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Everyday Verticality: Migrant Experiences of High-Rise Living in Santiago, Chile

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Abstract

Over the last three decades, Santiago, Chile has experienced rapid urbanization. The city's expansion has prompted the proliferation of high-rise residential buildings, mediated by spatial segregation along class lines and fragmented urban governance. Concurrently, Chile's strong economy has drawn regional labor migrants, resulting in an unprecedented increase in migratory flows. Drawing on ethnographic research, this article charts the everyday experiences of migrants in high-rise residences. As new arrivals seek housing, social networks channel migrants—particularly Venezuelans—into shared high-rise apartments, producing specific buildings as vertical enclaves. Lived experience within the confines of verticality are frequently shaped by the challenges of overcrowding. As migrants craft daily practices to mitigate these limitations, their routines make full use of limited space and meaningfully engage with building common areas, public spaces, and neighborhoods. The everyday practice of verticality articulates links between high-rises and surrounding sites, neighborhoods, and the broader urban fabric.

Keywords: verticality, migration, high-rise residence, public space

Introduction

In the last decade, the ways in which urban life transpires across multiple intersecting levels has garnered increasing attention (Elden, 2013; Graham and Hewitt, 2012; Harris, 2015). For many citizens, the most formative engagement with verticality is through housing as expanding high-rise developments intimately shape residents' lives, daily routines, and engagements with the city (Graham, 2016; Jacobs, 2006). Drawing on ethnographic research conducted with migrants in Santiago, Chile, I examine the ways in which everyday practices connect high-rise residences to surrounding neighborhoods, public spaces, and the broader city. The rhythms of life within the walls of high-rise towers and the quotidian routes, processes, and paths that residents navigate dialectically shape a multidimensional city. The sometimes-onerous barriers that migrants encounter as they mediate the passage from high-rise homes to the city at large and their associated routinized practices represent a liminal step—one that articulates a banal yet crucial socio-material separation between interior and exterior spaces, vertical and horizontal

dimensions. As migrants move through these buildings and make use of neighborhoods, their repeated engagements bridge this separation, linking vertical urbanism to visited sites and integrating high-rises into the lived urban fabric.

The repetition of these paths and the diversity of urban engagements are part of the “city as a thing in the making” (Simone, 2010:3). Practices of inhabiting the city and potentialities of encounters among diverse people, places, and things speak to the fluidity of a never fully defined or complete project (Simone, 2010). The daily practices of high-rise residents illustrate how the confines of vertical structures funnel them along certain paths, require time to navigate, facilitate inadvertent social contacts, and shape their engagements with buildings, neighborhoods, public spaces, and the city. An ethnographic approach to migrants’ experiences in high-rise residences illustrates the ways in which verticality is part and parcel of the urban fabric.

Extending the idea of “verticality as practice” (Baxter, 2017) beyond the walls of tower blocks, I explore how residents craft salient connections to the urban sphere through their day-to-day engagements. High-rise apartment towers are not merely proliferating structures reshaping Santiago’s skyline, but these buildings are home to millions of people, fundamentally shaping their experiences of the city. In turn, the ways in which individuals use these buildings and the surrounding areas continually reshape urban life. This dialectical relationship between built form and everyday experience exemplifies “how the vertical and horizontal are mutually implicated and produced” (Harris, 2015:602), such that “horizontal and vertical extensions, imaginaries, materialities and lived practices intersect and mutually construct each other” (Graham and Hewitt, 2012:74). In this article, I illustrate the ways in which migrants navigate this ambiguous multidimensional terrain framing the mundane practices that contextualize and make meaningful life in high-rises. I analyze how individual residents, through their (and others’) repeated actions,

become agents of a “quiet encroachment of the ordinary” (Bayat, 2010)—one that crafts both building-based rhythms and neighborhood-based patterns of use—and I chart the ways that migrants shape urban life even as they are likely only temporary residents.

Methods

In this article, I draw on ethnographic research examining migrant experiences with high-rise apartments. Between 2009 and 2019, I conducted more than twenty-four months of fieldwork detailing migrant experiences of settling in Santiago and Chilean perceptions of new migratory flows. Preliminary fieldwork took place in 2010, followed by a 16-month stay in 2012–2013 and shorter visits in 2015, 2016-17, and 2019. While contextualized by previous research, the data presented here comes from three months of fieldwork conducted in 2019. The significance of the surge in Venezuelan migration provided a focus for this fieldwork. Semi-structured interviews conducted in 2019 with migrants (n=50)—including 28 Venezuelans—and Chilean respondents (n=19) inform this article. Twelve interviews were conducted with Chilean directors of neighborhood councils. These offices link municipalities to smaller districts and provide a point of contact for residents seeking assistance. In light of the growing importance of neighborhood councils in producing documents enabling migrant access to educational, health, and other services, I recruited directors to share their insights on migrant settlement in their neighborhoods. Participant recruitment was done in-person through an NGO and online through circulation of recruitment materials on migrant community and advocacy groups on Facebook. Interview data is complemented by observations as well as by insights gained through “go-alongs” (Kusenbach, 2003). Accompaniment of migrants in their daily routines and movements afforded a “relational

perspective on place and space” (Carpiano, 2009:263), illustrating their perceptions of buildings, spatial practices, social norms linked to specific sites, and their relationship with the broader city.

