

# INTERPRETATIVE AUTOETHNOGRAPHY AS A QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY TO HUMANIZE SOCIAL RESEARCH IN LATIN AMERICAN TRANSBOUNDARY CONTEXTS

LA AUTOETNOGRAFÍA INTERPRETATIVA PARA HUMANIZAR LA INVESTIGACIÓN SOCIAL EN CONTEXTOS TRANSFRONTERIZOS LATINOAMERICANOS<sup>1</sup>

AUTO ETNOGRAFIA INTERPRETATIVA COMO METODOLOGIA PARA HUMANIZAR A INVESTIGAÇÃO SOCIAL EM CONTEXTOS FRONTERIZOS LATINOAMERICANOS

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## ABSTRACT

This paper aims to connect the present moment of contemporary Qualitative Inquiry with the Latin American qualitative inquiry audience from an interdisciplinary approach. In order to do so, the main statements that place the QI in present times will be presented, specifically the tradition of interpretative autoethnography understood as a form of critical research that seeks to sensitize, to evoke and to transform realities through experimental writing as a way of investigating. This methodology, widely used in research projects in English speaking countries to address injustices and problems that affect the lives of voiceless people, allows to relay knowledge from the self, the ethno, to the social. In this paper, a bibliographical review about the method is conducted and addresses an example taken from field work experience in the project Fondecyt regular N° 1160869 *“Relationships and social interactions of children of immigrants and Chilean children in the schools of Arica”*. The applications and contributions of this methodology for social research are discussed through the voice of a Latin American woman who develops her research line from a border region, and how these methodologies can address the caretaking of the participants of the study.

**Keywords:** Interpretive Autoethnography, Experimental Text, Storytelling, Interdisciplinary Research, Migration and Childhood, Everyday Life.

## RESUMEN

Este manuscrito tiene como objetivo conectar el momento actual de la Investigación Cualitativa contemporánea con la audiencia de investigación cualitativa latinoamericana desde

una aproximación interdisciplinaria. Para ello se expondrán los principales enunciados que sitúan la investigación cualitativa desde la tradición de la autoetnografía interpretativa, entendida como una forma de investigación crítica que busca, entre otros fines, sensibilizar, evocar y transformar realidades a partir de la escritura experimental como forma de investigar. Esta metodología, ampliamente empleada en proyectos de investigación en países angloparlantes para abordar injusticias y problemas que afectan las vidas de personas sin voz, permite relevar conocimientos desde lo auto, lo etno, a lo social. En el presente manuscrito se realiza una reseña bibliográfica acerca del método y un ejemplo tomado a partir de la experiencia de trabajo de campo en el proyecto Fondecyt regular N° 1160869 *“Relaciones e interacciones sociales de niños hijos de inmigrantes y niños chilenos en las escuelas de Arica”*. Se discute las aplicaciones y los aportes de esta metodología para la investigación social desde la voz de una mujer latinoamericana que desarrolla su línea de investigación desde una región fronteriza, y cómo estas metodologías pueden atender a los cuidados de los participantes de los estudios.

**Palabras clave:** Autoetnografía Interpretativa, Texto Experimental, Storytelling, Investigación Interdisciplinaria, Migraciones e Infancia, Vida Cotidiana.

## RESUMO

Este trabalho tem como objetivo conectar o momento atual da Investigação Qualitativa, com o público da investigação qualitativa latino-americana, desde uma perspectiva interdisciplinar. Para isso serão expostos os principais e atuais conceitos que si-

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tuam a IQ, especificamente a tradição da autoetnografia interpretativa, entendida como uma forma de investigação crítica que busca entre outros fins, sensibilizar, evocar e transformar realidades a partir da escrita experimental como forma de investigar. Esta metodologia amplamente empregada em projetos de investigações em países de língua inglesa, para abordar injustiças e problemas que afetam as vidas das pessoas sem voz, permite revelar conhecimentos desde o auto, o etno até o social. No presente trabalho, realiza-se uma resenha bibliográfica acerca desse método e um exemplo tomado a partir da experiência do trabalho de campo no projeto Fondecyt regular N° 1160869 *“Relações e interações sociais de crianças filhas de imigrantes e crianças chilenas nas escolas de Arica.”* Discutiremos as aplicações e os aportes desta metodologia para a investigação social, desde a voz de uma mulher latino-americana que desenvolve sua linha de investigação em uma região fronteira, e como estas metodologias podem atender aos cuidados dos que participam desses estudos.

