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Challenges of State Ethnographies in Uruguayan Enclosed Facilities for Children and Adolescents*

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Abstract: In this paper, we address the challenges to ethnographically-oriented qualitative research in Uruguayan state facilities for children and adolescents. Based on two qualitative studies, we examine the relevance of conducting research in enclosed institutions that manage the daily lives of children and

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adolescents within a state framework. Several methodological challenges and questions arise including the different dimensions of institutional access, transit and permanence; the rapport and communication with research participants and key institutional actors; and the writing and dissemination of the results of this type of research. We discuss the possibilities and obstacles associated with qualitative methodologies when carrying out state ethnographies, and the importance of such studies as a way to evidence the living conditions of children and adolescents in these institutions. In the conclusion, we reflect on the ethical dimensions of research. State ethnographies allow us to think about the future of qualitative research, and especially of ethnography, in relation to an ethical task that is constructed in the encounter with those others that shape the research processes. An ethical-political approach that gives agency to the participants in our research, despite the fact that living conditions in these institutions often violate people's right to be heard. We wonder about the ethical and political relevance of the knowledge produced, considering that public information about some affected groups does not necessarily imply an improvement of their living conditions.

Keywords: Adolescence, childhood, ethics, qualitative research, state ethnographies.

Desafíos de las etnografías estatales en instituciones cerradas para niños, niñas y adolescentes

Resumen: en este artículo abordamos los desafíos de la investigación cualitativa con orientación etnográfica en espacios administrados por el Estado uruguayo para la atención de niños, niñas y adolescentes. Con base en dos estudios cualitativos, nos preguntamos por la pertinencia de la investigación en instituciones estatales cerradas que gestionan la vida cotidiana de niños, niñas y adolescentes. De esta manera, surgen varias cuestiones y retos metodológicos: las diversas dimensiones del acceso institucional, el tránsito y la permanencia; la relación y comunicación con participantes de la investigación y actores institucionales clave, y la escritura y difusión de los resultados de este tipo de investigaciones. Discutimos las posibilidades y los obstáculos asociados con las metodologías cualitativas aplicadas en etnografías estatales, así como la importancia de estos estudios para evidenciar las condiciones de vida de niños, niñas y adolescentes que viven en estas instituciones. En la conclusión, reflexionamos sobre las dimensiones éticas de la investigación. Las etnografías estatales permiten pensar el futuro de la investigación cualitativa, y en especial de la etnografía, en relación con un quehacer ético que se construye en el encuentro con esas otras personas que configuran los procesos de investigación. Un enfoque ético-político que concede agencia a las personas participantes en nuestra investigación, a pesar de que

las condiciones de vida en estas instituciones muchas veces les vulnera el derecho a ser escuchadas. Nos preguntamos sobre la relevancia ética y política del conocimiento producido, considerando que la información pública sobre algunos grupos afectados no necesariamente se traduce en una mejora de sus condiciones de vida.

Palabras clave: adolescencia, ética, etnografías estatales, infancia, investigación cualitativa.

Desafios das etnografias do Estado em instituições fechadas para crianças e adolescentes

Resumo: neste artigo, abordamos os desafios da pesquisa qualitativa orientada etnograficamente em espaços administrados pelo Estado uruguaio para o atendimento de crianças e adolescentes. Com base em dois estudos qualitativos, questionamo-nos sobre a pertinência da pesquisa em instituições estatais fechadas que gerem a vida diária de crianças e adolescentes. Desse contexto, surgem várias questões e desafios metodológicos: as várias dimensões do acesso institucional; transições e permanência; a relação e comunicação com os participantes da investigação e com atores institucionais-chave, bem como a escrita e divulgação dos resultados deste tipo de pesquisa. Discutimos as possibilidades e obstáculos associados com as metodologias qualitativas aplicadas em etnografias do Estado, bem como a importância desses estudos para mostrar as condições de vida das crianças e adolescentes que vivem nessas instituições. Na conclusão, refletimos sobre as dimensões éticas da investigação. As etnografias do Estado permitem pensar o futuro da pesquisa qualitativa e especialmente da etnografia, com relação a um fazer ético que se constrói no encontro com aqueles outros que configuram os processos de pesquisa. Uma abordagem ético-política que dá agência às pessoas que participam de nossa pesquisa, apesar de as condições de vida nessas instituições muitas vezes violarem seu direito de serem ouvidas. Questionamos sobre a relevância ética e política do conhecimento produzido, considerando que a informação pública sobre alguns grupos afetados não necessariamente se traduz em melhoria de suas condições de vida.

Palavras-chave: adolescência, infância, pesquisa qualitativa, ética, etnografias do Estado.

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In this article, we focus on the challenges of ethnographically-oriented qualitative research (Fassin 2017, 2013) in state institutions for children and adolescents in institutional care or subject to non-custodial judicial measures after having committed an offence. Based on two studies carried out in state institutions which deal with population groups in Uruguay, we discuss how and why research should be performed in enclosed institutions or total institutions (Goffman 1961) that involve managing the daily life of children and adolescents in a state framework.

