

Capitals, Aporophobia, and Schooling: Tensions of Social Reproduction Among Venezuelan Migrant Children in Colombia

Capitales, aporofobia y escuela: tensiones de la reproducción social en infancias migrantes venezolanas en Colombia

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how the economic, social, and cultural capitals of Venezuelan migrant families are reconfigured during their integration into Bogotá, and how these transformations shape the schooling trajectories of migrant children. Using a qualitative design with quantitative support, surveys, narrative interviews, and the MNA Strategy (migrant narratives) were applied to explore tensions between social reproduction, school-based aporophobia, and adaptation processes. Findings reveal patrimonial losses, fragmentation of family networks, feminization of care, and significant reconfiguration of cultural capital among children. Results also show that schools function simultaneously as spaces of integration and sites of symbolic exclusion, where practices of aporophobia emerge among economically disadvantaged children. The study concludes that migrant schooling trajectories are marked by structural inequalities that constrain social mobility, and that schools require policies attentive to care, diversity, and the protection of migrant childhoods.

Keywords: 1. migration, 2. childhood, 3. social capital, 4. school integration, 5. cultural inequality.

RESUMEN

Este artículo analiza cómo los capitales económico, social y cultural de las familias migrantes venezolanas se reconfiguran durante su integración en Bogotá, y de qué modo dichas transformaciones influyen en las trayectorias escolares de niños y niñas. Mediante un enfoque cualitativo, con apoyos cuantitativos, se emplearon encuestas, entrevistas narrativas y la Estrategia NAM (narrativas migrantes) para examinar tensiones entre reproducción social, aporofobia escolar y procesos de adaptación. Los resultados evidencian pérdidas patrimoniales, fragmentación de redes familiares, feminización del cuidado y reconfiguración del capital cultural infantil. Así mismo, muestran que la escuela opera simultáneamente como espacio de integración y escenario de exclusión simbólica, donde emergen prácticas de aporofobia entre infancias empobrecidas. Se concluye que las trayectorias escolares migrantes están marcadas por desigualdades estructurales que limitan la movilidad social, y que la escuela requiere políticas sensibles al cuidado, la diversidad y la protección de la infancia migrante.

Palabras clave: 1. migración, 2. infancia, 3. capital social, 4. integración escolar, 5. desigualdad cultural.

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INTRODUCTION

The arrival in recent years of Venezuelan migrant families in Colombia has resulted in social and educational landscapes characterized by profound inequalities, as well as by institutional challenges stemming from human mobility. Although migration has been primarily addressed from economic and humanitarian perspectives, understanding its impact on children's schooling requires focusing on the tensions arising from the interaction between families, territories, and educational institutions. Schooling is not only a mechanism for integration, but also a space where the capital that families mobilize during their migration process is reconfigured, a space where dynamics of social recognition and exclusion are reinforced (Bourdieu, 1999).

Several studies have evidenced that the educational experiences of migrant children are conditioned by job insecurity, family breakdowns, and housing instability that characterize migration processes—all of these being factors that directly impact on the continuity of their educational trajectories. It is in this context that schools can reproduce inequalities, when their practices fail to take into account the specific characteristics of migrant settlement processes or the material and symbolic resources available in migrant homes (Portes & Landolt, 1996). Similarly, the transformations in economic, cultural, and social capital that families undergo in their displacement affect their capacity to meet institutional expectations, particularly when school codes privilege repertoires that are not always accessible to those living in vulnerable situations (Coleman, 1988; Lin, 2002; Putnam, 2000).

Although the authors of this paper have worked on topics related to the Venezuelan migrant experience in Colombia, they have focused on the methodological possibilities of the MNA Strategy for reconstructing childhood trajectories and understanding mobility narratives (Linares Alvarado & Forero Londoño, 2025a, 2025b). These studies emphasize the narrative and expressive contributions of the strategy, but fail to examine the role of schooling in the processes of social reproduction or the forms of stigmatization that emerge in the educational sphere. This paper follows a different approach by situating the analysis within the tensions between poverty, capital, and schooling, as well as the manifestations of xenophobia and aporophobia that condition the school experience of migrant children, a phenomenon that requires conceptual differentiation to understand its structural nature (Cortina, 2017).

From this perspective, this study makes an original contribution to the line of research at hand, broadening the discussion so as to include educational and sociocultural dimensions not explored in the authors' previous work. The article analyzes the social reproduction strategies of Venezuelan migrant families and their relationship to their children's educational experiences, aiming to understand how available resources, the material conditions of their settlements, and the meanings families attribute to schooling influence educational trajectories. By means of a narrative approach, family stories are brought together with descriptive data from surveys, allowing for a simultaneous examination of the structural circumstances and subjective interpretations that shape school life in migration contexts (Riessman, 2008).

By positioning the debate at the intersection of migration, capital, and schooling, this study contributes to broadening the discussion on educational inclusion in contexts of inequality. It demonstrates that schools are not only places of reception but also arenas where tensions linked to economic precarity and social differentiation are brought to the fore. The analysis presented here provides conceptual and empirical elements for rethinking institutional responses to migrant children, especially in territories where poverty and mobility are persistently intertwined.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Understanding the school experience of Venezuelan migrant children in Colombia requires analyzing it from a conceptual framework that allows us to connect the family transformations resulting from displacement with the institutional dynamics of schools. From this perspective, social reproduction theory offers tools for examining how inequalities are reconfigured during migration and how they affect the educational trajectories of children. According to Bourdieu & Passeron (1996), social agents operate within structured fields where the unequal distribution of economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital conditions their possibilities for action and the institutional expectations they interact with. By entailing material and symbolic ruptures, migration transforms the position that families occupy in these fields, redefining both the resources available to them and the strategies they develop to sustain schooling.

From this perspective, capital should be understood not only as accumulable resources but also as relationships that acquire meaning within specific contexts. Various studies have shown that migrant families experience a loss or devaluation of some of the cultural and social capital they possessed in their country of origin, a situation that affects their ability to interpret school codes and to participate in institutional dynamics.

The concept of social capital is useful for explaining these transformations. Coleman (1988) conceives of it as the set of relationships that facilitate certain individual or collective goals, while Lin (2002) emphasizes the importance of resources accessible through social networks. For his part, Putnam (2000) differentiates between bonding and bridging ties, noting that the latter allow access to broader opportunities. The research of Portes and Landolt (1996), however, did warn that social capital can also have negative effects when associated with relationships of control or isolation. In the case of Venezuelan migration, these perspectives help us understand why some families manage to set in motion networks that promote schooling, while others face persistent barriers upon arrival in new territories.

Likewise, the economic hardship resulting from the migration process introduces additional tensions in the relationship with schooling. The loss of economic capital limits the ability of families to cover costs associated with education, or to maintain a stable environment that fosters continued schooling. Aporophobia, a concept developed by Cortina (2017) to describe the rejection of poor people regardless of their national origin, is linked to this dimension. In order to analyze the stigmatization mechanisms faced by migrant families in schools, one must differentiate

aporophobia from xenophobia, as this allows us to recognize that prejudices are not directed solely at Venezuelan nationality, but also at the economic vulnerability experienced by a large part of this population. This distinction is fundamental for interpreting the school experiences of migrant children, especially in contexts where poverty becomes a marker that shapes institutional expectations and daily interactions.