**Palavras-chave:** Autoetnografia Interpretativa, Texto Experimental, Storytelling, Investigação Interdisciplinar, Migrações e Infância, Vida Cotidiana.

## INTRODUCTION

Conducting qualitative research in Latin American universities is not an easy task. Even though decades have passed since the well-known disputes between the qualitative and quantitative researchers in the 80's, these arguments are still present in the everyday life of social sciences and health research, in the current higher education system in Latin America. This is a system in which numbers matter more than content and the relevance of the problems under study; in a worldwide system in which an academic career is valued according to the number of papers, the rankings and indexations, rather than the value a research project may have for a community (1, 5-6).

In the current Latin American research context in areas such as the social sciences and health, we find paradigms and ways of understanding research that are imposed and opposed, with criteria about the scientific based on positivist logics which can hardly dialogue with qualitative research that relays local knowledge from the voices of the people being researched. At the same time, our voices in research must remain silent since there is a predominant tendency to do research exclusively from the data generated from the participants (interviews, focus groups, etc.).

Thus, qualitative researchers in Latin America subsist with less possibilities of publishing in Latin American journals, and even lower in ISI journals of countries that predominate in scientific production, from which there is constant criticism even because of the development of scientific productions in Latin America which replicate the studies conducted in these countries (for example the United States). From where the importance of creating our own methodological logics and rigor criteria is emphasized not adapted from the countries predominant in science. This, which is stated as a critique Latin

American science, requires the consideration of the context in terms of the socio-economic and institutional adjustments required when doing research (7). Thus, as Spinak puts it, the social context of the scientific process shapes the selection of research and publication themes. Because of this, research in the social sciences and health should emphasize our priorities and objectives which are first expressed in our own languages “, where analyzes out of context, applied to the Latin American scientists’ efforts, could inevitably lead to alienation. This “if in our scientific endeavors we frequently imitate trends and seek recognition that makes sense only in the cultural and social context of the central countries” (7).

Therefore, “If, as some people believe, scientific activities can only be developed within the paradigms chosen by rich countries, the consequence is that Latin American countries are relegated to the rank of scientific colonies.” “Confusing the international scientific community with that of the Anglo-American world, the latter becoming the only source of norms and criteria for granting or denying validity ... “ To our scientific endeavors, being forced to internationalize our work on local realities in order to publish them in the English language, the language of science, through international academic platforms, achieving the expected success in audiences many times distant from the realities we study (Conference of Contemporary Ethnographies Across the Disciplines [CEAD]) (7). In this career, we have to deal with science and technology government policies that, in the case of Chile, do not fund research monographs, but rather reports on research results, and in which the approval of qualitative research projects corresponds more to mixed methods research with the use of software, frequencies, conglomerates analysis, etc.

According to the above, the trend in Latin American qualitative research responds to these demands and respond to the 8 moment of QI (1). In the United States and Anglo countries, such as England, Australia and New Zealand, lines of qualitative research -which are new for us in Latin America- have already been established for about 20 years (8 - 12). The gap of moments I refer to is evidenced every year at the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry that is held at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, led by Dr. Norman Denzin and at the conference of Contemporary Ethnographies Across the Disciplines that travels south of the world every two years and which will be held in 2018 for the first time in Santiago de Chile.

A reflection of this can be found when we attend a qualitative research conference and we can differentiate the different approaches, methodologies and paradigms of Latin American researchers and those of Anglo countries. From my research career in Chile since 1999 in Arica, 2002-2006; in Spain, and since 2009 in the United States, and attending national and international conferences since 2002, I have been able to verify that what we understand by QI in Latin America corresponds to a moment previous to how the QI is being conducted in English-speaking countries like in the United States (13 - 15). In this sense, Denzin and Lincoln, maintain that in these times “we need to fine new ways of connecting persons and their personal troubles with social justice methodologies. We need

to become better accomplished in linking these interventions to those institutional sites where troubles are turned into public issues and public issues transformed into social policy”, and the call for the congress of this 2017, is “Qualitative Inquiry in the Public Sphere” (1). Critical qualitative research is under assault. These are troubled times. The global right is on the move. It is setting the agenda for public discourse on the social good. In so doing it is narrowing the spaces for civic discourse. A rein of fear is on the air. The 13th International Congress offers scholars the opportunity to resist this discourse, to experiment with different ways of being moral, political and ethical in the public sphere, to foreground, interrogate and invent new interpretive practices, to engage in a politics of advocacy, pro and con, to form coalitions, to experiment with new ways of resisting the pressures of neoliberalism. The Congress will be an arena for advancing the causes of social justice, while addressing racial, ethnic, gender and environmental disparities in education, welfare and healthcare (16).