Qualitative approaches to social research are under continuous debate and transformation (Denzin and Lincoln 2018). Therefore, by analyzing some key elements of ethnographically-oriented qualitative research (Fassin 2017, 2013; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995) and emphasizing state ethnographies (Fassin 2015; Thelen, Vetters, and Von Benda-Beckmann 2018), we propose to adopt an ethical-political perspective (Roth 2004; Roth and Von Unger 2018; Sisto 2008) to examine the challenges associated with the development of this type of approach in enclosed settings that share characteristics with total institutions (Freshwater *et al.* 2012; Goffman 1961; Jewkes 2011; Watson and Van Der Meulen 2018).

As Didier Fassin (2015) points out, state ethnography "adopts a symmetrical view. It is inductive, micropolitical, and from below. It is based on the participant observation of various institutions through the routine work of their agents and the everyday interactions with their publics" (ix). Within the framework of anthropological studies of the state (Sharma and Gupta 2006; Trouillot 2001), our goal is to articulate the state ethnographies approaches (Fassin 2015; Thelen, Vetters, and Von Benda-Beckmann 2018) with the perspective of childhood studies (James and James 2001; Qvortrup, Corsaro, and Honig 2009). In order to achieve their objectives, state institutions deploy various forms of management, regulation, and rationalities that are produced and reproduced in daily interactions among the agents involved.

State ethnographies lead us to think about the future of qualitative research, and especially of ethnography, in relation to an ethical task that is constructed in the encounter with those others that shape the research processes. An ethical-political approach that gives agency to the participants in our research, despite the fact that living conditions in these institutions often violate people's rights to be heard.

The ethnographical task is indeed fundamentally relational, favoring analysis through interactions in the establishment of intersubjective links and communication between researchers and participants. Sisto (2008) argues that the current transformations taking place within the framework of qualitative research methodologies have set the field of dialogical production between researchers and participants, as a form of relational knowledge production.

We also consider that there are few opportunities for some population segments to express or give an account of their living conditions. This is why we believe that the production of knowledge about these institutions is an opportunity for bringing these questions to the forefront. It should be noted that issues related to children

and, even more so, to adolescents in terms of public safety are abundant in the media and public discussions, while there are scant references to their living conditions or to how these state institutions are run.

We reflect on ethnographic work that is committed to expanding what is visible in the functioning of the state and gives agency to the people who participate in the research as well as to generate relevant knowledge for people who work daily with institutionalized children and adolescents. In the studies we present, the challenges to access are diverse and the barriers to research access often become possibilities for the agency of adolescent girls and local authorities. These are aspects that stress and transform the way we understand those others with whom we work in terms of power relations.

Our task is to analyze power relations, ideologies, and singular characteristics that state institutions acquire in certain social and historical contexts. State practices are not neutral, automatic or mechanized actions; they are actions conducted by specific people, loaded with meanings, affections, and morals that are transformed through time. From the perspective of childhood studies, children and adolescents are recognized as active social actors, with voice and agency (Chávez and Vergara 2018; Ciordia 2021; James and James 2001), as well as social agents with the potential to change their context (James and James 2004).

The institutions in charge of managing the lives of children and adolescents have historically combined care and education with punishment in undifferentiated ways that have been reflected in the legal regulations themselves through figures such as the indeterminate sentence, abolished with the Código de la Niñez y Adolescencia (Childhood and Adolescence Code. Act n.° 17.823 2004).[1] This socio-historical matrix runs through us as researchers and questions us ethically when we think about the close links between a Penal State and a Social State (Fassin 2015). How can some rights, such as education, be restituted within the framework of juvenile penal systems? Many of the adolescents with whom we work complete primary education and acquire reading and writing skills while they are in the Juvenile Penal System. Advocating for a minimum criminal law is only one dimension of an ethical discussion regarding the forms of punishment and education established for young people.

Some of the main questions that guide our analysis discuss the implications and motivations for accessing enclosed spaces to carry out research involving the free and informed consent of the participants, how we relate to and include ourselves as participants in our research studies, and how we write about them. It should be considered that, in many contexts, co-writing and co-analysis are difficult to implement especially according to ethical standards (Abbott *et al*. 2018; Freshwater *et al*. 2012; Roth and Von Unger 2018).

From feminist epistemological perspectives (Haraway 1991; Harding 1996), ethical reflection about knowledge is linked to the recognition of the semiotic-material

1 Código de la Niñez y la Adolescencia N.° 17.823, approved on September 7th, 2004. Uruguay, IMPO, Centro de Información Oficial. https://www.impo.com.uy/bases/codigo-ninez-adolescencia/17823-2004

positions in which it is produced. The notion of situated knowledge developed by Donna Haraway (1991) highlights the partial, localizable, and critical as an alternative to the relativism and totalization characteristic of positive science. The commitment to the reflexivity of interpretation practices is associated with the possibility of incarnation of a particular place. Thus, vision is understood as a question of the *power to see*, as visualizing practices must be analyzed in terms of power relations.

