

MIGUEL-IVÁN BARRADAS

My name is Miguel-Iván Barradas. I was born in Mexico. I arrived in Canada on June 14, 2008.

Miguel-Iván was a journalist and defender of human rights in Mexico. He went through difficult times such that he was forced to leave his country. He arrived in Canada with a temporary status, but he finally became a permanent resident.

CHOOSING CANADA

I was familiar with the laws that exist here in Canada. The laws that protect people. I believe there is a very important legal framework here that protects civil rights. This is something that exists even in Mexico and Latin America, but the laws are still weak. The thing I love most about living here in Canada is the chance to express my opinions, most of all. And to be able to live with a sense of freedom, a sense of social peace. That is something that is almost impossible to find in Mexico and in many other countries that are going through difficulties these days. For me, it is always an element of pride. For me, it is part of the Canadian identity.

CHALLENGES TO BE OVERCOME

I remember when I arrived in Canada. The first few days I was here, even with my status as an asylum seeker, it was difficult given the communication problem. I spoke not a word of French. That's normal for Montrealers.

I was not considered a tourist; I was a person living here. In Montreal, the everyday language for almost everyone is French. So, to explain my situation to the authorities, to find a lawyer, for example, it was a bit complicated even if there were social workers to help. But it took days, weeks maybe, to adapt to this new reality. There is a sense of powerlessness, I think, as an immigrant. I force myself to speak and I decided to speak French because for me it is closer to Spanish, my mother tongue. There is sometimes a very significant challenge and that is the lack of tolerance on the part of some people here. I like speaking in French, I like writing in French, I like living in French. But it is hard. I see that sometimes there is no collective patience, even if I am very proud and I know I speak French with a very Hispanic accent. But this is part of my identity, too. But the lack of tolerance on the part of some Quebeckers or Canadians, in general, I believe that it is a very, very significant obstacle.

REFUGEE STATUS

A lot of work remains to be done here in Canada. I've known lots of refugees like me. And, like me, they are always lost. Always living in a state of general confusion. Even

though there are legal resources for protecting refugees, there aren't the cultural resources needed to integrate these refugees. And the reality of refugees is quite unique. It is not like the reality of other immigrants. Refugees are always individuals who live in a perilous situation with a temporary status. There are no programs for providing cultural integration to refugees.

One must learn all the Canadian traditions. Why is there a Canada Day? Why is there a Remembrance Day? Why is there a Patriots' Day in Quebec? What does it mean? I think that for refugees and almost everyone I have met, unfortunately, it is something that is not a priority. It is sad because part of integrating into Canada is knowing those things. It is not just a matter of speaking English or French.

ON CANADIAN IDENTITY

The Canadian identity, it is a very interesting mosaic. I feel that I gave a lot of thought to the Canadian identity when I become a Spanish teacher. I had a lot of Algerian, Japanese, Chinese, Albertan, Quebec students, all across Canada. And I think there were a lot of differences, ethnicities, races, ways of thinking, opinions, but we knew we were together to achieve an objective. In class, the objective was to learn Spanish. So I think that was part of the Canadian identity as well. Certainly we are all very different, there are a lot of diverging opinions, but we are also capable of coming together and overcoming our challenges. For me, that is the most important thing about being Canadian and being a multicultural Canadian these days.

Migue-Iván has just created his own company in Montreal that focuses on promoting the art and culture of Quebec and the First Nations of Canada in Latin America. He recently earned his Master's in Hispanic Studies.