In this journey, and as it can be seen in the program of the work presented by the qualitative researchers at Urbana-Champaign, it can be stated that the current trend in qualitative research is based on the arts, [auto]ethnography, poststructuralist critical psychology, critical qualitative research, digital tools for QI, indigenous research, global qualitative research in health, among other groups that share the need to produce social transformation in the work environments of its members (Source International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry website. Last group section. ). In this sense, it is a qualitative research that is not limited to the use of data collection techniques, but its epistemological support is found in basic philosophical theories that work in or along the lines of the continental tradition: “Agamben, Badiou, Deleuze, Derrida, Foucault, Heidegger, Lacan, Malabou, Mouffe, Nancy, Nussbaum, and Žižek.

Acknowledging that in the current academy the struggle for social justice tends to be a solo work, in entities that are based on cooperative efficiency, this work is a challenge to the “neo-liberal governments aligned with multinational corporations.” (Source ICQI last group section), and then the call -or the engine- is to be part of the ICQI community and work together for the social justice of our communities.

Conducting this type of research in Latin America is unusual. When looking at the bibliography, it can be noticed that Latin American researchers who develop some of the modalities of [auto]ethnography are usually Mexican scholars who have received specialized training in the United States. Examples of this are the works of Elizabeth Aguirre Armendariz, and Silvia Bénard Calva, or other Latin American academics working in universities in the United States, such as Brazilians Claudio Moreira and Marcelo Diversi (17-19). On the other hand, there is a wide range of texts by Latin American writers who, without being qualitative researchers, contribute literary elements from Latin American thought and realities.

It is even more difficult to find Latin American researchers to develop interpretive [auto]ethnography or performance studies. In this sense, and studying the method at the Internation-

al Centre for Qualitative Inquiry of Professor Norman Denzin, father of interpretive [auto]ethnography, and after developing this type of work for the last seven years, I consider that conducting this type of research in Latin American contexts is transgressive, unusual, unprecedented, and as posed by Pelias, comprises a fracture to the predominant academic discourse in research; and for the field of education, this is a disruptive framework of research on critical social thinking as a way to “be, research, write, advise, and teach qualitative research in academia” (20-21).

The Interpretive [Auto]ethnography school, starts from assumptions such as:

Charles Wright Mills argues that: sociological imagination enables us to understand the history and biography and the relationship between the two in society. The challenge, as posed by Denzin, is to develop a methodology that allows us to examine how the private problems of individuals are connected to public affairs and to the public responses to these problems. That is its task and its promise. People can understand their own experience and evaluate their own destiny only by locating themselves within their historical moment (3).

For Denzin, the method deals with a work designed to provide students and teachers with an accessible description of a critical, existential, interpretive approach that has been practiced in their work and that of others (3).

“Interpretive biography, which in the last two decades has been astonishingly proliferated as interpretive (auto) biographical methods, is referred to as creative analytic practices by Richardson. These practices are built and moved through the classic versions of life stories and biographical case studies. These include narrative ethnography, meta-autoethnography, autoethnography, collaborative autoethnography, co-constructed decolonizing autoethnography, duoethnography, collaborative writing, ethnodrama, performative ethnography, sociopoetry, performative writing, writing stories, ethnographic fiction, polyvocal text, and mystories” (3).

“...These new forms of life stories take shape in the key terms that define them: *Narrative, meanings, voice, experience, reflexivity, presence, representation*” (3).

For the critical researchers these terms are considered as remains of an age of humanistic research that valued the I and its social experiences uncritically (Jackson & Mazzei; McLure; Pollock; Scott; St. Pierre & Pillow; and others (3). In this sense, qualitative inquiry in Latin America somehow follows these tendencies to leave biographies and voice in the first person out of the research projects, focusing on the reporting of results. At the same time, while these are the facts of qualitative research in Latin American countries, online representations of life experiences proliferate and the virtual self with its life histories are present everywhere thanks to social media technologies (Skype, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc.).

In Latin American contexts such as the one in the region of Ar-

ica and Parinacota in Chile, social science research investigates the *voice* and the *presence* of indigenous people in colonized spaces, which as stated by Smith, revolves around oral stories, myths, and performative narratives to make sense of their lives, themselves, and the collective stories. In contexts such as this one, the words, the rituals, and the performances are important for them (3).