We therefore argue that reflexivity, a polysemic notion, places us in the uncomfortable position of having to reassess our practices as researchers (López-Gallego 2014; Pillow 2015). It is a fundamental element when it comes to thinking about the researcher-participant relationship. Reflexivity is understood as "the exercise of a critical conscience with respect to the researcher's own actions as the subject conducting the research. Reflexivity turns researchers and their activity into the object of their own analysis" (Sisto 2008, 132). Pillow (2003) criticizes the use of reflexivity in terms of a narcissistic confession of a researcher's subjectivity: who we are and how this data affects us. She puts forward a critical alternative to this use of reflexivity, which can involve difficulty and discomfort in a territory that is unfamiliar to the researcher. Thus, it is a question of being able to show our diversity and the impact that enclosed institutions have on us.

In our view, ethnographic approaches contribute to the search for meaning in human actions, giving priority to researchers' active participation thanks to their continuous presence in the field over a lengthy period of time. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), the ethnographic approach constitutes "the most basic form of social research" (2) in the sense that it mirrors the way in which people give meaning to life. Researchers are the fundamental instrument in this process, in which through their active presence, rather than just as distant observers, they try to understand and produce a narrative about the environment under study. Thus, the analysis of reflexivity (Pillow 2015, 2003; Rowe 2014) is the driving force of the process for situated knowledge production (Haraway 1991), where the ultimate goal is understanding the problem from the perspective of its main characters and comprehending meaning in-depth.

Fassin (2013), meanwhile, provides lines of analysis to reflect on the different purposes of ethnographically-oriented qualitative research, and points out that ethnography is a kind of commitment that entails ethical tensions in two areas: with regard to the fieldwork and participants, and to society expressed as public space. Along these lines, we highlight a reflection on access, relationships, writing and dissemination, in connection with the ethical-political aspects, which are the main focus when dealing with minors whose rights are being violated. Thus, the "censorship of research leaves the monopoly on legitimate discourse to the political representatives of the state" (Fassin 2013, 21).

As illustrated by our discussion above, the institutional contexts in which we conduct the research studies presented here, characterized by state management of the lives of children and adolescents, are privileged scenarios for reflecting on the ethical challenges faced by qualitative research methodologies. There is a growing

interest in that respect, as shown by many of the qualitative studies carried out in closed systems (Freshwater *et al*. 2012), prisons (Abbott and Scott 2018; Abbott *et al.* 2018; Reiter 2014), and surveillance and security institutions (Fassin 2017; Lippert, Walby, and Wilkinson 2016), with vulnerable populations (Surmiak 2018; Umamaheswar 2018), and even more so if they relate to childhood and adolescence (Bengtsson 2014; López-Gallego, Galeotti-Galmés, and Montes-Maldonado 2018; Montes-Maldonado, López-Gallego, and Galeotti-Galmés 2018).

Methodological and Ethical Aspects that Shape Research in State Institutions

In this section, we briefly describe two studies developed by the authors, which inform the empirical material used in this paper. We outline the research frameworks, goals, methods and techniques that are employed, and we place special emphasis on reflecting on the implications of institutional access, the relationships with research participants, and the space-time dimensions of the various institutional scenarios.

The studies we are presenting are conducted in two institutions tasked with caring for children and adolescents. Both institutions are state-run and enforce, on the one hand, judicial protection measures in cases of rights violations and, on the other hand, non-custodial judicial measures for adolescents who are between 13 and 18 years of age and have committed an offence. Both are regulated by the Código de la Niñez y Adolescencia (Childhood and Adolescence Code. Act no. 17.823 2004).

The first is the Instituto del Niño y Adolescente del Uruguay (INAU), which provides care in residential centers for children and adolescents between the ages of 0 and 18 who, for any given reason, lack family or parental care. These centers may be state-run or operated by Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) on the basis of agreements with the government agency. According to the latest official figures, as of May 2019 (INAU 2019), 5.004 children and adolescents were under the care of the different types of INAU centers throughout the country.

In addition, the Instituto Nacional de Inclusión Social Adolescente (INISA) is responsible for the execution of judicial measures in the case of offences committed by adolescents between the ages of 13 and 18. Data obtained through fieldwork in April 2019, shows that the system serves 346 adolescents, including 292 under custodial measures and 54 under non-custodial measures. It currently has a single program for the enforcement of non-custodial measures, in some cases coordinated with CSOs through different agreements.

Both studies have the backing of the Ethics Committee at Universidad de la República which regulates studies that deal with human beings as well as the institutional endorsement granted by the responsible institution. The use of information follows the ethical requirements of the discipline, pseudonyms are used for the participants in order to respect confidentiality and the use of private information that can identify them is avoided. People involved in the interviews are asked for

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informed consent or informed assent that involves: research objectives, voluntariness, confidentiality, and respect (American Psychological Association 2017).

