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Virtual Communities of Anglo and Spanish Migrants in Chile. A Multiple Case Study

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This article characterizes and analyzes the development and construction of virtual communities of Anglo and Spanish migrants living in Chile. We selected some of the most popular and active sites among them and analyzed hem using virtual ethnography methods and discourse analysis in its textual and contextual dimension, as well engaging with the discourses of its creators. The socialization process that occurs in these communities is oriented towards sharing experiences and accomplishing objectives in common among the members, like meeting other migrants and locals, learning a language and obtaining useful information about the country of current or future residence, among others. The bloggers and web admins interviewed build transnational social spaces through their use of new digital media. We found a clear connection between the communities analyzed and the political, economic and social reality of the nation-states—of origin and destination—in which they are rooted.

Keywords: international migration; highly skilled migrants; digital migrants; virtual ethnography; virtual communities; social network sites

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Virtual communities of Anglo and Spanish migrants in Chile: a multiple case study

International migration to Chile has grown exponentially in the last twenty years, from about 108,000 in 1990 to more than 450 thousands in 2015, becoming a new destination for migrants from all over the world. While most of this migration, close to 85%, comes from neighboring countries and other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, there is a relevant community of migrants from the "Global North" (9%). As such, among the top ten countries of origin we can also find people born in the United States and people born in Spain. People born in these countries do not incorporate and/or participate in Chilean society in the same way regional migrants do. They have, on average, higher incomes, higher educational levels, and the reasons for migrating differ as well. They call themselves *expats* and not immigrants. In this paper we present preliminary results of a study that sought to characterize and analyze the construction and development of virtual community of Anglo and Spanish migrants living in Chile and to evaluate its possible effects on incorporating to Chilean society.

Virtual communities have become more and more a fertile space to research negotiating processes between migrants and the places or origin (Bernal 2006; Schrooten 2012). On the other hand, the 2008 global economics crisis produce a surged of emigration from countries in the Global North, such as Spain, Italy and Greece (Triandafyllidou and Gropas 2014). These migrants are usually young people that, unlike other recent migrants, rely heavily on virtual spaces to communicate with the home country, keep informed about return possibilities, and even work remotely. These networks connect not only migrants, places of origin, and of destination, but also migrants that have migrated again to a third country and no longer live in—in this case—Chile. Our research poses community-level questions directed to understand how this virtual community

originates and functions and what is its connection to the offline world, together with some micro-level questions about the migrants' reasons to migrate and their adaptation to Chile (Brand, 2006).

In the subsequent sections, we present the theoretical frame of the research where we connect recent approaches to international migration, life-style migration, as well as virtual communities. Following we introduce our use of virtual ethnographies and face-to-face interview as our main methods. We finalize discussing the participants' vision of their virtual community and ours.

Migratory flows and their connection with the cyber world

The 21st century is an era of fluidity and openness, where the crossing of borders is common, either with the intention of studying, developing a career, marrying or improving the quality of life (Castles 2010). Although mobility has been historically significant, today's world is moving in a more dynamic, complex and traceable manner than ever before (Sheller 2011). Given that "globalisation brought growth, acceleration and diversification of migratory flows" (Domingo, 2015: 98). After the global economic crisis of 2008, migration started to be seen as a solution, as it solved the complicated situation in which habitants from the most affected developed countries where left. Thus, many highly skilled youngsters came to developing countries where they could find jobs; receiving states that haven't received enough academic attention (Brand 2006). In this context, movements of the highly skilled were accepted and labeled as professional mobility, "while those of the lower-skilled were condemned as unwanted migration" (Castles 2010: 1567). Hence, migration can be seen as a risk or a solution depending on "the migrant's country of origin and professional skills" (Domingo 2015: 99).

This intensified mobility converged with the massification of wireless communication conducted through the internet, that allowed migrants to be in contact with their support networks

from their destination and home countries (Sheller 2011). The internet is nowadays considered a rich space for cultural exchange in which significant social relations are produced, although it was considered a very limited form of communication that lacked contextual social signs when it was first studied (Hine 2004). There was also a marked separation made by early internet theorists between the online and offline worlds, which are currently perceived as imbricate dimensions that evolve together and reproduce the events that occur in each other (Arriazu 2007; Schrooten 2012).