Despite the history and cultures that make up the societies being studied, the researchers' voice continues to be that of the researcher based on positivist logics that strives to be neutral to arrive at their results following a linear logic, omitting his/her color and culture, or they see themselves as such and relate to their object of study from the imperial gaze of a white and non-indigenous Western person, who studies the other subordinate, weak, needy, deficient, poor. Thus, the social sciences are still processes of colonization based on the world trends in research in the Western world. Thus Latin American social sciences and qualitative research are based on more quantitative rather than qualitative assumptions imported from the countries that dominate science, and we as researchers are not necessarily aware of how much of it is in our own research projects.

According to the above, for the case of psychology in the region from which I write, we do not have a subject of Latin American indigenous psychology, which rigorously addresses the theoretical and methodological study of the particular life experiences of people of indigenous cultures which are studied, and consider the different historical and sociocultural realities in which these experiences are developed, understanding the local language, and the unravelling of the local characteristics, from a native perspective. In other words, we do not have theories and research that includes a body of knowledge with indigenous concepts, indigenous methodologies, indigenous personality tests, new lines of indigenous psychology teaching, and an active participation in indigenous communities, which would allow us to locate the field from a decolonized perspective (22, 23).

Denzin argues that "in the last three decades in the United States, interest in interpretive approaches for the study of culture, biography, and the life of human groups has reappeared. A central point to this view has been the argument that societies, cultures, and the expressions of human experience can be read as social texts, as structures of representation that require symbolic affairs (Clifford & Marcus; Panourgia & Marcus; Van Maanen) (3). These texts, oral or written, have taken on a problematic status in the interpretive project (Conquergood). Then the questions have emerged concerning how texts are stated, read, and interpreted (Derrida), and how now authors, lives, societies, cultures, and expression of human experience are the main topic discussed in interpretive texts (Geertz). In the interpretive autobiographical method - a life can be captured and represented in a text - now open to questions. A life is a social text, a fictional and narrative production. "

Denzin's proposal refers a new way to explore a new set of terms. To go from the traditional life story, to a biographical

project in an interpretive autoethnographic project. In critical, performative practices that begin with the biography of the writer and move to the culture, the discourse, the history and the ideology. "Interpretive performative autoethnography allows the researcher to take each personal life in its immediate particularity and on the field of its life in its historical moment. Events occur in these places where structure, history and auto-biography intersect" (3).

Although using a new methodology created in the United States seems contrary to what I claim in this text, and I support the need to generate local knowledge to study our local communities, from decolonizing methodologies, I consider that the methodological "weapons" included in the method in question, are initially given, but the content, the researcher's own voice and the issues being addressed, compel the researcher to develop an arduous, often lonely, and vulnerable process to find his/her own voice and re-write the stories and the knowledge of their conventional investigations, from a decolonized perspective.

Accordingly, attending the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry held annually at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign allows us to connect the worlds through research and validate our voices in an international discourse. In this we have much to do. Generate new forms of experimental writing, which in addition are governed by the norms of our language and consequently, our ways of thinking. Incorporate, re-signify and rewrite knowledge located from paradigms that we can formulate from the local knowledge that we relay. There's the challenge. Not in becoming a minority and peripheral copy that subsists in a disadvantage in relation to "first world" researchers, but rather to value local wealth, to take theoretical and methodological elements from countries that have developed internationally recognized trajectories, and develop new ways of knowledge that include the recognition of our motivations, positions in the field and that allow us to do critical social research that has a positive impact on the lives of the people we study.

In this sense, the contributions of interpretive [auto]ethnography to the study of border problems in the central south Andean macro region from where the Fondecyt project N° 1160869 is conducted, have allowed us to incorporate our first person voices and our biographies through our own ways of thinking, analysing, problematizing, and communicating, in order to answer our questions generated before and during the initial phases of research and fieldwork, for example about who the subjects we study are and what meanings have in the region that "Other", "us", "migrant" or "immigrant's child", "foreigner", in relation to an "us"; to understand the transnational context in which our lives unfold. In this sense, it is a matter of doing research that tensions sociological, psychological, historical and anthropological knowledge to the basis of the project, with the reality from a decolonized perspective of knowledge.

However, the risk in using these methodologies is that these new forms of research become a fashion that somehow guarantees to tune with what the American publishers expect as a

publishable product in indexed journals type ISI. In this sense, I believe that doing interpretive [auto]ethnography or any of its forms requires a long process of learning that forces us to connect and situate our own self with the self of the others in that particular social, political, cultural space where the life of the people we investigate develops, and among the people we investigate.

