

Imagined Worlds and the Gendered City in Chilean Historical Fiction

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Abstract: This study maps mechanisms by which three Chilean historical novels published between 2000 and 2010 propose the ideological inclusion of women in the imagined worlds of Santiago de Chile. These mechanisms, shaped by the theories of Arjun Appadurai and Michel Foucault, shed light on the function of gender within the fictional city. This interpretation highlights the relationship between space, gender, and the construction of historical narratives.

Keywords: historical novel – space – gender – imagined world – Chile



Santiago is not Chile. This phrase challenges a history of centralization and marginalization that has been lived out in many different spheres of national life. Nevertheless, Santiago looms large, both in its physical dimensions and its social importance as the cultural and economic center of the country.¹ Literature participates in the production of gendered spaces that mirror societal norms and aspirations, “not only in establishing and sustaining political projects of ordering of the social space, but also as tools for rewriting oppressive spatializations and proposing virtual geographies of emancipation” (Sierra 6). Therefore, social inclusion in literary texts illuminates gender’s function in the imagined geography of the city of Santiago. The form and function of inclusion vary, but in the novels I study here contests of power—both its exercise and its consequences—reflect inclusion in ways that illustrate the tension between the “imagined worlds of the official mind” (Appadurai 33) and imagined worlds created and embodied within historical fiction. These worlds stand out from the overtly masculine and privileged contemporary city of Chilean narrative,² even as they integrate postmodern literary techniques. *Inés del alma*

¹ The Metropolitan Region covers 15,403.2 km² and its 2015 estimated population was 7,314,176 inhabitants, about 41% of the total estimated national population (Instituto).

² In contemporary Chilean fiction the city is a mostly masculine space, as critics such as Vinodh Venkatesh and J. Agustín Pastén note in a number of studies on authors such as Alberto Fuguet and Pedro Lemebel. Fuguet and Lemebel’s work as they relate to social class as well as sexual identities expressed through urban spaces differ. The imaginary of what has been called new Chilean narrative encompasses this limited space. An entire metropolis exists outside of the social map constructed on the

mía (2006) by Isabel Allende, *El sueño de la historia* (2000) by Jorge Edwards, and *Mapocho* (2002) by Nona Fernández share a historical orientation as well as thematic connections between gendered spaces and the city's space. Through re-creations of Santiago they widen the concept of citizen-subject to include women and other groups marginalized within the social imaginary. Though each novel posits women's inclusion in these imagined worlds, the achievement of this inclusion occurs through various mechanisms. I will show that through these mechanisms gender marks fictional urban spaces and functions to dislocate the officially-approved imagined worlds of the historical moments represented.

Absences³ inform the imagined city in transitional fiction,⁴ both with reference to Chile's recent past and through how artistic work portrays social groups' perceptions. According to Arjun Appadurai, imagination functions as social practice. The concept of imagined worlds comes from Benedict Anderson's imagined community, and they are defined as:

The multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe. An important fact of the world we live in today is that many persons on the globe live in such imagined worlds [...] and thus are able to contest and sometimes even subvert the imagined worlds of the official mind and of the entrepreneurial mentality that surround them. (Appadurai 33)

People compose these worlds through a series of constructions, for example, the creation of image and narrative. Additionally, the associations of persons in a shared space⁵ have the hegemonic function of "incubat[ing] and reproduce[ing] compliant national citizens" (Appadurai 190) and are constituted by imagination itself. The ideal national citizen remains a gendered subject, though the spaces portrayed in fiction can

basis of masculine experiences of largely, though not exclusively, privileged classes. Many of these experiences depend on the sexual exploitation of women's and gay men's bodies, emphasizing a performance of masculinity that depends on denigrating others to assert dominance. For example, at the conclusion of Fuguet's acclaimed novel *Mala onda* (1991) the protagonist and his father go on a drug-fueled prostitute binge. These experiences are presented as normative, and therefore this masculine space becomes linked with the city without other modifiers.

³ Haitian anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot notes persuasively that these absences are important not only to historical fiction but to the production of history itself.

⁴ Here transition refers to the transition to democracy after the end of Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship in 1990.

⁵ Appadurai uses the term *neighborhood*, which he defines as "situated communities characterized by their actuality, whether spatial or virtual, and their potential for social reproduction" (179). His concept of neighborhood depends on its relationships and contexts. Note that Appadurai's neighborhood may in some instances correspond to a spatial neighborhood but that it is not dependent on sharing a particular physical space or place. This idea is related to Henri Lefebvre's concepts of social spaces and the alternative construction of the concept of place. In relationship to imagined worlds, neighborhoods matter as a context or set of contexts (184) that are, in part, produced through discursive practices (187).

make that gendering visible. The historical interests of these novels, however, emphasize the doubleness of a historical novel in that “one may know the outcome of the story from the past, but be nonetheless drawn into a new rendering of it” (Young) which amplifies differences from the accepted narrative. The novels I study in this essay privilege telling new or multiple versions of a story, which often challenges discursive power within the novel as well as in the contexts that produce these texts. Part of this context is the shared space of an imagined world, which corresponds to an imaginary city.

