

## Hondureña-Americanah

By Joanna E. Sanchez-Avila

*All water has perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was.*  
 –Toni Morrison, “The Site of Memory”

I am Hondureña (hyphen) Americanah. The long dash visualizes the distance I feel between my Honduraness and my U.S. Americanness. I have never physically been to Honduras, unless you count Google Maps Satellite images as a form of travel. My herstory begins with the threads of my parent’s story of immigration.



*Figure 1. Screenshot of Google Maps Satellite Image of Honduras. Author screenshot.*

In the mid-1980s, both of my parents emigrated from Honduras to the United States. Like most immigrants seeking a better life, America was the ‘Land of Opportunity’. As Central American immigrants, they settled in Los Angeles, California. They became self-employed and began selling ice cream in an ice cream truck.

They had three daughters, who spent most of their childhoods growing up and laboring alongside them. The ice cream truck exposed us to nomadic tendencies, patterns of social interactions, or to the schematics of navigating a self-employed business. During our childhoods, my sisters and I spent most of our time in the ice cream truck, so often times home felt like a temporary space.



*Figure 2. Polaroid of ice cream truck snack menu. From author's family archives.*

My childhood backyard included the mean streets of South, West, and Central Los Angeles. My sisters and I grew up temporarily occupying these streets. In fact, most of our time we spent in the historic Mid-Wilshire area known as Koreatown (K-Town). My memoryscape consists of the people and actions I witnessed: mujeres, niñ@s, thugs, drugs, violencia, Blacks, Latinos, americanos, Coreanos, drogadictos, y la competencia: los raspaderos, los eloteros, los carretilleros, y La Mara: todos mezclados como un soft serve ice cream swirl.

The ice cream truck was my first (in)formal classroom. It taught me that I was not like other Latinos. I learned about the hierarchies within Latino communities that perpetuate discrimination based on ethnicity, class, cultural and political ideologies as if trying to survive the white supremacy of American systems of oppression were not enough. In the thirteen years that I worked with my parents, I learned that my cultural heritage was something that should remain obscure.



*Figure 3. "Sensuous Intertextuality." 2017. Author's personal art.*

As a 1990s Honduran-American, I grew up amongst the Mexican, Mexican-American, and Chicana/o hegemony in South Central Los Angeles, California. The dominant minority cultures subsumed me. I began passing as Mexican in order to survive. Slithering through my daily encounters of Latinidad. I felt faceless. Sometimes even headless, like I was doing a dance with multiple veils, mimicking Salome from the Bible.

As a child, I never made long-term friendships because I often had to wear masks. My Mama told me that in order to avoid social hardships in school; I should tell people that I was Mexican. She emphasized that revealing that I had Honduran parents would only complicate my interactions with other people. This conversation was the moment I realized passing as Mexican would become my survival strategy — a strategy that would get me through the rest of my 15 years of public schooling.



Figure 4. Elementary school handmade Mother's Day Postcard. c. 1998. From author's personal archive.

My elementary school was a mix of students in the following order of majority: Mexicans or, Mexican Americans, African Americans, and very few Central Americans like me. I remember becoming close with three other Central American students in my second grade class. Two of them shared Salvadoran culture with each other. The third was Guatemalan. Though I am not Salvadoran or Guatemalan, I was just happy to know that at least a few other Central Americans existed in my world.

My fear of being othered and tokenized silenced my *herstory* for most of my life. In fact, I did not even begin to identify as Honduran-American until I was in my *third year of college*! When I was growing up, and even to this day, it is rare to find other folks like me in close proximity who are Honduran-American.



*Figure 5. Author self-portrait at the beach. May 2017. Author's personal collection.*

After taking women's studies courses in college, I was motivated to learn more about my identity as a young woman, but also about myself as a distinct Latina. I began to entender mis experiencias con teorías y empecé hablar en la lengua de los estudiad@s. My college education helped me identify aspects of my experiences in critical and self-empowering ways. This is where I gained my voice through the language of critical consciousness. My exposure to radical thinkers of color appeared here and there like blots of rainbow colored ink on white paper. It motivated me to create a paradigm shift in my thinking of how I was reading the world and how I could continue to exist in it.

Reclaiming authorship of my identity reminds me that I no longer need to wear a mask. Now, I use language to create a new self-identification.