High-rise living in the multidimensional city

In the last decade, attention to the “off the ground” (Graham and Hewitt, 2012), “volumetric” (Elden, 2013), and “three-dimensional city” (Harris, 2015) has prompted consideration of the ways in which urban life transpires across multiple intersecting levels. Ethnographic work increasingly takes up McNeill’s call to examine “the relationship between the tall building and the ‘city’ as an identifiable place with its own histories, myths and collective place narratives” (2005:43). Analysis of “ordinary topologies,” like the quotidian movements of high-rise residents as they visit family, charts the ways in which individual actors participate in the co-constitution of the city itself (Harker, 2014; Nethercote and Horne, 2016). This growing body of research explores how residents “shape and transform [towers] in important ways that often belie the apparently monolithic architecture of such structures” (Graham, 2016:191). Such work complicates enduring perceptions of high-rises as marked by stigma, disrepair, and failure by analyzing the social ties, connections, activism, and investment that coexist with the challenges of living in these residences (Abrams et al., 2020; Jacobs et al., 2007)—thus recognizing that acts of housing and dwelling are coproduced and shape the city itself (McFarland, 2011).

Exploring the social meaning behind vertical developments, Baxter argues that the high-rise is more than merely housing—it is home (2017). Bringing together a physical site, the emotions and practices rooted there, and the connections to broader publics (Blunt and Dowling, 2006), “the high-rise [is] a domestic environment that is intensely meaningful to residents, and important in identity and belonging” (Baxter, 2017:334). Meaning is invested in vertical homes

through everyday activities, such as using common areas, having small conversations with neighbors, taking in the view, and personalizing apartments (Abrams et al., 2020; Baxter, 2017). In this way, “verticality is not pre-given, but co-constructed in everyday life” (Baxter, 2017:335). In research with Bengali migrants in Toronto, Ghosh examines how aging high-rise complexes can be transformed into vibrant “vertical neighborhoods” (Ghosh, 2014). Tower residents appropriated common areas, rented an apartment to serve as a mosque, played in hallways, coordinated laundry days to make them social moments, and provided informal childcare. “More than merely being things fixed in space, residential high-rises constitute diverse and complex interrelationships between people and things—where conceived and lived spaces coexist, but not necessarily in unity” (Ghosh, 2014:2009). Ethnographic insights emphasize the diverse practices—sanctioned and unsanctioned—contained within apartment buildings, the contested meanings that coexist at these sites, and the ways in which residents creatively appropriate and reshape these spaces.

As residents make homes in high-rise towers, everyday life is shaped by the physical dimensions of the building. At its root, volumetric urbanism “intensifies the diversity of everyday urban actions, sustained and mediated by myriad interfaces and in-between spaces” (Wang, 2020:15). Density, proximity, and the built form of residential towers shape experiences in ways that differ from other housing forms. Small spaces impact everyday routines, necessitating carving out areas to work away from children, minimizing consumption, and seeking outdoor recreation venues (Nethercote and Horne, 2016). The proximity of other residents can manifest in sounds and smells, such that specific social norms develop, articulating what is acceptable, when, and what behaviors should be avoided (Shilon and Eizenberg, 2021). The process of regularly moving between the street level and apartments crafts a specific type of

material engagement within towers as well as a relationship with the city itself (Jackson et al., 2021; Shilon and Eizenerg, 2021). This repetitive process and technology-enabled passage provides a physical separation; an intermediary step linking home and street. The bridging of this separation is so central to high-rise residences, that Arriagoita (2014) argues that home itself can be unmade when this link breaks down. In a public housing high-rise in Puerto Rico, Arriagoita analyzed how both the making and unmaking of home rely on socio-material engagements, such that broken elevators undermined engagements with others, the space itself, and participation in the broader community (Arriagoita, 2014). This socio-material dialectic shapes life within tower blocks and extends to the relationships between buildings, surrounding neighborhoods, and individual users whose daily engagements link and make sense of these connections.