In today's real world, people use technology to communicate, socialize and understand, making it an increasingly virtual world where virtual activity is part of everyday life (Arriazu 2007; Kozinets 2010; Schrooten 2012, Shumar and Madison 2013). This is why we have decided to study a segment of the migrant cyber culture in Chile, which we think has a primary role in migrants' lives and is a significant element of the local cyber culture. This online culture comprises the cultural practices and lifestyles that emerge with the increase of networked informatic technology (Kozinets 2010). Additionally, cyberspace is a cultural product of its users because it is created and consumed by them, which means that anyone can be a producer and distributor of information on it (Bernal 2006; Hine 2004; Ruiz and Aguirre 2015). The net influences people's sense of community by posibilitating the emergence of virtual communities that are computer mediated social groups in which social organization tasks are performed at every hour and through large areas and time zones (Howard 2002; Rheingold 1993).

In virtual communities people share jokes; discuss; trade; exchange knowledge; support each other emotionally; play; fall in love and find friends, to list only some of the activities people perform in them (Howard 1993). Thus, they can be qualified as communities of practice that limit and enable their agents, giving them multiple possibilities but also restricting their participation inside them (Isabella 2007; O'Reilly 2012). They are composed of a hybridization of the public

with the private and of sites with virtual and physical base, so their limits aren´t static or easy to define (Bernal 2006). Together with this, they are physically decentralized because they're not formed around a central place or a corporeal organization (Howard 2002). What is more, they have the potential to be global, as internet can overcome time-space barriers and enable the interaction and communication of users located in different geographic spaces and time frames (Arriazu 2007; Ruiz and Aguirre 2015). This surmounting, however, is not complete, because when users arrange an on-site meeting they can encounter physical barriers like the distance among them (Isabella 2007). Therefore "the internet does not make offline borders and bodies redundant" (Alinejad 2011: 43).

Internet is the diasporic medium by essence, as it builds over, strengthens and extends social networks, allowing migrants in diverse locations to connect, share information and analysis and coordinate their activities (Bernal 2006). The use of new technologies is one of the main ways in which migrants follow their transnational lifestyles, so they are a valuable tool for them that allows them to be connected socially, politically and culturally to their countries of origin (Schrooten 2012). Online activity creates a sense of immediacy and connectivity for migrants that shorten the distance with their countries of origin (Helland 2007).

Classifying migrants

There are many categories to classify migrants, defined according to their socioeconomic and cultural contexts of origin as well as the motives that guide their migration, but we will focus on the associated categories of qualified migrant; of privilege; business expat; amenity migrant; migrant by marriage and expatriate.

Beginning with qualified migrants, we accept the definition of them as people that have achieved a level of education correspondent to third level studies (Lozano and Gandini 2009: 3). While privileged migrants come from a privileged state in relation to the one that receives them and are in a position of individual privilege in respect to the inhabitants of their host society and other migrants (Croucher, 2009). Another privileged migrant is the business expat, that has been sent abroad to represent a multinational firm, which makes him or her specially privileged, having all expenses covered by the firm (Green, 2009). Whilst marriage migration responds to the arrangement of transnational marriages (Lee, 2013).

In respect to the term expatriate, it can refer to a simple residence abroad for a considerable amount of time or the renunciation to the nationality of a country. In recent times, it has been associated to the ideal of a young adventurer that moves through the world: "(..) the figure of the expatriate has become transformed today into another, once again romanticized, image, the international globetrotter" (Green, 2009, p. 327).

Last but not least, amenity migrants migrate attracted by cultural or natural amenities (Gosnell y Abrams, 2009) and lifestyle migrants do so to improve their life quality (Benson and O'Reilly 2009), they are "people who take the decision to migrate based on their belief that there is a more fulfilling way of life available to them elsewhere" (Benson and O'Reilly, 2009).

