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# Social Capital and Child Migration in Chile: Problems in Generating Social Relationships in Educational Environments

## Capital social y niñez migrante en Chile: problemas para generar relaciones sociales en entornos educativos

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this article is to analyze the difficulties that foreign students face in creating social relationships and bonds of friendship in an educational context with a high migrant presence in Santiago de Chile. The methodological strategy developed is qualitative, with observation and ethnographic interview being the main techniques for obtaining data, which was carried out within two basic education schools. Based on the concept of social capital, this study illustrates how diversity in ethnic elements, such as language, religious beliefs, and skin color, lead to difficulties for social integration in Chilean schools, which in turn generates experiences of violence and discrimination among students. The importance of this work lies in the fact that it provides important elements to understand the problems that migrant children face in Chile.

*Keywords:* 1. migration, 2. education, 3. social capital, 4. Chile, 5. segregation.

RESUMEN

El objetivo de este artículo es analizar las dificultades que enfrentan estudiantes extranjeros para crear relaciones sociales y lazos de amistad en un contexto educativo con alta presencia migrante en Santiago de Chile. La estrategia metodológica desarrollada es de tipo cualitativo, siendo las principales técnicas para la obtención de datos la observación y la entrevista etnográfica, realizadas en el interior de dos escuelas de educación básica. A partir del concepto de capital social, este estudio ilustra cómo la diversidad en elementos étnicos, tales como el lenguaje, las creencias religiosas y el color de piel, propicia dificultades para la integración social en las escuelas chilenas, lo que a su vez genera experiencias de violencia y discriminación entre estudiantes. La relevancia de este trabajo radica en que aporta elementos importantes para entender las problemáticas que enfrentan las infancias migrantes en Chile.

*Palabras clave*: 1. migración, 2. educación, 3. capital social, 4. Chile, 5. segregación.

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## INTRODUCTION

The number of migrants living in different Latin American countries has increased in recent decades, not only due to differences in the economic conditions among countries (Bauman, 2017), but primarily due to widespread violence and sociopolitical problems in the corresponding countries of origin (Landeros Jaime, 2022a; 2022b; Landeros Jaime & Maas Pérez, 2022), which is also associated with the intense search for better job or educational opportunities in the host countries (Green, 2013).

In this sense, regarding the migratory context recorded in Chile, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported in 1990 that at least 114 597 migrants lived in Chilean territory, a figure that represented 0.9% of the population (Stefoni, 2011). However, a decade later, this figure had increased to 1.22% due to the presence of people mainly from Argentina, Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia.

By 2010, the Departamento de Migración y Extranjería (DEM) (Department of Migration and Immigration) reported the presence of 352 344 immigrants in Chile, which represented a substantial increase, with the Peruvian community leading the South-South migration of the first decade of the 21st century. The economic conditions and the international projection of Chile abroad as a safe and stable space in financial terms led to migration continuing on the rise; on this, reports indicate that until 2021 at least 1 482 390 migrants lived in Chilean lands (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas [INE], 2022).

It should be emphasized that these changes in Chilean migration statistics led to complex scenarios and new challenges not only for Chilean society, but also for the authorities, mainly associated with the urgent need to improve their migration policies and social programs aimed at benefiting the economic and sociocultural inclusion of migrant groups living in Chilean territory.

In this context, educational institutions received a large number of students from Latin American and Caribbean countries, including several who lacked documents proving their regular residence in Chile. According to media and academic reports, the number of foreign students increased sharply in the country (Mardones, 2017). In this regard, educational authorities indicated in 2015 the presence of 30 625 (0.9% of the total student population) foreign students enrolled in the different Chilean schools, who came from at least 11 countries (González et al., 2016). By 2016, the number of enrolled migrants had risen to 61 085, representing 1.7% of the total student population (Sepúlveda, 2017).

Along this line, the number of foreign students enrolled in 2017 was at least 77 608 (2.2%), reflecting the sustained increase in children and adolescents in schools. This upward trend has remained constant in recent years; as a reflection of this, in 2022, school authorities in Chile reported the presence of 192 040 students born in another country.

It is important to note that the increase in the migrant population in Chile, and especially the segment enrolled in schools, is met with a landscape of constant discrimination and rejection attitudes by the local population (Navarrete Yáñez, 2017), which in turn is also reflected in the

dynamics of migrant children in Chilean schools (Bustos González & Díaz Aguad, 2018; Cerón et al., 2017). It is for this reason that the educational issue regarding migrant populations is of special interest, mainly from an analysis that focuses on the inclusion and education of children (Espinoza & Valdebenito, 2018; Imilan et al., 2016; Stefoni et al., 2016).

