

LATIN AMERICAN IMMIGRANTS' CHILDREN'S LIVED EXPERIENCES IN RURAL AND URBAN SCHOOLS IN NORTHERN CHILE: UNDERSTANDING LOCAL, NATIONAL, AND TRANSNATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF CULTURE CROSSINGS*

EXPERIENCIAS DE VIDA DE HIJOS DE INMIGRANTES LATINOAMERICANOS EN ESCUELAS RURALES Y URBANAS DEL NORTE DE CHILE: ENTENDIENDO EXPERIENCIAS DE CRUCE DE CULTURAS DESDE LO LOCAL, NACIONAL Y TRASNACIONAL

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RESUMEN

Este ensayo invita al lector a explorar, experimentar y conectarse con múltiples experiencias de vida de niños(as) hijos de inmigrantes de origen latinoamericano en la ciudad de Arica, ubicada cerca de la frontera norte de Chile. Las historias de los niños se refieren a vidas en un área de "corredor" en fronteras de América del Sur, cuyos límites son a veces definidos y a veces difusos. Obstáculos (u oportunidades), dificultades (o sueños): las experiencias de vida migratorias son mediadas por la nacionalidad, el color de la piel, el género, el estatus socioeconómico, las intenciones de empleo y otros asuntos.

Si bien las políticas de migración pública de Chile prometen fronteras abiertas, los criterios de ingreso al país pueden reflejar en la práctica la desconfianza, el rechazo y la discriminación. La sociedad chilena también está dividida: hay solidaridad, tolerancia y respeto, particularmente hacia los niños, pero también puede haber una sensación de que los inmigrantes latinoamericanos pueden ser considerados "problemáticos".

Los momentos que cuento en este capítulo se basan en la autoetnografía interpretativa (por ejemplo, Denzin, 2014), y trazo la ruta de mi propia narrativa, releyendo mis propias experiencias de educación a través de (y dentro) de las fronteras en diferentes momentos de mi vida de estudiante en Chile, España y los Estados Unidos. Estos relatos ponen de relieve mi reflexión sobre el sistema educativo actual en Chile, y especialmente en la región fronteriza de Arica, desde perspectivas políticas, sociales, culturales e históricas. Estos factores influyen en las interacciones y relaciones forjadas entre niños extranjeros y niños chilenos, tanto en el aula como en el patio de recreo.

Palabras Clave: Hijos de inmigrantes, fronteras y transnacionalismo, autoetnografía interpretativa, investigación cualitativa, escuelas.

ABSTRACT

This essay, invites the reader to explore, experience, and connect with multiple children's lived experiences of immigration in the city of Arica, located near Chile's northern border. The children's stories are about borderland lives in a South American 'corridor' area, whose boundaries are at times defined and at times fuzzy. Obstacles (or opportunities), difficulties (or dreams): migrants' lived experiences are mediated by nationality, skin colour, gender, socioeconomic status, employment intentions, and other issues.

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While Chile's public migration policies promise open borders, selection criteria may in practice reflect distrust, rejection, and discrimination. Chilean society, too, is divided: there is solidarity, tolerance, and respect, particularly towards children, but there may also be a sense that Latin American immigrants can be considered 'problematic' arrivals.

The moments I told in this chapter draw upon interpretive autoethnography (e.g. Denzin, 2014), and I chart the route of my own narrative, re-reading my own experiences of education-across-(and within)-borders at different times of my life in Chile, Spain, and the USA. These narratives throw into sharp focus my reflection on the current education system in Chile, and especially in the border region of Arica, from political, social, cultural, and historical perspectives. These factors influence the interactions and relationships forged between foreign children and Chilean children, both in the classroom and in the playground.

Key Words: *Children of migrants, borders & transnacionalism, interpretive autoethnography, qualitative inquiry, schools.*

These stories are set in transnational areas in which there are identity slippages – is the local also the national? How does this play out in urban versus rural settings? And to perpetuate a long-running conflict and tension with Peru and Bolivia, where exactly is the Chilean border, both in reality and in the imagination? Notions of 'ideal' (white, European-descended) Chilean identity may be present in local ways of valuing and of seeing Others, and the violent legacies of forced *Chilenización*, during the dictatorship, linger on.

