weak government army in its fight against both the guerrilla and the paramilitary was completely overpowered. Furthermore, the Colombian government was incapable of providing solutions to the insurgents' social and economic critique nor did the government resolve the conflict between the guerrilla and the paramilitary. With the new millennium and the impact of the United States of America's "Plan Colombia", the precarious position of the Colombian military changed. The military budget increased from 1.6 % of the Gross National Budget in 1985 to 2.9 % in 2002 (Garay: 17). To this increase (coming from the redistribution of the national budget), one must add the external technical and military aid provided by the USA (475 million US dollars in 2002 [ciponline.org]), most of which is targeted to the narcotics problem.

However, in spite of this stronger offensive on the part of the government, uncontrolled violence continues to cause extreme suffering for all sectors of the civil population. A whole new vocabulary has been born to describe the different types of extortion which have evolved into a sophisticated system of illegal taxation. For example: "vacuna" (vaccination) is what one regularly pays in order to be able to work; "boleteo" (ticketing) is a special levy that an individual or business must pay upon receipt; "pesca milagrosa" (miraculous fishing) means kidnapping for cash; "peaje" (toll) is what an individual must pay to transit in certain areas; "cobro" (collection) is the payment for goods to circulate. One would think that one was back in Medieval Europe when the movement of goods and the welfare of people were controlled by pirates and bandits.

This state of war has forced massive displacements of the population. According to the Social Registry (Registro de la Red de Solidaridad Social 2000), there were 865,000 displaced people in 2002 alone (including 185,000 households in 887 municipal ridings covering 87% of the national territory). According to the same source, 56% of the people left their original residence because of generalized fear, 32% because of confrontation with an armed group and 5% because of being singled out as a target. CODHES (Consultoría para los derechos humanos y el desplazamiento [Human Rights and Displacement Registry] 1999) and the UN Refugees Committee consider Colombia, with a total number of over 2.5 million displaced citizens, as the second country in the world (after Sudan) with the greatest number of national and international refugees. Thus the peasants of the rural areas are escaping to the relative anonymity of the nation's cities and the city dwellers are becoming refugees in other countries.

More than 3000 kidnappings occur in Colombia per year: it is the world's highest number. Thousands of Colombian families have suffered the pain of paying repeated ransoms without succeeding to liberate the victims. Mistreatment, torture and even death are not uncommon. In what has become an established industry, a very alarming development with its subsequent terrifying trauma is that of kidnapping small children (Navia and Ossa. Pending publication).

The toll that the continuous massacres, executions, assassinations, disappearances, tortures, kidnappings, rapes, displacements, armed robberies, recruitment of children and all types of extortion is extraordinarily high. The nation's economy is in disarray with

the destruction of its agricultural base, the loss of primary resources, the undermining of social services and the destruction of human resources. Civil servants, members of parliament, judges and prosecutors, political activists and media members are particularly vulnerable. From the beginning of 1991 to the middle of 2002, there were 40 reporters and human rights activists assassinated. (infoamerica.org)

In this sense, the constant presence of violence has created a general atmosphere of fear and distrust. People are suspicious of one another and are closing more and more their inner ranks, by reducing their contacts to only family members and a few selected friends. The end result is that the normal flow of interrelations within the community has been destroyed and the quality of life degraded (Mosquera Rosero 1996).

In short, as the World Bank put it in 2001 in its *Colombian Poverty Report*, the main reason why the upper and upper-middle sectors of the population emigrate is because they perceive the economic risks of the present situation and see themselves as the main targets of crime and desolation.

II. THE ETHNOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTARY

Up to this point I have discussed the political and social context of the two Colombian families portrayed in the video documentary I would like now to pass to examine two questions around the medium I have used: why I decided to present the material in a

video format (a determinant decision with profound consequences) and what is the aim of an ethnographic documentary.

The objective of a documentary is to communicate a vision by audiovisual means. The strategies of ethnography used in documentaries are very different from those used for commercial or fictional purpose (Villegas 2000). The documentary aims to portray the reality of the immigrants, to bear witness of the captured events, to reveal the complexity of human interaction in all its immediacy. For a long time documentaries were made in film and were only produced by the very few individuals who had both the means and the technical knowledge to deal with such a medium. The arrival of video technology, with its lower costs, clarity of picture, ease of operation and portability, has broadened the accessibility. Nowadays, the ethnographic video-documentary has become an important and effective academic research tool. It is used in all kinds of settings and circumstances: to illustrate cultural variables or social problems; to depict myths, beliefs and rituals; to reveal how human beings think, live and organize themselves (Vallés 2000).

In ethnography, participation is fundamentally associated with being in the field in the role of observer. Incorporated in this concept is the idea of social interaction with the subjects, interaction that must be meaningful. Presence in the field allows the ethnographer to capture and understand the significance that the subjects attach to their own actions, discourses and institutions (Velasco 1999).

In an ethnographic documentary, the researcher with his or her camera adapts to the surrounding circumstances, learns from the context as it develops and records without intruding in the process (Vallés 2000). The researcher does not direct the staging, select locations or highlight special scenes as it would be done in a commercial documentary where, although based on real facts and settings, the production team and the director control the telling of the story.