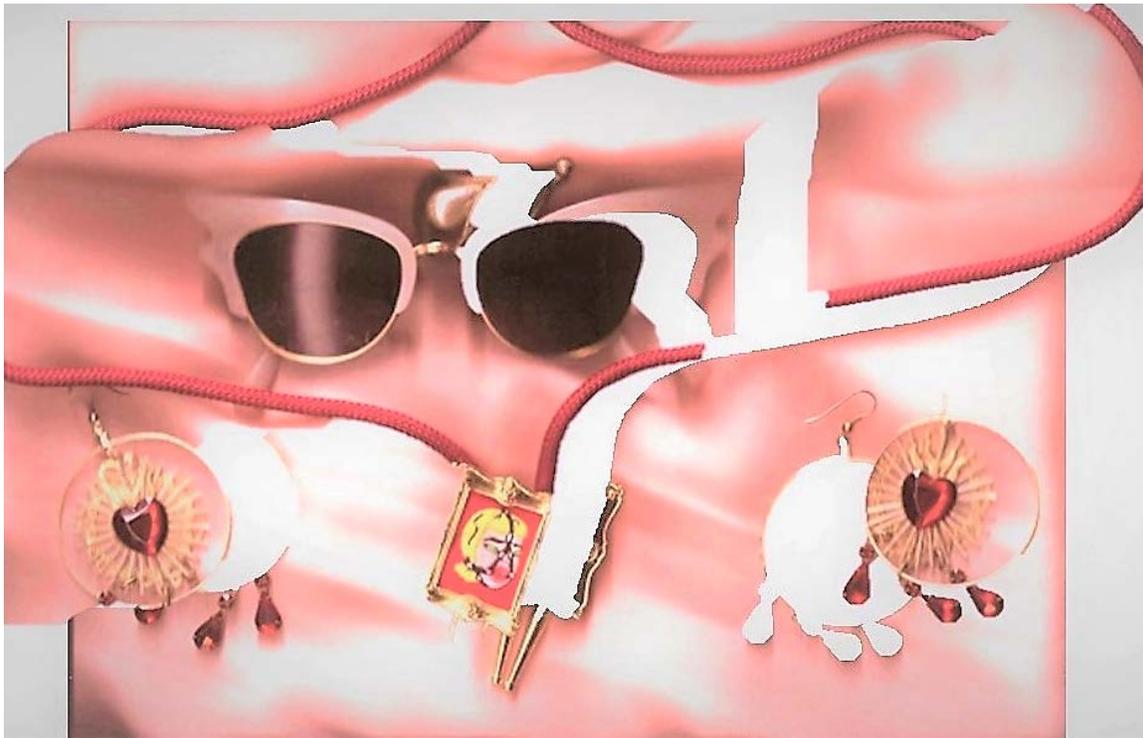
#### Hondureña-Americanah

Linguistically it communicates the multiplicity of identities I currently possess. The term *Hondureña* is the Spanish feminine noun to describe a female from Honduras or who has Honduran heritage. *Americanah* with an 'h' emphasizes how the vintage aesthetics and nostalgia of 20<sup>th</sup> century American culture influences my fashion, and acknowledges my birth in California, USA. Additionally, I felt a connection to Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's definition of *Americanah*, "a word in Nigeria referring to people who pretend to be Americanized or have been Americanized" (Kamal, 2014). For various reasons, I relate to Adichie's definition of *Americanah*, one for example is that my college education enlightened me to the complexities of U.S. history and the problematics of its origins, as well as the complexities of assimilation within it.



Figure 6. "The Art of Femininity." 2017. Author's personal art

I began and to this day continue my journey of self-discovery, self-validation, and self-acceptance. I learned that women of color, including me, have their own *herstories*. In those college classes, women's histories, *her-stories*, were uncovered, restored, and talked about as part of general history, which moved me. These historical discoveries inspired me to challenge the mainstreaming that I participated in by passing as Mexican. I no longer wanted to demarcate my body as Mexican through language because I realized that I was committing an epistemic violence toward myself. I was erasing my parents' Honduran *hers-* and *his-*stories in order to belong to the mainstream.



*Figure 7. "Avant-Garde Aestheticz: Dr. Frankenstein's Logicz." 2018. Author's personal art.*

The stratification of my identities amplified insecurities of who I am. I feel like a hybrid. I am composed of many parts mostly with origins outside of my Honduran heritage. Like Dr. Frankenstein's monster, I exist in the world as an assemblage of Mexican/Mexican-American/Chican@, Black, and white America, and of some Honduran ideologies, beliefs, and cultural understandings. One body, many parts: American-American, Honduran-American, Mexican-American. I was all of them but none of them at the same time, feeling like Dr. Frankenstein's monster.

