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## 1. Introduction: Online and on the margins in Alto Hospicio, Chile

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# 1

## Introduction: Online and on the margins in Alto Hospicio, Chile

On 18 September 2014 – Chile’s national holiday, the *Fiestas Patrias* – 24-year-old Nicole work up early in her family apartment. She looked out the window at Alto Hospicio, in the north of the country. Her mother was in the kitchen preparing food for the occasion and her father had just arrived home from a week-long shift as a heavy machine operator at a large copper mine a few hours away from the city. She could hear her younger brother still snoring through the thin walls of their small apartment. As usual she grabbed her second-hand iPhone 4 to send Martin, her boyfriend of five years, a Facebook message wishing him a good morning. Then she began skimming through Facebook. After reading a number of posts wishing everyone a fun-filled holiday, she wrote her own post related to *Fiestas Patrias*.

*Primero, soy HOSPICEÑA, Después, soy NORTINA, y último, soy Chilena. . . así qué viva Alto Hospicio! Viva el Norte!*

First I am HOSPICEÑA [from the city of Alto Hospicio], next I am NORTHERN and finally I am Chilean . . . so Hooray Alto Hospicio! Hooray the North!!

In this short post Nicole declared her loyalties – first to her city, next to the region and only then to her country, even on the national holiday. In many ways she used this post to establish how she imagines her position in the world, and the way she understands herself in relation to various larger communities to which she belongs. Alto Hospicio is considered a marginalised city, and the far north of the country a peripheral region. By emphasising these more local ways of identifying rather than her national pride, she highlights her own marginality as a citizen. Particularly during *Fiestas Patrias*, a time invested with national symbolism, when she writes ‘Viva Alto Hospicio! Viva el Norte!’ she leaves the much more common phrase ‘Viva Chile’ notably absent.

Nicole's proclamations of loyalty to city, region and nation are particularly poignant as conveyed through social media, a form of communication often imagined as existing beyond any borders. Social media has become associated with global networks, unfettered by nation-states, geographical differences or even cultural variation. Yet Nicole used this medium precisely to declare certain kinds of place-based citizenship.

Citizenship, in its colloquial use, is generally understood to mean an individual's membership in a political and geographic community. It includes that individual's legal status in relation to a governing body, but also her or his participation within the public defined by that governing body. These range from small-scale, local, face-to-face communities, in which an action such as picking up litter makes one a 'good citizen', to the much larger communities such as the nation – or even a sense of 'global citizenship' where most members do not know one another face-to-face, yet individuals still feel obligations to contribute to a collective good.

The specific meaning of citizenship varies considerably in different historical, physical and cultural contexts. Bosniak suggests that we conceive of citizenship as a collection of interwoven strands including legal status in an organised community, rights within such communities, public participation and feelings of belonging.<sup>1</sup> Considering these different conceptions of citizenship allows us to differentiate between them, while also recognising that they are always (en)tangled. These various meanings at times complement one another; at other times there may be tension between them. As Nicole's post makes clear, citizenship is often deeply connected to people's understanding of who, where and how they exist in the world.

Traditional treatments of citizenship acknowledge the role of mass media in its construction, particularly in terms of belonging and nationalism. For example, in tracing the spread of print media beginning with the Industrial Revolution, Benedict Anderson suggests that speakers of different varieties of a language such as English or Spanish may have found it difficult to understand people from another region, even if they nominally spoke the 'same' language. With the rise of national newspapers, however, people began to see themselves as similar to others in the rest of their country, who were readers of the very same paper, and began to understand the nation as an 'imagined community'.<sup>2</sup> With the emergence of internet communication, and particularly the interactive features of social media, we can see how these imagined communities are now likely to cross national borders quite easily.

Anderson indeed suggests that the local alignment of social habits, culture, attachment and political participation are being unravelled, in

part, by modern communications. However, virtual spaces also allow for conceptions of citizenship that move beyond formal, legal and constitutional definitions in order to emphasise the ‘everyday practices of belonging through which social membership is negotiated’.<sup>3</sup> As we see from Nicole’s Facebook post, in some instances global forms of communication become the very space in which individuals use place-based ways of expressing the self. And Nicole is not alone. Though not always as explicit, the residents of Alto Hospicio, Chile often use social media to express various forms of citizenship related to the city, region or nation. Much like the ‘public sphere’, described by Habermas<sup>4</sup> as a domain of social life in which public opinion may be formed and debated, social media provides a space for discussion, for expressing opinions – and thus creates a public for discussing and contesting what citizenship means.

Because this new public sphere of social media is, in theory, open to and viewable by people almost anywhere in the world, we often find it easy to assume that it fosters forms of cosmopolitan citizenship, privileging the view that all people, regardless of geographic location or political affiliations, are citizens in a single community. As borders become increasingly porous, with capital, goods, people and ideas flowing practically unimpeded by geographic boundaries,<sup>5</sup> citizenship takes on new meaning. Within such a context, the way Nicole and many other Hospiceños place importance on locally based forms of citizenship becomes all the more meaningful, particularly as residents of a marginalised area. Social media provides an ideal medium for studying these types of self-expression, rendering them visible both to other Hospiceños and to the ethnographic observer.

Hospiceños contrast their experiences with the types of national or global citizenship that often accompany movements of people and ideas, promoting a sense of solidarity within the community rather than emphasising distinctions. These individuals identify in ways that highlight local affiliation connected to family, social networks, work and community politics. When Hospiceños express these identifications through social media it often reinforces their values of normativity in surprising ways. This book elucidates the ways in which Hospiceños use social media as a conduit to highlight certain discourses and erase others, in the service of sustaining normativity and redefining citizenship from a marginalised position.

These themes of citizenship, marginality and normativity are pertinent to the discussion of social media in this book. This is because, particularly in a marginalised area, social media has become the most prominent public sphere in which claims to and contestations of

citizenship may be made. In Alto Hospicio most of what people post on social media is in some sense connected to the performance, maintenance or examination of what it means to be a good citizen.<sup>6</sup> Of course not all postings explicitly announce that they are about citizenship, as Nicole's did on the national holiday. Instead most of Hospiceños' posts masquerade as funny memes, silly videos, mundane photographs or banal recounting of the day's events in a status update. When framed as claims that their marginality actually represents a normative form of citizenship, however, the extraordinary potential of an ordinary post is revealed.

## Viva Alto Hospicio!

When Nicole wrote her Facebook post, declaring 'First I am Hospiceña', she communicated the importance of her connection to Alto Hospicio. She positioned herself as one of the roughly 100,000 residents who occupy this city near the geographic centre of the *Norte Grande*, or 'Great North' region of Chile. Alto Hospicio, literally translated as 'High Accommodation', sits high on a sand dune overlooking the Pacific Ocean, but at first glance there is little that seems hospitable about the place.

The Great North is enveloped by the Atacama Desert, the driest in the world, and the natural landscape is barren. Sand permeates everything. Most roads in the city are paved, but covered with a layer of sand, giving them the same neutral colour as the empty lots that host beds of discarded rubbish. Cars line the streets from one end to another, also covered in a thin layer of sandy dust. Homes are usually constructed of painted cement blocks or bricks, with flat roofs, and surrounded by security fences. Dogs lie by the side of the street, often with a coat of sand covering their fur. Average annual precipitation is about 1 mm, so plant life is almost completely absent, apart from a few plazas with artificially grown palms, flowers and grass. Playgrounds and cement basketball courts are common, and well used, leaving them with peeling, faded paint. The wares sold at corner shops spill out into the street, alongside faded poster advertisements that look as if they were printed in the mid-1980s. On busy streets and plazas vendors lay out wares on blankets, selling everything from fresh produce and prepared lunches to school supplies and used clothing.

