

## THE MIGRANT SELF IN UNCERTAIN TIMES: LATIN AMERICANS AND THEIR CHILDREN IN POST-CELTIC TIGER IRELAND

Fina Carpena-Méndez, Ph.D.

While neoliberal reforms, aimed at deepening the transnational economic and political integration of Latin America in the global order, have resulted in increased levels of migration, social inequality, and the dismantling of local subsistence economies, immigration has been central to the Celtic Tiger story of development. Unusually positioned between Europe and the postcolonial world, Ireland reversed more than a century of out-migration becoming a society of return migration and new immigration. In the last decade, both rural and urban Ireland have received rapidly shifting and highly contingent immigration flows, including sending areas from Latin America (Brazil, Ecuador, Colombia, and Argentina among others). My project explores, through the perspective of children's lives, the centrality of immigration in the reorganization of the everyday experiences and the formation of new kinds of subjectivities and corporalities in the Celtic Tiger story of development. I seek to develop an ethnographic understanding of how recent economic restructuring in Ireland is creating new subject positions for Irish children and youth, and how the experiences of Latin American children are differently reconfigured in the process of crossing national borders and settling in Irish globalized and transitory (urban and rural) spaces. My research seeks to uncover the different migratory pathways, transnational and everyday lives of Latin American children growing up in Irish transitional society, vis-à-vis Irish and other immigrant children. In so doing, I hope to unravel the emerging forms of relatedness, difference, and inequality that children are both embodying and contesting while growing up in Ireland.

Latin American migration to Ireland is extremely socio-economically diverse. Latin Americans from middle-class and working-class sectors have come to fill a broad range of occupations, from highly-skilled jobs in health care, pharmaceutical, IT and software, to industrial and agricultural, in both rural and urban areas of Ireland. An extreme multiplicity of migratory trajectories shakes at a cognitive level the homogeneous category of "migrant". Latin American migratory pathways and experiences in Ireland range from Mexican maids who came from the US with the return migration of their Irish employers to the undocumented migration from rural Brazil to rural Ireland, including middle-class migrants' downward social mobility in Ireland, as well as the ongoing spatial mobility in search of opportunities following migratory circuits within Ireland and Europe. Latin Americans have different possible migratory circuits to choose around the world: the US, Portugal, Spain, Italy, UK, and Ireland. Migration networks often involve third and fourth countries and depend on the specific insertion in the labor market. Through deep interviewing with families, my research explores how experiences of growing up are affected by migration trajectories through several countries (US, Portugal, Spain, UK); how in each of these countries Latin American children have experienced different constructions of their subject positions, identities and ethnicity, in school and community life; how these learning experiences shape their sense of belonging and their understanding of their incorporation experiences in Irish society, and how, in turn, affect decisions to migrate again or settle permanently in Ireland. My project examines these migratory trajectories in relation to disrupted or altered expectations of life-course transitions, intergenerational relationships, and the unfolding of children's life chances and life paths. I am also exploring how middle-class families resituate their experiences of growing up as second or third generation of

European immigrants in Latin America in light of their children's experiences of immigration in Ireland.

Despite the impossibility to imagine a unity among manifold migrant trajectories, the neoliberal state is increasingly conceptualizing and managing immigration in terms of ethnic categorizations while withdrawing its responsibility to provide public services and infrastructures to its citizens. My research argues that transnational migration has become central to practices of global rationality through which local spaces and social life are profoundly reworked and new forms of relatedness, difference, and inequality created. Within this context, children have been targeted in European immigration and integration research. Children's well-being has gained prominence in the international agenda in recent years as shifting geopolitical and economic regimes are restructuring children's experiences of the everyday, the family, kinship practices, and the nature of state's support for childhood institutions. In my project I argue for a focus on the reorganization of children's and youth experiences as a privileged lens revealing the nature of the globalizing process taking place in late capitalism, bringing the study of children and youth to the forefront of discussions on neoliberal globalization. Through ethnographic research with children in families, public spaces, and schools, my project examines the effects of current economic, immigration, and integration policies on immigrant children and the social formations and forms of intercultural communication emerging in Ireland.

