Entre Mundos/Between Worlds: Images of Life between Mexico and Ireland

Nuala Finnegan¹

Don't forget to look back every now and then to remember where you come from. Que no se te olvide voltear para atrás de vez en cuando para que no se te olvide de dónde vienes. **Roselyn Sánchez**

Stories of movement and migration have thus far been integral in shaping our twenty-first century world. Writing this article in the midst of a Covid-19 pandemic that has so dramatically suspended our freedom of movement, images of travel and mobility come into sharper focus as though they belong to a past that can never be recovered. It seems particularly pertinent to remember therefore that the vast array of microhistories of movement between and across the Atlantic in the last two decades tell a story of accelerated globalization, transnational encounter and hybrid identity formation. This article documents a recent community art project that sought to shed light on one such microhistory of transnational mobility — that of people of Mexican origin to Cork City, Ireland over the course of the twenty-first century. The transatlantic encounter between Ireland and the English-speaking countries of the Americas has been amply documented in both image and word.² However, whilst there has been cultural and scholarly interest in significant Irish communities in the Spanish speaking world,³ the presence of the Spanish-speaking communities of the Americas in Ireland is less explored and less visible.

From my own engagement work in the Centre for Mexican Studies, I can attest to the growing numbers of Mexicans and a broader community of residents in Cork with Latin American connections, roots and origins. In terms of reliable statistical data, it is known that as of April 2019, there were 622,700 non-Irish nationals resident in Ireland accounting for 12.7% of the total population.⁴ Research into migration in this context, however, frequently pivots around the dual issues of European mobility and freedom of movement on the one hand, and the urgent social concerns that emanate from the asylum process as it is currently configured and its system of Direct

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² To name just two recent book-length studies, see Gabriela McEvoy's *La experiencia invisible. Inmigrantes irlandeses en el Perú* on Irish immigrant experience in Peru (2018), or Tim Fanning's comprehensive overview of notable Irish presences on the continent, *Paisanos: Forgotton Irish Who Changed the Face of Latin America* (2016). Margaret Brehony's ground-breaking exhibition, *The Irish in Latin America* (in partnership with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade), charted a rich history of Irish migrant pathways to the Americas and multiple other scholars have examined the varying migration trends. Much of this research may be tracked through the journal, *Irish Migration Studies in Latin America*.

³ Work on the Irish diaspora in Argentina is of particular note. See, for example, Helen Kelly's *Irish 'Ingleses'*. *The Irish Immigrant Experience in Argentina 1840-1920*.

⁴ Statistics are from the Central Statistics Office and are available at:

https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/pme/populationandmigrationestimatesapril2019/



"María"

These pictures represent the combination of two worlds and how we have adapted to them. "María" is a nahuatl doll from the state of Querétaro, where I come from. My dad brought it when he visited me and when he gave it to me he said: "this is a small piece of your home in Cork".

Mis fotografías representan la combinación de dos mundos y cómo nos hemos logrado adaptar. María, es una muñeca náhuatl que viene del estado de Querétaro de dónde soy yo. Me la trajo mi papá cuando me visitó y cuando me la dio me dijo: "un pedacito de tu casa en Cork".

Elisa Vallejo Márquez



"Any given weekend - Cualquier fin de semana"

When you live in Mexico City to be able to see such an amazing view of nature is something you have to organize, pack and get ready as a special activity in a weekend or holiday. In Cork every day you just get into your car, you drive 5 minutes and booom! Nature will surprise you with its awesomeness.

Cuando vives en una ciudad tan grande como la Ciudad de México, tener la oportunidad de disfrutar la naturaleza implica un gran esfuerzo. Tiene que ser en fin de semana o vacaciones y esto implica organizar, empacar, reservar, cargar, recorrer kilómetros, encontrar donde estacionarse, etc. En Cork un día cualquiera puedes simplemente subirte a tu coche, manejar 5 minutos o simplemente dar la vuelta en la esquina y... boom! La naturaleza te va a sorprender con todo su esplendor.