In my experience, I began to study this type of methodologies at the International Center for Qualitative Inquiry of Professor Norman Denzin at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, attending regularly from 3 to 7 months per year uninterruptedly since 2012. During the time of my first research stay, Professor Denzin recommended me two books that were key to what I call the decolonization of my brain for the study of the trauma of former Chilean political prisoners. These books were: Sophie Tamas's *Life After Leaving: The Remains of Spousal Abuse (Writing Lives: Ethnographic Narratives)* and *Memory Is another Country: Women of the Vietnamese Diaspora*, written by Nathalie Huynh Chau Nguyen (24, 25).

Somehow, and without being too aware of the process that began with my first stay in Urbana-Champaign, this process meant a new way of doing in-depth research for me, but also a new way of seeing life and of relating to other people. A way of looking through a different lens at the paradigms I used and the ways of doing research that for me dealt with qualitative research, but which were not quite so now, and rather approached the mixed methods of research in social sciences and in health.

Throughout this journey, to use this type of methodologies in Latin American contexts, initially about the painful traumatic experiences produced by the experiences of political repression in Chile between 1973 and 1990, meant to move from relating to the people I studied from an external observer position - who analyzed data with CAQDAS from their speeches obtained through the semi-structured interviews that I conducted, to situate myself in / between / with / from the survivors to these experiences, incorporating my biography as daughter / girl / woman / student / academic, born and raised in dictatorship after a process of revelation and realization (26, 25).

As researchers we are not always aware of the decisions we make in researching and the links to our biography as the basis of our research interests, nor of our ways of understanding reality and of the theoretical and methodological influences we have embodied in our self. In this personal process, the relevance of Denzin's methodological proposal for the study of the projects I have developed, starting with the processes of traumatization of former political prisoners more than 30 years after the events occurred; followed by my study of the trauma in the lives of Colombian women who arrive in Chile fleeing the guerrilla in early 2010 through the northern border of Chile (27 - 29), and today in the study of interactions and social relations of the children of the immigrants in the border city of Arica, lies in the fact that it has allowed the creation of resistance narratives, autoethnographic stories that although they resist, they demand to be told (3). These are stories that start from

epiphanies or revealing moments of research and that perform realities from a place of pain, a self written as a performative self, a self that resists, says, escapes, feels from the relationship with the other participant of the research.

These stories give an accurate account of experiences that move from the voices of people without voice but who paradoxically tell these stories, and to the groups - the audiences - that connect with the lives of researchers and the researched, giving structure and meanings to the lives being studied. It is about the actions that are registered in the participant observation, also the omissions and secrets, looks that involve relevant information about what is not said, although the "relevance" opens a whole universe of cultural and ethical aspects (30). In this sense and as Muñoz puts it, "unsaid words and tacit agreements are, very often, human communication in its most complex and elegant form" (30).

From a decolonized position, those who should have the last word about the problems that occur in their lives are the very people being studied. The result of studies of interpretive [auto]ethnography, performs the stories of people with and for them.

At the same time, doing critical social research such as interpretive [auto]ethnography in Latin American academic contexts, addressing our problems of everyday violence, racism, and discrimination in academic settings where the social sciences continue to be taught to and from non-indigenous populations, the experiences of the qualitative researcher are incorporated as field notes and not as results of an investigation, and the position in the field of teaching / research / learning tends to value the neutrality of why we do what we do, without being able to situate ourselves with our students incorporating our own biographies in the knowledge that we share, makes this methodological option try at least out of some courage to be involved in the research projects that we develop, the need to be present in each phase of the process, to develop a critical reflexive ability to question our own paradigms learned in the academy to conduct research and to locate ourselves clearly in a field that is often undermined by governments, neoliberal logics in research, science and technology in our Latin American academic contexts, and a hierarchical system that somehow controls the voices mainly of women in the academy (31).

Doing this kind of research on these problems in Latin America also produces a discourse that breaks conventional academic discourse with the freshness of sensory experience that facilitates communication with the audience as a way of constructing new realities by seeing us closer rather than far from the people we investigate. In this sense, if we think of the contributions of research to society, this type of methodologies allows us to connect as individual universal beings from specific moments and individual stories, and from there understand the other oppressed who suffers, in this case boys and girls who come to a foreign country without having a say in the decision because they have to accompany their parents to a different place which is now also their country.

