Private, Parochial, and Public Realms in Santiago, Chile’s Retail Sector

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Recent scholarship contends that the rise of shopping malls, gated communities, and gentrification as well as citizens’ withdrawal to the private realm have eroded public life in U.S. and Latin American cities. Malls’ suburban location and security policies exclude the poor and restrict free speech; residents and fences in gated communities exclude outsiders; and police and businesses in downtowns and high-rent districts limit poor people’s access to public areas. I expand this discussion with an analysis of the accessibility of Santiago, Chile’s retail areas, the social relationships present there, and marginalized groups’ informal resistance to their exclusion. The city’s distinct segregation pattern, transit system, and state-licensed street markets permit greater contact between rich and poor and foster vital public spaces. I adapt Lofland’s typology of fleeting, quasi-primary, and intimate secondary relations in public to examine social interactions in farmers’ markets, flea markets, and shopping malls. The distinct mix of relationships within these markets reflects the characteristics of users, varying degrees of accessibility to diverse populations, and state policies toward markets. Marginalized groups’ informal resistance is pervasive in each setting. In contrast to the dominant view that public space is declining in contemporary cities, Santiago residents are not universally reclusive, antisocial, or reluctant to engage in cross-class public encounters, and the city retains vital public areas. The findings demonstrate that our understanding of public space is incomplete without an awareness of social relationships and informal resistance alongside structural constraints to the accessibility of urban locales.

Contemporary analyses of U.S. metropolitan areas explore how post-World War II suburbanization and contemporary urban revitalization have changed the public character of cities. Shopping malls are designed for automobile access and mall owners tend to exclude the poor and political protests. Privately run business improvement districts (BIDs) impose curfews, set restrictive rules in public parks, and hire private security guards, thereby decreasing homeless and poor people’s access to these public places. Established merchants and city officials shut down illegal street markets, pedestrian bridges and tunnels segregate the poor from middle-class employees and tourists, and gated community residents exclude outsiders through security devices and staff. These trends have undermined an earlier pattern of social interaction by diverse groups and public political expression in cities (Davis, 1990; Zukin, 1995; Lofland, 1998; Boddy, 1992; Crawford, 1992; Cohen, 1996).

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293
Analysts of contemporary Latin American cities identify similar trends, arguing that economic globalization, gentrification, and tourist promotion facilitate the privatization of public space. Authors explicitly invoke analyses and empirical cases from the United States as guides to understanding Latin American cities and provide evidence that similar processes are occurring in the region (see Low, 2000; Caldeira, 2000; Kazman, 2001). In Costa Rica and Ecuador, policies designed to promote tourism in downtown and historic districts often entail the redesign of historic plazas for more effective policing and closure of street markets or expulsion of unlicensed vendors (Low, 2000; Bromley, 1998). Residents and managers in new suburban gated communities in Brazil and Chile use aggressive security measures to exclude the poor and residents have little social interaction with individuals outside the gates (Caldeira, 2000; Márquez, 2003). Finally, in cities of the Southern Cone of South America, an increasingly segmented labor market, residential segregation, and a two-tiered education and health system have decreased interactions between rich, middle class, and poor (Márquez, 2003, 2004; Kazman, 2001).

This article challenges the thesis that public space is in universal decline in Latin American cities by comparing distinct retail areas in Santiago, Chile located outside the city’s downtown and high-rent suburban districts that most studies of U.S. and Latin American cities have focused on (one exception is Zukin, 1995, Ch. 6). Santiago’s distinctive urbanization pattern and urban policies, labor market characteristics, the social relationships present in different retail areas, and poor people’s informal resistance to police and merchant control strategies have combined to create vital public spaces. These findings contradict the thesis that public space is being privatized throughout Latin American cities: these retail areas evidence cross-class interactions, intimate and long-term social ties, and poor people’s resistance to control strategies.

Santiago, Chile is an ideal setting for exploring these issues. As a free market “model,” the country became a test case for experiments in private sector and service privatization, import liberalization, and market models of land allocation. The Pinochet dictatorship’s policymakers believed the application of market models to most arenas of social life would undermine Chileans’ intense politicization (prior to the 1973 coup), powerful class identities, and social solidarities by luring citizens with the promise of prosperity and efficiency via individual consumer choice (Constable and Valenzuela, 1991; Martínez and Díaz, 1996; Moulián, 1997, 1998). The opening of urban land markets in the 1980s facilitated gated community and shopping mall construction (Portes, 1989; Sabatini and Arenas, 2000), and more recently, government officials have attempted to “sanitize” the city’s downtown through the installation of surveillance cameras on pedestrian streets, a 1998 plaza redesign, and 2003 crackdowns on prostitution, theft, and street vending. Santiago thus seems a prime candidate for the privatization of public space, but a careful examination of the city’s retail development and shopping cultures yields a more equivocal picture.

Most scholars who examine the decline of public space argue that changes in the real estate sector, land markets, public opinion, and urban policies (particularly policing) have led to the decline of public space. However, I argue that this analysis is limited in two regards. First, by focusing only on high-rent downtown districts, gentrifying areas, enclosed shopping malls, or gated communities, it does not explore the possibility that other urban public places may be more accessible due to their location outside high-rent and tourist areas.

The location of poor settlements on Santiago’s periphery, low automobile use, and widespread public transit discouraged suburbanization on the U.S. model, and facilitated
PRIVATE, PAROCHIAL, AND PUBLIC REALMS IN SANTIAGO, CHILE

the location of malls and gated communities in mixed income areas. Moreover, a large, publicly supported street market sector and a substantial informal economy coexist with malls and big box stores; these markets are more accessible than shopping malls and are rooted in intimate neighborhood ties. These structural differences with U.S. metro areas facilitated the development of a heterogeneous retail sector that hosts vibrant public spaces.

Second, this literature focuses on macro-structural patterns that limit accessibility to public spaces, malls, and gated communities, but authors have conducted little research on interactions within these areas. Scholarship on personal relations in public (Lofland, 1998; Morrill, Snow, and White, 2005a, 2005b) indicates that specific locations exist at points on a spectrum between publicness and privativeness, different kinds of relationships can coexist in a single location, and populations may resist efforts by police and mall managers to exclude them from public and quasi-public places (locations like malls where large groups congregate that are geared toward specific activities and whose owners engage in some gate-keeping functions) (Morrill, Snow, and White, 2005a, p. 14).

In comparing traditional markets with shopping malls, I use Lofland’s (1998) typology of private (family), parochial (neighborhood), and public (civic) realms, as well as her analysis of social relationships in public. I also utilize Morrill, Snow, and White’s (2005a, 2005b) analysis of fleeting and anchored relationships in public and quasi-public spaces. Lofland argues that we can examine given spaces (legally public or private) in terms of the type of social ties present at any given time, creating the possibility that a location can be in flux or divided between distinct realms.

I found that farmer’s markets, located in neighborhoods, combine private and parochial dimensions via long-term ties among and between vendors and customers. These markets are also open to anyone who enters and are sites for electoral and public health campaigns. Flea markets are more anonymous because of their metropolitan-wide clientele, but maintain parochial and private relations between vendors. Guards and police are unable to eliminate illegal trade, which evidences these markets’ accessibility to groups that police exclude in downtown public areas. Moreover, the markets’ multi-class clientele and the festive environment in adjacent streets give them a carnivalesque and spontaneous quality.

Finally, shopping malls located in mixed income areas and accessible via public transit attract a mixed-class clientele. Guards have difficulty restricting the entry of thieves and panhandlers. They are thus less homogeneous in class terms than U.S. malls. I use De Certeau’s (1984) concept of “tactics” and Low’s (2000, p. 183) idea of “spatial appropriation” to analyze the informal resistance of illegal vendors, panhandlers, and thieves in these market environments.

My analysis of the structural conditions affecting the accessibility of urban places, the relationships present in locales and how they shape these areas and patterns of spatial appropriation by marginalized groups advances the discussion of the privatization of public space. First, I specify the conditions facilitating or limiting the accessibility of public areas permitting the examination of different levels of accessibility of locales across urban space or between cities. Second, in contrast to the dominant view of the privatization of public space, I show how users shape public spaces and are not merely constrained by government and merchant control strategies. This interpretation shows us that Latin American cities are undergoing contradictory processes: public space is declining in high-rent districts, but persists in others.
I develop this argument by reviewing analyses of public space, social relationships in public areas, and public space in Latin American cities. I then turn to an analysis of the spatial organization of Santiago, a description of the study’s research design, and a review of my findings on social relationships in retail areas. The conclusion explores the implications of the analysis.