The narrative dimension complements this framework by enabling the exploration of how families interpret their own migration and educational trajectories. According to Riessman (2008), narratives constitute forms of organizing experience that reveal meanings, tensions, and strategies that are not easily observable through quantitative approaches. From this perspective, family narratives allow the understanding of how capital is redefined during migration, what role families assign to schooling, and how they conceive expectations about their children's educational future. In turn, the MNA Strategy, developed by the authors in previous research, provides an analytical tool for identifying the interrelationships between mobility, child well-being, and family trajectories, allowing us to position the educational experience within a broader social process that articulates vulnerability, agency, and the reconfiguration of capital.

From this conceptual positioning, it becomes possible to understand the schooling of migrant children as a process marked by symbolic and material disputes, where the position of families in the social sphere and the value assigned to their resources influence institutional expectations and the opportunities that open up or are restricted in the school environment. These perspectives allow us to approach the inequalities that manifest themselves in daily life in schools and the ways in which families attempt to negotiate their place within them.

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach and Design

The research was developed from a qualitative approach with descriptive quantitative support, consistent with the purpose of understanding the migratory and educational experiences of Venezuelan children from the perspectives and trajectories of their families. A case study design was adopted, allowing for an in-depth examination of the social and school dynamics that shape the processes of social reproduction in contexts of human mobility. This approach brought together narrative analysis with socio-educational information obtained from a survey, thus articulating the interpretive density of the narratives with the identification of general trends in the structural conditions of the families.

Study Context and Participants

Fieldwork was conducted in two public schools in Bogotá: Toberin School (in the Usaquen district) and Fernando Mazuera Villegas School (in the Bosa district). Both schools are characterized by a growing migrant population and by socioeconomic vulnerability that impacts school life. Participants were selected using purposive sampling. Venezuelan migrant families with children between the ages of six and 12, who had lived in the country for at least one year and were willing to share aspects of their migration and school experiences, were included. A total of eight focus groups were conducted with children, in-depth interviews were held with parents or guardians, and a structured survey was administered to 114 Venezuelan families.

The survey was answered by one legal guardian per household, thus defining the family as the sampling unit. However, some questions generated information per person, for example, regarding occupation, educational levels, or school support practices. Therefore, certain results are presented according to the number of adults in the surveyed households. This distinction allows for analytical coherence between the family characterization and the individual data, strengthening the validity of the interpretations derived from the study. This procedure allowed for combining the children's perspective and the adult's viewpoint on educational experiences, support networks, and the tensions that emerge in the migration process.

Techniques and Instruments for Data Collection

The study made use of three main techniques. First, focus groups were conducted with children to explore perceptions of belonging, school, and mobility. These dynamics incorporated expressive tools from the Mosaic Approach, by Clark and Moss (2011). This approach combines multiple participatory methods, such as mapping, role-playing, social portraiture, and self-portraiture, to access the children's perspective through verbal and nonverbal communication. Projection mapping allowed children to spatially represent significant places from their migration and school journeys, providing a graphic way to express experiences that not always emerge in oral narratives. These techniques encouraged children to construct their own narratives and participate in the research process, consistent with the principles of horizontal collaboration and acknowledgement of children's discourse.

Secondly, narrative interviews were conducted with parents, based on Riessman's (2008) approach to reconstructing meaning from personal narratives. These interviews allowed for an understanding of the reconfiguration of capital, expectations of social mobility, and family strategies associated with schooling. Third, a socio-educational characterization survey was administered to 114 families, with closed and semi-open questions related to economic, educational, and relational capital; school support practices; working conditions; and family arrangements during migration. The data obtained were integrated with the narratives, so as to strengthen the comparative and contextual analysis.

The MNA Strategy (migrant narratives)

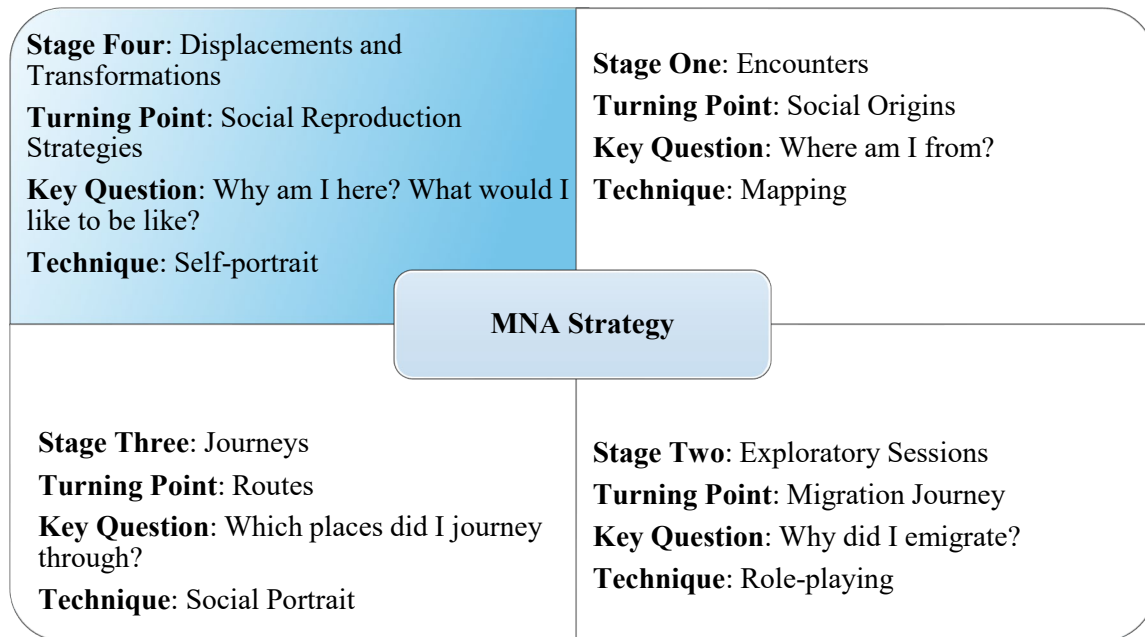
The interaction with children was guided by the MNA Strategy, developed by the authors in previous research as a model aimed at revealing the voices of migrant children, acknowledging their subjective experience as a legitimate source of knowledge. This model was characterized by:

- Expanding the range of responses from children, as their voices became a powerful tool for understanding and raising awareness of their perspectives.
- Showing alternative ways of communicating, representing, and interpreting the memories and emotions of children who have experienced vulnerable situations.
- Evidencing the voice of children in the first person in the research, with the aim of avoiding potential biases related to children's perspectives as interpreted by adults.
- Ensuring that the research narratives are not received exclusively through spoken words; therefore, the case study incorporates children's discourse from the perspective of graphic experience and nonverbal emotions, as a narrative that is sometimes unconscious for the child being studied.

The MNA Strategy is structured in four methodological stages (Figure 1). Each moment functioned as a space for conversation, play, and symbolic representation that allowed children to construct their own narratives, without adult mediation, in accordance with the horizontal principles of this strategy:

- Encounters: focused on social origins; mapping is the primary technique here.
- Exploratory sessions: oriented towards the migration journey, using role-playing.
- Journeys: linked to school and family routes, using the social portrait technique.
- Displacements and transformations: encompassing reflection on the spaces traversed by the migratory geography associated with expectations of mobility, where the social reproduction strategies that shape these trajectories are analyzed, by means of the self-portrait technique.