The impact of “verticality as practice” (Baxter, 2017) spreads beyond the confines of these buildings. As high-rise constructions flourish globally, verticality has become an integral part of the urban fabric. In arguing for participation of high-rise residents in city planning, March and Lehrer note that “unique practices, experiences and spatial configurations of public space emerge out of the verticality of the high-rise’s built form but also out of its implications in horizontal imperatives and spaces of neighbourhood revitalization” (2019:80). As diverse individuals and groups are drawn into concentrated housing in high-rise towers, urban verticality is lived relationally, with residents weaving together below ground, street-level, and elevated territories in a complex, interconnected, and continually re-made whole. This notion of the city as a patchwork that is creatively constructed as people navigate their daily routines illustrates Simone’s discussion of cityness, in which the “practices of inhabiting the city are so diverse and change so quickly that they cannot easily be channeled into clearly defined uses of space and resources or patterns of social interchange” (2010:3). As diverse individuals are drawn into

concentrated living arrangements in high-rises, they engage in spatial practices, rooted in the building, but spreading beyond to sites of employment, commerce, and recreation. These uncoordinated—albeit cumulatively powerful practices (Bayat, 2010)—craft the city anew, etching out spatially rooted networks, many of which are ephemeral. The coalescing of everyday movements and routines adds a further dimension of temporality to the lived realities of high-rises. Daily rhythms play out within tower blocks, while concurrently shaping the “city heartbeat”—the pulse of ebbs and flows of urban life (Coletta, 2017; c.f. Lefebvre, 2004). In Santiago, migrants living in high-rise towers take on a role in the construction of this multidimensional urban reality—the city in the making. It is through everyday practices that discrete high-rise buildings and verticality writ large are woven into the urban fabric.

Multidimensional Santiago

Santiago is Chile’s bustling urban core. Six million residents—more than 35 percent of the national population—live in the metro area (INE, 2017). Urban growth has prompted both the development of peripheral areas (Ducci and González, 2006) and the volumetric expansion of central municipalities (Contreras, 2016; Garreton, 2017). Iconic photographs of Santiago capture an agglomeration of towering buildings nestled against the Andes Mountains, positioning verticality as emblematic of the city’s modern aspirations. South America’s tallest skyscraper anchors the financial district, Sanhattan, acting as a “powerful signifier on a symbolic plane” that is visible from almost all points of Santiago (Graham, 2016:151). The city’s vertical development began in the 1920s with early residential towers positioned as symbols of modern urban life (Márquez, 2017; Vergara Vidal, 2017). High-rise construction accelerated in the 1990s, quickly becoming the norm for urban housing (Contreras, 2016). Recent expansion of

developments in middle- and lower-class sectors of the city is marked by an “unprecedented form of housing” characterized by mass production of large-scale, high-density towers (Rojas Symmes, 2017:6).

Even as high-rises have altered the city, many of the metro’s long-standing structural divides have been reinscribed in new, more vertical forms. Significant research documents Santiago’s spatial segregation along socioeconomic lines (Sabatini et al., 2001; Agostini et al., 2016; Garreton, 2017). Relocation of informal settlements from central and wealthier areas of the city under the Pinochet dictatorship (1973-1988) paired with construction of social housing projects in Santiago’s peripheries entrenched urban segregation (Garreton, 2017), making way for liberalization of the land market and market-based redevelopment (Casgrain, 2014; Garreton, 2017). Wealthy areas are now concentrated in northern and eastern sectors (Agostini et al., 2016) and poorer areas ring Santiago’s southern and western peripheries (Rodriguez and Winchester, 2004). Adding a topographic dimension to the city’s segregation, the common dividing line between upper-class and lower-class sectors is Plaza Italia. Upper-class areas are referred to as “above” Plaza Italia (east toward the Andean foothills) with lower-class areas “below” (west). This division illustrates how “vertical and other spatial metaphors literally work to constitute and reconstitute social power: they both derive directly from the physical and phenomenological experience of social life and actively influence how people perceive and shape the social and political world” (Graham, 2016:15). This critical spatial segregation also bears myriad impacts on the daily life of city residents, shaping access to jobs, services, and quality of life (Link et al., 2015; Jirón and Mansilla, 2014).

Further exacerbating urban segregation, Santiago is also administratively fragmented. Consisting of 37 separate municipalities without a metropolitan level authority, urban