Various investigations assert that "discrimination in the educational context is a reflection of the Chilean cultural scenario, characterized by its homogeneity. As such, any manifestation or expression that violates this gives way to the emergence a certain intolerance and prejudice" (Grau Rengifo et al., 2021, p. 14). This is well illustrated by the school assimilationist logic that forces children to adapt (Bustos González & Díaz Aguad, 2018; Bustos & Gairín, 2017; Mondaca et al., 2018; Mondaca-Rojas et al., 2020), which in turn causes the segregation of those who do not achieve/desire such assimilation.

Therefore, the objective of this article is to analyze the difficulties that foreign students face in developing social relationships and bonds of friendship in an educational context with a high presence of migrants, in Santiago de Chile (Chile). The above is inserted in a Chilean context in which the existence of codes linked to ethnic diversity has historically promoted social exclusion between and within groups in a web of violence, discrimination, and racism, even among migrants.

Below follow the theoretical aspects that served as the analytical foundation for the empirical data, in addition to the methodology for obtaining such data. Then the main findings and conclusions will be shown.

## SOCIAL CAPITAL AND ITS DIFFERENTIATED ACCUMULATION

Social capital can be understood from the set of resources that the individual accumulates based on belonging to particular groups or types of social networks (Auyero, 2012; Bourdieu, 1986), therefore, all the relationships created within the different student groups, as well as the ties between colleagues in work spaces or sports teams, are precises examples of social capital.

In this regard, Bourdieu (2001) emphasizes that the measurement of this type of capital depends on the volume of the network and the mutual recognition of those who comprise it, taking into account the different archetypes of connection that may be present. Certainly, Bourdieu underlines the relevance of these connections with others, in a context in which people constantly direct their efforts to increase the accumulation of this type of capital (Bourdieu, 2001; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2005). It should also be noted that this process is far from occurring naturally or automatically, but is rather the result of the implementation of investment strategies (Bourdieu, 1986) that involve all other types of capital, both economic and cultural, together with their permanent interaction and mutual conversion (Landeros Jaime, 2020). It is also essential to mention that symbolic capital would be associated with individual strategies and their own recognition.

Due to its instrumental characteristics, social capital is a set of resources that individuals or groups can make use of depending on the context in which they find themselves. In this sense, it is important to recognize that this set of networks is described as a tool for action, which, according

to Coleman (1988), is possibly useful in specific actions, but useless in others, which is consistent with Bourdieu's approach. "Social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible" (Coleman, 1988, p. 98), although it is important to underline how fundamental it is to take into account the interactions that occur between social capital, economy, and culture (Portes, 2000b).

Thus, the main value of social capital lies in recognizing the values of a social structure that may be essential to achieve the interests of an individual. In this sense, Bourdieu and Coleman focus on the benefits that social capital can provide. In other words, both sociologists present an instrumental definition of social capital (Portes, 2000b), although its accumulation operates differently for each individual, since elements intervene that lead to these being differentiated processes, in which, as Bourdieu points out, the "rules of the game" that mediate the performance of capital take on relevance (Lareau et al., 2016).

In relation to this, some studies describe how people can only reap the benefits of capitals by activating/using them in specific contexts (Chiang, 2018; Dumais & Ward, 2010; Kisida et al., 2014; Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999); however, in the same way that accumulation can be different based on each life history, individual position (Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999) within society, context, and interests, the ways in which social capital is used can differ largely due to the amount of accumulated cultural capital, which also includes knowledge about when to activate social capital in order to access its benefits (Landeros Jaime, 2020; Lareau, 1987; 2015; Lareau et al., 2016). Empirical studies on education (Lareau, 2011), health (Palmer & Xu, 2013), and migration (Coe & Shani, 2015; Nieto, 2014) have developed these lines of knowledge.

Particularly so in the study of international migration and transnationalism, the concept of social capital has been employed to analyze the benefits that the accumulation of social networks brings with it when people decide to leave their place of origin to seek new opportunities in their destination, in the understanding that the migratory journey will be less complex for those who have a greater accumulation of ties with people with migratory experience (Portes, 2000a; Portes et al., 2005; Portes & DeWind, 2008; Portes & Zhou, 1993, 2012).

Similarly, the social capital that a person on the move has will also allow him or her to obtain privileged information regarding the cultural, social, and economic codes, dynamics, and practices in the host country, which benefits the inclusion of those who have recently settled in an unknown (or little-known) environment. In other words, accumulated social capital favors the development of the migration project, as well as fostering scenarios in which individuals tend to share valuable information. In this, the function of social capital stands out as a generator of benefits and a source of resources mediated by non-family networks, although it must also be recognized as a source of social control (Portes, 2000b).

On this last line, Portes and Landolt highlight the adverse effects of this type of capital, pointing out at least "four negative consequences" of social capital: 1) possible exclusion of individuals; 2) excessive obligations for members of a certain group; 3) restrictions on individual freedoms;

and 4) top-down normativity, in a context in which people called "outsiders" will remain excluded based on their differences (Portes & Landolt, 2000).