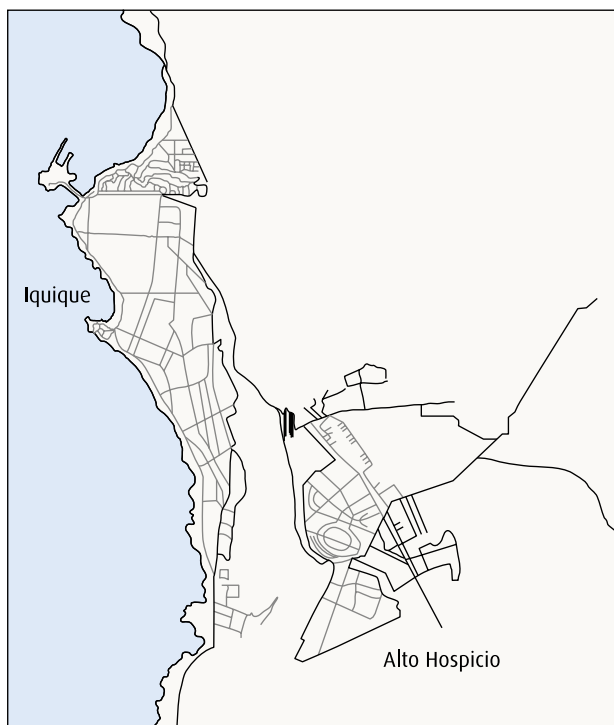
Despite its 100,000 residents, Alto Hospicio feels like a small city that continues to sprawl. The central business area occupies only three blocks of busy road, and includes city government offices, the cultural centre, several banks, two supermarkets and what seems like



**Fig. 1.1** Map of Chile showing Alto Hospicio, nearby Iquique and the national capital, Santiago

100 barbers shops. The city began to grow in the early 1990s, jumping from 9,000 residents in 1992 to over 90,000 a decade later, and has been officially recognised as a municipality only since 2004. Although it is a new city, there is something that looks faded and used about almost everything. Nothing seems to be shiny or fresh in Alto Hospicio.

Glancing at the social media profiles of young Hospiceños makes this clear. They snap selfies in front of their dusty school buildings or inside their homes, usually decorated with furniture and textiles purchased second-hand at the city's outdoor market. Even the humorous



**Fig. 1.2** Detailed map of Iquique and Alto Hospicio

memes so popular among Chileans are passed from page to page like reused goods.

Though the majority of this young generation grew up in Alto Hospicio, most of their parents did not. The population boom of the 1990s was a result of strong economic conditions in the region. Alto Hospicio sits between the port city of Iquique, with its tax-free import zone, Zofri, and copper mining operations in the Altiplano, the high plain of Chile's interior. So, despite the seemingly barren surroundings, the region teems with natural resources, from fishing and importation on the Pacific coast to the copper reserves in the Andes mountains. Because of these resources, the region attracts migrants from central and southern Chile, as well as international migrants from Bolivia, Peru and Colombia, all looking for better work opportunities.

The entire Norte Grande<sup>7</sup> region is essential to Chile's economy. The port in Iquique is one of the most important in western South America, and employs about 20,000 people, loading and unloading cargo,



**Fig. 1.3** A view of Alto Hospicio from a hill in the central eastern part of the city

shipping goods and selling tax-free items in Zofri. Even more influential is the mining industry, which employs over 150,000 people throughout Chile, most of whom are concentrated in the Great North. Copper exports alone make up about 20 per cent of the country's GDP and 60 per cent of its exports.<sup>8</sup> Yet while the people who consider Alto Hospicio their home make up a significant proportion of workers in both these industries, they rarely experience the true economic benefits of this industry.

The economy of this mining region in Chile is a study of contrasting juxtaposition, in which vast mineral wealth is surrounded by a seemingly endless desert void. In Iquique's new southern neighbourhoods high-level managers and international engineers buy mini-mansions and park their Hummers in the driveway. At the same time the majority of mining workers and their families live in modest neighbourhoods in northern and central Iquique or in Alto Hospicio, often inhabiting homes with cement floors and lacking conveniences such as hot water. In Alto Hospicio some entire neighbourhoods are *tomas* [takings], in which residents simply claimed the land without any title by building their own houses there.

Iquique is surrounded by water to the west and a 600-m sand dune to the east. The latter curves toward the ocean to close off the city in the north and south, dropping almost directly into the sea. As both



the mining and importation industries boomed in the 1990s and huge numbers of migrants arrived to the region from other parts of Chile and abroad, Iquique simply could not accommodate more people: moving to Alto Hospicio was the only option. The sand dune had long been home to a mining train depot, dating from the early twentieth century, and a few indigenous peoples' settlements that had been there since the 1950s. Migrants began staking claims to land on the dune, simply by beginning to build on the area that later became known as the *Auto Construcción* [Self-Construction] neighbourhood.

As the city continued to grow, new neighbourhood developments became more organised, with homes and large apartment buildings funded by government programmes. Alto Hospicio continued to be officially part of Iquique until 12 April 2004, when President Ricardo Lagos Escobar signed Law No. 19943 declaring Alto Hospicio a separate municipality. Today most reports suggest that Alto Hospicio has about 100,000 inhabitants, though no census results have been made public since 2002.

Residents describe the city as marginal and disenfranchised, calling it *fome* [boring] and ugly. Because almost all residences in the city are modest – either self-constructed or part of government social housing systems – a uniform and utilitarian aesthetic pervades the



**Fig. 1.4** A self-constructed home in a *toma* neighbourhood

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## Alto Hospicio ocupa último lugar en ranking de calidad de vida urbana

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**Fig. 1.5** ‘Alto Hospicio occupies last place in ranking of quality of life in cities’

landscape. Those in the port city of Iquique, just 10 km down the sand dune to the east, often describe Alto Hospicio as impoverished, dangerous and ‘uninhabitable’. In 2014 and 2015, during which I conducted the majority of my field work, the *Índice de Calidad de Vida Urbana* [National Index of Quality of Urban Life] ranked Alto Hospicio last among cities in Chile. The rankings took into consideration working conditions, business climates, sociocultural conditions, transportation connectivity, health, environment and housing.<sup>9</sup> Hospiceños certainly recognise these stereotypes about the city, and do not necessarily disagree. However, they see their marginalised city as part of the way they perceive themselves – not as victims, but as an exploited community that continues to fight for its rights.

When the quality of life ranking appeared in the news, many Hospiceños shared a link to the article on Facebook, commenting with

both pride and sarcasm. Commentaries ranged from '*Díos mío, como sobreviven???*' [My God, how do they survive?] to '*Vengan a visitar a nuestro paradiso*' [Come visit our paradise]. No one contested the ranking or listed things that they felt could be assets for the city. Instead they employed sarcasm to highlight both their pride in being from Alto Hospicio, as well as calling attention to their marginalised subjectivity that comes as part of being a Hospiceño. They knew most people who would see their comments on the post were Hospiceños as well, but still felt it was important to comment. Within the local public sphere, these types of public comments about marginality were important to express belonging and community cohesion.

## Viva El Norte!

Alto Hospicio's quality of life ranking clearly marks the city as marginal. Yet it also calls attention to the fact the entire northern region is in many ways a peripheral zone. Indeed, this positioning was important to Nicole's declaration of northern pride as well. Despite a few high-ranking mining professionals who make their homes in Iquique, the wealth and prestige of Chile is concentrated away from the North. At the same time, however, this wealth and prestige very much depends on the northern region's natural resources.<sup>10</sup> Copper exports from the Great North make up about one-third of the country's income, significantly contributing to the fact that Chile's economy expands by about six per cent annually while unemployment and inflation remain very low.<sup>11</sup> In fact it was the natural resources of the Great North's Atacama Desert that brought the region into the Chilean nation in the first place.