While location remains constant across these novels they each explore different events in Chilean history. *Inés del alma mía* retells a foundation story of the city from the perspective of the Spanish conquerors. Narrative authority rests with a Spanish woman. Her affirmation and exploration of this authority enables her portrayal as a protagonist with agency in varied symbolically-charged spaces. A woman’s power to tell her own story—the founding of the city—opens an imagined world contrary to the narrative in which men conquered and women quivered. *El sueño de historia* refers to a double foundational moment for Santiago. On the one hand, the novel narrates the distant past of the 1780s from the perspective of the 1980s, uncovering parallels between the years leading up to the end of the dictatorship and the decades prior to the war for independence from Spain. On the other hand, the narrative of the late eighteenth century highlights the building of important and symbolically resonant parts of the physical plant of Santiago. In all times, space enacts discipline, enclosing those who do not conform to behavioral expectations and threatening others who resist hegemonic imagined worlds. One female character engages in undesirable gendered behavior and is subsequently punished through restriction within these spaces; however, she resists. This resistance posits a different imagined world in which oppressive disciplinary functions no longer map onto space. *Mapocho* writes and rewrites various historical referents and in so doing plays with the notion of historical truth. In *Mapocho* narratives are written, recycled, and disposed of as are characters. The disposability of people reflected throughout the narrative emphasizes their dehumanization as they become physical and cultural waste. The people’s placement on Santiago’s map draws associations between specific locations and modernity’s throwaway attitude towards humanity. People of all genders are disposable, but one of *Mapocho*’s female narrative voice’s experiences and (dis)embodiment of the city undermines the entire enterprise of inclusion in the imagined world. The world of the discarded is itself an imagined world, in which exclusion includes.

Conflict around perceived and real exclusion mirrors the tension between political and social centralization and regionalization that permeates Chilean history. The military dictatorship (1973-1990) privileged a centralized and authoritarian polity that was also reflected in geographical centralization in Santiago. During the period following the dictatorship known as the democratic transition (1990-2010), civic actors primarily working in Santiago negotiated the desirability of centralization and

consolidation in various areas of public life. As Rebecca Biron observes, “Latin America’s cities present the beauty of extreme contrast: design and dysfunction, control and chaos, the vast and the very small, the distant past and the distant future. These cities traditionally concentrate political and economic power in their respective countries, but they also intensify the conflicts generated by that power” (3) and these conflicts determine who belongs to the national group and who is excluded. In general terms, the “sorting transactions by which marginal people are produced do not simply take place *in space*; they are achieved in part *through space*” (Ruddick 35). Santiago’s spatial organization reflects multiple axes of difference, such as racialized social class. However, the visibility of these axes depends on the social perspective of the individual and the lens through which they observe the world. Fiction remains one of the fragments that can contribute to these perceptions.

During the Chilean transition to democracy, the construction of fictional Santiagos appears in a variety of narrative texts, including historical fiction. Historical fiction can be an ambiguous term, encompassing a wide range of narratives without shared ideologies or techniques. Canon-formation exercises tend to devalue it despite its popularity across cultures and languages, such as when Harold Bloom concludes that “history writing and narrative fiction have come apart, and our sensibilities seem no longer able to accommodate them to one another” (21). Nevertheless, the reading public enjoys historical fiction, and in the past few decades literary critics value and engage with it also. In the Latin American context, among the dominant concepts used to understand contemporary historical fiction are Seymour Menton’s New Historical Novel; Linda Hutcheon’s historiographical metafiction; and Magdalena Perkowska’s Hybrid (Hi)Stories.⁶ All of these concepts define historical fiction in relationship to postmodernism and to the narrative turn in historiography. The New Historical Novel offers the most restrictive definition, requiring not only certain narrative techniques and philosophical stances but also rigidly delineating the appropriately historical. Traditional historical fiction represents a portion of current literary production, but many authors who work exclusively in the genre integrate postmodern characteristics to their work. The definition of historical also provokes disagreement, with critics like Menton requiring a large temporal remove from events, while critics like María Cristina Pons argue for a relationship between memory and history that recognizes the historical nature of more recent events. The novels studied here illustrate aspects of the New Historical Novel such as metahistoriographical commentary and narrative intervention, but several posit an explicit narrative relationship with the present.⁷ In order to work

⁶ Helene Carol Weldt-Basson offers a more comprehensive review of the theoretical development of historical fiction with an eye to the Latin American context, noting that “the novel has evolved in Latin American from a minor to major genre” (40) that behooves our critical attention.

⁷ Under Menton’s concept of historicity only one of the three novels I study here (Allende’s *Inés del alma mía*) could be considered sufficiently historical, and it is the text with the least engagement from literary criticism.

with the texts studied in this essay I privilege the concept of the historical novel that “traza una imagen o visión no solo de un acontecimiento pretérito concreto, sino también de la historia y del discurso histórico y su relación con el presente” (Perkowska 37) without requiring the use of specific literary techniques or philosophical postures. Historical novels play with shared knowledge about places and times, and through this artificial distancing this type of literary production opens avenues for the exploration of ideas around narrative, history, and who has the power to shape them both.