My own voice is *Ariqueña, Chilena*, and Latin American and my identity has both influenced, and been influenced by, my own experiences of crossing cultures at home and abroad, thereby allowing me to see myself in the place of 'Otherness' that I am now researching among the children of immigrants. This essay therefore seeks to put into words what cannot easily be said, to generate knowledge intended to promote a culture of respect and integration in the border-region schools.

Autoethnography as a border

I am a lecturer in a public university in Northern Chile. In a place where we are in an "interesting", and to me, a passionate space: the Andean *corridor*. The space of daily life where good and bad experiences between the west of Bolivia, the south of Peru and the north of Chile take place. Simply by looking at the newspapers, just reading that, or listening to or watching the local news on TV, we could know what has happened during this century in our borders. I could see this as clearly as we could see the stars at an observatory (Pelias, 2014). I could never see the stars as clear as this in any other place but in the Cerro Tololo Inter-American Observatory¹ in my country.

In my Chilean scenario, the border is more than the geographical barriers or the Chilean public policies against migrant people or in favor of them. The borders are in our minds. Then they

are extended to routes, trajectories; the lives of people who grow and move forward; lives like mine, traveling to different places with more or even less money; with different flavors and smells in their memories and identities defined across borders, with or without security insurance, foreign ID cards, sometimes isolated, sometimes asking for things we do not have in our countries, sometimes without knowing what tomorrow will be like in the foreign country where they/we are waking up one day.

There is a place where the liminality, the hybridity, the inequalities, the difference behind *our colors*, are acts not problems to be solved. A place where the importance of your ID card could allow you to live a better life depending on the luck you had at birth, depending of the value behind your appearance, behind your beliefs, behind your politic view of the world. These words sounds better than practices about that.

In this context, the context of a region, the macro central south Andean region, my university – the University of Tarapacá - is growing. Only because it was created there, we have the responsibility to understand and create local knowledge based on multicultural policies in our classrooms. But how could we break the glass of national policies of *Chilenismos (Chileanism)* as a state-nation, where sovereignty is imposed over our lives as a mark of fidelity? And in the practice, how can we gain the struggle to break the thick glass created between Peru, Bolivia and Chile from the historical segregation and racism against indigenous people and immigrant people from previously peripheral nations, where the case of other realities, in the practice is not difficult to see *antiimmigration as sentiment* (McLaren, 1997, p. 210), founded in the historical facts that made us enemies in the past?. The enemy [other from neighborhood Andean countries] not as a post colonial idea of mestizo; the other as unclassified lives with us, with children with Chilean nationality

as students in Chilean schools, where they need to dance to the rhythm of centralist Chilean non-representative folkloric dances; as children under the guise of Chilean children, who learn about the war and battles against their own countries with the happy end given by the history written for Chile, by Chileans, against the 'looser' Andean neighborhood countries heroes from Peru and Bolivia (e.g. Aguirre & Mondaca, 2011; Chaupis, 2015; Ugarte, 2014). As we learned in the history class in primary and secondary school in Chile.

Families that need to support our economy, working better than the Chilean people, working in the positions that Chilean people do not want to be, resisting inequalities and social injustices against foreign Latin American people. Besides, women seem to always belong to a lower level in the Chilean social order. Women who cannot continue their studies because the national public policies in education demand long, slow, expensive, and bureaucratic procedures to obtain the recognition for their studies obtained in their home countries. People who need to resist the violence behind the views, acts and national laws, which were only changed in 2015 to create effective public policies in immigration. However, these 'laws' have been suspended until today (Rehbein, 2017). This, in a country that has more migrant people and their families, in numbers that increase every year, coming mostly from Latin American countries (Departamento de Extranjería y Migración, Ministerio del Interior y Seguridad Pública – Chilean Government, 2016), is it possible? Percentages which have a high impact on the national educational system which is non inclusive of interculturality but recognizing that this is the way to have a better life, in a safe place, in a questionable "multicultural space" that we linger to see as our current social organization and our regional place in northern Chile, in the macro central south Andean region.