The Inca were the first to exploit the natural resources of the Atacama, developing silver mining after they colonised the Chango indigenous people of the region in the early sixteenth century. Spanish colonists, who conquered the area and its people a few decades later, further exploited silver deposits and built up the city of Iquique as a social and economic centre. When Peru won independence from Spain in 1821, Iquique and the surrounding mining towns became part of this new nation. It was not until the 1830s, when prospectors discovered deposits of the natural fertiliser sodium nitrate in the Atacama, that the governments of Bolivia, Chile and Peru began to consider the land valuable. All three nations hoped to profit from mining, and began negotiating what was previously an undefined border. After decades of dispute,



**Fig. 1.6** Map of territory changes as a result of the War of the Pacific

and encouraged by British financiers, Chilean president Aníbal Pinto sent troops to capture the resource-rich desert that was under Bolivian rule. In accordance with a previous treaty Peru came to the defence of Bolivia, joining in combat against Chile. Pinto declared war on both nations in April 1879, thus beginning what became known as the War of the Pacific (1879–83). By the end of the conflict in 1884 Chile had taken Bolivia's entire coastline and Peru's southernmost province of Tarapacá, thus moving its northern border more than 700 km north. The area of

Iquique and Alto Hospicio, as well as Antofagasta (more than 400 km to the south), had both previously been Bolivian areas. Arica (300 km to the north), formerly part of Peru, also now came under Chilean rule. Most importantly, the resource-rich Atacama Desert had become Chilean territory. The border has remained as such, though the area is still disputed; Bolivia and Peru continue to file challenges with the United Nations International Court of Justice.

When Chile finally firmed up its claim to the Atacama territory, the government quickly set about a process of 'Chileanisation' to cement their sovereignty. Military units were stationed in the area, not only as deterrents to Peruvian and Bolivian forces, but also to remind the populace of their new nationality. To mitigate resentment towards the military, and the new nation as a whole, the Chilean government launched projects aimed at incorporating the northern population into the nation-state. It mounted projects in religion and education for both children and adults, projects which Frazier calls 'key vehicles for promulgating official memory'.<sup>12</sup>

Modernisation was at the core of the country's nationalist discourse. The newly won northern region of Tarapacá was home to nitrate exports that provided economic means to sustain such an image. A new class of wealthy citizens emerged from the nitrate industry, strengthening Chile's reputation as a country of wealth, culture, progress and modernity, but most were based in the capital, Santiago.

Nitrate mining, particularly as backed by foreign investment, created a boom in the region. Though most of the new-made nitrate barons settled in Santiago or abroad, those who settled in Iquique quickly set about constructing the city in European style; a municipal theatre was included among many stately buildings of colonial architecture, made of Oregon pine. Migrants began arriving from Southern Chile, Bolivia, Peru and other South American nations to fulfil the need for labour in the mines and processing plants. The nitrate industry proved short-lived, however; a German-made synthetic substitute was created in 1909, causing the Chilean industry to collapse by the 1940s.

Cycles of economic boom and bust have characterised the area since the nitrate era. The most recent mining boom, beginning in the 1980s, has been in copper exportation, and it continued through the time of my field work. In the current decade (2010s) northern Chile supplies one-third of the world's copper, which makes up 60 per cent of the country's exports and 20 per cent of its GDP. Large multinational

companies such as Phelps Dodge and Sumitomo have partnered with CODELCO, the state-owned copper company. Much of the profit is sent abroad, to Japan, the United States and the United Kingdom, while the Chilean government averages about 11.5 billion US\$ per year in profits from mining.<sup>13</sup>

The influence of mining also made Tarapacá the ‘birthplace of the Chilean labour movement’.<sup>14</sup> In the early nineteenth century most of the labour force in the sodium nitrate fields was composed of migrants from southern Chile, Argentina, Peru and Bolivia. Despite very different backgrounds, these workers overcame ethnic and national differences to organise their demands for better working conditions. Such solidarity was in part a consequence of their labour and lives being so thoroughly controlled by the nitrate industry. Mining companies often paid wages in tokens usable only at company-owned stores, and most workers had no family resources on which to rely. The nitrate fields were also so distant from workers’ homes that it was almost impossible to return to their communities with any regularity. With the mobility of the workforce restricted, the companies found it easier to enforce adherence to work schedules and rules. As Frazier suggests, these conditions gave workers the sense that ‘solidarity among the miners was their sole means of protecting themselves against the ups and downs



**Fig. 1.7** Iquique’s Municipal Theatre, decorated for *Fiestas Patrias*

of the mining cycle and exploitation by the foreign companies'.<sup>15</sup> The labour movement, increasingly important until the early twentieth century, organised not only for better working conditions, particularly in response to times of economic depression: it also supported the creation of schools, adult education programmes, cultural centres and women's centres, and has been noted as providing a foundation for Chilean socialism.<sup>16</sup>

The Great North was a strong region for the socialist party in Chile through the 1960s, making it a particularly prominent target when Augusto Pinochet's United States-backed neoliberal regime overthrew Salvador Allende's socialist government in 1973. General Sergio Arellano flew by helicopter from Santiago to the northern provinces in what came to be known as the 'Caravan of Death'. He visited the prisons filled with 'subversives' – socialist party sympathisers – and singled out the highest profile prisoners for execution, sometimes as many as 26 at a time.

Of those who were not imprisoned, tortured or disappeared, many Northerners fled the country. The area was already well equipped with tunnels into Peru. They had been used to smuggle food into Chile during the preceding US-led embargo designed to weaken the socialist party, paving the way for a leadership more sympathetic to neoliberal reforms. When, despite the embargo, Chileans reaffirmed their faith in socialism by electing Allende, the United States backed Pinochet's violent military coup. The food-smuggling tunnels were then transformed into escape routes, and at times, into living quarters. Overall the brutal regime executed or disappeared 3,200 Chileans. It imprisoned an additional 80,000, while more than 200,000 fled the country.<sup>17</sup>

The influence of the Pinochet regime was multifaceted, resulting in huge economic impacts on the region as well. Indeed, the United States backed the regime specifically as a means to install Milton Friedman's neoliberal economic theories as a test case. These policies centred on privatising state-owned companies and resources, deregulating business, cutting social services and opening the country to unimpeded imports.<sup>18</sup> As a result inflation spiralled to 374 per cent. More than 400 state-owned companies were privatised and tariffs were brought down by an average 70 per cent. Chileans working in manufacturing and related industries quickly lost their jobs as cheaper imports flooded the market. Unemployment under Allende had been about three per cent, but under the new 'economic shock' dictated by Friedman it reached 20 per cent. In 1975 Pinochet's finance minister

reduced government spending by 27 per cent and continued to cut: in 1980 government spending reached just 50 per cent of what it had been under Allende, leading to further unemployment and fewer social resources at a time when they were acutely needed. The government almost entirely defunded social services. The social security system was privatised, health care changed to a pay-as-you-go system and public schools<sup>19</sup> were replaced with vouchers and chartered schools; even cemeteries were privatised.<sup>20</sup>

Pinochet's government maintained these policies until 1982 when the Chilean economy crashed – debt exploded, hyperinflation took hold and unemployment rocketed to 30 per cent. Pinochet was forced to re-nationalise several companies. Naomi Klein points out that in retrospect Pinochet's saving grace was that he had never privatised the state copper mine company CODELCO, which generated 85 per cent of Chile's revenue from exports. Copper from the Great North saved the country from complete financial ruin.

However, those profits went to the government and wealthy investors, while workers in the north felt the brunt of economic problems created by extreme 'free market' reforms; they were in large part among the 45 per cent of citizens who had fallen below the poverty line by 1988. Pinochet's regime was finally defeated in a democratic election in 1989. However, subsequent democratically elected administrations intensified the export-oriented neoliberal reforms, though with less violent and totalitarian control.