Why, then, read these three novels in light of mechanisms for women’s inclusion in imagined worlds bounded by the city? They appear to be strange bedfellows. Many assume Isabel Allende’s bestselling historical novels have little in common with Nona Fernández’s chronologically shattered text. As women, Allende and Fernández may offer a different perspective on the gendered city than a male author like Edwards. *Inés del alma mía* follows a chronological first-person narrator, *El sueño de la historia* goes back and forth between narrative voices and centuries, and *Mapocho* goes even further in fracturing chronology and voice. They don’t share historiographical referents. Fernández and Edwards attract the attention of literary critics while Allende reaches a much larger readership. However, to think through gendered spaces, imagined worlds, and mechanisms for inclusion, the juxtaposition of these texts offers generative possibilities that considering them in isolation, or only with like texts, would elide. In reading imagined worlds and the gendered city in *Inés del alma mía*, the narrative voice’s negotiation of textual authority illustrates the limitations of projects of inclusion centered on stories of the conquest. Colonial power remains thematically important in *El sueño de la historia*, and the way in which it is exercised through disciplinary spaces within the city shapes competing imagined worlds. The tension between contradictory worlds continues in *Mapocho*, though inscribed on urban space through specific types of places and sculpted through power relationships between governors and the governed.

Conquest depends on power, and traditional narratives of conquest exult in the power to dominate others. Chile’s conquest and colonization by Spain focuses on the domination of the landscape, especially the Atacama Desert, as well as the conflict engendered by the resistance of indigenous groups to Spanish soldiers and settlements. Conqueror Pedro de Valdivia (1497-1553) was accompanied by an Extremaduran woman, Inés Suárez (1507-1580), who is the subject and narrative voice of Isabel Allende’s historical novel *Inés del alma mía*. She does not appear in all colonial chronicles of the conquest of Chile. However, texts such as Jerónimo de Vivar’s *Crónica y relación copiosa y verdadera de los reinos de Chile* (1558) and Pedro Mariño de Lobera’s *Crónica del reino de Chile* (1598) tell of a series of actions attributed to her. Famously, Inés Suárez saves Santiago de Nueva Extremadura by beheading the indigenous leaders held captive by the Spanish in response to the attack of the *lonko* Michimalonko (1500-1550) against the

new settlement on September 11, 1541. Many authors⁸ attribute a maternal role to her and more salaciously explore her illicit sexual relationship with Pedro de Valdivia. Allende's version of the conquest re-imagines and re-writes the colonial project privileging different perspectives, participating in the trend of historical novels of the conquest written in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In this case, that perspective belongs to Inés Suárez and remains centered in the spaces Suárez inhabits in Santiago. Inés Suárez's narrative voice as envisioned by Allende illustrates the construction of authority, the ideological limits of refocusing the story of Chile's conquest on Suárez, and the role that the space of the newly founded Santiago plays in this possible imagined world.

Inés Suárez's textual authority in *Inés del alma mía* undermines the conquest narrative of exclusively European and masculine domination while also questioning discriminatory attitudes in Suárez's own culture towards women and, up to a point, the indigenous cultures that they seek to subdue and exploit. The novel opens with a declaration of existence as a female subject, a woman conquistador capable of telling her own story: "soy Inés Suárez" (13). This narrative self shapes the imagined world of Santiago's foundation. This story is necessarily and conscientiously incomplete. Contrary to much of the historiographical archive, Allende's text does not advocate for an absolute knowledge of the past and reflects on its own practices of inclusion and exclusion: "A pesar de mi afán de exactitud, he omitido bastante. He debido seleccionar sólo lo esencial, pero estoy segura de no haber traicionado la verdad. Ésta es mi historia" (120). The reader, aware of reading a story of the conquest, associates Suárez's story with the foundation of Santiago itself. The narrative of the novel fills selected absences and silences in the official and non-official narratives of the Chilean conquest, in part through detailing everyday life. Suárez, the other Spaniards, and the indigenous population live out this life in the public and private spaces of the new Spanish settlement. This space reflects these practices, as is the case when Valdivia returns from a trip to Peru. Suárez has prepared the house they share for his return, but Valdivia refuses to come to the home and breaks off their relationship through a messenger. That same day Suárez proposes to another man and moves into his home. Though the conversation about marriage and relationships occurs in private spaces, "los vecinos de Santiago, que se habían quedado esperando en la Plaza de Armas después de la misa, aplaudían" (296). Thus Suárez inhabits a hybrid space in the city that interweaves the domestic and the public. Homes are generally perceived to be women's spaces; in the text, Suárez shifts between this notion of a gendered private space and her public persona which both projects and constructs an imagined world in which she and others around her have some agency in their own narratives. The public reaction to Suárez's

⁸ Examples include Alejandro Vicuña (*Inés de Suárez*, 1941), María Correa Morandé (*Inés... y las raíces de la tierra*, 1964) and Jorge Guzmán (*Ay mamá Inés*, 1993).

choices in this example suggests that private spaces are themselves mediated by the public, as Suárez's role in her community requires.