Carla Olea

Provision on the other.⁵ For the most part, as the Latin American community falls outside of these two categories, it has largely escaped researcher scrutiny.⁶ This community does however feature within this picture of increasing diversity in Ireland, having grown in number significantly in the last two decades. Of particular note is a sizable Brazilian presence to the extent that Portuguese is now Ireland's third largest heritage language and that Brazilians account for 16% of the top ten registered nationalities in the country.⁷ The Mexican community accounts for 2% of registrations and continues to increase.⁸ There is, however, little data available on the experiences of Mexican citizens throughout the country and part of the objective of the project was to draw out reflections from this growing, dynamic community on ideas around diasporic belonging, home, place and togetherness.



"Bud! Are you okay?"

To discover Ireland is such an adventure, always drifting between being in the correct place and time to see unique moments, moments that are difficult to see in your home town. Sometimes, surprisingly, you can see otters, seals and even the odd drunk man enjoying the summer in the River Lee. Other days you go to Blarney Lake, and you will find swans, ducks and horses playing dead.

Descubrir Irlanda es una aventura, siempre a la deriva de estar en el tiempo y lugar preciso para ver momentos únicos y difíciles de ver en tu ciudad natal. A veces caminas por el río Lee y sorprendentemente ves nutrias, focas y hasta uno que otro

⁵ Ronit Lentin is one of many scholars to have tackled the issues. See "Asylum seekers, Ireland, and the return of the repressed", *Irish Studies Review*, 2016, 24:1, 21-34; "Pregnant silence: (en)gendering Ireland's asylum space", *Patterns of Prejudice*, 2003, 37:3, 301-322; *After Optimism: Ireland, Racism and Globalisation (2006). With R. McVeigh.*

⁶ Some people of Latin American origin in Ireland have citizenship from other European countries. There are also asylum seekers from Latin American countries in Ireland, from Nicaragua and Venezuela, to name just two examples.

https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/people/we-don-t-know-how-long-we-ll-wait-for-asylum-but-we-have-hope-now-1.3235545

⁷ https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpnin/cpnin/

⁸ The then Mexican Ambassador, H.E. Carlos García de Alba estimated the Mexican population to be between 1,000 and 1,500 in Ireland in 2011. Una Mullally," Ireland's Mexican Wave", 16 September 2011. Available at: https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland-s-mexican-wave-1.601082. The Census data of 2016 places Mexico on the

list of "between 1,000 and 10,000" nationally. For further information, see Census of Population 2016 – Profile 7 Migration and Diversity. https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp7md/p7md/p7anii/

borrachito disfrutando del verano. Otros días vas al lago de Blarney y te encuentras con cisnes, patos, y caballos que juegan al muertito.

José Baruch Romero



Untitled

Never before in my life have I experienced being this far away from my family. I've lived in another part of my own country but it doesn't compare to the experience of living in another country with a different language. Living here I've had the emotional experience of running into other Mexicans in Cork, someone who can understand my regional jokes, and someone I can speak with in my native language after many days of speaking only in English. Although our ways of living, the food and the activities we used to do in México are very different from what we experience here in Ireland, we are still smiling, we are happy to know a different place like Cork and we are also very grateful for how friendly and respectful Irish people and foreign people from all the world have been with us.

Nunca en mi vida había experimentado el estar tan lejos de la familia, había vivido en otro estado de mi propio país pero nunca se comparara a la experiencia que el vivir en otro país con un lenguaje diferente. Aquí he experimentado la emoción que es encontrar otro Mexicano en la misma ciudad de Cork, que pueda entender tus chistes regionales y se vuelve el deshago después de hablar varios días en otro idioma. Aunque no son las mismas condiciones de un hogar compartido, comida, de pertenencia, de actividades que solíamos hacer en México, seguimos sonriendo, estamos felices de conocer un lugar diferente como Cork y también estamos muy agradecidos con el trato respetuoso y amigable que nos han brindado los irlandeses y extranjeros de todo el mundo, gracias a todos nuestros nuevos amigos.

