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Special Issue:

Ethnographies of everyday Chile: Urban spaces, memory, and community

Editorial foreword

This special issue emerges from a collaborative initiative between the Escuela de Antropología de la Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile and the Escuela de Antropología de la Universidad Diego Portales. Conceived as a shared academic endeavor, this edition is dedicated to showcasing the work of Chilean undergraduate students currently pursuing their degrees in anthropology. We are especially grateful to Antro-pólus Journal, hosted at Eötvös Loránd University, for generously opening this space and making this special issue possible.

The objective of this issue is to provide a platform for making visible the research, experiences, reflections, and findings that mark the early stages of their formation as anthropologists. By foregrounding these emerging voices, we aim to recognize the intellectual rigor, methodological creativity, and critical engagement that characterize undergraduate scholarship.

In this volume, we invite readers to engage with these contributions, which address diverse themes rooted in the Chilean context. Together, they offer insightful perspectives on contemporary social realities while reflecting the vitality and promise of a new generation of anthropologists.

Editorial board:

Lili Almási-Szabó; Tamara Andrea Lara Ahumada; Victoria Violeta Amatista Leiva Guerra; Katherine Irene Griffero Kramm

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I. From the Field

From Violence to Reconciliation: The Role of the Church in La Legua Community

If you grew up in a working-class family in Santiago, the Chilean capital, whether middle-class or poor, you would have noticed that Christian symbols were everywhere. You could see them in people's homes, in schools, as accessories, in street graffiti, in gang-related language, as tattoos, and most importantly, in churches. These churches, at least in Santiago, tend to be located in poorer working-class neighborhoods, which could explain why poor people invest a lot of money in their churches or religious ornaments for their homes and clothing.

In this reflection, we will refer to our experience doing an initial ethnography exploration during our first semester of university, which was conducted in La Legua, a marginalized sector of the commune of San Joaquín in Santiago, famous and, at the same time, stigmatized for its delinquency. The methodology used was participant observation, and we did it while walking through the street market in La Legua, talking to senior citizens. The street market is located on Avenida Padre Mariano Puga; here, you could see vendors and customers in their routine, through their interactions you can see the familiarity between them, suggesting most of them were probably from the same neighborhood. Walking along the street, fruits, vegetables and other various market stalls block the view of the small houses, but between these stores stalls a space is left to see the painted murals of the Parroquia San Cayetano, with a large sign reading "La gloria de Dios es que el pobre viva" which translates as "The glory of God is that the poor may live". Then, Christianity is key to understanding the subjectivity, identity creation and resiliency in poor marginalized communities.

But what is it about Christianity that makes it so popular among marginalized people in Santiago? We theorize it is connected to both Jesus's message and the role the churches play in the neighborhoods, roles such as feeding those in need with a system called "Olla común" community meals organized by the church where free food is distributed to anyone who comes, regardless of whether they attend mass or belong to the parish. The food is covered by donations of money and food that the churches receive. There's also something called a "Ropero común" or solidary closet, clothes are donated to those who need them; however, we do not know if these are things that all churches do, but as far as our knowledge of the churches in poor neighborhoods goes, we believe this is something very common and, according to our interviewees, these instances are present in La Legua.

The community of La Legua is characterized by a hardworking life, whose mindset stems from resilience in his humble field of work and crime-ridden area, and by the dedication they have to transmit religious beliefs from generation to generation. The testimony of two of our participants highlights this last point, offering support, comfort, and valuable lessons for the future. Alongside the free-meal and free-clothes programs, churches also play a role in the mediation of violent situations in the neighborhoods. La Legua's church, "Parroquia San Cayetano", was built there strategically, and it soon began to be an important part of social life configuration in the neighborhood. The influence this church has in mediating violent situations is an important feat, and the people who live there recognize that too. However, the presence of violence in society is well recognized, and many express that "people are so bad these days". To face this reality, belief in God becomes a source of comfort and relief for communities, who through religion find the strength to confront violence and decide who to trust.

Whitehouse and McQuinn's (2013) chapter gives a detailed look at how religious ritual influences have power in society and the reduction of violence. Its content provides insight into how religious rituals and beliefs manage tensions and conflicts inside society. Although their chapter focuses on the historical period of witch hunts in Europe, they argue that religious ceremonies provide a symbolic and social framework that helps manage the tensions. On the other hand, Appleby (2000), examines how religious traditions can be both a source of violence and a force that promotes peace and reconciliation. In the context of La Legua, this duality is shown through strong social cohesion and a respectful attitude among its members. Religion, as evidenced in the interviews, plays a central role in people's daily lives and provides emotional and spiritual support. This aligns with the notion of religion as a force that promotes peace and reconciliation. However, participants' testimonies mention the challenges of trusting others and the constant need to reflect on the violence in their environment. This dynamic reflects the ambivalence of the sacred and how religion can be a source of comfort and relief in the face of violence, while at the same time raising challenges and questions about how to address it.

The importance of this church around the violent situations come with the figure of Mariano Puga, also known as «cura obrero» or «cura guerrillero»¹, he was someone who preached Christian values alongside his absolute support for the poor. One interviewee told us that he was a very good person, inspiring, and that he generated trust and forgiveness in the

¹ "Worker priest" or "guerrilla priest".

neighborhood. This is shown inside La Legua's own streets, as many streets of the area were merged into one big avenue that was named Avenida Padre Mariano Puga, where the Parroquia San Cayetano is situated. This highlights the existence of important symbolisms for the community, from the most widely known image of Christ to the more local figure of the priest, present in the testimonies of those interviewed.

Therefore, our ethnographic study reveals the importance of religious beliefs, specifically Christianity, inside the communities as it provides fundamental support when facing violent situations. Through the constant church presence, the creed has played an important role in social cohesion and the reduction of violence as the belief of having a superior being and the trust of its divine guidance provide people with strength and hope they need to face these challenges and find peace. With a welcoming embrace towards both victims and perpetrators, La Legua's vision of society highlights the importance of reconciliation and forgiveness as key elements in the fight against violence. Instead of repression or vengeance, they look towards understanding the causes of violence in the community and offering support to everyone involved in the conflict.

In that sense, religion is vital to form an ethical and moral framework that guides the search for reconciliation. With an inclusive and compassionate perspective, the community and the church seek to address the deep-rooted causes of violence and to promote social and personal transformation.

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Older Adults as the Soul of the Street Market

When I considered the idea of conducting an ethnography at a street market (*feria*) in the city of Santiago de Chile, I never thought about what I would encounter. I come from a relatively small city, Salamanca, in the fourth region of Coquimbo, where the majority of the population is from the countryside and resides in rural areas, unlike Santiago. There, small street markets are held on weekends—a temporary commercial activity carried out for a few days where different products are sold—spanning no more than 3 blocks of a street, with the exception of the annual bazaars that take place, which are larger events covering entire streets.

The street market on Avenida Grecia in Santiago was extensive, with an incredible variety of commerce and people. And how not to acknowledge it? With its beautiful and imposing view of the Andes Mountains in front. The atmosphere of the market was a combination of aromas, sounds, and sights; furthermore, it constituted a microcosm in which life stories intertwine. Some merchants, pleasant and respectful, promoted their products while the buyers, focused on their carts, looked for additional products to add to them. In this space, both young people and adults share and coexist with their surroundings.

The sun's rays slipped through the awnings, illuminating the vivid tones of the fruits and vegetables that contrasted with the structure of the stalls. People moved through the crowd, while their faces reflected the enthusiasm for buying and, at the same time, the excitement of advancing in the long lines that formed. I highlight that the noise of conversations, the offers, and the melodies of songs made up a chaotic, yet at the same time pleasant, symphony.

I have thought that going shopping at the street market on weekends is a very common practice in Chile, especially among older adults, which transforms into a way to maintain an essential social bond in their lives. I began to reflect and realize that, within the market, the presence of older adults is immense; I believe that within this space they play a vital role. As merchants and sellers, their experience is reflected in a kind treatment and wise recommendations about the most emblematic products of the place. And in the case of the buyers, this is reflected in how they appreciate each option with a careful gaze and meticulous hands, likely guided by the memory of flavors and fragrances from past times.

While observing these interactions, I could not help but remember my grandmother, my dear Ita², when she asks me to accompany her to the street market on some weekends or during my vacations, for me to help her choose her purchases. It is a request that fills my heart, because it allows me to enjoy her company and help her in whatever I can while I have her by my side alive; how I wish grandparents were eternal.

The street market becomes a space where the idea of how they take advantage of the free time that weekends provide is embodied, to carry out these recreational activities in a calm manner, also valuing the act of sharing conversations that affirm their sense of belonging and community with the other people who go to buy or sell. From the other perspective, being a very diverse market, older adults are allowed to sell their own products, such as handicrafts, a variety of foods, household items, etc. Giving them the opportunity of their lives, to provide for themselves independently.

As shown in Figure 1 below, a person is set up with their personal cart to go through the market.

Figure 1



View of the street market facing the mountain range [Photograph], by Lemus, 2024

As soon as I noticed that different older adults were walking without carts or large bags in their hands, that they just stayed for long minutes talking with the sellers —conversations like "Haven't seen you in so long," "How has your health been?", "The other day I remembered you"— I sensed that these are dialogues that enrich the soul of this small segment of the

² - Ita: An affectionate term for grandmother (Abuelita).

population, and I knew that, in this market, not only objects are exchanged, but stories, anecdotes, and the spirit of each seller or buyer.

Finally, I allow myself to say that the street market presents itself as a place that transcends a simple exchange of products; so to speak, it is a refuge of memories, relationships, and community life for this side of the adult population; it reveals itself as a space of social and emotional encounter. In this little piece of the world, every conversation and participation for these people transforms into an act of resistance against the isolation that often accompanies old age, breaking with the stereotype of passive or invisible old age, and reaffirming their value as individuals. For older adults, it represents accessibility, autonomy, and a valuable opportunity to preserve important human bonds. It also reflects an intergenerational bridge thanks to them, as they nourish the memory and knowledge of the younger ones. Thus, the street market transforms into a mirror of how everyday life can become an enveloping act of interaction and humanity, where every encounter, every smile, or simple greeting, leaves a mark on those who star in it.

Raising and Teaching: From Educators to Mothers

Last semester, as part of a university course³, we conducted research in a municipal basic education school⁴, and we sought to understand the perceptions that teachers and school staff had regarding gender violence in the educational context. The school was not in bad condition, but many of the children lived in vulnerable situations with unstable or complex family environments. Throughout the semester we conducted interviews and observations, and took field notes with teachers and school staff members, who helped contextualize the different realities experienced within the school.

Among the many stories collected, there was something that my ears could not ignore: the women educators were deeply involved in the upbringing of those children. There was not a single conversation in which they did not speak with devotion about their students, nor a moment when they did not treat them as if they were their own children. There was something that flourished in each of their stories: it was the bond that they themselves created with the children, nurturing them as if they were their own. They opened their hearts and souls to them. They were not only mathematics or language educators, they were psychologists, aunts, makeup artists, braiders, friends and most importantly, they were mothers to those kids. We noticed that female teachers and officials linked their work with motherhood, fulfilling a maternal role in the lives of the students.

They cared about their grades, they cared about how they behaved, how things were going in their homes, their fears and their sorrows. Girls in math classes were given special support not merely to improve their grades, but to empower them, and they created a space for the girls to speak, shout and express themselves freely. At the same time, they also sought to guide all the children, instilling in them values and advice to help them face life and the future. For them, educational work did not end with the subjects; it was an extension of their identity as mothers. Their work began as soon as they set foot in the school. They combed and braided the hair of those girls whose mothers did not do it, they gave them prizes and values, and they created a deep and maternal bond, where children and teachers recognized each other with affection and care beyond the limits of the classroom.

³ This research was conducted in collaboration with Mariela Gómez, Julianna Jiménez, Leonardo and Diego Leguía.

⁴ “Basic education school” refers to what is commonly known as elementary school.

We not only noticed it in the teachers, we also saw it in the children themselves and how they counted on them: at recess, throughout the interview, and even in the teachers' room, they were always in constant search of their female teachers—to tell them about their day, of some problem, to get a simple hug, or to be helped. In this way, it was not only an educational relationship, but also the construction of a maternal space of care within the institution.

II. In Focus

“André's Blood Unites Us”: The Case of Rituals of Faith and Memory in Resistance to Political Violence in La Victoria, Chile

Abstract

This paper explores the relationship between the faith experiences of the residents of La Victoria and their collective memory of priests André Jarlán and Pierre Dubois, who defended the human rights of residents during the Chilean Military Dictatorship from 1973 to 1990. This was an ethnographic and historiographic investigation conducted with residents who had a relationship with the mentioned priests, involving participant observation of rituals, masses, and political and religious spaces related to these figures. The study has led to the conclusion that the relationship between faith and memory among the residents of La Victoria is expressed in the performance of rituals related to Jarlán and Dubois, as symbolic acts in which religion and political convictions are inseparable elements of human experience. In this sense, the ethnographic case of La Victoria provides an in-depth understanding of the religious dimension of collective memory.

Introduction

Inside Nuestra Señora de la Victoria Parish, we witnessed the fortieth anniversary of Father André Jarlán's death. We were seated next to members of the Hermanitas de Jesús and two local residents of La Victoria, a poor urban neighborhood in Santiago de Chile. They were mother and daughter. In the middle of the Eucharist, the lights went out, and the aisle leading to the altar filled with little girls dressed in white, with angel wings and crowns. They danced to the rhythm of a soft piano piece that played over the loudspeakers. As they moved, they held up photographs from different time periods. Some were in black and white; one of them was the face of Víctor Hugo Morales, who was detained and disappeared during the Chilean Military Dictatorship in 1976. Other photographs were in color; one of these faces was Francisca Sandoval, a journalist for the independent media outlet Señal 3 de La Victoria, who was killed during a demonstration of the Central Unitaria de Trabajadores y Trabajadoras de Chile on Workers' Day in 2022. The girls danced throughout the parish and raised the photographs on the altar. They headed for the entrance to the parish, where one of the girls went forward to take more photographs. She crossed the path to the altar and placed the images on a large cross covered with faces, among which was that of André Jarlán, the French priest of the parish who was killed in 1984, in the middle of the Military Dictatorship, while he was

reading his Bible in his house. The girl and another companion stood contemplating the cross, while another girl, further ahead at the altar, with a companion holding her wings, stood watching the figure of Jesus crucified. At that altar, faith and collective memory were united in resistance.

Priests, Memory, and Lived Faith

The aim of this study was to understand the connection between the experiences of faith of La Victoria's residents, in Santiago de Chile, and the collective memory of the Military Dictatorship and the Catholic priests who defended human rights during that period. In this way, we understand experiences of faith as individual and collective experiences about God or related to the divine beyond the mediation of ecclesial institutions (Cerdeña, 2020; Brusoni, 2019). On the other hand, and for the purposes of this work, collective memory is presented as the active construction of the past in people's present (Ramos, 2013).

In Chile, the state repression carried out by the Military Dictatorship from 1973 to 1990 against civil society resulted in a breakdown of social relations, through the closure of spaces for political discussion and the systematic violation of human rights by the armed forces (Aranda, 2009). Faced with this scenario of destruction of the social fabric, the Church took on the role of protecting and promoting grassroots organizations that would provide opportunities to rebuild interactions between citizens and cooperation in civil society (Cancino, 1997; Cancino, 2001; Bravo, 2016). In this context, the Church opened spaces for social rearticulation through the incorporation of the Vicariate of Solidarity, the Pastoral Workers' Ministry, the Youth Ministry, and the regional vicariates in Santiago, which led to the emergence of a popular collective subject or actor (Castillo, 1986).

During the dictatorship, the Chilean Church made its presence felt in *poblaciones* through the involvement of its priests with neighborhood communities, promoting active nonviolence and peaceful commitment to dignity (Bravo, 2016). This involvement came at a high price, as evidenced by the death of André Jarlán, parish priest of La Victoria, who was shot in his room by one of the many shots fired by the police in the context of political repression (Jordá, 2001). This case was a significant milestone for the opposition to the dictatorship and the defense of human rights, which was expressed in constant popular demonstrations denouncing the crime, which remained in the collective memory of the residents of La Victoria decades after the event (Cortés, 2018). But how do these residents experience this collective memory in their present as believers? This paper explores, through

the case of La Victoria, the connection between political events as social repercussions of state repression over residents and the lived faith of these inhabitants, deeply connected with the circumstances of their daily life and the cultural and historical context in which believers develop their trajectories (Bahamondes & Alarcón, 2022). In this sense, lived faith is a crucial dimension for deepening our understanding of the complex social reality of the subjects.

Research Methods

The empirical data consisted of ethnographic research conducted between September 2024 and August 2025. The study focused on the residents of La Victoria, a neighborhood located in the municipality of Pedro Aguirre Cerda, in Santiago de Chile. Specifically, this research involved neighbors who witnessed the role of the Catholic Church and its priests in the defense of human rights and the rearticulation of the social fabric in the course of repression and state violence during the Military Dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet (Cancino, 2001; Bravo, 2016). The research methods included participant observation during rituals and activities of Nuestra Señora de la Victoria Parish, an organization to which human rights defender priests, including André Jarlán and Pierre Dubois, belonged. In addition, we conducted long-term interviews with members of this parish, all neighbors of La Victoria, to gather life stories about their faith and their past, in connection with their memory of the priests during the dictatorship.

The ethnographic research focused primarily on interviews, but during the process we discovered a series of religious rituals whose symbols and performative phenomena showed us, in the first instance, interactions between political views and divine elements such as God, the Cross, or Jesus Christ. This turned our focus primarily to the shared experiences of these rituals, complementing them with interviews to get closer to the meaning of the performative actions. This shift included audiovisual documentation of the rituals and the analysis of the symbolism present in their material representations. Finally, the research methods also included the interpretation of oral and written discourses that were part of the rituals, such as songs and recitations. These interpretations are based on Geertz's (1973) methodological approach of thick description, aiming to explore the web of meaning behind human action through the deep interpretation of symbols present in the fieldwork.