CONTEMPORARY THREATS TO URBAN PUBLIC SPACE

Contemporary discussions of suburban shopping malls and urban redevelopment in the United States describe how government policies, real estate and commercial investment, and police actions have reduced the accessibility of urban public spaces to all citizens. Analysts of Latin American cities use these works as guides for their interpretations of contemporary changes in metro areas, thus making a careful review of the U.S. context essential for understanding these issues in Latin America. To contextualize this discussion, we must first define public space.

Both Davis (1990) and Zukin (1995) use Central Park in New York City as a starting point for understanding modern public space. Davis (1990, p. 227) argues that Olmstead, the park’s designer, believed the participation of different social classes and ethnic groups there would discourage social upheaval. Zukin (1995, pp. 25–27) emphasizes how Central Park and other public places became more inclusive during the 20th century. The wealthy were the park’s first users, though the immigrant working class later became its primary denizens; these changes coincided with the desegregation of public accommodations throughout the country. In addition to accessibility, Zukin argues that places are public insofar as government authorities operate them (1995, p. 32). Lofland (1998, p. 8) adds the feature of visibility—public spaces (unlike, for example, private homes) can be seen by all societal members.

Mitchell (1995, p. 115) emphasizes the political dimension of public space: “Whatever the origins of any public space, its status as ‘public’ is created and maintained through the ongoing opposition of visions that have been held, on the one hand, by those who seek order and control, and, on the other hand, by those who seek places for oppositional political activity and unmediated interaction.” We thus understand public spaces as locations that are accessible and visible to all persons, controlled by publicly accountable agencies, and open to free political expression.

These authors view public space as threatened today because government policies, architectural designs, and private investment limit these places’ accessibility and openness to political expression, transfer their control to private businesses, or make interaction between strangers highly unlikely in these settings. These processes are most evident in quasi-public places like shopping malls and public places such as parks and plazas.

Suburbanization in the postwar U.S. resulted from state laws permitting local zoning and hence promoting metropolitan government fragmentation, the extension of federally subsidized mortgages for single family homes to white middle income citizens and housing/lending discrimination against minorities, homeowners’ tax deductions, real estate firms’ mass housing construction in open land areas, and the 1956 Federal Highway Act (Dreier, Mollenkopf, and Swanstrom, 2004, Ch. 4; Crawford, 1992, p. 19; Lofland, 1998, pp. 196–200; Kowinski, 1985, p. 25; Satterthwaite, 2001, pp. 95–100; Cohen, 1996, p. 1051). These policies helped create an auto-centered commuter setting based on individual
homeownership in large tracts without the construction of traditional central business districts as well as economic and racial segregation across metro areas (Satterthwaite, 2001, pp. 98–99; Dreier, Mollenkopf, and Swanstrom, 2004). Malls quickly developed during the 1950s following the large population shift to the suburbs (Cohen, 1996, p. 1051).

Mall designers hoped their establishments would become new “town centers,” but also desired to create a perfected version of the old downtowns (Cohen, 1996, p. 1056). In practice, this meant including community meeting rooms, but also excluding the poor and minorities. Individuals without cars had limited access to malls because of the lack of public transit links to shopping centers, making encounters between different class and racial groups there unlikely (Cohen, 1996, p. 1060; Gottdiener, 1997, p. 134; Dreier, Mollenkopf, and Swanstrom, 2004, p. 64).

Malls also restrict political protests. This is a significant limitation because a large segment of the population now uses malls as de facto public spaces, so that urban parks, plazas, and civic centers serve this function less than in the past. While several court decisions allowed malls to prohibit protests, recent rulings have permitted limited, though not full expression on their premises through leafleting (but not marches and speeches inside) (Cohen, 1996, pp. 1068–1071; Whyte quoted in Lofland, 1998, p. 211; Satterthwaite, 2001, p. 116). Malls’ economic success also meant reduced sales in downtown stores and thus declining pedestrian use of these areas (Gottdiener, 1997, p. 84; Crawford, 1992, p. 19).

Authors also emphasize mall managers’ use of electronic surveillance and security guards to inhibit crime and discourage “deviant” behaviors (Satterthwaite, 2001, pp. 113–114; Whyte quoted in Lofland, 1998, p. 211; Gottdiener, 1997, p. 149; Davis, 1990, pp. 240–244). These measures, in addition to management policies permitting mall officials to remove panhandlers, intimidate minority youth, and discourage crime, might also inhibit the spontaneous behaviors and interactions found on city streets.

City governments and private developers have also transformed parks and sidewalks to make them appear safer and increase real estate values (Zukin, 1995, pp. 24–38). These strategies reflect a “symbolic economy” in which “culture” (broadly construed) drives urban economic development. BIDs allow businesses to tax themselves and use revenues to clean streets, as well as restore, manage and secure parks. New park rules enforced by private security guards often restrict access to homeless persons. Additionally, BIDs seek to make public areas and businesses visually attractive to white middle-class residents and tourists, and once these groups numerically dominate these areas, the poor may feel unwelcome (compare Mitchell, 1995).

Zukin (1995, Ch. 6) also examines the minority neighborhoods of downtown Brooklyn and Harlem, arguing that a vital street trade there clashed with city and corporate redevelopment efforts. While street trading remained in Brooklyn in spite of new office construction; the mayor, with local merchant support, removed an African street market from Harlem, notwithstanding vendors’ organized protests (see also Duneier, 1999).

Davis (1990, pp. 232–236) describes the Los Angeles city government’s efforts to restrict homeless persons to the Skid Row neighborhood by constructing barrel-shaped benches at bus stops that are difficult to sleep on, setting park sprinklers to turn on at night so homeless people do no sleep there, and through police dispersion of homeless encampments. Additionally, architects designed publicly subsidized downtown office and hotel areas without pedestrian access to the neighboring Skid Row and Latino neighborhoods, and middle and upper-class residents have moved into gated communities, closed their neighborhood streets, or used high-technology security systems to exclude outsiders.
These authors offer compelling arguments and evidence for the decline of public space in metro areas. Nonetheless, their account is incomplete. First, it focuses primarily on downtowns, gentrifying neighborhoods, and prosperous suburbs, leaving open the question as to whether or not urban neighborhoods with different characteristics experience the same processes. More importantly, these accounts say little about how users shape public and quasi-public spaces; authors leave virtually unexamined users’ responses to city and merchant control strategies (Zukin (1995) is a partial exception on both accounts). Is public space declining across all urban areas? Do users shape public places? To answer these questions, we now turn to examine relationships in public places.

SOCIAL INTERACTIONS IN PUBLIC AND QUASI-PUBLIC PLACES

In contrast to analyses of the privatization of public space, work on social interactions in public settings explores these areas’ social dynamics. Lofland (1998, p. 9) shifts the focus from public space to the public realm, parts of urban areas where individuals “in copresence tend to be personally unknown or only categorically known to one another.” She contrasts the public realm with the private realm, based on intimate ties within families and personal relationships; and the parochial realm, anchored in the shared identity of neighbors and acquaintances in communities (1998, p. 10). The presence of a particular type of realm is “the consequence of the proportions and densities of relationship types present and these proportions and densities are themselves fluid” (1998, p. 11). As a consequence, legally public space may not be part of the public realm if strangers are not its principal users.

Lofland (1998, pp. 53–67) identifies three types of social ties in the public realm. Fleeting relationships are short-term interactions with little lasting significance, quasi-primary ties are temporary and filled with sentiment, and intimate secondary relationships are emotionally based and enduring. Moreover, she identifies “person-to-place connections” whereby official monuments gain cultural significance for observers, or individuals whose frequent locations make them symbolically significant and grow connected to these places and to one another. For her, interactions in the public realm can be emotionally significant and seemingly unimportant fleeting ties can evolve into emotionally meaningful connections tied to the public realm. This observation contradicts early accounts (the “community lost” thesis associated with Simmel, 1902–03 [1950] and Wirth, 1938 [1968]) that predicted the decline of intimate primary ties in cities characterized by anonymous interaction largely devoid of meaning and sentiment.