Guadalupe Beatriz Márquez

The community of people of Mexican origin in Cork has grown exponentially in the twenty-first century. From a tiny number in the early 2000s to approximately 350 residents today.⁹ Within the community, there is much diversity both of generation/age and region of origin as well as many different migration stories. Some come to study in the university, others come to learn English for

⁹ It is impossible to know the exact figure and this approximation comes from my own experience of engagement with the community and information relayed to me by members of it who have compiled these estimates from their figures. In so far as they can be accurate, there are approximately 219 of whom 138 are adults (63%), 56 are children under twelve (25%) and 26 students. Sources for this figure come from data on access of those popular social media sites such as the Facebook page, Mexicanos en Cork (https://www.facebook.com/MexicanosenCork/) and/or attendance at activities of the community (such as the annual party to celebrate Independence). The overall figure also allows for a more transient population that doesn't necessarily engage with activities of the community among whom are large numbers of people who come to access English language courses. With an estimated figure of 2,035 Mexican students registering at language schools in Ireland in 2018, (a figure provided by the organization MEI - Marketing English in Ireland), it is possibly an underestimate of figures for Cork. I am grateful to Margaret Brehony, Cecilia Gamez Campanella and Patricia (Paty) Neilan for their help in compiling this statistical snapshot.

short periods, others come to take up highly skilled employment opportunities in the multinational and pharmaceutical sectors. Others have made Cork their homes through marriage with Irish or other European citizens. From this mosaic of stories, different lived experiences emerge. In cultural terms, it is a particularly active community, participating enthusiastically in civic projects like the St. Patrick's Parade (for which they won an award for Best Dance Group in 2016 and again in 2018), as well as multiple cultural festivals throughout the city including the Cork Jazz Festival and Dragon of Shandon Parade, Shandon Street Festival and Tory Top Park Family Day. There is particularly strong collaboration with the Centre for Mexican Studies in University College on multiple community engagement projects like the annual *posada* hosted by UCC, and the Day of the Dead altar which has been ongoing for many years and which incorporates an interactive workshop element with children, an exhibition, public talks and which has been a collaborative venture with UCC, hosted in the city at St. Peters since 2016.



Untitled

I arrived in Ireland in September 2017 to do a Masters in UCC but my experience in Cork has gone beyond the academic. As soon as I arrived in Cork I met a group of surfers with whom I have been able to learn a lot about Irish culture, the sea and enjoy the green landscapes. As a Mexican I had never experienced a cold beach or covering up from head to toe. I didn't know people had to use wetsuits, gloves, boots and hoodies to be able to swim in the sea, at the beginning that was mind-blowing. That's why I have chosen to show this image of my surf experience in Ireland.

Llegué a Irlanda en septiembre de 2017 para hacer mi maestría en UCC pero mi experiencia en Cork ha ido más allá de lo académico. Al poco tiempo de mi llegada fui acogida por un grupo de surfistas con quienes he pasado mucho tiempo y gracias a eso he aprendido mucho de la cultura irlandesa, pero sobre todo, del mar y he podido disfrutar de los verdes paisajes. Al ser de México, no conocía la experiencia de ir a la playa con frío y cubierta de pies a cabeza, ni sabía que la gente tenía que usar trajes de neopreno, guantes, botas y gorra para poder nadar en el mar, al principio todo eso era de otro mundo. A través de esta imágen muestro mi experiencia del surf en Irlanda.

Brenda Mondragón Toledo



"No transportation"

I've been living far from Mexico, for around 12 years, but I've never seen a disruption like the one suffered in Cork during the snowfall in 2018. It reminded me of a flooding I lived through in Chiapas, Mexico or other natural disasters sadly common in our country. At the time of the snow, we were living beside the bus depot in Cork, shown in the picture, a depot always empty during the day with its buses out transporting people around the city. This time it was full of buses with everyone at home not able to go anywhere. The situation sounds scary but in fact it wasn't. We were all the time surrounded by our Irish neighbours, asking us if we needed something as we have two small children. That was indeed another sign that we feel safe, protected and mainly happy in Cork. Just like home.

He estado viviendo lejos de México cerca de 12 años pero nunca había visto una interrupción como la sufrida en Cork durante la nevada del 2018. Este evento me recordó una inundación que viví en Chiapas, México, y otros desastres naturales que tristemente son comunes en nuestro país. Nosotros vivíamos junto al depósito de autobuses de Cork que se ve en la foto, un depósito siempre vacío durante el día, transportando a la mayoría de la gente en la ciudad; en esta ocasión estaba lleno de autobuses con todos en casa sin la posibilidad de ir a ningún lugar. La situación sonaba escalofriante pero de hecho no lo fue. Nosotros estuvimos todo el tiempo rodeados de nuestros vecinos irlandeses, preguntándonos si necesitábamos algo porque tenemos dos niñas pequeñas. Ese fue otra señal de que estábamos seguros, protegidos y sobretodo, felices en Cork. Como en casa.