development is loosely coordinated and municipal investments in public infrastructure vary greatly (Garreton, 2017; Rodriguez and Winchester, 2004). Residential high-rises exemplify the city's fractured urban planning as municipalities compete for these development projects with public-private partnerships leaning heavily toward maximizing profits (López-Morales et al., 2012; Vicuña et al., 2020). Buildings taller than nine stories are concentrated in just one third of the city's municipalities, with high-rises varying greatly in size, amenities, and cost (Vergara Vidal, 2017:36). High-rise apartments in wealthier areas are on average double the size of apartments in lower-middle class areas and often include amenities like bike storage areas, green spaces, playgrounds, pools, rooftop barbeques, gyms, and common rooms (ibid). Between 2011 and 2016, the average size of an apartment in the lower-middle class municipality of Estación Central shrank from 48 m² (517 ft²) to 38 m² (409 ft²) and many buildings contain few amenities (López Morales and Herrera, 2018; Vicuña et al., 2020). Neoliberal market logics frame investments in high-rises both among developers as well as property owners. Apartments—particularly in central areas—are increasingly purchased as investment properties. In Santiago, 43% of apartments are rentals and in Estación Central 36% are rentals (López Morales and Herrera, 2018). Verticality reinscribes class distinctions as developments in poorer areas are characterized by compact spaces, limited amenities, overcrowding, a high concentration of rental occupants, and frequent turnover (López Morales and Herrera, 2018; Contreras, 2016).

Concurrent with Santiago's volumetric expansion, Chile has become a destination for Latin American migrants. Drawn by the nation's economic growth, over the last three decades, increasing flows of migrants have settled in Santiago. In 1992, migrants comprised less than 1% of Chile's population, but by 2019, migrants accounted for 8% of the population (Godoy, 2019; INE, 1992). An initial increase in Peruvian migrants in the 1990s was followed by flows of

migrants from Colombia, Bolivia, Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti (Rojas Pedemonte and Silva, 2016; Stefoni, 2011). The unprecedented influx of Venezuelan migrants furthered the expansion of migration after 2015, accounting for 30% of migrants in Chile (DEM, 2020). Each national flow responds to different push and pull factors, and nationality can significantly shape access to housing, employment, and documentation (Correa Téllez, 2016). Framed by strong demand for an inexpensive and flexible workforce, migrants often occupy low-paid positions, working as domestic laborers, janitors, manual laborers, sales personnel, street vendors, kitchen assistants, landscapers, construction workers, street sweepers, parking attendants, and gig delivery workers (Stefoni, 2011). Access to specific employment sectors are often shaped by nationality, racialized stereotypes about which migrants are most apt for specific positions, and an interest in flexible labor (author redacted; Correa Téllez, 2016). For example, Peruvian women are sought for work as domestic laborers due to their perceived docility (Mora and Undurraga, 2013) and opportunities washing cars, pumping gas, and stocking merchandise are more frequently available to Haitian men (Rojas Pedemonte et al., 2017). Notably, the recent Venezuelan migration is on average higher-educated, more middle-class, and more likely to work in professional positions (Doña-Reveco and Gouveia, 2020; Stefoni and Silva, 2018). These distinctions position the sizeable and most recent migratory flow of Venezuelans in contrast with other groups, impacting their experiences of the city, work, and Chile (author redacted, Stefoni and Silva, 2018).

Two thirds of migrants live in Santiago (Garcés, 2015; INE, 2017), and migrant settlement is reshaping central areas of the city. In the municipalities of Santiago and Estación Central, migrants account for more than 20% of the population (López Morales and Herrera, 2018). Prior to 2015, migrant housing was concentrated in centrally located historic houses that

were often subdivided and in disrepair (Bonhomme, 2021; Ducci and Rojas, 2010; Garcés, 2015). Increasingly, migrants are sharing high-rise apartments as more units become available to rent, older housing stock is replaced, and new arrivals mobilize greater financial resources (Contreras, 2016). Accessing rental housing presents significant challenges. In Santiago's largely unregulated housing market, property owners can ask for myriad financial and documentary requirements, fostering situations of price speculation, substandard housing conditions, and overcrowding (Torres and Garcés, 2013). Racism and discrimination further exacerbate bureaucratic barriers that migrants face as they seek housing, with rental prices often differing based on race, nationality, and perceptions about cleanliness and responsibility (Bonhomme, 2021). Subsequently, migrants often secure housing through informal networks based on social contacts and national groupings (author redacted).

Bureaucratic disjunctures and housing discrimination have fostered spatially-rooted community settlements. In interviews with directors of neighborhood councils, clustered settlements were a recurring theme. When nationality and housing types were raised, the connection of Venezuelans and high-rises was ubiquitous. In a 2019 lecture about migrant housing, the director of Estación Central's municipal office of migration shared heat maps and explained how Venezuelan migrants are clustered in high-rise towers by the metro, and Haitian migrants live in aging housing stock in southern neighborhoods. One council director shared similar reflections, "In the apartments, I know of [Venezuelan] families living in 32 m² with 12 people. The buildings look pretty, but the overcrowding there is worse than the Haitian community who live in historic houses, some with dirt floors and falling into disrepair.... These options are equally bad." The association of verticality with Venezuelan migrants was routinely

reiterated during interviews and clustered settlement based on nationality, type of housing, and length of time in Chile are documented in burgeoning research on the topic (Razmilic, 2019).