The narrative voice establishes her authority through her memory, and the idealized reader accepts the validity of her observations due to her physical presence and participation in the events she describes. Memory fails only once in the novel, at the moment the narrative voice must tell the most distinctive event in the historiography associated with Suárez and the foundation of what later becomes Chile's capital city: the 1541 defense of Santiago. The enclosed city is left undefended as Spanish soldiers ride out in search of indigenous threats, and the defense succeeds not only because of Inés Suárez but also because of the actions of other women and allied indigenous peoples. Michimalonko's forces fight to recuperate an imagined world in which the Spaniards are no longer present in the Mapocho valley and Suárez fights to strengthen the colonial imagined world. These competing versions reflect the spatialization of power written onto the valley of the Mapocho river. In the beheading of captive indigenous leaders Suárez embodies colonial violence: she is the conquistador. In previous fictional versions, the narratives characterize Suárez's act as something masculine, and therefore good. Allende differs markedly from other writers in the choice of narrative uncertainty in this moment, stepping away from the first-person narration that dominates the novel. Suárez's memory of the events is partial, and the narrative voice emphasizes that she draws on other accounts. This narrative reconstruction both draws the reader's attention to the beheading and distances Suárez from her own reported action. During the battle, Allende's Suárez remembers inhabiting her house, converting it into a clinic to care for the injured. By focusing on nurturing acts rather than destructive ones, no matter how successful both were, this version of Suárez shifts the value placed on those acts, especially those traditionally coded as feminine. She sees her space—house and city—threatened with annihilation and acts accordingly, though the violent acts attributed to her remain a gap in her memory, filled in by allusions to other authorized narratives.

Though Suárez takes on the role of the violent conquistador, her narrative voice also explores gendered and racialized attitudes in her own culture. While in Spain Suárez desires the Americas because she dreams of freedom she perceives to be unavailable to her, and in the different parts of the world in which she lives she creates community and solidarity with other women. Suárez builds community with indigenous and mestiza women over the course of her life based on the shared community-building work in which they engage: educating, feeding, and healing others. Suárez juxtaposes her own life story with what the system expects of women, in the process critiquing a system that treats her and those she chooses to be her community unfairly. Nonetheless, the novel does not question the legitimacy of the conquest itself. *Inés del alma mía's* challenge to women's exclusion from the Grand Narrative of the conquest affirms the ideological underpinnings of the encounter between the hemispheres. Suárez firmly ensconces herself as Spanish, the "us" for the Mapuche "them," whom she nevertheless recognizes

as “dignos enemigos” (144). When Validivia’s party arrives in the Mapocho valley, not only does Suárez recognize the location as following the guidelines set out by Emperor Charles V but she also comments on God’s providence in providing this space for Spanish settlement (191). The novel questions the methods rather than the motivations of the colonial enterprise.

In Isabel Allende’s version, Inés Suárez becomes a heroine because of her extraordinary actions as well as her continual participation in the institutions of civil society. In previous narratives of the Chilean conquest men, both Spanish and indigenous, exercise the power. In *Inés del alma mía*, a woman conquers and founds and, as an exceptional individual, also functions as a symbol of the Chilean nation due to her role in the Conquest and the integral role of women in its development. Suárez matters to the city because, in Allende’s construction, it is hers. She fulfills a maternal role to the city’s space, midwifing it into being both through her actions and her narrative. Suárez lives her maternity by raising the children of other mothers, for example, her second husband’s daughter,⁹ while at the same time building the city. Her vocation centers around the creation and care of Santiago: “he creado hospitales, iglesias, conventos, ermitas, santuarios, pueblos enteros, y si me alcanzara la vida haría un orfantaio, que mucha falta hace en Santiago” (194). While Allende’s text values the traditionally feminine notion of mothering, she disassociates it from physical childbearing and resists the notion that women had to act like men in order to be valued as leaders in their own right. In this way she challenges the official imagined world, based on chronicles written by Spanish soldiers and priests and codified by nineteenth-century inhabitants of the lettered city, that figures Santiago as a masculine creation.

While a story such as that of Inés Suárez re-imagines the foundation of the city from a female perspective, as the centuries of colonial control passed the city was continually re-built according to the plans and priorities of nearly exclusively male leadership. At the close of the colonial period, Joaquín Toesca (1745-1799) designed and oversaw the construction of many buildings and public works that have had an outsized importance on the symbolic map of Santiago. Cultural perceptions of the space, and place, of Chile depend upon power and the symbolic function of the built environment of the city. Toesca contributes to the consolidation of images of both civil and ecclesiastical power in society: La Moneda Palace and the frontis of the Cathedral, respectively. While the neoclassical style that many associate with Toesca’s work prizes order and discipline, domestic harmony was out of reach for him. This drama develops alongside Toesca’s architectural creations in Jorge Edwards’ novel *El sueño de la historia*, in which Toesca is co-protagonist with the narrator, Ignacio, who writes from Augusto Pinochet’s dictatorial Chile. Ignacio lives in Santiago and reads the archive of

⁹ At the start of the novel Suárez describes her desire for children but is unable to become pregnant and give birth to biological offspring. She reflects that from the perspective of her old age, “comprendo que la verdadera bendición de la Virgen fue negarme la maternidad y así permitirme cumplir un destino excepcional” (26).

the life and work of Toesca, imagining a late-eighteenth century that mirrors many aspects of the authoritarian regime within which he operates in the late-twentieth. In Toesca's life Ignacio finds a reflection of his own domestic and political dramas. This connection functions as an effort to understand something key to the culture from which the novel comes: how to reconcile and understand the violence and pain experienced under dictatorship. Antonia Viu underlines the function of this parallel when she argues that "al aludir a la transición del mundo colonial al republicano, [...] sugiere una reflexión sobre una crisis más vigente: la que implica el paso del Chile de la dictadura militar al Chile democrático" (180). These transitional moments, in which Chile as a political entity changes its system, create dramatic conflicts that depend on historical competency,¹⁰ though they likewise speak to a universal experience of change. Change often begets resistance, and the tension created by competing imagined worlds in Edwards' novels, embodied in Toesca's wife's experience of the city as a disciplinary space, illustrates the tensions inherent in transition.