The research procedure started with short visits to La Victoria during the Week of André Jarlán, a period dedicated to the anniversary of the priest's death. We established contact with the parish where the priest worked and began to build rapport with its active members. They received us and consented to collaborate with the research. They allowed us to observe

and analyze their practices in Eucharists, social activities, talks, and responsories. They perceived us as “two lads who crossed all of Santiago to get here to learn about us,” as the current parish priest said in one meeting. In these terms, we were outsiders to the neighborhood, but we had some conditions that made the relationship with participants easier, such as being, at that time, undergraduate students at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile and conducting research funded by the Pastoral Department of the university. These conditions were closely related to the Catholic religion, making trust between us and the community more fluid.

In addition, this ethnographic research implied a process of self-reflection for both researchers, because each of us carried a past that had elements in common with the participants. In Gabriel’s case, he was raised in a Catholic family and had completed all of his sacraments. In Javiera’s case, she was raised in a *población* in Antofagasta. In this way, this ethnographic experience dialogues with Narayan’s (1993) rethinking of the distinction between the anthropologist as insider or outsider of the studied community, arguing for a conceptual hybridity of the researcher’s identity, beyond the classical conceptualization of the native and non-native anthropologist, which is incoherent with the complex reality of globalization and the different backgrounds carried by every researcher. In this case study, people from La Victoria are not “natives,” but they identify themselves as *pobladores*; however, this is not a sign of marginalization from the rest of society, nor a concept shared with the rest of the inhabitants of Santiago. Being a *poblador* of La Victoria is part of an identity that Javiera and Gabriel are not fully part of, but as researchers, we can both use our narrative to give them a position as subjects, owners of their trajectories as agents of resistance. That is a fundamental and transversal element of this work.

Ritual and Political Conflict

Recognized works by scholars have explored how ritual can express a political aspect of society. Gluckman, a classic author and central figure of the Manchester School of Anthropology, explained that rituals can serve as an outlet for social conflicts (Berreco, 2009). In his research on relations between white and African people in North Zululand, Gluckman (1958) explores how these groups collaborate beyond the division implanted in the patterns of social structure. This does not mean that there is no dominant group over the other, but rather that there exists a structural balance based on the dynamic position of the members of each group in different contexts and social situations. In this analysis of conflict, the author explains

how ritual can express the reverse case of the social structure (Berreco, 2009). In the case of this ethnographic research, the conflict is between the residents of La Victoria and state political repression.

Likewise, Turner (1969) explains that ritual involves a complex set of sociocultural symbols in a dynamic performative act. In this process, different roles participate in a collective and individual experience that allows the community to adjust itself to social change. This is possible because of the multiplicity of *personae* and categories that coexist during the transition of ritual. As Turner states: “each individual's life experience contains alternating exposure to structure and *communitas*, and to states and transitions” (Turner, 1969, p. 94). In this context, structure and *communitas* are two different elements in tribal society. The concept of *communitas* expresses an area of common life among fellows beyond social structures such as hierarchical orders, caste ties, or class systems. Nevertheless, the author explains that *communitas* does not mean a complete antonym to social structure and institutions, because through *communitas* rituals can give recognition to the basic link between humans, essential for the existence of society. This link occurs in an area of liminality, where participants in the ritual process become involved in a space of uncertainty and ambiguity, being placed in a condition of equality.

In addition, Turner's work has been essential for understanding the link between ritual and symbols. According to the author, the symbol has the capacity for reference, for referring to “something” that is not explicit in the symbol itself (Turner, 2019). Furthermore, it has the power to generate action among people who come into contact with the symbol. Ritual is laden with symbols. For example, in baptism, the water poured over the heads of the initiates and the presence of the cross are both symbols. In the sacrament of Catholic confirmation, it is common for the priest to give the participant a small slap on the cheek as a symbol of their new “awakening” as a Christian.

The Ritual of Faith and Memory

The results of this research consist of two dimensions. First, there is the identification of rituals performed by the inhabitants of La Victoria in which there is a connection between faith and the collective memory of the priests who defended human rights, mainly André Jarlán and Pierre Dubois. These rituals consist of Eucharistic celebrations held in the neighborhood, pilgrimages, and commemorative events in which the faith of the inhabitants interacts directly with their political and social convictions. We have therefore named this phenomenon Rituals

of Faith and Memory. Through active observation of these rituals, interaction with the inhabitants, and in-depth analysis of their discourse in the context of ritual practice, we have identified a symbolic thread that integrates the inhabitants' beliefs with their strong political principles.

In the situation described in the introduction, entitled *Misa de los Caídos* (or *Mass of the Fallen*), a central element of the relationship between faith and memory is expressed: ritual as the articulator of two worlds. On the one hand, the traditional structure of the Church is presented: the existence of an altar, divine symbols such as Jesus crucified, instruments for communion, among others. On the other hand, it presents the symbolic action of commemoration: the appearance of the faces of disappeared detainees and victims of political repression in La Victoria, the memory of André Jarlán and Pierre Dubois as defenders of human rights during the military dictatorship, and the cries for the memory of Chilean political and social actors such as Salvador Allende and Víctor Jara.

Nevertheless, these two aspects, religious and political-commemorative, are not in tension or in an alternating relationship. The explanation for this argument lies in the existence of a third symbolic line, which corresponds to an evident integration of the religious and political spheres. An illustrative example is found in the lyrics of a song performed by the choir:

Jesucristo aquí, presencia y memoria

(Jesus Christ here, presence and memory)

(...)

Qué linda la gente que tiene memoria

(How beautiful are people who have memory)

Seguro que tiene esperanza también

(Surely they also have hope)

Qué lindo este pueblo que pinta su historia

(How beautiful are these people who paint their history)

Se junta y celebra cantando su fe

(They gather and celebrate, singing their faith).

(Fieldwork data, authors' personal archive, 2024; authors' translation)

In this excerpt, memory as an act of agency by the people coexists with the expression of faith. Painting one's own history is conceived as an act in which faith also plays a leading role. At the same time, the phrase used on altars, “La sangre de André nos une” (“The blood of André unites us”), is relevant, as it clearly refers to the act of remembrance of the priest who was murdered during the 1973–1990 military dictatorship. However, this act is articulated in a religious context that invites the union of believers and the search for justice, also motivated by Church doctrine. Below is Figure 1, showing the altar mentioned, where Jesus is crucified alongside the phrase just mentioned.

Figure 1

Jesus crucified, at the back of the altar of Nuestra Señora de La Victoria Parish.



Note. Photograph from fieldwork (authors' personal archive, 2024).

This type of altar symbolizes a relationship between the Church and the religious community of La Victoria, in which the history of resistance and struggle of the inhabitants is part of their experiences of faith. This implies that the Church accompanies its parishioners in an explicitly political and social context. This accompaniment is also supportive, as evidenced by the *Via Crucis* pilgrimage, during which a cross is carried bearing images of residents of La Victoria who were victims of state repression, including cases of disappearance, murder, or the lack of accountability on the part of institutions. Among these photographs is the face of Víctor Hugo Morales, who disappeared at the hands of the DINA (National Intelligence Directorate) in 1976, as well as the image of Cecilia Piña, a worker who was murdered in 1986. At the same time, there are contemporary images, such as that of Francisca Sandoval, a journalist for the

independent media outlet *Señal 3 de La Victoria*, who was killed during a demonstration organized by the CUT (Central Unitaria de Trabajadores y Trabajadoras de Chile, or United Workers' Union of Chile). These faces are integrated into the construction of the cross, as can be seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Cross of the Fallen in Nuestra Señora de La Victoria Parish



Note. Photograph from fieldwork (authors' personal archive, 2024).

Walking Together in Resistance

The second dimension of the findings lies in the cohesion between the Church and the community. Classical sociology has focused on the significant impact that religious institutions have on individuals' actions (cf. Durkheim, 2001; Durkheim, 2019), which has given rise to anthropological currents that highlight the agency of communities in the construction of religious symbols through performative acts (Turner, 1969). However, this study delves deeper into the finding that, in this case, agency is not located exclusively in the Church as an institution, nor in the residents as socio-political actors, but rather in a shared agency that begins with the residents as builders of collective memory, accompanied by the Church as a spiritual guide. This is where the relevance of André Jarlán and Pierre Dubois lies: as priests, they became actively involved in the social problems of the inhabitants, linking their pastoral work with political action, as the interviewees explained. In this way, the Church, rather than being

merely a functional institution in the lives of the inhabitants, is one that walks alongside them in their struggle for resistance.

While we were interviewing Mónica, one of the lay leaders of the parish in La Victoria, she recalled her first experiences with Pierre Dubois:

"With Pierre, coming to Mass, coming to a reading (...). He was very good at conveying the Gospel, at showing how to live it, not thinking that the Gospel was two thousand years ago, no, it was the Gospel today, today, here, it is the Gospel that one lives. (...) At 17, 18 years old, coming and meeting a priest who brought the Gospel to our reality, and that God was here, it was different." (Mónica)

In this passage, it is important to note Mónica's understanding of the Gospel as something grounded in reality—marked by poverty, repression under the military dictatorship, and drug use among young people—among the residents, with whom priests Jarlán and Dubois were actively involved. When she says "God was here", she is referring to the concrete reality of herself and her neighbors. This is consistent with the worldview of the divine in the parish. During the *Mass of the Fallen*, in a collaborative activity at the tables, each group was invited to engage in a moment of conversation with the question: When have you felt God's presence, or what moments have left a mark on you? We were seated with Silvia, an elderly mother, and her adult daughter, Karen. Silvia worked as a volunteer in the parish, in soup kitchens set up for disadvantaged people. She said that, for her, the presence of the divine was found in social action, in being in contact with the people who live in the neighborhood. Her daughter added, along the same lines, that there is nothing that allows greater contact with truth than being *there*, where life is lived among neighbors.

In another situation, Carmen, a social leader who had a close relationship with André Jarlán and witnessed his death, explained his role in the community with the following nuances:

"They were already abusing us a lot during the dictatorship (...) When Andrés arrived here in La Victoria, he fell in love with the young drug addicts and got very involved with them and with the young children because he always carried his backpack with him, carrying salt, lemon, vinegar, and candy... to give candy to the young children and the other things were for when [state agents] threw tear gas bombs. He kept going, helping out there." (Carmen)

This fragment emphasizes André Jarlán's commitment to the neighborhood, not only to the most disadvantaged people, but also to protesters in the context of demonstrations during the political repression of the Military Dictatorship.

Conclusion

In the course of this research, we have explored the connection between political commitment and religious elements through rituals. The existence of these religious and political dimensions in equilibrium allows for a deeper understanding of the relationship between faith and memory. The ritual we witnessed is a performative act that manages to unite these two elements. However, this is not merely a formal mixture; this union has an ontological implication, since the relationship between the believer and their religion coexists with the relationship between the inhabitant and their memory. The religious world is also a world of critical awareness and collective memory.

On the other hand, the involvement of priests André Jarlán and Pierre Dubois meant, for the residents, the establishment of mutual trust and collaboration between the Church and the community, through the accompaniment of the religious institution not as a doctrinal entity, but as a body of action that was present in the everyday lives of the residents during political violence. In this sense, residents and priests were walking together toward a better future.

In addition, conducting this study in a historic *población* of Santiago de Chile, allowed us to broaden our perspective toward other relevant aspects of its parish community in relation to the space they inhabit. Topics related to urban space, municipal institutions, and the role of the Church in the community, among others, are areas that are opened up by this field of study.

Moreover, through our fieldwork and continuous engagement, we managed to build a closer bond with the community. They opened the doors of the parish to us and invited us not only to ecclesiastical rituals but also to accompany them and foster unity. They were pleased with our interest and attendance at their activities, and they take pride in their collective identity, which we are presenting to the academic world.

Furthermore, these findings can be used to discuss the tensions and dialogues between the “popular” Church and the institutional structure of the Catholic Church in Chile. Learning from primary sources that these priests rang the parish bells to warn residents to hide before raids and kidnappings, and having living testimonies of a Church that followed Christ's example in times of repression, is extremely valuable. Not only because this constitutes

testimonial evidence of the role of the Catholic Church in difficult times such as the military dictatorship, but also because it reveals the characteristic resistance of this population and its neighbors, who to this day defend this memory and demand justice for their fallen.

Last but not least, this study recognizes the agency of the residents of La Victoria. The priests, through their dedication, became part of the residents' Victorian identity. They arrived in a neighborhood that was founded on illegally seized land, with a history marked by repression and difficulties in accessing basic goods and state protection. These priests, with their faith and political convictions oriented toward social action, were a great support to the residents, providing them with both material and spiritual support during the repression of the dictatorship.

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This land, ours.

Prologue

As part of the “Qualitative Methods” course, this research was conducted during the first academic semester of our sophomore year, from April through July 2025. Given the opportunity to freely choose our field of study, we opted to investigate and explore the *Cementerio General* of Santiago. Our primary focus was on the workers and the social life within this space.

Founded in the 19th century, the *Cementerio General* is one of Chile’s most significant heritage sites, both for its size and its historical significance. From an institutional standpoint, it is presented as a site of national memory and cultural value: an open-air “museum” that houses monuments, mausoleums, and key figures in the country’s political and social history. Through heritage tours, cultural projects, and a carefully constructed official narrative, the cemetery is positioned as a space for safeguarding collective memory.

In this sense, the cemetery functions as a funerary infrastructure, as well as a cultural and institutional mechanism that organizes, represents, and transmits certain ways of understanding history, death, and memory in this type of city, in accordance with the image the administration seeks to project.

Opening of the course: Preliminary visit

The entry into the field was facilitated by family connections. Within the family memory lies the story of the first author’s Brandon Iturra, father, whose life has traversed the liminal, the harshness that exists within it, and on the street. His mother was taken away during the dictatorship and later buried in the cemetery. This present memory served as a bridge in an initial conversation I had with him, when I mentioned my interest in choosing the cemetery as a possible site for research. At that moment, he interrupted my story to recall his own relationship with the place: during his childhood, he sold water on busy days, such as All Saints’ Day. In that memory, the graveyard caretakers also appeared, whom he described as active participants and experts on the territory, yet at the same time, largely unrecognized within the cemetery’s operations. There, the seed of what would later become this research began to take root.

Once I understood the family connection that preceded my own to the place, through my paternal grandmother, I also discovered a connection to a great-uncle, my maternal grandmother's brother, who is also buried in the cemetery. I decided to visit him one Sunday, unannounced and as a deeply personal gesture. I arrived at the site as a mourner and a visitor.

My initial stance was not that of an active observer, but rather that of a mourner and family member returning to the cemetery to reconnect with the memory of his grandmother and uncle. I went with the intention of introducing myself. That is what I did: I introduced myself to my grandmother as her son's son, as her grandson. I bought a large bouquet of flowers, and upon finding her niche, so small that it wouldn't hold the entire bouquet, I decided to place one flower of each color. I remained there for several minutes.

Near that spot stands a building known as "Los Caracoles"⁵, where I began searching for the niche of my Uncle Mel, my grandmother's brother. For several minutes I walked through aisles lined with rows of stacked niches. Along the way I met a woman and her daughter, who helped me find my way. Finally, we found the place where my uncle rested alongside his daughter. The niche was neglected, with a small cactus and the names written in marker. There I left the remaining flowers and stood in silence for several minutes.

I left that area with a sense of peace, having found my uncle and been able to pay my respects to my grandmother. However, as I made my way toward the cemetery exit, I felt disoriented by the sheer size and labyrinthine layout of the place. It was then that I realized the woman who had helped me was likely a groundskeeper. At that moment, a first insight struck me: some people within the cemetery possess a practical and detailed knowledge of the grounds. The caretakers seem to act as mediators of the space, connecting visitors with the resting places of the dead.

As I left the "Los Caracoles" section, I came across a stall next to a small hut where they sold flowers, water, food, and various funeral items. I stopped for a few seconds, trying to get my bearings to find the cemetery exit, and that's when I heard a voice say, "Hey! Are you lost?" It was the man running the stall, Andy.

Unsure of how to respond, I saw this as an opportunity to strike up a conversation and replied, "No... but I'm an anthropology student." I briefly explained my interest in

⁵ A multi-story building with niches on each floor. It gets its name from the spiral ramps on it.

understanding the place and asked if we could talk when he had time. He understood immediately and invited me into his workspace.

He welcomed me with unexpected hospitality. He invited me to sit at a table inside his stall, and just then, a woman appeared: Norma, who had been working at the cemetery for many years. They spread out an old map of *Cementerio General* on the table. In that instant, I realized two things at once: that the field was beginning to open up before me, and that I was being recognized as a participant within that space.

Norma and Andy were groundskeepers for the so-called “patio de tierra”⁶. During our conversation, they explained various aspects of their work and the day-to-day operations of the cemetery. Their work, that's often passed down through generations, consists of cleaning and maintaining the burial sites. However, they also pointed out that they do not receive a formal salary and that their livelihood depends mainly on tips given by visitors. They also recounted conflicts with other formal and informal workers, and tensions with the institution responsible for managing the cemetery. Through their words, the existence of a complex and largely invisible social network that forms part of daily life within the cemetery began to emerge.

As Norma pointed out: “Envy is awful... people fight over the plots, over the care, over the flowers, over the water.” Along the same lines, Andy added that “it’s not just outsiders; there’s also theft among the gardeners.”

That encounter marked a turning point. The field opened up unexpectedly, allowing me to talk with people who had a deep understanding of the place. Before leaving, I thanked Norma and Andy for their time, the conversation, and their willingness to share their experiences. At that very moment, the invitation remained open, as a gesture, and as the beginning of a connection that was starting to take shape in the field. I suggested the possibility of meeting again and talking, but this time accompanied by my research partner, Alexia Stoberg, with whom I am collaborating on this project.

As I left the cemetery that afternoon, I felt a sense of happiness. I had gone there for a personal reason that left me satisfied, and right after that, the possibility of a research project opened up. I left feeling grateful, grateful for the hospitality I had received, and certain that the place was much larger and more complex than I had imagined. From that moment on, the

⁶ These are dirt courtyards located beyond the brick wall that serves as a divider in the cemetery, revealing a different kind of death, set apart from the cemetery’s historic and ostentatious section.

research began to take shape, along with a broader understanding of the social life that thrives within *Cementerio General*.

The Social World of the Cemetery:

First field visit

Entering *Cementerio General* as a group was like stepping into another world, one removed from the constant bustle and chaos of the streets, leaving behind the mental noise and entering a realm of remembrance, care, and respect. It spans 86 hectares, with wide avenues where you're accompanied by birdsongs, the sound of brooms scraping across the ground, or bicycles with guards riding from one place to another.