Here it becomes relevant to delve into those elements that cause people, in this case migrant girls and boys, to be left out of the networks that are built in certain contexts, taking into account the differences in the stories (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2005) that each individual presented, in addition to the diversity in terms of the rules and codes of the spaces in which those who are newcomers now find themselves in the host place.

In relation to this, it is reiterated that social capital "is not necessarily positive all the time" (Evergeti & Zontini, 2006, p. 1029) among migrant communities and their efforts to establish and benefit from networks and bonds of friendship. In order to achieve a better understanding of how social capital operates in environments with a migrant presence, some research brings in the concept of ethnicity, understood from belonging to groups in which conditions of existence are shared (Anthias, 1992, p. 428).

The approach of international migration and transnationalism suggests that these categories group certain people together and exclude others (Birani & Lehmann, 2013; Painter & Price, 2019), and that it is ethnicity that underpins the argument that segregation, mostly presented as a form of group distribution across specific spaces (Van Ham & Tammaru, 2016), also manifests itself in specific spaces of social life, for example, in educational contexts.

It is worth highlighting the discussion that has developed on the importance of beginning to answer questions related to "how people utilize social capital as a resource in ethnic identity formation or indeed how ethnic identity is a product of social capital" (Reynolds, 2006, p. 1091).

## METHODOLOGY AND ETHICAL POSITIONING

The methodological strategy developed in this article is qualitative, in which the main techniques made use of to obtain data and information were ethnographic interviews (Sherman Heyl, 2007; Spradley, 1979) and non-participant observation in two primary schools located in Santiago de Chile with a high presence of migrant students, whose ages ranged between 7 and 10 years old, originating from different countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Regarding the age range, it is relevant to emphasize that it was defined based on the strategy set forth by Lareau (2000, 2002, 2011), which highlights that it is at this stage that parental involvement is stronger, when compared to students close to adolescence (Choi, 2017).

It is important to note that the schools were chosen not only because of their high percentage of migrant students enrolled in recent years, but also because these are educational establishments where the administration is interested in developing school policies aimed at improving the sociocultural inclusion of migrant children who interact in the classrooms. They also show openness to academic initiatives, and to those of organized civil society, that contribute elements of improvement in matters of inclusion.

The ethnography was carried out between March 2018 and January 2019, divided into two stages: the first five months focused on the Bocanegra school (pseudonym), a public educational institution where the presence of migrant students is greater than 75% of the total student population, which amounts to 661 students. It should be noted that in this institution several students from the migrant community do not have documents that prove their regular residence status in Chile. At the same time, many of them had lived in conditions of greater poverty due to the problems their family faced in finding a formal job in the country. This school, which has traditionally provided arrangements for migrant children to continue their studies, is located in the downtown of Santiago de Chile, one of the areas most frequented by migrants who have recently arrived in the country.

As for the non-participant observation sessions at the school, it is noteworthy that the authorities agreed to provide access to record data only three times a week, which was scheduled by themselves, in accordance with the recommendations related to the needs of the research. During the entire period at the Bocanegra school, the author interacted with native and migrant students, took notes on activities, soccer games, dance practices, and general aspects of the daily life of the student community.

The ethnographic interviews (Sherman Heyl, 2007; Spradley, 1979) with teachers, administrative staff members, and school authorities were recorded on audio and lasted 35 minutes. Part of the data was also collected from informal conversations with students from both schools, which were recorded only in the field diary. Informed consent was obtained from mothers and fathers, as well as the assent[2] of the children, who were given general information about the field work during the first day of non-participant observation in the classrooms. These informal conversations took place in the daily routine of their student life, during breaks between classes, at soccer games, and during cultural activities.

On the other hand, following the same methodological strategy implemented in the public school, the ethnographic work at the Niños Héroes school (pseudonym) was recorded mainly in a space where students played soccer games before entering classes and during breaks. Data collection was carried out during the last four months of fieldwork, with a regularity of two, and occasionally three, times a week. This is a private school subsidized by the Chilean government, in which the State pays part of the tuition and families the rest, with an enrollment of 310 students, of which 70% are migrants. This school is located in Franklin, a working-class neighborhood traditionally known for the commercial activities that take place there daily.

When it comes to the ethnographic interviews, whose purpose is to allow the discourse to flow through free association with the least amount of interruptions (Guber Rosana, 2001), it should be emphasized that they were conducted with the mothers of the students in their homes; the priority topics were the strategies of their daughters or sons to create bonds of friendship at school, the

[2] The research project from which this article derives obtained the approval of the Committee of Ethics and Safety in Research of the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile (PUC) (Pontifical Catholic University of Chile.)

economic and sociocultural inclusion difficulties they identified, the way in which they transmit cultural capital within the home, and the problems detected regarding education in Chile.