In this place, as it is a general tendency in the world, there is a tendency to transfer knowledge from white dominant cultures with positivistic views of the psychologist, for example. Fortunately, this is only the main tendency.

In this context, interpretive autoethnography is for me, as the voice of a Latin American woman, an act of healing, an act of liberation, an act of working out/ preparing, an act of salvation. A hope to create new academic spaces of actions where the banner of social justice is not only for

the paper, the desk, or the international worldwide conference. It is concerned with a research ethic since I work with people who need solutions to their and our social problems. In this scenario, we need to do something.

From a series of trips officially called post-doctoral stances, I identify moments of a process of awakening, breaking the silence, finding my I as a *coffee latte* color woman's voice, as a way to break sovereignty and nationalism in my border town (Cid, 2012), as a gift from the richness of a culture deleted behind the color of my skin, but at the same time, impossible to erase the obvious in my eyes and in the eyes of others, as a process of moving in motion, and moving to action as maturity of my I (Zapata-Sepúlveda, 2016).

This, in different contexts marked by marketplace policies and neoliberalism in higher education as a worldwide tendency. This, marked by the sexism and the normal kinds of violence against women like myself, that represent a threat for some kinds of scholars that prefer the current social order even in contexts influenced by laws and political right-wing governments that have made these people believe that the world will be safe as it is. This, in contexts where fear and terror (and their consequences), caused by the past and present state repression, fits on individualism, indifference, and the distant and (positivist) view of the other (suffering) seen and touched always from the top, always from the non-victim position (this in contexts where fear and terror caused by the past and even present state repression, fits in individualism, indifference, and the distant position from the top to the sufferer).

Close to this blanket, on a beautiful hill in the driest desert in the world, where I can see 3 countries at the same time, I wish to share my performative text as a dream.

I wish to break the traditional paradigms about ethics and the controlled role of the researchers in the field, a way to humanize the academia, a way to invite audiences to do something, a way to create a better world from the isolated and individual writing process to the sharing spaces that evoke personal and universal memoirs (Denzin, 2016). This in an era of the national measures marked by papers no books, marked by national projects that do not fund this kind of inquiry as research. This, in an era where we can do *Writing of [as] healing and resistance* (Weems, 2013).

In my research Project which seeks to study the interactions and social relations of the children of immigrants and the children of Chileans in the schools of the border city of Arica, the questions now are: Who are we, the Chileans in Arica? Who are we the Ariqueans in Arica and in the capital? Who is the 'other' foreigner in the city? These questions that challenge our nationalistic triumphant post Pacific War ego against the Peruvians and in a series of historical disputes against the Bolivians as a landlocked country, which is also reflected in our victories in football soccer, especially when they take place against Peru and Bolivia, which lead me to think of the invisibility of our colourless voices when we conduct research about the 'other' immigrant in our country.

Miss, we are not the problem. The problem is that the government and the football whip up sentiment against our country to emerge (I became aware of this during a group interview conducted in a school in the city; an 8 year-old primary school girl whose parents are from Peruvian origin).

Studying the other from the perspective of interpretive autoethnography is to do research from our perspective as well. Writing about the other from these methodologies is to connect from the social sciences with the pain and grief of lives full of sacrifices that strive to resist a racist society that looks at them with distrust, in a second order category and as a problem (e.g. Tijoux, 2016).

Two teachers of primary education tell the children in the classroom: *"your parents come to take advantage of the system. In Chile they give them everything. You have more money than I do"*. The children smile, not quite understanding what they are being told.

Your parents bring you to school wearing your worst clothes for the school to give you (the children) uniforms, food, and lodging. Because this country even gives houses to foreigners. But each year it is your own parents who renew their vans, and take the money to Bolivia where they build large mansions.