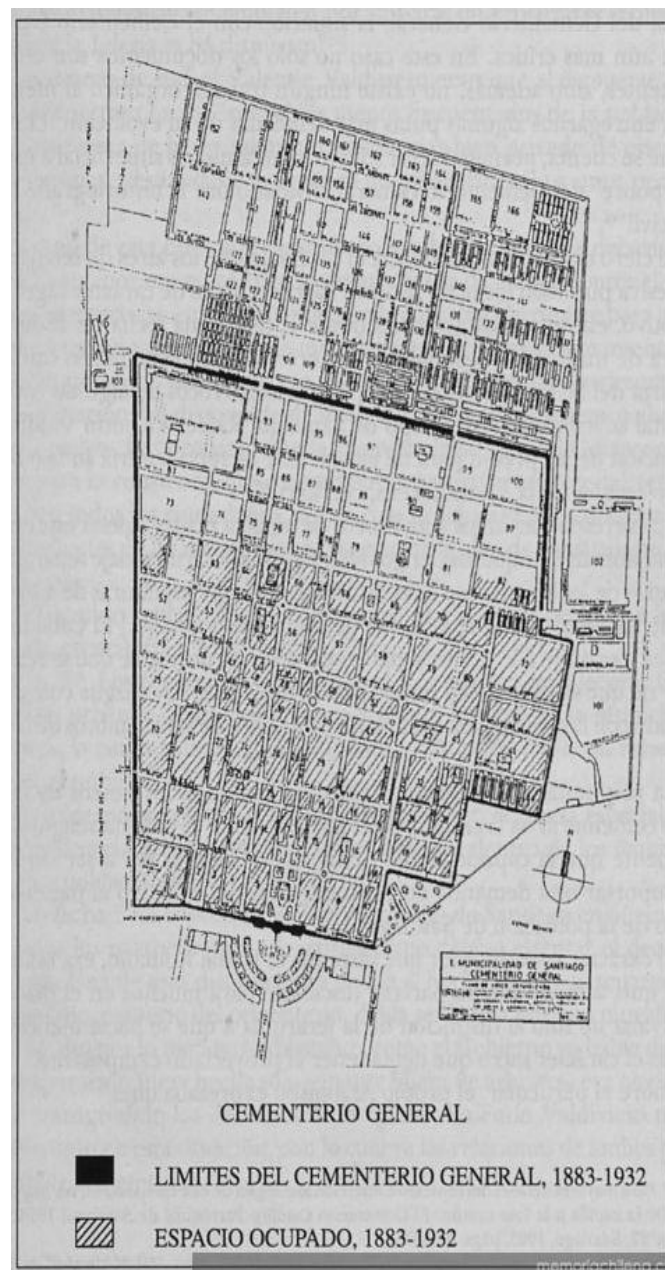


Figure 1: Plano Cementerio General de Santiago, 1883–1932 [Map of Santiago Cementerio General, 1883–1932]. From Memoria Chilena, Biblioteca Nacional de Chile.

From the entrance to Recoleta, passing through the tall gates next to the subway station, you'll first encounter the cemetery guards, who are responsible for monitoring the grounds and the people entering. As you venture deeper into this vast area, you'll likely encounter hundreds of graveyard caretakers, who are informal workers dedicated to maintaining this place, a space filled with emotions and memories, and one that sometimes also becomes a place of oblivion and abandonment.

In any case, they are the first people you are likely to encounter, whether on the main avenues like Limay or Horwitz, or on the endless streets that connect the entire cemetery. You can see them tending to the grounds, watering plants, selling food, lending a bucket to remove the dust covering the names on a grave, or helping those who find themselves lost among the cemetery's vast streets and alleys.

On our first field trips, we had the opportunity to accompany Norma and Andy while they were working. We spent hours talking, while we observed the care they take in tending to their plot, their space, and those they refer to as their "muertitos"⁷ As we cleared the ground of fallen leaves or pulled weeds growing over the graves, we struck up a conversation in which we heard stories about what it's like to care for this space.

Inside the cemetery, we noticed that some graves were visited frequently, and that families asked the caretaker to keep them well-maintained, while others had been neglected over time. We also heard about disputes they had with the caretaker of the cemetery located right behind theirs. The conversation was filled with information and memories about what it's like to work in this space, as well as the relationships and tensions that exist among the people who inhabit the place. These stories show that the cemetery is a space full of connections, a social network that expands and becomes increasingly complex.

Immersion and working methods

Earlier, on the initial sites, Alexia was responsible for securing research permits from the cemetery administration. Because of this, we also began to engage with certain institutional spaces within the site, understanding that the Cementerio General functioned as a complex

⁷ "My little dead ones" is a term used to refer to the deceased they care for in their backyard; it reflects the closeness and bond that develops between the caregivers and their deceased loved ones.

system composed of multiple levels of organization, where other ways of working exist; and on that occasion, while obtaining the permit, we were able to interact with guards, restorers, and secretaries

In the subsequent sections, we were able to observe different ways of working, inhabiting, and understanding the space. One such example was the guards, who are responsible for supervising the cemetery and mediating conflicts that arise within it.

While mapping the cemetery, we met a guard named Daniel, with whom we agreed to meet and talk the next day. When we arrived the following day, Daniel asked us to wait a moment, as he had to wait for the PDI⁸ to arrive because a vault had been "reventado"⁹.

While we waited for Daniel to finish the procedure, we decided to walk down San José Avenue in search of a worker. We ran into another guard named Claudio, who was eager to chat after we approached the "caseta"¹⁰ to ask for directions. While we were talking with Claudio, Daniel let us know he was available for a while to chat, so we decided to have separate conversations at the same time to get a wider variety of stories.

Later, when we got back together and discussed what had happened, we noticed how similar their stories were regarding their work and how they lived within the cemetery. Both said that, contrary to what many people tend to believe, what they consider dangerous in their work are not the dead or ghosts, but the people who enter to desecrate graves or steal within the cemetery, looking for the Christ figures or the handles of the bronze tombs to sell them.

Both also pointed out the lack of security personnel in the cemetery, explaining that no more guards are being hired. And while they do not have the same relationship with the dead as, for example, courtyard caretakers do, the cemetery space remains important to them. They describe it as a peaceful place, where the dogs, which have been abandoned at the cemetery, keep them company during their long shifts as they patrol the grounds or monitor the few security cameras on site.

⁸ PDI (Policía de Investigaciones de Chile) is Chile's national investigative police institution, responsible for criminal investigations and forensic work.

⁹ "Broken into" refers to when the lids of graves are broken open to desecrate the bodies or steal valuables.

¹⁰ A small or prefabricated structure designed to house people, store items, or provide temporary services; in the cemetery, they are used by groundskeepers as small personal storage sheds.

We began to build closer ties with the cemetery administration when we learned through social media about a heritage tour organized by the cemetery's management, which included a walking tour of various historic sites aimed at presenting a polished image of the area. The tour was led by Noemí, who has been working there for 14 years, organizing various tours and projects for the cemetery in collaboration with a team of actors and actresses who conduct theater-tourism tours throughout the year. To elaborate a bit more, the tours are aimed at a diverse audience, with different approaches and narratives, which allows participants to become immersed and connect emotionally in some cases.

The Heritage Tour with Noemí was filled with personal emotion, memory, and social struggle. We walked past memorials, mausoleums, and graves that hold a strong historical and social significance. At each stop, they gave a speech aimed at commemorating and keeping the history of the place alive.

When the guided tour ended, we approached her to talk and told her about our research project, to which she responded with the same enthusiasm she had shown during the tour. Although the cemetery requires her to maintain an institutional tone and image, she strives to include a message related to both collective and individual memory within her tours and presentations. Noemí mentioned during our conversation that she lays herself bare, sharing her daily emotions, and that some tours, such as the one in Courtyard 29, are much more painful to conduct because of this connection to the stories told along the routes.

Despite being part of the cemetery's institutional and formal space, her discourse and vision of the place do not stray from the daily reality of the site, and she recognizes herself as an intermediary—someone who facilitates dialogue between visitors and the administration, carrying out her work both on the ground and in organizing tours. In her narrative, she acknowledges the plot caretakers as key agents within the cemetery, noting that they are the ones who care for and maintain this space. She also points out that most caretakers have been working there for generations. Within the discourse of her tours, she highlights the importance of memory and of keeping art alive, thereby recognizing the system and the complex social life that forms within the cemetery.

Care and situated appropriateness

On our next field visit, we had to go back to get a document that would allow us to speak freely with the workers, but Alexia arrived early and took the opportunity to strike up conversations and expand our network of contacts. As a result, we once again worked in

parallel across different areas, which allowed us to cover a larger area and gather a wider variety of stories.

Alexia walked through several streets, recording the atmosphere of the cemetery, until she met Gloria, a caretaker who works in a courtyard located on the historic and ostentatious side of the cemetery. In this section, the nature of death changes; burials in vaults or in the ground give way to mausoleums, structures that rise high above our heads. Among these streets lies a courtyard known for housing a place associated with an urban legend well-known among cemetery visitors.

Gloria says that caring for this courtyard is difficult for her. When she's taking care of the place, the atmosphere changes; often, among the grass of the graves, she finds objects associated with witchcraft, and she usually feels as if someone is accompanying her while she works. For Gloria, the cemetery remains a peaceful place, but working in that section makes her feel uneasy. For that reason, she usually asks the guards to accompany her when she has to go in to sweep the hallways or remove the witchcraft items that turn up hidden in the dirt. Gloria said, "I'm careful inside, but I... when I go in, I'm accompanied... I go in with someone. Just enough to get the job done."

Brandon, on the other hand, met a cemetery caretaker, Sandrita, who explained how her work, despite being surrounded by death, is full of life. It is a job, in her words, where they must welcome visitors or those burying their relatives, and where they are responsible for receiving them, cleaning, maintaining the grounds, "sustaining death," and keeping things in order.

Sandrita has been working as a cemetery caretaker for 30 years. Before her, her mother worked caring for the same cemetery, and when she passed away, she left the care of the cemetery to her. Over time, and as in other stories, she grew accustomed to the place and formed a relationship of trust with the visitors, a relationship that grew stronger over the years.

Once we gathered as a team across the vast grounds, we listened to Kelita's story. She mentioned again that her work stems from a family tradition and that, although the place initially frightened her, over time she grew quite fond of the routine of caring for it. Despite the affection she feels for the cemetery, she describes her work as very demanding and sad. Kelita mentions that there are days when they might spend the entire shift working and still not receive tips or even a thank you from visitors. For this reason, she notes that she would not like to continue the tradition of passing this work down to future generations. For us as researchers

who have engaged with the space and formed a bond with the workers, it is harsh to hear the hostility directed at those who dedicate themselves to maintaining and caring for the cemetery; we are witnesses to the work that takes place there, and it should be much more valued and recognized by everyone around them

After our conversation with Kelita, the day was drawing to a close. The fatigue in our legs and backs from long walks through the cemetery's streets, combined with the exhaustion from conversations filled with stories that evoked various emotions in us, led us to seek a place to rest for a few minutes. We then headed toward the crematorium area, a space slightly set apart from the main flow of the cemetery, forming a margin within another margin, almost like a system of its own within a larger one. This condition is also visible on the cemetery map itself, where the crematorium appears delineated and separated from the rest of the usual routes.

The area is enclosed by high fences and features a pedestrian entrance and a vehicle entrance. Inside, it resembles a spacious park, with green areas, trees, and spaces set aside exclusively for the resting of the deceased in urns. Unlike other parts of the cemetery, the spatial layout here is different: there are no vaults or large mausoleums, but rather a more open and contained arrangement.

Within this space, the crematorium building, which includes offices and viewing rooms, occupies approximately one-third of the site. To access it, one must enter this park, walking past trees and benches, until reaching a structure that, despite being surrounded by nature, evokes a rather technical and industrial logic. In that sense, it resembles a kind of factory, softened by the environment that contains it.

Due to the time of day, the place was relatively quiet.

Throughout the research process, we sought to maintain an ethic of respect for the space: never interrupting rituals, not disturbing visitors or grieving family members, and approaching staff and visitors only when conditions permitted. However, at that moment, we tried to find an opportunity to speak with one of the crematorium staff members.

The Crematorium as a liminal system

It was in this context that we spoke with Marco, a crematorium worker, whose account offered a different perspective on death and the cemetery. For him, the space is not defined solely by death, but also by the daily life that unfolds there. On several occasions, he described

the cemetery as a kind of “park,” recalling his own childhood there. Marco grew up there: his father also worked at the cemetery, and the trade, as in many other cases we had observed among graveyard caretakers, was passed down through family ties.

This element further reinforces a characteristic we had previously identified in the field: the presence of occupational lineages within the cemetery. Entire families have worked for generations in various trades such as caretakers, gravediggers, crematorium workers, forming a network for the transmission of both practical and symbolic knowledge. In Marco’s case, the cemetery is more than a workplace; it is a territory of belonging. He described it as a second home, a space he cares for and maintains as his own. He remarked, for example, that if he saw something dirty or out of place, he would simply clean it up, just as he would in his own home. In Marco’s words: “Sometimes people leave something dirty behind; I pick it up and take it to the trash so it doesn’t look ugly. Just like any home, right?”

His account also shed light on the technical and bureaucratic aspects of death, a perspective that contrasts with many of the social representations of death that are steeped in mystery or fear. Marco explained that cremation procedures follow specific protocols: there is a waiting period of three to four days before the procedure takes place, bodies are identified through fingerprints and records, and strict control is maintained over every stage of the process. In that sense, the crematorium functions as a modern institution, organized according to principles similar to those of a hospital or a public service, where death is managed through technical and regulatory procedures.

Despite this technical dimension, the account also revealed a complex emotional relationship with the work. On the one hand, he spoke of death as an everyday occurrence, a reality that those who work there live with daily. However, it also acknowledged that certain cases, especially the death of children or people close to the staff, have a different impact. One statement that highlights this duality is: “We’re so used to it that we’re on autopilot. We know what we have to do. I mean, all my coworkers know what they have to do.” “...still, it hits you hard when they cremate a little boy, I don’t know, a grandson, five years old, four years old. You think of your own son, your own grandchildren. So then it’s like the whole thing gets heavier.” This suggests the existence of a unique balance between professional detachment and human sensitivity: a form of emotional detachment necessary to perform the job, but one that does not imply a complete lack of affection or empathy.

Another recurring theme in his account was experiences related to sensations or presences within the space. Marco mentioned that, although he himself said he didn't "see" anything, at times he could sense a different kind of energy in certain areas of the site. These accounts came across more as ambiguous experiences that form part of the everyday imagination of the workplace. Rather than defining a supernatural truth, these stories seemed to function as shared codes among workers: ways of organizing the experience of the place, reinforcing practices such as respect for the dead, caution in certain spaces, and the importance of maintaining a good mood during the workday.

At a particular moment in the conversation, Marco pointed out something that made a strong spatial impression during the fieldwork. We were talking in the crematorium building, while he mentioned that he always asked his colleagues to work with a positive attitude, play music, and keep the atmosphere as lighthearted as possible. "Because up here we have to be in good spirits," he told us, "down there it feels different." It was then that we realized the crematorium furnaces were located directly beneath the spot where we were sitting.

Access to that lower level was via a spiral ramp, which was also used to facilitate the movement of carts and equipment. As Marco recounted, as you descended, you could sense changes in the atmosphere, including in the temperature of the place, and Marco told the workers, "Do whatever you want, but stay cheerful. Because there's a lot of energy here and a lot of people crying. So that hits you, it hits you after the whole grueling routine, and it's like, we don't want that. So I tell them, 'Listen, sing, stay cheerful.'"

Down below were both the cremation furnaces and the areas designated for the temporary storage of bodies, which the workers colloquially referred to as "refrigerators." This vertical organization of space produced a strong symbolic feeling: above, the place where workers converse, rest, or socialize; below, the place where the final process of transforming the body takes place, the place seemed to be an axis mundi.

In this context, the role of the crematorium worker also emerges as that of a mediator. Marco performs technical tasks, guides families, answers questions, clarifies doubts about the processes, and, at times, provides emotional support to those who arrive with their loved ones. His work thus lies at the intersection of various dimensions: the technical and the symbolic, the bureaucratic and the emotional, the everyday and the ritual.

Through his account, death ceases to be presented solely as a final event associated with burial. In the case of the crematorium, it appears rather as a process: a transition in which bodies

remain temporarily within the institutional system before becoming ashes that are returned to the families. In this way, the cemetery is revealed once again as a living space, where multiple practices, forms of knowledge, and social relationships intertwine around the daily management of death. In this case, the crematorium functions as a system within a system, another margin within the territory.

Management

Building on the connections forged during our fieldwork and our ever-expanding knowledge of the area, we began to explore new avenues for conversation within the cemetery. Thanks to the permits secured from the administration and the contacts we established with various staff members, we were also able to access accounts from other levels of the institution's operations. And so, it was the subsequent meeting with the cemetery's general director that introduced one of the most significant contrasts within the research.

Up to that point, our understanding of *Cementerio General* had been built primarily from the situated experience of fieldwork: long walks through the courtyards, conversations with caretakers, guards, and workers, and observation of the daily practices that sustain the place. Through these experiences, we had begun to recognize the cemetery as a complex social network, sustained by emotional bonds, family memories, and informal forms of work.

The conversation with the director offered a different perspective, focusing on the institutional and administrative aspects of the cemetery. From this standpoint, the site was described as an institution grappling with multiple tensions: financial problems, legal constraints, labor disputes, and structural challenges in managing a space of *Cementerio General* magnitude.

In her account, the cemetery emerges as a critical setting. In the director's words, she repeatedly mentions the difficulties of maintaining order, cleanliness, and the upkeep of the space within a context of limited resources and regulations that restrict the possibilities for institutional intervention. In her words, there is no legal framework allowing for the delivery of materials, no agreement recognizing the caretakers, and legally, this cannot be done. Thus, the cemetery is presented as a site of memory or historical heritage, and also as a public institution subject to constant administrative pressures.

One of the most complex issues that arose during the conversation was the relationship between the administration and the groundskeepers. While our field observations showed that

the groundskeepers were key players in the day-to-day operations of the cemetery, cleaning, maintaining the grounds, guiding visitors, and building relationships with families, from the institutional perspective, their role becomes more ambiguous.