Finally, regarding the ethical position (Atkinson et al., 2004; Morrow & Richards, 1996), it is noteworthy that the author shared with the people who appear in this article the condition of being a migrant residing in Santiago de Chile, which helped to achieve greater trust and fluidity in the conversations with the migrant families, with whom experiences about migrant life in Chilean territory were shared as a preamble to each meeting. This strategy of sharing experiences and possible solutions to problems generated empathy and clarity in the interviews, as well as access to observation sessions. To ensure that this strategy did not represent a bias in the construction of the data, the support and endorsement of the Committee of Ethics and Safety in Research of the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile ( Pontifical Catholic University of Chile) was obtained.

## MIGRANT STUDENT LIFE IN CHILEAN SCHOOLS

One of the main challenges that families face when settling in Santiago de Chile is related to finding a job that provides them with economic stability and allows them to cover the costs of living in an environment that, at first, seems foreign to them (Landeros Jaime, 2020, 2022a). Thus, while mothers and fathers seek to increase economic capital at home, migrant children face difficulties inherent to sociocultural inclusion in schools, where creating bonds of friendship and relating (that is, accumulation of social capital) with their peers is complex, despite the similarities that those who share the migrant condition in Chile may have in common.

Based on the ethnographic work carried out between March 2018 and January 2019 at the Bocanegra and Niños Héroes schools, problems were identified in the composition of student groups in these educational institutions, and in the practices that generate segregation between students. In this order of ideas, this section analyzes some strategies that migrant children deploy with the purpose of creating bonds of friendship and social relationships that allow them to gain access to different groups.

On the other hand, it was also found that religious beliefs, promoted in homes by mothers and fathers, are a fundamental element for the accumulation of social capital by migrant children.

Finally, the issue of the implementation of cultural policies aimed at improving social relations between girls and boys, both migrants and nationals, who are enrolled in Chilean schools, is addressed.

### *The Formation of Groups and Exclusion*

At the Bocanegra school, the number of identified student groups is lower than at the Niños Héroes school. However, in this private educational institution subsidized by the Chilean government, diversity based on ethnic elements such as religion, language, and skin color (Anthias, 1992) has triggered difficulties in terms of social inclusion. Under these circumstances, despite the fact that the record of migrant grouping is lower at the Bocanegra school, during the field work a group

made up of Venezuelans—who represent the largest migrant community at the school—was the most relevant in terms of leadership and participation.

The identification of how migrant children are grouped within educational establishments was detected during the recording of informal conversations among students who share a certain degree of cultural capital in relation to their country, or region of origin in Latin America and the Caribbean. In these dialogues, the students reflected on the current situation and the problems that led their families to decide to leave their home and emigrate to Chile.

> Today I have seen how migrants, mainly Venezuelan girls, have begun joining groups where other classmates remain on the side. For the most part, these Venezuelan students talk about the problems of their country of origin and the problems related to the living conditions of their families (F. Landeros, field diary, June 15, 2018).

Here it can be seen how in some cases the establishment of relationships and bonds of friendship takes place from elements that are inserted into the cultural capital of the children who converge in schools; that is, the information that girls and boys of Venezuelan origin share regarding the situation in their country helps to form a network within the classroom, which illustrates the relationship and the mutual conversions between social and cultural capital described by Bourdieu (1986).

However, taking into account what Portes and Landolt (2000) pointed out regarding the exclusion that the accumulation of social capital by one group of people can generate for another, it is important to emphasize that this information shared among students segregates classmates due to their lack of knowledge about Venezuela. During the conversations, it was made evident how students who do not share any information about the politics of that country, for example, Peruvians and Puerto Ricans, decided to keep their distance or simply remain silent. This is particularly relevant given that, at the same time that some students take secondary positions, others create bonds of friendship and gain recognition, as an accumulation of symbolic capital, within the group, through the use of their cultural capital, as is the case of Sebastián (Venezuela):

> Sebastián, who is concerned about the political situation in Venezuela, talks about the problems of buying groceries and food in his country. His speech is fluid because he has all the information that his parents share with him. In an interview with his mother, she mentioned that her son knows the Venezuelan problems because that is part of his upbringing (cultural capital) as a Venezuelan child (F. Landeros, field diary, May 15, 2018)

Sebastián was one of the group leaders who during the months of ethnographic work at the Bocanegra school accumulated the recognition of his classmates based on his participation, and on the exposition of his ideas and reflections. An example of this is when several classmates ask him for advice before carrying out any task or action in the school. Sebastián is a leader whose participation and leadership within the group is reinforced by the use of his cultural capital. In other words, this type of background is crucial to create and at the same time condition access to some groups; it also allows individuals to take privileged positions within the network.

In this case, the accumulation of social capital from the common knowledge about the place of origin (cultural capital) and from the use of this same information within the educational space can be detected, in a context where it is more feasible to establish links with someone who knows and experienced (or experiences) similar problems. In fact, those who have nothing to share probably become "strangers in the network", as Portes and Landolt (2000) argue when describing the negative aspects of social capital. However, there are friendship groups of a different composition in schools, more related to the ethnicity of each student, in which physical appearance is crucial to join specific networks.