Protection Strategies for Children and Adolescents from the Perspective of Care and Gender

Research Problem

The aim of the first study shown is to analyze social care practices followed by institutional agents in the Uruguayan protection system for children and adolescents and the social-criminal system. It is also intended to shed light on the running of social protection strategies through the implementation of protective measures in response to rights violations against children and adolescents and to custodial measures imposed on adolescents. Finally, we intend to shed light on the notions of care and gender underpinning social protection strategies.

This is a qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln 2018), a unique and in-depth case study (Flyvbjerg and Casado 2004; Yin 1993), with an ethnographic approach (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995) that emphasizes state ethnographies (Fassin 2015; Thelen, Vetters, and Von Benda-Beckmann 2018). The fieldwork is carried out in two institutional settings: INAU´s care and residential centers for children and adolescents who are separated from their households, and INISA´s correction centers for adolescents who have committed offences. The fieldwork was conducted between September and December 2017. Thirty-four in-depth interviews were held with system agents (educators, social educators, psychologists, social workers, lawyers, psychiatrists, coordinators, directors), selected by intentional sampling based on inclusion criteria (Ritchie and Lewis 2003) according to: sex, age, role, education, seniority in the task and type of center where the job is carried out. Institution staff who did not have an ongoing, daily relationship with children and adolescents were excluded from the sample.

We also use a document analysis technique (Altheide *et al*. 2008) through a systematization of case files. Those are the record documents where all the information concerning each child and adolescent is documented and where the interventions and actions carried out are described. A field diary is kept throughout the process, to note observations, reflections, activities, impressions, and affections recorded during field activities.

Access, Relationships, and Locations

Given the various difficulties involved in carrying out research in these areas, prior to the formal application for a research permit, several people who knew about the subject were interviewed. They provided support to plan the best access strategy, and in turn acted as gatekeepers (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995) and access facilitators.

Formal access requests needed application letters, an explanation of the project and the scope of the research, endorsement by the Ethics Committee (School of Psychology, Universidad de la República del Uruguay), interviews and an evaluation by the institution. This process took approximately six months. Once formal authorization had been obtained, obstacles continued to arise throughout the entire research process, in different areas. These included additional authorization applications depending on the center that the researchers approached, interviews with the authorities at the centers, bans on computer use, making photocopies, accessing documents, entering the premises with personal belongings, and searches prior to entering the centers. This was compounded by strict control and surveillance of all activities carried out and of their output. It is evident that access negotiation does not end after entering the institution; it is ongoing, and dialogue and agreements are necessary throughout the process, in interaction with institutional actors. In this sense, we consider that it is fundamental to define what type of information is shared with participants, to assess different points of view and the power relations (Chereni 2014), to build trust based on the security created by confidentiality and privacy, and to have sufficient flexibility in listening so that the meetings are fruitful for both the researcher and the interviewees.

Establishing a close, trusting relationship with the people who work at the centers is a permanent challenge, compounded with the distance/estrangement that we, as researchers, experience in relation to much of what happens there. Fassin (2013) argues that ethnographies combine the art of presence and distance,

> With presence, comes a reciprocal acquaintance between the observer and the observed: a form of mutual trust progressively develops, which makes possible an access to the everyday and the commonsense of those under study. Distance — stepping aside — results from simultaneous astonishment (the permanent surprise in front of a given state of affairs) and estrangement (the sentiment of not belonging to the group) as well as the search for a distinct perspective (bringing the larger picture into being). (xi-xii)

The participants in our case, are staff at the aforementioned institutions and members of technical teams. Accordingly, unlike people in confinement or children and adolescents, they are not considered a vulnerable population (Surmiak 2018). In any case, we are going to consider them participants who coexist with some vulnerabilities, given the characteristics of the institutions where they work, the asymmetrical power relations established by a pyramidal hierarchy, the strict oversight and control to which they are subject, and the climate of stress and pressure they face as part of their responsibilities and demands of their job.

It is worth noting the remarkable openness and willingness of the staff at the centers to participate in the interviews. All the interviews were carried out in the centers to which the interviewees belonged, and conversations took place in closed rooms that provided a sense of warmth and privacy. Only two people refused to allow the

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interview to be recorded, expressing fear that the information could be misused by the researcher, that their voices would be broadcast in the media, or that they would face some kind of retaliation from the institution. Some interviews were cancelled, and dates or times were rescheduled, there were interruptions, changes of venue or other situations linked to the day-to-day functioning of the centers and their needs, which are marked by unforeseen events and a variety of conflicts.

The space-time relationship in a research setting is an interesting aspect of analysis (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). We believe that several temporalities coexist in our context, all displaying different elements. In the institutions, temporality follows the pace of judicial demands and legislative requirements. Thus, there is also a staff temporality, which varies depending on the personnel's respective roles, either as managers or directors, or educators who share the daily lives of the population they serve. And, of course, there is the temporality of the children and adolescents, their life stories, and their relationships with relatives and other role models.