Figure 1. MNA Strategy



Source: Own elaboration.

Turning Points as an Analytical Structure

The narrative analysis was centered around three turning points that mark milestones in children's trajectories (Linares Alvarado & Forero Londoño, 2025a). These points constitute themselves into the analytical basis for understanding the relationship between inequality, schooling, and social mobility:

- Social origin: structural conditions of the country of origin.
- Migration journey: a liminal experience that transforms perceptions and actions.
- Social reproduction strategies: the ways in which families negotiate their place in host communities.

The fourth stage of the MNA Strategy was developed through focus groups with migrant children, aimed at exploring their school experiences, perceptions of integration, and future aspirations. This step was structured around expressive activities, particularly the self-portrait technique, which allowed participants to graphically represent their experiences, emotions, and expectations revolving around school and the host community. The dynamic was accompanied by open-ended questions and group dialogue exercises, designed to encourage spontaneous storytelling and the exchange of meaning among peers. This strategy fostered the production of information positioned from the children's perspective, enabling the analysis of how migrant children interpret their educational trajectories, mobilize their symbolic capital, and confront situations of recognition, exclusion, or stigmatization in the school setting.

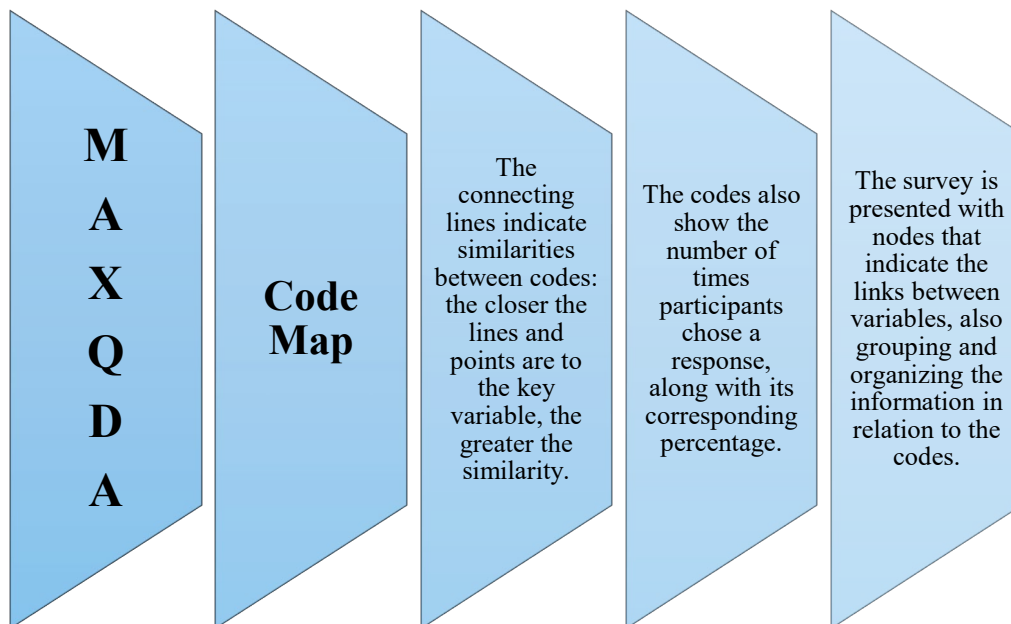
Within the field of research, the MNA Strategy offered a multi-scalar understanding of migration trajectories. The methodological design accounts for the before, during, and after of the migration process, as well as the interactions that individuals establish in each of these stages with their educational and social environment. By collecting data on cultural, social, and economic capital in the country of origin and the receiving country, a complex interpretation of these trajectories becomes possible, avoiding simplistic or essentialist interpretations of the educational success or failure of migrant children.

This approach provides added value by incorporating information sources that enrich the analysis of the phenomenon under study. Triangulation between children's testimonies and the voices of mothers, fathers, and caregivers strengthened the interpretive validity presented later. Overall, the methodological design allowed for a critical reading of the structural conditions that influence the school inclusion processes of migrant children.

Data Processing and Analysis

The information obtained through the survey was systematized using a descriptive analysis aimed at identifying patterns in family resources and the socio-educational conditions of migrant families. For the qualitative analysis, the MAXQDA software code map tool was employed (Figure 2). According to Caravantes and Botija (2022), this application allows for the graphical representation of relationships between categories and the visualization of trends in the data.

Figure 2. Characteristics of the Code Map Based on the Data Analysis Using the MAXQDA Software



Source: Own elaboration.

The coding was carried out in two stages. The first was open-ended and allowed for the identification of emerging units of meaning in the narratives. The second involved axial coding based on the proposal by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006), which facilitated the articulation between emerging categories and the study's theoretical framework. Once the codes were constructed, the text segments were grouped according to their thematic similarity, allowing for the delimitation of analytical axes associated with social reproduction, school-family relationships, and experiences of stigmatization and aporophobia.

Ethical Considerations

The study complied with the ethical principles established for studies with vulnerable populations, in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations General Assembly, 1989) and with the guidelines set forth by Alderson and Morrow (2020) regarding research with children. Written informed consent was obtained from participating adults and assent from children, clearly explaining the study's purpose, confidentiality, use of information, and the possibility of withdrawing participation at any time. Data protection was also guaranteed through pseudonyms and digital security protocols. The MNA Strategy included principles of care and horizontality that avoided unnecessary exposure of the children and fully respected their forms of expression and pace of participation.

RESULTS

Capitals of Origin and Capitals of Destination in Venezuelan Migration

Our results allowed the understanding of Venezuelan migration as a capital reinvestment strategy in which children occupy a central place in family projects. That is, families aspire to preserve or increase their economic, social, and cultural capital in the destination country, while children are active agents who participate in this endeavor through their schooling and community ties. Based on the survey, the information from the focus groups and the interviews, the transformations of the source and destination capitals are analyzed below.

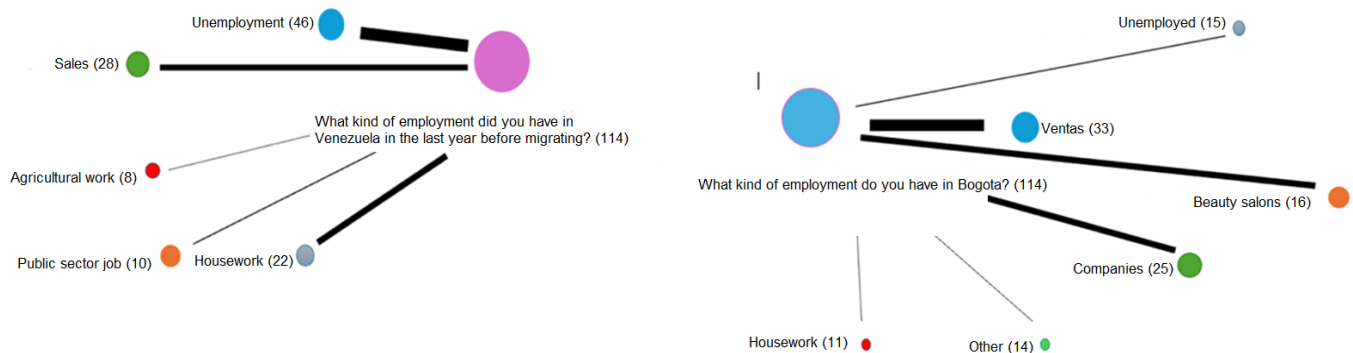
Economic Capital: Employment and Material Assets

Venezuelan migration, understood as a capital reinvestment strategy, places children at the center of this statement: on the one hand, families seeking to increase or preserve their capital do so by recognizing the destination as a potential setting for their children's development; on the other hand, children contribute to the appreciation of the resources with which families migrate. "The study of household economics has shown how social ties are essential to sustaining the positive relationship between migration and development, since family relationships are a source of specific resources" (Gabarrot, 2010, p. 59).