> My daughter misses her friends who stayed in Venezuela. She told me that her classmates in Chile treat her very badly. The main problem is her hair, it is kind of curly. Sometimes classmates change their behavior quickly; today they can be quite nice to her and everything is different the next day (V. Pérez, mother, personal communication, June 10, 2018).

At the same time, the school presents another problem, especially among Chilean and foreign students: "Classmates think that [my] daughter wants to steal their boyfriends, that is why Anastasia stays away from some groups" (M. Gutiérrez, mother, personal communication, September 16, 2018). Similarly, another mother mentioned that her "daughter suffered discrimination from her classmates because of her physique. She is a short and very quiet girl" (R. Huerta, mother, personal communication, October 16, 2018).

Consequently, students struggle to keep their position, where not only physical appearance becomes relevant in the creation of this type of friendships and bonds, but also mutual recognition and trust are paramount; this same line has been developed by other research in the Chilean context (Webb & Alvarez, 2018).

Regarding the grouping of students in the Niños Héroes school, teacher D. Mendoza describes the characteristics detected in the different groups based on their ethnic elements. All this while watching a soccer game in the school yard during one of the breaks:

> The Haitian group is the strongest and most closed [in cultural terms] in the school for two main reasons: first, because when they communicate with each other they do it in Creole, even though some learned Spanish during their first years at school (D. Mendonza, teacher at the Niños Héroes school, personal communication, October 19, 2018).

This condition excludes all those who do not speak their language. Second, "they have jokes and games that no one shares with them" (D. Mendonza, teacher at the Niños Héroes school, personal communication, October 19, 2018). In other words, these characteristics of the Haitian group are the result of their ethnic origin, seen from the use of language (Anthias, 1992); also due to their practices and dynamics, which few migrants of other nationalities and Chilean students understand.

Furthermore, in the dispute for privileged positions in school, a mix between recognition and violence represents the most relevant elements of the Haitians' strategy, members of the school's administrative staff pointed out. For example, migrants from Haiti mainly use educational

achievement to gain or accumulate recognition, or symbolic capital, among peers and teachers. "They are the only ones that take notes and always ask the teacher questions, and do their homework. They show their high grades and achievements in front of their classmates, all the time" (F. Landeros, field diary, October 25, 2018).

### *Educational Achievement and Violence as Generators of Social Capital*

In this process of recognition between migrants and Chilean classmates, Haitians adopt a visibly violent stance, not only in their games and activities, but also in their interactions with people. On this, a staff member mentioned that "Haitians are the most violent. They kick and hit each other all the time, and walk in and out as if there were no doors" (G. Florencia, personal communication, October 25, 2018).

However, according to the field notes, the violent acts narrated by the academic staff never affected students who were not part of the Haitian community, which means that these dynamics and practices of Haitian migrant children are linked to their intragroup interactions, which, as with the group of students from Venezuela and their interests based on cultural capital, exclude those who do not share these codes and information.

It is important to note that other types of customs were also observed, for example, some related to other actions: "A Haitian migrant student greets me by shaking my hand. He is a calm person in the classroom. He shakes my hand strongly; it is evident that this student has a lot of physical strength" (F. Landeros, field diary, October 25, 2018).

Although the Haitian group is the most closed one in the school, and many migrants and Chilean students cannot join it due to the differences mentioned above, an exception is seen with the inclusion in the group of some minorities; for example, several Afro-descendants from Colombia and the Dominican Republic, who, regardless of not sharing their culture and language, occupy a position within the Haitian group or community.

Certain elements related to the strategies to gain recognition lead to the understanding of this exception, such as the use of educational achievement in a context of discrimination and violence shared by Afro-migrant students. This situation becomes relevant with the practices and bonds of friendship between Benji (Haiti) and Jonas (Colombia):

> They are best friends. In the classroom, they are the students who are most discriminated against and abused by both their fellow migrants and Chileans. However, at the same time, Benji and Jonas always follow the teacher's instructions and assignments, showing their results to all the students, seeking to obtain their recognition. There is another Afro-descendant student from the Dominican Republic who also shows his assignment results, due to his high scores (F. Landeros, field diary, October 20, 2018 - October 28, 2018).

This is how the ethnographic data show the similarities to that which was obtained through interviews and informal conversations. In this regard, an authority of the institution explained the

dynamics of grouping in the school: "it is a process led by them. So, for example, those migrant students will eventually tend to group together as we can see with the Haitians" (Julieta, administrative staff, personal communication, September 13, 2018).

In these cases, it is common for Afro-descendant migrants to first obtain recognition, as symbolic capital, from their classmates; then they try to create bonds of friendship or social capital with students who do not share the elements mentioned above. In other words, regardless of nationality, Afro-descendant students use their symbolic capital to increase the chances of acceptance by other (non-Afro-descendant) migrants or even groups of Chileans. However, these strategies are absent in other cases also related to Afro-descendant migrants, who choose to reject their origins and adopt different cultural and social stances depending on their contexts, as will be shown in the next section.