Morrill, Snow, and White (2005a, pp. 14–15) adapt Lofland’s relationship categories by identifying “fleeting” and “anchored” connections, and expand her analysis by differentiating public areas in “high rent,” “low rent,” and ethnic communities. On this latter point, people who attempt to carry out personal relationships on the streets of middle-class areas are typically expelled, poor areas may have abandoned buildings that individuals appropriate for private use, and residents of ethnic neighborhoods may transform local streets into makeshift plazas. Moreover, they follow Lofland by arguing that specific groups appropriate legally public places, thus temporarily making them private, as when a family holds a picnic in a park (p. 15).
Morrill, Snow, and White (2005b, pp. 226–231) also examine the social consequences of public behaviors, exploring their material, social, and psychological functions. Here, they argue, for example, that fleeting and anchored relations carried out in public or quasi-public places can facilitate economic transactions or resource sharing among members.

Lofland and Morrill et al. demonstrate that an analysis of a location’s public or private character is one-sided without a review of the relationships present there. Groups shape these spaces through their relationships and practices of appropriation. The ties are emotionally and culturally significant, and vary across high-rent, low-rent, and ethnic communities.

Implicit in the above discussion is an analysis of subordinate actors’ informal resistance to their exclusion from public and quasi-public spaces. De Certeau (1984, pp. xix, 36–38) argues that subordinate groups insinuate themselves into spaces and subvert their control by politically and economically powerful groups. Furthermore, Low (2000, p. 183) argues that illegal street vendors and thieves engaged in “spatial appropriation,” to slowly take control of Costa Rican public plazas; and Bayat (1997, pp. 63–65) describes “the politics of quiet encroachment” through which Tehran street vendors use “passive networks” to stage spontaneous protests when police attempt to expel them from downtown streets. The presence of these forms of resistance necessitates the modification of accounts that only view the urban poor as victims of business and government efforts to exclude them from public spaces.

This study of the fate of public space in Santiago integrates an analysis of the accessibility of retail areas through an examination of urbanization and retail development, an interpretation of meaningful relationships within retail areas, and an exploration of marginalized groups’ spatial appropriation in distinct shopping zones. The analysis will show the contradictory trends of privatization alongside the persistence of public spaces in different areas of Santiago, as well as demonstrating how users shape locales through their public relationships and practices of spatial appropriation. To contextualize the discussion of Santiago, I review the debate on public space in Latin American cities.

THE DEBATE ON PUBLIC SPACE IN LATIN AMERICA

The dominant perspective on the fate of public space in contemporary Latin American follows analyses of North American cities, examining this phenomenon in light of shifting segregation patterns since the 1980s. Scholars highlight the decline of public space as evident in the rise of gated communities, police expulsion of the poor from public plazas, heightened residential segregation, and citizens’ declining use of public areas due to fear of crime. They contextualize this analysis within the previous pattern of urbanization and social segregation in the region from 1940 to 1980.

During the 20th century, urban primacy was common in Latin America: in each country, the largest cities’ population outpaced that of the next three cities. Competition from commercialized agriculture displaced tenant farmers and peasants from rural areas and policies locating publicly supported industries and infrastructure in large cities attracted migrants (Portes, 1989, pp. 7–9; De Oliveira and Roberts, 1996, p. 259). While primate cities grew rapidly, migrants’ low wages and slow economic development meant that neither the government nor real estate companies built much housing exclusively for the poor, most migrants built “self-help” housing after invading public lands, often on
the urban periphery, and governments tolerated these invasions (Caldeira, 2000, p. 225; Portes, 1989, p. 8; Gilbert, 1998, pp. 80–84; De Oliveira and Roberts, 1996, p. 270; Gill, 2000, pp. 55–66). Upper-class families lived in downtown areas; and later, with the advent of auto transport, occupied a wedge-shaped area radiating outward from downtowns. The large poor population and inadequate infrastructure made peripheral areas unappealing to the rich, thereby making U.S. style suburban residential and mall development difficult to achieve (De Oliveira and Roberts, 1996, p. 270; Portes, 1989, p. 8; Sabatini and Cáceres, 2004, pp. 14–15).

While from the 1940s to 1970s, many Latin American countries experienced substantial industrialization and public sector growth, the demand for employment outpaced its supply. In the absence of adequate unemployment insurance, many poor people worked in the informal sector (Portes, 1989, p. 8). Portes and Hoffman (2003, p. 43) define the informal sector as follows: "Latin America is different from the advanced societies in that a significant proportion of the population is not incorporated into fully commodified, legally regulated working relations, but survives at their margin in a wide variety of subsistence and semi-clandestine economic activities. These are generally referred to as the informal sector." They found (2003, p. 53) that still in 1998, between 1/3 and 1/2 of the Latin American urban economically active population worked in the informal sector, representing the largest segment of the workforce. The limited regulation of land and labor markets during this period meant that squatters might appropriate government-owned lands and face limited risks of repression and street vendors gained de facto access to city streets. Urban governments were relatively tolerant of poor peoples' uses of public space.

However, several authors argue that segregation patterns changed beginning in the 1970s. In São Paulo, Brazil, changes in the zoning law in the 1970s and cheap peripheral land gave private developers incentives to build gated condominiums in poor suburban areas (Caldeira, 2000, Ch. 6). She argues (Ch. 7) that condo managers aggressively secure these communities, while residents in high-status condominiums avoid interaction with poor residents "outside the gates" and harbor antisocial attitudes toward fellow residents. Fear of crime has led many city residents to protect their neighborhoods or homes with bars and gates and to abandon formerly vibrant public areas.

Márquez (2003, 2004) found that Santiago, Chile's gated community residents sought to insulate their “community” from Santiago and the surrounding poor neighborhood and to recreate the neighborhood of their childhood in a pastoral (formerly) rural setting. She faults state slum clearance and public housing construction programs for severing reciprocal networks among former residents of illegal encampments, locating new housing in peripheral areas with little access to parks, schools, buses, and stores, and reinforcing residents’ social marginalization by not holding official home opening ceremonies. New public housing residents from different areas of the city fear and distrust their neighbors, prohibit their children from playing outdoors, and harbor competing group identities. She finds stark geographic and cultural divisions between rich and poor and among the poor, all of whom have withdrawn to the private realm.

Similarly, Dammert (2004) reviews survey data indicating that Santiago residents fear crime and leaving their homes at night, and summarizes interviews with upper-income residents who live in isolation from and have little knowledge of poor neighborhoods. However, Santiago, has very low crime rates by Latin American standards (Rodríguez and Winchester, 2001, pp. 2, 14; Portes and Hoffman, 2003, p. 69).
PRIVATE, PAROCHIAL, AND PUBLIC REALMS IN SANTIAGO, CHILE

Low (2000) and Bromley (1998a) find that city officials in San José, Costa Rica, and Quito, Ecuador, have restricted poor people’s access to historic downtown areas in an effort to boost tourism. In San José, officials closed and redesigned two plazas, in the process expelling unlicensed vendors and prostitutes, though these actions followed earlier cycles of spatial appropriation and redesign. In Quito, government efforts at downtown historic preservation designed to attract tourism meant the closure of several street markets, though most markets outside downtown remained.

Finally, in an analysis of cities in the southern cone of South America (and a summary of data from Montevideo, Uruguay), Katzman (2001) argues that deindustrialization and the shift to a service-based economy have promoted job/income polarization, greater residential segregation, and a division between private and public services. These changes have reduced the likelihood that the poor and rich might interact at work, in neighborhoods, or in public areas or facilities, thereby eroding the sense of a shared community across classes and helping reproduce a marginalized subculture of alienated and antisocial youth.

These analyses provide important evidence that residents of Latin American cities are fearful, reclusive, and avoid cross-class encounters in public, and urban governments seek to control and segregate public spaces. Nonetheless, these findings are limited because they focus principally on high-rent districts (downtowns or gated communities), on identities and behaviors rooted in the private realm of the home, or infer from structural trends (but do not demonstrate) the absence of cross-class interactions.