In this way, capital of origin and transit are key for projects in destination locations, aimed at investment and the appreciation of capital, to fulfill a function within the social hierarchy. As per Mines and Massey (1985), “social networks create individual links in diverse cultural and geographical settings and produce contacts between people from sending and receiving societies, which are crucial for understanding the phenomenon and its proliferation across different social strata” (p. 104). In order to understand migration, we aimed at identifying and analyzing the sources and destinations of capital. With this objective, some key findings related to this link are presented next.

The survey data evidence a profound reconfiguration of the labor market integration of adults before and after migration (Figure 3). In the year prior to leaving Venezuela, 40% of respondents (46 people) were unemployed, while a significant portion were engaged in housework (22) or low-skilled activities such as sales (28), agricultural work (8), and low-paying public sector jobs (10).

Figure 3. Comparison Of employment status before Migration and in Bogotá, Based on Data Processed in MAXQDA, 2024



Source: Own elaboration.

In Bogotá, an increase in labor market participation can be observed, although primarily in informal and precarious occupations: 33 people work in sales, 25 in companies, and 16 in beauty salons, while 15 remain unemployed. The transition from inactivity or domestic work to these occupations demonstrates a reinvestment of economic capital through subsistence jobs, subject to high turnover and disadvantageous wage conditions, which extends in time the economic vulnerability of migrant households.

The crisis that Venezuela faced in 2015 was exacerbated by the high cost of living and the scarcity of job creation. “Compelled by the need to access means of subsistence or opportunities for social mobility, vast sectors of the population are essentially expelled from their territories to resettle [...] abroad” (Márquez & Delgado, 2011, p. 20). According to this perspective, the social and economic reorientation of the workforce is one of the predominant relationships among the survey participants. A significant increase in the employability of Venezuelan migrants in Bogotá, compared to their last year in Venezuela, can be observed, this contributing to a reinvestment of

capital where the migrant's main resource is their labor and their inventive capacity to find employment.

Along these lines of analysis, mobility conditions have shaped the migrant's labor market in such a way that inequalities with respect to native-born workers have become evident. As such, "the lack of channels for regular migration—transportation, financial resources, and in [many] cases, identity documents—which forced them to migrate in precarious conditions or outside the law" (Vargas Ribas, 2018, p. 116) determines their place of employment, the activities they are willing to perform, and the wages they may receive.

It is in this context that a large number of families have settled on the outskirts of Bogotá, where they hold informal and itinerant jobs; some even resort to begging, taking their children with them. The above leads to continuous mobility for children; that is, even though they have emigrated from Venezuela, crossed borders, walked, ridden buses, canoes, and other forms of transport that have landed them in Bogotá, the employment or unemployment situations of their parents reinforce their ongoing migration.

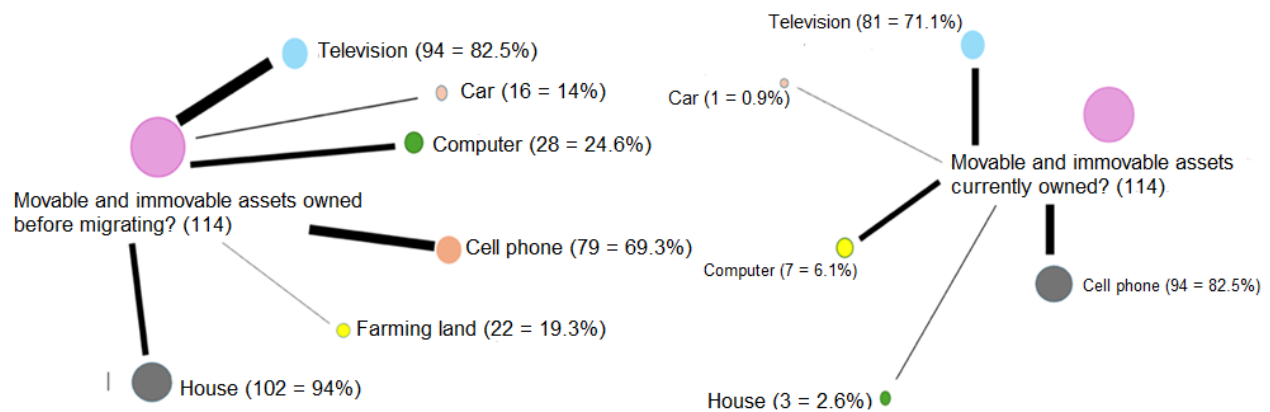
Moreover, the geographical closeness and cultural similarities between Colombia and Venezuela also affect the employment spaces of their inhabitants, which may coincide with the map of codes in that participants similarly reproduce the activities of their place of origin. This implies the recovery and social reproduction of practices that maintain a link with their personal history, even when this entails unequal participation in the market of the receiving communities. Bourdieu (1988) stated that "competitive struggle is the form of class struggle which the dominated classes allow to be imposed on them when they accept the stakes offered by the dominant classes, [...] by virtue of the initial handicaps" (p. 164). That is to say, the stake of reinvesting economic capital implies an acceptance of exclusion and marginalization inherent to the conditions of vulnerability in which Venezuelan migrants and their children have arrived in the country.

These approaches to the labor reproduction strategies in the receiving space of Venezuelan migrant families allowed us to identify two powerful lines of inquiry for formulating relationships that position the understanding of the social trajectories of migrant children. First, from a relational perspective, the fields associated with the structure of a society that links birth in a territory with the control of the capital derived from it perpetuate practices of exclusion and labor imbalance that in turn increase xenophobia and aporophobia. A second element links the lives of children to the employment status of their parents or guardians, in terms of their well-being and development; thus, if parents secure jobs that provide them with economic security, then their children will remain enrolled in the same educational institution, be better nourished, and have ensured stability in terms of their emotional and physical development, this restoring their lives after the events that marked their previous years due to forced displacement.

In other areas, the loss and reconfiguration of material assets become visible when comparing the assets owned before migrating with those existing in the destination country (Figure 4). In Venezuela, 94% of families reported owning their ownhouse, and a significant proportion also

owned farming land, a car, a computer, and other household goods. In Bogotá, home and farming land ownership has almost completely disappeared, while ownership of televisions and cell phones continues and is even strengthened.

*Figure 4. Economic Capital in Migration,
Based on Data Processed in MAXQDA, 2024*



Source: Own elaboration.

These results suggest that, after the exodus, economic capital shifts from asset accumulation to satisfying immediate needs, while certain technological goods become key resources for sustaining support networks, emotional bonds, and strategies for social integration. Television and cell phones, available in most households both in the country of origin and that of destination, serve as material support for the continuity of cultural practices and communication with family members who stayed in Venezuela.