The choice of the video documentary format as the main research tool of this project was determined by:

- 1) the familiarity of this researcher with video documentary, given his past experience as a television producer in Colombia, and,
- 2) the researcher's strong belief in using non - conventional means to pursue an academic inquiry.

My video was produced with the same high technical standards of a professional documentary with good sound and clear images. Furthermore, all editing decisions (order of sequences, music, subtitles, presentation by a practicing reporter, opening and closing written text) were done with the unique purpose of creating a rigorous ethnographic audiovisual document. Given the great differences between Colombian and Canadian culture, stock footage was inserted amidst the interviewing scenes in order to help the viewer understand the salient points of the lives of the members of the two families and clarify the different stages they went through. The expressed feelings

and actions of the protagonists were never controlled by the researcher. The questions during the filmed interviews were semi-structured (see questions in Chapter 3).

In short, *Vancouver: The Longest Journey of Our Lives* fulfills a dual purpose: it is both a research and a communication tool. However, as we shall see, in order to obtain meaningful footage, a great deal of work had to take place before the filming itself. First a representative sample of the upper class Colombian families that had recently immigrated to Vancouver had to be chosen and then a trusting and respectful relationship had to be established between the researcher and his subjects so that they would openly tell the unheard story of their Odyssey.

CHAPTER II

THE PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR JOURNEY

PREAMBLE: CANADIAN IMMIGRATION POLICIES

The first step that the Colombian immigrant families had to take to come to Vancouver was to comply with the Canadian Immigration laws and regulations to obtain entry to the country. According to the Canadian Embassy in Colombia, the Canadian Immigration Program is the result of a long tradition and it is a constant reminder of the role played by immigrants in the industrialization of Canada, a role so important that immigration has become an essential trait of Canadian identity. Since World War II, 7.8 million immigrants (including 4.5 million refugees) have entered the country. Moreover, 55% of the inhabitants of the three major cities are foreign-born (40% in Toronto, 25% in Montreal and 35% in Vancouver.) In 1957, the 10 main sources of immigrants were European. Now, eight of the main sources are no longer from Europe: 20% of the immigrants are from Hong Kong, China and Taiwan while another 20% are from India.

In 1976, a new Naturalization and Immigration Act was put into place to stop discriminatory biases. In 1982, numerous revisions have opened the doors to immigrants and to refugees. The objective of the present laws is to comply with

Canadian demographic objectives, to help the reunion of families, and to acknowledge international obligations while emphasizing the long established humanitarian tradition of the country. (cic.gc.ca)

Canada has been involved in admitting human right cases from around world through the Refugee and Humanitarian Reallocation Program. Under this program, Canada processes urgent cases of refugees who need immediate protection when there are no security risks or serious health problems involved. Canada has been collaborating with Colombia to reallocate an increasing number of threatened citizens. In 2002, there were 922 Colombians admitted to Canada under Government sponsored programs and 220 who came under private sponsorships. Between January and April 2003, another 288 were admitted under the first category and 62 under the second.

One class of immigration to Canada, which is of particular interest for this project, is that of the "Entrepreneur." The exact regulatory requirements are stated under subsection 98 of the Immigration Act. In very broad terms, a foreign national with business experience who invests in Canada a minimum of 400,000 Canadian dollars in an enterprise employing more than one unrelated person may be granted Canadian permanent residency, subject three years later to a reevaluation of compliance. Family members enter under the entrepreneur's immigration status. One of the families interviewed in the documentary entered Canada under the "Entrepreneur" class.

The other class that interests us is the "Skilled Worker Class" since the other family used it to immigrate to Canada. The description is as follows: "Skilled workers have education, work experience, knowledge of English or French and other abilities that will help them to establish themselves as permanent residents of Canada" (for further details about both classes, see [www. cic.gc.ca](http://www.cic.gc.ca)). As we shall see later on, the difference in the class of entry to the country will have profound implications for the two families involved.

I. FIRST CONTACTS AND SELECTION

Once I decided that topic of the project is to study the impact of immigration on upper class Colombians, my first move was to get in contact with Vancouver's Colombian community. A Canadian friend took me to the birthday party of a Colombian woman who had been living in Vancouver for the last twenty-five years. There I connected with three other compatriots. Soon we were exchanging personal stories about who we were and why we had come to Vancouver. Three days later, I had appointments to visit each of them at their home with their families.

Colombians are known for their pleasant and cordial demeanor and hospitality. Although we did not know each other, I was warmly received in the three different homes. We discussed the Colombian political and social situation and told personal and

professional anecdotes. Finally, in each case, I explained the purpose of my research and asked them if they would be willing to participate. In spite of the good rapport we established, and the fact that I, as the researcher, was also a Colombian and had also immigrated to Vancouver, the three families independently refused to participate. To put them at ease I told them my own story (my partner, a well known journalist had twenty-four hours to leave the country as there was a contract to kill him). I also assured them complete anonymity and even proposed to disguise their faces and voices in the video, to no avail.

One of the families argued that, although they lived in Vancouver, they did not feel safe. Three of their family members had been kidnapped and one of them was still in the hands of the FARC. Another family argued that they did not want to jeopardize their stay in Canada with any comment that could be construed as critical of the host country. They would not participate as long as their immigration status was not totally resolved. The third family did not want to permanently record their story: the father was dying of cancer and their business was bankrupt.