Accessibility in the research process depends largely on the relationship that the researcher builds with participants. At the same time, research in enclosed settings presents certain difficulties and heavy emotional demands (García-Santesmases 2019; Jewkes 2011) that must be dealt with. For example, getting access to places, participants, and materials is not always possible, due to varying degrees of availability or restrictions, meaning it was sometimes necessary to bend the rules in order to carry out the research work (Sivakumar 2018).

As to restrictions and the degree of availability in the research, we ran into major difficulties in accessing the above mentioned case files. Although they are available, access was highly restricted, and this task was hindered in various ways. Given their potential to facilitate or deny permission to perform research, institutions affect research plans and shape the way in which relevant knowledge is produced (Myers 2015; Watson and Van Der Meulen 2018).

Female Adolescents and Non-custodial Measures in the Uruguayan Juvenile Justice System

Research Problem

This research project is part of one of the lines of inquiry carried out by the study program on socio-legal control of childhood and adolescence in Uruguay: Studies on juvenile delinquency Research and Development Group. One of its objectives is the in-depth study of the treatment received by adolescent women in the enforcement of non-custodial measures in the Uruguayan Juvenile Justice System.

The methodology is qualitative (Denzin and Lincoln 2018) with an ethnographic approach (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995) that emphasizes state ethnographies (Fassin 2015; Thelen, Vetters, and Von Benda-Beckmann 2018). We follow observation and ethnographic accompaniment for four female adolescents

and recording in a field diary. A document analysis technique (Altheide *et al.* 2008) is also used, involving the reading and systematization of these four young women's official case files. These documents contain a record of everything the institution has done regarding the female adolescents and a transcript of the entire process.

The fieldwork was carried out in two different stages in 2016. In the first stage, the goal was to gain institutional access and become familiar with the context. This was done through interviews and meetings with the respective institutional authorities, as well as with members of the technical team. The second stage involved the ethnographic fieldwork (Guber 2013) through what we call ethnographic accompaniment, by becoming part of the workgroup tasked with implementing the non-custodial measures for the four female adolescents.

Recording in what we call extended field diary is the fundamental research tool. It is employed as a place to describe the activities, meetings and relationships in context and with the participants, as well as a space for reflection, where theoretical elements and discussions start to intertwine and lines of analysis begin to emerge.

Access, Relationships, and Locations

Given that this study is conducted by a research group that is implementing several lines of inquiry, initially the negotiations for institutional access had been carried out jointly, for all group activities and lines of inquiry. This means that the process includes certain obstacles and facilitators, as many formalities and authorizations are required to obtain access to the institution. Numerous meetings and interviews were held with institution authorities, many letters and requests were submitted, along with the endorsement of the Ethics Committee (School of Psychology, Universidad de la República), before final permission was granted, after approximately one year of paperwork.

We then began negotiating to obtain authorization to work in the only institution center where non-custodial measures are officially implemented. The center provides service to adolescents serving with non-custodial measures or those whose prison sentence has been commuted to a non-custodial measure by judicial resolution. They attend the center once or twice a week to take part in various activities, including: individual or family meetings with the technical team, formal education tutoring, and various arts and sports workshops. Occasionally, they also take part in group activities outside the center, such as cultural, sports, or recreational visits.

The goal of the institution is to implement the non-custodial measures for the time mandated in the court sentence, as established by law. However, the strategies to be followed to meet this goal are not clearly defined beforehand and are developed at the center, under the guidance of its authorities. The non-custodial measures outlined in the Childhood and Adolescence Code include: reprimand, guidance and support, community service, damage reparation to victims, parole, and probation. The judge hands down the measures after the conclusion of the judicial process and sets their duration. Parole and probation are the most frequently-implemented measures.

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For institutional access, negotiations, and continuity in the field, the director of the establishment played the role of gatekeeper. Shared goals and a common working strategy that reflects the research objectives and the institution's own needs allowed for a high level of acceptance, as did a fluid communication channel with management and the rest of the team. Thus, the possibility of exchanging impressions and ideas about issues affecting the center and other spontaneous questions with the different staff members was central in establishing relationships to open doors in the field. The concept of "acceptable incompetent" (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, 117), a person who finds him or herself trying to fit into a social group that he or she has just joined, is a good description of our first days in the institution (López-Gallego 2015).

It is important to note that this center is the only open-door facility in the entire institution. However, the logic of confinement permeates its entire daily performance and institutional organization: the staff at the center has worked at the detention centers at some point, and the adolescents come to such centers, or they commit an offence while serving the non-custodial measures and are therefore imprisoned. Other examples of such logic are: a police officer guards the center; there is strict control of attendance, and if the youth do not attend or fail to comply with the measures, they can be put in confinement. In other words, even though this is not a detention center, the characteristics of a total institution (Goffman 1961) are displayed in different ways.