### *Rejection of Origins as a Strategy for Inclusion*

Some foreign students deployed different strategies during the ethnographic work, seeking acceptance and recognition from their classmates to join the different groups. As part of this effort aimed at avoiding becoming an outsider among migrants and Chileans, some segregated students rejected their origins and modified their behavior during interactions with their peers, teachers, and staff members.

The case of Juan, originally from Puerto Rico (or Peru), is an extraordinary example of how migrants deploy all their resources when trying to negotiate access and permanence in groups. The situation of this student, due to the lack of information about his origins, represented a complicated case because, while he explained having been born in Puerto Rico, the teacher's records show that Peru was his actual country of origin.

> That's one problem with Juan. The principal has this information about his origins, then the teachers have different information, but when you talk to him to request information about his parents or relatives, he explains different things all the time and we do not know why (A. Pereira, teacher at Bocanegra school, personal communication, May 4, 2018).

When the author spoke with Juan during a break at the beginning of the school year, this child explained that his parents were from Peru, but that he was born in Puerto Rico when his family lived in that country. Contrary to this first response, when the school year was ending, Juan himself identified himself as Chilean: "I am from Chile. I am from here, from Santiago de Chile" (Juan, personal communication, June 10, 2018). In fact, Juan's purpose was to create friendships primarily with Chilean students. In that sense, during the observation sessions, it was common to see him near classmates, primarily Chilean, trying to take a position within their groups.

This Puerto Rican, or Peruvian, student never tried to join migrant groups. On the contrary, his interest was in groups made up of Chilean students, so Juan probably changed his behavior, as pointed out in the field notes: "As the months passed, Juan modified his behaviors and tried to use

various Chilean idioms in his daily speech/vocabulary. He also imitated the Chilean accent, identifying himself as a student from Chile" (F. Landeros, field diary, June 12, 2018). "I am from Chile", Juan emphasized during a classroom activity. Another similar case is that of Restrepo, a Venezuelan student who moved to Chile with his family and who identifies himself "as a Chilean student" (F. Landeros, field diary, June 11, 2018).

In a scenario where the differences marked by individuals cause a hierarchy among students in schools in terms of socialization, association, and friendship, Damaris tries to establish a difference between Dominicans and Haitians, Haitians being the most vulnerable from among the migrant communities in the two schools studied in this article.

This Afro-Caribbean student, worried about being rejected by her classmates, who identify her as Haitian, activates her strategies with the aim of joining migrant groups, which represents a contrast with Juan's situation, because Damaris, unlike Juan, highlights her Dominican nationality as a strategy of differentiation and social inclusion, in an environment where Haitians are the main victims of segregation, discrimination, xenophobia, and violence. Another relevant point is that her interest was always focused on migrant groups.

As a victim of bullying by her classmates due to her skin color, which involved negative expressions directed towards her, Damaris emphasized her origins at least four times during the ethnographic work. In that regard, in a personal communication, the principal explained that the main concern at the school was this type of harassment and even student suicide (A. Peña, principal at Bocanegra school, personal communication, March 29, 2018). Although teachers do not have the skills and experience to mediate these types of problems, they are the ones who must resolve problematic situations, as shown in the field notes:

> Please, you don't have to say this [reject your origins]. You are from the Dominican Republic, not from Haiti. Although Haiti is a lovely country, we know that you are a Dominican girl. It's okay if you are from one country or the other, it doesn't matter. Please don't cry (R. Sarmiento, teacher at Bocanegra school, field diary, April 25, 2018).

These efforts by teachers helped to mediate between students on numerous occasions. However, Damaris's problem became more complicated as the semester progressed.

> At the beginning of the semester, this student proudly asserted her origins: "I am from the Dominican Republic!" However, she now hesitates, even refuses, to talk about the subject. She does not want to remind her teacher of her origins. She had cried because of the jokes made by some (male) classmates about her nationality (Field diary. Bocanegra School, April 25, 2018).

The teachers' intervention only resolved problematic situations for short periods. The field notes on Damaris make it possible to analyze her two strategies, as well as how her interactions with other people became more problematic after the teacher's intervention. First, she clarified her origins by highlighting the difference between countries (Dominican Republic and Haiti), which resolved the confrontations with her classmates, not only those of Chilean origin but also migrants

(mainly non-Afro-descendants). Secondly, when this dynamic no longer benefited her, she tried to hide her origins so as not to be identified as Dominican, and thus achieve incorporation into certain student groups.

The teachers' attendance simply complicated this situation to a high degree, due to the repetition of their questions about nationality or origins, which highlights the need to design and implement multicultural policies in Chilean schools.