However, the very same people who refused to participate because of their personal plights felt responsible for their refusal, and independently from one another began to search for other candidates among their Colombian acquaintances. Two weeks later, I had twelve names and contacted all of them.

After the first meetings, I decided not to include four families because they did not fit my criteria for upper class families. Out of the remaining eight, two of them refused to participate because of personal reasons (did not have the time) Finally, six families accepted to participate under certain conditions: five families refused to be filmed and said they would only answer questions orally as long as their identity would remain anonymous. To summarize, only one family, out of the 15 interviewed so far, put no conditions and accepted to participate in the video. This was in August 2003.

I understood and accepted the arguments of my fellow immigrants for not participating and realized how difficult it would be to find willing subjects for my documentary. There was trust as far as my personal integrity and the integrity of Simon Fraser University as an institution, but there was complete distrust as far as the eventual viewers or users of the video. It is important to state at this point that 95% of the families interviewed had been directly affected by the existing violence in Colombia (with kidnapping, extortion, blackmail and armed robbery) and did not want to jeopardize their chance of enjoying a peaceful existence in Canada. As an "insider" Colombian I profoundly sympathized with their worries since I knew what it is to be threatened; yet as an "outsider" researcher I also knew how important it was to create a document that would record the process of the immigration experience.

I continued my inquiry and, following more leads given by the other participants. I found four other upper class families willing, in principle, to be interviewed in front of the

camera. By then I had two books full of notes of oral interviews that helped me formulate the basic interview schedule and define the orientation of the documentary.

The horn of plenty of having five families that fit my research profile who were willing to be interviewed in front of the camera forced me to make the final decision on the video format. How many families to include? To try to document the lives of all five families would make the video chaotic and confused, let alone very costly. After some deliberation, I decided to choose, as my sample, two upper class families that would encompass among them all the characteristics of the rest. One family had to be large, with many children and with older parents (45 years old or more) to contrast with a young family without children; they also had to enter the country under different set of rules. The Ponce de León and the Fonnegra families met these prerequisites. Besides, both families were convinced of the importance to record their migration experience. Both felt that the immigration regulations should be revised and improved, particularly those dealing with the “entrepreneur” category. Both families were willing to invest as much time as needed to complete the taping of the interviews.

II. A DESCRIPTION OF THE TWO FAMILIES ON SCREEN

A. The Ponce de León family

The Ponce de León family consists of five members:

1. **Álvaro Ponce de León** is the family head. He was forty-seven years old when the video was made in October 24, 2003. He was born in Bogota, as were his parents. He is the descendant of a Spanish conquistador and belongs to one of Bogota's richest families. His father was the founder of the biggest publicity agency in the country with contacts in the higher spheres of the political and business world. Álvaro studied in one of Colombia's most prestigious private high schools. He then studied architecture at the University of the Andes and was sent by his parents to study English in England. Later on he received a scholarship to pursue his studies in architecture in Rotterdam.

Álvaro worked as an independent architect for more than twenty years building housing and commercial buildings. Before coming to Vancouver he owned a company with over one hundred employees that built and installed gas tanks in gas stations all over the country. Because of this work, he crisscrossed the land from big cities to humble villages putting him in contact with the best and the worse of people and situations.

Álvaro's service to the community at large is very impressive and quite uncommon for an upper class Colombian. At age sixteen he joined the Boy Scouts. He later was responsible for expanding the organization through out the country with the founding of many camps in various cities. As a young man he joined the National Navy and was in the reserves for seventeen years. He used his experience as a navy lieutenant to organize many river and sea trips to bring food and medicine to poor and remote settlements.

2. **Lucía Serrano Ponce de León** is Álvaro's wife. She was forty- six years old when taping her in October 24, 2003. She was born in an eastern provincial town. Her parents were very rich landowners who sent her to study in the private Jesuit University Pontificia Javeriana in the Capital. According to her, Lucia's family is hard working, very authoritarian, and conservative as most people in that part of the country. While at the university studying Fine Arts, she met Álvaro. She finished her degree, and married him. They had three children. Lucía did not live a life of leisure, she contributed a lot to the family business by working very hard as the General Manager of the construction company.

3. **Carolina Ponce de León** is the eldest daughter. She was twenty-one years old when she came to Vancouver. At age four she joined the Girl Scouts and channeled her energy into that organization. She had graduated from the best Primary and High Schools in Bogota and enjoyed all the privileges of a Colombian upper class upbringing:

private schooling, chauffeured car, elite social clubs, private lessons in sports, music, dance, and holidays in the Miami family house. Carolina is very much like her mother: hard working, a perfectionist, more interested in pursuing a career than developing other life matters. Before immigrating to Canada with her parents, she was studying at the same university as her mother, the Pontificia Javeriana, and had completed six semesters in industrial design. She finished her degree at the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design in Vancouver.

4. **Lucía Ponce de León (“Chiquis”)** is the second daughter and was twenty years old at her arrival. She was raised with the same privileges and in the same manner as her elder sister and also joined the Girl Scouts. But contrary to Carolina, she craved since childhood to have a large family. When leaving Bogota, she had completed two semesters in Psychology at the Pontificia Javeriana University. Once in Vancouver she obtained a Certificate in Early Childhood Education at Capilano College and later she completed her degree in Psychology at Simon Fraser University.