These histories of exploitation and violence give Northerners a certain character, particularly in terms of their sense of citizenship. For many Chileans, the legacy of the Pinochet regime has left a void in political life in the North, as people try to distance themselves from national politics. Yet at the same time memories of the labour movement that began with nitrate workers remain a strong organising principle for Northerners, who understand themselves as similarly exploited for the benefit of those living in Santiago or who take the profits abroad. Nitrate-era imagery even figures prominently in memes that declare northern pride. Such memes that reference local historical politics are popular and posted by social media users in order to highlight their identification as Northerners. These memes differ drastically from those that comment on national politics, which often involve Photoshopped pictures of current politicians in ridiculous situations, overlaid with funny text and commentary. Being Northern is thus often about claiming political citizenship on a local level while eschewing national politics, and Hospiceños use social media as a key place to express this kind



of citizenship. Citizenship is about more than politics, however, and this history equally affects how Hospiceños see their participation within the nation–state in a variety of formations – among them sociality, economy, politics and legal rights.

## Viva Chile!?!?

In many ways the legacy of the Pinochet regime made Chile precisely what Friedman hoped – a neoliberal example. Following the vote to end Pinochet’s rule, subsequent democratically elected administrations have maintained neoliberal economic policies, through export promotion strategies and continued privatisation. The government’s role in the economy is mostly limited to regulation, although as noted the state continues to operate copper giant CODELCO and Banco Estado [State Bank]. Since 2006 Chile has boasted the highest per capita income in Latin America, with a purchasing power parity value of \$21,948 between 2010–14,<sup>21</sup> demonstrating the apparent success of these policies.

As economic anthropologists point out, neoliberalism is not just about faith in the ‘free market’; it also includes the reconfiguration of ideological assumptions about the role of individuals in society.<sup>22</sup> These ideologies become embedded in normative social scripts.<sup>23</sup> Rather than people expecting the government to provide for their basic needs, they expect government to act merely as a referee for private business. Individual responsibility often becomes a cultural value, promoted by political rhetoric which suggests those in need of social safety nets are failing to contribute to society, as well as similar but more subtle forms of discourse within education and advertising.<sup>24</sup>

Advertising in fact plays a major role in the adoption of neoliberal ideologies as cultural norms.<sup>25</sup> When governments deregulate markets, they often become saturated with consumer products. Companies hope to distinguish their goods through advertising, which often appeals to certain forms of identification – middle class or luxury, masculinity or femininity, family or regional values, alternative lifestyles or youthful enjoyment. Specifically neoliberalism shifts the meaning of ‘citizenship’ so that citizens often participate in the political process through the purchase of commodities, in ways that reinforce privatisation and eroded citizenship rights.<sup>26</sup>

These values are often evident on social media as well. From motivational memes which encourage viewers to take responsibility for achieving their goals despite difficult life circumstances to selfies that

conspicuously display the trendiest brand-name accessories, neoliberal ideology has pervaded even this seemingly unencumbered media form. This is not the case for the majority of social media users in Alto Hospicio, but is certainly true of most users in Santiago and even Iquique.

Given the ways in which the private mining industry and tax-free imports have bolstered Iquique's economy, it could be considered a poster city for neoliberal policies. Private industry continues to thrive in the area. Private banks and healthcare companies provide infrastructure, while nationally and internationally known private businesses such as Walmart (known as Lider in Chile), Home Depot (known as Sodimac) and McDonald's provide commercial outlets for residents. The main attraction in Iquique is the beach flanked by restaurants and night-clubs. The Dreams Casino is a popular spot not only for slot machines and craps tables, but also for weekly concerts. Of course the Zofri on the north side of the city is popular for buying imports, ranging from children's toys and clothing to new HD flat-screen televisions and cars from China, Japan and the United States. Iquique even boasts an 'American-style' mall with over 100 shops and a ten-screen movie theatre. The food court offers international favourites such as KFC and Yogen Frusz, as well as national chains such as Doggis serving *completos* [hot dogs]. In contrast to Alto Hospicio, a handful of cafes, restaurants and bars offer free Wi-Fi to patrons.

The absence of Wi-Fi in Alto Hospicio may be indicative of a more extensive difference. Alto Hospicio is a city built within, and because of, the economic outcomes of neoliberalism, but the consequences of this ideology have been quite different here than in most places. Businesses of the sort that can afford extensive advertisement have never placed importance on attracting Hospiceños as potential customers. This has lessened the influence of 'keeping up with the Joneses'-type class consciousness; Hospiceños generally see little value in conspicuous consumption and feel no shame in seeking assistance from social services. Consequently Hospiceños retain their expectation that the government should provide services such as housing, healthcare and education. The lack of large-scale advertising has also left the market open for the types of small, family-owned companies that are often eclipsed by larger businesses. In Alto Hospicio this trend promotes the valuing of community over 'outsiders', and means that to a large extent the association of consumer products with certain forms of identification has never taken root.

In contrast most Chilean cities, including Iquique and Santiago, represent a neoliberal system as it was intended by economic architects such as Friedman – one in which private businesses provide for most



**Fig. 1.8** Billboard advertisement in central Iquique for Zofri Tommy Hilfiger shop

needs and people are 'free' to consume products that they see as contributing to their sense of self. And this neoliberal system is central to the fact that most middle- and upper-class Chileans see their country as more 'Europeanised' or 'Americanised' than its neighbours, citing the stable government, military and economy, as well as the world-class cosmopolitan city of Santiago.

The International Monetary Fund and World Bank have used Chile's free-market economy as a model for the region.<sup>27</sup> Santiago, in particular, provides proof that the 'modernity' associated with neoliberal economics places Chile among the most highly developed nations of the world.<sup>28</sup> Santiago is home to the best Chilean universities, which represent some of the highest ranked educational institutions in Latin America.<sup>29</sup> It is also home to the national football team, which presents a serious challenge to the best teams in the world. In terms of art and literature Chileans have made contributions to world-renowned collections, and Santiago boasts museums and historical sites showcasing the lives of well-known Chileans

such as Pablo Neruda and Isabel Allende.<sup>30</sup> Musicians such as Victor Jara and Violeta Parra are still revered, and recent popular acts such as Gepe have gained international fame. Chile is also home to annual music festivals such as Lollapalooza Chile, which attract musicians from around the world and hundreds of thousands of their fans.

Most Chileans in central urban areas conceptualise the nation not as *mestizo* [mixed race] nor multi-ethnic, but as homogenous, and in fact homogeneously white.<sup>31</sup> This homogeneity and claims to modernity ‘bind the nation with a sense of “exceptionalism”, as most Chileans look at their country as a beacon of stability amidst a rather chaotic set of neighbouring countries.’<sup>32</sup> Yet many Chileans in central urban areas also identify the poor living conditions in places such as Alto Hospicio as a symptom of national decline that conflicts with with a more prevalent national narrative of modernity.

## Life on the margins

While Santiago appears comparable to cosmopolitan cities on any continent, Alto Hospicio looks and feels like another world. To travel the 2,000 km between Alto Hospicio and Santiago takes about 30 hours by bus. Hospiceños experience this profound distance as both physical and figurative. Rather than perceiving themselves to be a part of this developed nation, Hospiceños view themselves as representatives of the country’s inequality. Chile’s high per-capita income is mitigated by its standing in 2015 as the developed nation with the highest inequality in the world.<sup>33</sup> So while median income may be around US\$20,000, even the most prosperous Hospiceños – those who work in mining – make only about US\$8,000 a year. Those working outside the mining industry usually earn about half of that. Residents of Alto Hospicio watch as most of the profits from their region are funnelled back into economic transactions in the national capital or sent abroad. Many Hospiceños feel ignored by national politicians and exploited by international industry.<sup>34</sup> To them Santiago often appears as a symbol of the economic exploitation of the region, and of the nation’s economic inequalities in general.