From this we see how understanding relationships from the perspective of the valuation of economic capital reveals that these types of resources associated with the place of origin are significant, with real estate ownership being particularly important. Thus, in the space of social reproduction, where the demand for economic capital manifests itself, the search for employment and food takes precedence over the purchase and ownership of both goods and property. Nonetheless, the data highlight two elements that shape economic capital relationships among migrants: first, foreigners having cell phones enables them to keep bonds and to expand the social support networks among families, mitigating the complexity of their exodus. Along these lines, Melella (2021) considers that:

The use of mobile devices such as cell phones, personal computers, and smartphones has allowed for more fluid emotional connections and has mitigated the rupture caused by distance. It has also fostered the formation of a dual presence: the physical (or real) and the imagined (or virtual), that of being here and there, thus participating in both the community of origin and that of the destination (p. 7).

As part of this formulation, it should be noted that interactivity lessens feelings of uprootedness, the sense of family abandonment, the loss of identity, as well as the feeling of alienation and loneliness. This also influences children, who are able to maintain connections with their native country and establish perceptions of time and space in the globalized world, redefining concepts such as the feeling of closeness and presence.

A second element that remains strong in both the place of origin and the destination is television; the media have in this mass-produced product a mechanism that embodies the processes of globalization. Pertaining migration, social reproduction strategies are linked to maintaining ties with communities of origin, with the aim of preserving cultural identity traits and promoting the perpetuation of inherited traditions, rituals, languages, and beliefs in their descendants. In line with this, Amezaga et al. (2012) argue that:

Television is a medium that penetrates the family sphere, thus potentially influencing its cultural development. The home is a space where there are greater opportunities to preserve one's own culture and identity (among other reasons, because it is the space dominated by those who are typically more likely to preserve their identity, that is, the older generations, who have internalized the culture of their country of origin to a greater extent), with lesser penetration from the “outside” world (p. 1).

Likewise, the strategies employed by migrant children to reproduce their cultural capital of origin and transit are enriched by national programs that reinforce their perceptions of receiving communities; migrant children unconsciously learn the ways of life and being of new places, which facilitates their assimilation processes in school and their acculturation. This, as mentioned earlier, can lead to the forgetting or denial of their origins.

Social Capital: Family Networks and Community Ties

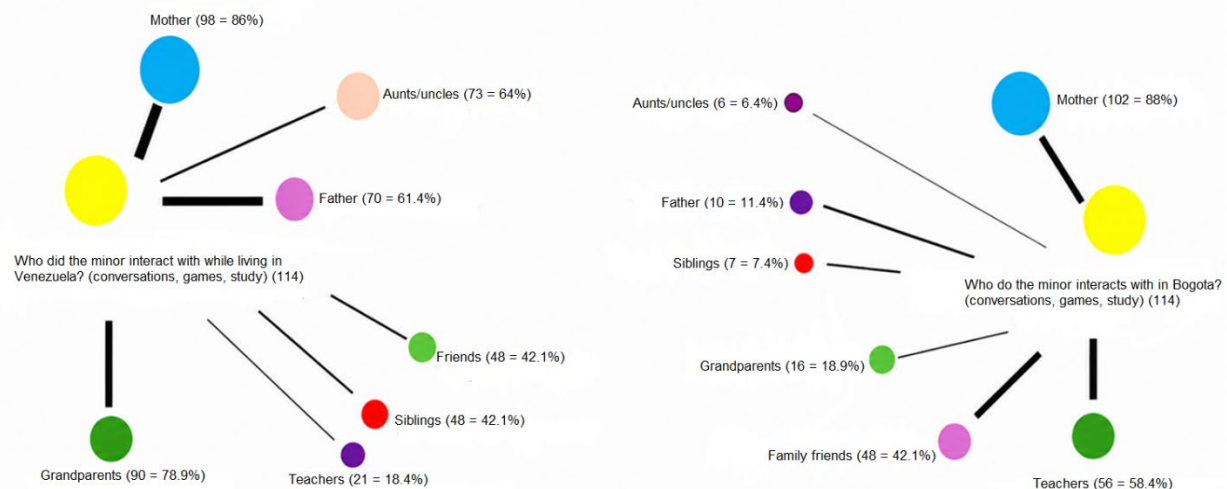
The survey and interviews show that the Venezuelan exodus frequently involves extended families, which allows the preservation of some of the social capital of migrants in the destination country. Thus, if the migration occurs with parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, or other relatives, social reproduction strategies maintain or attempt to preserve their position, and thus minors have greater chance of a better future, as the family unit strengthens their upbringing and supports their development. In this regard, Jiménez Zunino (2011) highlights that:

The circumstances that influence how migrants perceive themselves and their migration project are plenty: having formed a family in their country of origin—with part of the family remaining there—or in their destination country [...] and having a “family safety net” that allows them to make decisions [...]. Migration strategies, therefore, while oriented as

strategies to avoid downward social mobility³ in their country of origin, cannot guarantee a satisfactory position in their destination (p. 460).

Likewise, the form assumed by social relations within the family structure is characterized by groups that migrate and travel together, but which separate during the journey or upon arrival in the receiving communities. That is, children, parents, siblings, uncles, or grandparents may all be settled in Colombia, but they do not all inhabit the same social spaces. These two issues account for conditions that exist in Colombian society in relation to Venezuelan society, conditions related to the polarization surrounding their arrival and the ongoing tension in their integration into the country, which extends into the school environment. Accordingly, Figure 5 summarizes the transformations in children's social networks before and after migration.

Figure 5. Characterization of Social Capital of Origin and Destination, Based on Survey Results Processed in MAXQDA, 2024



Source: Own elaboration.

In Venezuela, significant relationships were concentrated within the extended family: mothers (86%), grandparents (78.9%), fathers (61.4%), aunts/uncles (64%), and siblings (42.1%). After arriving in Bogotá, the maternal figure remains the primary reference point (88%), but the rest of the family network fragments, and the presence of the father (11.4%), siblings (7.4%), grandparents (18.9%), and aunts/uncles (6.4%) decreases significantly.

In this new scenario, non-familial socializing agents emerge, such as teachers (58.4%) and family friends (42.1%), who acquire a central role in the daily lives of children. The interviews

³ Downward social mobility is the product of a deviation from the slope of a collective trajectory. There are three ways of observing this phenomenon: 1) intergenerational downward social mobility, when sons and daughters find themselves in a lower social position than their parents; 2) intragenerational downward social mobility, when there is a break in the professional trajectory of individuals and a loss of their social position; and 3) educational downward social mobility, when a decrease in the social return of academic degrees is observed in comparison with previous generations (Larrambeber, 2020, p. 30).

deepen into this trend by showing that many families, although sharing territory with other migrant relatives, do not live together or move through the same urban circuits, which limits their daily interaction and weakens traditional emotional support.