### *The Role of Religious Beliefs in Friendship*

Informal conversations with migrant students and their mothers provide relevant material, useful to understand the ways in which religion intervenes in the accumulation of social capital, the latter represented in this educational context as friendships. In this sense, segregation arises from specific actions and decisions related to religious beliefs, which parents reinforce through the transmission of cultural capital (linked to religion) in homes (Landeros Jaime, 2020), raising a barrier between classmates. The case of a Venezuelan girl exemplifies the above statements:

> She doesn't want to play with anyone. Earlier, other [Haitian] students were also in the same situation, but they changed, and she hasn't yet. This case is interesting, but at the same time very sad for her. Because she is isolated from people (R. Huerta, administrative staff, personal communication, October 16, 2018).

This testimony highlights at least two different paths followed by migrant children. First, some of them refuse to adapt their dynamics and practices just to create bonds with others, in the face of an educational system that constantly reproduces assimilation practices. Second, following the Haitian example, several migrant students relax their beliefs and create bonds regardless of the religion they and their peers believe in, which is useful in the process of social inclusion and adaptation in host societies, as one academic staff member detailed about a student from Haiti:

> Look at that student over there, she is from Haiti. I don't remember her name, but the important thing is her posture, she seems confident. I like it this way, because when she arrived she was shy and always looking at the ground. Nowadays, it seems that she has changed, and it is the right thing for students to change (Francisca, administrative staff, personal communication, November 18, 2018).

Just like the group of students from Haiti, whose capacity for flexibility in order to achieve inclusion became evident, Aisha, a student from Pakistan who moved to Chile with her family due to the armed conflict in her country of origin, represents an example of how religion can generate segregation within groups of migrant students. According to the vice-principal of the Niños Héroes school, the problem with Aisha was that "she always tried to avoid talking to and participating in activities with male students. It has to do with her religion, but things are different here. We try to include her while still respecting her beliefs" (P. Morejón, personal communication, April 27, 2018).

Later, during fieldwork, Aisha gradually changed her attitudes and accepted trying to get involved in activities with male students, unlike her sister, who refuses to maintain any kind of communication with her classmates. “Step by step, she opened up to Chilean culture, but there’s still much to work with her” (P. Morejón, administrative staff, personal communication, April 27, 2018).

In relation to this, the mother of another student explained during an interview that when creating friendships at school, her daughter should:

> mainly look for people who share religious beliefs with us, this is the advice I always repeat to my daughter, because we Venezuelans believe in Christ. We are a Catholic family living in Chile. She has problems making friends because of our religion: we are Orthodox Christians (F. Armenta, mother, personal communication, May 16, 2018).

In these terms, segregation related to religious elements is a result caused by some students who only follow their religious beliefs and the advice of their family when creating ties and friendships, something identified within student groups from the same self-imposed practices and restrictions of some of their own members. Because of this, school authorities began implementing multicultural policies with the purpose of minimizing segregation between migrant and Chilean students, as well as to improve the process of social inclusion within institutions. In the following section, the main characteristics of these initiatives in each school will be described, as well as their differences in terms of formality, implementation, and results.

### *Multicultural Policies in Two Schools in Chile*

In both schools, nationalities were practically the same among the migrant community. However, the main difference, related to ethnic origin and particularly present in elements such as language, religion, and skin color (Anthias, 1992), generated a special interest in designing and implementing policies to improve coexistence within schools. These policies aimed at preventing segregation include the initiative to publish school information and news in several languages, multicultural activities, as well as improving interpersonal communication between teachers, authorities, and academic staff members with students.

During an interview, a staff member at the Niños Héroes school described that these multicultural efforts began a year ago due to the “high presence of Haitian students and others who did not speak Spanish. All information is posted in several languages, such as Spanish, Creole, English, and French in specific areas of the school and classrooms” (D. Monje, administrative staff, personal communication, November 25, 2018). According to the authorities, this is a policy that mainly follows two objectives: first, to improve the social integration of migrant students; second, to decrease the level of grouping and segregation recorded among students in the school.

Therefore, they decided to hire a professional originally from Haiti, a teacher who has worked since the first semester of 2018 in creating and strengthening ties between the Haitian community

and students who do not speak Creole or French. Similarly, a professional from Venezuela also began implementing multicultural strategies among migrant groups (F. Landeros, field diary, November 25, 2018). As noted, the school administration's policy follows an institutionalized process that includes several initiatives, in which the participation of teachers and administrative employees is evident.

These efforts contrast with the lack of formal and institutionalized multicultural policies as part of the Bocanegra school's work rules. In this sense, while at Niños Héroes the authorities develop different strategies for social inclusion, at Bocanegra the director only talks about the relevance of this type of policies as a way of working, but the institution lacks formal regulations that guarantee that the entire school team follows a multicultural approach. The importance of this type of policies is simply presented in the form of speeches during the ceremonies that take place before the entire student community.