Methodological considerations

We used a qualitative methodology for this multiple case study, because it gives space to reflexivity and flexibility in the investigative process and allows the co-production of knowledge between researchers and subjects (Mason 2002). The decision of doing a multiple case study was based on the fact that it "enables the researcher to explore differences within and between cases"

(Baxter and Jack 2008: 548). In our case we used virtual ethnography and semi structured interviews, complemented with participant observation as our research methods. The first method implies producing and consuming digital realities and was used with the purpose of studying the social relations that develop on cyberspace, together with the practices of meaning construction that virtual communities have: such as sharing entries and images (Rybas and Gajjala 2007; Ruiz and Aguirre 2015).

When conducting virtual ethnography, we positioned ourselves as lurkers in some occasions and as active participants of the web in others. A lurker is an anonymous reader of internet-based public spheres, namely a non-participant observer of web sites, which is a native practice in the virtual field, where active participants of "public virtual spaces act in the knowledge that they always can be observed anonymously" (Greschke 2010: 10). Our active participation on the web consisted in interacting with the study subjects through computer mediated communication (CMC) (Arriazu 2007; Hine 2004; Howard 2002; Isabella 2007; Rheingold 1993). This implied sending emails or private messages on web pages with the objective of mainly arranging interviews.

As we mentioned previously, we also used semi-structured interviews to understand what the participants thought of their sites, the role it plays in their lives and how they perceive themselves through its use (Isabella 2007). We chose this technique because "it is more probable that interviewed subjects express their points of view in an interview situation designed in a relatively open manner, than in a standardized interview" (Flick 2004: 89).

The information we gathered was analyzed with discourse analysis in its textual and contextual dimension. The first one characterizes the composition of the discourse and the second

details the circumstances in which it's been produced, as well as the characteristics of the individuals that produce it and what they intended with it (Ruiz 2009).

We started the fieldwork in January 2016 revising blogs, web sites, Facebook groups and pages created by our study subjects, who we then interviewed and joined in on-site meetings arranged through their sites. The sampling for all the methods used was purposive, according to the selection criteria, namely that they were Anglo or Spanish migrants living in Chile that had any kind of web site (blog, Facebook page or group, web site). We also used snowball sampling, obtaining the contact information of site admins from other admins and receiving site recommendations by interviewees or other collaborators, as well as following links in the sites we visited. We focused on intimate or smaller scale virtual communities, like blogs, websites and Facebook pages with hundreds of subscribers. On top of that, we analyzed some massive virtual communitie s with 1000 members or more.

Our sample includes creators of Facebook groups and pages as well as of blogs, websites and Meetup groups. Among them we have the creator of the Facebook group *Españoles en Santiago de Chile* [Spaniards in Santiago, Chile]: the biggest Facebook group of the Spanish community in Chile, with more than seven thousand members; the admin of the Facebook page *Recuperemos el CRE de Chile* [Let's take back the Chilean CRE]: a political campaign for the Council of Spanish Residents in Chile that has more than two hundred subscribers; the admins of *Café Polyglotte*: a Meetup language exchange group with more than a thousand "linguaphiles" (*Café Polyglotte* n.d) and the bloggers of *Bitácora de Bronte* [Bronte's log]: a blog about the experiences and reflections of a Spanish diplomat that lived in Santiago until 2016, *Bearshapedshpere*: about the stories of an American writer that lives in Chile since 2004 (which also has a Facebook page with more than four hundred subscribers), *Our Chilean Adventure*: about

the experiences and recommendations of an American family that homesteads in southern Chile since 2013, *Gringo in South America*: about the opinions and reflections of an American English teacher that lives in Chile since 2010, *Querida Recoleta* [My dearest Recoleta [Chilean district]]: of the stories and emotions of a New Zealander anthropologist that lives in Chile since 2012 and *Tarweed Spirit*: about the narrations of a retired American teacher that lives in Chile since 1972. We also interviewed the creators of the sites *Chile Insider*, where writers comment Chilean news (that has an associated Facebook page with 58 subscribers) and *Laura Millán*, the personal site of a Spanish journalist that lives in Chile.