The lived experience of Manuela Fernández de Rebolledo y Pando (1765-1808), Toesca's *criolla* wife, also revolves around change. Fernández de Rebolledo's position¹¹ depends on ideologies of feminine behavior and their relationship to the city, illustrating challenges to the naturalization of what Daphne Spain calls gendered spaces, which "separate women from knowledge used by men to produce and reproduce power and privilege" (3). This is based not only on her intimate relationships with various architects and engineers but also her experience of urban space as a disciplinary space. This imagined world corresponds to the environment in 1980s Santiago as much as to Santiago on the eve of Independence from Spain. The reader observes a contest between two imagined worlds: the first, associated with Toesca, elevates order, discipline, and institutional power, and sparks the second, associated with Fernández de Rebolledo, characterized by the value placed on desire, resistance, and freedom. Ignacio's affinity for elements of both Toesca and Fernández de Rebolledo's worlds reflects their strength, though the novel's concluding sentences indicate that the narrator chooses to "ingresar al orden" (412). Despite his choice, however, the novel itself keeps the door open to resistance, concluding in hypotheticals and lamenting Ignacio's lost redemption, presumably impeded by his surrender to order.

Toesca's devotion to order and Ignacio's ultimate choice of imagined world do not negate Fernández de Rebolledo's resistance. Married in 1782, she belongs to a family whose social position is threatened by a series of inherited problems. Several

¹⁰ José de Piérola proposes that historical competency is a quality in the reader of historical fiction that refers to a shared knowledge base for historical references. It functions as a wink between readers of the genre that permits the acknowledgement of events, characters, and stories that may exist in the historiographical archive or in other circulating historical narratives.

¹¹ In the literature "Manuelita" is the most common name used to refer to Manuela Fernández de Rebolledo. Throughout this article, I refer to her by her legal name. I make this choice conscientious of the fact that the use of the diminutive can be read as an infantilizing move.

sources suggest that her mother arranged the marriage to Toesca in order to resolve financial challenges. Over the course of Toesca and Fernández de Rebolledo's marriage she carries on affairs with other men, particularly with her husband's apprentices. Her most infamous act remains a failed attempt to kill her husband by poisoning his favorite food, asparagus, for which she was jailed and disciplined in various private residences and convents. Having received an education limited by "orgullo de casta y una terquedad voluntariosa" (Pereira Salas 186), she is seen as a crudely uncultured woman (Edwards, "Mito" 10). The woman who resists the reformation of her behavior, evidenced by her serial adultery, does not fit within the expectations of her culture, and suggests that the desire that Fernández de Rebolledo expresses and enjoys provides a gendered alternative to the normative independence narratives that her husband's work represents. Her resistance to disciplinary structures, dependent on gendered expectations of behavior and morality, can be read as ahead of her time: "una precursora de los tiempos nuevos, de las sociedades libres, sinceras" (Edwards, *Sueño* 371).

Fernández de Rebolledo experiences the city as a space of resisted discipline in which she can undermine places designed for her reformation and confinement. Their rigid structures give way to her social networks and will to live life following her own desires. This suggests that the disciplinary sites of the city are unable to fully discipline women, or at least privileged women. Fernández de Rebolledo creates an imagined world in which discipline fails. Throughout the novel she is subjected to many efforts to reform her behavior in line with the acceptable morality of her eighteenth-century world. The convent serves as the institution most apt for this discipline, and her husband and other civil authorities restrict her to them on multiple occasions. As space, it reflects the practice of restricting the lived environments of women, especially with regards to their presence in public spaces (Zamorano 129). The convent functions as a heterotopia of deviance in the Foucauldian sense: a place apart and reserved for those individuals whose behavior does not conform to the norms of the social imaginary.¹² Fernández de Rebolledo transgresses these enclosed spaces—the majority of which are located within the city—and through her transgression she affirms her freedom: "El mundo de los conventos al que Fernández de Rebolledo es sucesivamente confinada no tiene muros para una mujer bien conectada y confiada en la ceguera de un marido extranjero" (Viu 223). Though Toesca did not design the convents in which his wife was detained, he participates in the legal system that so punishes her. Fernández de

¹² Foucault describes heterotopias as "real places – places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society – which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (24). Following this, heterotopias of deviance are a manifestation of a post-primitive world.

Rebolledo only exists in the legal system as the object of discipline, either subject to her husband or her mother's attempt to supplant her husband's legal authority over her.¹³