In the second stage of research, we were already integrated into the daily life of the institution and had established strong bonds with some of the members of the technical team. Thus, thanks to the relationships we built, we were able to engage in what we call ethnographic accompaniment of female adolescents who were taken into the institution in compliance of non-custodial measures. We followed four adolescents, and were able to participate in the entire process.

There are a number of ethical and methodological issues regarding working with female adolescents serving judicial measures who might be confined if they fail to comply with their sentences. First, the issue of free and informed consent under these conditions calls into question autonomy and freedom of choice (Abbott *et al.* 2018; Kristensen and Ravn 2015). The asymmetry in the relations and power distribution between adults and adolescents, social class, educational level, and institutional rank, among others, are elements to be taken into account.

Thus, oral informed consent is an important part of the process, where a clear understanding is essential regarding the presence of the researchers, the goals of the research, and the possibility of the adolescents dropping out at any time without this harming them in the institution or in the monitoring of their judicial process, where they are evaluated every three months.

As Bengtsson (2014) points out, adolescent girls are often not interested in talking about or sharing aspects of their lives, let alone know about the investigation process. So respecting the power to refuse is a key aspect. Other research studies carried out in enclosed spaces (Abbott *et al.* 2018; Kristensen and Ravn 2015) have warned of the

ethical risks of these procedures. "The heightened risk of coercion is a central concern. People who are in prison may not feel they are in a position to refuse research requests and choices to participate may be influenced by their relative deprivation" (Abbott *et al.* 2018, 2). In our view, reflecting on free and informed consent is one of the ethical challenges of research in enclosed institutions, where participants find themselves in a situation of vulnerability and asymmetry in terms of autonomy and freedom.

The female adolescents were 15-17 years old and remained at the institution for two to six months. Regardless of the different kind of relationship established, a bond and safe space were created with each one of them. The ethical-political dimension gave rise to questions throughout the inquiry process (Montes-Maldonado, López-Gallego, and Galeotti-Galmés 2018). In order to address the ethical questions, we decided to anchor the research in the relationship with all of the participating female adolescents and the institutional staff, so that procedures were shaped by relationships and dialogue. Thus, the way in which we include participants, how we speak for them without them, and privacy and confidentiality safeguards constitute a protection measure that sometimes comes into tension with the relevance of disclosing certain information or keeping it private.

Confidentiality is an important part of the interview process and guaranteeing it in this context is a challenge (Surmiak 2018). Keeping the identities of the authorities, technicians, educators and staff members anonymous in such a small institution is very difficult. To do so, they are described as operators. Alongside confidentiality, the place of researchers in writing and distributing qualitative research deserves further discussion. Esther Wiesenfeld (2000) criticizes the researcher's absence in studies when dealing with issues related to his or her ethical responsibility: "the responsibility he or she has to depict 'others' through his or her reports, assigning meanings to their actions, all of which equates to a colonizer-colonized mentality (Ulichny 1997; Walsh Bowers 1995) or one of enlightenment (Morgan 1996)" (4). As Fassin states, writing always implies some degree of betrayal: "Betraying those who trusted me, who allowed me to enter into their everyday life, who said and let me see things they did not necessarily want people to know" (2013, 32-33).

Research activities ended with a series of workshops aimed at sharing analyses and experiences, as well as with group discussions with the members of the technical team and program authorities. We worked on two central themes based on the concerns of the institutional team: gender in juvenile justice systems and approaches to sexual violence.

Education and Punishment: Contradictions and Ambiguities from the Heart of the State

The two aforementioned institutions, which operated as one before 2016, are different in terms of goals, the types of population they serve, the types of care centers they manage and the legislation that regulates them. However, we group them

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together for the sake of analysis, highlighting the fact that they are both enclosed settings. Thanks to the contributions of Goffman (1961), Foucault (1995) and Wacquant (2009), and the research studies in which we have participated, we speak of enclosed institutions, as they include the elements defined in Goffman's notion of total institution (1961), the predominance of confinement (Freshwater *et al*. 2012) and the barriers to access in general terms.

In the context of our research, the enclosed institutions display a form of organization in time and space where the population they serve, their needs, and the methodologies applied to satisfy them are homogenized. At the same time, at institutional level, there is a rupture in day-to-day life that gives rise to different forms of isolation, which can be either geographic or based on certain limitations in social and community relationships. Their modus operandi goes beyond the fact that they are closed or locked-out in the literal sense of the term, and their operation is marked by a high level of control and surveillance; rules and regulations; a passage of time confined to institutional and/or legal timeframes and schedules; a biased, asymmetric distribution of power based on unequal positions in terms of age, class, and educational and socioeconomic levels; endogamous social relations and a lack of cultural contact with other circles; a reward-punishment mindset, expert knowledge interventions; and regular individual evaluations, among other characteristics.