In total, we interviewed 12 migrants that had 42 years in average and came mainly from the U.S (7) while others came from Spain (4), New Zealand (1), and Britain (1). They are all relatively privileged migrants that came to Chile searching for new opportunities and out of self-interest, not because of an urgent economic necessity or to help their relatives back home, as a matter of fact, some of the younger participants even receive money from their family.

Most of the virtual field is freely accessible, so safeguarding privacy and anonymity is difficult and can conflict with the ethnographic task (Ardévol and Gómez-Cruz, 2013). In the case of the interviews, however, we obtained consent of all the participants of this study and asked them if they wanted to use a pseudonym or their real name. In some cases, they already had a virtual pseudonym.

Massive and intimate virtual communities

On Facebook, there are many groups related to a diaspora that have a national basis (Crush et al 2012), being the most popular—among the Spanish community in Chile—*Españoles en Santiago de Chile* with more than seven thousand members of a wide age range, although most of

them are young adults. The content of this group is open to any member of this social network. On the description of *Españoles en Santiago de Chile* they set out the following warning: "Posts polémicos de política o religión pueden ser borrados y sus autores expulsados"[5] (*Españoles en Santiago de Chile* n.d). Every post must be approved by their admins, who reject all spam or fraud and give preference to posts of Spanish members. The admin said he chose this rather strict editorial line to avoid disputes:

> *"Antes había mucha disputa ahí de política, entonces, uno que si del Podemos, que si el PP, de Derecha, Izquierda... (..) Ahora está un poco que tienes que autorizar las publicaciones de mucha gente pero antes era libre, entonces, empezaban ahí las peleas y claro, tenía su parte graciosa pero también ahí se tiraban los trastos todos…"*[6] (October 11 2016, on-site interview)

So the participation of the group users is limited by the admins, who decide which post can be published (Isabella 2007; O'Reilly 2012). The intention of the group—as stated on its description—is to gather the biggest amount of Spaniards living in Santiago, to be in touch with each other. In practice, it works as a virtual marketplace where Spaniards sell their furniture (when they return home) or Spanish meals they prepare. Many also search for an apartment when arriving in Santiago or consult for the paperwork they need to do when arriving.

In the end, it is a consolidated mutual help platforms where its members and creators give advice to foreigners that live in Chile or are thinking of moving there (Rheingold 1993). The

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[5] Polemic posts that deal with politics or religion can be deleted and their authors expelled (from the group).
[6] We had many political disputes before, so one was of Podemos; another of PP [Partido Popular]; of a right wing tendency; left wing (..) Now you have to authorize the posts of many people, but before it was free so there where fights and yeah, it had its funny part but they would be at each other's throat

participants are mainly Spaniards (and some Chileans) who reply or publish requests and announcements referred to the work field, housing, paperwork, meeting points and many other aspects. The community cohesion of this group is not that high because in occasions its members disagree on a subject and argue between each other, in a very passionate manner. One of our Spanish interviewees (the admin of the Facebook page *Recuperemos el CRE*) had the perception that the users of this group where constantly attacking each other and fighting, so he participate in it very much, except when he needed to buy or sell things. But in spite of this, the group remains united, without a significant member drop out.

On Meetup, that is a web site for organizing social gatherings between people that have similar interests, language Exchange groups stand out. One of them is *Café Polyglotte* meant for anyone who wants to "share its language and culture with others" (*Café Polyglotte* n.d) on weekly meetings that take place on a pub. The members are mainly Chileans who want to learn or practice English or another foreign language, together with some foreigners visiting or living in Santiago that want to learn or practice Spanish. Its creator is a Spanish philologist named Matthew, who is from the US and works as an English teacher in Santiago. On his Meetup profile, he claims to be interested in everything related with language and linguistics. The co-organizer is Jessica who is a Spanish and Portuguese philologist, originally from Great Britain.

Matthew told us he would like the group to have a bigger sense of community, so that he could on the members' presence in every meeting and disposition to replace him when he can't attend.

(..) yo me gustaría tener como he dicho, como más un sentido de comunidad, dentro del grupo que todavía no tenemos…[7]

However *Meetup* is not that well known in Chile, as it is in the United States where it was created. Here, it is used by a more reduced segment of internet users (expats and entrepeneurs), while in the United States its use is more generalized[1], which shows that technologies are used in particular ways according to determined contexts (Hine 2004).