In contrast to the above findings, Santiago has several structural characteristics that promote cross-class interactions in public, and diverse groups meet in and significantly shape neighborhood retail areas and malls. By examining structural characteristics of Santiago overlooked by many scholars as well as users of locales outside high-rent districts, I did not find fearful, reclusive, and antisocial residents; rather, I encountered vital public areas rife with meaningful relationships.

STRUCTURAL PRECONDITIONS FOR THE PERSISTENCE OF PUBLIC SPACE IN SANTIAGO

Just as U.S. suburbanization relied on federal housing, transit, and banking policies, and gentrification coincided with a shift from an industrial-based to a service-based economy; Santiago’s development reflected industrial, housing and transit policies, and the character of its urban land and labor markets. Santiago did not experience U.S. style suburban residential development that permitted shopping malls’ success based on a primarily middle-class clientele. Settlement patterns and transit policy made malls accessible to the poor, while a large informal economy and state-supported neighborhood markets created economically diverse public shopping areas.

The Santiago metro area, whose population in 2003 was 5,040,001, and which consists of 32 semi-autonomous municipal governments, experienced a similar pattern of development as that described for the region as a whole prior to the 1980s, and has undergone some significant changes since then. During the 20th century, it has been a primate city, representing 33.8 percent of the country’s total population and 40.6 percent of its urban population in 1985, though its rate of growth declined from 1952 to 1982 (Portes, 1989, pp. 14–15). From World War II until the 1960s, middle- and upper-class residents lived in
the area to the east of downtown, blue collar workers lived in the Southern and Western sections of the city, and self-help settlements covered a large portion of the urban fringe (Portes, 1989, p. 22; Sabatini and Cáceres, 2004, pp. 14–15).

Though class segregation declined somewhat in downtown and eastern Santiago during the 1960s, segregation increased under the Pinochet dictatorship (1973–1990), which eradicated poor settlements in eastern Santiago and moved these residents to remote municipalities in the South of the metro area; subdivided the municipalities to double their number from 16 to 32, thereby separating the poor and rich into separate jurisdictions (further redistricting occurred in the early 1990s); and opened 64,000 hectares of outlying lands to development. These policies permitted greater office and commercial development in the wealthy eastern zone, allowing residents to satisfy all their work and recreational needs there; isolated former residents of eradicated neighborhoods; and sharpened differences in income and access to public services between residents in distinct municipalities (Portes, 1989, pp. 21–23; Greaves, 2005, p. 199; Salcedo, 2004, p. 173).

However, during the 1990s, some parts of the metro area witnessed greater cross-class interactions. The liberalization of land markets permitted greater concentration of real estate capital and thus the development of gated communities and shopping centers in mixed- and low-income areas outside the traditional elite enclave. Developers built in lower income communities rather than remote, less-populated areas because of cheap land on the urban periphery permitting large profits (Sabatini and Cáceres, 2004, pp. 16–19; Sabatini and Arenas, 2000, pp. 98–103; Cáceres and Fariñas, 1999, p. 38). Moreover, development of geographically isolated middle- or upper-class suburban residential and commercial areas on the U.S. model was not feasible because in 1991, only 17.6 percent of Santiago’s population traveled to work by car (vs. 84 percent in the U.S.) (Sabatini and Arenas, 2000, p. 98), and though car ownership has increased since that date, in 1997, 56 percent of area households still did not own a car (De Mattos, 1999, p. 18). Moreover, lengthy travel times by auto inhibited the development of remote U.S. style exurbs (Sabatini and Arenas, 2000, p. 100).

Because of the proximity of rich and poor in these areas, gated community residents hire poor local residents as nannies and gardeners and patronize their small convenience stores, while poor residents enjoy improved infrastructure and services (Salcedo, 2004; Sabatini and Cáceres, 2004). In contrast to Márquez’s (2003) case study of a single gated community, these studies examine several communities in different parts of the metro area, and include interviews with both condominium and poor residents, providing a wider range of comparative cases than the former study. These authors found that gated community residents did not isolate themselves from nearby poor residents, in contrast to their counterparts in Los Angeles (Davis, 1990), São Paulo, Brazil (Caldeira, 2000) or those studied by Márquez (2003) in Santiago.

Additionally, the liberalization of land markets and external trade facilitated a rise in imported consumer goods and the growth of big box supermarkets and malls. In 1999, 53 percent of national food and personal items were sold in large supermarkets (D’Andrea, Stenger, and Goebel-Krstelj, 2004, p. 5). Moreover, in 1997, the 10 most important malls in Chile had two billion dollars in sales, and in 2002, there were 11 regional malls in the Santiago metropolitan region (nine in the metro area; two in Puente Alto, a nearby municipality outside Santiago county) (Salcedo, 2003, pp. 1093–1094). Most of these
PRIVATE, PAROCHIAL, AND PUBLIC REALMS IN SANTIAGO, CHILE

malls are located in mixed-class communities with public transit access, facilitating the patronage of a mixed-class clientele (Salcedo, 2003, p. 1094; Sabatini and Arenas, 2000, p. 103).

However, in 2002, 47 percent of national food and personal items sales were in small supermarkets (four checkouts or less), corner stores, open air markets, and outdoor kiosks (D’Andrea, Stenger, and Goebel-Krstelj, 2004, pp. 4–5). Santiago’s neighborhood farmers’ markets have more than $2 billion in annual sales and the metropolitan region hosts 401 neighborhood farmers’ markets. Vendors purchase licenses from city governments, but many illegal vendors squat at the end of the markets and legal vendors may not pay taxes. The markets can thus be considered part of Chile’s significant informal sector, which Portes and Hoffman (2003, p. 56) calculate at 30.8 percent of the urban economically active population (including microentrepreneurs—employers of four workers or less, own account workers, and nannies). Furthermore, according to a 1997 survey, microenterprises (defined in the survey as firms with nine employees or less) constituted 80 percent of Chilean firms and 40 percent of the employed (Valenzuela and Venegas, 2001, pp. 19, 22–23).

As I demonstrate below, with the exception of government efforts to ban street commerce downtown (Contreras and Weihert, 1988 describe similar efforts in the mid 1980s), local authorities are reluctant to repress unlicensed street vendors in neighborhoods because they generate so much employment at little or no government expense and shutting down the markets could produce a political backlash (see Seligmann, 1997 in this issue in Cuzco, Perú). Additionally, because they can be reached on foot and there is no formal gatekeeping there, these markets are highly accessible to a broad range of people.

This review identifies the structural preconditions for cross-class interactions in mixed-income Santiago neighborhoods. Gated community construction in poor peripheral locations, an extensive public transit system, a vibrant street market sector, and government reluctance to repress illegal street vendors outside high-rent districts facilitate cross-class interactions in malls and farmers’ markets and between gated community residents and their poorer neighbors. Thus far, I have only identified the structural preconditions for the persistence of public space in Santiago’s shopping areas. After outlining this study’s design, I demonstrate that these areas are indeed parts of the public realm because of the diverse groups that use them, the meaningful relationships they develop, and marginal groups’ spatial appropriation practices.

RESEARCH DESIGN

I conducted research for this article during June and July 2001 and again in July 2003 in Santiago, Chile. Based on contacts developed in earlier research on labor politics and working class consumer behavior (Stillerman, 1998, 2004), I developed a snowball sample for preliminary interviews, which generated suggestions regarding appropriate research sites. I conducted 100 hours of participant and nonparticipant observation (along with two research assistants) in several outdoor farmers’ markets, flea markets, wholesale markets, an immigrant garment district, supermarkets, and shopping malls throughout Santiago; and in meetings of the national farmers’ market vendors association (ASOF). The farmers’
and flea markets, supermarkets and malls observed on the first visit are located in low- and mixed-income areas. Research on the second visit focused on two farmers’ markets in the Cerro Navia municipality in western Santiago; the Bio Bio flea market, on the southern edge of the Santiago municipality; and Mall Plaza Oeste, located in the southwestern suburb of Cerrillos. My assistants and I jotted down schematic notes immediately following field visits, wrote longhand notes as soon as possible afterward, and typed completed notes onto a portable computer.

Additionally, I conducted 24 formal interviews with farmers’ and flea market merchants; scholars with expertise in the area; government researchers; mall and flea market vendors; and marketing professionals in banks, department stores, supermarkets, and shopping malls. I took longhand notes during interviews and computerized them afterward. In addition to ethnographic and interview-based research, I collected relevant published documents, including newspaper articles, marketing studies, government data and studies, and NGO reports.