The rhythms of vertical life

Experiences of verticality often differ from flattened perceptions of high-rise living. In the municipality of Estación Central, a series of high-rises has garnered significant attention, with the highly publicized legal battles over municipal regulation. These towers illustrate growing concern over “vertical ghettos” based on their density, lack of privacy, elevator use, street congestion, and overcrowding of nearby public spaces impacting neighborhood life (Sabatini, 2017). Charting building size, number of apartments, number of elevators, and availability of common or green spaces, Rojas Symmes developed a measure of housing precarity, with the buildings detailed below representing very high levels of precarity (2017). Even as public debates over the failure of these developments linger, residents continue to craft these sites as home, making do with their many limitations.

I met Sara months before I learned of the notoriety of the buildings we visited. We met for an interview in July 2019 at a small plaza. A Venezuelan woman in her mid-twenties, she had been in Chile one month. After our two-hour conversation, Sara invited me to see where she lived, so the following Saturday, I took the metro to Estación Central. I texted Sara when I arrived, and she responded that she was waving to me from her balcony. I looked up at the monolithic façade of the high-rise but I could not see her. She texted that she would come down, appearing five minutes later. Sara explained that we would go to her friend’s apartment before visiting hers. As we walked, Sara pointed out her balcony on the 13th floor, indicating that it was the one with the mattress off to one side and hanging laundry. As we turned the corner and

walked down the dusty side of a narrow one-way street, five large apartment blocks—three still under construction—loomed above a row of two-story houses. I stopped to take photos and Sara talked about how the neighborhood was still in development. She pointed out a bike repair store and shared that she had taken her bike there a couple weeks ago, when she saw a friend from her small hometown. Sara had not known that her friend was in Chile and was delighted to reconnect with Julia who she was taking me to meet.

In the crowded lobby, we waited our turn to pass through a narrow entryway adjoining the attendant's desk. Sara said a cheerful hello, noted we were visiting a friend, and swept right by the desk as the attendant attempted to field two other people's questions at the same time. Three young men with bulky food delivery backpacks were lined up to guide their bikes through the entryway. We waited as one elevator arrived, discharged six people, and promptly filled again. Almost immediately, another full elevator arrived, everyone exited, and Sara shepherded me onto the elevator. We got on, moving to the opposite side as two couples. A young man with a bike came on after us, maneuvering his bike so that it stood upright—the only way it would fit. The elevator door closed, with just enough space to accommodate the man's delivery backpack. At the seventh floor, the elevator stopped, the biker exited, one couple got off, and the biker re-entered. At the 12th floor, the biker leaned toward the remaining couple as Sara and I eased around him to emerge in a long hallway. Sara knocked on her friend's door, and two boys, aged nine and five, opened the door and animatedly welcomed us into the studio apartment. The space was approximately six meters by six meters, and half of the living space was taken up by queen-sized mattresses piled on each other. Sara's friend, Julia, introduced herself and explained that they pile things together during the day so that the boys have space to play.

In the interview, Julia noted that they were very lucky to have found this place. She recounted how her husband had migrated first to Chile, sharing tight quarters with a cousin and several other Venezuelans. After a year saving, he borrowed additional money to bring Julia and the boys to Chile. He had looked for housing but only found a single room of a sub-divided house in a remote neighborhood. Julia noted in despair that the room had a dirt floor and was always damp, making the transition to wintry Santiago unpleasant. After six months with Julia working, they were able to find their current apartment. As Julia spoke, the boys went from jumping on the mattresses to knocking over a precarious tower of folded laundry, then driving trucks along the window ledge. Across the apartment's dark interior courtyard, I could see children regularly appear in three other windows. At one point Julia gazed at her boys, sighed, and confided that she still wondered if they would be better off returning to Venezuela and their spacious, two-story house with a yard where the boys would play in the warm sun. I asked if there were common areas in the complex, noting that most buildings I visited had a small play area. Julia said that this block did not have common areas, and that there were no parks nearby. A couple of times a week she would walk the boys 40 minutes to a large city park, and they would play for several hours. She confessed that she felt guilty, but most of the playing they did was in the apartment's confines.

As we spoke, Sara patted out cornmeal *arepas* from her perch in the petite kitchen corner. Sara laid out tuna and vegetables on the meter-long space that doubled as both counter and table. She heated the *arepas* one at a time on the single burner stovetop, stacking the completed ones on a plate. Sara placed four plates on the counter and unstacked three plastic stools. Meanwhile, the boys eagerly pointed out the apartments displaying Venezuelan flags, and Julia estimated that three quarters of the building's residents were Venezuelan. The boys took turns playing their

favorite songs, holding the phone above their heads next to the window to find the scant cell signals to make it through the layers of concrete. These small actions, like making a favorite food and streaming familiar songs, are integral in making new spaces home (Bonhomme, 2013). From the displays of Venezuelan flags to the stacking of household items and tracking of limited cell service, these practices of lived verticality shape the lives of high-rise residents (Baxter, 2017; Nethercote and Horne, 2016; Ghosh, 2014).