Thus, those who spend time in these institutions —children and adolescents, technical teams-staff, and authorities— constitute the agents of research in the context of state management of a population composed of poor children and adolescents (Medan, Villalta, and Llobet 2018; Villalta 2013).

The state is constructed and deconstructed in these micro-spaces. As Lynne Haney (2004) highlights, the state, through its social and penal policies, produces contradictory regulations, which does not imply a failure or perversion of the system, but rather its modus operandi: government by contradiction and ambiguity. The agents in their daily relationships with children and adolescents mobilize values about good, bad, right, wrong combined with feelings of indignation, compassion, empathy and suspicion. All this unfolds in the framework of asymmetrical relations in terms of power, an aspect that is actualized in the relations of dependence that are established in a state framework that combines punishment with education.

> Security in the centers operates as a functioning criterion and a way to justify the use of certain cruel and violent practices. Security is defined by state agents as the security of adolescents, their own security, the internal order of the center, and the prevention of disturbances and break-outs. To maintain order, a disciplinary protocol and a regulation of the procedure of physical containment of adolescents deprived of liberty in conflict situations are followed. These protocols show that security is a central axis for managing the centers and these procedures allow the use of: handcuffs, shackles, elements used for physical restraint, searches. In turn, the architectural layout of most of the centers makes them resemble adult prisons where you can see police personnel, bars,

> cells, and punishment cells. Several of the institutional agents interviewed explain that the objective of education in deprivation of liberty is hampered by the primacy of the objective of security and surveillance. (December 2017. Research field diary for: Protection strategies for children and adolescents from the perspective of care and gender)

> Vanessa is 17 years old and is serving a non-custodial judicial measure of guidance and support (CNA, 2004) for 60 days. She comes early to the first interview, very serious and a little upset, she hardly speaks although she watches intently. She is accompanied by her mother, who does not intervene either. She has already fulfilled a previous precautionary measure and she knew the Institution, but she did not remember what that process had been like. Her only memory was that she "went alone and signed." This affirmation that is repeated among the adolescents comes from a practice installed in the fulfillment of the non-custodial measures where the adolescents have to sign to record their attendance at the Institution. Compliance with this measure occurs ritually as part of the judicial process they go through. Sometimes, the objective of their presence in the institution is imprecise. With no planning adjusted to the adolescent and the extension of the measure in terms of time, and lack of activities. The judicial measure manages to control attendance in formal terms, has the capacity to coerce and legitimize the power of transgression of the law, but the contributions of the measure to the adolescents' education are diluted. (October 2016. Research field diary for: Female adolescents and non-custodial measures in the Uruguayan Juvenile Justice System)

Within the framework of these institutional characteristics, the idea of government by contradiction and ambiguity (Haney 2004) makes sense. Thus, as they try to fulfill their objectives —of protection and education— these institutions intertwine running logic in their actions whereby the educational function is associated with various forms of punishment.

Thus, the ends of the Penal State and the Social State are brought closer and closer through the implementation of their criminal and social protection policies. Some examples of ethnographic work reveal how punishment has a complex social function (Foucault 1995) and is rooted in daily institutional functioning.

The tension arises between a Penal State that punishes and a Social State that cares, especially for those who find themselves in a context of politically induced precarity (Butler 2017). The narrative becomes porous when dealing with categories of *dangerous* or *in danger* between repression, fear, and compassion (Fassin 2015). We, as researchers, are affected by these logics that problematize the punishments and care that are managed in state institutions.

Conclusions

The reflections presented in this article are based on our research experience in enclosed facilities for children and adolescents in Uruguay. The analysis is guided by the questions considering the difficulties entailed in accessing enclosed spaces to

carry out research, how we relate and include participants, how we write about them, and how we disseminate the research results.

Our aim is to contribute to current debates within the framework of ethnographic qualitative research methodologies through the development of ethnographies of the state. The theory of the state grows in its construction from empirical contributions, based on these frameworks the state (Fassin 2015) is a concrete, heterogeneous entity situated in a specific historical, social, and political context. We are interested in understanding the people who inhabit state institutions and produce them on a daily basis, to able to grasp the qualities of state practices from the individualities that inhabit them. The approach shifts away from abstract, universal, or neutral conceptions and ideas. The interest lies in highlighting the power relations, ideologies, and singular characteristics that state institutions acquire in certain social and historical contexts. Institutions, to fulfil their objectives, set in motion a multiplicity of forms of management, regulation, and rationalities that are produced and reproduced in the daily interactions between the agents that make up the institutions. Consequently, we can affirm that state practices are neither neutral actions, nor are they automatic or mechanized; rather they are actions conducted by specific people, loaded with meanings, which in turn are transformed over time. They express the affective dimension of state practices.