PRIVATE, PAROCHIAL, OR PUBLIC?: RETAIL SETTINGS IN SANTIAGO

The dominant image of residents in Latin American cities is that they are increasingly fearful of strangers, reclusive, and avoid public encounters with persons different from themselves. I have already shown that Santiago includes structural characteristics that facilitate cross-class encounters in retail and residential areas. In this section, I demonstrate that many Santiago residents are anything but fearful and reclusive: cross-class encounters predominate in Santiago’s markets and malls outside high-rent districts, shoppers, and vendors in farmers’ markets develop long-term affective and trust-based ties, a flea market with a reputation as a dangerous place attracts huge cross-class crowds, and panhandlers and thieves are permanent fixtures in malls.

Long-term government licensing of neighborhood-based farmers’ markets, police reluctance to repress illegal vendors because of the absence of formal employment alternatives, and the availability of public transit or markets’ proximity to residential areas explain the high accessibility of farmers’ and flea markets to a wide ranging public and the ability of illegal vendors to claim space adjacent to or within legal markets. Similarly, many malls’ location in mixed-income communities and accessibility to public transit explain the mixed-class public and persistence of thieves and panhandlers within these retail centers.

This argument demonstrates how a retail area’s location, accessibility to pedestrians and public transit, and state policies toward markets powerfully affect its clientele mix, the types of relationships present, and its openness to marginalized groups. Moreover, a location’s design and patterns of policing tell us little about its social character. A legally public space like a farmer’s market may be highly intimate due to the prevalence of primary and intimate secondary ties among users, while private spaces like malls may seem more “public” because fleeting relationships prevail there. Moreover, government’s unwillingness to repress “undesirable” elements in markets facilitates these groups’ use of spatial appropriation tactics. While these findings are limited to a small number of retail settings and thus cannot be generalized to the entire metro area, at minimum, they lead us to qualify the thesis that public space is declining throughout Latin American cities. I now examine each retail type in detail.
Farmers markets in Santiago date back to before the Europeans’ arrival to the Americas. During the colonial era, vendors and poor people held seasonal markets and other popular festivals in the city’s main square, while in the 19th century, city and church authorities forced these activities into the urban periphery and later prohibited neighborhood carnivals and fiestas they considered immoral. Periodically, unlicensed food vendors attempted to sell goods near downtown public markets, but the city government eventually pushed them into peripheral urban neighborhoods, where they served the bulk of the population. From the late 1930s until the mid 1950s, the city government abandoned its repressive policies toward illegal markets and formalized them with the goal of reducing food prices by allowing producers to sell direct to consumers. In reality, middlemen who purchased from farmers at wholesale markets came to dominate the markets (Salazar, 2003, pp. 23–84).

Today, virtually every Santiago neighborhood has a farmers’ market that rotates between different streets on different days. Though the markets originally only sold fresh produce, they have now expanded to include a wide array of foods, household goods, clothing, and entertainment items. Merchants purchase permits from the relevant municipality, or squat at the end of the market (where they risk ejection by police).

The markets’ long-term ties to specific neighborhoods have facilitated patterns of sociability among shoppers and customer-vendor ties. Neighbors greet in the market, thus making them a significant community institution. Effective vendors develop intimate secondary ties with individual clients, setting aside high-quality produce or food for their *caseros*, or regular customers, or providing them with informal credit to pay for prepared food, clothing, or furniture (Satterthwaite, 2001 and Zukin, 2004 note that in the past, similar vendor-client ties existed in U.S. markets; Duneier (1999) identifies similar ties between contemporary street vendors and neighbors in New York City).

The desire for a regular supply of fresh, quality produce gives shoppers an incentive to maintain close ties with particular vendors: “[Georgia comments] This one has good lettuce; that’s why I like to go there. You see the other ones—they’re no good.” Moreover, the *casero* (regular vendor) provides low-income housewives, the sporadically employed, or the unemployed with credit they would unlikely access in large chain stores. D’Andrea, Stenger, and Goebel-Krstelj (2004, p. 8) note that low-income shoppers in Latin America take advantage of the “virtual wallet” (short-term credit) corner stores and open-air vendors provide because they offer more flexible terms of repayment than large chains and shoppers can avoid embarrassment when they are short of cash at the supermarket. Anchored ties with vendors also create a family-like relationship, as customers watch vendors’ children grow up in the market and vice versa: “I’ve known some of the vendors’ children since they were little babies. Now, I go to the market and hardly recognize them because they’re all grown up.”

Intimate secondary ties with customers give vendors two advantages. First, these connections help them discern whether or not an individual is trustworthy enough to provide credit to. Furthermore, if a vendor knows more than one generation in a family, they can potentially use the parent’s influence to secure payment from their children. Second, the ability to provide credit at a relatively low risk expands sales opportunities in a market with a large portion of low-income customers. Vendors inspect individuals’ nearby homes after they request credit and to collect payments, thereby minimizing risk of default.
Vendors develop techniques to sustain and manage these ties. They provide regular clients with personalized services like saving premium produce or seeking specific items from suppliers:

A middle-aged woman walks up and browses through the clothing rack.

Julio: “Hi there, how are you doing?”

Customer: “I’m doing ok. Hey, do you have any of those long-sleeved sweaters, you know, with the v-neck, like maybe a gray color.”

Julio: “Sorry, I only have these other ones. Do you like them?”

Customer: “You know, it’s not really what I want. Will you get some in soon?”

Julio: “Well, I won’t travel north until next week. So, it wouldn’t be until next Saturday.”

Customer: “When you go, could you look for one of those sweaters and save it for me? You know the kind I like.”

Julio: “No problem.”

Vendors serve as regular customers’ confidants: “I get along well with my customers. You know you need to be nice to them... You make friends with them, you hear about their lives, when they’re sick, and so on.” One vendor tries to build regular customers’ loyalty by giving them Christmas presents. As Morrill, Snow, and White (2005b, pp. 226–231) argue, anchored relationships between individuals may facilitate acts of reciprocity and solidarity, as when one customer’s granddaughter was injured in a severe fire. Her caseros provided her with food and other assistance to help her through this tragedy.

Vendors also maintain primary ties with one another. Several family members often work at the same stall or run multiple stalls (Salazar, 2003, 87–89). Vendors also follow their parents into the business. Pablo, a western Santiago vendor, and president of the vendors’ union, runs a food stall with his mother, wife, and teenage daughter. Additionally, he and the market’s former treasurer are compadres (one is the godfather of the other’s children), another vendor was the godmother for the president’s wedding ceremony, and Pablo was to be the godfather for a customer’s expected child. Additionally, Pablo’s teenage daughter was dating this pregnant woman’s nephew. Though these relationships operate within a public setting, they hold a significant private dimension.

Markets are also significant public spaces. Because they operate in the street, they do not exclude specific categories of individuals, as evident in the presence of unlicensed ambulant vendors walking through the markets. The markets observed were located in mixed income communities and attract a cross-class clientele: while most customers appeared to be working class or poor, I observed some elegantly dressed older couples, and one market delegate commented, “People drive here from rich neighborhoods because it’s country-like and open. They enjoy the outing—it’s not like indoor markets.”

Farmers’ markets are also sites of political participation. Congresspersons campaign in the markets because of their direct access to large populations in their districts, some market organizations have elected candidates for city council to influence policies toward the markets, and unemployed activists set up soapboxes in the markets.

Taking advantage of their access to a large population and the trust shoppers give them, vendors have organized public health campaigns at the neighborhood and national scales. In Cerro Navia, vendors worked with their neighborhood association to encourage female
PRIVATE, PAROCHIAL, AND PUBLIC REALMS IN SANTIAGO, CHILE

shoppers to get free cervical cancer screenings at a local clinic and relied on customers’
trust to broach this delicate topic.\textsuperscript{23} The national vendors’ association also worked with
the health ministry to eliminate sales of fish carrying food-borne illnesses during Holy
Week.\textsuperscript{24}

Licensed (\textit{feriantes}) and unlicensed vendors (\textit{coleros}) have ongoing conflicts. Feriantes
believe coleros who claim spaces at the edge of markets represent unfair competition.
Indeed, a recent study conducted by the Santiago Chamber of Commerce found that
coleros annually sell about 40 percent of the value of feriantes’ sales.\textsuperscript{25} Feriantes, even
those who began as coleros, seek government support to control (or eliminate) coleros.
However, unlike downtown Santiago, where in 1998 government authorities redesigned
the central plaza and in 2003 expelled street vendors (as noted above), local governments
in residential areas treat feriantes with benign neglect.