5. **Enrique Ponce de León** is the family's center of attention and was sixteen when he arrived. Because he was the only male and the youngest, he admits he was quite spoiled. His father wanted him to follow his steps. He joined the Boy Scouts at age three and he went to the same private all male High School as Álvaro. He finished his High School in Bogota; once here, he earned a Hospitality Management Certificate from the Vancouver Community College.

The general characteristics of the Serrano-Ponce de León family at their arrival are as follows:

- Upper class conservative, catholic ;
- Very closely knitted;
- Interested in social activities to help others in need.
- Geographically mobile (Rotterdam, Miami, Spain).
- Husband, wife and three adult children.

B. THE FONNEGRA FAMILY

The Fonnegra family consists of two members:

1. **Carlos Fonnegra** comes from a rich Colombian on the coast Caribbean traditional family. His family riches come from cattle and agriculture, he was twenty-eight years old when the documentary was made in October 24, 2003. He studied in Bogota in an Anglo-Colombian private school based on the British educational system. He studied Architecture at the University of the Andes. He then went to Dublin, Ireland to further his architectural specialization. He was working as an architect in Bogotá before coming to Vancouver.

2. **Nicole Abusaid Fonnegra** was twenty-seven years old when video taped. She is Carlos's wife. She is of Lebanese descent. Her paternal grandfather immigrated to

Bogota, so she is a second generation Colombian. Nicole's mother is a professional psychologist born in Bogota. Nicole's father owns one of the major real state companies in the country. Nicole studied in a private High School and, upon graduation, went to Los Angeles, California to learn English. Nicole's life in Colombia was centered on her studies and on sports. From a very early age she learned to play tennis and so as a young woman, she traveled through the USA and Europe participating in different private clubs' tennis tournaments. Before immigrating to Canada she studied Anthropology at the University of the Andes. Carlos and Nicole married three months before their departure for Vancouver.

The general characteristics of the Abusaid - Fonnegra family on their arrival are:

- Migration history on both sides: Carlos' family moved from the provinces to the capital; Nicole's family moved from Lebanon to Colombia.
- Both sides are geared to business, ready to enter new fields without previous expertise.
- Upper class family because of their economic position but lacking the cachet of the prestige of the Ponces de León whose name is linked to the arrival of the Europeans in the Continent. Old money weighs more in Colombian society.

III. THE TWO SCREENED FAMILIES: A COMPARISON

Although the two families belong to the upper class of the Colombian society and had the education and means to be able to enter Canada, we would like to contrast and compare other features that distinguish them. The first main difference between the two is the generation gap: Álvaro and Lucía could be the parents of Carlos and Nicole. The second major difference is that Álvaro and Lucía have Colombian born children that immigrated with them to Canada. The parents were emotionally torn in making the decision to immigrate for their children: on one hand they wanted them safe and away from Colombia's everyday brutality; on the other hand, they were depriving their children of the luxury life *they* had been brought up in. Because of that decision, there was a lot of tension and conflict among them.

In the case of the Fonnegra family, there was no conflict since there were no children. Carlos and Nicole decided together to immigrate. They were only following their relative's past steps. They are young, free, and adventurous. They also know that they will be backed economically by their Colombian families.

Álvaro and Lucía had always worked with their own companies at a national level. They owned a construction business in Colombia, always related to Álvaro's expertise as an architect, and made all the decisions without depending on boards, presidents or

associates. Carlos and Nicole, on the other hand, perceive their enterprises as a global endeavour. They are ready to enter into any sound business deal, in any area.

Another major contrast between the two families is the different immigration policy - classes they used to come to Canada. The Entrepreneur Class was advantageous to the Ponces de León family because they could immigrate together as a unit but it carries the burden of having to establish and maintain a business from the onset. The Fonnegras, as in using the Skilled Worker class, have no legal obligations with the government and can do as they please. Álvaro and Lucía fled Colombia's violence, but they also wanted to offer a brighter future to their children; Carlos and Nicole fled Colombia's violence, but also wanted to obtain Canadian passports to facilitate their world travelling.

As different as their personalities and their situations are, the members of the two families share quite a few traits. Both male heads are architects and studied in the same private university. Both did their specialization abroad. They both practiced their profession in Colombia: Before departure, Álvaro, due to his age, had time to develop an impressive portfolio of many building projects; Carlos, on the other hand, had only worked in a government agency designing the layout of footpaths in National Parks.

Both female heads of the families have academic graduate degrees, not just finishing school, but rigorous degrees: Lucía studied Fine Arts and Nicole Anthropology. They

are independent, decisive and responsible, ready, when needed, to steady the family course.

Both families have been directly struck by Colombia's violence. The Ponce de León family was threatened to be kidnapped before they left their country. And, Álvaro was, in fact, kidnapped as a youngster. Carlos father was going to be taken by a group of eight armed men but luckily that day he was not at the homestead.

Both Lucía and Nicole felt unsafe. Lucía always lived with the worry that her children would be harmed. Nicole feared for her personal safety in public, for example she complained because of the worry of being raped or worse. It was living with a constant fear that finally determined both families to immigrate and take the long journey to Vancouver.