Lessie Jo Frazier suggests that a unifying force for northern Chileans is their ‘profound sense of abandonment and persistence’.<sup>35</sup> This sense of abandonment in many ways conditions the ways in which Hospiceños understand their position within the nation-state. Through a lens of marginality, many Hospiceños see themselves as peripheral, defined in contrast to the perceived centre of Santiago. Marginality is often used as a

category of analysis within the social sciences, generally to describe the conditions of people who struggle to gain societal and spatial access to resources and full participation in political life.<sup>36</sup> In this view marginalised people are socially, economically, politically and legally excluded, and therefore vulnerable to a host of forms of structural violence.<sup>37</sup>

Marginality is defined and described along both societal and spatial axes. The societal axis focuses on demography, religion, culture, social structure, economics, politics and access to resources, emphasising the underlying causes of exclusion, inequality, social injustice and spatial segregation of people.<sup>38</sup> The spatial dimension of marginality is primarily based on physical location and distance from centres of development – areas lying at the edge of, or poorly integrated into, local, national and global systems. The two axes intersect when marginal spaces are considered dirty and unhealthy, dangerous, disorganised and threatening to the established order, leading to depictions of the inhabitants of marginal *barrios* themselves as marginal people: ‘backwards, aggressive, and primitive or uncivilized in nature, qualities that their geographical position on the urban periphery supposedly reflects’.<sup>39</sup> In both senses marginality is not a static state, but a process that emerges and evolves with time in various types and scales in socio-economical and geo-political environments. Thus a person or group is not marginal, but *marginalised*, actively positioned as such through the deployment of power.<sup>40</sup>

Yet, as Goldstein points out, anthropological writing about marginal areas – sometimes referred to as *barrios*, *favelas*, *barriadas*, *colonias populares*, shantytowns, encampments or *tomas* – have contested assumptions that marginal urban citizens are alienated and lacking agency to effect change over their circumstances.<sup>41</sup> Instead anthropologists have pointed out the ways in which marginalised peoples and places are economically and culturally integrated into larger urban society, effectively engaging in struggles to improve their living conditions.<sup>42</sup> Yet despite this work the idea of marginality continues to figure prominently in popular and official ideologies of spatial and cultural identification and categorisation in urban Latin American society.<sup>43</sup>

I use marginality here then not as a theoretical principle, but as a way that Hospiceños identify.<sup>44</sup> In actively distancing themselves from Santiago – both in daily life and through their online activity – Hospiceños identify as marginalised citizens through visual modes, discourses about personal relationships, ways of configuring their associations with production and consumption and, perhaps most importantly, in their engagement with politics and national citizenship. In this

sense marginality is neither an analytical term nor a static identity, but something collectively and actively produced.<sup>45</sup> Through this production Hospiceños categorise themselves as that which is ‘unlike the centre’, while also instantiating a self-understanding<sup>46</sup> that includes their social location as peripheral.

Evelyn, who moved to Alto Hospicio from Antofagasta in the early 2000s, often used social media to express her experiences as ones of abandonment by the state. Having lived in a *toma* for almost a decade, she often complained about the lack of social services available, blaming their absence on the national government. Evelyn’s husband Marco worked a seven-day shift in a mine about four hours from Alto Hospicio, leaving her alone with her ten-year-old son every other week. During this time Evelyn devoted most of her time to local campaigns, for example opposing a sewage plant in her new neighbourhood or advocating for more children’s playgrounds. She had also been involved in recent mayoral campaigns and helped with the 2012 census. She explained to me:

I know that if I want something done, I have to do it. The politicians aren’t going to help me. Santiago isn’t going to help me. But I’m a fighter and even though they are absent I persevere.

In this complaint Evelyn both identifies herself as speaking from the periphery and distances herself from ‘Santiago’ as a symbol of the centre. These sentiments are reflected in her social media use. Evelyn created a Facebook group to unite ‘outraged’ Alto Hospicio residents for social justice causes. These include the sewage plant and playgrounds mentioned above, as well as simply spreading information about corruption in the regional and national governments. She also uses WhatsApp extensively to organise citizens’ meetings, most recently focused on bargaining collectively for better electricity rates. Although her personal Facebook page is peppered with funny videos and pictures of her young son, it also has a strong base in political memes and videos that denounce hypocrisies and inequalities perpetuated by the national government.

Through her online presence Evelyn both claims identification as a marginalised citizen as well as speaks back to the types of institutional and governmental power she believes lie at the root of these inequalities. Evelyn identifies herself in contrast to what she sees as an exploitative Chilean government and positions herself alongside her neighbours as ‘outraged’, marginalised citizens advocating for their rights. In doing so she positions committed individuals as ‘good citizens’ while positioning the government, and those who support or benefit from its corruption,

as part of a national problem. She demonstrates that her allegiance is to the local community rather than a form of national citizenship. By doing so through social media she positions Facebook and similar platforms as the appropriate space in which these public-sphere debates should take place.

## Erasing difference, highlighting normativity

To return to Nicole, her Facebook post declaring herself *Hospiceña*, *Nortina* and only then *Chilena* did much more than highlight her allegiances. Perhaps more importantly, it erased certain other possible forms of identification that might have been salient. Her gender is implicit in the Spanish noun formation, in which personal descriptors ending in ‘a’ indicate a woman as antecedent (i.e. *Nortina*-feminine vs. *Nortino*-masculine, or sometimes used as a gender-neutral form). Yet she does not draw attention to her gender here, as she could have done by saying ‘Soy una mujer Nortina’ [I am a northern woman]. Equally she emphasises location, rather than a particular political party or stance. Location also replaces the possibility of identifying her Quechua indigenous origin in this post, which in many contexts, even in other regions of Chile, would be relevant to themes of citizenship and nationalism. I only learned that Nicole had Quechua ancestry after knowing her for more than a year, when she filled out a survey and I watched her enter ‘Quechua’ into the ethnicity box. For many *Hospiceños*, the elements of their personal experience with which they identify are distilled both on social media and in daily life.

Of course, all people at all times erase aspects of themselves that could form the basis of a particular way of identifying. Identification is an active process, which often involves highlighting certain aspects of the self and reducing the emphasis on others, sometimes in ways that exceed conscious awareness.<sup>47</sup> The point is not that Nicole neglected to mention some of these aspects, but rather that there was a clear trend in Alto Hospicio to ignore or erase particular forms of identifying – those commonly connected to ‘identity politics’ – such as indigeneity, non-traditional gender ideologies and class differences. And these erasures are further amplified on social media.

Rather than aiming to distinguish themselves from others, many individuals in Alto Hospicio highlight their desire for normativity. Viewed from an anthropological perspective, the concept of normativity refers to the everyday assumptions individuals make in a particular

context, and the way in which they consider these assumptions to be natural. These assumptions have to do with what is considered correct or incorrect, just or unjust, appropriate or inappropriate, right or wrong. Hospiceños have a sense of what their neighbours consider to be appropriate, and they generally follow those guidelines rather than challenge them. Of course such guidelines exist, and are followed by, most people in any context. These guidelines change according to the society or situation in which they emerge, but the fact that most people abide by them is precisely what makes them normative.

In Alto Hospicio, however, those guidelines often encourage individuals to fit in rather than seek to distinguish themselves from others. Bourdieu famously argued that those with assets such as education and cultural knowledge create a sense of 'distinction' for themselves by determining what constitutes taste, and thus naturalising differences between 'high culture' and 'low culture'.<sup>48</sup> Upward mobility, then, is about not just economic means but expressing distinction through taste as well. Yet residents of Alto Hospicio actively reject attempts at distinguishing themselves from others in the community. The norm of Alto Hospicio then, is doubly normative: most individuals abide by 'correct' behaviour which requires them to refrain from overly distinguishing themselves from others.