Later, as we left, Sara and I stood waiting for the elevator. Two descending elevators stopped just long enough for us to ascertain that they were full. As the minutes stretched on, a janitor was methodically cleaning the hallway, making his way toward us. Sara had speculated that he was Venezuelan and when he was within earshot, she said hello, eagerly inquiring what town he was from once she heard his accent. The two talked for a couple minutes before an elevator arrived with space for us. We got in with a brief hello to the other occupants and Sara quietly commented that she enjoyed being in a place where could meet Venezuelans. The lobby was crowded as we left, with four bike delivery employees entering the building, while two attempted to leave. After we made it outside, Sara pointed out all the Venezuelan products lining the shelves of the small, adjoining storefront, including cornmeal for *arepas*, and both Chilean and Venezuelan types of bread.

Elevators are the infrastructural underpinning of high-rise living and the passage from apartment to ground level is a ubiquitous step that mediates the connection between high-rise home and the city (Graham, 2016). This technology's form, function, and use become an integral part of daily life (Shilon and Eizenberg, 2021) such that its break down comprises the integrity of vertical homes and community (Arrigoitia, 2014). This in-between site also becomes a social condenser (Murawski, 2017) prompting iterative yet new daily encounters between residents.

The combination of working as a bike delivery worker and living in a high-rise presents quotidian micro-frictions centered around elevator use—one that Sara came to know intimately as she spent six months as a bike deliverer. Survey data indicates that for the two main delivery companies, 70% and 40% of their respective workforces are migrants, 80% of whom are from Venezuela (Cruz and McManus, 2021:21). Like Sara, most workers choose this position for its ease of entry—in contrast to other employment options (ibid:29). Given the scale of high-rises in Estación Central, the clustered settlement of Venezuelans, and the significant presence of bike delivery workers residing in these towers, the ubiquitous movements of bikes and the spatial dynamics they present adds further frictions to the rhythm of daily tower life.

Cumulative patterns of daily practice shape how people see and understand their vertical living spaces. In early work on verticality, Fernie reflects on the cadence of a high-rise:

The rhythms of a towerblock are made explicit by the sheer density of people living in it. I can tell the time of day by the movement of neighbours walking past my front door, by the smell of cooking drifting in through the windows (normally a mixture of curry and boiled vegetables), the sound of rubbish being deposited into the rubbish chute, and by the soft hum of the lift as it collects and deposits passengers. These rhythms are a constant reminder that there is space between me and the ground (2000:51).

Sensory minutia of sights, sounds, and movements frame life for tower residents, making tangible the separation from below and the proximity of other residents (Jackson et al., 2021; Shilon and Eizenberg, 2021). The textured richness of verticality is made meaningful through activities that are not reducible merely to “something that takes place in vertical landscapes” (Baxter, 2017:350)—like the smells that waft through hallways and the flags that mark apartments. Daily rearranging of furniture, utilizing every inch of possible storage including exposed terraces, preparing simple meals, shopping for food daily, coordinating bathroom schedules, making the most of waiting time at the elevator, and taking advantage of common areas are all practices framing the rhythms of confined quarters (Nethercote and Horne, 2016).

Verticality's connections to public space

I navigated the morning rush to meet Nico early one Monday in July 2019. In the block before Nico's building, I passed two construction projects, one stretching into the sky amid the echoing notes of heavy equipment, and the other offering a glimpse of a multi-story hole. Nico's high-rise overlooked the river in central Santiago and abutted a busy four-lane thoroughfare. The entryway was busy with people leaving for work, parents accompanying kids in school uniforms, and others entering with leashed dogs or bags of freshly baked bread. When Nico arrived, he suggested that we talk in the park across the street. I followed him as he jogged across four lanes of traffic. When I asked if it was always an exciting crossing, he laughed and said that he had stopped even noticing it. He explained that the nearest crosswalk was blocks away and he came to this park daily, noting that the park offered him an escape—a break from the small apartment, and some sanity amid Santiago's bustle.

We sat, drank maté, and Nico shared his experiences in Santiago. Originally from Argentina, he had moved a month before to join his Venezuelan girlfriend. Nico was settling into the city, completing visa paperwork, and looking for work as an agronomist. As we talked, the occasional jogger, dog walker, or parent and child passed by, and two of the joggers nodded silent but familiar greetings to Nico. When I asked what it was like to live in Santiago, Nico shared:

Luckily, there is this beautiful park, [the apartment] is in a very convenient location because it's just ten minutes to the Plaza de Armas, it's right downtown. I live on the 26th floor which has a very beautiful view [...] it is calmer to live higher up because the sound from the street isn't as strong.