Fernández de Rebolledo's lack of self-control, alongside her breach of the sexual mores of her society occur in the privacy of the domestic sphere, though her behavior in public spaces like the plaza does not maintain her society's standards for feminine modesty. Courts confine her to the Clarist convent and later the Augustinian convent, neither of which is capable of changing her behavior or attitude. Finally, with the city's disciplinary structures unable to effect the desired change in her behavior, authorities send her to the Beaterio de Peumo—"un lugar siniestro y desolado, un Beaterio situado entre lechos secos de río y montañas desiertas" (270), where her spiritual director tells her that "lo mejor para ti, y para todos nosotros, es que el Señor te lleve. Porque donde llegas, con tu cara bonita, con tu cuerposote, traes el desorden" (242). Having exhausted disciplinary spaces—a failed heterotopia of deviance—the only recourse that the representative of order can suggest is her annihilation: death. The effect of her behavior—disorder—runs contrary to the hegemonic imagined world epitomized by her husband and written onto the built environment of the city through his work. Fernández de Rebolledo's inability to accommodate herself to societal norms, privileging her own desires above the rigidity and maintenance of her society's system, can be read as a commentary on her husband's desire for order. Toesca, intimately linked to Santiago and the Chilean nation by his artistic and architectural creation, opposes Fernández de Rebolledo's will. Her ferocious resistance to her husband's imagined world emphasizes the failure of disciplinary spaces and institutions. It proposes the possibility of different, freer imagined worlds that privilege resistance to order and obedience to desire above their opposites.

Space that functions to control the individual expands from the convents of *El sueño de la historia* to encompass all of the spaces of Santiago, built and natural, in Nona Fernández's first novel. The Mapocho River snakes through the city of Santiago as a concrete-encased trickle of brown liquid. Many water-quality issues in the river today stem from untreated wastewater upstream, continuing the historical practice of using the Mapocho as a dumping ground. *Mapocho* uses this practice to structure an exploration of historical narrative, family relationships, memory, and the city. The novel does not feature any extraordinary historiographically-extant female figures that mold imagined worlds to permit either women's active participation or resistance. Instead the reader encounters a fragmented novel with multiple historical referents that link to a fictional protagonist and an occasionally identifiable cartography of Santiago. The marginalized space of the novel's main character, Rucia, who narrates in death, as well as the recycling of places, people, and knowledge, creates a destabilizing space. When

¹³ Clara Pando, Fernández de Rebolledo's mother, brought a court case against her son-in-law between 1793 and 1797 protesting Toesca's kidnapping and incarceration of her daughter on the advice of the Bishop of Santiago. For an analysis of the process, see the work of María Eugenia Albornoz Vásquez.

etched on a familiar map, this space prompts questions about the connection that can be made between places, people, and knowledge and any collective sense of identity. In order to explore possible imagined worlds inscribed in the novel I will underline three specific places: the river, the tower, and the bridge. These places reflect gendered practices dependent on spatial function and cultural expectations.

The novel presents us with repeated characterizations of the phantasmal inhabitants of the text as disposable persons who are as easily discarded and replaced as the old historical buildings of the city that developers tear down to build modern skyscrapers. Carlos Jáuregui and Juana Sanchez argue that at the close of the twentieth century we encounter many dehumanizing metaphors that represent undesirable elements of society, culminating in the use of the term “disposable” to describe other human beings (368).¹⁴ In reading this term as a consequence of the ideologies of the lettered city, Jáuregui and Suárez link its use to the society of consumption and late capitalism, both of which are key themes related to the character of the democratic transition in Chile.¹⁵ In this world, individuals and groups outside of or oppressed by the logic of the neoliberal capitalist system—the prevailing system in democratic Chile—become disposable, less than, literal trash. This dehumanization excludes symbolically, concretely, and physically.

Mapocho branches off from an expectation of historical novels: the immersion of the reader in a particular moment of the past. The novel focuses on a multiplicity of versions of four different historical contexts. They include the experience of Pedro de Valdivia in Chile and the death of the Mapuche *lonko* Lautaro in the 16th century; Luis Manuel Zañartu’s time as Corregidor of Santiago in the 1770s, in which he functioned as the ultimate civil authority given Chile’s distance from colonial centers; the first presidency (dictatorship) of Colonel Carlos Ibáñez del Campo (1927-1931); and the era of the multiple narrators of the novel, which corresponds to the 1970s and later. The narrators of *Mapocho* are dead and they move through a Santiago haunted by the dead. The narration fragments in various discourses expressed through the voices of Rucia, the protagonist; her brother Indio; her father Fausto; the gossipy voice of the “dicen que;” and fragments of Fausto’s magnum opus, the *Historia de Chile* commissioned and approved by a powerful and shadowy government. Different narrators repeat variations on the same stories and explore possible emplotments for their narrative arrangement. Through the recycling of narratives the novel destabilizes the idea of a master narrative

¹⁴ This concept of the disposable was constructed within the Colombian context of fascination with violence and the *sicaresca*. Despite the specificity of this context, the concept can illuminate a reading of Fernández’s novel.

¹⁵ For more detail about this process in the economic and artistic realms, see the work of Luis Cárcamo-Huechante. Daniel Noemi Voionmaa summarizes the current consensus: “The new democracy in Chile does not oppose a dictatorial regime; on the contrary, this new democracy fulfills “the promise” implicit during the dictatorships, the hegemony of neoliberalism” (111).

while using the freedom of death—both Rucia’s and the historical figures’—to explore new possibilities for imagined worlds.

The Mapocho River links disposability, death, and urban space within the novel. “Mapocho, the river, functions as a scar that marks the city, while *Mapocho*, the novel, aims to reveal the scars in Chilean society and history” (Noemi 119). As the novel opens, a voice in first person narrates as Rucia-in-the-coffin floats, seeing her ghost on a bridge reconsidering scattering her mother’s ashes in the dirty river.