In looking at Hospiceños' online media, it is clear that a general sense of being marginalised is highlighted; forms of identifying that could compete, in contrast, are often left in the background or even erased. In fact the erasure of ideologically discordant elements from identification is key to its social utility. This erasure is particularly important in Alto Hospicio because identifying as marginalised, rather than more specific subaltern forms of identification, excludes those who are most marginalised in favour of a more general, normative sense of marginality.

For Chileans living in Alto Hospicio, people are rarely categorised as anything other than *mestizo*,<sup>49</sup> or of mixed Spanish and indigenous ancestry. Many Hospiceños in fact expressed sentiments such as 'pure races do not exist here'. Southern and central Chileans who have moved to the city quickly integrate with those born in the north. Census projections suggest that around 2,000 individuals from the Mapuche indigenous group of southern Chile live in Alto Hospicio,<sup>50</sup> but they are essentially absent from public discourses and understandings of race and racial relations,<sup>51</sup> as are Afro-descended Chileans. Both groups are considered merely Chileans, blending into the tapestry of brown *mestizo* shades that make up the human landscape.



However, certain other nationalities are racialised instead. Bolivians and Peruvians living in Chile often do not conform to the idealised *mestizaje* (*mestizo*-ness). While their skin colour does not differ significantly from darker Chileans they often have phenotypic differences evident from their Aymara ancestry, for example a shorter, broader stature and what many refer to as ‘indigenous facial features’ including close-set eyes and a large nose. In contrast to Mapuche, who are considered to be phenotypically closer to the *mestizo* standard, Aymara are thought to appear more indigenous, falling outside of the *mestizo* spectrum. Bolivians and more indigenous-looking Peruvians are also characterised as speaking slowly and softly, and many Hospiceños claimed they have a particular unpleasant odour. ‘It must be their food!’ one older Hospiceña woman explained.

Iquique boasts a *barrio boliviano* [Bolivian neighbourhood], several Colombian social clubs and countless Peruvian restaurants which often function as Peruvian social centres as well. Alto Hospicio by contrast has very few public clubs or social spaces dedicated to foreign migrants. While some immigrants such as Colombians and Peruvians from urban areas integrate more easily into social life, Bolivians are



**Fig. 1.9** Graffiti reading ‘*Cholos fuera! Bolis, pata raja! Monos culiao*’ [trans: ‘Cholos (urban indigenous Andeans) get out! Dirty footed Bolivians! Fucking monkeys’]

excluded from the collective sociality and subject to discriminatory discourses. Bolivia, a nation in which 60 per cent of citizens consider themselves indigenous (and up to 74 per cent in the Altiplano region that borders Chile), is also ranked as the poorest economy in the continental Americas, outranking only that of Haiti in the hemisphere.<sup>52</sup> Bolivian immigrants are often treated by Chileans as second-class residents of the city.

This discrimination is closely associated with the politics of indigeneity in Chile, and the benefits provided to indigenous Chileans as a 'vulnerable category'. Many Chileans believe that individuals with indigenous surnames (whether citizens since birth or naturalised citizens) have greater access to social services such as public housing, healthcare and even education (although this perception is actually incorrect). In the racial logic of Alto Hospicio, the categories of 'indigenous', 'Bolivian' and at times 'Peruvian' are conflated to mean a foreign racial underclass; terms are often used interchangeably, so that nation of origin stands in for race.<sup>53</sup> By grouping these international migrants into a single category they are racialised and stigmatised, much as local people view economic migrants around the world. Racial tensions rarely manifest in violence, but stigma and outright discrimination against Altiplano immigrants is undeniable. As one informant mentioned to me, 'Racism is the same here as everywhere, except we don't hit them, we just ignore them. We don't insult them to their faces, we do it behind their backs.' Ignoring immigrants often serves to exclude them from public social life and the imaginary of racial homogeneity that dates to the colonial period. As Bosniak notes, notions of belonging have inherently exclusionary tendencies: some individuals must inevitably be constructed as 'outside' the community in order for the 'inside' to have value.<sup>54</sup>

While Colombians, Peruvians and Bolivians often retain strong connections to their countries of birth citizenship, hoping to return home after benefiting from northern Chile's economy, nationality-based groups in Alto Hospicio do not exist in the public eye. Though Colombian men are known to socialise on a particular corner of the central plaza, and in neighbourhoods on the outskirts of Alto Hospicio one can often hear parties playing Bolivian Morenada music on weekend nights, these social groups do not form official organizations or publicise their activities online or offline. They certainly do not use public social media to identify themselves as members of such social groups. While more than 11 per cent of Alto Hospicio residents are of Aymara descent, many of whom are Chilean by birth, they do not organise using indigeneity or Aymara ancestry as a way of identifying. The director of the small

*Consejo Nacional Aymara* [National Aymara Council] office, which occupies a nondescript building a block from the former city hall office, notes that their services are drastically underused.

This is in part because identifying as Aymara, even for Chileans, aligns oneself with foreignness and is understood as contrary to discourses of progress. In fact many people do not even know that they are indigenous until they discover their surname on a government-published list of names of indigenous origin. As noted above, appearing on this list classifies the individual as part of a ‘vulnerable category’ allowing them access to indigenous land and university scholarships, although not to government-funded housing and subsidised healthcare, as many assume. But instead of providing a rallying point for political rights, as it does in southern Chile’s Mapuche areas,<sup>55</sup> indigenous identification in the North is easily glossed over or utilised in depoliticised ways only to gain access to certain governmental advantages.

Forms of identification associated with gender and sexuality are often similarly de-emphasised. A number of Hospiceños, both men and women, comment that the local women’s centre is unnecessary. Indeed most of its programming involves courses such as knitting or health-conscious cooking classes in which anyone could enrol. Many Hospiceños consider the centre to be unnecessary because they believe most women feel empowered in their families and community; they see issues related to poverty and violence as affecting men and women equally. In their perception men and women have similar economic problems and face similar rates of intimate violence. Both are equally likely to be assaulted if walking alone at night. Popular discourses value women as mothers, as well as recognising women’s need to have friends and a social life outside of the family. Many men also comment that they feel their wives and girlfriends are more empowered than themselves, as women generally manage finances and organise shared time within the relationship. Several young men even joke that women see girls’ nights as a human right, whereas a man going out with his friends is considered highly suspicious and is often regulated by his female partner.

For lesbian, gay or bisexual individuals in Alto Hospicio, identifying as such may cause a stir within the family but is not generally publicly shamed. A number of young men and women are quite open about their identification as lesbian or gay on Facebook and Instagram, often using hashtags such as #lesbichile or #instagay in their posts. Most are open with their families as well and maintain a normative lifestyle, with expected forms of wage labour aligned with their gender. It seems that only when individuals – whether they identify as gay, lesbian, bi or

straight – adopt roles that cross or confound gender lines are they considered to breach social conventions.

For example, when 18-year-old Michelle told her friends that she was interested in women they initially teased her, asking if she would cut her hair, stop wearing skirts and give up studying graphic design to work in construction. The group continued to invite her along for their outings to Iquique and weekend parties, however, and after a few months hardly any of her friends thought of Michelle any differently than before. Even when she used the #lesbichile tag on Instagram, it was hardly worthy of note by her friends. In contrast lesbians who take on a 'butch' appearance and seek employment in what are considered masculine forms of work, such as mining or construction, are generally rejected by both their male colleagues and by women's social circles.