The director acknowledged them and requested that they be recognized as part of the site's intangible heritage, acknowledging the historical significance of their presence within the cemetery. However, she also pointed out that their status as informal workers creates significant administrative challenges. As she explained, there are more than two hundred caretakers working independently within the grounds, which makes it extremely difficult to regularize their status or fully integrate them into the institutional structure. In her words, "there are around 200 or so, 300 caretakers, so it's difficult to establish any kind of communication or benefit for them through formal channels."

This situation reveals a structural tension that runs through the cemetery's operations: many of the practices that sustain the daily care of the site take place outside the institution's formal framework. The caretakers work primarily based on informal agreements with families, rely on tips or direct payments, and organize their workday autonomously. From an administrative perspective, this reality creates a difficult-to-manage area, where the informal sector is indispensable for the system's functioning but at the same time eludes the state's regulatory mechanisms.

The director also highlighted the legal constraints facing the administration. Most of the graves and mausoleums are privately owned, which prevents the institution from directly intervening in their maintenance or restoration. Similarly, regulatory frameworks make it difficult to allocate public resources to workers who are not formally employed by the institution. In this sense, the cemetery appears as a space caught between rigid regulations and concrete needs that emerge daily on the ground.

Another central element of his account was the social inequality visible within the cemetery itself. As we moved through the space during our fieldwork, we had begun to notice how the forms of death varied by sector: from large mausoleums and monuments in the historic district to more working-class areas where the graves become progressively smaller, denser, and closer together.

From an institutional perspective, this inequality is also evident in terms of management. Heritage sectors historically associated with the elites receive the bulk of conservation efforts, while other areas face greater levels of neglect. In cases where families

stop paying for the maintenance of a grave, or when bodies are unclaimed, the remains may ultimately be cremated and subsequently interred in mass graves. This practice, presented by institutions as a necessary solution to the lack of space and resources, introduces a particularly critical dimension to our understanding of the cemetery.

This point sparked one of the most powerful reflections during the research: social inequality does not disappear with death; it continues to shape the space even after death. Remaining in a specific location within the cemetery, including its care, visibility, and continuity, it depends, to a large extent, on the ability to financially sustain that space over time.

In this regard, when it is no longer possible to pay for a family member's final resting place, the institutional alternative boils down to a standardized procedure: cremation and burial in a mass grave. This approach, far from being an exception, is part of the system's routine operation.

This, far from being an isolated finding, this situation had already been mentioned in previous conversations with caregivers and workers, who described it as a well-known reality, albeit one that is rarely brought to light. However, hearing about it within the institutional framework allowed us to grasp its scope, through which we came to understand that this is not merely an administrative practice, but a way in which inequality is materially inscribed in the territory, even after death.

Despite this critical assessment, Repetti's account also outlined a vision for the cemetery's future. Giannina notes, "We're working on a project that I'm not going to tell you about right now because it's coming out soon." Among their proposals were ideas aimed at integrating the site more actively into the city: strengthening heritage tourism, developing cultural routes, opening up spaces, and promoting activities that redefine the cemetery as part of the urban landscape. From this perspective, the cemetery would not be solely a place associated with mourning and death, but also a cultural and heritage space capable of generating new forms of relationship with the city.

For us, as field researchers, this encounter produced a significant contrast. While in our observations the cemetery appeared as a space deeply inhabited by workers, family memories, and informal relationships that gave meaning to the place, the institutional narrative presented it as an administrative system plagued by management problems, restrictive regulations, and structural challenges.

Rather than contradicting each other, the two perspectives seemed to view the same phenomenon from different angles. On the one hand, the cemetery is experienced in daily life by those who work there and inhabit it; on the other, the cemetery is administered through state structures. But ultimately, it is the informal workers who sustain, in a silent and non-institutionalized manner, much of the cemetery's daily operations, functioning as an invisible foundation upon which the system rests.

Following our conversation with the cemetery's director, our fieldwork began to move once again across different levels of the cemetery. While the meeting with the director had opened up an institutional and structural perspective on the cemetery's operations, in the days that followed we revisited the space, accompanying workers and observing the cemetery's daily life.

One of these encounters was with the president of the Federation of Workers of *Cementerio General*. As mentioned earlier, through the network of relationships and contacts we had built, along with negotiations with the administration and their authorization, we secured potential contacts with whom to speak.

In this case, the account focused mainly on the technical and organizational aspects of working at the cemetery. During our conversation, we walked with him through different sections of the grounds, which allowed us to see a different side of the place: the relationships between workers from different trades. As we walked, he greeted security guards, gardeners, groundskeepers, and other staff members we encountered along the way. Many of them seemed to know him well, responding to his greetings with warmth and respect.

More than the specific content of the conversation, this encounter allowed us to observe how workplace relationships within the cemetery are intertwined with personal bonds built over the years. The tour demonstrated that, despite the institutional tensions mentioned earlier, the cemetery continues to function as a social network where different workers recognize one another and maintain daily relationships with each other.

One aspect that particularly caught our attention during these meetings was the spatial trajectory of these types of institutional conversations. Unlike our walks with graveyard caretakers or informal workers, who often led us to the more working-class sections of the cemetery, meetings with administrative officials or institutional representatives tended to take place mainly in the heritage or historical area of the grounds.

Certain spaces within the cemetery seemed to clearly reflect distinct hierarchies and modes of representing the site. As we progressed on our walks, the spatiality and materiality of the territory became fundamental to understanding these differences, as something fully visible and traversed.

In this sense, a distinction became evident in the way the cemetery is presented and inhabited. From the spaces linked to management and administration, the tour tended to be directed toward the historic district, highlighting its heritage, monumental, and even tourist character. However, this emphasis implied, consciously or unconsciously, the omission of other sectors of the cemetery, particularly the so-called “dirt courtyard.”

This section, located beyond the historic wall, marks a physical and symbolic division within the cemetery. On one hand, it delineates the main section; on the other, it leads to an extension associated primarily with working-class neighborhoods, which emerged in the context of the crisis of the 1990s, when available space began to run short. Crossing this threshold involves moving through the territory and entering into another way of inhabiting death.

In the dirt courtyard, precariousness becomes more visible: the materiality of the space—that is, the ground-level graves, the overcrowding, the lack of infrastructure—intersects directly with working conditions. Dilapidated shacks, limited resources, and forms of organization appear that contrast with the monumentality and order of the historic section. This is a space where the work of the caretakers becomes more demanding, but also less visible within the institutional narrative.

This difference creates a central tension: why do certain tours not venture into these sectors? The omission of the dirt courtyard does not seem to be accidental, but rather forms part of a specific way of representing the cemetery, in which precariousness is displaced or obscured by the site’s heritage image. Thus, inequality is expressed in the material conditions of the spaces, but also in the ways in which they are displayed, traversed, and narrated.

Last field visit

Finally, at what would be our last site of observation, we returned to the cemetery early in the morning. On this occasion, we worked in parallel again, which allowed us to broaden the diversity of stories and narratives. While Alexia went ahead to find a gravedigger in the

administrative area on Av. En La Paz, Brandon began talking with various workers responsible for maintenance tasks.

Among them were Francisco, Sofia, and Rosa, who worked primarily on cleaning and maintaining the formal sections of the cemetery, especially in areas near the historic district. Their accounts were brief, but they reinforced something we had already heard on multiple occasions: the cemetery operates through a variety of trades that sustain its daily functioning, many of which are invisible to visitors.

Later, we spoke with Lucía, a plot caretaker, who again mentioned themes that recurred constantly in the stories of those who work there. She spoke of inherited work, of relatives who tended other nearby plots, and of how family networks extended within the cemetery itself. She also noted, like other caretakers, that a large part of her income depended on tips from visitors or informal agreements with families requesting grave maintenance.

That same day, we also spoke with Jesús, the cemetery gravedigger. Although his main job involves the more hands-on aspects of funeral services, he told us that a large part of his daily work consists of transporting wreaths and floral arrangements to various wakes and ceremonies within the grounds.

His story, once again, touched on a recurring theme we had heard many times: he grew up in the cemetery from a very young age, and many of his colleagues are childhood friends. The work was not merely an occupation, but a continuation of life. With over twenty years of experience, Jesús spoke from a wealth of practical knowledge and familiarity with the place. We decided not to delve into the most grueling aspects of the job, not out of evasion, but out of respect for the flow of the conversation and the boundaries he himself set.

It was at that moment that an unexpected connection emerged between different accounts from our fieldwork. The flowers Jesús was transporting that day were destined for a wake being held in the crematorium area. Days earlier, we had learned that a worker we had hoped to speak with would be unable to do so due to the recent death of a close relative. Without going into details or revealing identities, we realized that the paths we had been following were beginning to intersect at a single point in the territory.

That scene was neither planned nor sought out. It simply happened. And yet, it encapsulated something we had been observing from the very beginning: within the cemetery, networks intersect time and again. Workers, families, officials, and visitors are part of a dense

network where stories rarely remain isolated. What at first seemed like a series of independent encounters turned out to be a broad, vibrant, and deeply interconnected social network.

That intersection was the threshold that led us to the next encounter.

Óscar

As evening fell, we decided to head back toward the crematorium area. This space, as we mentioned earlier, has a distinctive feature within the cemetery: it is fenced off and slightly set apart from the rest of the grounds, functioning almost as a margin within the system itself. If the cemetery already presents itself as a space separate from the city, the crematorium seems to constitute an additional margin within that margin, an area where the administration of death takes on a more technical, automated, and silent form. However, this technical character coexists with a park-like aesthetic: expansive green areas, well-manicured grass, and open paths that visually soften the experience of the place. It was there, in a park, that we finally spoke with Óscar, the caretaker of the area, whom we had seen on multiple occasions riding his bicycle through the cemetery or working on graves in different sections. In previous encounters, our attempts at conversation had been postponed; however, we always exchanged a greeting, a brief exchange, a closeness that was slowly building even without a formal interview having taken place.

The encounter with Óscar marked one of the most significant moments of our fieldwork. Even before we formally introduced ourselves, he told us that he had already seen us several times, outside of our previous encounters with him, walking through the cemetery, watching us as we talked with other workers. At that moment, we still didn't realize that, while we were observers, we had also been observed. That shifted our perception of the site slightly; we weren't just researchers traversing a space; over time, we became a recognizable presence within it. The conversation began on the benches near the crematorium, where Óscar had his caretaker's booth. The exchange quickly took on a casual tone, filled with laughter and references to other workers we already knew, reinforcing the sense of community that had been emerging over the months.

In the middle of that conversation, a comment came up that opened up a whole new dimension to the experience. Óscar pointed out that it wasn't usual for outsiders to be able to talk to so many workers inside the cemetery and suggested, with a laugh, that we had probably been "pushed" by the people there themselves, or even by those resting there: "You guys are walking with that angel, you're walking with an angel who guides you; I told you without

meaning to, I told you without meaning to what you needed.” This idea emerged as a recurring theme, as at various points during the fieldwork other workers had mentioned that “the little dead ones” were happy that we were talking about them. Rather than seeking to verify or refute these statements, we decided to hold onto the question they raised: was this access the result of our own perseverance as researchers and our genuine interest in the work at the cemetery, or of these “nudges” attributed to those who are no longer here? The coexistence of these interpretations allowed us to understand that access to the field cannot be explained solely through methodological planning, but also through the systems of meaning that structure the everyday experience of the place.

The moment took on an even more intimate quality when Óscar called us “little angels,” suggesting that our presence had been warmly welcomed. Beyond its symbolic significance, this gesture encapsulated something we had gradually come to realize: through our research, in addition to employing formal tools, we had managed to forge bonds built slowly through respect and persistence. Then Cynthia, Óscar’s partner, appeared and joined the conversation, confirming that she had also seen us walking through the cemetery earlier; the scene cemented that accumulated sense of familiarity. The conversation became even more relaxed, transforming into an unexpectedly intimate closing moment. What began as an interview ended up feeling more like a long-overdue, almost intimate conversation. When we finally got up to leave, Óscar hugged us and thanked us for everything, for the research, for talking, and for taking an interest in his work. That reciprocal gesture marked the symbolic conclusion of our fieldwork during that semester.

Thus, over the course of more than twelve field trips, spending over forty-six hours inside the cemetery, we held approximately sixteen in-depth conversations with workers and had numerous brief exchanges with other people who live in or visit the site. In total, we spoke with around thirty people, including plot caretakers, guards, gravediggers, maintenance workers, administrative staff, and visitors.

Beyond the numbers, what emerged was an understanding of *Cementerio General* as a living necropolis. Far from being a static space, the cemetery functions as a complex social organism where death does not bring the collective to a close; rather, it reorganizes itself. Every actor, from the graveyard caretakers to the administration and institutional leadership, participates in the daily upkeep of the place. In this sense, the field did not close with the end

of the academic semester; on the contrary, it remains open as a territory of constant inquiry, where life, work, memory, and death continue to intertwine.

Results

The Cemetery as a living system

At first glance, the *Cementerio General* may appear to be a static space, associated primarily with mourning and death. However, as the fieldwork progressed, this initial impression began to fade, giving way to an understanding of a complex, dynamic system in constant flux. The cemetery revealed itself to be a space where multiple practices, actors, and temporalities intersect on a daily basis.

In this sense, the cemetery can be understood as a space that, even though it is embedded within the city, operates according to its own logic, which reorganizes its hierarchies and forms of coexistence. As Foucault (1984) suggests when referring to certain “other spaces,” it is not a territory isolated from the urban order, but one that reflects and reconfigures it under specific rules. The cemetery is not outside the city; it is one of its clearest condensations, operating as a parallel city.

A territory that revealed itself as a functioning urban micro-society. Visitors who activate economic circuits and flows of movement, guards who regulate traffic and security, an administration that manages the institutional image of the site, and groundskeepers who maintain large sections of the place both materially and relationally, form an interdependent and informal network that keeps the space in constant operation. Each actor participates in a system that extends beyond the funeral function and generates dynamics characteristic of social organization.

The cemetery takes shape as a network of trajectories that continually intersect, adjust, and are negotiated. In Ingold's (2011) terms, the space functions as a web of shifting lines, woven into the daily practices of those who inhabit it, not an empty or neutral container. From this perspective, the cemetery is not a collection of isolated individuals; it is an ongoing relational process where social life reorganizes itself around death.

Although this system was not formally designed as an autonomous society, in its daily functioning it operates as such: it possesses distinct roles, implicit hierarchies, formal and informal economies, territorial disputes, the transmission of knowledge, and support networks that ensure its continuity. The territory we entered with uncertainty gradually revealed itself as

an inhabited space, laden with relationships, tensions, and ways of life that far exceed its funerary function.

In this sense, the cemetery is not merely a place where death dwells; it manifests as a space where life reorganizes itself around it.

The network that sustains

Throughout the fieldwork, it became clear that the cemetery's operations do not depend exclusively on its formal administrative structure, but rather on a network of everyday relationships that sustain the place both materially and symbolically. Beyond institutional organizational charts, what we observed was a web of connections built over time, in which trust, reciprocity, and mutual recognition play a central role.

The graveyard caretakers, for example, manage physical spaces; they handle relationships with families, negotiate with other workers, and maintain informal ties that allow the system to function smoothly. Similarly, the guards, administrative staff, and maintenance workers operate in constant interdependence, adjusting their actions according to contingent situations that are often not covered by formal regulations.

In this sense, the cemetery can be understood as a relational field in which positions are not defined solely by official titles, but by the recognition accumulated within the network. Following Bourdieu (1986), capital is not limited to the economic; it also includes social and symbolic resources that allow certain actors to exert influence, mediate conflicts, or facilitate access.

Long-standing presence in the area, practical knowledge of the territory, close ties to certain sectors, and a reputation built up over time all function as forms of capital that shape day-to-day dynamics.

This became evident in numerous situations: workers referring us to others, implicit recommendations that sparked conversations, warnings about whom to approach or when to do so. Access to the field was neither linear nor neutral; it was mediated by this network of intersecting legitimations. Each conversation paved the way for the next, and each strengthened connection reinforced our position within the network.

However, this network is neither homogeneous nor harmonious. There are also tensions, hierarchical differences, and silent disputes that permeate the space. Institutional administration, for example, projects a formal image of the cemetery that does not always align

with the daily practices of those who carry out this kind of routine work. This coexistence of institutional and practical levels produces frictions that are a constitutive part of the system.

Rather than a rigid structure, what we observed was a fabric in constant adjustment. The cemetery's continuity depends not solely on regulations or administrative procedures, but on this network's capacity to sustain connections, resolve contingencies, and reproduce forms of cooperation that allow the space to continue functioning. In this sense, the necropolis is sustained less by its architecture than by the relationships that traverse it.

Tensions Within the System: Between Norm and Practice

If the cemetery functions as a living system sustained by relational networks, it is also true that this functioning is neither harmonious nor linear. Throughout the fieldwork, it became evident that the space does not operate solely under the formal rules that govern it, but rather through a constant negotiation between the normative and the everyday.

From an institutional perspective, the cemetery must project a clear image: historical heritage, an orderly space, regulated infrastructure, an urban monument. There is an official narrative that organizes the visitor experience, defines heritage circuits, and projects a coherent representation of the site to the outside world. This dimension is visible, structured, and carefully managed.

However, in daily practice, the cemetery's actual functioning depends on situational decisions, verbal agreements, informal mediations, and accumulated knowledge that do not always align with written regulations. These are not merely exceptions to the rule; they constitute a distinct way of producing order. Institutional order seeks stability, whereas everyday order operates through adaptation.

Caretakers negotiate yard boundaries, assign tasks, mediate conflicts between families, and resolve unforeseen situations not covered by the regulations. Security guards adapt their approach based on the context. Maintenance workers coordinate tasks that go beyond formal protocols. What keeps the cemetery running is not the rigid enforcement of rules, but the ability of those who work there to resolve contingencies in real time.

This difference does not always lead to open confrontation, but it does produce silent friction. There are moments when the projected image of the cemetery as a heritage monument does not align with the lived experience of those who sustain it daily. The gap between representation and practice does not destabilize the system; it constitutes it.