As we have stated, we also reviewed less massive virtual spaces, primarily blogs and some small Facebook groups, which are more restricted and cohesive than the massive ones. The most personal of these smaller scale communities are blogs, which are used as journals by bloggers, who share their experiences as travelers and residents in different places of the world in them. Some bloggers are more open than others, but in most blogs you can get to know a lot of their authors' lives, which generates an intimate relationship between bloggers and their readers (Doostdar 2004). We found more active blogs on the Anglo virtual community in Chile, where there are many female bloggers, while the Spanish blogosphere has few active bloggers, as some of them have returned to Spain and stopped updating their blogs.

Although there are some Spanish bloggers that left Chile and continued updating their blogs, for they created them before arriving to Chile, like Bronte of *Bitácora de Bronte*, the blog of a Spanish diplomat that lived in Chile from 2012 to 2016. In her blog, she writes about her life in the destinations she's had, which includes work anecdotes, literary interests, acquaintances and traumatic experiences (like earthquakes).

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[7] I would like to have as I have said, like more of a sense of community, inside the group that we still don't have…

She is clearly a privileged expat, since she has all expenses covered by the Spanish state and she even considers herself a "*expatriada de lujo* [luxury expat]" (June 30 2016, on-site interview) (Green 2009). The slogan of her blog –when she was in Chile– was "Vivo en Chile, por ahora. La migración es mi estado natural, por trabajo y por carácter. En algún momento, escribir este blog se hizo más fácil que mandar postales a la familia y a los amigos"[8] (n.d, *Bitácora de Bronte*).

Bronte constantly clarifies that the opinions expressed on her blog do not necessarily reflect those of Spain's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, which she works for: "nunca olvido que, finalmente, también tengo una función de representatividad, entonces, hay cosas que, al final, aunque las piense, no las voy a poner nunca, o sea, yo me autocensuro"[9] (June 30 2016, on-site interview). She is listed on expat blog lists so most of her online interaction is with expats, that ask her how the country she is living in is "y cosas así como domésticas"[10] (June 30 2016, on-site interview).

On *Españoles en Santiago de Chile* some members were promoting the Facebook page of a campaign of representatives for the Council of Spanish Residents in Chile (CSR or CRE in Spanish). The group is called *Recuperemos el CRE* [Let's take back the CRE] and claims to be the politically independent alternative to Spain's traditional parties, although they do have a left-wing tendency and an affinity with Podemos ['We Can']: a more recent Spanish left-wing party. Before the election, they convoked assemblies on their Facebook page to agree on proposals for their program and to disseminate the role of the council among the Spanish community in Chile. After the election, they use their Facebook page to document the council's sessions and summon

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[8] I live in Chile, for now. Migration is my natural state, because of my work and character. In some moment, writing this blog became easier than sending postcards to my family and friends
[9] I never forget that, in the end, I also have a role of representativeness, so there are things that in the end, even though I think about them, I'm never going to put them [on the blog], I mean I censor myself.
[10] and things like that, like domestic

assemblies to agree on proposals they can then present to the council. Also to give an account of their work in the council.

In both periods (before and after the campaign), they inform their followers of practical matters, like what they need to do to vote in Spain's internal elections and also share their opinions on different events and news, like the celebration of the 12 of October, which commemorates the arrival of Cristopher Columbus to America. On a note, they manifest their repudiation towards this celebration:

Los migrantes españoles no celebramos genocidios[11]

La Asamblea Recuperemos el CRE de Chile quiere expresar su profundo rechazo a la celebración del 12 de Octubre, como día de fiesta nacional de España. Consideramos que es necesario y de justicia hacer un reconocimiento a los pueblos colonizados por su resistencia y dignidad y, reconocemos no sentirnos orgullosos de esta época histórica[12]. (12 October 2016, *Recuperemos el CRE*).