IV. THE JOURNEY

The story of the migration of our two families is not only a geographical journey, it is also an emotional and social journey: a journey of self-discovery, of finding out one's inner strengths and resources. As we shall see in their story of adaptation to Vancouver's economic and social reality, it was not an easy process. However, perseverance and determination brought rewards.

On their arrival to Vancouver both families continued with the same life style they had in Colombia. They spent the first months as a holiday, travelling around British Columbia to become familiar with their surroundings. On purpose they did not try to get in touch with any Colombians residing in Vancouver because they wanted to immerse themselves in the Canadian culture. Later on, once established in their business, they reconnected.

Neither Carlos nor Álvaro were aware that their professional titles in architecture, in spite of their work experience in the field, would not be recognized in Canada. It was an unexpected shock and something that had not been specified by the Canadian authorities when they applied to emigrate. Both men failed to find work in architecture, a field already highly competitive among settled Canadians. Álvaro, as soon as he arrived, started the business he had already planned in Colombia. As head of the new company, he would consult and cooperate with manufacturing and construction businesses in order to provide a friendly environment for seniors and handicapped people. His company would also distribute already existing and newly designed interior design items. He had cut for himself a very difficult task. Carlos, after numerous attempts, only found work in drafting. He hated it because all of the creative aspect of architecture was gone and promptly left that job to look for other opportunities.

While the two male heads were striving to practice their profession, each family ran out of the funds they had brought from Colombia. In despair in order to survive they took

any job they could find in 2004, no matter how menial. It is important at this point to recall that Álvaro, Carlos and Nicole spoke perfectly correct English since the three of them had learned the language in their childhood or in their teens. However, their bilingualism did not open many doors. Álvaro worked as a painter painting houses. Carlos sold computers and built wooden boats. Nicole worked as a waitress in bars and restaurants. Lucía put all her energy into learning English as fast as she could. She later found entry-level work at a picture framing shop. The contrast with their previous life in Colombia to their present situation in Canada could not be greater.

Álvaro was the one who was hit harder, probably because of his age and the fact that all his life he had been the family's provider. He could not face his children or his wife because he had lost his main role in the family, because he was used to being a leader in business, he had had a career, a profession. Suddenly, he could not economically support his family as he did before. He became deeply depressed, which made matters worse.

Lucía, although dismayed by the turn of events, faced the music. She carried on with her job making picture frames. Although not getting high wages, she was able to cover the family's basic needs.

The children were, in a way, more successful. They immediately found work: Caroline as food server; Chiquis as an expert babysitter and multi-talented Enrique, as a new

Renaissance man: he made sandwiches, painted houses, repaired cars, entertained at parties, ushered at theaters, and took on many other projects as well.

The situation of the Fonnegra family was different. First of all the couple was young and had no dependents. Carlos did not so strongly attach his ego to the role of provider. They were a team, Carlos and Nicole, and if Nicole was doing better than he was at a given time, there was no problem. He had not invested his life into a profession like Álvaro had. Although a trained architect, he had the gift of adaptation.

Nicole, fed up with being a food server, decided to become a cook. When the video was made we can see her first at cooking school and later with Carlos help (who designed the room) getting ready to open their restaurant. It was very hard work, it was very demanding, it was very far from being an amateur tennis player and a socialite in Bogota. Even so the young couples were only able to own a restaurant because they received the financial backing of their families in Colombia.

It is interesting that although both women experienced a radical change in their lives, both appreciated the freedom they have gained in Vancouver. They valued being free of gossip and the constant pressure of being scrutinized by others; they enjoyed being free of the social prejudices held by the Colombian upper class. They also appreciated having shed the superficiality that had ruled their lives while there and to be judged for

one self, not by the job one held or one's status. In other words, they cherished Vancouver's open society.

CHAPTER III

MAKING THE VIDEO

I. THE INTERVIEWS

Before the taping I had two meetings with each family during which I set up details about when and where the interviews would take place. It was important that the interviewees felt relaxed and comfortable. By the time the taping was scheduled, two of the Ponce de León children were unavailable and out of town. Carolina had returned to live permanently in Bogota and Enrique had been chosen to work at Disney World. I then made the decision, on the basis of maintaining a parallel, not to include Chiquis and to focus the video solely on the two couples.

Setting up the interview for the Ponces de León was straightforward but organizing the interview for the Fonnegras was difficult because of their tight schedules and the many interruptions in their schedules. I wanted to separately interview each of the four participants so that there would be greater fluidity, less interruptions, and a more

intimate atmosphere. Above all, I wanted to receive honest answers, and avoid any pressure the participants might feel about expressing conflicting views in front of a loved one. However, the Fonnegras requested to be interviewed together in order to save time. Moreover, during the taping they carried on with the management of their business, answering their e-mail and the constantly ringing telephone. They even took care of the needs of two visitors while I was there filming. In spite of these interruptions, I still managed to get individual interviews from each of them within their time constraints. What is more, none of the participants refused or avoided answering any of my questions.

II. THE SCHEDULE

The interviews were semi-structured. In other words, I used the following questionnaire as a guideline but I did not interrupt the flow of the conversation. I gave the participants the freedom to expression their ideas and follow their thought associations.

1. When and why did you emigrate?
2. What did you think of such a decision? What was the decision-making process and what steps did you take to emigrate?
3. Were you then working? Doing what?
4. What was your work level in Colombia?