Several vendors’ union leaders described long efforts to get local government to restrict
or remove coleros: “at my market, the \textit{coleros} began to organize. There are 200 \textit{coleros} at
the entrance occupying a privileged spot. I made them move two blocks away and their
numbers declined… it took me five years pressuring the city government before they
forced the vendors to move.”\textsuperscript{26} Other feriantes described pressuring city government to
confiscate falsified licenses, and gaining police support to eject \textit{coleros} who squatted on
licensed vendors’ spots, but not to remove them.\textsuperscript{27} An official in a low-income suburb,
La Granja, indicated that city authorities would rather legalize coleros than expel them:
“There are 1000 coleros within the city because of high rates of unemployment. The
feriantes tried to push them away from their markets. We’ve told them they can only sell
used goods and as a consequence can pay a lower license fee than market vendors.”\textsuperscript{28} He
also commented that the city had denied a building permit to a supermarket to prevent
unemployment among small businesses and farmers’ markets.\textsuperscript{29} Thus, authorities in lower
income areas are less willing (or able) to expel unlicensed vendors than in downtown
Santiago. Moreover, the \textit{coleros}’ spatial appropriation practices make it difficult to
remove.

Farmers’ markets are complex spaces in that they include private, parochial, and public
dimensions. Their location and deep roots within neighborhoods and many customers’
low incomes facilitate intimate secondary vendor-client ties. They also harbor primary ties
among vendors associated with the private realm. Because markets are publicly accessible
and attract large crowds, they are highly political sites. Vendors’ close ties to customers
facilitate their political advocacy in public health campaigns. Though licensed vendors
would like to privatize markets by ejecting coleros, municipal governments are unwilling
to remove them given high rates of unemployment and underemployment. Anchored re-
lationships and political participation within markets contradict the view that Santiago res-
idents are isolated, reclusive, and resistant to cross-class public encounters: neighborhood
residents and public officials seek, benefit materially from, and enjoy these relationships.
Moreover, the presence of intimate secondary ties in markets shapes the character of these
significant public institutions.

\textbf{FLEA MARKETS}

Santiago hosts several indoor flea markets that attract large crowds, especially on weekends.
The Bio Bio market is the most well known and is located in an older neighborhood near
downtown Santiago. The market hosts individual vendors crowded under several large corrugated metal roofs and covers approximately one square mile. Originally an open-air market, city authorities compelled vendors to move indoors during the 1970s and again in 1995 (Salcedo, 2004, p. 95), though street vendors today still work on the sidewalks, especially on weekends. Products sold include clothing, furniture, computer goods, antiques, tools, and bric-a-brac. The market sits alongside the city’s defunct stockyards, which the government moved to an outlying district during the 1960s, though many small restaurants, butchers, and fresh fish stores still operate there. Much of the clothing and software is clearly pirated merchandise, and citizens widely believe that many of the used goods sold there are stolen. In addition to its reputation among some as a thieves’ market, the neighborhood has a reputation for assaults and theft of shoppers and passersby, though this negative image appears to have little effect on the large crowds the market attracts.

The market also includes primary ties among vendors: “My wife’s side of the family are merchants... My mother-in-law started the business. She began [selling underwear and baby clothes] in the farmers’ markets as a colera, eventually purchased licenses for three stalls, and later got rid of one. My brother-in-law sells leather clothing with her in the farmer’s market and at Bío Bío.” Additionally, several siblings may work in distinct market stalls. Vendors sometimes ask siblings to hire their children as vendors, or to lend them merchandise to sell when they are low on stock.

Unrelated vendors maintain intimate secondary ties with one another and suppliers. Vendors in neighboring stalls share tools and supplies, jointly care for animals, and take collections for funeral wreaths and burial costs when a fellow vendor dies. Trust underlies employer-employee relations as approximately 70 percent of vendors in the furniture building, where the bulk of observations occurred, have verbal contracts and do not receive health or retirement benefits. Merchants may also cooperate to apprehend robbery suspects.

The markets attract huge crowds from throughout the metro area on weekends because of their central location, the multiple bus lines and light rail line that stop across the street or down the block from the market, and its reputation as a source of bargains, one-of-a-kind goods, and a fun place for an outing. Unlike farmers’ markets, customers are unlikely to purchase furniture, computer supplies, clothing, or antiques on a daily basis. Because of its metropolitan-wide clientele, vendors do not develop anchored ties with regular customers evident in farmers’ markets. Merchants do not offer shoppers credit or accept checks as their fleeting interactions create unbearable risks of customer default: “Almost no one accepts credit cards here... We accept some checks, but it’s problematic because we don’t have the verification service that mall stores do.”

Because vendors tend not to develop anchored ties with shoppers, they feel free to assess a “surcharge” on products sold whose value depends on a customer’s perceived class background:

Leon: “There are people who come in and say, ‘I’ve saved $75 all year to buy a dining room set.’ They have limited resources. There are other people that have money, but not that much, but it won’t hurt them to spend $150 for a dining room set. There are also people who could afford to spend $750 on a dining room set and they will pay in cash... That dining room set costs $400. It’s made of chestnut wood and is very pretty...”
PRIVATE, PAROCHIAL, AND PUBLIC REALMS IN SANTIAGO, CHILE

Author: “Then how can you charge them $750?”

Leon: “Look. We look at that person and figure he can afford $750. So we tell him that’s the price. In vulgar terms, we say that we ‘hit him with a stick.’ It’s like we hit him with a stick to get that money from him.”

These strategies reflect not only the short-term and functional character of vendor-client ties, but also the multi-class nature of clientele. However, vendors do adopt the familiar farmers’ market terms of “casero” and “my dear” to attract shoppers.

The market’s most distinctive feature is its public dimension, evident in its accessibility to unregulated and possibly illegal trade and the inability or unwillingness of police and guards to control it, as well as the heterogeneous public and weekend outdoor attractions present on surrounding streets.

As in farmers’ markets, ambulant vendors circulate indoors selling coffee or prepared food. Vendors and managers are more concerned about over 100 “pirates” operating in a building with 600 official stalls. The pirates are unlicensed and self-appointed brokers who approach shoppers as they enter, show them other vendors’ merchandise, and charge them a finder’s fee, pocketing the difference.

The four security guards bemoan pirates’ tactics of spatial appropriation: “we’ve been kicking out the ones who charge a significant surcharge so we’re controlling the situation a little more. We’ve moved them to one end of the building and when they move to the other end, the vendors call us and we come to ask them to move. They leave so we don’t catch them in the act of defrauding customers.”

The police are of little help in addressing fraud or theft: “The police come on weekends and if there’s any problem, they show up right away because of the large crowds. During weekdays, they say ‘let them work it out amongst themselves, just like in La Legua’ [a poor neighborhood known for drug sales and violence].” Because guards are short-staffed, legal vendors do not rely on them in emergencies and apprehend theft suspects themselves (compare Salcedo, 2004, 80–81). Police periodically target individual vendors for selling pirated merchandise, but this appears to have little overall impact on illegal sales.

On weekends, the markets attract a large and diverse clientele and activities when the city closes off the street that bisects market buildings. Teenagers and families fill the street moving from one building to the next. Street vendors sell food and consumer electronics, and we also observed live concerts on stage, street musicians, a male-to-female transvestite dancer accompanied by a drummer, a man with a baby llama for photos with children, record salespeople singing along with their music, young men selling puppies, and pantomime artists. This circus-like atmosphere captures some of the spontaneous elements that scholars find lacking in quasi-public spaces like shopping malls (Whyte, quoted in Lofland, 1998, p. 211). The diverse clientele, spontaneous quality of street vendors and performers, and wide array of attractions make this a unique public space.