The children still do not understand. On the other hand, says a teacher, *"I still have the same old Chevette!"*.

All of this takes place in the context of a rural school classroom where most of the children are sons and daughters of Peruvian and Bolivian parents who have come to the country to work in agriculture in that area. The teachers' comments are a follow up to a situation in which I had just informed them about the objectives of this research, and the teachers give their opinion about the children of immigrants coming to their class in front of the whole class and as a response to my sharing the objectives of my investigation with them.

Then, the way we see the other depends on us, in a constant coming and going of perceptions, ideas, actions that intertwine race, class, status, nationality, gender, and the role of students in the schools of Arica. An identity that varies from school to school, depending on the geographical area in which the school is located (Zapata-Sepúlveda, *in press*).

According to the actions taken by the same members of the school community for their students, according to the value given to the other between the children themselves and their parents. So, to speak of migrations in the north of Chile deals with private and complex events in the lives of people who voluntarily or involuntarily have reached what we understand is our country, driven by poverty, the illusion of a better life and to start a life different to which they have lived until arriving in Chile.

In the days in which I write these lines, I find myself attending schools every day throughout the morning. I attend one school a day. I came back after 24 years. The realities are very diverse, as well as the faces of immigration through the children and the educational systems in rural and urban areas. In the rural area of Arica, one of the 8 schools is located at Km 45, in a town called Pampa Algodonal. The road from the city ends there. This is the most distant school from the university I work at that is located in the city, and it can be reached by car in about 50 minutes. In this school, there has been an increase in the enrolment from twenty-eight students to more than 70 in the last year.

The children say there is no difference here during their group interview. We are all the same, and although in terms of inclusion the valuation of the own culture of migrant children or children of immigrants should be considered a contribution to education in Chile, they feel welcomed when their

Chilean friends tell them that they are the same as them. This is what they would like to hear. It is like being accepted and not being what is discriminated against and segregated. Why would anyone want to be different when difference marks inequality, discrimination, stigma, rejection and is the cause of mockery? This trend, which also followed by some teachers, is the way schools have faced the arrival of the children of immigrants, now also Chileans.

One day to Maria, a 7 year old girl who approached me while I was observing the children play during recess:

María: *Hi, she says to me, I want you to come here more often.*

I: *What is your name?* I ask.

María: *Here my name is Marien and in Bolivia it is Maria.* While she smiles.

I: *Are you from Bolivia?*

María: *Yes, my parents are from Bolivia. We sometimes travel to see my grandma. I miss her a lot. She always asks my mom to bring her here but I do not know why they haven't brought her here yet. Every time we visit her she tells my mom: take me with you, take me with you.*

I: *And what is it that you miss about your grandma?*

María: *I miss being with her and the yummy food she makes. She makes me like four different dishes. And these are yummy.*

I: *Are these dishes spicy?*

María: *Yes, these are hot.*

I: *And do your parents work here?*

María: *Yes, my dad works in the farm and my mom looks after my baby brother and doesn't work. I don't want them to get divorced so I want my dad to stop drinking.*

At the same school, the most rural of the project, close to Bolivian border and with an undefined number of children born to Bolivian parents and of Bolivian nationality, the children attend a multigrade classroom which has been built on two containers.

This room symbolizes for me the greatest protection that these children can have to live a childhood as children who study and play in their recess without differences that segregate them because all of them are children of farmers, mostly passers-by and without residence permit to work from Bolivia. Many of their parents do not have the

residence to be in the country. Others do, and they also have the Chilean citizenship, but this seems a matter of an errand, which in this protected space does not make them any different.

From this room with 10, 11 and 12 year old children, where I have a seat at the back of the room, I observe their interactions, their interactions with the teacher, also with me during class and recess. I also observe myself in relation to them and what I feel by being there.