5. Did the different family members contribute to cover the cost of the household expenses?
6. Was the income centralized? Did each of you contribute or was only the family's head responsibility?
7. Who managed the household expenses?
8. Are you working now in Canada? Is this work connected to your previous occupation in Colombia?
9. How do you evaluate being a member of the Vancouver workforce? Are you earning more, feel more respected, have made more connections at the work place than before?
10. Do you share the household duties?
11. Who administers the family funds?
12. Within the family what changes have occurred in the type of work, in the management of the family funds and in the decision-making process?
13. Do you think these changes are good? How do you feel about it?
14. Have the changes affected the family interrelations? How?
15. Do you want to return to Colombia? Explain.

III. EDITING THE TAPED INTERVIEWS

When I finished all the interviews, I had four cassettes of taped material. I had four hours of footage that had to be cut into 30 minutes. In order to do so, I transcribed all of the exchanges word by word and, with the print in hand, I chose the segments which seemed to be the most important in relation to my research questions: those that I felt would present the experiences, challenges transformations and adaptations of the families. I proceeded to edit the selected segments and decided to add stock footage to lighten and/or clarify the narration. I felt that the visualization of particular locations or the projection of images (past or present) of the families would help the spectator understand their story.

The next step was to thematically structure the answers of each of the four interviewees so that the answer of one person would be complemented by the response of another. I wanted to present the material in a coherent, orderly fashion and I also wanted to keep the four characters present throughout the whole video by interconnecting their life stories.

IV. THE STOCK FOOTAGE

Using the contacts I had made as a reporter and television producer in Bogota, I called two television stations in Colombia and obtained all the stock footage I requested. There are eighteen points of insertion of external images in the interviewing footage. Here is the description and provenance of the support material in the order of appearance in the documentary.

1. Álvaro Ponce de León while serving in the Navy Reserve

Álvaro is talking about how important it has been for him to serve in the Navy Reserve. He is full of pride and nostalgia to have helped his people during his years in the military.

(The photographs come from the family's private collection and were taped for this documentary).

2. Nicole driving a car in Bogota

I wanted to have an image that would prepare the spectator for Nicole's testimony that was about to follow. She is about to present her comfortable life in Colombia and I wanted to project a generic image that would exemplify that life style.

(Family video taken during her first visit to Colombia, after immigrating to Canada).

3. The Ponce de León family in Orlando, Florida

Lucía is talking about how much the children enjoyed their trips to Disney World. The images show the happy and carefree family of the past.

(Family video taken while visiting Disney World in 1994).

4. A “Missy” Production

Álvaro is telling what a great life his children had in Colombia. They formed part of an amateur group (“Missy”) that presented all kinds of shows. It is interesting to notice the production quality of these shows i.e. lighting, music, props, wardrobe, etc. All expenses (including private teaching) connected with the shows were paid by the parents of the participating pupils.

(Ponce de León family video filmed in 1990.)

5. The 1986 International Exhibition in Seville, Spain

The Colombian Pavilion showed the best the country had to offer. The “Missy” group was chosen to perform. The performers’ parents paid again all expenses, including transportation. The Ponce de León children were amongst these performers. The images show the family’s level of affluence while illustrating Álvaro’s memories.

(Ponce de León family video filmed in Seville in 1986.)

6. The bombing of “El Nogal” Club in Bogota

On February 7, 2003 a bomb exploded in this very exclusive social and sporting club. Thirty-two people were killed and one hundred and sixty were seriously injured. The club and surrounding buildings were completely destroyed. FARC infiltrated the capital with the specific intention of attacking the upper class. One of Nicole’s cousins was injured and both interviewed families had numerous friends and relatives who were members of the club. The four protagonists are talking about the level of violence that forced them to leave their country. The real images of the real bombing bear witness of the magnitude of the problem they all faced. The Bomb of El Nogal Club exploded when both families were already living in Vancouver. The disaster reinforced even more their feeling that they had made the right decision by emigrating to Canada. (Images from NTC [New Television of Colombia] Archives filmed in 2003, ten minutes after the explosion.)

7. FARC guerrilla cadres in the Colombian forest

Carlos and Nicole are speaking about the FARC incursions in the interior. I asked for FARC footage in training camps away from the Capital. As mentioned before, their families had been threatened by the FARC forces. (Images from NTC [New Television of Colombia] Archives filmed in Puerto Salgar Meta in 2000).

8. Carlos' and Nicole's wedding

The couple is saying that, as soon as they got married, they began to plan their emigration to Canada. They sold their wedding presents to accumulate cash for their trip.

(Fonnegra's private collection.)

9. Vancouver Air views

The beautiful sights of Vancouver are in contrast with the Colombian terror images. They serve as transition from one type of life to the other.

(Footage from the Public Relations Office of Kairo Communications.)

10. Enrique Ponce de León driving the family car

Álvaro is saying that his son was the first to find work. These images are to identify him to the viewer.

(Private collection of the Ponce de León family.)

11. Lucía working at the framing shop

Álvaro and Lucía are talking about how hard it was for Lucía to find work. We filmed Lucía at her work place to show the viewer the radical change she had undergone.

(Video filmed by my cameraman and myself in North Vancouver in 2003.)