The market’s large and diverse crowds likely reflect the wide range of products available. Wealthy individuals frequent antique stores, youth congregate near t-shirt, music and electronics booths, and young couples shop for furniture. The area’s reputation as a thieves’ market means that some seek used goods at very low prices, while others attempt to repurchase goods stolen from them. A veteran vendor comments:

Everyone likes Bío Bío. I’ve seen rich people, poor people—people from all social classes …TV actors used to like to go there … For example, at my brother-in-law’s
store, wealthy people purchase leather jackets for $125 that would cost them $450 at the department store... People of humble origins can buy a leather jacket there for $15, too. Even entrepreneurs come to purchase machinery, like soldering machines. I saw an electrical generator for $300 that's worth $2000... You find the most surprising things there.46

The Bío Bío market, having begun as an outdoor retail area, shares some elements with farmers’ markets. Members of family businesses share primary ties and unrelated vendors rely on anchored relationships to share resources and maintain security. In contrast, Bío Bío vendors maintain fleeting ties with shoppers: the intermittent character of sales and a clientele hailing from throughout the metropolitan area (and elsewhere) preclude such close ties. Indoor illegal vending persists within the markets due to precarious control from guards or the police and brokers’ spatial appropriation tactics. The availability of a wide array of discounted, used and stolen goods and novelties attracts customers seeking unique articles, and an exuberant weekend street life lures all manner of citizens, performers, and vendors. The market’s popularity in spite of its reputation as a dangerous place underscores its vitality and importance as a public space. Many Santiago residents (including entrepreneurs and high-income antique shoppers) assume the risks of crime victimization in order to enjoy the market’s many pleasures, offering further evidence that many Santiago residents are not withdrawn, antisocial individuals.

SHOPPING MALLS

Shopping malls in Santiago share some important characteristics with their counterparts in the United States: the use of electronic surveillance and security guards to deter crime and “deviant” groups, bright illumination, a mix of higher and lower priced stores, food courts and entertainment areas for children, and advertisements for Walt Disney movies hanging from the ceilings. Additionally, fleeting vendor-client ties and “private realm bubbles” (Lofland, 1998) among groups of shoppers prevail in these settings.

However, unlike U.S. shopping centers, several Chilean shopping malls attract a multi-class clientele due to their location in mixed income communities with easy public transit links, and theft is the primary form of deviance in the malls in contrast to teenage loitering. The wider class mix of southern and western Santiago malls makes them more public than their U.S. counterparts and the prevalence of panhandling and theft results from high poverty levels and public transit access in neighborhoods where many malls are located.

Chile’s first mall was built in 1981 in eastern Santiago and caters to a wealthy clientele (Salcedo, 2003, p. 1094). In 1989, a rival company built Plaza Vespucio, a mall in the southern Santiago mixed income suburb of La Florida, and has subsequently built malls in the mixed income suburbs of Cerrillos and Puente Alto as well as provincial cities. While initially considered risky investments, these mixed income malls are quite successful.

Plaza Vespucio is located at the crossroads of Americo Vespucio and Vicuña Mackenna, two wide boulevards with stops for dozens of bus lines running throughout the metro area and a city light rail line stop. Sixty percent of visitors arrive to the mall on foot or via public transit.47 Plaza Oeste is located further west on Américo Vespucio in Cerrillos. While there
PRIVATE, PAROCHIAL, AND PUBLIC REALMS IN SANTIAGO, CHILE

are bus stops in front of the mall, more limited bus access has led the company to run private bus lines directly to the mall from areas not covered by city bus routes. The mall is also located near a public housing complex. The bulk of our observations occurred in Plaza Oeste, though we conducted observations in Plaza Vespucio in 1999 and again in 2001. I did one time observations in 1999 at Alto Las Condes (an up-market mall in eastern Santiago), and in 2001 at the Mall del Centro and Mall Panoramico (in downtown and Providencia, an upper middle-class area).

Plaza Vespucio’s location in a mixed income area has created challenges for mall managers, as one advertising consultant notes: “The mall’s main clientele is the lower middle class . . . Lately, the customer mix has been tipping toward lower income groups. Mall managers are not very happy about that for obvious reasons—these groups have less purchasing power. The mall is starting to get tacky.”

“Private realm bubbles” (Lofland, 1998, p. 12) predominate among small groups of mall customers who shop or eat together, or couples who court in the mall. These small groups take on a more convivial quality in the smoking section of the Plaza Oeste food court, where groups sit together, drink beer, smoke, converse, and laugh. Vendors maintain quasi-primary ties by chatting while smoking cigarettes during breaks or holding birthday and farewell celebrations after closing hours. A shoe vendor noted that some repeat customers attempted to create quasi-primary ties with vendors by updating them on their families and introducing them to their children, but these exchanges were superficial and precarious.

The malls’ most noteworthy aspect is the visible role of theft and panhandling. Guards in bright red uniforms supervise the malls and surveillance cameras are installed throughout the buildings, yet we observed several incidents that raised doubts about the ability of guards and surveillance cameras to control these behaviors. On a weekday evening visit to Plaza Oeste, a young man dressed in hip hop style clothing who looked quite rushed approached my research assistant in the parking lot and offered to sell him an Adidas brand watch for $15 (he suspected the watch might have been stolen given the low price). He later saw two groups of youth in hip hop style clothing in the mall, one of which asked people in the food court for change or leftover drinks before the guards asked them to leave. The following week at lunch time, a child approached us in the food court requesting money or food, and guards escorted him outside. Shortly afterward, seven guards ran through the mall, some of whom entered the men’s room to inspect the garbage cans and ashtrays (we presume they were chasing suspected thieves). Guillermo, a shoe salesman, comments:

There are organized groups of young thieves operating inside the mall. One guy will buy and the others behind him will steal. I estimate stores must lose thousands of dollars in theft . . . the thieves have countless tricks . . . The guards know the thieves by appearance and as soon as they see them they escort them outside . . . you also see kids in the parking lot skateboarding and break dancing. As soon as the guards see them, they kick them out. Some days you will see drunken people walking around the mall at 4:00 PM, since they sell beer in the food court. The guards don’t like it but they can’t do anything because they are customers.

Several scholars in the United States and Great Britain argue that malls are a common gathering place for young people, guards try to restrict their behavior (even if they are merely hanging around), and some youth buy and sell drugs or panhandle there (Ortiz,
My findings concur with this research insofar as the thieves and panhandlers, like teenagers in the U.S./UK, are a permanent feature of the malls even though guards regularly try to eliminate them. Like U.S. and British teenagers, panhandlers and thieves use spatial appropriation tactics to subvert guards’ efforts to eliminate them. However, the difference is that the Chilean youth involved are poor. This difference likely results from the mall’s location near a public housing complex and accessibility to public transit. This is further evidence of the distinctive characteristic of many (though not all) Chilean malls as multi-class settings.

Santiago’s mixed-class malls are less privatized than their U.S. counterparts. Because of their accessibility to public transit and location in mixed income communities, they attract a more economically diverse clientele, and in this regard, are more public than U.S. malls. Similarly, while middle-class youth loitering and horseplay are key preoccupations of mall guards in the U.S. and UK, youth panhandling and theft are key and persistent forms of deviance in the Chilean case, reflecting the presence of the poor near malls and the availability of public transit from many parts of the metro area. This finding supplements Márquez’s (2003, 2004) evidence on public housing residents. While she finds that residents suffered isolation and segregation, the evidence from the mall indicates poor residents access shopping malls present in their own neighborhoods or via public transit, thereby questioning malls’ role as exclusionary organizations.

CONCLUSION

Most scholars examining metropolitan housing and retail development and the management of public parks argue that public space is declining in U.S. and Latin American cities. Focusing on quasi-public suburban malls, downtown redevelopment, gentrification, and gated communities, these scholars focus on the control strategies city governments and businesses use to exclude poor and minority groups from quasi-public and public areas in order to bolster retail sales, land values, and political careers.

This literature is significant both theoretically and politically. Scholars have uncovered processes of social exclusion that result from contemporary forms of urban and suburban retail, residential, and infrastructural development. Their analyses of these injustices point to much-needed policies to guarantee full access for all citizens to the public spaces that make cities unique and facilitate residents’ exercise of their rights to free political expression.