Passing as Mexican has highlighted the troubling issues silenced by dominant narratives about who gets to claim Latinidad. These strategies are a result of the internal challenges that some individuals struggle with as they navigate through Latinidad within the dominant minority culture. They are revelations of the complexities of multilayered systems of assimilation in the United States.

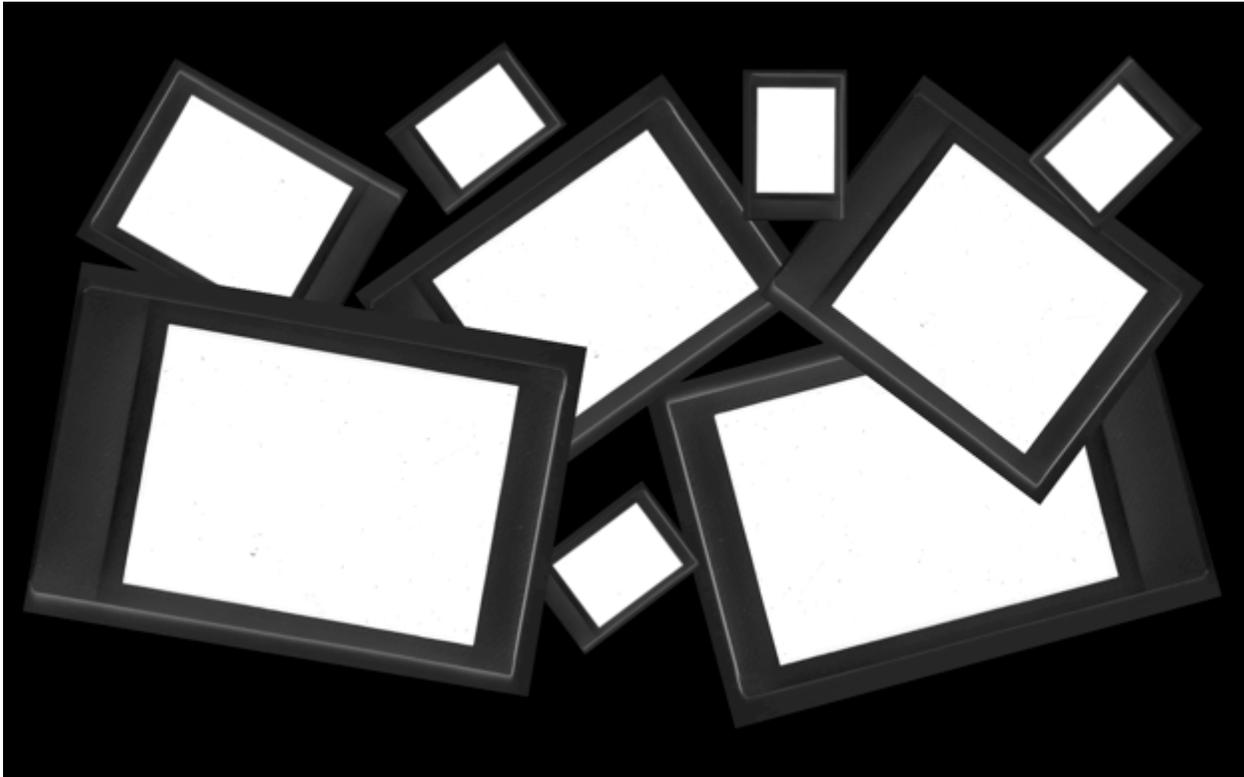


Figure 8. “In Process...” 2018. Author’s personal art.

Despite the recent limited representations of Hondureñas, Hondureños, and Hondureñxs as threatening criminals and suffering immigrants at the U.S.-Mexico border due to the on-going political instability in Honduras, and the #45 (Donald Trump) administration’s restrictive immigration policies that affects many Central American migrants, I am hopeful that a multidimensional representational spectrum of Honduran identities exists. Perhaps it is already in process, seeking institutionalization in *hers-* and *his-*tory.

### **Gotitas Del Saber**

Our stories, our memories, and our lived experiences are like an undeveloped instant photograph or Polaroid picture. Although predisposed circumstances may frame our stories, we are still developing them and reflecting on what these memories mean to us.

We must continue to document our experiences and historicize our lives of resilience and resistance. In addition, remind those who want to erase us, and ignores us, that we are here to stay, and that we exist without apology!

**Works Cited**

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