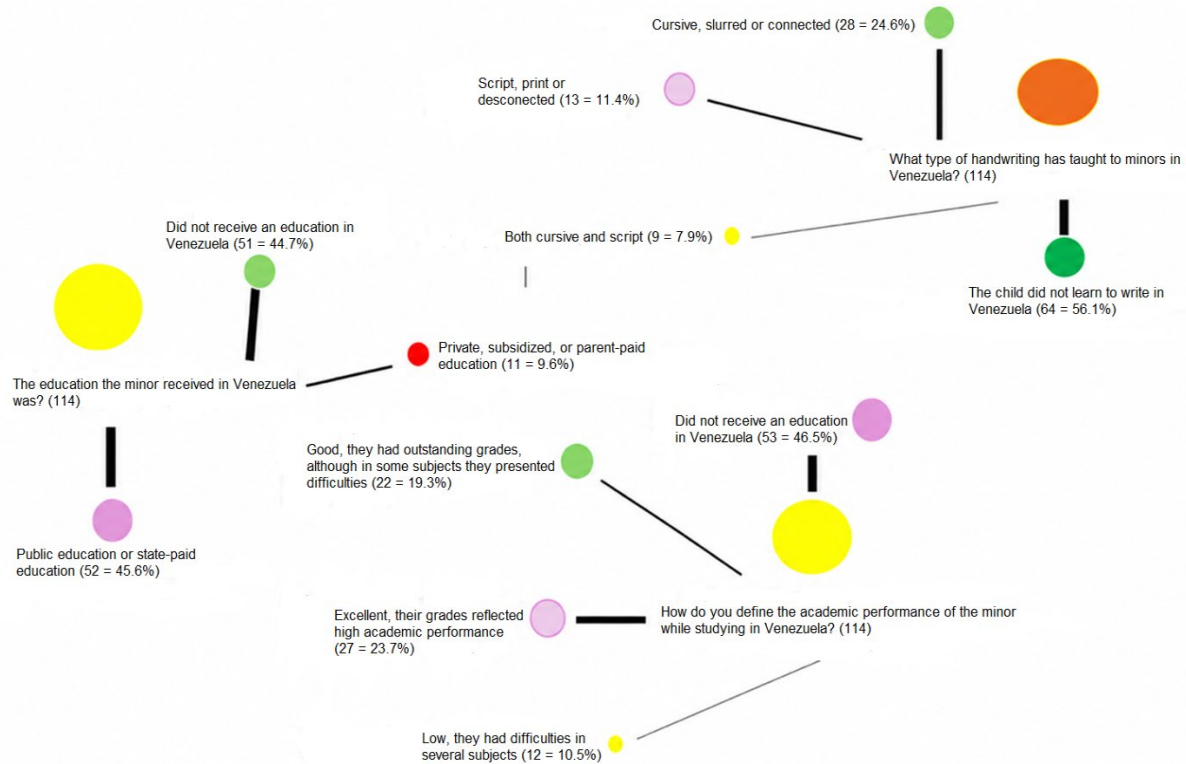
The data also highlight the feminization of caregiving: the mother remains a constant figure before, during, and after the migration process, while the father's presence becomes periodic or distant. In several accounts, women describe long, informal, or poorly paid workdays, which forces them to leave children alone or in the care of older siblings. This reconfigures childhood responsibilities and has direct consequences for the well-being and educational trajectories of children.

Cultural Capital: Schooling Trajectories and Educational Expectations

Figure 6 summarizes the educational trajectories and perceptions of school performance of migrant children between six and 12 years old. Before arriving in Colombia, they were attending primary school (42.9%), preschool (14.3%), and secondary school (10.2%). However, 32.6% did not attend school in Venezuela, revealing the limitations of the education system in crisis contexts. In Bogotá, a significant change is observed: the percentage of out-of-school children decreases (3.1%), while enrollment in primary (68.4%) and preschool (18.4%) increases. These data reflect the Colombian education system's efforts to incorporate the migrant population, but they also show that many children begin their schooling directly in the host country, without a background in the education system of their origin.

The interviews and focus groups allowed for the identification of two main family strategies for reproducing cultural capital. On the one hand, families with high academic capital but limited financial resources consider education a core value and envision their children achieving similar or higher levels of education than the parents possess. On the other hand, families with low or no inherited cultural capital rely on school as a means to build a new educational legacy, hoping that future degrees and certifications will open up job opportunities and social mobility. In both cases, schooling is configured as a key space for articulating the capital of origin with the possibilities of integration into the receiving society.

Figure 6. Characterization of Origin and Destination Cultural Capitals



Source: Own elaboration.

Aporophobia in the Classroom and the School Experiences of Migrant Children

The focus groups conducted under the MNA Strategy reveal that discrimination against migrant students is not solely based on national origin, but also on the association between Venezuelan origin and poverty. The self-portrait of participant RTAU4 (photographs 1 and 2) represents the experience of physical and verbal aggression in the classroom, where her classmates insult her by calling her a “gorilla” and emphasizing that “she has no money” and “is from Venezuela.” The account of this girl explicitly links her nationality and economic status to the mistreatment she received, illustrating forms of school aporophobia among peers.

The data also reveal that women are the ones who maintain a constant presence in the lives of children, before, during, and after their arrival in Bogotá. The feminization of the Venezuelan exodus highlights the role of women as caregivers and those solely responsible for the care of their children. This single-parent role explains how migrant women employ strategies to support their families. “In a scenario of paternal absence (both financial and emotional), the image of the mother is over-idealized as a woman who, although on her own, is strong, resilient, and selfless” (Pavez-Soto, 2013, p. 79). This dimension of femininity and motherhood becomes more complex in the realities of childhood, with children left alone or responsible for younger siblings while their

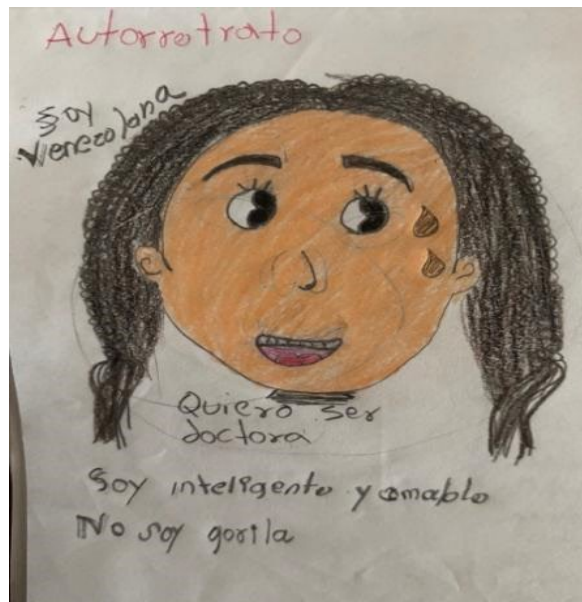
mother works; a situation echoed in schools, where reproductive strategies are geared towards resilience and survival.

Photograph 1. Participant RTAU4. Focus group



Source: Personal archive of the authors, Bogota, Colombia, 2025.

Photograph 2. Self-portrait of participant RTAU4. Focus group



Source: Personal archive of the authors, Bogota, Colombia, 2025.

*Aporophobia in Schools: The Poor
 Against the Poor*

The two educational institutions under study are located in low-income neighborhoods of Bogotá, with students primarily coming from households in socioeconomic strata 1, 2, and 3. In this context, Venezuelan children share classrooms with impoverished Colombian students, resulting in a scenario of social proximity, but one not without tensions. In both cases, the families live with limited financial capital and are employed in domestic work, in companies where they earn minimum wages due to their limited cultural capital, or in informal and itinerant activities such as street vending.

