Uncovering the Invisible: Portraits of Latin Americans in London is a photographic collaboration between British-Mexican photographers Pablo and Roxana Allison focusing on the diversity of backgrounds and life-stories of the people that make up this community. It aims to shed light on a multiethnic group that has remained almost invisible but which contributes both economically and culturally to the shaping of British society.

The project’s objective is to support and progress official recognition of this community and to highlight and acknowledge their presence in the UK in order to reach equal opportunities, access to services and representation in parliament. This will improve their quality of life in the country they now call home. It is important to highlight that the London boroughs of Southwark and Lambeth have already recognised them officially.

The catalogue was possible thanks to the financial support from The Business Engagement and Innovation Services (BEIS), University of Nottingham, and has been produced for the exhibition Uncovering the Invisible shown at City Hall London from 16th June to 3rd July 2014 during the FIFA World Cup in Brazil, which showcased portraits of Latin Americans living in London. These portraits are part of a broader project, which presents the faces and stories of the members of this community across the UK.

The exhibition involved collaboration with research fellow Dr Laura Carletti of The University of Nottingham’s Horizon Digital Economy Research Institute. The implementation and design of Near Field Communication (NFC) allows visitors to listen to the life stories of the people in the portraits. This pilot project is part of Horizon research in the creative and cultural sector that aims to enhance the visiting experience by interlinking physical and digital spaces to encourage public participation and engagement.

The production of the project and exhibition was made possible thanks to the financial support from the University of Nottingham’s Horizon Digital Economy Research Institute, a HERMES award from Business Engagement and Innovation Services at the University of Nottingham, the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the University of Nottingham.

For more information about the project please visit: www.uncoveringtheinvisible.co.uk

Photographers Pablo and Roxana Allison were born in Manchester (United Kingdom) and grew up in Mexico City. They later returned to England where they currently live. Their photographic practice focuses on themes of cultural displacement, belonging, memory and identity.

Pablo graduated with a BA (Hons) in Documentary Photography from Newport College of Art and Design, University of Wales whilst Roxana holds a BA in Fine Art from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). Their work has been exhibited in Mexico and the UK.
From business to restaurants, and tango to samba, London’s Latin American communities are having a significant impact on the life of our city, economically, socially and culturally. ‘Uncovering the Invisible’ offers a fascinating insight into their diversity, underpinning historic ties that saw the likes of Simón Bolívar, Francisco de Miranda and José de San Martín hone their ideas for revolution and independence here, and our city’s strengthening economic links with emerging economies of that vast continent.

With the FIFA World Cup in Brazil this summer and the Rio Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2016, this exhibition is also timely. As the biggest soccer tournament in the world gets underway, I hope as many Londoners as possible will visit City Hall to see these pictures, as part of what I am sure will be lively and colourful celebrations throughout the capital.

Boris Johnson
The Mayor of London

The University of Nottingham is proud to sponsor this photographic exhibition of Latin Americans in London at City Hall which is taking place during the FIFA World Cup in Brazil. The University has notable research strengths in Latin American studies and is developing mutually beneficial partnerships with universities across Latin America (Mexico, Peru, Argentina, Chile), and in particular with Brazil. The University is investing some £2 million in engagement with Brazil and has established a joint investment fund with the State of Sao Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP). We have welcomed more than 25 Brazilian PhD students and fellows to Nottingham in the past two years, working in areas such as oncology, bio-energy, food security and water quality. The majority of the Latin Americans resident in Nottingham have links with the higher education sector and the University of Nottingham.

This exhibition, ‘Uncovering the Invisible’, by Pablo and Roxana Allison, has been piloted in the Cervantes Institute, Manchester, and incorporates cutting-edge technology developed at The University of Nottingham’s Horizon Digital Economy Research Institute. The smart phone technology enhances user engagement with the photographs and is part of a larger digital research project developed by Professor Derek McAuley and Dr Laura Carletti.

We are delighted to be part of the celebrations in London during one of the world’s most exciting sporting events taking place in Brazil, the world’s most successful footballing nation.

Professor David Greenaway
Vice-Chancellor
The University of Nottingham
I am delighted City Hall is displaying this exhibition at a time when Latin America, especially Brazil, is in the headlines for the World Cup. Pablo and Roxana Allison have captured the faces of the individuals who make up the Latin American community in London and have given them this unique opportunity to tell us their stories. The exhibition is the culmination of four years’ engagement with Latin Americans in London funded initially by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and more recently by The University of Nottingham and Horizon Digital Economy Research Institute. What started as a historical exploration of women and independence in Latin America (Genderlatam) has fed into the census research carried out by Professor Cathy McIlwaine (Queen Mary University of London) and her report No Longer Invisible, 2011, sponsored by the Trust for London. It has also tapped into the much broader political debate of recognition for the Latin American community in London, spearheaded by the Latin American Recognition Campaign with notable success in Lambeth and Southwark.

