

Interweaving the Americas: A transnational metamorphosis autoethnography to transgress Ecuadorian education for Buen Vivir

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"Education for *Buen Vivir* requires that educational actors advocate for an educational world that allows us to reconstitute our strength, vitality, spirit, and self-consciousness to know who we are, how we live, with what forces, and who accompanies us. Living education from within makes us more empathic, compassionate and united by a purpose of promoting harmony, equity and equilibrium with life in its fullness."

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The paradigm of *Buen Vivir* (Good Living) in education turns on the educational purpose regarding the transformation of the world. This autoethnography, which draws from transnationalism theory (Vertovec, 2009) and transnational academic mobility (Kim, 2010), explores how my critical self-examination of transformation shaped my lived experiences within transnational spaces to advance the conversation on postcolonial entanglements in education from the standpoint of a transnational migrant scholar and educator. Throughout *three academic mobility journeys* between Western and Latin American society, I explore privileges and disempowerment afforded me by my education, laden with postcolonial influences. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine my lived experiences that flourished my *transnational identity capital* (Kim, 2010) and activated my spirit for advocating for pedagogies for social transformation, relevancy, autonomy, resistance, liberation, and dialogue. By creating a *self-portrait artwork* and the composition of a *poem*, I aimed to inform, inspire, and reveal my self-exposure in my findings, which authenticates my critical/decolonial thinking by merging artistic performance with autoethnographic inquiry. I reflectively, critically, and evocatively explore and disclose vulnerabilities, positionality, and perspectives as disruptive experiences of my progressive metamorphic process that initiates from my self-identification as an *Azogueña caterpillar* to transmute myself to a *transnational purple butterfly*.

INTRODUCTION

By creating transnational autoethnography narratives, the primary purpose was to reveal the ways in which quality trans/national higher educational program and academic excellence cultivate conditions for educators to adjust and revitalize their teaching practices aiming at developing students' critical thinking and emancipatory learning while promoting education as a practice of freedom. Likewise, it strives to inspire professionals in academia to pursue continuous professional preparation in response to the challenges posed by the Ecuadorian paradigm of *Buen Vivir*. Since most research from the perspective of *transnationalism* often seeks to visualize transnational organizations and institutions, the transnational migrant her/himself, as the central axis, has been left aside from research scopes. Therefore, it is essential to study deeply *migrants' activities* and their *lived experiences* at the individual level to understand better the different structures of transnationalism, transnational academic mobility, and its effects.

In this context, this autoethnography study with an evocative and critical approach aims to enlighten the meaning of my metamorphosis stages and processes, which I ponder as a symbolic representation to explore my *transnational metamorphosis* development within socio-cultural, political, economic, but mainly educational spaces of two nations, Ecuador and the United States of America. Interweaving my narratives through personal stories and past experiences highlights episodes of my life where I have been going through self-reflection, critical self-awareness, and understanding of my socio-cultural identity, values, traditions, and beliefs. Illustrating ways my shift into a more complex understanding

and pragmatic acceptance of antecedents of my postcolonial educational culture allows me to create shifts in consciousness leading me to acquire additional, potentially transformative perspectives, different ways to understand myself, my circumstances, and my academic worlds. Grounded in the social economy knowledge notion, my accessibility to knowledge was fostered by transnational/international education, transcultural interconnectedness experiences, and *transnational identity capital* (Kim, 2017) within academia. The significance of this autoethnography study validates and encourages prioritization of public investment for development and improvement of human talent capacities.

METHODS

To understand what it means to be a transnational academic migrant with *transnational identity capital*, I elaborate on the autoethnography methodological approach foundations, methods, and considerations. This approach celebrated and honored my transnational lived experiences during my journeys throughout the *path of Conocimiento* and metamorphic stages from *Azogueña caterpillar to a transnational (purple) butterfly* for acquiring my education for Buen Vivir. Through this *transnational reflective-evocative autoethnographic approach* with critical nuances, I embodied my stories around “the personal and its relationship to culture” (Ellis, 2004, p. 31) within *evocative autoethnographic accounts* (Bochner & Ellis, 2016), descriptions, and interpretations (Ellis, 2004, p. 31).



While reflecting on my socio-historical, postcolonial, and transnational cultural and academic experiences, I disclose vulnerabilities through intimate self- confessions when *writing stories* (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) through expressive skills. Through disciplined self-reflection that this type of research implies, I gained understanding and made meaning of aspects and dimensions regarding my *transnational identity capital, academic mobility, post- colonial education, the path of Conocimiento, and Buen Vivir fundamentals*, that an empirical position would probably have overlooked. Data collection and management aligned with Chang’s (2016) *strategies for self-narratives data collection*. The analysis method aided by a combination of (self) *narrative portraits analytical strategy* (Rodríguez-Dorans & Jacobs, 2020), *writing as a method of inquiry* (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005), and *theory-driven analytical features* (Bhattacharya, 2015) assisted me in identifying aspects specific to my research subject. The data management and analysis process were completely non-linear and multidirectional. I utilized the NVivo software to organize and categorize my memory, self- observational, and self-reflective and external raw data I collected throughout my 10 years of experiencing transnational academic mobilities.