In this context, the students of immigrant origin integrate into a social space with native children with whom they share not only a stage of life and a common language but also a similar social background. In this reality, the Venezuelan population that arrived in Colombia in the last decade has integrated under adverse conditions, due to the stigma surrounding their coming. According to Perilla (2020):

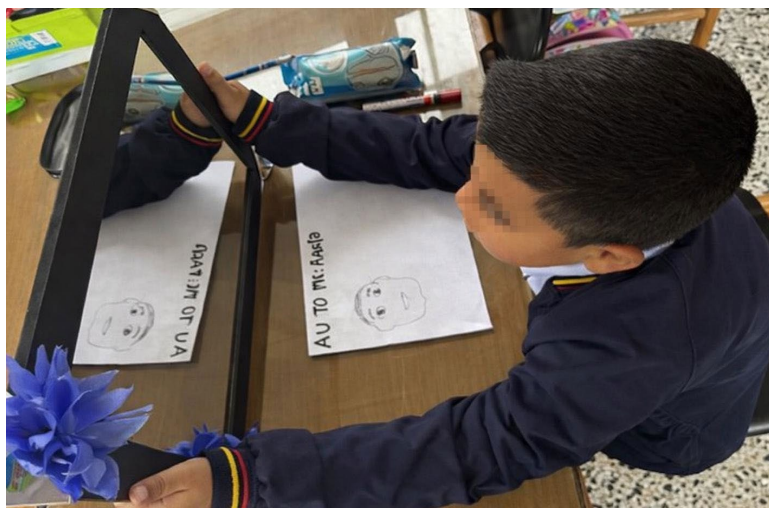
Oblivious to the fact that the country's poverty and inequality are the result of structural conditions that have been affecting its economy for years [...], many of the concerns expressed by Colombian society already existed, but Venezuelan migration has revealed deficiencies and precariousness stemming from weak government management. The idea that migrants cut down on employment opportunities and worsen working conditions is deeply entrenched, fueling Colombians' fear of living in even greater inequality (p. 125).

In light of these controversies, migrant children attend schools not only to mitigate the living conditions brought on by economic hardship, but also the trauma inflicted upon them by their forced displacement. In stage four of the MNA strategy, Displacements and transformations, the account presented by a twelve-year-old student (Mazuera. GF Self-Portrait, Participant: RTAU4) illustrates this relationship:

Once I was called to counseling, and I told them about the fight I had with some other girls in my class because I defended myself. They were pushing me around and calling me 'gorilla, Venezuelan gorilla,' so I pushed one girl and she pushed me back, and then they all grabbed me, pushed me, and kicked me. For me that was the most... It was very sad, all because I didn't have any money and I am from Venezuela.

Similar situations emerged in other focus groups. Photograph 3 documents the case of a child who, during a game, overheard his classmates substituting the term "thieves" with "venecos" to refer to the group of migrant children. The student interpreted this association as a sign that Venezuelans are seen as criminals and decided to stop playing. These scenes evidence how, within the school setting, native children reproduce social discourses that equate poverty, foreignness, and being a threat.

Photograph 3. Participant RTAU2. Focus group



Source: Personal archive of the authors, Bogota, Colombia, 2025.

These complexities, occurring in micro-social scenarios, reinforce ideas of exclusion toward foreigners promoted by the media and entrenched in family circles. According to Bourdieu and Passeron (2003, cited in Velasco Ortiz, 2013), “the school, rather than promoting social mobility, reproduces the inequalities inherent in each society by selecting the most privileged and maintaining their position” (p. 190). In this sense, “the presence of migrant children and adolescents puts a strain on the education system, and their increase [...] is often perceived as a threat” (Poblete, 2019, p. 356). Still, instead of reducing the school to a place that merely expresses inequalities, what is also reproduced is a feeling of fear involving the surplus population characterized by a scarcity of financial capital. Aporophobia in schools translates into discriminatory actions by poor native children against equally poor immigrant children; this is related by one of the mothers interviewed (Toberín, EP Participant: AUP1):

Our life has changed because I want to give my son a good home, provide him with the resources so he can grow up and be a good person. But I haven’t achieved that kind of stability yet; I work every day for it. But yes, here I feel that they reject me and my son for not having anything, because in Venezuela I had my house, I had my things, everything. Here they think that because I don’t have anything and I come from Venezuela, I’m going to steal from them and things like that, and they sometimes say the same thing to my son at school.

This relationship becomes a strategy of reproduction by the native towards the migrant, part of a social differentiation that transfers this feeling of rejection towards the poor to the behavior of the children who begin a journey through the recognition by the other. From Cortina’s point of view (2017):

It is the poor who are a nuisance, those lacking resources, the helpless, those who seem unable to contribute anything positive to the GDP of the country they arrive in [...]. The

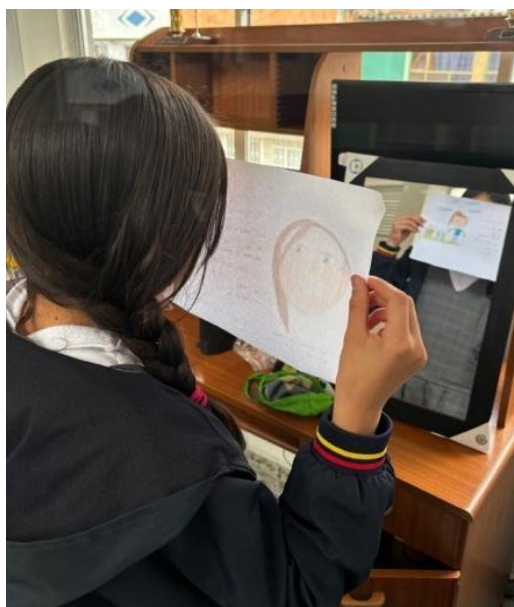
unscrupulous say that they will increase the costs of public health, take jobs away from the natives, are potential terrorists, bring very suspicious values, and will undoubtedly disrupt the well-being of our societies, in which there is undoubtedly poverty and inequality, but to an incomparably lesser extent than that suffered by those who flee wars and misery (p. 7)

The interviews with mothers reinforced this perception. Several of them recounted episodes in which they felt rejection towards themselves and their children for “having nothing” or for being associated with criminality. These experiences show that school can become a setting where subtle and explicit forms of exclusion manifest themselves on a daily basis, inscribing themselves on the bodies and memories of migrant children, as they condition their relationship with learning, belonging, and community participation.

The Illusio of Migrant Childhood: Feeling Venezuelan in Colombia

Despite inequalities and experiences of school discrimination against the poor, data produced through focus groups and interviews indicate that migrant children do not see themselves solely as victims, but also as individuals who develop their own projects and expectations in their destination country. It was specifically during the self-portrait stage (see Photographs 4, 5, and 6) that the MNA Strategy allowed us to observe how children integrate their Venezuelan identity, their future aspirations, and their school experiences in Bogotá into a single image.

Photograph 4. Participant RTAU1. Focus group



Source: Personal archive of the authors, Bogota, Colombia, 2025.

Furthermore, the accounts of parents indicate that migration is experienced as a family commitment to transforming their children's educational future. Some interviewees emphasize that

they do not foresee returning to Venezuela because they believe that education in Bogotá offers greater opportunities for their children. This *illusio* or belief that “the game is worth it” becomes evident in the discourses where parents express gratitude for the schooling their children have access to, perceiving it as compensation for the sacrifices they have made at work.

From the perspective of children, school appears as both a space of acknowledgement and a source of tension. One participant stated that when she puts on her school uniform, she feels like she belongs in Bosa and values that “they teach much better here,” while describing herself as someone who wants to “be very intelligent” (Photograph 4). Another girl expresses that she strives to meet her mother’s expectations, although she acknowledges difficulties adapting to the teaching methods, different from those in Venezuela (Photograph 5).