Erwin Morales

Between Worlds/Entre Mundos: Images of Life between Mexico and Ireland was an initiative of the Centre for Mexican Studies, University College Cork and had its roots in a panel I convened for the Society for Irish Latin American Studies conference, Comparisons, Conflicts and Connections: Ireland and Latin American in the Past, Present and Future, held in Trinity College Dublin in April 2019. This panel comprised a conversation between two Brazilian artists resident in Ireland (Silvio Severino, Elis Taves O'Sullivan) and an Irish artist (Rita Duffy) on the interconnections and entanglements in their work of the concepts of Ireland and Latin America. On foot of this conversation, and realizing that there were many artists of Latin American origin resident in Ireland with whom conversation might be fruitful, the idea for this exhibition emerged. Entre Mundos/Between Worlds then, was an exhibition of photographic images by members of the Mexican Community in Cork which presented visual reflections on ideas of home, belonging and identity shaped from their multiple lived experiences between languages and cultures. The exhibition call asked participants to speak to "how it feels to live and move in two worlds. At once" (Ellen Hagan). Its aim was to produce a set of visual reflections that could provide a sense of what it meant to be Mexican in Cork for a diverse audience. It was a collaborative project managed by a curatorial team, led by me as director of the Centre for Mexican Studies alongside two key team members, Cecilia Gamez Campanella, long-term Mexican in Cork resident and collaborator of the Centre for Mexican Studies, and Silvio Severino, a Brazilian digital collage artist, based in Cork. We were fortunate also to work with partners also in Cork City Library who facilitated us with exhibition space and their expertise.¹⁰



"Hello and thank you to the King Star"

The hardest part of living in Cork, for me, has been to adapt to the local climate. I couldn't stop eating chocolate the first months, which here is delicious by the way, but it still couldn't lift my spirit, therefore I was sad and sleepy most of the day. It wasn't until I bought some vitamins that my mood improved a bit. Nevertheless, since the sun started shining bright in the sky again, hot, like I'm used to, I've felt really happy. Now every time I see the sun I lift my hand and greet him, thanking him from taking all that cold weather away.

Lo más difícil para mí ha sido aceptar el clima. En los primeros meses no paraba de comer chocolate, que por cierto aquí es delicioso, sin embargo, no podía cambiar mi estado de ánimo, normalmente me encontraba triste y con mucho sueño. Hasta que compré unas vitaminas y me ayudaron a mejorar un poco mi estado de ánimo. Pero desde que comenzó a salir el sol brillante, caluroso como estoy acostumbrada a sentir, me siento muy feliz. Y cada que veo el sol levanto la mano para saludarle y doy gracias de no sentir más frío.

Esthela Silva

One image was selected from each photographer and exhibited alongside a brief biography of the photographer and their own written reflections on the images they took. The project insisted on a bilingual approach throughout, with all text in both English and Spanish. The rationale for this was twofold: on the one hand, we hoped that it might empower those members of the Mexican

¹⁰ We were deeply indebted to the commitment to the project shown by Liam Ronayne, Director of the Cork City Library and Patricia Looney.



Untitled

I have lived almost all my life in the countryside in the mist forest in the mountains in México, so the beautiful landscape of the coastline of Cork has been a pleasure for me. I can spend hours with my camera walking through all the corners of this county, recording images that help me to remember that feeling I have lived with in México almost all my life.

He vivido casi toda mi vida en el campo, en el bosque de niebla en las montañas en México, así que el hermoso paisaje de la costa de Cork ha sido un deleite para mí. Paso horas con mi cámara recorriendo los rincones de este gran condado grabando imágenes que me ayudan a recordar ese sentimiento con el que he vivido en México casi toda mi vida.