The performative text embodies and makes theory and experience visible to others (32). It is embodied, evocative, always unfinished, and unlimited (33). For Elbaz, quoted in Denzin, auto-ethnographic texts are written with a double perspective in mind for "other" (father, brother, theorist, author, audience, etc.) (3). These texts are also ideological productions of class, gender, "race", at a time determined by history, culture, and the situations at hand. In this type of qualitative research it is dealt with aspects that are relevant to understand the human experience, where guts knowledge can exist in all its physical expression (34).

An example below:

Story 1. Year 1984. My story (27).

Karen (this and all the names are fictitious) is a childhood friend with whom I attended classes daily in the downtown area of the city. We, along with Cristina, Dayffa, Whanda, Berta and Marcela, our other friends, were students at a Catholic women's school in the 80's. Our childhood was spent in perfect tranquillity. I think of that time and the sound of our laughter, the high pitch of our squeaky voices, the long sessions of exchanging cards, and everything that we came to collect, come to my memory. Strawberry Shortcake's album was one of the first I completed and I got to have so many cards that I completed it twice! Our collections of writing paper, paper with drawings, flowers, angels. Also the napkins that Aunt Olga, a single woman, Aunt Maria's sister-in-law – who is my mother's sister, brought from the United States whenever she came to visit. The pink writing paper were always more valuable and I was very good at negotiating and getting the most beautiful ones. I still have that collection of writing paper and also the napkins. At that time, I definitely do not remember me being a student of an outstanding performance at school. I thank my parents that even though they did everything they possible could for me to never lack anything I needed to study, they did not have the apprehensions, aspirations and interests of the parents of my classmates, who had as an imperative to get good grades. I remember that these friends crying if they got the top mark of 7.0, or a minimum mark to pass, 4.0.

In elementary school I went to school to play. I did not perform badly because although I've always been a little distracted, a part of me paid attention in classes and a little effort was enough to pass each grade. With my friends, we always ran in the largest patio of my school, surrounded by rooms, terraces and high concrete walls, all in perfect neatness. This was typical in religious schools, which usually ensure parents the maximum protection and well-being for those who studied there.

In Arica, a city in which it hardly ever rains and the cold in winter is very bearable, I remember that stage of my life that began when I was 8 years old and until 17. They were sunny days, at a time when current problems such as solar radiation were not present and nothing seemed to hinder our sense of freedom to play until the bell that announced that we had to return to the classroom. At the same time, at that time, a significant part of the Chilean population - also in Arica - lived the worst atrocities

of violence and torture for political reasons in Chile (35). But we were not aware of what was happening outside, although some of it impacted us from the social structure in which we were being involved in our role as students.

Secrets, silences, looks of concern, omissions from my friends about our family stories, seemed to be out of the school grounds. Today and talking with my lifelong friends, how could a 7-year-old say that her father was not her father, if it was a requirement of admission to the school to be the daughter of married parents?. At that time, acknowledging the ethnic origin was to recognize our own selves as without rights; a discredit; a shame. So now I understand how the absence of family stories about our local origin was a family measure that, like those high walls surrounding the school, guaranteed protection to our lives as girls against violence and discrimination.

In this apparently protected childhood, and as I have written somewhere else previously, our lives went on. There, Karen, who was more cheerful than I was and with whom sometimes we could not stop laughing in class, was always caught red handed by the teacher of English (27). The teacher, who as time went by took less and less time since the beginning of her class to end up asking Karen to leave the room in annoying voice. This was the moment when Karen's smile was gone and so was mine. In my case, I remember that my hands began to sweat, with the fear that the teacher could have seen me laughing too, and then she would ask me to leave the room as well and send me to the school inspectorate, where I had to stay listening sometimes to a speech of complaint, a dose of guilt, and assuming a branded role which is difficult to remove from your body, that of being a bad student. This is what happened to Karen every time the teacher of English asked her to leave the room. What worse situation can happen for a girl of 8 - 9 years than to be rejected by her teacher in whom she believes blindfolded and who she looks up to, who fulfils the role in that time of being one of the most important figures in the life of each child and who is acknowledged from her privileged position as holder of the knowledge for which a child attends school? This teacher was the prototype of a racist and classist person, keeper of a caste system, hierarchical by nature, in a social and political era that violently propitiated this form of social stratification. In the border zone, where not to resemble the *national* white, European of the elite in Santiago, having dark skin and a multicultural background, was undoubtedly a disadvantage when compared to a minority group of blonde classmates, who had either green or blue eyes and coming from families that were linked and behaved with our teachers from a privileged position (36).