Mi cajón navega entre aguas sucias haciéndole el quite a los neumáticos, a las ramas, avanza lentamente cruzando la ciudad completa [...] Viajo por un río moreno. Una hebra mugrienta que me lleva con calma, me acuna amorosa y me invita a que duerma y me entregue por completo a su trayecto fecal [...] En la ribera un borracho lanza una botella vacía que se hace pedazos al topar conmigo. Vidrios me llegan a la cara, un hilo de sangre corre por mi frente. (Fernández 11)

The squalor of the river clashes with the notion of its function as a symbol of life-giving water and renewal and underlines the strangeness of the world the ghostly characters inhabit. The polluted modern-day waterway has nothing to do with Fausto’s description of the Edenic river that Pedro de Valdivia would have encountered in the sixteenth century. Associating the river with Eden implies binary gender roles in which a masculine creator forms a world and the beings within it. Fausto wanted to say that the river “en ese entonces no era el conjunto de mojones y basura que es ahora, sino más bien un torrente de agua pura, que hasta tomar se podía si es que a uno se le antojaba” (40). However, his editor-censors removed the reference to the condition of the river, as speaking of filth “no parecía digno de un texto de estudio, y mucho menos para una Historia oficial. ¿Para qué hablar cochinas, Fausto?” (40). Fausto is not given an opportunity to respond to officialdom’s rhetorical question. The biblical allusion to an earthly paradise evokes images of beauty and purity related to the river of the past. However, Man’s dominion over creation echoes the power of the editor-censors and the authority which they represent. The imagined worlds in conflict between Fausto’s texts and the desires of the powerful contrast imagined pasts with a filthy present, but this contest remains between worlds created by and for powerful men. The final version of Fausto’s text, censored knowledge about the past, forms the basis for the construction of a hegemonic imagined world because of its designation as official pedagogical material. Sanitizing the story of the river on which Rucia floats functions only insofar as those in power control the narrative, and the occasional survival of Fausto’s drafts challenge that control.

The river crosses the Santiago of *Mapocho*, transporting waste in what was once the life-blood. The flashy new tower built upon the rubble of a neighborhood soccer stadium eclipses the rest of the urban space labeled “barrio” by Rucia. This tower

phallically symbolizes progress while it attempts to “disappear” that which came before. This includes torture and gendered violence in an allusion to the military’s use of stadiums as concentration camps, and it dominates and reflects the varied landscapes of Rucia’s neighborhood. The tower is built on the ruins of a stadium in which agents of the state sexually violated people, especially women. The new construction does not obscure this gendered violence but rather emphasizes its ability to enact it again through its physical shape and dominance of the landscape. However, Rucia’s response deviates from the desired reaction of an imagined world of control and recognizes the tower as a remembrance, likening it to “un monolito enorme de esos que marcan los lugares en los que han ocurrido accidentes carreteros. Esos que dicen *a la memoria de...*” which inspires the observer to comment “ojo, aquí murió alguien” (90). Throughout *Mapocho*, the reader encounters any number of places that inspire similar reactions; Rucia, herself dead, later responds to a viewing of the tower with the same formula—hey, someone died here—that emphasizes not only the anonymity, interchangeability and disposability of the dead, but also the geographical representation of the place of death. The city buries its past while turning its attention towards a sanitized version of its own narrative—a new imagined world—designed to project a certain kind of collective subjectivity into the future that erases the complicated, conflictive, and peripheral. However, the phantasmal protagonist understands and undermines that projection.

Like a guard tower, the newer building overshadows its landscape. “Su fachada es de espejos y el Barrio entero se ve reflejado en ella. Un pedazo de cada cosa, un collage [...] ninguna de esas imágenes recortadas en el vidrio de la torre le es familiar” (26). The presence of her father’s office and residence on the top floor complicates Rucia’s alienation from the modernizing erasure represented by the mirrored tower, a process in which all modern citizens participate. As the author of the Official History, which the authorities use to bludgeon the body politic into a collective but not-quite-coherent whole, Fausto’s position at the apex of the symbol of this power challenges efforts to recuperate the past entombed in the debris under its foundation. The barrio lives, buried “por construcciones, por publicidades de televisión por cable y telefonía móvil. Sobre él las máquinas se pasean, el tránsito se atasca a las siete de la tarde, los andamios se elevan, la gente circula. El Barrio yace bajo el paso acelerado de todos” (177). In this proposed imagined world, history, space, and society coexist. However, the palimpsestic understanding of the neighborhood is only available to the dead, the already-discarded. Time and the city condemn even the omissions and appendices of Fausto’s Official History to destruction and obscurity, lost in the dirt and grime.

Bridges are thought to lift their users above such filth, but the main bridge featured in the novel cannot escape its own subterranean ghosts. The Calicanto bridge over the Mapocho connected the center of the city with La Chimba. During the colonial period, this area remained agricultural and functioned as a cultural and physical space for indigenous persons to congregate. Fernández’s novel focuses on the connection between colonial Santiago and La Chimba as it relates to the construction of the