I have attempted to move this discussion forward through a more complex and differentiated understanding of the social and political nature of locales across metropolitan space. This has first entailed the selection of research sites outside the high-rent, gentrifying, and wealthy suburban districts often studied by these scholars. If we are to study public space, then we cannot examine it only in the most high-profile locales because our findings may be skewed toward exceptional settings rather than representing most urban neighborhoods or districts. Second, I examined the structural pre-conditions necessary for the maintenance of public spaces, the nature of relationships within specific retail areas, and patterns of spatial appropriation adopted by marginalized groups. This analytical move was designed to integrate the structural approach adopted by most students of public space with an analysis of how social relationships
PRIVATE, PAROCHIAL, AND PUBLIC REALMS IN SANTIAGO, CHILE

shape urban spaces and how subordinate actors resist government and business control strategies.

I found that Santiago Chile’s pattern of residential segregation, transit infrastructure, labor market characteristics, and state policies toward the retail sector actually facilitate cross-class interactions in many retail areas. Moreover, meaningful social relationships prevail in flea markets, farmers’ markets, and malls, ranging from “private realm bubbles” to long-term, emotionally infused, trust-based ties. Many Santiago residents are not fleeing the public realm and its cross-class encounters; they seek out its material benefits, pleasures, and opportunities for participation. Additionally, Santiago’s poor are not passive victims of mall or park security guards: they actively carve out spaces in retail areas, much to the chagrin of public and private authorities.

These findings contrast with discussions of U.S. malls as settings that exclude the poor (Crawford, 1992; Cohen, 1996) and of gated communities in Los Angeles, São Paulo, Brazil, and Santiago, as isolated and exclusionary fortresses (Davis, 1990; Caldeira, 2000; Márquez, 2003), and Latin American residents (like their U.S. counterparts) as reclusive, antisocial, and withdrawn into their private cocoons (Márquez, 2003; Caldeira, 2000; Katzman, 2001; Dammert, 2004).

While we cannot generalize from this study’s findings, it offers an analytical framework and poses a set of questions that will hopefully push forward the debate on urban public space. I have argued that analyses of the character of public space need to examine accessibility (as most authors have) alongside relationships and “tactics” or “spatial appropriation.” Relationships and tactics give us firsthand knowledge of the characteristics of users of a given locale, the nature and meaning of their ties to one another, and the ways some may resist patterns of social exclusion. Moreover, I have argued that we need to examine these three dimensions across urban space rather than only in high-profile areas.

The use of this analytical approach will help us address some key unanswered questions in the debate regarding urban public space. How do local land markets affect the accessibility and users of public spaces, and how does the variation in land values across a given city promote differing degrees of publicness and privateness in these neighborhoods? How do policies regarding the access of homeless persons, street vendors, and other disprivileged groups to public and quasi-public areas vary across cities (and countries), and do these variations affect the level of diversity among users of public spaces? Do local shopping, neighboring, and political traditions affect variations in the character of public spaces within and across cities? Answering these questions will give us a more precise picture of the factors that promote or erode public uses of urban locales, and may guide us toward policies that guarantee full access for all citizens to urban settings and might facilitate greater cross-class interactions and tolerance in cities throughout the hemisphere.

The privatization of public space is on the agenda in Santiago, Chile, much like in other Latin American and U.S. cities. This is not a new issue as Santiago officials have tried for almost two centuries to remove street commerce from the downtown area, and as of yet, they have had little success (Salazar, 2003). Recently, the city government has attempted to exclude street populations from the city’s downtown, but distinctive urbanization and retail development patterns facilitate the maintenance of public spaces in traditional markets as well as mixed-class shopping malls and excluded groups effectively claim space in contested retail zones. The future of public space in Santiago will depend as much
on shopping mall development and government redevelopment efforts as on its diverse population’s shopping traditions and uses of the city.

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Notes

1 De Ramón (2000, p. 177); “Trivelli y Lavín ponen en marcha ‘plan cero comercio ambulante,’” *La Nación*, 17 October 2003, 11.


3 The metropolitan region, which includes a number of rural counties, has a population of 6 million. However, Santiago county (*provincia*) is normally understood as the metropolitan area. It includes 32 municipalities, though Puente Alto and San Bernardo, located in separate counties, are now considered part of the metro area.

4 Bromley (1998b), notes that traditional markets have grown alongside shopping malls in Quito, Ecuador, for many of the same reasons noted in D’Andrea, Stengel, and Goebel-Krstelj (2004), though the latter study did not include Ecuador.


8 Field notes, Los Carolinos market, 3 July 2001.

9 Large department stores normally require a history of continuous employment with an adequate salary before extending credit; discount chain stores offer credit to those with more limited means, but also charge high interest rates and have high rates of default: interview with Claudia, 8 July 2001. Claudia evaluates credit applications for Falabella, Chile’s most successful department store chain.


11 Field notes, El Montijo market, 13 July 2003.


13 Field notes, Quilicura farmer’s market, 27 July 2001. For a similar observation, see: Salazar (2003, p. 94).


17 Field notes, El Montijo market, 13 July 2003.

18 Field notes, El Montijo market, 13 July 2003. It is unclear whether or not the president or his godparents, compadres and comadres use these ties to receive business support (as in the case of merchant-artisans in Ecuador and Bolivia: see Colloredo-Mansfeld, 1999 and Buechler et al., 1997), or if the relationships are of a purely religious and familial nature.

19 Field notes, Los Carolinos market, 5 July 2003; interview with Carlos, Peñalolen market, southeastern Santiago, 22 July 2001.
PRIVATE, PAROCHIAL, AND PUBLIC REALMS IN SANTIAGO, CHILE

21 Interview with Hector Tejada, 6 August 2001. Tejada is president of the Farmers’ Market Vendors’ Association (ASOF), based in Santiago but with links throughout the country.
22 Field notes, San Ramon farmers’ market, southern Santiago, 5 August 2001.
23 Field notes, El Montijo market, 13 July 2003.
24 Interview with Hector Tejada, 6 August 2001.
25 “Santiago: Mas de $173.000 millones anuales venden ferias libres.”
26 Field notes, ASOF meeting, 15 July 2003.
27 Field notes, ASOF meeting, 31 July 2001; interview with Carlos, Peñalolen market, 22 July 2001.
28 Interview with Raúl, La Granja municipality, 29 July 2003.
29 Interview with Raúl, La Granja municipality, 29 July 2003.
30 Interview with Arturo, 24 July 2003.
36 Close ties with customers may exist in the food sales area, though we did not gain entrée with these vendors.
37 Field notes, Las Gangas building, Bio Bio market, 13 July 2001. This vendor’s wife, a partner in the business, commented that they had received a bad check from an upper class patron: field notes, Las Gangas building, Bio Bio market, 1 July 2001.
39 Vendors selling lower cost items with smaller profit margins did not apply surcharges for fear of losing sales to the competition; instead, they might drop prices to close a sale: field notes, Mercado Placer, Bio Bio market, 26 July 2003.
46 Interview with Arturo, 26 July 2003.
47 Interview with Francisco Sabatini, 29 July 2001 and Mario, 2 August 2001. Sabatini draws the data for transit access to the Vespucio mall from a 1991 official origin and destination census cited in Sabatini and Arenas (2000). Mario works for an advertising firm that was assisting the Mall Plaza chain with market research and its brand image. Mall Plaza owns Plaza Vespucio and Plaza Oeste. Nicholls et al. (2000), compare shoppers at a U.S. mall with those at an up-market Santiago mall and find that most of the visitors to the Santiago mall arrive by car.
48 Interview with Mario, 2 August 2001.
49 Field notes, Plaza Vespucio, 4 August 2001; Plaza Oeste, 10 July 2003.
50 Interview with Gerald, 23 July 2003.
51 Of course, theft occurs in most retail establishments. My point is that it is both visible and persistent at this mall.
53 Field notes, Mall Plaza Oeste, 24 July 2003.
54 Interview with Guillermo, 23 July 2003.
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References


PRIVATE, PAROCHIAL, AND PUBLIC REALMS IN SANTIAGO, CHILE


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QUERIES

Q1  Author: Please add “Bromley, 1998” and “Gilbert, 1998” to the reference list.
Q2  Author: Please note that the reference “Cáceres and Sabatini, 2004” has been changed to “Sabatini and Cáceres, 2004” to match the reference list.
Q3  Author: Please cite reference “Sabatini, Cáceres, and Cerda, 2001” in text.