

## New Staff at ESO



Rodrigo Parra

### Rodrigo Parra

As a young boy I was mystified by those enigmatic and persistent “clouds” in the night sky of my beloved Valparaíso. I will neither forget, nor be able to describe, the striking feeling I had while reading about the real nature of the Magellanic Clouds in the very first astronomy book I ever owned (*Astronomía* by José Comas Solá). My interest in astronomy grew at a steady rate. Many years passed. During a visit to La Silla while studying electrical engineering, I saw a long-haired (and bearded) astronomer walking barefoot towards a small white dome. I remember thinking to myself something like, “Wow, what a cool job!”

I graduated and started working in industry. After one year, I decided to obtain an MSc in digital/microwave communications in Chalmers, Sweden. Just as I was writing my master’s thesis, I had the opportunity to meet John Conway and work with him on a thesis about interstellar masers (disguised as a telecommunications thesis). I was assigned to a small office at the Onsala Rymdobservatorium, which eventually became my second home for about five years, until I received a PhD in radio astronomy under John’s supervision.

I am deeply interested in the study of the possible evolutionary connections between AGN and starburst activity. One of the questions guiding my research is whether or not the 100-parsec-sized regions of starburst activity we see in external galaxies are scaled-up versions of Galactic star-forming regions. If not, what makes them different? I have studied star formation and AGN activity using cm-wavelength VLBI observations of large samples of galaxies, as well as deep cm- and mm-wavelength interferometry of single objects. Over the years I have gathered much experience in both the theoretical and practical aspects of the interferometric techniques that are my principal research tools.

In 2007 I returned to Chile as a postdoc at Pontificia Universidad Católica. I taught a radio astronomy course and gave a few theoretical seminars about interferometry. Additionally, I worked in parallel as the CONICYT support astronomer for the APEX telescope where my main duties were to plan and conduct the observations of Chilean projects. In this position, I was lucky enough to have a free “test-drive” of the job before joining ESO as an APEX staff astronomer. I must say I completely fell in love with the Sequitor base and the overwhelming beauty of the “white lady” (our VERTEX dish) dancing against the immaculate sky of Chajnantor. I must say also that the operation of the APEX telescope is particularly challenging (and tricky), due to the experimental nature of the project itself. But the reward is priceless: the assortment of installed instruments combined with the outstanding site allows discoveries to be made almost every day.

### Faviola Molina

Not feeling totally a foreigner in Chile, I arrived in this exciting country in March 2006, when I started postgraduate studies at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. As student I enjoyed my first two and a half years in Chile, sharing great experiences with the people I worked and studied with.

When I was a five years old my big brother began to encourage me to watch astronomical TV programmes. I was surprised about how many things can be found ‘outside’, and how they work. I was born in Mérida, Venezuela. I studied physics at the Universidad de Los Andes, situated in the same beautiful city where I was born. At the end of my undergraduate studies, I joined the Centro de Investigaciones de Astronomía (CIDA) to start my thesis project. The subject was modelling the emission line spectra of star-forming galaxies.

I have been always interested in observational astronomy. So, at the same time as I was developing my undergraduate thesis, I started to work as a service mode observer at the Observatorio Nacional Llano del Hato, the observatory closest to the equator, and managed by CIDA.

After I obtained a BSc in physics, I moved to Chile and obtained an MSc in astronomy and astrophysics from the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. My thesis there was about modelling the mass-luminosity ratio and chemical enrichment in galaxies, considering the impact of the integrated stellar IMF.

I joined ESO in September 2008 and work as a support astronomer at La Silla.



Faviola Molina