Men are subject to similar gender constraints. Pablito, a gay man in his late twenties, is happily open about his sexuality with his family. However, his mother has no idea that he is involved in organising a weekly drag performance show in Iquique. He manages performers through a separate Facebook profile using his stage name, and vigilantly controls the privacy of those posts to ensure his mother never discovers this aspect of his life. So gay and lesbian Hospiceños are generally accepted in the community, as long as they do not upset the apparent homogeneity of the community or call too much attention to themselves.

Perhaps most importantly, class distinctions in Alto Hospicio are also downplayed in an attempt to homogenise. Most people consider themselves to be in the bottom half of income in the country, but very few place themselves in the bottom 25 per cent (though official figures suggest that poverty in the city may be as high as 40 per cent). Key to this sense of class homogeneity is a collective rejection of conspicuous consumption. People who do make expensive purchases often become targets, judged and viewed with suspicion by their neighbours.

I often ate lunch with Vicky, a 50-year-old woman who had lived in Alto Hospicio for 20 years. She and her husband Jorge, a miner, moved in during the first major wave of new residents in the 1990s, along with their two young children, Alex and Gabriela. By the time I met them Gabriela had a son, Samuel, and her fiancé José had moved in with the family as well. One day, as I ate some of Vicky's famous pesto noodles, she mentioned that her neighbours across the street were building a third storey on to their home. 'They've only lived there a year,' she told me. 'Where are they getting the money? They must be narco-traffickers,' she conjectured sincerely.

On another occasion she and Gabriela spoke about another neighbour, an example of someone who had recently moved up the sand dune from Iquique and did not conform to the norms of Alto Hospicio. 'I see her Facebook posts and she's always buying expensive clothing, wearing jewellery, new shoes, new furniture. It just seems like a waste of money to me, always posting pictures, always showing off.' Gabriela jumped in, 'It's like she's *flaite* but not *flaite*.'

*Flaite* was a term I heard often, either in warnings or in jokes about slang terms. Something akin to 'gangsta' or 'ghetto' in English, *flaite* is both a noun and an adjective; it describes young people from poorer families, who speak in uneducated slang and are considered aggressive if not dangerous (for example, 'That *flaite* might steal your wallet' or 'Don't use that word, it's really *flaite*'). What prompted Gabriela to make the comparison with their neighbour, however, is the idea that *flaites* are known for wearing flashy brand-name clothing. In fact, that is usually how they are identified.<sup>56</sup> Particularly because their neighbour often posts pictures of her purchases, her 'showing off' is considered just as tactless and flashy as *flaites*. Both Vicky and Gabriela thus clarified the boundaries of what was acceptable to them in terms of home architecture, as well as self-presentation, by pointing out instances of going beyond the norms. Affronts to normativity have social consequences, most of which are reflected in moments such as Vicky and Gabriela's gossip at lunch.

Individuals such as Vicky's neighbours, with new-looking, pressed clothing from department stores in Iquique, reveal their relative affluence. Almost everyone in Alto Hospicio wears mostly second-hand clothing, bought at the local Agro market, though individuals of lower income use the same few worn T-shirts for years. Only their tattered state distinguishes them from the sea of people in simple T-shirts paired with jeans, khaki work trousers or shorts. It is rare to see a woman in high heels or a formal skirt, even when at work, while in the winter fleece jackets are common. Shoes are most often athletic styles such as Converse, Reebok or Nike brands, and in the colder months most women wear faux leather boots. Some teens adopt 'heavy metal' or 'punk' styles, but this usually means that they wear more black than colour, and occasionally have visible tattoos. Even haircuts rarely stand out from the crowd, with men sporting trimmed cuts and women long wavy styles.

Similarly, most homes conform to one of a few standard styles. In contrast to the three-storey home nearby, Vicky's house was like those of most established families with a steady income in Alto Hospicio. These houses have between three and five bedrooms on two levels, one



**Fig. 1.10** Women's clothing styles for sale in Alto Hospicio's Agro market

bathroom and tiled floors. In a middle bracket, newer families often live in small, three-bedroom apartments in large complexes, such as the one where I lived. Though the apartments are quite spacious for one or two people, most families have at least three generations in the same apartment, often with five to seven members of the family sharing the three small bedrooms. In poorer neighbourhoods homes are more likely to be built by the families who live in them, sometimes without legal right to the land. These houses have concrete floors and one or two bedrooms into which they fit multiple beds like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.



**Fig. 1.11** A barber's shop display of possible hair styles

Living arrangements clearly vary widely and are usually organised by neighbourhood: the relatively wealthier families live in homes in the central, oldest parts of the city, and the poorest live on the outskirts of the city in *tomas*. In part, however, architecture helps to homogenise even these differences, as almost all homes, whatever the neighbourhood, have a high fence or wall surrounding them, with some sort of sharp points deterring unauthorised entry. These fences serve not only to provide security; they also obscure views of the home, making differences in quality and size hard to perceive from outside.

Within the home, certain material goods also help to identify social class. Electronics are considered necessary, even as prevalent cultural norms in Alto Hospicio eschew the types of consumerist ideals that characterise the middle classes of middle and higher income countries. A computer of some sort is essential for all but the very poorest of families, while a new Xbox is a true sign of means. While the prevalence of somewhat new technology may seem at odds with identification as marginalised citizens, they buy these items relatively cheaply from the Zofri mall. They are prioritised over other consumer goods, including clothing, new furniture and even seemingly basic necessities such as hot water or repairs to damaged ceilings and walls.<sup>57</sup>

Aside from electronics, most home goods are purchased second-hand. Families buy appliances such as used refrigerators and stoves at the outdoor market of Alto Hospicio, or online through Facebook groups such as 'Buy and Sell Alto Hospicio'. For most families televisions, stereos, video game systems and smartphones are among the few expensive consumer goods that are considered important despite a family's limited financial resources. These represent a significant expenditure in a community where many people support a family on the national minimum salary of \$210,000 CLP (Chilean Pesos) a month, or about US\$340. As social media has become ever more important to daily life, these devices that Hospiceños use to connect are now considered essential.

Homes are especially important because there are few social spaces for entertainment and consumption in Alto Hospicio. While neoliberal economic contexts are usually characterised by a proliferation of businesses catering to entertainment and lifestyle, most businesses in Alto Hospicio are family-owned, and few of these families have ambitions for a business any larger than that which will sustain their single family on its profits. Most restaurants operate as take-away windows, though the city's eight Chinese restaurants are popular for a sit-down meal. The city has one pool hall, two bars and one strip club (for men only). There are no gourmet restaurants, nor any department stores, cinemas, bowling alleys or casinos. Nor, in contrast to many Latin American contexts, is the central plaza used much as a social space for meeting and conversing with neighbours. Instead the private home is the hub of social life.

In most families, meals are especially important for spending time together. Breakfast is less formal, but the whole family returns to the house for lunch, the largest meal of the day. Over dishes such as rice and meat or noodles with tuna and tomato sauce, the family takes a break from daily work to share an hour together. Usually only the miners,



working several hours away from the city, are absent. There are plenty of small lunch restaurants in the centre of Alto Hospicio, but these usually cater to men from other towns who work in Alto Hospicio doing construction. Residents prefer to pick up popular pre-made meals of fried chicken and fried potatoes, or *colaciones* of noodles, vegetables, meat and salad, available at small take-away windows all over the city, to eat at home with the family.

Evening tea, known as *once* [pronounced ‘own-say’, like 11 in Spanish], is also a family affair, accompanied by bread and cheese, avocado or sandwich meat, while the radio or television relays the day’s news. The family, as well as friends or extended family who often come from another neighbourhood in the city to partake, traditionally linger for hours at the table, a time called *sobremesa* in which they discuss the news or family and neighbourhood gossip. In recent years, however, adolescents often race away from the table after eating to return to Facebook, and even younger children ask to be excused in order to continue a game of Angry Birds. With the ubiquity of social media, public spaces are no longer necessary for socialising. One can be connected to any number of friends and family without leaving the home.