He liked Santiago but imagined himself returning to the countryside in the future. For Nico, navigating everyday micro-frictions, like those posed by waits for the elevator and street

crossings, were just mundane hurdles to accessing sites that provided him with respite. Shilon and Eizenberg write that “affective relations between bodies and sound can transform how people engage, experience, and act within the urban environments they inhabit” (2021:132). For someone most at home in natural areas, the quiet perch of his apartment and the adjoining green spaces became sites that Nico inhabited, drawing them together through daily engagement. At the end of our conversation, Nico insisted that I meet his partner, Valentina, as she was closely tied into the robust Venezuelan social networks.

That Sunday, I returned along quiet streets, passing empty office buildings and shuttered storefronts. When I arrived, Valentina asked if we could talk in the park, and Nico accompanied us across the road before setting off for his daily jog. When we spoke, Valentina talked about settling in Santiago. She initially stayed with her sister, her brother-in-law, their three kids, and two friends, “we were eight people in an apartment with one bedroom, but that is what must be done to support everyone.” For the first year, Valentina had worked overtime to build savings, putting in ten-hour days “Monday through Monday” at a phone store. Her 45-minute commute took her south, traveling by bus and returning home late exhausted and hoping for a seat. She eagerly shared that her new job comes with a 19-minute walk to work, detailing her route and the enjoyment of the new commute. Quotidian movements, like commutes, are one way that residents link high-rise homes to workplaces, crafting intangible and often ephemeral ties and connections along the route. These repetitive movements articulate strong ties between frequented places and more dispersed webs of engagement for less visited sites, as in the links bike delivery workers develop. Mobilities, repeated visits, and everyday engagements with workspaces further integrate vertical homes into the multidimensional city (Harker, 2014; Jirón and Mansilla, 2014).

After a month living with her sister, Valentina had used her knowledge, connections, and savings to find her current apartment. She initially shared her one-bedroom apartment with two friends to minimize the cost. A month before Nico arrived, she had asked her friends to find other housing. When I asked her about living in Santiago, she commented:

Everything is nearby, we have the produce market, we have shopping centers, the park. That said, it is very stressful in the sense that on the weekdays the traffic is very busy and there is the stress of the city. . . . The good thing about Santiago is that it has given us opportunities, it is a city that is well maintained, for example, the parks—I always see them so well maintained, the apartment buildings are in perfect order, the sidewalks clean, the market, the economy—it's all stable.

For Valentina, her life in Venezuela frames how she views Santiago. This relational perspective illustrates how “imagination of an ideal neighborhood are often seen through a dual lens – of how things are here and there” (Ghosh, 2014:2019). Valentina’s overtly positive view of Santiago’s public spaces were voiced in comparison to those in Venezuela where the lack of resources and increasing insecurity often deterred the use public spaces.

Accessibility of public spaces was a common refrain, particularly among recent Venezuelan migrants. In one interview, an older man from Venezuela shared that in his hometown, security concerns had completely curtailed his visits to public parks and even free movement on the streets. He reflected upon his daily use of a community library as a return to how he remembered the possibilities of public space. In the months that followed, I often saw him in the library, and we would chat before heading separate ways. Similarly, I conducted many interviews at a large community center, and several migrants noted that its central location, spaces for gathering, and free artwork had brought them to the center previously. After one interview there, a woman walked me over to the city’s information booth and made sure I got the listings of the free tours. She was waiting for her visa and living with her son’s family, so she would attend a different tour each day. She said that it was good to be outside walking and she

had learned the history of the city, met several friends, and gotten out of her daughter-in-law's way for a couple hours each day. After another interview, the woman I had interviewed walked me out of her building and insisted on showing me the church a block away from her son's apartment where she was staying. She led me around the different naves, explaining that it was her new "home" away from home and that she had gotten to know several regular attendees. From using parks and plazas, to exploring bike trails, going on free tours, and participating in religious communities, migrants routinely make use of myriad city spaces. In his work on urban change, Bayat argues that the "collective actions of noncollective actors" can power urban transformations (2010:15). As individuals go about their everyday routines to meet their needs, the cumulative impact of similar efforts can lead to the "quiet encroachment of the ordinary" (Bayat, 2010:15). In this way, the cumulative, albeit uncoordinated, impact of these repetitive movements between high-rise housing, workplaces, and key public spaces weave urban verticality into the broader fabric of city life.