Sidarta Corral

community not very confident in English to respond to the project call and we insisted on English to ensure that the ideas surrounding the image would translate back to its audience based in Cork and made up of predominantly English speakers. As the result of Silvio's expertise, it was also possible to screen a video mashup of the images alongside the contextual information. The exhibition was opened on October 7th 2019 as part of University College Cork's Community Engagement week by the Mexican Ambassador to Ireland, H.E. Miguel Malfavón Andrade.

Visual Reflections on Uprooting and Regrounding

The concepts of uprooting and regrounding¹¹ so central to migrant experience constitute an evocative starting point from which to commence analysis of this particular exhibition. Images ranged widely from rural and urban land and cityscapes, to objects, people, animals, and body parts. The photographer profiles were equally diverse and featured a professional art photographer with an established career, Sidarta Corral, and a four year old girl, Amelia Morales.¹² The majority of photographers who submitted images were resident for less than five years in Ireland and several were students at University College Cork. It is highly probable that the project appealed directly to the student community because of its association with the university and their familiarity with

¹¹ These concepts of migrant experience are explored in the collection of essays, *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*, edited by Sara Ahmed, Claudia Castada, Anne-Marie Fortier and Mimi Sheller (Berg 2003). ¹² The project owes everything to the participating photographers who generously gave of their time and energy. The curatorial team was deeply saddened by the death of one of the photographers, Sidarta Corral, in June 2020.

its environment. Indeed, one of the images features the university explicitly. In any follow up project, it is envisaged to explore more broadly reflections from those people of Mexican origin resident in Cork for a longer period to get a sense of how those concepts of uprootedness play out over time.



"Brought you flowers – Te traje flores"

A few years ago I left Mexico with the idea of travelling around the world, to learn new languages and to meet extraordinary people. I was so excited to start this new adventure that I just packed my stuff, took a plane and landed in this beautiful and amazing place, Ireland. At the beginning everything was new and exploring this place was what motivated me every day. However, things changed and I stayed longer than expected, Ireland touched my senses and caught me slowly and nicely. This mysterious, privileged and beautiful green emerald captured my heart and made me fall in love with its charms and people. So I gave my flowers to Ireland, I merged my colours, flavours and fragrances. And now, we belong together. After all, I understood no matter how far you go, traditions and flowers will let you settle down anywhere and there, you will find home!

Hace algunos años dejé México con la idea de viajar por el mundo, aprender nuevos idiomas y conocer gente extraordinaria. Estaba tan emocionado de empezar esta nueva aventura que sólo empaqué mis cosas, tomé un avión y aterricé en este hermoso y extraordinario lugar, Irlanda. Al principio todo era nuevo y explorar este lugar era mi motivación cada día. Sin embargo, las cosas cambian y me quedé más tiempo del que esperaba. Irlanda tocó mis sentidos y me atrapó despacio y amablemente. Qué misteriosa, privilegiada y hermosa verde esmeralda que se ganó mi corazón y me hizo que me enamorara de sus encantos y de su gente. Entonces dí mis flores a Irlanda, combiné mis colores, sabores y fragancias. Y ahora nos pertenecemos. Después de todo, comprendí que no importa qué tan lejos te vas, tradiciones y flores te permitirán echar raíces donde sea, ¡y ahí encontrarás un hogar!

José Soto

Some of the images navigate ideas of belonging and longing, Guadalupe Beatriz presents a picture of togetherness as two female subjects are posed entwined contemplating one of Cork's many bridges. Carla Olea's children are also shot side by side in an image of intimacy as they look out at a lake. Water is a central component of both images. Symbolising flow and movement, it is also elemental and thus part of a vision of the world that is shared even if not through the same space

or time. Both these representations then stage ideas of belonging in environments that are tinged with beauty but also strangeness. The idea of strange permeates many of the images including the horse playing dead by Baruch Romero, or Erwin Morales's aerial shot of Cork's Capwell bus station under snow, captured in its frozen glory during the extreme period of snow in March 2018. This image signals strangeness across both contexts — as strange for a Mexican audience as it is



Romeo Dominguez "untitled"

Everybody has a different perspective of the world. By looking at the world through someone else's point of view we can learn a lot about that person and about what they culturally think is beautiful, important, and worthwhile. I firmly believe that communication through art, but especially the visual arts, is the best form of diplomacy that can exist between two people, cultures and countries.