As part of the discussions on qualitative methodologies, these debates emphasize symmetry, horizontal relations between researchers and participants, dialogical interaction and mutual respect, and researchers' reflexivity as conditions for knowledge production. We advocate an approach that considers our research as a process where researcher subjectivity is actively and thoughtfully put into play against the backdrop of relationships with research participants and context. The way in which we implement these qualitative methodology premises in research performed in enclosed institutions for children and adolescents will shape ethical-methodological possibilities.

The institutions where we carried out our research question the ethical dimensions of research in terms of access, free consent, and relations between researchers and participants. Obtaining institutional authorization and/or the endorsement of an ethics committee is just one dimension of an ethical-political strategy that must include numerous meetings, relationships, and presence modalities. The concept of intermediaries and/or gatekeepers (Abbott *et al*. 2018), understood as people who open the doors for research and grant access, seems to be key to gauge the viability of research in spaces characterized by confinement and enclosure. Thus, the research process includes the need to know those who can facilitate and/or block access to the location. We therefore, argue that access is a process that does not end merely when we manage to enter the institutions, but that continues to be built while we are present in the institution. Reflecting on the obstacles that impede initial or continued access, including the methodological strategies created to overcome the barriers, gives us clues about the way in which the institution operates. An operation, in this case,

characterized by the discretionary power of management, and the isolation and enclosure of people who live and/or work there.

The notion of pornography of violence expressed by Bourgois (2005) questions us from an ethical perspective, as it calls us to reflect on the rationale of ethnographic narratives and observations that thoroughly describe the suffering of the people participating in such research, and the violation of their rights. Revealing these shocking aspects also entails witnessing oppression (Reiter 2014), intolerable experiences (Fassin 2005) or unlivable living conditions (Butler 2017) in these institutional spaces, raising the question of what to do with this knowledge. In addition to the risk of generating further stigmatization and discrimination, gathering knowledge about some affected groups does not necessarily mean an improvement of their respective living conditions.

In presenting our argument, we have questioned the rationale and methodologies applied to research on vulnerable groups. Surmiak (2018) concludes that categorizing subjects as *vulnerable* can have paternalistic (by denying agency) and reductionist connotations (by failing to take into account vulnerability as a situational rather than a permanent state). She adds that this category entails the essentialization and stigmatization of those who are assigned to it. In any case, public space as a space for denouncing the intolerable (Fassin 2005) or managing unlivable lives, according to Butler (2017), is associated with ethical and political obligations that cut through what we define as research problems and the participants in our research.

This point also relates to the responsibility for the writing and dissemination of our research. The possibility of writing to transgress, as described in the article by Gustafson, Parsons, and Gillingham (2019), provides us with tools to analyze the ways in which we write and present/construct these others, in a patriarchal and hierarchical academic context. Their approach, as feminist researchers, entails a challenging of the limits-edges of knowledge production, in order to generate coherence with the epistemological assumptions of the research we produce. Collaborative writing production and the textual form adopted by written communications are some of the issues that shape the modalities of dissemination and writing. "The writing space can be yet another venue for reproducing exploitative relationships" (Gustafson, Parsons, and Gillingham 2019, 20).

In our view, we have a great responsibility to speak for others; levels of co-authorship are very difficult to achieve in these institutional scenarios without removing ourselves from what we write, like a powerful, external, neutral eye (Haraway 1991). We are aware that the interpretations we construct are not the final version of what can be said about the corpus collected, but a narrative that deepens our understanding of the subject matter, which we see as part of a debate that needs to be deepened and broadened: care and protection modalities and/or punishment modes that we, as a society, develop for children and adolescents.

In some cases, writing takes shape as firsthand accounts (López-Gallego 2014; Montes-Maldonado, López-Gallego, and Galeotti-Galmés 2018) that are not aimed

at individualizing stories, but rather to highlight the singularity of participants and the institutional contexts where research takes place. This allows us to talk in terms of transferability, rather than generalization. Transferability as a criterion for legitimizing qualitative methodologies makes sense as a means to generate knowledge applicable to other contexts while respecting the location of these research processes in enclosed settings (Lincoln and Guba 1985). As noted by Langtree, Birks, and Biedermann (2019), dense description (Geertz 1973) as an analytical and writing modality, facilitates the processes of knowledge transfer, by providing a more in-depth description of institutional contexts, participants, information production devices, and interaction contexts in which knowledge is produced.

The questions concerning what research information we disclose and how we do so, remain open. We agree with the "afterlife of ethnography," as proposed by Fassin (2017) to refer to encounters between research and the public and the process of shifting from private to public spaces and disclosing research. Ethnography has been characterized in its approaches as method, writing, or experience; three aspects that are interrelated when it comes to the dissemination and publication of material, and in this sense, both encounters and audiences are diverse.

In terms of the strengths and weaknesses of our research, we argue that the multiple difficulties of performing research in these contexts affect knowledge production, as access and permanence possibilities constrain the scope of the research. In any case, persistence in conducting research in these spaces and its relevance is the strength of making ethical-methodological possibilities visible, of giving an account of and denouncing the management of what we can define as unlivable lives (Butler 2017).

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