As noted here, they are not neutral in their opinions and take a defined stand on the matters they comment on, even if it is Chilean politics, a subject they refer to in various posts, expressing their support for local political movements like the one that seeks to change the pension system and condemning political events like the military coup. It is the most politicized and polemic community analysed, considering they have critical and sometimes uncommon positions. The CSR is evidently a measure of the Spanish state to retain its sovereignty among its citiz ens abroad, as

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11 The Spanish migrants don't celebrate genocides
12 The Aseembly Recuperemos el CRE de Chile wants to express its deep rejection of the celebration of October 12 as Spain's national holiday. We consider it is necessary and fair to make a recognition of the colonized populations for their resistance and dignity and we recognize not feeling proud of this historical period

it provides a nexus between the representatives of the Spanish emigrant community and its corresponding consulate (Brand, 2006).

The former candidate for president of the candidature and actual member of it, said they represent the new Spanish migrants in Chile, those who came before the crisis and not the civil war. He also manifested not feeling identified with the term expatriate, which was even a political term in Spain, used by right-wing persons who didn't like the term emigrant because it was associated to poor migrants. On their Facebook page they never identify themselves as expatriates, they use the term migrant or emigrant instead.

As we mentioned above, the Anglo blogosphere in Chile is more active and extended than the Spanish one. A renowned member of the first blogosphere is the blogger of *Bearshapedsphere* (Eileen)*,* who is a qualified migrant with many professions (Lozano y Gandini, 2009) that writes in a sarcastic, cynical, capricious and disperse manner about her life in Chile, including stories about her many experiences, criticism of the Chilean economical system and culinary recommendations. She moved from the US to Chile in 2004 so she's been here for 12 years and has shared a lot of anecdotes and reflections in these years. On her blog, she presents herself as an ex Brooklynite and a current *Santiaguina* or Santiago, Chile dweller and manifests this adaptation to Santiago and Chile in her posts too: "but the water was smooth, or as we say in Chile "a teacup of milk" (una taza de leche)*"* (8 April 2016 *Bearshapedsphere*). Her entries are mostly written in English, with some Chilean slang added.

She is a self-defined digital migrant with a strong presence on the web, which includes a blog, a Facebook page and an Instagram and Twitter profile. The purpose of the blog isn't helping other migrants settle in Chile, although some readers request it, but she said she wasn't willing to

do service writing anymore (which she did when she first arrive to Chile and knew about all the paperwork needed). Her objective creating this blog was to publish her written work that would not get published in other media and having a "giant business card on the sky" (10 May 2016 on-site interview).

Through the blog, she has met almost all her foreign friends and some colleagues, although she told us she did not feel very connected to the daily readers that comment on her blog or Facebook page and was not willing to get a coffee with everyone that contacted her after reading her work. The objective of having the blog was not meeting people. When we asked Eileen about her Chilean readers, she described them as non-mainstream Chileans, as they have to be able to understand the stylized English she uses, which is very difficult to translate adequately.

A blogger that does do "service writing" –as Eileen calls it– is Lori, from *Our Chilean Adventure,* that documents the life of her family, that moved to southern Chile to fulfill their dream of "living in a remote location and off the grid" (24 April 2014 *Our Chilean Adventure*). So they migrated looking for natural amenities, but their migration has also an economical and political explanation, for the father of the family was bankrupt in the US and they did not feel comfortable with president Obama's administration (Brand 2006; Gosnell and Abrams 2009).

On her blog, Lori writes about her trips through southern Chile with her family; her children; the positive things about Chile and more practical matters, like how to obtain identity documents in Chile being an expat. It is the only blog in our sample that works as a guide for any English speaker that wants to move or travel to Chile, as it has various and recent entries about interesting locations to visit there or the steps to move to Chile from the US, in response to the many requests of the readers regarding this matters (specially the first one).

Her initial intention for creating the blog was "to keep family and friends informed about what we were doing [she and her family], it was easier to having to call or write to each one individually" (12 August 2016 on-site interview), just as Bronte states on her blog's slogan. Then they realized there were lots of compatriots interested in Chile and their lifestyle, so they made the blog public and began answering their readers' inquiries.