Cada persona tiene una perspectiva diferente del mundo. Mirando el mundo a través del punto de vista de alguien más podemos aprender más de esa persona y entender que lo que piensan culturalmente es hermoso, importante y que vale la pena. Creo firmemente que la comunicación a través del arte, pero especialmente a través del arte visual, es la mejor forma de diplomacia que puede existir entre dos personas, culturas y países.

Romeo Domínguez

for natives of Cork city for whom extreme snow is still a rare occurrence. Moving through the exhibition, we encounter images that privilege displays of Mexican presence like objects (flowers, dolls) in carefully constructed mise-en-scenes that feature historic and immediately recognisable buildings from Cork's cityscape such as St. Finbar's Cathedral (completed in 1879) or the Quadrangle, the old quarter of University College Cork, constructed in 1845. So, José Soto places a female subject in full Day of the Dead make-up and costume against the backdrop of St. Finbar's cathedral. Elisa Vallejo Márquez playfully positions a Nahuatl doll in University College Cork's "quad" (old quadrangle). Poignant in a number of ways, her text explains that the doll was a gift from her father and embodies a little piece of her Querétaro home. Here the miniature dimensions of the doll when juxtaposed with the imposing backdrop of the nineteenth century buildings connote ideas of vulnerability and frailty. There are also other displays of obvious Mexicanness in the civic life of the city such as Romeo Domínguez's evocative capturing of Mexican participation in the Cork Jazz Festival parade. In this way localized terrains are shot through with visual displays of otherness, inserted into the cityscape as provocation, contesting conventional viewpoints and challenging spectators to look anew at buildings or landscapes that are familiar.

Other images deploy tropes that are familiar cross-culturally yet punctured with deeply personalized twists. One such example is Roselyn Sánchez's image of the footsteps in the sand or another is provided by Esthela Silva who presents an image of her hand held up to the sun. While



Untitled - Amelia Morales



"Decisions - Decisiones"

"Don't forget to look back every now and then to remember where you come from" – those are the words my dad always tells me before starting a new trip. And precisely that is the meaning of this picture. Every footprint means a decision that has been taken and shows how far my steps have taken me. These footprints make me feel anxious about not knowing what is next but excited to think how far I can go, walking ahead with a firm step.

"Que no se te olvide voltear para atrás de vez en cuando para que no se te olvide de dónde vienes"-, son las palabras que siempre me dice mi papá antes de emprender un nuevo viaje. Y precisamente eso significa esta foto, cada huella significa una decisión tomada y el ver hasta dónde me trajeron mis pasos, me hace sentir, ansiedad al no saber qué es lo que sigue, y emoción de pensar hasta dónde puedo llegar, siempre con paso firme y hacia adelante.

Roselyn Sánchez

striking a visual chord of commonality with a Cork audience, the texts that accompany these images nevertheless reveal deep personal insights: the footsteps connect with words Roselyn's father used to whisper and the hand, strategically shot against a shaft of sunlight, discloses a particular longing for light and heat. Images of movement and activity -so often foregrounded in migrants' narratives of home and homelands —also punctuate the images throughout. We see it in the shot of vehicles in the bus station by Erwin Morales, or in the figure of a mother, standing next to a child's buggy or stroller. Looking at this image, knowing that it was taken by the subject's four year old daughter, Amelia Morales, the audience appreciates this deep connection between the mother and the child's learning and moving through the new environment in which she finds herself. Roselyn Sánchez's footsteps leading away into the sand suggest further pathways, a walking into the beyond. Brenda Mondragón Toledo's energizing image of surfing captures her own narrative of belonging and merging and here again, we return to water as central motif. Sidarta Corral's exquisite shot of a jagged southern Irish coast-line also incorporates water, alongside rock, another elemental image of beauty. From this brief overview then, it can be discerned that these visual testimonies pinpoint ideas about inbetweenness in ways that are aesthetically accomplished as well as deeply engaged with the project remit. Moreover, they stage multiple moments of migrant belonging and estrangement; togetherness and entanglement in images that are playful, poignant and powerful, sometimes all at the same time. Ultimately, we can see how they bring together ideas around uprooting and regrounding that encapsulate a snapshot of living between worlds in Cork in the Autumn of 2019.

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