Autoethnography opens spaces to incorporate *creative arts-based approaches* (Anzaldúa, 2015; Bhattacharya & Payne, 2016; Leavy, 2020; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005), which this research embraces. The representation of my data analysis draws in arts-based approaches to educational research (Barone & Eisner, 2012), which integrate tenets from the creative arts into scholarly work. These approaches are valuable and effective in “expressing the multiplicity of lived experiences in nuanced, complex ways while also remaining accessible and evoking emotional connections” (Bhattacharya, 2015, p. 21). Tenets of *portraiture methodology* (Travis, 2020) and *narrative portraiture* (Rodríguez-Dorans & Jacobs, 2020) intersect with arts-based methods embodied in my self-narrative findings. By creatively designing a self-portrait painting with *two-dimensional visual art* (Wang et al., 2017), I captured the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of my 10 years of transnational academic experiences.

This artwork, which I recognize as my *transnational academic metamorphic self-portrait painting*, merges my identity, my transnational decolonizing voice, and spirit essence existing

Think of me as the
Good-Living-Bor-
derless Butterfly
with a new mestiza
consciousness and
Andean mystic
leanings.

*I take flight with my purple
wings
alert and aware
of not falling again into
captive fears
with transparent thought
and the pedagogy of hope
I spot the scope
of my active voice
for decolonizing
other codified caterpillars’
souls*

among multiple spaces and realities. I regularly use short personal stories and poetry to represent and explore my perspectives in this research. These poetic moments intend to open a vibrant path to the fragmented aspects of my identity and voice through episodic experiences. Thus, my self-narrative findings involve a *poetic representation* (Butler-Kisber, 2010) since poetic positions allow for a more personal conversation tone.

CONCLUSIONS

This transformative autoethnography embodies self-representation and the production of writing, knowledge, memory, imagination, consciousness, identities, and the political resistance and agency of the female-post colonial trans/national Other, particularly the Ecuadorian/mestiza. Within this *década ganada*, I created a new story and new agenda to start acting from being an other-sider, halfway between complete outsider and an insider. My chief form of orientation to the world is having an active spirit to explore connections, engage in *diálogo de saberes* (dialogue of all knowledge), contribute to knowledge transfer and production, creating trans/national collaborations and inform the educational needs of my people. Today, we all must bridge the chasm between campus political activity and grassroots activism, women and men, us and others of whatever race or culture they may be. Through our scholarship and creative expression, we must be willing to translate across (mis)perceived differences instead of highlighting our separate worlds and facilitating and obstructing dialogue and collaboration. Today we are poised on the brink of our flowering. We need to increase our capacity for awareness, vision, presence, and compassion and integrate reflective and contemplative practices into daily professional routines. For this, we need to clarify collective and personal identities and visions (Anzaldúa, 2015). If we educate people to learn to live *Buen Vivir desde adentro* (*Good living from within*), it can happen. I call it: *The world of the good living from within*.

RESEARCHER RECOMMENDATIONS

The primary recommendation from this work is for Northern and Latin American educator actors to become aware of the ways in which trans/national academic mobiles experience their academic crossings into the field of professional education. It is crucial to reflect on academic aspects that have not been considered previously regarding academic migrants, as well as to consider some instructive adaptation for our specific trans/national and international academic communities.

Potentially, governments and administrators should emphasize the continuous improvement of education at all levels. Public funds must be invested in intangible human talent with the outcome that equal education of excellence promotes knowledge and solutions to social problems. It means reengineering universities to spend less on bureaucracy and more on academics. It is critical to improve the quality and democratization of higher education by having access to technology and creating knowledge through investment in science, technological development, and innovation. It is necessary to encourage research, establish instruments that promote the social economy of knowledge and revalue the role of educators, researchers, and innovators in our societies. Higher educational actors should rethink educational policy and practices differently in inclusive and respectful ways to enable processes for building dialogue in harmony and respect for the diverse and multiple horizons beyond the vision of modern and modernizing. It will allow us to build a society with an authentic practice of interculturality where interdependence and exchange between cultures are equitable under conditions of equality and respect.

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"By changing ourselves, we change the world. The process of acquiring education for Good Living from within is a path of a two-way movement—going deep into the self and expanding into the world, a simultaneous recreation of the self, and a reconstruction of society."

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