The tension is not expressed as a rupture, but as a constant adjustment. The space remains operational because both dimensions, the formal and the informal, coexist and are mutually dependent. Administration structures, but practice sustains. Regulations define boundaries, but concrete experience resolves issues.

In this sense, the cemetery is neither a perfectly oiled machine nor a chaotic territory. It is a space that functions through this productive friction, where different ways of understanding order coexist and overlap.

Death as an extension of inequality

So far, we have shown that the cemetery is a living, tension-filled system. However, upon closer inspection, a deeper dimension emerges: death does not eliminate inequality; rather, it reorganizes it into new forms.

Physical movement within the cemetery is political. There is an internal geography that embodies social differences. Upon entering via Avenida La Paz, “the main entrance,” visitors encounter monumental mausoleums, marble sculptures, family chapels, and names inscribed on polished stone. Here, memory takes on a solid, elevated, and enduring form. The architecture occupies space, imposes itself visually, and projects permanence.

As one proceeds along O’Higgins Avenue (the main street, which runs the length of the cemetery), the scale changes. The graves become smaller; stacked niches appear, along with dense walls that stack bodies vertically, and, further on, earthen courtyards bounded by simple structures. The monumentality diminishes, the materiality becomes more fragile, and permanence depends on constant maintenance. This is not merely a matter of aesthetic differences. It is a visible spatial stratification. Urban inequality does not end with biological life; it is reconfigured within the funerary landscape.

As Achille Mbembe (2003) has pointed out, modern power manages life and, beyond that, the conditions under which death is administered and distributed. Necropolitics is not limited to the act of killing; it also involves the differential organization of who can live better, who is exposed to greater vulnerabilities, and how the spaces where death is inscribed are regulated. In the cemetery, this administration does not manifest as explicit violence, but rather as material differentiation. Not everyone rests in the same way, not everyone occupies the same space, not everyone has access to the same kind of memory.

Some bodies are inscribed in marble and remain in family mausoleums for generations. Others are embedded in dense, overlapping walls, where remembrance depends on periodic payments or administrative renewals. In the most precarious cemeteries, continuity rests on daily care. Without maintenance, many graves deteriorate rapidly, become overgrown with weeds, and lose visibility. Death thus appears as a continuation of the social structure. Memory is not the same for everyone, and this difference is not accidental. Even after death, access to permanence is mediated by economic resources, family networks, and the ability to sustain the space over time. Death does not equalize; it redistributes the conditions of permanence.

The crematorium adds another layer to this reorganization. The reduction of the body to ashes eliminates the prolonged occupation of land, but it does not eliminate differentiation. Inequality manifests itself in the ability to choose one's final resting place, in the ability to afford urns, columbariums, or specific rituals. Even in the physical dissolution of the body, the economy continues to operate.

We do not claim that the cemetery produces inequality. Rather, it reflects and reorganizes it within its own topography. The city does not end at its urban boundaries; it extends into its city of the dead. The cemetery is a space of collective rest, but not a passive one; it is an active social map where inequality remains inscribed and where power is also exercised in the administration of final rest.

The Cemetery as a multilayered system

What emerges from this research cannot be fully grasped in a single semester; it is not a static institution, but rather a dynamic, stratified system in which multiple logics coexist. The *Cementerio General* functions simultaneously as a formal administrative structure, an informal network, a spatial manifestation of inequality, and a symbolic territory where memory and mourning are constantly negotiated.

Its functioning does not depend on a single organizing principle. Institutional regulation, daily adaptation, economic differentiation, and emotional bonds are not mutually exclusive: they overlap and sustain one another. The cemetery is structured by rules but is maintained through practices. It reflects urban hierarchies but also produces its own internal reorganizations.

Far from being a static space associated solely with the end of life, the cemetery appears as a system in constant adjustment. Within it, death does not bring social life to a close; it

reorganizes it, and the dead are active social agents. It is precisely in this overlap, between the formal and the informal, between permanence and transformation, between administration and lived experience, that its vitality is sustained.

Conclusions

The social life that thrives within the *Cementerio General* shows that death does not bring the city to a standstill: it reorganizes it. What may appear from the outside to be a static, silent space is revealed, through ethnographic experience, as a territory shaped by labor, inequality, memory, institutional regulation, and the everyday connections that sustain its functioning.

The cemetery is not merely a place of mourning. It is an urban microcosm where the same tensions that run through the city are reproduced and reconfigured: spatial hierarchies, differentiated economies, disputes over recognition, and informal ways of sustaining what the formal structure fails to cover. Within its walls, not only do bodies rest; relationships circulate, positions are negotiated, and networks are maintained that allow the system to continue operating.

The workers, yard caretakers, gravediggers, guards, and maintenance staff, among others, are not secondary actors in this dynamic. They are the ones who mediate between the norm and practice, between the institution and the families, between death and the continuity of social life. Their daily work reveals that the cemetery's functioning depends less on its monumental architecture than on the relationships that run through it.

The question that guided this research “what is the nature of the social life that inhabits the cemetery” finds here a partial but significant answer: it is an organized, tense, and persistent life that does not disappear in the face of death, but rather reorganizes itself around it. The *Cementerio General* does not mark the end of social life; it reveals it in another form. In this space where the city lays its dead to rest, the city also continues. It is a living necropolis, a parallel city.

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Cheap, Unique, and Eco-Friendly: How Ferias Have Become a Staple in Second-Hand Clothing Shopping

Introduction

Identity is constructed through a constellation of elements, each of which plays a key role in shaping how we understand ourselves and how we are perceived by others. Although no single component can fully account for this complexity, the way we dress our bodies offers a particularly powerful lens through which identity becomes visible. Clothing not only helps establish how we wish to present ourselves but also mediates how we are read by others. As Hansen (2004) argues, “Because it both touches the body and faces outward toward others, dress has a dual quality [...] This two-sided quality invites us to explore both the individual and collective identities that the dressed body enables” (p. 372).

Because dressing the body is a way of positioning oneself within a particular context, it can be understood as a form of performance that uses the body as a vehicle of communication. As Gaillard and Visser (2022) note, “What we put on our bodies is a signal to others, consciously or unconsciously emitted, and often we signal to others with clothes that we feel resemble our identity” (p. 2). From this perspective, a range of factors that might initially seem secondary become central to understanding the clothed individual. One of these factors is the way clothing is acquired, especially in an era in which second-hand shopping has gained increasing importance both as a strategy to reduce the pollution generated by the textile industry and as a response to the rising cost of living.

In Chile, one of the most popular places to obtain second-hand clothing is the *ferias libres* [street markets], not only for utilitarian reasons such as variety and affordability, but also for hedonic ones, such as atmosphere and social interaction. As a result, the feria becomes more than a site of commercial exchange (Peñaloza et al., 2015). This article analyzes how the second-hand clothing areas of *ferias libres*—particularly those near San Bernardo Station and Observatorio Station—attract a specific demographic, mainly young adults associated with subcultures and with forms of green consumption. These consumers turn away from the mass-produced garments of the fast fashion industry in search of clothing that is cheap, unique, and eco-friendly. At the same time, the repeated use of local ferias contributes to the creation of a space in which both clients and vendors benefit from sustained interaction.

How to Dress the Body

As noted above, the clothed body functions as a visual guide to individual identity. “The use of goods as symbols for communicating with other consumers is related to the use of goods in the development of self-identity” (Piacentini & Mailer, 2006, p. 252). This makes it necessary to examine the factors that shape both the acquisition and the use of clothing. According to Haanpää (2007), consumption is structured by contextual factors such as economic, cultural, and social resources; by individual factors, including socio-demographic conditions; and by personality-related factors such as values, beliefs, and worldviews.

Clothing consumption is no exception. The use of particular shapes, colors, textures, and iconographies signifies different things depending on the social and cultural context in which an individual is situated. This becomes especially relevant among people who use self-expression as a means of finding community and a sense of belonging, particularly consumers who employ clothing to affiliate themselves with specific subcultures (Rahman et al., 2011). In order to recognize other members of the group, subcultural styles tend to rely on distinctive visual markers. As Kruse (1993) suggests, identification involves a process of differentiation. Consequently, the lack of access to certain garments can limit one’s chances of achieving recognition and belonging within a scene.

For example, members of the punk scene participate in DIY (do it yourself) culture, where spontaneity and improvisation are central values (Triggs, 2006). As a result, the garments they wear are often made from what they already have or what they can afford, such as battle jackets or crust pants. In this context, individuals who purchase expensive, company-curated versions of “DIY-looking” clothing are frequently excluded and labeled as posers, revealing how authenticity is negotiated through material practices.

At the same time, the growth of consumerism and the rapid circulation of trends have led fast fashion to generate enormous amounts of textile waste. As Brooks et al. (2017) note, “The unbridled consumption of clothing threatens the environment” (p. 482). Environmentally conscious consumers, therefore, seek to incorporate green consumption practices into their clothing routines in order to maintain more sustainable lifestyles. One important response to this problem is what is known as slow fashion, a concept that challenges the growth-oriented logic of fast fashion and proposes alternative ways of producing and consuming clothing (Fletcher, 2010). While slow fashion is often associated with durable garments, eco clothing, or organic clothing (Deutschen & Moll, 2021), these options are frequently expensive and thus inaccessible to many people.

Where to Buy Apparel

Given these tensions, the mass-produced clothing offered by fast fashion retailers does not meet the needs of the groups discussed above. On the one hand, individuals involved in subcultures tend to seek unique garments that resonate with their specific scenes (Rahman et al., 2011). On the other hand, environmentally conscious consumers look for ways to participate in more sustainable forms of fashion (Deutschen & Moll, 2021). In this context, traditional retail spaces such as shopping malls—characterized by standardized products and limited affordable sustainable options—are often discarded. If these spaces are rejected, where can clothing that meets these criteria be found? One answer lies in second-hand markets, and in Chile, these are most visibly represented by *ferias libres*.

Ferias libres have existed in Chile for nearly two hundred years, and today they constitute a widespread phenomenon, with approximately 900 *ferias* across the country, most of them concentrated in the metropolitan region and its surroundings (Tejada, 2013). These markets usually consist of between 50 and 200 vendors who set up their stands early in the morning and close in the afternoon (Tejada, 2013), offering a wide range of products. *Ferias* differ significantly from other shopping spaces. As Rajagopal (2010) observes, “Street markets are considered more as social organizations with ethnic congregation than business networks, whereas shopping malls have emerged as technology-led business outlets and lifestyle centres in urban areas” (p. 278). In this sense, malls often convey a “synthetic” atmosphere that contrasts with the more “homey” and improvised character of the *feria*. Rather than being a space planned by professionals, the *feria* is a street temporarily occupied by people who work with what they have, in a way reminiscent of the *bricoleur* described by Lévi-Strauss (1966).

People often frequent *ferias* instead of conventional markets because of their low prices and variety (Peñaloza et al., 2015), particularly in relation to clothing. Although industrial manufacturers respond to consumer demand and reproduce current trends—including subcultural styles among youth (Crane, 1999)—their products are mass-produced. In contrast, *ferias* offer garments from a wide range of places and time periods. As a result, many of these items are unique or vintage and, in some cases, of higher quality than contemporary fast fashion products. Communication with vendors at *ferias* is also more direct. Due to the informal character of these markets, sales often depend on the relationships vendors build with their clients (Busso, 2010). This opens the possibility for more sustained forms of social interaction,

which, as Salazar (2004) argues, turn ferias into spaces that preserve civic and social relations and function as incubators of local social networks.

Field Observations

Both visits to the ferias—San Bernardo Station and Observatorio Station—were conducted on Sundays, when attendance is particularly high. The primary method used to collect data for this ethnographic exploration was the keeping of field notes, which form the basis for the observations and interpretations presented below.

Feria at San Bernardo Station

The first stands I encountered upon arriving at the feria were dedicated to second-hand clothing. The woman running the first one I approached shouted “a luca,” referring to the price of the garments piled in two large heaps beside her. Four people, all young adults with distinctive styles, were leaning over these piles, searching through the clothes. One of them caught my attention because their outfit closely resembled styles currently popular on social media, suggesting that trendy items can indeed be found in these spaces.

As I continued walking through the market, I stopped at as many second-hand clothing stands as possible. The feria is organized in such a way that groceries occupy one sector, while second-hand items are concentrated in another. The variety of garments was striking, differing in color, texture, and quality. In one stand, for instance, sportswear appeared heavily used, with the smell of sweat still embedded in the fabric. What remained relatively constant, however, was the age group of the customers: most people bending over the piles of clothes were young adults, many of them arriving in pairs or small groups. The music playing in this section of the feria consisted largely of songs popular among younger audiences, and a few stands further on sold items associated with kawaii fashion, such as Sanrio merchandise.

As I was leaving the grocery section, I stopped at a stand that sold drinks and offered a small space for customers to sit. While I was there, the vendor asked what I was doing, and after I explained the purpose of my visit, he suggested that I talk to other vendors, since, according to him, they enjoyed engaging in conversation with customers as a way of building loyalty. He also mentioned that if I needed to record anything, I could simply say it was for social media, as this was already familiar to them. When I asked about the impact of social media, he explained that the feria near San Bernardo Station had gained significant visibility through influencers. According to him, this exposure had led people from across the city to

visit in search of second-hand clothing, a phenomenon he described as having a positive impact on the market.

Feria at Observatorio Station

The feria at Observatorio Station is well known on social media for a stand that displays a large quantity of second-hand clothing at extremely low prices. Reaching this particular stand requires walking into the heart of the market, and along the way, it becomes clear that it is not the only second-hand clothing stand in the feria, although it is the largest in terms of both size and number of customers. The stand occupies around six tents, whereas most others consist of only one or two. Despite its size, it becomes so crowded that moving around the clothing racks is often difficult.

In contrast to the feria at San Bernardo Station, the vendors at this stand do not need to shout to attract customers, as the space fills up on its own early in the day. Instead, when a customer asks for the price of a particular item, they are simply told, and when a purchase is made, the garment is placed in a plastic bag. The demographic profile here is slightly different from that of the San Bernardo feria. It is not limited to young adults; rather, people of all ages visit, likely due to the quantity and diversity of clothing available. Nevertheless, it is still possible to observe individuals associated with subcultures and with sustainable consumption practices searching for garments that are both affordable and of good quality.

For instance, while I was browsing the racks, a long black skirt caught my attention. Before I could reach it, however, a teenager dressed in goth attire picked it up. They eventually put it back, although, unfortunately for me, it turned out to be too large. A while later, a woman and her daughter arrived and began looking through the racks in front of me. I overheard them discussing how the quality of clothing in malls and online stores had declined over time and how buying clothes at ferias was both more convenient and, as the daughter added, better for the planet.

Conclusion

As it has been established throughout this article, the dressed body is key to unveiling an individual's identity, "Hardly any area of contemporary social life is not subject to fashion" (Aspers & Godart, 2013, p. 172), and thus picking an item of clothing to wear is a form of communication itself. The two demographics explored, young adults who affiliate with certain subcultures and environmentally conscious individuals, look for second-hand garments to fill

their closets, as said items encapsulate their persona, and they have found ferias to be a perfect place to acquire such items. This can be observed in the teenager in the feria in Observatorio Station who could be recognized as a goth purely from their use of black clothing and striking makeup (Young, 1999).

Due to how much people prefer ferias in comparison to other markets, they have become a notorious source of second-hand apparel, gaining widespread popularity; consequently, the vendors have adapted their stands with the purpose of accommodating their new clientele. For instance, ferias invest in music in the store ambiance, the same way retailers would (Iyer & Kuksov, 2012). A key finding is that, in doing so, people begin to frequent their local ferias, which transforms them into spaces of mutual benefit where both clients and vendors establish reciprocal relationships. This new wave of customers has also allowed new stands to incorporate themselves into the ferias, as is the case of vendors that sell (mostly counterfeit) Sanrio merchandise, to appeal to members who affiliate themselves with kawaii fashion, as even when the company itself became aware of its impact on the fashion industry, they decided to focus on it (Yano, 2009). All these transformations the feria has suffered as of recently have been constructed, whether directly or indirectly, by both vendor and clientele, which in turn has cultivated a space both parties can benefit from. This newly founded feria serves as a place where the studied demographic can experience traditional shopping centers in the streets near their homes, they can window shop or enjoy a snack, they are also able to utilize this space as a place to spend time with friends, as observed by the groups of young adults visiting the feria together.

Aftermath

As positive as the situation may seem, the newly found popularity of feria could become the cause of its own downfall. The vendor at the drinks stand attributed the growth of the feria at San Bernardo station to people on social media recommending the place as a fantastic spot to buy secondhand clothing. He argues this is positive for the vendors and to the feria as a whole. However, many social media influencers who focus on ferias, claim that with time this slowly kills the market, as the rise of clients from other locations causes gentrification, or “an influx of upper-income people to low-income areas” (Hyra, 2016, p. 169), thus eliminating one of the biggest attractions, the low prices. To avoid this, influencers suggest considering the enormous number of ferias throughout the country (Tejada, 2013), and that people visit instead those closest to them. Although both ferias (San Bernardo station and Observatorio Station) have recently gained popularity, neither seems to be facing an imminent risk of gentrification.

However, it is still important to monitor potential changes in these markets over time to be sure.

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Childhood and Community

A Reflection on Visits to the Feria Friki

The Fair and its Concept

The Feria Friki is a type of itinerant fair that moves through different areas of the Región Metropolitana de Santiago, bringing with it various stalls that sell *friki* items. An example of this movement can be seen on the fair's Instagram account, as on August 3rd it was held at Mall Plaza Oeste, on the 10th in Recoleta, on the 17th in La Pintana, on the 24th in Pedro Aguirre Cerda, to name but a few.

The term *friki* can be quite broad, in fact, we ourselves struggled to define it precisely. We understood the concept, since we knew that if you are an otaku, you are a friki, and if you are a gamer, you are a friki, but being a friki does not necessarily make one a gamer or an otaku. One could say that they are related in a genus-to-species relationship. For the sake of conciseness, the Real Academia Española [RAE] defines friki in two senses. The first refers to an extravagant, strange, or eccentric individual, the second describes someone with an excessive and obsessive devotion to a particular interest (Field diary, Recoleta, 2025).

Visiting the fair proved instrumental to clarify this term, as we realized that the fair manages to bring together and group different communities under the term friki, “from the most classic, such as science fiction or fantasy, through video games, anime, and K-pop, and to medieval culture or professional wrestling” (Field diary, Mall Plaza Norte, 2025).