12. Chef Nicole cooking

I also had to show Nicole working in her new profession after going to cooking school.

We filmed Nicole at her workplace.

(Video filmed by my cameraman and myself in Vancouver in 2003.)

13. Nicole at her restaurant

Chef co-owner (with Carlos) shows her brand new restaurant.

(Video filmed by my cameraman and myself in Vancouver in 2003.)

14. Álvaro in a thoughtful mood

Álvaro is remembering his period of depression. We filmed him on a wet, dark afternoon in West Vancouver where he repairs old boats as a hobby.

(Video filmed by my cameraman and myself in West Vancouver in 2003.)

15 & 16. Various pictures of the Ponce de León children

I had to provide the faces of the missing children for the viewer. There is emphasis on Carolina because Álvaro talks about how hard it was for the family to accept Carolina's decision to return to live in Colombia.

(The photographs come from the family's private collection. They were taped for this documentary).

17. Walking at night in Vancouver

Nicole is talking about safety in Vancouver. The images show the calm expression of the pedestrians with no hint of fear or malaise.

(Footage from the Public Relations Office of Kairo Communications.)

18. The participants

To finish the study of the two immigrant families, I provided shots of each member as their updated story comes to an end.

(Photographs from the families' private collections, taped for this documentary).

V. THE SEQUENCE

The story is framed by two comments. The first one, at the opening of the video, is a black and white text, written in large capital letters and extracted from a Report of the United Nations Refugees High Commission that describes the violent political situation of Colombia at the time of the taping of the documentary. The starkness of the lettering and the harshness of the contrasting colours duplicate the roughness of the situation described. It was the violence of Colombia that set the two families in motion, leaving their native country in search of an orderly life in Canada. It thus makes sense to begin the video with the expounding of terror in order to trigger the viewer's empathy and to

follow the immigration process. The other comment is the closing statement by the well-known CBC reporter, Gloria Macarenko, who summarizes the importance of the testimony of the migration experiences of the two interviewed families.

In between the opening and the closing montages, the story is told. It begins with quick close ups of the four protagonists who utter ten random sentences that echo their predicaments and catch the viewer's attention. Carlos begins with: "Colombia is in a stage of violence that is similar to Iraq's." Nicole adds: "because the reality of Colombia is so rough that you have to move away." Later, Álvaro explains: "I did not know what becoming an immigrant would be like." And Lucía ponders: "and sometimes we do not know how we made it, but we made it."

Their accounts and impressions of their lives in Colombia continue until Gloria Macarenko interrupts it with the formal introduction of the documentary's topic and title. Her presence as a seasoned independent reporter gives greater credibility to the integrity of the material presented. Gloria's professional stance brings to the documentary the distant objectivity needed for broadcasting to wider audiences in North America who may not immediately identify with the families.

In the next section, there are long excerpts of the interviews where the participants reflect on their experiences, challenges and accomplishments. The video sequence concludes with an update on each member of the families. The same format is used for

all of them: first, the image of the person is presented, then a text gives the latest developments that have occurred up to the conclusion of the video in November 2003.

- **Álvaro:** "Today Álvaro runs his own company, selling home products designed to improve elderly and disabled people's quality of life. As well as seeing his family succeed personally and professionally, Álvaro dreams about owning his own house with an ocean view."

-**Lucía:** "Lucía continues working at the frame store. She hopes to go back to university soon and to become a well-known art restorer. The only thing she misses about her privileged past is having enough money to be able to visit her kids wherever they are."

- **Carolina:** "Carolina came back to Vancouver and went to the Emily Carr Art Institute where she finished a degree in industrial design. Even though she was offered a job at Sony in Tokyo and at Nike in New York, she returned again to Colombia to work as salesperson in a furniture store. Today she is in Costa Rica working for the biggest Industrial Design Company in that country. She knows that someday she will return to Colombia for ever."

- **Chiquis:** "Lucía 'Chiquis' got a degree in Psychology from SFU. Today, in addition to being the most famous baby sitter in North Vancouver, Chiquis is preparing a business plan to open an art therapy centre for people with mental disabilities. She is convinced that Vancouver is the right place to raise her family."

- **Enrique:** "Enrique, the sandwich artist, was chosen from among 120 people in Vancouver by the Cast Away Company to work in the Canadian Pavilion at Disneyland in Orlando, Florida. When he finishes that experience, he will return to Vancouver to

finish his Hospitality Management Studies at the Vancouver Community College. Today Enrique is facing the biggest challenge of his life being away from his family.”

- **Nicole:** “Today Nicole and ‘Bar Latino’ are two very well known names in the local food industry. Her biggest wish is to find a good manager to handle her business properly so that she can have more time to enjoy her family and Vancouver. Nicole and her husband go to Colombia at least four times a year.”

- **Carlos:** “Carlos continues to work with Nicole at the restaurant. He has also started a new clothing design and import business. Once their companies are strong enough, Carlos and his wife will be able to realize the dream that they had when they arrived in Canada: The Fonnegra family will sail around the world.”

The following remarks by Gloria Macarenko conclude video: “There are as many stories as number of immigrants. However, the stories of the Ponce de León and Fonnegra families bring up many questions with which to continue exploring the complex topic of immigration in a country whose most valuable resource is its people, people from all over the world.” Her statement draws the viewer’s attention to the research value of the ethnographic documentary they have just seen. As viewers, we have witnessed a qualitative in-depth analysis of an excruciating experience, seldom reported and seldom recorded.