‘Uncovering the Invisible’ is the second of two photographic exhibitions. The first, ‘Empowerment through Art’, created by Pablo, featured young Latin American women living in London who were keen to express their independence through photography and drama. It was shown at the New Art Exchange, Nottingham, and at Southwark Council in 2012. This new exhibition, ‘Uncovering the Invisible’, incorporates state-of-the-art digital technology developed at the Horizon Digital Economy Research Institute, University of Nottingham, and brought to us by Dr Laura Carletti. This technology allows us to hear the voices of the Latin American men and women who feature in the photographs. Pablo and Roxana have put faces to the statistics, and Laura has put voices to the faces. Now we can see that each of these Londoners is Latin American but also a unique individual with an interesting story to tell.

Professor Catherine Davies
Department of Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American Studies, School of Cultures Languages and Area Studies, University of Nottingham.
Livan Armenteros (Cuba)  
Primary School Teacher and Dance Instructor

I feel happy in the UK but sometimes a little nostalgic because I miss my family and it is also somewhat difficult to get used to the weather, people and new friends.

Alejandro Pereda (Mexico)  
IT and Marketing Programmer

I feel at home in the UK because I have my family, my wife. It’s 10 years since I arrived and I would say that London is a city that has accepted me very well.
At this point in my life I feel at home here in the UK and also very comfortable. I feel that I belong here.
Anselmo Di Bello (Argentina)
Gardener

I came to the UK because I wanted to learn a little more about this culture. I liked it and ended up staying. I have spent 15 years here so far and I feel very comfortable because I can do what I want.

Amy Rosario (Puerto Rico)
Actress and Receptionist

I feel happy in the UK because after three years I finally feel at home thanks to the support from the Latin American community. I also feel more connected to my roots.
To be Latin American is to have a very open attitude and to be spontaneous. It is also to be creative and persistent.

Nelly Mosquera (Colombia) Community Radio Presenter
Whenever I have the opportunity to visit my country of origin I feel that I need London but when I am in the UK I feel I need Colombia.
Alicia Bastos (Brazil) Creative Industries Professional

London is a particularly cosmopolitan place. The UK has offered me the opportunity to meet people from places I would have never imagined.

Gabriela Quevedo (Venezuela) PhD Student and Voluntary Sector Worker

It is certainly not easy to be an immigrant in any country but I believe it is an important experience for anyone to grow as a person both individually and collectively.
Fernando Abadie (Paraguay)
Banking Sector Worker

Being in the UK and away from my country has made me feel more identified with Latin America. One of the positive aspects I have experienced is that British people are very interested in learning about other cultures.
Carmen Barreda (Nicaragua)
Private, Public and Charity Sector Worker

I feel pretty good in the UK, there are many opportunities and I have been able to create the spaces I have wished. To be Latin American means to face the future and to continue building the unity that characterises us.

Alejandra Angulo (Honduras)
Banking Sector Worker

I feel very privileged to live in a very different place from mine in which there are many new things to learn and do. Ideally I would like to enjoy the best of both countries in one place.
Nestor Granda (Peru)  
Services Sector Worker 
I came to the UK in search of a job as the economy in the country I used to live in is currently in a pretty bad shape. The language barrier has been my main obstacle however I strive to improve every day.

Tommy Velasco (Bolivia)  
Services Sector Worker 
I am always going to be Latino, I am Bolivian by heart but I feel at home in the UK. If I were not at ease here I would have migrated elsewhere by now.
What does being Latin American mean to me? Well, it means that I am part of a greater community. And one thing that I feel unites Haiti to the rest of Latin America is the heritage of liberty and liberation.
Sabrina Cabrera (Ecuador)
Primary School Student
I feel good in the UK because I have friends at school and most importantly because I have my parents by my side.

Ingrid Hinojosa (Belize)
College Student
I feel accepted in London. I’ve travelled and lived in lots of different countries but I have never felt normal... in the UK there is so much diversity that you cannot feel outcast, one feels accepted and I really like that.
Alma Gatica (Guatemala)  
Charity Sector Worker  

Being Latin American to me means many things but in general I think it means happiness, colours and friendship.