Calicanto bridge in the 1770s. Carlos Franz observes that in texts about Santiago “la Chimba esconde nuestro vientre hambriento, nuestro sueño, y también nuestra locura” (33). Part of the city, yet other, La Chimba reminds the reader of Edward Soja’s “exopolis,” “the city without [...] the Exopolis [...] turn[s] the city inside-out and outside-in at the same time, unraveling in its paths the memories of more familiar urban fabrics” (239). The past narrated with regards to this section focuses on the power of rumor,¹⁶ and approximates the style of a folktale. In this story, the Devil came to earth and found a semblance of Eden in La Chimba; while intending to do good, he destroyed that which he cared for (La Chimba) and was unable to enter Heaven given the violence visited upon the workers forced to build the Calicanto bridge. The Devil’s desire for Heaven shapes this tale and motivates his actions. His offspring, two daughters and the bridge, motivate his behavior. The narrative offers multiple interpretations of his reaction to his daughters’ sexual maturity, the more realistic of which mirrors the heterotopia of deviance of the convent with an important twist: the young women are confined and he who behaves outside of societal expectations remains at liberty to do as he wishes. Women in this folktale are objects of desire to be disposed of as best serves the temptations and wishes of the powerful.

The Devil also views the bridge as his offspring, having turned his energies to its construction as a distraction from his incestuous desires. The Calicanto bridge is framed as a civilizing and progressive project that supplants a vulgar structure in a symbolism that parallels the economic program of the military dictatorship of the late twentieth century. Contrary to the goal of a project that values all persons, the human cost of the bridge’s construction challenges its existence as a common good. The Devil views his labor practices as part of a larger effort to prove himself worthy of heaven, and that the undesirables forced to work on the bridge construction pay for their sins on earth by doing so. The Devil was wrong. The disposable beings—criminals, the poor, indigenous persons—destroyed on the altar of progress haunt the city, as the voice of rumor confirms: “Dicen que los muertos todavía gimen. Dicen que nunca dejarán de hacerlo. Flotarán en el río y aullarán tan fuerte como puedan. Dicen que por culpa de los muertos el Diablo jamás entrará al Cielo” (80). Fausto goes beyond the speculation of rumor when he imagines the contorted souls of those holding up the bridge’s foundation (Fernández 111). The disposable bodies of the men whose labor built the structure create the foundation upon which national progress has been built, as seen not only with this bridge—which collapsed in 1888—but also with the tower built upon the dead of the soccer stadium.

Each historical moment in *Mapocho* also corresponds to physical elements of urban design in Santiago that underscore the dehumanization of marginalized

¹⁶ Rumor, like gossip, erases the distinction between public and private (Feeley and Frost 5). It is domestic and collective and can be related to a marginalized voice often associated with female-dominated spaces. “At best, gossip is trivial and idle; at worst, it is invasive and destructive” (1). Additionally, rumor is constitutive of immediate and imagined communities (8).

populations to the point of their conversion into literal trash, dead bodies polluting the river. While an absent presence in the novel, the power that controls the Official Story erases this “human trash,” the dead, from its hegemonic imagined world in order to construct a narrative to fit its own ideological goals. *Mapocho* challenges this construction by making evident the connection between these people, the spaces they inhabited, their lived experience and the efforts to forget them. It proposes a series of alternative imagined worlds disassociated from the masculinist power that shapes and censors the permissible narrative represented by Fausto’s text. The pain of gendered violence enacted on various bodies, including Rucia’s, becomes less immediate in the novel due to the spectral nature of its inhabitants. Allusions to the second creation story in Genesis link the river to men associated with state power exercising dominion over others. The tower emphasizes the sexualized violence enacted in the soccer stadium. The bridge stood on the bones of its builders, a sublimation of inappropriate sexual desire. The victims of this violence are united in death, in un-being. It is through not belonging that they belong. The imagined worlds of the powerful cannot make space for the violence and dehumanization they require to maintain power, but they also cannot erase traces of their abuses. *Mapocho* does not warn of the dehumanization of disposable people but rather explores their stories and indicts those who sought to dispose of them. In so doing, the novel complicates a simplistic reading of official history as an appropriate point of departure for societal reconciliation of past atrocities.

This itinerary of historical novels destabilizes the hegemonic stories that give form to the city. Isabel Allende re-writes the physical foundation of the city using a woman who through her sex and gender widens opportunity for participation in an imagined world inspired by both the historical Conquest of the Americas by Spain and twenty-first century concerns about gendered inclusion. Jorge Edwards presents a figure that resists the order imposed by the city’s blueprint. Manuela Fernández de Rebolledo rejects its discipline without fulfilling the same symbolic function as Inés Suárez, evoking an imagined world that embraces freedom and desire contrary to the world of order and discipline embodied by her husband and in the narrative link to Pinochet’s Chile. In Nona Fernández’s work, space no longer has explanatory power to imagine a singular concept of the city, experience, or collective identity.¹⁷ *Mapocho* offers a profoundly negative vision of history and the story, and the text proposes possible imagined worlds in order to abandon them like the trash in the river. The idea of a fragmented and divided city suggests a critique of the democratic transition in the Chilean context, which calls into question the value of anti-establishment imagined worlds created through these novels, all of which are cultural products of the transition. If the transition is a façade that has permitted the continuation and consolidation of authoritarian civil structures, reading these three novels together provides an image that

¹⁷ Space in *Mapocho* functions as critique in a way analogous to the work of other Chilean narrative writers such as Diamela Eltit, whose novels explore power and space as exercised on marginalized bodies.

challenges not only the tempered optimism of the imagined worlds in *Inés del alma mía* and *El sueño de la historia* but also the coherence and solidarity of the imagined worlds of politics and contemporary public discourse.

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