The school is a privileged site of contact bringing together students from diverse cultural, linguistic, and social class backgrounds. In this space, children's experiences in developing an awareness of other people's perspectives, and adapting in interaction with others, are at the foreground of emerging forms of communication and relatedness in cosmopolitan social formations. I seek to unravel how Irish historical experiences of colonialism and nationalism have shaped contemporary educational ideologies and practices, and how those practices are affecting the incorporation experiences of Latin Americans vis-à-vis other immigrant children. My research aims at developing an ethnographic understanding of what it means to grow up in contemporary Ireland, of how the texture of the everyday is fabricated in its globalized and transitory spaces. Through the voices of migrants, Irish, and their children, my research hopes to reveal the unexpected ironies, dilemmas, and problems inherent in the Celtic Tiger experience of development, contributing both to future immigration debates and to our understanding of how the American way of life, in its neoliberal global form, is being received and experienced in an European context with a particular socio-historical and cultural background such as Ireland. My project on Latin American families and their children in Ireland will contribute to the comparative ethnography of the migration and incorporation experiences of Latin Americans in the United States and Europe.

Central to my research is the development of anthropological approaches to the neoliberal interplay between migration and development, social transformations in Latin America and the formation of cosmopolitan societies in Europe, as well as the experience of transnational childhoods and schooling. I am engaged in the ethnography of migration as a global social process, taking into account the effects on the everyday and the reconfiguration of subjectivities and corporealities in both sending areas of the global South and receiving contexts of the global North. Economic restructuring in the last 15 years in Ireland has been dependent on the imbrication of foreign direct investment with the state's withdrawal of public services and infrastructures to its citizens. By developing an ethnographic understanding of this imbrication it will be possible to understand the limits and possibilities for migrants' integration and incorporation in Irish society. As immigration regimes and the labor market rapidly shift, Latin Americans from different class backgrounds face the

challenge of reorganizing kinship relations and care transnationally, managing the uncertainty of their everyday lives in Ireland, and their relations with Irish and other immigrant groups. Coinciding with the economic deceleration of the Celtic Tiger and the effect of current immigration and integration policies, in the last year the number of Latin Americans who have returned to their countries of origin after living in Ireland has exceeded the total number of migrants leaving Ireland in the last decade. Undocumented Brazilians, in particular, are reporting to experience increasing displacement in the labor market by the incorporation of Eastern Europeans to the EU and, in some cases, have begun processes of return migration to Brazil. The same process is happening with other Spanish speaking Latin Americans from Ecuador, Colombia, and Argentina. My project examines the conditions of possibility for both migrant settlement and integration in Ireland and return migration to Latin America, as well as the texture and the nature of transnational life. I am particularly interested in how these conditions affect and, in turn, are affected by social class.

In my current fieldwork as a Marie Curie Postdoctoral Fellow at the National University of Ireland, Cork, I have gathered ethnographic materials in county Cork, Galway, Roscommon, Clare, and Dublin in households, community centers, public spaces, and schools. I am applying to the Irish Latin American Research Fund to expand my research in order to continue to document the experiences of Latin Americans in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland and in return migration to their countries of origin. This research project will continue, after my joining the Department of Anthropology at Oregon State University, US, as an assistant professor in September 2009, until the academic year 2010-2011. I am experimenting with different forms of "itinerant ethnography", requiring episodic visits rather than sustained stays in multiples sites, and long distance communication through email and phone with migrants returning to Latin America. I am documenting the experiences of return migration of several families in Colombia and Ecuador through email, skype, and phone conversations. I will travel to Brazil in the summer of 2009 for a research visit with returned migrants from rural Ireland. I plan to return to Ireland in the summer of 2010 to revisit some communities and families with whom I have worked in the last year, exploring the post-Celtic Tiger context in which decisions to remain in Ireland or return are made and the perceived implications for children. A sense of self deeply rooted in solid experience is emerging among Latin Americans against the vanishing global neoliberal mirage of transnational social mobility, a source of delusion and revelation of terra incognita. This solidly experiential self articulates contestations to both impending futures as minorities in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland and as return migrants in Latin America, socio-economic and cultural areas ravaged by the effects of neoliberal globalization and in search of alternative governance models.

At the heart of the colonial and postcolonial anthropological project there has been the imperative of the Other. Migration scholarship is often distorted by the ethnic lens ("the exotics at home"), and framed within the language of the state in the binary integration/exclusion. In my research I argue for the comparative ethnography of migration as a global social process, taking into account the effects on the everyday and the reconfiguration of the self in both sending areas and receiving contexts. That is, the experiences of migrants and their children cannot be easily and usefully disentangled from broader social life and interaction in the sending and receiving contexts. We need different modes of organizing thought to reconsider received ontologies of being, belonging, and difference, which are presently based on notions of ethnicity and citizenship, to renew conceptual tools that can transect the reconfiguration of social worlds at the local and beyond the state. In this way, we could grasp forms in which migrants and locals attribute meaning to the historical circumstances that have produced them.