*"Out, get out of the room."* Said the teacher of English in an upset. *"You disturb a lot, and you also have trouble learning ..."* At the time and as I have mentioned earlier, Karen was exempted from taking the English class because she "had difficulties to learn the language", and the following year she was enrolled in a public high school (27). At that time this was not sanctioned. It is not sanctioned enough today, either. The violence with which the teacher of English placed Karen in a disadvantaged category, *"You cannot learn English"*, because you are not white? *"You*

have difficulty learning English”, Is it a genetic problem of the Aymara culture? “Leave the room”, you, this place is not for people like you! ... This room is for white people, and you are not, and you also interrupt the class. That’s what this teacher was thinking deep down inside.

What happens to others is learnt vicariously without the need to experience it in the first person. At that time, because of my age, I think that what happened to Karen, which was later dealt with by her family in silence, was for me a situation that somehow I learned to resist successfully. At the age of 7 - 8 years old, do we have the ability to differentiate ourselves from what is happening to our best friends? Or are we able to feel in this case their anguish, pain, regret for what was happening? It was easier to evade the situation, not to speak, but that did not mean we were not experiencing it in our classroom, to our dear friend Karen, to ourselves.

Many years have passed by and when I asked Karen for her consent to publish this story in 2016, she laughed and said, “Of course, my friend, you have my total support for your work. Fortunately, the teacher changed. Let me tell you that one day I met her on the main street of the city, and she greeted me by name. Sometime after, when my first daughter was born, she went to see me at the hospital and brought me a gift. I think that at that time I was too cheerful and dark-skinned. Luckily my girls turned out whitish.

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Moment 2. Year 2016, second semester.

This is a new day of me attending one of the eight schools in where we are conducting Fondecyt project N° 1160869.

Today I am sitting at the last desk of the classroom in a rural school where I can notice in different actions and measures the concern of teachers and school authorities for integrating the children of the immigrants into the school. They do so by promoting actions that they consider would favor their adaptation to the school system.

In this classroom there are more than 40 children who attend, most of whom are between the ages of ten and eleven. The classroom, the surrounding area, the sunlight that gets into the classroom through the windows located at both sides of the classroom; the attitude of the children which is silent, cheerful, calm, makes it so pleasant being here observing their interactions. A place where everything happens apparently in perfect calm and harmony. I attend different classes in this grade, many times. The children have been the last to sign the informed consent form in which we have explained to them why we are coming to their classroom. Anyway, they still come to me and ask me about what I am doing and what is it I am writing down in my notebook. They see me taking pictures, writing, talking to them during recess, let them use the camera so they can take pictures of their favorite places in the school playground during recess...

According to the home teacher, the children are mostly sons and daughters of Peruvian and Bolivian parents who work in agriculture in one of the valleys in the city. The children come to classes everyday – says the teacher – they are almost never absent.

The children are in a class with one of the teachers who uninterruptedly walks between one module and another, children sitting near to where I am, they look very restless and make noises when moving their chairs and desks. I notice that the teacher scolds them, while they do not stop kicking each other under the table, glancing at the teacher not to be discovered. But when they hit each other, the desks move and collide with each other, the teacher catches them red handed. The teacher keeps on scolding them again and again. The children continue kicking each other under the table. They look angry, no one wants to give up, and so the intensity of the blows increases as much as possible in intensity and speed. The teacher scolds them again. Again, and again. The teacher is interrupted by these children who do not stop kicking each other. The teacher cannot continue with his class. The children are still fighting, who wants to be the one who gives up in this argument?. Difficult answer, none of the children want to lose.

The teacher looks serious and upset, and raises the tone of his voice as he continues to teach the rest of the class that quietly is paying attention, as if the scene of the two children fighting was not happening in the same scenario. The children do not obey him and the class cannot go on in the calm that characterizes the daily life of this school. Then the teacher decides to ask them to leave the room: *Juan, and Pedro, leave the room now!* The children stand still without moving. The teacher insists: *Juan and Pedro, they leave now.* Juan is a dark-skinned child with no apparent indigenous features and has non-Aymara Chilean surnames, unlike Pedro who has Andean features and both of his surnames are Aymara. The children stand very serious, walk with an attitude of reluctance, and go to the door. *Juan, says the teacher, you stay in the playground, and you Pedro, you go to integration in the next room!*

Pedro looks down and frowns. Juan goes out looking at his classmates, but Pedro looks at the ground.