In analyzing "relationships between buildings, infrastructures, facilities and their urban contexts [...] considered holistically" (Wang, 2020:1) the role of power and positionality mediate individual experiences and engagements with these sites. While the limitations of small, shared apartments often prompt migrants to make the most of "third places," sites apart from home and work which are vital to individual and community well-being (Oldenberg, 1989, c.f. Abrams et al., 2020), not all migrants feel welcome and safe in these spaces. Peruvian research participants routinely reported not feeling comfortable speaking in constrained spaces like elevators and buses because their accent marks them. Additionally, migrant use of public space, particularly Santiago's central Plaza de Armas, has long been contested (Ducci and Rojas, 2010; Garcés, 2015), such that the site is often understood by both migrants and Chileans as a

racialized space of migration (author redacted). Notably, Peruvian migrants and black migrants of diverse nationalities report experiencing racist insults in public spaces (Garcés, 2015; Rojas-Pedemonte et al., 2017). One council director interviewed shared that he had recently seen anti-immigrant posters in the neighborhood, adding that he had quickly mobilized a group of volunteers to take them down. Contestations over migrant use of public space and individuals' perceptions about whether they belong at these sites shape engagement in public spaces, with these interactions impacting broader feelings of belonging.

Conclusion

High-rise constructions have produced uneven impacts for Santiago's central districts, with transformations deeply felt by long-term residents. One neighborhood council director shared, "The biggest impact on the neighborhood has been the outcropping of condominiums because if I compare the neighborhood as it existed before, there were many old patrimonial houses, and they've disappeared. Then, it was a neighborhood, it was just like a small town where everyone knew everyone." Nostalgia, however, often obscures the structural changes that fostered verticalization. These same neighborhoods were shaped by multi-decade processes displacing many low-income residents to the urban peripheries (Garreton, 2017; Casgrain, 2014), while prioritizing market-driven high-rise development (López Morales and Herrera, 2018). The resulting increase in rental properties, influx of young professionals, and new flows of migrants epitomize shifting—and ephemeral—temporalities. The patterned uses of urban sites described here are contextualized by broader structural dynamics prompting vertical development and spurring migration—all these forces coalesce, even if temporarily, in these buildings. This influx quality illustrates the ever-changing nature of urban areas (Simone, 2010).

Sara and Julia have both left Estación Central. Julia's family relocated to a house with a small patio on the city's western periphery following the birth of their third child. Switching schools and jobs enabled the family to stay closer to home, reducing commute times and altering their engagements with the city. At the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, Sara's three roommates lost their jobs and they gave up their apartment. Sara moved in the middle of lockdown. She shared photos of eerily empty streets and of her new room in a friend's house. Sara continued to work as a janitor throughout the pandemic, but now her shifts follow a 50-minute commute by bike from a southern municipality to a northeastern one. For migrants living in Santiago, layers of uncertainty frame hopes and concerns for the future. The pandemic exacerbated the economic precarity that many migrants face and unemployment, homelessness, and hunger increased. Adding further uncertainty, the April 2021 roll-out of Chile's New Migration Law is enacting new, stricter entry requirements for those seeking to live and work in Chile. These shifts will make it harder to legally work in Chile and add barriers to social integration (Thayer, 2021).

Rodenbiker argues that the volumetric analyses of cities must combine horizontal and vertical analyses with temporal, emphasizing the "politics of continuity and rupture" (2019:235). The urban rhythms (Coletta, 2017; Lefebvre 2004) rooted in high-rise residences and the quotidian ways residents weave these sites into the broader urban fabric contrast with the longer-term trajectory of the neighborhood's transformations. In research documenting Palestinian use of high-rises and linked mobilities, Harker argues, "it is important to think about the various pasts that are folded into Ramallah's present(s), and the ways in which such temporal relations are always spatio-temporal relations" (2014:327). Just as multiple pasts are folded into neighborhoods, everyday activities are shaped by an ever-present shadow of the future. This

“futural orientations” (Bryant and Knight, 2019) frames the ways that individuals see, understand, and engage with their neighborhoods.

As a nation, Chile is at a point of inflection. In October 2019, what started as student protests over an increase in metro fares ignited a “social explosion,” (*estallido social*), galvanizing widespread support. Under the popular refrain, “Chile has awoken,” 1.2 million people gathered on October 25, 2019 at Plaza Italia, the spatial dividing line between wealthier and poorer sectors of the city (BBC Mundo, 2019). Renamed by protesters Plaza Dignity, the site continues to be the symbolic focal point for mass gatherings. Protests centered on Chile’s socioeconomic inequalities, critiques of neoliberal policies, and advocacy for human rights, and these concerns continue to frame public discussion. Continued protests and political pressures have prompted a constitutional assembly—one that is currently re-writing Chile’s constitution, a process that is expected to reach its conclusion in 2022. This movement paired with the uncertainties and transformations posed by the pandemic and the new migration law illustrate how temporal ruptures (Rodenbiker, 2019) can remake the urban milieu. Amid these changes, hope and uncertainty coexist as migrants in Chile navigate everyday challenges and an unpredictable future.

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