The Experience of Visiting the Feria Friki

We chose to focus our research on the Feria Friki because it was a topic that resonated with us. It captured our attention and sparked our interest since we both identify as frikis. Consequently, our positionality as observers is deeply intertwined with the subject of study, and very few aspects of it were unknown to us.

The experience varied significantly with each visit, as each occasion of the fair was held in a different setting. Our first visit was to a park where the air felt thick, due to the large amount of dust being stirred up and the incessant flow of traffic. Compounding this, many stalls played their own music, resulting in significant noise pollution.

The second visit took place inside a shopping mall. While air quality was no longer a concern, we encountered significant issues regarding noise and space constraints. The area was densely crowded, and the music was played at extremely high volume. Furthermore, there was a dance performance in the center of the venue, which encouraged crowding and increased noise pollution.

Fortunately, these issues were absent during the third visit. The space was large; there were no cars passing through despite being a parking lot. Besides, there were only two sources of intense noise: a stage, where a Dance Cover competition was taking place, and a ring where a wrestling show was underway. However, these sounds did not interfere with each other. Everything seemed to be better coordinated and organized. The significant presence of children at this fair underscores this sense of organization, as parents tend to bring their children to environments that inspire greater confidence and safety.

One aspect that caught our attention as we explored these spaces is that the friki experience takes place in very different environments, and these environments ultimately determine how the community interacts. In an open park, for example, airborne dust and the smells of street food accompany the movement of people going from stall to stall. In a shopping mall, loud music and crowds make everything feel more stifling. While working on this ethnography, we learned that recording these sensory experiences is fundamental to better communicate what we experienced in each field site. We drew inspiration from the text by Harris et al. (2019), in which they show through their omelet experiment that the sensory dimension is an essential part of ethnographic work, as it allows what is observed to be completed by what is felt. In this sense, being friki transcends clothing or merchandise. It is also found in inhabiting these places, experiencing the atmosphere, sharing it with others, and having an experience that cannot be fully described if the sensory elements present at the friki fair are ignored.

Be a Child Again

One of the most striking observations was the high turnout of adults at the fair. It should be noted that we do not see this negatively since we do not consider friki hobbies to be exclusive to a specific age group. What sparked our curiosity was the way in which the Feria Frikí seems to have, as one of its objectives, the idea of returning to childhood, of bringing nostalgia to adults who, for various reasons, long to recover fragments of their childhood.

A member of the fair's staff told us that the Feria Friki originated precisely from this idea. They sought to showcase and bring back retro elements, those that were part of the childhood of many adults. This is why the slogan "Vuelve a ser niño" [be a child again] is the very essence of the fair, even though over the years they have incorporated more contemporary hobbies and themes.

We were able to observe how regression to childhood manifested in two ways: the first was nostalgia, and the second was continuation. Nostalgia refers to the acquisition of vintage or retro items that allow people to recall memories of their childhood. Continuation, on the other hand, means extending childhood into adult life, that is, continuing hobbies beyond a purely collector's spirit. However, this latter point creates some tension for us since it assumes that hobbies such as video games or anime are things for children. We firmly contend that this is not the case, as both video games and anime have specific demographic targeting, meaning that a significant portion of these media is produced with an adult audience in mind.

Considering the above, we believe that reclaiming aspects of childhood does not imply an infantilizing act, but rather a return to the agency inherent in being a child, namely leisure, play, and passion for something. We find it positive that increasing adults allow themselves to recover these abilities. An illustrative example is the group of friends belonging to the BTS fandom that we met in Los Dominicos. The fact that "ARMY" is socially coded with young women did not stop them from living their tastes and hobbies with passion. They became part of the fandom, and within the community there is no social judgment. The hobby can be lived freely.

When Walt Disney was asked about the success of the film *Snow White*, he replied that in his studios they were convinced of a single truth, "we were all children once." Therefore, everyone could enjoy hobbies that are socially considered to be for children. The Feria Friki understands this very clearly. It has tried an effort to create a safe environment in which not only children can express themselves, but where anyone can find a place to show themselves to others with full confidence and without the fear of social judgment.

Different Communities Converging in the Friki Sphere

Another significant observation from our fieldwork was the convergence of various communities around the Feria Friki. It is important to emphasize that this was better understood because we made more than one visit. With only a single visit, we would not have been able to grasp the full breadth of the term friki.

Being friki is far from a static or fixed concept. In fact, attempting to delimit it means transgressing it, since the concept must remain open. It must be able to develop over the years and to bring together, encounter, and recognize new communities that wish to participate in these gatherings. In essence, being friki is a living concept that welcomes and connects diverse communities that find part of their identity within it.

The very trajectory of the Feria Friki allows us to witness this. As previously noted, the fair's organizers initially understood the friki concept in a much narrower sense than they do today. Previously, it referred only to retro and vintage elements. Today, it also includes anime, K-pop, professional wrestling, medieval culture, and who knows how many other communities will continue to join in the years to come.

It should be clarified that communities gather and form in two instances: the specific and the general. The first refers to the bounded friki community, such as otakus, gamers, or K-pop fans. The second refers to being friki itself in a broader sense, which allows specific communities to come together in a single environment, symbol, and identity.

On the one hand, an example of the specific is the case of the K-pop fans we interviewed. One of the ARMY members told us, "a group of Koreans we will never meet brought us together, and now we are friends for life" (Field diary, Mall Plaza Los Dominicos, 2025). This phrase clearly reflects what a specific friki community is. However, through the same dialogue we had with them, we realized that for some of them being friki did not stop at BTS alone. One of them proudly stated that she is a friki because she has always liked science fiction films such as *Star Wars*.

On the other hand, an example of the general is the connection between video games and otakus. It is very easy to find relationships between both communities. Even a cosplayer we spoke with told us that these communities are part of the same whole. Many video games have anime adaptations, and many anime have video game versions. For her, being friki is what unites these communities under a single concept and identity. At the same time, another cosplayer who participated in this conversation accepted being friki as a unifying element but understood the concept as taking a hobby to a higher degree of obsession.

The third visit we made to the fair allowed us to clearly experience the convergence of communities. It would not be an exaggeration to say that there was everything present, including science fiction, anime, manga, K-pop, professional wrestling, board games, role-playing games, and medieval culture. The most notable aspect of all this was the pleasant and

welcoming atmosphere. The laughter of children, people having fun and enjoying their hobbies, and the prohibition of smoking and alcohol consumption made evident the need for spaces like this for everyone who wishes to participate.

In retrospect, we observed that at the Feria Friki differences between generations or tastes easily fade away. It is common to see an adult buying a figure from their childhood next to a teenager looking for the latest manga, or children watching cosplayers' costumes with amazement. No one seems out of place because the fair creates an environment where age or type of hobby no longer matters. What unites everyone is the shared excitement of belonging to a space that celebrates difference and passion, where each person can show themselves as they are, without feeling the need to fit into a category. This freedom of expression and encounter is perhaps what best defines the friki spirit.

Final Remarks

We consider, with humility and acknowledging the differences, that the concept of patchwork ethnography fits very well with our work. We carried out more field visits than required, since the first visit left us with more questions than certainties. It should be clarified that the visits were not perfect and were not free of difficulties; nonetheless, we were able to develop a study based on what we gathered on each visit in a fragmented way, but not for that reason any less rigorous or situated. Günel and Watanabe (2023) propose that instead of hiding these seams, they should be made visible, because knowledge is also produced through them. This perspective allowed us to legitimize the knowledge we were collecting during our different visits to the fair and to demonstrate that the field can be constructed from fragments that, when brought together in a rigorous and situated manner, can also present a broad and consistent picture.

This perspective enabled us to capture a broader image of the fair. We realized that sensory elements accompany each scene, that diversity of ages breaks boundaries, and that community is built through coexistence and even through shared actions. The concept of being friki does not need to be fixed in an exact definition, because it is lived in practice, in encounter, and in mixture. Being friki is also part of identity itself. It can be lived in community and expressed through the diversity that these events themselves bring together.

To conclude, it is necessary to say that within what it means to be friki, not all of us share the same trajectory. Some experience it as a reunion with tastes that marked their childhood. Others never set aside those passions and maintain them to this day as part of their

routine. There are also young people who are just beginning and are surprised by what for others has already become routine. All these forms coexist in the same space and recognize one another, regardless of age or the moment in which each person entered this friki world. In these spaces, no one is left out. There is no place for discrimination, there is no fear in showing who you are. They are flexible and safe spaces because at the end of the day we are all frikis.

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Designed experiences: ready-made spaces and sociability amongst exchange students in Chile

Author's note

This essay is based on fieldwork conducted by the authors during a four-month ethnographic study for the course *Introduction to Ethnography* in 2023. Originally written in Spanish, it was subsequently translated and slightly revised for publication. All quotations are the authors' translations.

The study adhered to ethical standards concerning privacy and the use of collaborators' information. Identifying details have been anonymized to protect confidentiality.

Introduction

New technologies have become part of our lives; they are a means of communicating with friends and acquaintances while also generating opportunities to interact with new people. The way we experience social life today is made possible by the interconnection of media and networks and their widespread global use. Just as in the physical space of face-to-face encounters, this digital cyberspace also contains implicit codes and rules that become evident when analyzing its use by individuals from different backgrounds and with different intentions.

The aim of this essay is to compare how sociability is shaped by the design of physical and digital spaces, where both types of space open opportunities for interaction that were not previously available and/or delineate pre-established paths for exchange students from diverse backgrounds. For this reason, we argue that these networks and platforms represent forms of agency, which can be understood through the concept of *ready-made spaces of sociability*: spaces designed with the goal of intuitively guiding their users toward social encounters.

In what follows, we analyze and succinctly describe the experience of a group of exchange students in relation to different institutions and ready-made spaces that contribute to their sociability and allow them to interpret their journey through a narrative of the “ideal exchange.” These institutions and spaces play a fundamental role in the students' exchange experience by responding to the needs that arise during their stay in Chile, ranging from loneliness to the desire to socialize, pursue romantic relationships, become culturally informed, and/or “experience Chile,” among others.

Design as a Behavioral Science: Ready-Made Spaces and Social Behavior

Our proposed analysis is primarily based on the ethnography of design, which encompasses both physical space and cyberspace. Specifically, our approach focuses on analyzing and exploring different ways of inhabiting space as a response to its design and layout. Borrowing one of the meanings of design proposed by Muratovski (2016), we understand the designer's work as that of a "behavioral scientist," especially within human-centered design (HCD), where the creation of user interfaces and digital platforms—which constitute our main interest—is subject to meticulous processes of trial and error when introducing or eliminating features.

In the initial phases of analysis, we observed that space, context, and layout configure specific modes of interaction that cannot be fully understood without paying attention to environmental cues. In fact, in most cases, such interactions would not be possible without the shape of the space and the connotations it sometimes carries. The behaviorist aspect of HCD lies in its emphasis on creating intuitive and simple products and services that take into account users' needs, senses, perceptual biases, and other psychosocial aspects of human experience. Ultimately, this approach is grounded in knowledge about how people think, act, and feel in relation to their environment and its objects. In this sense, design can be understood as a discipline that seeks to comprehend human behavior in order to guide and predict it in a manner analogous to a behavioral science.

Based on this framework and our recent fieldwork findings, we propose that social interactions are designed—that is, planned or directed—through what we call *ready-made spaces of sociability*. This refers to spaces, objects, or broad experiences that—analogueous to the founding examples that inspired the concept, Betty Crocker cake mix and IKEA furniture—create an illusion of control and self-ownership over our behavior and choices. As Richard Buchanan (in Pelta, 2012) aptly states, "there is no area of contemporary life where design is not a significant factor in shaping human experience" (p. 1). The multiple forms that this fabrication of spaces of sociability may take are innumerable; for example, the casino, which generates a sense of eternal night and excessive stimulation; the school playground; the office and its schedule; the discotheque; and so on.

Cyberculture, Cyberspace

During our fieldwork, we observed some of the ways in which culture is configured as it intersects with digital technologies and, simultaneously, how experiences of cyberspace are

specific to each cultural context. Ashley, a young British collaborator, told us that her use of social media was divided according to different intentions or types of relationships. For example, in her home country, Great Britain, the dominant platform among her friends for socializing is Snapchat (SC). On this platform, they chat, send photos of their day, or gossip, mainly due to its disappearing-message feature, through which messages are deleted once the chat is closed. However, when it came time to meet people during her exchange, she did not share her SC, but rather her Instagram (IG), adapting to local customs.

In Chile, Americans use and communicate with one another through IG, as it appears to be the most widely used social network in Chile. Social relationships are predisposed toward using IG: we exchange IG accounts when we want to continue talking or interacting because it is a casual medium. It functions as a letter of introduction through photos and biographical information (bio), and as a way of remaining present and updated in others' lives through 24-hour stories shared in real time.

On the other hand, according to our collaborators' experiences, the use of WhatsApp (WA), both for chats and calls, operates primarily as a means of maintaining contact with parents, relatives, and classmates. Interactions on WA are generally more directed in nature, with concrete intentions such as coordinating meetings for work, reporting to parents, or asking and answering questions related to university. This suggests that most interactions on WA, at least for Ashley and other collaborators, are not intended to meet new people or build relationships, but rather to maintain them: to sustain parent-child communication protocols; to preserve "corporate" relationships between peers through the exchange of information or the planning of meetings; and so forth.

Layouts, Paths, and Interaction Opportunities

The way Instagram has been designed makes its notifications a constant reminder of opportunities for sociability. Among our contemporaries, we are often "waiting for nothing," because any notification could be something important: an invitation to go out, a confession of love, a new friendship, or an urgent email. This uncertainty keeps us engaged in a continuous loop. This dynamic is a common feature in technological development, innovation, and design, as these processes open up opportunities for action that were previously unavailable or inaccessible to most people.

Social media interfaces currently conform to what authors such as Karsten (2019) colloquially describe as "no-brainers"; they possess such intuitive concepts, modes of use, and

clarity that they require minimal conscious effort to operate. This trend contrasts sharply with the situation just twenty years ago, when the early design and conceptual obscurity of computers made it virtually impossible to imagine action frameworks like those we have today. Even with the existence of the Internet, such possibilities would have required expert knowledge in programming and information theory.

IG, for example, effectively facilitates face-to-face encounters because of its gradual and less abrupt dynamics compared to arranging spontaneous outings during an initial interaction. Through various mini-interactions (e.g., a like, reaction, or comment), individuals can begin conversations and share virtual moments, thereby creating a basis for “justifying” a subsequent face-to-face meeting. In this way, IG provides meaning to the transition from cyberspace to physical space, particularly when meaningful digital interactions have already occurred.

Ashley illustrated this through the example of Instagram stories: one can reply to stories and “slide into the DMs” directly. For her, there is often no explicit reason to initiate a chat, but stories are designed as intuitive and natural means of interaction. One sees a story and can like it, react with an emoji, or reply directly. When uploading a story, users can also add ready-made interactive features, such as polls, questions, rankings, and so forth, which facilitate further conversation. In this sense, one does not even need to think about how or when to talk to someone; the opportunity arises naturally. These clearly signified “affordances” (Norman, 2013) —that is, the relationship established between the properties of the IG interface and the capabilities of the user— initiate, by virtue of their design, a consistent and almost self-evident set of behavioral “choices.”

When a student arrives for an exchange program, they bring expectations that guide their stay in Chile and give meaning to their trip. These expectations include visiting emblematic places, improving their Spanish, and immersing themselves in “Chilean culture,” among others, which together constitute their vision of the “ideal exchange.” It is within this framework that ready-made experiences emerge, associated with institutions such as universities and their programs, tourism agencies, and dating applications. Most of the time, recurring emotional patterns and interests can be observed among these students, and these are addressed by institutions with corresponding forms of agency. All of our collaborators experienced loneliness for periods ranging from two weeks to two months, which was alleviated through interpersonal bonding at the university. Exchange students formed

friendships with others in similar situations; since they were undergoing comparable experiences, the condition of being on exchange served as a unifying factor that generated interaction.

However, there is also a desire to meet Chileans, and participating in sports or artistic courses and workshops was an avenue explored by seven out of eight collaborators. Lectures typically constitute limited spaces for meaningful interaction among students; once class ends, everyone leaves, students remain silent in their seats, and group activities are usually coordinated through WA, the more “serious” and direct social platform. In contrast, the design of sports classes naturally generates moments of interaction during class time. Students must exercise together, form teams, train, compete, and communicate. The sports course thus facilitates interactions, which often translate into exchanges of IG accounts in order to meet again. In our fieldwork experience, this is precisely what occurred, as one of us befriended an exchange student, David. In the process, they exchanged IG accounts, arranged to attend a party together, and to this day remain good friends.

The Ready-Made Experience of Exchange

The construction of an ideal exchange is shaped not only by people but also by emblematic places; if one travels to Paris, it would be unusual not to visit the Eiffel Tower. This logic is transferable to Chile, as seven out of eight collaborators reported having visited places such as Torres del Paine, Patagonia, San Pedro de Atacama, and well-known beaches (Pichilemu, Concón, Bahía Inglesa, etc.). All of this contributes to the construction of the ideal exchange, a memorable trip closely linked to dating apps, the model institution of ready-made spaces of sociability. When students arrive on exchange, they are not exempt from the “love market”: they are perceived as potential romantic partners, they are exoticized for being different, and they, in turn, also wish to meet, flirt with, and date Chileans. Dating apps function as institutions with the agency to provide opportunities for interaction between these two individuals —local and foreigner— who share this interest and use such platforms to get to know each other.

A remarkable aspect of the design of these apps is that they open up a world of apparent control for users. On Tinder, people available to a user can be selected or discarded, which may be understood as showing interest or rejecting, respectively. However, the key difference between this dynamic and an initial face-to-face approach is that on Tinder the other person does not know whether I have shown interest unless they also express interest in me; this

produces the “match,” the moment in which both individuals know they are willing to go out or talk without having been exposed to rejection. The app operates as an institution that offers a structured and limited path while simultaneously generating a ready-made space that opens avenues oriented toward romantic interaction; the user can now do what they previously could not—or believed they could not—do. For contextualization, five of the eight collaborators had downloaded dating apps; only one of them had used such apps in her home country, and among those who did not use these platforms, one already had a partner before arriving in Chile.