Carolina Bugueno (Chile)  
Yoga Teacher  

I find it really exciting that when I hear someone speaking Spanish I will stop and ask them where they are from and it is always like meeting a friend or a family member.
Benjamin Welham (El Salvador)
Preschooler
Home for me is here in London because I am with my mummy and daddy and I like my bedroom and my toys but I like El Salvador because food is nice and I like being with my granny.
Rigoberto Delgado (Panama)  
Customer Service Advisor

London is definitely my home because I have had the chance to meet lots of people here... of course remembering my country is important but the place where I feel at home is definitely right here.

Victor Fonseur (Dominican Republic) PhD in Finance and Investment Student

I don’t think my home can be compared to any place here in the UK because over there I’ve got my family but I like it here in London. So far, I feel good!
Routes Through Latin American Identity

From a historical perspective the presence of Latin Americans in the UK can be traced back to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries with the presence of exiles and revolutionaries such as Viscardo y Guzmán, Francisco de Miranda, Simón Bolívar, San Martín and other heroes of Latin American independence. Roughly three key moments can be identified in the history of the Latin Americans in the UK. The first dates back from the late eighteenth century to the 1970's, followed by a second stage beginning in the 1970's with the arrival of refugees fleeing dictatorships particularly from Argentina and Chile, and a third stage – from the mid-1980’s to the present – which is characterized by a substantial influx of Latin American migrants escaping the economic crises in their countries of origin.

The Latin American community in the UK – numbering approximately 200,000 according to the No Longer Invisible Report by Cathy McIlwaine (Queen Mary University of London) – has contributed both economically and culturally to British society. But, who are Latin Americans? What does being Latin American mean? The answer depends on the focal point from which the diaspora is observed: geographical, historical or cultural, or all these together. It is commonly accepted that someone is ‘Latin’ if they belong to or descend from any of the countries in the region, from Mexico to Argentina. However it is important to underline that this identity has a long history and is constructed day by day by Latin American migrants.

First of all, we would like to express our gratitude towards every person who participated in the portraits and shared their life stories. Thank you for the trust, invaluable help, support and enthusiasm. Without you this project would have not been possible.

We would also like to thank the University of Nottingham’s Horizon Digital Economy Research Institute, the Business Engagement and Innovation Services (University of Nottingham), the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the University of Nottingham for the financial support towards the realisation of the project and catalogue as well as City Hall London, especially Brian Oakaby and Richard Reddie for their interest in the project and exhibition, the Cervantes Institute in Manchester and Southwark Council.

A big thank you to Professor Catherine Davies (University of Nottingham) for actively helping us and supporting us all the way, Dr Laura Carletti (Horizon Digital Economy Research Institute, University of Nottingham) for giving the exhibition experience such a wonderful dimension and Sarah Kerr (University of Nottingham) for contributing towards the making of this catalogue.

Also organisations which were key in the shaping of this body of work such as the Latin American Recognition Campaign (LARC), the Coalition of Latin Americans in the UK (CLAUK) and the Latin American Women’s Rights Service (LAWRS), we would like to thank Professor Cathy McIlwaine (Queen Mary University of London) for collaborating with us and for inspiring us through her academic research ‘No Longer Invisible’. Fred Coker and Lucia Cuevas (Armadillo Productions) for believing in the project and making the film come true and Claudio Chipana for his involvement and for sharing his views on Latin American identity.

A special thank you to Joe Ainsworth for taking the time and care to print the work, Mark Starbuck for his expertise and sharing his views on Latin American identity.

Claudio Chipana
Co-founder and member of LARC London, 2014

The creation of regional blocs such as UNASUR and CELAC, amongst others, is an indication that Latin American identity is more than something individual, it is more extensive, fluid and above all is diverse: the “Patría Grande” (the “Big Homeland”), which integrates all nations to the south of the Grande river and includes the Latin diaspora. Likewise, Latin America is multilingual and multicultural. As the Peruvian writer José María Arguedas affirmed: We are ‘of all kinds of blood’, that is, all races.

Latin Americans aim to be recognised and represented as a community that seeks integration and inclusion as an ethnic minority with equal access to opportunities in employment, education and social services.

With the emergence of organisations such as the Latin American Recognition Campaign (LARC) and the Coalition of Latin Americans in the UK (CLAUK) in London, the consensus is that the category for such group should be officially ‘Latin American’, its recognition as an ethnic minority by the London boroughs of Southwark and Lambeth represents a sure step towards its acknowledgement in the national statistics.

Uncovering the Invisible’s central subjects are all members of the Latin American community in the UK, each with a personal story to tell. Pablo and Roxana interweave the subjectivities captured in each portrait and enable us to understand the much larger story: the story of Latin American identity.

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