She promotes her husband's YouTube channel (*Chile Expat Family*) that is associated to the blog, where he shares videos about similar topics to the ones documented on *Our Chilean Adventure* like family trips, property they're helping to sell and how they homestead. They jointly administer both platforms and declare to have few visits in both and some trolling on the YouTube channel, which has been alerted by their subscribers.

The most personal blog on our sample is *Querida Recoleta* [My dearest Recoleta], the diary of a New Zealander mom named Helen that lives in Chile from 2012 and shares her emotional and mental states on it, as well as her life processes. She gives many details on her entries, which has gotten her into fights with her husband, who doesn't always feel comfortable with her level of sharing. She works as a baby sitter and has college degrees in Spanish, English and Social Anthropology. She came to Chile to reunite with her Chilean boyfriend, who she then married and had a son with, so her migration was originated by amorous motives: it was a marriage migration (Lee, 2013).Helen told us she created the blog because she noticed there were no Anglo migrant bloggers that blogged about a harsh reality like drug addictions and depressions or lived outside the affluent side of town, so she wanted to show a different and more interesting picture.

Almost all the bloggers began their blogs to keep their family and friends updated of their life in their receiving countries and then some opened it up to the general web audience, as they

realized people outside their inner circle were also interested in their experience. This started building a bigger community within each blog and their associated sites.

On the whole, the content of the communities is visible to any internet user, though some require a membership to participate. The most normed and restricted community is *Españoles in Santiago de Chile,* as posts are filtered and Facebook users have to request entrance to be admitted, although the content is visible to anyone. Another controlled community is *Our Chilean Adventure,* as Lori and her husband delete the "trolling" in its associated YouTube channel, even though their subscribers defended them. All these admins attempt to control the cyber culture they operate instead of letting it resolve its own governance system (Rheingold, 1993).

The most integrated and familiarized admins to Chile are Eileen from *Bearshapedsphere,* Helen from *Querida Recoleta* and Agustín from *Españoles en Santiago de Chile* who have been for many years in Chile or have close Chilean acquaintances (friends or couples) that helped them get accustomed to the country. This is reflected on the content they share, that includes informed tips and accounts of Chilean reality or on the detailed information of the country they gave us on the interviews.

While Lori and Jim from *Our Chilean Adventure* have the intention to integrate to the Chilean society and are in the process of achieving it, whereas the admins of *Bitácora de Bronte*, *The Chile Insider, Recuperemos el CRE de Chile* and *Querida Recoleta* don't pretend to stay in Chile on the long run, because of their profession, their migratory journey or an in satisfaction with the country.

Regardless of their level of integration to Chile, they all have some connection with their homelands, because they travel to visit their relatives or communicate with them, so they don't

recall their countries of origin as a distant place, even when they've lived for many years in Chile. They have a pretty realistic image of how their homelands are.

Of the total of virtual communities mentioned, the most active and consolidated ones are those located in social network sites (SNS) or that have any kind of presence in them, as there is more room for members to interact between each other or with the creators. These are *Bearshapedsphere*, *Chile Insider, Café Polyglotte* and *Españoles en Santiago de Chile*, which have many posts per day and a lot of discussion and sociability, as its creators and subscribers debate about diverse issues in them, like their perception of Chile, Chilean news and the local labor market.

Apart from this, *Café Polyglotte* and *Españoles en Santiago de Chile* organize face-to-face encounters on their SNS profiles so that members can get to know each other or keep in touch. For example in *Café Polyglotte* weekly meet ups are organized and in *Españoles en Santiago de Chile* many get-togethers come up spontaneously. This is to be expected as they are located in SNS that connect people and allow them to meet others (Crush et al. 2012; Kozinets 2010; Rybas and Gajjala 2007). There is also more community development on the communities that are interlinked, like *Our Chilean Adventure* and its associated You Tube Channel or *Bearshapedsphere* and its associated Facebook page and so on. This entwinement gives these communities more presence on the web, which broadens its reach.