> Our interest is in multiculturalism and interculturality in a context where Chilean government authorities do not pay attention to minorities, nor to migrants. We have at least 13 nationalities here, including students from Angola and Pakistan. At school, the main problems are social and emotional (A. Peña, director of the Bocanegra school, personal communication, March 29, 2018).

Despite the above, a teacher who has worked for the past two decades at the Bocanegra school reported that she has never received training on how to develop strategies in educational environments where the majority of students are migrants or people living in poverty: "we have to improvise because of the lack of training in this school. Also, we have to use our materials because of the few economic resources that the administration mentions all the time" (R. Sarmiento, personal communication, April 30, 2018).

Although the principal pointed out that the main problems among foreign students are social and emotional, which is probably the result of problems occurred throughout their life path, there are violent verbal situations that are part of the students' daily life in the classroom due to the dynamics of some teachers, as shown in the field notes recorded during a communication and language class:

> "Hurry up and throw the gum in the trash! In this class, everything has only one name, so if you hear someone say something different, it's wrong. Listen to me, shut up right now! You don't want to do anything, and it's the same at home, your mother told me that you didn't want to do your homework" (the teacher used a loud tone of voice at all times, mainly to address migrant students) (F. Landeros, field diary, March 15, 2018 - June 28, 2018).

At least three conflicting aspects were detected in the teacher's behavior and work strategy. First, the verbally violent way in which the teacher communicates with each student. Second, and more related to multiculturalism and segregation, the teacher seeks to force the students to speak and think in a similar way to the Chilean community, in an apparent effort to assimilate them with

the host society. Finally, by listening to his instructions, all classmates find out what is happening in a classmate's home, which violates the privacy not only of the student, but also of his family.

Although the main objective of formal school policies (Niños Héroes school) and informal school policies (Bocanegra school) emphasizes the search for possibilities to solve the problems related to grouping, segregation, and multiculturalism among students, these initiatives did not work during the fieldwork period, at least not according to the administration's plan; on the contrary, the students' behavior gradually worsened as the teacher intensified the attitude described above. This is probably not only the case in schools with a high migrant presence; however, in the case of this article, it was identified that the most violent verbal exchanges were those directed at foreign students. In addition, fights, confrontations, and grouping among migrants recorded a slight intensification, which could be remedied through periodic training aimed at teachers and administrative staff in order to help girls and boys improve their social networks.

## CLOSING REMARKS

Ultimately, creating bonds of friendship and relating to their new educational environment represents a great challenge for migrant children recently settled in Santiago de Chile, who face not only a Chilean society with its own codes, traditions, and customs, but also an assimilationist logic embedded in public policies on education that constantly encourage sociocultural inclusion processes to be more complex.

Based on the ethnographic work and the analysis presented, it was possible to identify that differences in terms of language, religion, and skin color cause problems for some migrant students to establish friendship ties, even with those people who were also born in a place other than Chile. In order to follow this problem that emerges from the ethnography carried out, it is important to reinforce the incorporation of ethnicity as a key concept in the study of the sociocultural inclusion of migrants in Chilean society, so as to identify the characteristics that produce segregation among students in educational institutions.

In this regard, it must be taken into account that, as Anthias (2013) described, the ethnic features of each person give value to the individual positions they occupy within the groups and to their own sense of belonging, always acknowledging that ethnic origin can be modified to take on different meanings, being a set of non-static resources.

It is important to mention that the Bocanegra and Niños Héroes schools share aspects of their student dynamics in terms of their organization, as well as in their general institutional functionality, and that there are also several aspects in which they differ. For example, the level of grouping of migrants is lower at the Bocanegra school than at the Niños Héroes school, which probably means that the informal efforts that the administration makes, such as festivals, cultural gatherings, and informative talks, to improve the multicultural environment have worked, at least in this area, in a positive way. However, the discrimination recorded in them shows that not all of the efforts of the administration achieved progress; an example is the rejection of the origins and the change of ethnic identification of Juan and Damaris.

At the Niños Héroes school, grouping practices among students were commonly based on similarities in ethnic elements such as religion, language, and skin color, in a context where these characteristics were more recurrent than at the Bocanegra school. In other words, the presence of migrant students who speak a language other than Spanish, are believers of a religion other than Catholicism, and are of African descent, is more pronounced in this school compared to the Bocanegra school.

Finally, the formality and informality of the multicultural policies implemented by the schools show the way in which the educational authorities have not managed to work in coordination, nor following the needs of Chilean society in terms of migration, which would represent a crucial effort due to the increasing percentage of newly arrived migrant children applying for enrollment in the country.

In summary, this article evidenced that accounting for ethnic elements improves the understanding of the difficulties faced by migrant children in creating social capital, in the form of friendship ties. Moreover, these ethnic differences in these Chilean schools illustrate the negative element of social capital related to exclusion, as addressed by Portes and Landolt (2000).

Translation: Fernando Llanas.

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