VI. POST VIDEO: A 2007 UPDATE ON THE TWO FAMILIES

What has happened to participants since the documentary was made? Many changes have occurred some for better and some for worse.

Beginning with the Ponce de León family, the most serious news is that fifty-seven years old Álvaro suffered a heart attack caused by the enormous pressure he had lived under. He recuperated and continues working in his business for the handicapped. He has also joined an architecture firm that designs housing projects. Lucía is fifty-six years old and continues working in the same frame store. Chiquis married a Canadian. She is totally assimilated into Vancouver life and works in public relations for a Vancouver hotel. Carolina returned to Colombia. She lives with her grandmother in the same privileged life of her family before they left Colombia. She works as an industrial designer. Enrique left the hospitality business and works for a construction company as an administrator. He is a devoted Vancouverite.

The Fonnegras sold their restaurant at the height of its popularity to another new immigrant Colombian family. Their clothing company is booming. Three different Canadian designers design the clothes in Vancouver and then they are manufactured in Colombia. Carlos' brother is in charge there of production and world distribution. Nicole thirty-three years old and Carlos thirty-four years old frequently travel for business

and/or pleasure all over the world. They go to Colombia as much as once every two months but their permanent residence is Vancouver.

VII. CONCLUSION

The first and most important point to be made, after having followed both families step by step in their long process of immigration and adaptation to Canada, is that they succeeded. They succeeded in making Vancouver their new home, contrary to so many other cases that have to return to their country of origin bankrupt and morally defeated.

For Álvaro and Lucía their victory is becoming Canadian citizens with their children and obtaining Canadian passports. Two of their three children are completely integrated into Canadian society; they hold Canadian academic degrees and are able to join the work force without obstacles or barriers. The parents' personal economic and emotional toll has been and is very high but they feel compensated by their children's regained freedom. While they have a very precarious day-by-day economic situation they are able to survive thanks to additional funds provided by their children.

Carlos and Nicole feel vindicated because they were able to gain Canadian citizenship. After a difficult period of adaptation, they have been successful in a business enterprise that not only maintains but also reinforces their ties with Colombia and with Canada.

Since they were free as a family of the responsibility of raising children, they were able to take business economic risks and to move as needed.

In the case of the Fonnegras, their youth was an asset while in the case of the Ponces de León their more advanced age was a hindrance. The same can be said of their Canadian entry class: the Fonnegras as Skilled Workers had freedom of movement, the Ponces de León as Entrepreneurs were locked into a highly structured, if not impossible, set up from the outset.

Witnessing of the struggles of these very sophisticated families to join the mainstream of Canadian society, the question that arises is whether their integration could have been made in a smoother manner. The answer is definitely yes.

The “Entrepreneur Class” as it stands now is an aberration. Basically, if you have money (lots of money) and you can survive, even if you lose your initial investment, you can buy your entrepreneur classification and, by extension, your Canadian passport. If, as an entrepreneur, you invest all your assets (as the Ponce de León family did) in a business enterprise that you have to design from your country of origin without local contacts and without really knowing the local conditions, your chances of success are very poor indeed.

The "Skilled Worker Class" also requires some fine-tuning. Both Fonnegrases' entered under that class yet neither of them was able to work in their professions. The problem has been long known. "We encourage foreign professionals' to come, then let our professional bodies tinker with credential systems to protect themselves by marginalizing the new comers" (Saul).

Furthermore, there should be better immigration information and services abroad in Canadian Consulates and Embassies. An Internet page or printed brochure is insufficient.

There are studies that show the non-skilled workers with no knowledge of English or French have a difficult time when they immigrate: My case study shows that upper class, highly educated professional immigrants who know English well have also a very difficult time being integrated. Age, mind-set, family conditions, flexibility in the outlook have a lot to do with it. To become an immigrant is to start at the bottom and to forget what one was somewhere else.

At the latest LaFontaine-Baldwin Symposium held in Vancouver on February 30, 2007, it was claimed: "Canada is a world leader in the great experiment of immigration and citizenship, yet we show little curiosity about how this talent works and how we can improve it" (Saul).

I hope that "Vancouver: The Longest Journey of Our Lives", brings a human dimension to an issue faced by many highly skilled immigrants who have an advanced education and a wealth of experience and international contacts. Seeing a jet-set Nicole transform herself into a chef and a restaurateur or Lucía change from personnel manager to frame maker is quite a challenge and a lesson to all of us. Their hard work and tenacity sustained them as individuals. They also sustained one another as family members and were able to draw on financial and cultural resources, whether they brought them with them to Canada or developed them within Canada or abroad.

By recording each family's accounts on video, it becomes possible for them to share their experiences in the hope that others may learn from both their difficulties and their achievements. The two families have continued their spirit of wanting to help other new immigrants: Alvaro has organized a depot of used appliances and furniture to set up new comers on their arrival . Carlos and Nicole made a policy to hire only new immigrants, particularly Latin American students.

"Vancouver: The Longest Journey of Our Lives" brings some much needed answers to the very difficult and very Canadian question of the inclusion of immigrants into the nation.

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