In an exchange context, these students relied on the agency provided by Tinder (or similar apps) to check off their ideal exchange through an international romance. Within this framework, Tinder emerges as a virtual space deliberately designed to generate interactions through clearly defined features that guide individuals toward meeting one another.

Another ready-made space of sociability, now in “real life,” is *Miércoles po*, a discotheque (allegedly) designed for exchange students in Chile. It generates a comfortable environment for exchange students, where it is understood that people from abroad—or those intending to meet exchange students—will attend, thus eliminating uncertainty; whoever goes to *Miércoles po* is going there to meet people and have a good time. Add alcohol as a disinhibitor and pop music, and the result is an ideal environment for socializing and partying. This venue is so well-known that seven out of eight collaborators attended. Interestingly, despite being such an artificial, standardized, and pre-arranged environment, most of our collaborators went only once, as this experience does not fully correspond to their ideal exchange: they wish to socialize with Chileans, not with other foreigners in what feels like an imitation of a foreign club.

In light of the above, some students choose to depart from the ready-made path and swim against the current. This can be seen in the experience Fernanda shared with us about her former partner, Karl, a German student who avoided socializing with other exchange students during his stay because, in his view, they were not experiencing Chile but rather engaging in tourism, as if the experience were something that could be designed, promoted, packaged, and sold wholesale. Karl rejected several of the ready-made spaces outlined in this essay, with the exception of emblematic sites and dating apps, where he met Fernanda. Otherwise, he actively sought to “be one of us” and to “eat noodles with sauce next to the *suegrita*, instead of *pastel de choclo* on a clay plate in a Chilean restaurant.”

Users: Subjects in Design

According to Pink et al. (2016), contemporary communities have become geographically dispersed “personal communities,” as social media situates individuals within digital environments tailored to them. In this context, individuals have the possibility of designing themselves and their social circles, joining others at will based on their tastes and interests rather than through external imposition. However, the paradox of this mode of sociability is that interactions between users depend on —and are shaped by— algorithms, echo chambers, and fortuitous digital connections that create opportunities for encounters between two or more users. Individuals design their personas and social lives, but not without having themselves been shaped by their digital environments, which offer content and people who share political, recreational, informational, or other interests.

Social networks, like other ready-made spaces of sociability, are far from absolutely determining the individual; they limit possibilities while simultaneously opening new opportunities to reaffirm or reinvent oneself, at least within cyberspace. In our fieldwork, we observed that exchange students tended to present themselves on their networks in a very particular way: most explicitly referenced being foreigners in Chile, portraying their trip as a different adventure or experience. “French guy in Chile” was Vladimir’s Tinder bio; Jazmine preferred to write in her Instagram bio, “Come see my adventure in Chile,” and created a separate account specifically to document her trip —@american_hanging_out_in_Chile (pseudonym) was her username.

According to Escobar (2019), “in designing tools (objects, structures, policies, systems [...]) we are creating ways of being” (p. 57). As demonstrated in our discussion, the design of the ideal exchange has produced specific ways of experiencing what it means to be a foreigner in Chile. Ready-made experiences of sociability open the possibility of following specific paths or resisting them, yet this resistance is only meaningful because such paths already exist. For this reason, we follow Escobar (2019) when he states that “design is literally everywhere; from the grandest structures to the humblest aspects of everyday life, modern lives are painstakingly designed” (p. 57, own emphasis).

Conclusion

In this essay, we explore how a design-based ethnographic approach provides a fruitful framework for understanding social relations situated within their respective contexts. We propose the concept of ready-made spaces of sociability to explain how different experiences

—in our case, those of exchange students in Chile— appear to repeat themselves or at least respond to a structure manifested in the relationship between individual and environment.

In this context, different spaces—including digital ones— operate as institutions that transcend individuals and direct their behavior in predictable ways through features that generate intuitive paths oriented toward specific objectives, thereby satisfying their desires; in this case, the ideal exchange. We emphasize, however, that this direction of behavior does not constitute absolute determinism, but rather establishes a framework that enables modes of action and interaction that are possible only through designed affordances in their encounter with the user. It is important to clarify that the design of experiences through spatial layout is also evident in recurring patterns among exchange students, such as the places they visit, the apps they use, and the emotions and interests that motivate them to follow these designed paths.

In summary, this study shows that the experience of exchange students is shaped by different institutions that influence the paths they take. These institutions—such as dating apps, social media platforms, and exchange programs themselves— generate forms of agency that allow opportunities for sociability to emerge in a seemingly natural way. As a result, during their stay in Chile, students can frame their journey within an ideal exchange narrative that validates and gives meaning to their experience.

Although our ethnographic research focused on exchange students, we came to recognize that sociability among ourselves is also experienced and constructed through these ready-made spaces, which may take different forms but respond to similar needs and objectives. It is therefore plausible to continue developing this study within spheres of everyday life by applying the concept of ready-made spaces to other objectives: commerce, in the layout and organization of a supermarket; comfort, in the arrangement of a waiting room; and even the obscure realm of the deep web, which generates other modes of agency and ways of experiencing space—for example, through anonymity and the uncertainty of not knowing the intentions of others.

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Appendix

1. Summary of common ready-made spaces among collaborators (exchange students)

Collaborator	Nacionality	Participated in sports/arts Course/workshop	Attended to <i>Miércoles Po'</i>	Used dating app(s)	Went to emblematic places
David	U.S.A.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Dante	U.S.A.	Yes	Yes	No (In a relationship)	Yes
Ahley	Great Britain	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Christy	Great Britain	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ming	China	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Jazmin	U.S.A.	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

Vladimir	France	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Karl	Germany	No	No	Yes	Yes

2. Visual representation: *Travelling as a ready-made experience*



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III. Moments

Art and Cracks in the Santiago Subway

The Santiago subway was inaugurated on May 15, 1975, with a route connecting the districts of Lo Prado and Santiago, from San Pablo to La Moneda. From its beginnings, it was presented as a symbol of progress, aligned with the profound social transformations experienced in Chile during the late twentieth century. During and after the dictatorship, and even to this day, the metro has remained an emblem of modernity and national development. For this reason, Chile has often been portrayed as a model to follow in the region, acclaimed by public opinion as “the jaguar of Latin America”, an economic miracle and a country with one of the most modern transportation systems in the Southern Hemisphere.

In the same year the subway was inaugurated, a decree was issued that remains in force today: “*No begging, street commerce, prostitution, or any other activity involving the collection of money shall be permitted in cars, stations, or other subway premises*” (Ministry of Public Works, 1975). Today, forty-nine years after the decree and more than three decades after the end of the dictatorship, this situation has not substantially changed.

One ordinary afternoon, after a hectic day in Chile’s fast-paced capital, I wait for the train to arrive. The subway, used daily by approximately two million people, pulls into the station. I walk through a sea of bodies, pushing and being pushed, while familiar messages echo over the loudspeakers: “Let passengers get off before boarding,” “Give your seat to those who need it most.” Repeated day after day, these phrases become part of the norm and reflect an aspiration toward social order. Yet there are people who escape this established norm: street vendors and musicians, whose presence is prohibited by the same regulations that govern the Santiago subway. They inhabit realities that are institutionally rendered invisible, while at the same time revealing broader tensions within Chilean society.

César Suárez is a blind artist whom I met on Line 3, the most modern and recently inaugurated line of the subway. César is Bolivian; he migrated from Santa Cruz to Santiago two years ago and now dedicates himself to music in the metro. After speaking with him, thanking him for his performance, and offering a small monetary contribution, we said goodbye. As César turned to continue his work and stepped out of the car, a message sounded over the loudspeaker: “Do not buy from street vendors or donate to musicians.” Nevertheless, César continued singing.

The Santiago subway functions as a national symbol of progress, modernity, and unity. Precisely for this reason, it seems unable to grant space to diverse and marginalized realities that expose the cracks within society. However, subway artists, through their daily resistance to regulations and to precarious working conditions, choose to persist in doing what they value. Over time, they have carved out a place in each car and have become a fundamental part of the metro experience, giving it rhythm, sound, and a distinctive social identity.

María Esperanza Romero

Learning the Social Rules of the Subway as a Non-Capital Resident

For most of my life, I lived outside Chile's capital. After the pandemic and a sabbatical year, I moved to Santiago to study, and adapting to the city required adjusting to its rhythm, its people, and especially its social rules. Among these, the subway quickly became central to my daily life, as I depended on it to commute to university and to move across the city. In Chillán, my hometown, there is public transportation, but nothing comparable to the metro in Santiago. Immersing myself in this world of strategies, pushing and shoving, street vendors, musicians, and constant movement, I found not only a space for observation but also a training ground for learning how to navigate this dynamic environment and make efficient use of time.

Santiago is a fast-paced city. At times, it seems as if people forget they are living, and we all adopt the role of efficient, almost mechanical bodies moving from one point to another. I often try to slow down, to breathe, to pause and observe. In doing so, I began to notice how people inhabit the subway: it is not merely a space of transit, but an everyday environment that many have turned into a kind of shared home. It is a place to read, listen to music, sleep, sell goods, and express art. At the same time, passengers appear to tolerate the constant crossing of what some might consider personal boundaries. Pushing, someone else's hair brushing against one's face, the concentrated smell of bodies, and the often intense heat—even in winter—are all received with little protest, as part of the normal experience of travel.

Yet there is one feature of subway life that consistently transforms these journeys and adds color to them: the presence of subway artists. Whenever they appear, I stop reading or take off my headphones. These performers range from remarkable singers to musicians with beautiful instruments and highly skilled dancers. Official regulations prohibit giving money to these artists in order not to encourage what is considered an "irregular" activity. However, when the daily trips begin to feel repetitive and someone steps into the car to play the violin, it can feel like being transported elsewhere. Similarly, leaving the subway tired and hearing a band play while climbing the stairs introduces a break in routine that brightens the day. Moreover, subway artists often perform with an energy and joy that can be contagious, at least for those who are willing to receive it.

The Santiago subway also functions as a cultural space. Within it, one can find established businesses, libraries, fairs, and different artistic representations across lines and

stations, including murals, mosaics, and paintings. All of this enriches what might otherwise be only a transportation system and contributes to the creation of a world with its own rules and social dynamics. Alongside these official or institutionalized forms of culture, there are also “unofficial” practices: spontaneous dance or exercise classes in stations, street vendors, musicians, protests, and other forms of occupation of space. Although I have been living in Santiago for almost two years and regularly use Lines 1, 4, and 5, I do not yet feel fully immersed in or familiar with everything this world entails. Just as I am still adapting to many of its dynamics, understanding the subway remains an ongoing process that requires more time and experience.

Andean Music in the Subway

The Santiago subway is characterized by multiple dynamics that shape everyday life in the city. However, it is easy to overlook how sensorially and culturally meaningful this space can be for its users, particularly because of the presence of street artists and musicians who become part of the daily journey. This phenomenon invites closer observation of subway life, especially during off-peak hours, when the flow of passengers is lower. What follows is a brief account of one such encounter.

On Wednesday, November 27, 2024, at around noon, I was walking toward the transfer to Line 4 of the Santiago subway, surrounded by people moving quietly through the station. At that moment, I encountered a familiar yet striking element of everyday subway life: live music. Despite the regulations that prohibit musical performances in public transportation, a distinctive sound caught my attention as I boarded the car. Two musicians were performing Andean music using traditional instruments. One of them carried a *legüero* bass drum, while the other played a *quena*, a *charango*, and also sang. I was particularly struck by the agility, rhythm, and precision with which he performed, constantly switching between instruments.

The rhythm and melody of the music were highly appealing to the passengers, in part because of the popularity and cultural resonance of Andean-influenced music in Chile. Groups such as the Chilean band Los Jaivas, who fuse Andean and folk traditions with progressive rock, exemplify this influence. Observing the audience's response, I noticed a generally warm and welcoming reception: some people contributed money, while others expressed their appreciation through gestures and attentive listening.

Despite this positive response, music has not always been well received in this space. Depending on the time of day, the level of crowding, and the strict enforcement of regulations that penalize these activities, musicians are sometimes perceived negatively. Nevertheless, for many passengers, music can become a welcome companion during the journey. Moreover, in conversations I have had with subway musicians, they often emphasize the continuous effort they invest in practicing and refining their craft in order to perform, gain recognition, and generate income in these spaces. This situation reveals an ongoing tension in subway life and points to a broader debate about the social dynamics of the metro and the conflicted relationship between street artists and this highly regulated environment.

Everyday Life in the Santiago de Chile Subway

The Santiago subway is far more than a means of transportation. It is a space in which the daily life of the city becomes visible. Every day, thousands of people use it, and inside its cars stories, emotions, cultures, and social dynamics intersect, making it a unique social environment.

During the morning rush hour, between 7:00 and 8:59 a.m., and again in the evening between 6:00 and 7:59 p.m., the subway becomes a kind of competition. I observe how people go up and down the stairs quickly, almost running, in order to reach their destinations—work, university, or home—on time. They speed up when they hear the warning beep announcing that the doors are about to close, and many do not hesitate to push in order to get on. Inside the car, the atmosphere becomes oppressive. The heat increases, bodies are pressed tightly together, and no free space remains. During the trip, I notice how some people fall asleep, while others' faces reflect discomfort, exhaustion, and the desire to get off as soon as possible. Despite this, and despite how uncomfortable the journey can be, some passengers take the opportunity to talk. Friends, co-workers, and couples chat and laugh, and these conversations mix with the noise of the train and the voices from other cars, producing a constant background of sound.

The discomfort of the commute does not prevent life from continuing to unfold. Accustomed to this routine, people go about their day, experiencing these daily journeys in different ways.

As the day progresses, between approximately 11:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m., the atmosphere of the subway changes. The crowds thin out and it becomes easier to move through stations and cars. It is during these hours that musicians of all ages often fill the cars with their performances. Some sing using speakers and microphones; others play instruments such as the violin, guitar, drums, keyboard, and even the trumpet. There are also groups of three, five, or more people who perform together and, in exchange, expect a voluntary monetary contribution from passengers, since for many this is their way of making a living. At the same time, it is common to encounter street vendors carrying backpacks or carts filled with various products: water, chocolates, headphones, phone chargers, T-shirts, flashlights, pencils, and more. During these hours, I also see young people reading or studying for university, making use of travel time. The subway thus becomes not only a place of transit, but also a space for commerce, work, artistic expression, learning, and, of course, social interaction.

The Santiago subway is therefore a space that goes beyond its basic function as transportation. It reflects social tensions, cultural diversity, and the everyday experiences of those who use it. Within this environment, different realities and different ways of coexisting—although sometimes uncomfortable—make the subway a representative scenario of life in Santiago, or at least of one of its most visible dimensions. This essay has sought to highlight the dual character of the metro: on the one hand, the burden, discomfort, and haste of daily commuting; on the other, the spaces it opens for artistic expression, commerce, and social encounters. This tension is precisely what gives the Santiago subway its distinctive social character.

Figure 1

Restriction Sign on Subway Car.



Note. Photograph by the author, 2024.

Figure 2

César Suárez on a Day at Work.



Note. Photograph by the author, 2024.

Figure 3

Soda Stereo Tribute Band Outside the Subway Station Tobalaba.



Note. Photograph by the author, 2024.

Figure 4

Art Exhibition in Combination Line 1-6.



Note. Photograph by the author, 2024.

Figure 5

Andean Music Duet.



Note. Photograph by the author, 2024.

Figure 6

Line 4 Subway Car.



Note. Photograph by the author, 2024.

Figure 7

Representation of Andean Music on line 4.



Note. Photograph by the author, 2024.

Figure 8

Metro Signage: “No Buying from Street Vendors or Giving Money to Musicians” (author’s translation).



Note. Photograph by the author, 2024.

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IV. Methods and Reflections

Migrant Sex Workers in the Plaza de Armas of Santiago and the Digital Space: A Methodological Analysis of Stigmatization

Introduction

This article presents the methodology employed and the main findings of a research project conducted during the first half of 2025. The general objective of the study was to identify the construction of social stigmas toward migrant sex workers in Chile. This research takes place in a context where sex work is neither prohibited nor penalized by law, yet remains legislatively unregulated. Simultaneously, xenophobic discourses have increased in recent years, reinforcing stigmas and social exclusion.

To address this issue, two key spaces were selected:

Plaza de Armas of Santiago: An emblematic site in national history and recently recognized as a core hub for sex work in the country.

El Silencio: A web forum where women offer sexual services and where their clients—mostly men—exercise strong symbolic power by evaluating and rating them based on physical attributes and the quality of the service provided.

Methodological Design

A mixed-methods approach was used, following the framework proposed by Hernández Sampieri, Fernández, and Baptista (2014). This approach integrates both quantitative and qualitative techniques and procedures, allowing the phenomenon to be addressed from multiple perspectives and dimensions. This facilitates a deeper and more holistic understanding of the experiences, discourses, and social dynamics that migrant sex workers navigate in the studied contexts.

The study adopted a non-experimental cross-sectional design, characterized by data collection within a single period of time. This design was chosen to capture a misunderstood and stigmatized social reality, identifying relationships and influences between variables without intervening in them. A methodological combination allows for a comprehensive and contextualized approach to the complexity of the phenomenon under study. This integration fosters a profound, multidimensional understanding of the experiences that shape the urban

marginalization of migrant sex workers within the analyzed physical and digital spaces. Furthermore, it facilitates the dissemination and visibility of the gathered knowledge, which could eventually lead to substantial changes in the conditions of the participants involved.

Data collection was carried out using four techniques: non-participant observation in the field and on the web platform; application of two digital surveys; semi-structured interviews with sex workers from Plaza de Armas and other people in the sector; and a bibliographic review of various sources.

Digital Surveys

Two digital surveys were applied. The first, conducted in May, had 36 participants; the second, conducted in June, was answered by 43 people. Both included a brief description of the research, names and contact information of the researchers, a thank-you note, and a guarantee of anonymity.

These surveys were directed at citizens outside of sex work to obtain a general overview of perceptions regarding migrant sex work in present-day Chile. They also sought to determine if respondents believed they could differentiate between migrant and Chilean sex workers and what prejudices they had heard. The anonymity of the surveys demonstrated the importance of flexibility in mixed research, as methodological errors regarding the exclusion of certain groups (such as male or homosexual sex workers) were corrected in the second survey.