Photograph 5. Self-portrait of participant RTAU3. Toberín. Focus group



Source: Personal archive of the authors, Bogota, Colombia, 2025.

In other instances, the self-portrait articulates a life project and a desire to settle in the destination country: one participant indicates that her dream is not to return to Venezuela, but to stay in Bogotá to become a singer, although she laments that she is sometimes called “veneca.” This term, used colloquially in Colombia to refer to Venezuelan women, acquires derogatory connotations that function as mechanisms of symbolic exclusion. In line with Cortina’s (2017) argument, such expressions can be understood as manifestations of aporophobia, that is, forms of rejection directed toward those perceived as poor or lacking resources, which exacerbates the vulnerability of migrants in school settings (Photograph 6). These narratives evidence how migrant children develop complex understandings of their identity, combining pride in their Venezuelan heritage with the desire to feel rooted in their host city and the need to be recognized as a legitimate part of the school community.

Photograph 6. Self-portrait of participant RTAU2. Toberín. Focus group



Source: Personal archive of the authors, Bogota, Colombia, 2025.

These results show that the social reproduction strategies deployed by migrant families, in their economic, social, and cultural dimensions, are intertwined with experiences of aporophobia and with the *illusio* of children who, from school, propose to build life trajectories that may allow them to inhabit the “here and now” without renouncing their roots.

Discussion

The findings hereby provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics shaping the migratory experience of Venezuelan children in Bogotá, demonstrating how family capital, educational trajectories, and forms of recognition and exclusion in schools intertwine in processes of social reproduction that influence the integration of these families into the destination country. As argued by Bourdieu (1988), the different forms of capital do not operate in isolation, but rather as relational structures that shape the possibilities for action and mobility of individuals. As such, the ruptures observed in economic and social capital during the transit towards Colombia, as well as the reinvestment strategies deployed by families, reveal how migration becomes a scenario where capital is reshaped and redefined according to the conditions of the new social environment.

The analysis of social origins confirms that migrant families arrive with fragmented capital, resulting from prolonged economic crises, dispersed family networks, and interrupted schooling. However, following Sayad (1999), migration should not be understood solely as loss, but also as a historical and social process that opens new possibilities for symbolic and material reconstruction. This becomes evident in the educational expectations that families place on Colombian schools, which they see as a resource for stabilizing life trajectories and generating opportunities that had become unfeasible in Venezuela. By narrating their previous experiences through techniques such as mapping and self-portrait, children not only recover memories of

discontinuity, but also articulate meanings that demonstrate their capacity to reinterpret the past and project it toward new forms of belonging.

Regarding the migratory journey, children's artwork and family narratives show that displacement represents for them a liminal experience where affective, identity, and cognitive frameworks are reshaped. Constant mobility, housing insecurity, and difficulties in ensuring educational continuity generate structural conditions that influence how the school is perceived as a space charged with ambivalence: protection and fear, possibility and alienation. From a sociological perspective, these experiences confirm that the migrant's position, as described by Sayad (1999), implies a double and complete absence, both from the country of origin and that of destination. The MNA strategy allowed this borderland to emerge clearly through the narratives of children, who expressed in their work both the fragility of their journeys and the symbolic power they place in education as a life project.

The third axis, pertaining social reproduction strategies, shows that, despite economic hardship and the shrinkage of family networks, Venezuelan families employ practices aimed at maintaining school continuity, rebuilding social capital, and negotiating their place in the educational community. However, the results also reveal the presence of school aporophobia, expressed in situations of mistreatment, stigmatization, and the association between poverty, foreignness, and risk. As pointed out by sociological studies on inequality and exclusion, schools can inadvertently reproduce symbolic hierarchies that position certain individuals as "others," not because of their national origin, but because of their perceived economic capital. In this case, aporophobia operates as a mechanism that defines who is deemed legitimate within the school environment, impacting on the educational trajectories and sense of belonging of migrant children.

In spite of these tensions, our results show that school also becomes a space for recognition and identity reconstruction, where children develop life projects that combine pride in their Venezuelan heritage with a desire to root in Bogotá. This finding confirms that migrant children are positioned both in a vulnerable position and as social subjects capable of mobilizing affective, cultural, and symbolic resources to contest their place in the territory. The *illusio*, which expresses the belief that education in Colombia "is worth it," reveals the power of the school as a space to reframe painful migration experiences and project horizons of social mobility.

Furthermore, and from a methodological perspective, the MNA Strategy proved to be a relevant tool for accessing children's narratives in migration contexts, as it allowed for the acknowledgement of children's voices in the first person, avoiding adult mediation that often distorts their experience. The combination of narrative, graphic, and performative techniques enabled a comprehensive approach to how children construct meaning about their origins, their journey, and their integration into school, thus enriching the structural analysis provided by the socio-educational survey. This methodological integration strengthens the understanding of migration as a phenomenon simultaneously structural and subjective, wherein material inequalities and symbolic constructions intersect to shape the trajectories of families and their children.

This discussion evidences that the results fully meet the study's objective: to analyze the social reproduction strategies of Venezuelan migrant families and their connection to their children's experiences in school. The study shows how these strategies translate into tension with processes of aporophobia (fear of the poor) and with social mobility projects that children develop based on their own language and lived experiences.

CLOSING REMARKS

The findings of this study show that the social reproduction strategies of Venezuelan migrant families are significantly reshaped in the Colombian context, particularly in educational settings marked by structural inequalities. The analysis of capital in the countries of origin and destination shows that migration implies not only loss, but also the setting in motion of economic, social, and cultural resources aimed at ensuring the continuation of schooling for children. These dynamics confirm that schooling constitutes a central axis in social mobility family projects and in the reconstruction of a sense of belonging in the destination country.

The results also reveal that migrant children experience forms of aporophobia at school, where the association between poverty, foreignness, and being a threat triggers practices of symbolic exclusion among peers. However, these experiences coexist with processes of acknowledgement that allow children to develop narratives of belonging, value the education they receive, and envision possible futures in Bogotá. This tension between exclusion and acknowledgment suggests that, for migrant children, the school operates simultaneously as a space for the reproduction of inequalities and as a setting for identity reconstruction.

Likewise, it became evident that the social reproduction strategies employed by Venezuelan families are closely linked to their children's school experiences, shaping educational trajectories affected by precariousness, but also by expectations of mobility and projects of rootedness. This study provides empirical and conceptual elements to understand how migrant children construct meaning about their place in the host society, and how the school can play a decisive role in decreasing or magnifying the inequalities they face.

The study also acknowledges the need for further research on the links between aporophobia, educational policies, and school practices, as well as for comparative studies analyzing social reproduction in other migrant communities in Latin America. Such approaches will allow advancing our understanding of the tensions that shape children's migration experiences, and to formulate more inclusive and socially just educational strategies.

In closing, one of the most valuable contributions of this research is the revaluation of migrant capital. Migrant children are not merely passive recipients, but also bearers of knowledge, languages, customs, and ways of being in the world that enrich host communities. By making this capital visible, the research proposes a pedagogy of acknowledgement, wherein migration is not associated with marginalization or deficiency, but rather with diversity, power, and transformation.

Translation: Fernando Llanas.

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