

Desde la Lejanía – Vladimir Pacheco Cueva’s comments.

There are many books written about the refugee experience. Recent examples include Dina Nayeri’s *The Ungrateful Refugee*; the five-book series edited by David Herd and Anna Pincus, *Refugee Tales*; Viet Thanh Nguyen’s *The Displaced*; and Loung Ung’s *First They Killed My Father*. As a genre, these works examine the experiences of those fleeing persecution, violence, and war. Invariably, they touch upon themes such as fear, displacement, nostalgia, solidarity, and hope.

In Australia, Latin American authors have contributed to this genre either by compiling refugees’ stories or by narrating their own journeys. Florencia Melgar and Jorge Jordan’s *9 Vital Stories* is an example of the former, while Marcial Parada’s *Chilenos Exiliados en Australia* exemplifies the latter.

Although this genre is somewhat representative of refugee communities in Australia, significant gaps remain. For many years, no book-length publication focused on Salvadoran refugees, despite the fact that they constitute one of the most significant refugee populations in the country.

This has changed with the publication of *Desde la Lejanía*. In writing the book, authors Tania Canas and Glenda Mejía deliberately limited their interpretative role, choosing instead to let the voices of those interviewed speak for themselves. This approach is evident in the text, which is predominantly written in Spanish, with occasional instances of Spanglish. The editorial decision to foreground the interlocutors’ voices ensures that their stories remain the central focus of the book: of its 246 pages, nearly 200 are devoted to their narratives.

Following a brief introduction—in which the authors justify their methodology and explain their positionalities—the reader is immersed in stories organised into three main sections: life before departure, the departure itself, and settlement in Australia. As an economist, I found myself particularly drawn to José Luis’s reflections on managing one’s own finances when settling in a new country (p. 243), the loss of social status (p. 228), and the difficulties of securing employment when qualifications and skills are not recognised (p. 215). Another story that stands out is Marina’s emotional breakdown in front of a counsellor who does not understand a word she is saying but listens attentively—an act of care that proves to be exactly what Marina needed (p. 206).

While each story is distinct, they also share important commonalities. Differences in experience are shaped by factors such as the historical moment of departure from El Salvador, levels of education and skills, age, prior life experiences, expectations, awareness of the risks of political engagement, and the impossibility of return. Yet despite these differences, all the narratives reveal shared feelings of nostalgia and uncertainty, barriers to education and employment, the need to belong, shifts in identity, the acquisition of new knowledge and perspectives, and experiences of racism and discrimination.

Together with the book’s beautiful illustrations, these stories exemplify what can be achieved when authors—who are themselves daughters of refugees—remain closely connected to the communities whose voices they amplify. *Desde la Lejanía* not only validates refugee experiences but also challenges dominant narratives about refugees by foregrounding stories of courage and determination in the face of seemingly insurmountable cultural, economic and social barriers.