The less active communities analyzed where some blogs, that remained inactive for months because their creators had moved to a different country or just didn't have time or enthusiasm to blog. What is more, we had to exclude some blogs because their creators had abandoned them and

wouldn't answer our interview requests. It is very common for blogs to become "*inactive in the short term*" (Alinejad 2010: 47).

Conclusions

On the basis that cyber culture is neither singular nor monolithic but an ecosystem of online subcultures, we can state that each virtual platform analyzed is part of the ecosystem of online migrant subcultures in Chile, grouped by country of origin and language, among other characteristics (Rheingold, 1993). All the bloggers and admins interviewed build transnational social spaces through their use of new digital media (Alinejad 2011; Glick 2007).

There is a clear connection between these communities and the political, economical and social reality of the nation-states of origin and destination in which they are rooted, considering the content shared in them is about Chile or the homelands of their authors and participants or even about other nations they've lived in during their migratory journey (Alinejad, 2011).

There is also an obvious language barrier between the Chilean and the Anglo virtual communities, that creates a gap between them that doesn't exist between the local and the Spanish ones, although there are Chilean members on both of them but more on the Spanish one (Alinejad, 2011).

As we said on our methodological considerations, all of our interviewees are qualified and even privileged migrants, specially the Spanish ones, who weren't in such a bad situation on their home countries or prior destinations, as some Anglo participants that where bankrupt or living in insecure areas before arriving to Chile.

In all, some communities are destined to a specific kind of migrants, like amenity migrants, politicized migrants, non-privileged migrants or pluralistic migrants, but the shared intention is to entertain, inform and connect its members.

Despite this nuances, all the sub communities analyzed fit to some extent with the diverse definitions of virtual communities coined by the authors that have studied them, as they are "social aggregations that emerge from the internet when enough people maintain a public discussion, during enough time with enough human emotion to establish networks of personal relations in cyberspace" (Rheingold, 1993). They are also part of the cyberculture of Spanish and Anglo migrants in Chile, that share "social interaction, ties and a common interactional format, location or 'space' (..), in this case, a computer-mediated or virtual 'cyberspace'" (Kozinets 2010: 10).

They are "*detailed and personally enriching social worlds*" (Kozinets 2010: 23) constructed by people with shared interests which they pretend to develop by connecting through interactive media located on the internet" (Ontalba 2002). These interests can be to practice languages, meet other migrants and locals, sell or buy things, get advices and information, find a job or share experiences, among many others.

However, the communities that have a presence in SNS are stronger, because they're more massive and function with the interaction of its members, while communities that are outside SNS are more personal spaces where the interaction between authors and readers isn't essential, although it boosts them. A Facebook group where no one reacts to the posts published or an internet portal where nobody responds the questions posed in the forum will probably disappear, but instead a blog where nobody comments may keep functioning as long as it has visitors.

Furthermore, regarding the denomination "expat", some participants had no problem with it and used it during the interview situation and on their websites, while others associated it with an upper class status and a discriminatory attitude, so preferred the terms migrant or immigrant instead, which seemed to be more formal or neutral for them. The term expat is associated to relocated employees of transnational firms or to young adventurers (Green 2009) and implies a differentiation –intentional or not– of other migrants that come to Chile, who are often discriminated for having a low level of qualification, coming from a poorer country in South America or one that has a historical rivalry with Chile, belonging to an ethnic minority or been seen as a threat to national security (Acosta 2013; Cárdenas 2010; Domingo, 2015; Tijoux and Retamales 2015; Yañez and Cárdenas 2010).

We could also observe the socialization process that occurs in the virtual communities analysed, which is oriented towards sharing experiences and fulfilling common goals, like meeting other expats and local people, learning a second language or obtaining useful information regarding the actual or future country of residence, among others (Isabella 2007).

It is evident, from the data recollected in this study and others that migrants' virtual communities have a central role in migratory processes, especially in the arrival and departure phase, when they are vital to get information on how to settle in or leave a country. Additionally, in virtual communities migrants generate and share information about their locations that can encourage others to migrate there (Hayes, 2012).

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[1] En el mundo hay 220,000 grupos de Meetup y 127,630 de ellos son organizados por usuarios de Estados Unidos (What Meetups tell us about America 2016)