Semi-structured Interviews

A total of seven interviews were conducted in the Plaza de Armas sector.

Initial interviews: We spoke with people working in the area regarding the weekly flow of sex workers, their perceptions of these women, security conditions, and the schedules when police or guard presence ends.

Sex worker interviews: Four migrant sex workers were interviewed. Their accounts provided a subjective and critical view of their working conditions, including violence, conflicts between workers, self-care dynamics, community support networks, educational levels, and experiences of discrimination.

To obtain these testimonies, a respectful and careful approach protocol was adopted. We prioritized interviewing women who were not accompanied, and the first contact was made by a single team member to ensure trust. We explained the academic objective, offered anonymity, and emphasized that participation was completely voluntary.

Non-participant Observation

In situ observation was conducted at Plaza de Armas to understand the physical and social environment. This allowed for the identification of worker diversity regarding nationality, body type, and presentation. We recorded specific behaviors, such as the intimacy and complicity — suggestive of a pre-existing relationship— between certain individuals shown through gestures like kisses on the cheek and physical contact. However, a marked distance from the client was observed during service value negotiations.

Additionally, we conducted non-participant observation on the El Silencio web forum, involving an exhaustive navigation of discussion threads. We focused on user accounts of their experiences to understand how social representations are constructed and reproduced in this digital environment.

Bibliographic Analysis

To support the research, we performed a bibliographic analysis focused on female sex work, migration, social stigmas, gender, sexuality, feminized bodies, sexual health, discrimination, and intersectionality. We used Boolean operators (AND/OR) and consulted credible academic sources such as Scielo, Google Scholar, UC Libraries, ResearchGate, and RedTraSex. We prioritized updated literature situated in the Chilean context to understand local dynamics and their link to migration. English texts were also incorporated to provide global perspectives. This review allowed for a critical analysis of the relationship between sex work, stigmatization, and territorial exclusion in both physical and digital spaces.

Main Findings

The data reveal the persistence of a social imaginary that links migrant sex workers with criminality, disorder, and sanitary insecurity. Surveys and interviews with outsiders show a dominance of discourses labeling them as carriers of infections, seekers of an "easy life," members of criminal gangs, and responsible for bringing this activity to the country. This

reflects a tendency to invisibilize the structural causes of migration and the fact that sex work has existed in Chile since the Colonial period.

Testimonies from the workers confirm that their environment is a space of exclusion. While the qualitative sample is **purposively** focalized, its depth provides critical insights into how stigmatization functions intersectionally (Crenshaw, 1989), intensifying at the crossroads of nationality, gender identity, and occupation. For example, migrant sex workers who were also transgender faced triple discrimination, being targets of attacks from both clients and passersby. This dehumanization results in extreme vulnerability where a lack of institutional protection forces workers to resort to self-defense, including the use of knives.

Finally, a dichotomy was identified based on the context of interaction:

1. Public Space: Rejection and the view of the worker as a threat to morality and national identity predominate.

2. Digital Space (El Silencio): An attitude of closeness and idealized objectification is manifested. However, this is not a humanized vision, as it is mediated by severe hypersexualization and the consumption of their bodies.

While the physical space dehumanizes through rejection, the digital space does so through fetishization; in both cases, the stigma remains and the woman is reduced to her sexual function.

Reflections on the Research Process

We faced ethical and practical challenges associated with the taboo nature of the topic. Initially, we wanted to study power relations in sexual encounters, but due to safety concerns in the field, we modified our focus to understanding sociocultural stigmatization. Flexibility and sensitivity are essential when working with vulnerable groups. The use of anonymous tools was relevant for generating a safe space that led to transparent responses.

As a group, we deeply value the willingness of the participants. The most significant contributions came from the four migrant sex workers. Through them, we understood a reality marked by violence and discrimination, but also by self-care and solid community support networks.

A particularly significant encounter occurred with a transgender Chilean sex worker who approached us voluntarily. Her story, starting at age twelve, reflects extreme vulnerability. She recounted a traumatic first experience where she was physically assaulted, had her wig stolen, and was abandoned, leading her to adopt permanent self-defense measures. However, her story also spoke of resilience, highlighting networks where workers are adopted by a "mother" who guides them—a role she now performs for newcomers. Her testimony was fundamental in breaking stigmas, as she mentioned she holds a professional degree, a reality shared by many others. This honesty allowed us to recognize their capacity for organization, their education level, and the dignity with which they build their identity.

Conclusion

These themes are becoming increasingly visible. Working on sensitive and controversial topics is inherent for an anthropologist seeking change, and it is relevant to do so with the proper methodology. One must have the plasticity to adapt to the challenges inherent to researching taboo topics. Our aim was to bring visibility to some of those who lack an institutional voice.

We recommend not hesitating to work with taboo topics, as ignoring them only increases indifference and invisibility. This must be done with prudence and respect. The importance of methodology in controversial topics lies in treating people with dignity, reaffirming that creating constructive narratives for marginalized groups is an essential task of anthropological labor.

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Should I reduce all of my field experience to a bad situation?

Our tools

As social researchers, our body, thoughts and emotions are the greatest tools we have to generate a deep, sensitive and comprehensive research. That is why if there is a problem that negatively affects these tools, and we don't know how to handle them, something could go wrong, either with our research, or with ourselves. "It is through such introspective, emotional self-awareness that qualitative researchers can develop more open and attentiveness" (Benoot & Bilsen, 2016, p. 6).

The risks of conducting qualitative research are poorly addressed in literature and schooling in relation to their importance. We cannot deny that Professors tend to warn us about the pros and cons of each research method, but they do not teach us what to do if we are ever involved in any kind of situation that puts us at risk. My professors constantly insist on the importance of being extremely careful when dealing with more vulnerable communities. We must follow a lot of ethical regulations to take care of the well-being of the interviewees, and to reduce the possible issues that our research could cause. But where do we researchers stand, and, why isn't our well-being a priority just like everyone else's?

We are not fools either, we all know that there is literature available about this topic – if we look for it, we will find plenty of it– but the fact is that these resources are not provided to us as basic literature in the university. Why have they not been included yet? It seems rather obvious to state the importance of being instructed on the risks that research can lead us to from the very first moment of our academic education. Otherwise, how will we know whether it is best to put a stop to an investigation for the sake of our own wellbeing or let it run its course while putting us at risk. How are we expected to be able to draw the line in the moments that matter the most when this is a topic that is not discussed in any of our courses? The only time when concern is shown by the researchers is when they are studying topics that are too strong, such as violence, suffering, death, loneliness, illness, etc. Since these are considered sensitive and triggering topics for qualitative researchers, the problem is that they are not necessarily the only sensitive topics, nor are they the only ones that produce stress, distress and anxiety. Examples of qualitative research topics may or may not appear to address sensitive issues, our work is an intimately personal experience and one's own perspectives are critical (Stahlke,

2018). The empathetic nature of qualitative research is to be constantly relating to others, all interactions and thoughts born from there, are emotionally charged. "The fact that we are genuinely interested in our participants' perspectives does not negate the fact that they can be hard to hear and cause us distress." (Stahlke, 2018, p. 6)

The Situation

So, should we reduce all of our field experience to a bad situation?

"Researcher harm is thankfully a rare event, but universities (unlike some cognate organizations such as the media or aid agencies) are insufficiently prepared to guard against it. As a senior manager in an aid agency (and a former frontline worker) told us: 'If you haven't prepared for the worst, you 'll be up the creek when it happens'." (Bloor et al., 2010, p. 53)

Sadly, in my second year of university I had to experience an unfortunate encounter in the field, and nothing could have mentally prepared me for the situation I had to endure. Perhaps the situation I am about to describe might appear as a result of unnecessary overthinking or might not seem entirely severe, however, while I was going through it nothing made sense and I was filled with an overwhelming sense of threat that made me feel incredibly vulnerable.

I was happily partaking with a community of poets, who had gathered to commemorate the lost ones in dictatorship (Chilean military dictatorship, which lasted almost 20 years). The atmosphere could not have been more welcoming, people were singing, clapping, crying, sharing food, among many others. I was shocked by the amazing panorama I was witnessing, until a man with whom I had talked to by chance, began to insinuate himself in front of me. I felt trapped, no one seemed to notice us, we were just two people talking in the crowd, but if I ignored him, was I going to be judged? It seemed like he and everyone else had known each other for years. Suddenly there were no sounds, no voices, no music, it was just that man inviting me to see him outside the event, to go to some river or hill, away from everything. I had an uncomfortable smile on my face, I just wanted to disappear quickly from there and leave everything; he asked me for my number, and I gave it to him.

I thought that if I backed off and did not give him my number, they were going to isolate me and all the good mood and the trust that we had built was going to be lost. Suddenly I was in the fine line of disregarding my own feelings and emotions to keep my research going or

standing up for myself while risking losing all contact with this beautiful community. Now, looking back to it, it seems very clear to me what was the most reasonable choice to make, but at that moment, I couldn't bring myself to a solution that would leave me both satisfied with my wellbeing and with my investigative work.

About a week after that particular event, I had nightmares relating to that person and the uncomfortable situation I experienced. I won't be sharing them though, because they are not very friendly. Just for the record I will say that the morning after the event, I had to take a few showers to feel a little better.

Fortunately, I had the support of loved ones to help me overcome that horrible feeling, but other junior researchers might not be so lucky. So, are they supposed to just endure and ignore all the feelings of guilt?

Situations of other investigators.

I thank all the researchers who raised their voices and thoughts, it is thanks to all the experiences lived and shared, that we were able to visualize the importance of emotional wellbeing for qualitative researchers. Mental health has been one of the most famous topics in recent times, it was inevitable that it would come up in our field at some point.

Regardless of the approach of study, many researchers took their personal experiences in the field, and shared how difficult it can be to live and analyze situations such as, dealing with people with cancer in isolation (Benoot & Bilsen, 2016), people with breast cancer (Rager, 2005; Johnson, 2014), child and adolescent abuse narratives (Jackson et al. 2013), recovery of communities after a natural disaster (McKinzie, 2017), nurses' professional practices (Stahlke, 2018), among many others. While these topics may or may not be considered as sensitive research, what unites them all is the impact it had on the researchers to empathize and analyze all the experiences shared by the interviewees, notwithstanding the topic, each person has different ways of living the experiences and meditate on them, even if everyone investigated the same topic, the personal results of the researchers would still be different, because it is the subjective experiences that are responsible for connecting at an emotional level with the environment around us, because we feel, we are empathetic, and we are also people.

All the authors acknowledge the lack of literature that addresses this topic in depth, but they also present to us the solutions they have come up with, they advise us what to do if we are ever involved and trapped in the professional/personal stuff. We will easily realize that the

solutions will always be linked to talking to someone, to unburden oneself and sharing experiences in order to calm them down.

"When I began the interviews for my study, I started seeing Nan, a counselor at the university at which I was employed. I conducted three interviews to pilot test the interview protocol and 13 interviews to collect data for analysis. Talking things over with Nan during that 2-month period was extremely helpful. I remember having the distinct feeling of being much lighter as I left each session with her. I think debriefing with her was one of the smartest things I did for myself during that period." (Rager, 2005, p.426)

It is at that moment that we begin to understand the importance of having a mentor or a professional colleague on our side, who will watch over our well-being throughout the research process.

"I found that my supervisors were also another resource that was beneficial throughout the research process. [...] I was fortunate enough to be in a situation where I was allocated supervisors that provided the aforementioned sources of support and mentoring. It was important for me throughout the research journey to feel that I was supported and was able to approach my supervisors at any stage throughout the study to gain support and advice." (Johnson, 2014, p.206)

However, not everyone has access to someone. We recognize the privilege of having help, knowing that we must improve and include methods so that researchers do not have to go through so much pain and emotional stress in doing their work.

"Sharon and Elinor were privileged in being able to access support when working with the data within CLS premises through the mechanism of formal debriefing sessions available to all CLS staff, and we were also able, as a team, to disclose and discuss the nature of this data, and our experiences with it among ourselves. Many researchers are perhaps unable to do so." (Jackson et al., 2013, p. 8)

If we do not have access to a mentor, we can also keep track of our personal perceptions as the study progresses, so that our emotions and perceptions are not put on the back burner.

"The most effective way for me to undertake this process was through keeping a research journal. It was important for me, at the outset of my Ph.D. candidature, to feel

like I could justify my decisions regarding my personal experience with the topic, and to make it clear that this was something I had considered in-depth. I wanted to be explicit from the outset that my experience was a part of who I was, and as such, it was not possible for me to disregard it whilst conducting the research." (Johnson, 2014, p. 205)

Reflections

I cannot help but be infinitely grateful to the authors cited above and to the many others who speak out for others, without whom I might not have found the comfort and motivation to talk about it. Focusing on mental health helps us understand that suffering is a social phenomenon that is formed through the construction of meanings in constant interaction with other people, including the participants of our study and ourselves (McKinzie, 2017)

Personally, I had a teacher with whom I was able to share my field experiences, trying my luck and hoping to get some feedback on what to do. It turns out that I did not get it, because she was not given the tools to handle that kind of situation either, however, I managed to connect with her, we had a conversation about her difficulties also as a teacher, having to be constantly reading more than thirty papers every month about very strong issues that her students go through. So, if she didn't have the mentorship to handle all of this as a teacher, what is in store for us students and future social researchers? It is a wake-up call to Universities around the world, this super vague handling of the risks of research is not just a mere corporate deficiency on the part of universities in modernity, because there are literally other very similar institutions that handle these issues much better and are assigned the importance and depth they deserve (Bloor et al., 2010).

Universities have a huge gap and need to recognize the need to provide adequate support and resources for the training of students and researchers in the management of sensitive issues. This lack of preparation for the fieldwork environment will not only end up affecting the quality of the research, but may also have a negative impact on the well-being of those conducting these studies. If the empathetic nature that characterizes qualitative research is affected, how can we expect the experiences of interviewees to be treated with the respect, sensitivity and depth they need. By establishing clear and accessible protocols for addressing the suffering involved in the difficult experiences that emerge in the research process, we can improve the quality of future research, and in the same way, contribute to the construction of a more empathetic academic community that is more aware of the human realities it studies.

The experiences lived and shared by all the researchers were the impetus we needed to understand the relevance of the emotional well-being of qualitative researchers. The more experiences we share, the more impact we generate in institutions that ignore it. Don't be afraid to speak up for yourself, we are all with you, your experiences will never be belittled as long as the voices of other researchers who have also shared their stories remain in our memory.

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V. Just One Minute

Katherine Griffiero

Hands at Work: The Scarcest Commodity

In a woodcarver's workshop in Santiago's Pueblito de Los Dominicos, the rarest good is not a mask or a bowl but the sight of hands working on wood. What circulates here is the immediacy of labor made visible: time becoming form.

The market unfolds as a choreography of making and meaning. A luthier who learned by doing invents instruments as he goes, guided by ear and grain. A leatherworker builds slow mastery against the conveniences of mass retail. A restorer toggles between commission and pedagogy, teaching technique while repairing histories. A match-stick sculptor insists that without contact—without the charged space of encounter—one is not an artisan. Across these shops, authorship appears as time materialized: time to sand, to stitch, to tune, to explain; time to refuse the rush that would make every piece the same.

Visibility here is not decoration but ethic. The workshop is a stage whose performance is pedagogy. Visitors are taught why glaze must dry, why spruce resonates differently from cedar, why no two figures can be identical. Makers also police the encounter's terms. One woodcarver distinguishes "transactional" from "warm" clients, defending a moral economy in which attention must meet attention—where the price includes apprenticeship in how value is made.

Pressures, however, are real. Stall occupancy tilts from makers toward merchants whose restocking outpaces the rhythm of the handmade. Publics oscillate in the wake of the pandemic; perceptions of insecurity shorten visits and thin the lingering that handwork requires. These forces recode the social contract around slowness, repair, and singularity, putting artisanship in negotiation with speed.

And yet counterweights persist. Neighbors cover for each other when someone must travel; long friendships are renewed in doorways; a teacher counts dozens of pupils who paint to heal, to learn, to let go. Such micro-ecologies of care sustain more than livelihoods. They sustain a way of knowing in which objects carry provenance, tempo, and the touch of named hands.

If there is Just a One Minute lesson: craft endures when spectatorship becomes witness. Paying for a piece compensates time already sedimented in form; watching a maker work honors time as it becomes form. Markets like Los Dominicos do not survive by resisting

tourism but by re-educating it—returning the gaze to hands and hours, to provenance and technique—and inviting the rest of us to trade in the scarcest commodity of all: unhurried attention.

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Robert Figueroa, Benjamin Ulloa

Video games: Are they anthropological?

One topic we have investigated throughout this semester is video games from the perspective of game developers. During the interviews, events, and focus groups we conducted, a recurring question among participants was how video games can be studied from an anthropological perspective. Our response consistently focused on culture, specifically gamer culture or video game culture, as the main framework for analysis.

However, a developer we met at the event “The Spooky Party Games” offered us a different perspective, an approach that we had previously overlooked. He explained that video games are anthropological objects because they are a human creation and form part of an ongoing process of creative evolution.

This new point of view prompted us to reflect more deeply, as video games, understood as creative works and forms of art, are capable of conveying their creators’ visions within digital environments designed to be shared with others.

The developer also explained that his studio aims to create video games that engage in social critique and promote community support. One example is his game “Hungry Penguin,” in which a portion of the profits is donated to a non-governmental organization dedicated to penguin conservation.

Creating an indie video game in Chile is a leap of faith. Large and traditional media outlets, such as the news media, do not usually cover video games, and when developers receive funding or awards, these achievements are rarely discussed. The Chilean State allocates very limited resources to promote video games, assigning fewer funds compared to areas such as sports or traditional arts. In response to this situation, spaces such as Indie Fest Chile or Indie Week Chile become essential.

Therefore, these events do not only serve marketing purposes, but also function as spaces for the dissemination of ideas and values. Game developers invest their creations with elements of their own subjectivity, emotions, and personal understandings of the world. This represents one dimension of the importance that these events hold for developers.

Ultimately, video games are not anthropological solely because they belong to a culture, but also because they are human creations that contain messages, meanings, values, and ideas.

These elements converge in their ability to be conveyed through immersive, playable, and shared digital worlds.