The class ends and recess comes. At the beginning of the next class, Juan and Pedro join their classmates. We return to the classroom, and Juan enters more calmly, just like Pedro. Pedro looks at me out of the corner of his eye and again looks at the ground. He seems to be ashamed.

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I think: “You have to know your place, you are in classes, you must obey the teacher, and you, who also has trouble learning, the social punishment you will receive to extinguish your behavior, is to ask you to go to integration”. This I tell you in front of your classmates who watch as spectators in first person waiting to resume class”. This scene reminds me of Karen when the teacher told her *you have trouble learning*. Is not this the worst sanction of all that can be transmitted to children who

have difficulties to learn and are excluded from the classroom to go to address the learning problems they have?

But at the same time I think: I am worried about this student, because I cannot help him focus, he wastes time in classes. I prefer to ask him to go to work with the support teacher in integration so he does not waste time in this class.

I'm there; I cannot intervene. How could I do it there? If I have permission to observe interactions in the classroom. On the other hand, it is very easy for me to connect at this time with my primary education student self, and feel anguish about what I am seeing-living. I think about Pedro's future, and how his performance in school will be depending on what he does in situations such as the one he is living and one he should not be proud of. I see Pedro in the future, dedicated to agriculture as an option, or as a student in one of the academic programs at the university where I work. The two options will be good if they are really his options in an educational system that determines the lives of their students. This in a country that does not have public policies that address the intercultural integration of Chilean children with and without Andean or Afro ancestry and the Children of immigrants of different nationalities.

In the schools, situations which are hard to understand seem to have two or more ways of being read. However, from the observation conducted, I cannot know which of these two messages was the one the student of Aymara descent who was expelled from the classroom got. Neither can I know what the intention of this teacher that after a series of observations, demonstrates a high commitment to the class and effective pedagogical strategies is.

I think of the process behind the approach to interculturality as a problem that should be approached in a systematic way, and how from our own biographies we can develop an approach from the humanization of concepts, making sense of our experiences in relation to experiences of the people we study, starting with a review of our own life biographies. How conscious or unconscious are we about our acts, perceptions and actions that we perform in relation to an *other* according to its origin evidenced in the skin, traits, nationality and cultural codes that we handle as our *own*? I think of the impact that actions like those that take place in the classroom theatre can have in a person's life. I think of how social research in schools should be a tool of social transformation to promote respect, equity and integration between boys and girls without distinction of "race," class, gender, nationality. At the same time, how colonized is our way of observing when we investigate other, now national, but that we continue to see as an immigrant with all that has been evidenced is attributed to the concept (37).

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Research experiences that evidence discrimination, stigmatization and racism, but also integration, mutual support, assimilation, valuation of the *other* child of an immigrant, are relieved in this project and with this type of methodologies, to produce knowledge and to break silences on situations that may or may not be replicable but that deal with significant moments in the lives of the people who are studied.

Writing performative text based on the methodology proposed here and for the case of the lives of children of different cultures, trajectories, ways of seeing life and communicating, and that take place in schools in the border city of Arica, is a tool that can be very useful for connecting theories to the base of the project with all the local knowledge, from an integrative, human, and contextual approach. Through the stories that can be told, we move from the body that embodies the experiences in a line of critical pedagogy that reaches the paper seeking to perform the lives of the people who participate as actors, and also to the lives of the audiences who read these texts.

These texts, which, as Denzin argues, include people represented as personal stories, scenes, places or the context in which the story takes place, and an epiphany or crisis that provides the dramatic tension, are now one of the lines of development of the Fondecyt project to obtain unprecedented knowledge of everyday school life and the conformation of habitus in the schools of the border city of Arica (3). In this project we work in two lines, a line that develops a qualitative methodology rather of a mixed sociological type with the use of Nvivo for the operationalization of the sociological dimensions under study, and at the same time, this reflexive line. Both lines of methodological development will be assembled to obtain that clear, complex picture, deep in its tones, abstract, with inconclusive but definite parts, with the ability to evoke, convey, connect, iconic, symbolic, drawn from the voices of children and the key actors who participate in the theatricality that is developed daily in schools, and from my voice as a researcher born and raised in the border region of Arica, who crosses borders and observes and assimilates from and in different cultures.

From both roads we are working on the representation of the phenomenon that we study with sufficient depth and methodological rigor to understand how the lives of the children of immigrants with the Chilean children in the border city of Arica develop in the conformation of their habitus, which so far, have been observed to be quite different to other international, national and even local contexts.



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