I watch them working during the whole class. The children smile every time I come to their classroom. It is as if they are happy because someone comes to visit them. They are in such a faraway school. The farthest from the down town area but the closest to the places where their parents work and their homes. At the same time they are very shy and they almost do not turn around to look at me but at times they gaze at me to see whether I am looking at them because they know I am there. They play between them when they have finished their exercises, all in a very low tone of voice and make jokes between them that I cannot hear. It is very pleasing to be there. It is very relaxing, and time passes very quickly. They ask me to take pictures of them and their games. They do not ask me to print them. Just to take pictures of them at recess.

When having a chat with a staff member at the school, she tells me:

There are children who sometimes arrive without socks because they do not have them, and it is very cold here in the morning. Some children ask for bread, sometimes I have one without anything in it and they eat it with great enthusiasm, as if it were a bread with something yummy inside.

Many of them do not know the sea, they have never been to the city, and we cannot send them homework because we know they will come back the same the next day. That is why we need to do a review of the contents before the tests.

Those two children you see over there who are sitting together at the front of the classroom come from Bolivia and do not have a mom. One of the calls me mom and the other calls the other teacher aid in the school mom. I look at those children and they never changed their sitting position. They stood there looking at their copybook during the whole day. I didn't hear their voices either.

These days I have not stopped thinking about those children and seeing in them what could be the most impoverished and difficult face of immigration in Arica. Very invisible to many even to me that I have lived there almost all my life, and it is very hard and difficult to imagine as to put ourselves in those children's shoes.

Even though this is not the common face in this school, this is part of their lives and realities for the case of the children the staff member talked about. Then, the children's lives depend on their past and present family histories, on the decisions their parents have made, and on the current socio-economic and family conditions of their parents in Chile, so, regardless of this, links are always left behind. Family immigration always means a loss, of culture, of flavors, of smells, of the loving touch of close relatives, of origin.

I wonder about my role as a researcher in the school. Some teachers look at me with caution. Am I a stranger who can come and evaluate them? But who likes to have someone come and evaluate them? Am I really an outside observer? I'm definitely not. How should I act if I detect a situation that threatens the integrity of the children? What should I do if some teachers make judgments about the child labor that some children have to do? Or is the consumption of alcohol thought to be present in their parents, and which is part of ancestral cultural practices? or when the older children involved in the project refer to racism in some of their teachers? New frontiers arise in this work, children relate to me differently depending on the school, and I begin to have a particular role that they grant me being there and to interpret from my emotions again.

On the other hand I'm there, as a researcher, as a person. Sometimes I allow myself to feel happy but I also feel anxious, because it concerns

childhood, it concerns long-term separations, it concerns the knitting of a new chapter in their life stories, no won Chilean land, in an educational system that has failed to foresee how to make the lives of these children easier, how to provide them with emotional support, how to integrate them without giving them new scars in their lives. In this scenario, the challenge is major, thinking on suggestions.

Thinking on how to make the research to promote an environment of equity, respect, and appreciation for the other which mingles with a 'we'. This project forces us to make public policies proposals from the stories of these children, their experiences in the classroom and at recess. They are not aware of this but every day I attend the school I learn some more about the answers I need to continue working on this research project. In this sense, Interpretive Autoethnography the way I have learnt it from Professor Norman Denzin (e.g. Denzin, 2014) allows me to link my own experiences (biography) as a primary school student with my own experiences as an adult as I have studied in different countries and I have also been treated as a foreigner, or migrant, and these experiences entwine now with the biographies of the children. To see them closer rather than further away, more relatable to our own school stories, conducting research which is sensitive about what is unsaid but is acted out (Zapata-Sepúlveda, 2016), about how a *habitus* is formed without thinking about what is best for their lives. It humanizes us. It leads us to break the daily unfairness of the segregating and hierarchical criteria between us and others. It leads us to action and respect for the diversity, relieving the cultural wealth that is creating a new Chilean society, the one of today, the one of tomorrow.

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Notas

¹ <http://ftp.ctio.noao.edu/noao/node/67>