These customs also reveal the ways that social class bears on daily life in terms of economic resources and comparable social standing. Social class also helps to shape cultural norms and cultural outlook.<sup>58</sup> In this respect most Hospiceños are quite similar, subscribing to the same unassuming normativity as most of their neighbours. They identify with a general, locally based sense of marginality, which deemphasises neoliberal accoutrements of big homes and fancy clothes in favour of commonalities shared by all members of the community. Almost all individuals in Alto Hospicio, even with their personal differences, still fit into this scene. Their life plans rarely involve exploits other than finding a job and a partner, making a home together, raising children (and maybe a pet) and enjoying cable television in the evening on a large flat screen, while chatting with friends on a Samsung smart phone.

Very few people finish a university degree. For young men the mining industry is more lucrative and has more job stability. Although contracts usually last between six months and three years, there always seems to be another mining operation in need of workers. Most are content to remain in Alto Hospicio, rarely expressing desire to move to Iquique, let alone to another region. Few people aspire to the types of higher education or employment beyond options available in the region. Though most young people can quote from Hollywood films, few have a desire to become proficient in English or Portuguese. Younger adults

particularly love making fun of the Open English commercial for language learning on television, mockingly repeating English words from the advertisements such as ‘hospitalisation’ and ‘Mr. Fitzpatrick’.

Though travelling within the region is common, taking a trip of more than a few hours by bus is considered a rather big deal. Trips to other parts of Chile usually involve bus rides of more than 24 hours and cost at least \$60,000 CLP or US\$100 for a round trip (about one-third to one-fifth of the cost of flying). While some young people hope to move to Santiago (particularly those who have family there), most Hospiceños who grow up in the North see Santiago and other large urban areas as full of crime and chaos. While they do not necessarily believe Alto Hospicio to be ideal, they think of it as a middle ground that offers the conveniences of urban life (as opposed to the small mining villages) without the annoyances of crowds on the Santiago metro, *barrios* full of petty criminals and the pollution and dirt associated with city life. In fact many at times refer to the national capital as ‘Santiasco’ (*asco* is the Spanish word for disgusting).

One popular meme, shared as simple text on a white background, portrays the vision many Hospiceños have of Santiago. The text says:

Living in Santiago is. . .1) Wake up at 5 am, kiss your children while they sleep and arrive at work at 8am while trying to avoid being assaulted. 2) Stop working for half an hour to eat crappy food or drink coffee while trying not to be assaulted. 3) Leave work at 6:30 and arrive home at 9, while avoiding assaults. 4) Kiss your children while they sleep. 5) Shower, eat something, and try to sleep for 6 hours. Thanks but I think I'd like to stay here in my region.

Through actions that portray all Hospiceños as similar, and those that distance them from or express distaste for Santiago, they create a binary between the normative, marginalised people with whom they identify and a wholly different, consumerist, cosmopolitan, exploitative and ‘disgusting’ world of Others. Ariztia<sup>59</sup> points out that in Santiago both the location of a newly purchased home and the consumer items residents use to decorate it are closely connected to a sense of ‘distinction’,<sup>60</sup> as well as belonging and identity.<sup>61</sup> These are ‘points at which [class] categories are actually negotiated and performed’.<sup>62</sup> The general anti-consumerist discourses and aesthetics of Alto Hospicio combine with tendencies to group all within a general sense of marginality rather than appeal to subdivided senses of identity politics. In so doing they construct a binary between the good, hard-working but exploited and

marginalised population of Alto Hospicio and the superficial, consumerist, capitalist, exploitative imagined residents of Santiago.

By conforming to the aesthetic and (non)aspirational normativity of Alto Hospicio, residents socially locate themselves as belonging to a marginal place, content with a marginal lifestyle, and even express pride in identifying as marginal. They do not highlight their autonomous individuality, but rather present themselves as closely connected to networks based on family, friendship, work relationships and community engagement. In terms of race and class, individuals in Alto Hospicio put forth a great deal of effort to maintain a sense of homogeneity, rather than emphasising distinctions between different social groups.

They achieve this, to a large extent, by highlighting ways of identifying that support ideals of community and working-class pride, rather than forms of identification that distinguish between nationality, race or ethnicity, or forms of lifestyle that are rooted in consumption. So while a place with so much migration and mixture might easily display significant cultural clash, jostling and juxtaposition of histories, traditions, customs and concerns, these differences are neutralised in Alto Hospicio into a visible normativity. Such normativity is particularly visible through Hospiceños' use of social media. Identifying with a general sense of marginality is especially highlighted, while other more particular forms of identification are erased.

## Ordinary people, extraordinary citizenship

These normativities, both online and offline, are key to citizenship in its various strands. Being a 'good' citizen in most neoliberal contexts involves blending into the population, as a 'proper' member who reproduces, finds employment and aspires to 'possessions, property and wealth'.<sup>63</sup> Yet in Alto Hospicio residents place importance on distinguishing themselves from what they see as a dominant yet exploitative form of mainstream citizenship, instead positioning their marginalised citizenship as that which represents 'real' Chileans.

Like many Hospiceños 30-year-old Francisco does not post much original content on his Facebook page. His infrequent status messages rarely even amount to a full sentence. More than half of his profile pictures are photographs of celebrities, cats or cartoons, rather than images of himself. Those that do feature Francisco portray him in his work uniform from a loading dock at the port or in fatigues from his time in the military. However, he does post multiple memes, videos and music every

day. Most of the memes in particular play on themes of marginality and difference with a sense of humour. One meme he posted portrays Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Eve asks, 'Adam, where do you think we are?' to which Adam responds, 'We are in Chile, Eve. Don't you see that we're without clothing, without food, without a house, without education and without hospitals? And they still tell us we're in paradise!'

In posting such memes Francisco uses his Facebook page not only to identify himself as being marginalised, but to position this marginality as central to his sense of what it means to be Chilean. This particular meme positions the real Chile and real Chileans as those who go without things such as hospitals and education. Rather than suggesting that Alto Hospicio is not included in the imagined icon of Chileanness, Francisco, like many Hospiceños, repositions his marginality as true Chileanness. The political and economic elite of places such as Santiago, meanwhile, are positioned as outside of this sense of belonging – those who *tell* others that they're in paradise.

In a sense Francisco here redefines what Chilean citizenship looks like from a marginal perspective. When Hospiceños oppose themselves to their imaginary of Santiago residents, they claim being marginalised as the norm, the condition of the *real* Chile. In doing so they mark their own citizenship as that of 'good citizen-subjects' – contrasted with those who claim citizenship based on identity politics rather than identifying in solidarity, consumption rather than hard work and working-class identification and, of course, political power rather than marginalised subjectivity. They move beyond identifying with legal status and political rights to highlight public participation and feelings of belonging instead. They privilege the city above the region and the region above the nation, and emphasise cultural citizenship above political citizenship. The majority of Hospiceños also prioritise a normative sense of being marginalised above the identity politics of gender, sexuality and indigeneity.

In identifying themselves as marginalised and in portraying this marginality as ordinary, Hospiceños reverse the logic of centre and periphery. They seek to position themselves as 'true' Chileans, while those in the 'centre' of the country – symbolised by Santiago – are cosmopolitan Others. This is possible in part because of social media, which allows them a space to express such a reversal in which theoretically those in Santiago or other world centres may see their posts. Hospiceños overwhelmingly concentrate their social media use on local concerns in which normativity rather than distinction is valued. Hospiceño normativity emphasises unassuming aspirations and utilitarian life goals

focused on the local community, with very little emphasis on anything that could be considered fantasy. Thus there is something quite extraordinary about the ordinariness of Alto Hospicio.

## The form of this project

The extraordinary nature of the ordinariness of Alto Hospicio is something that I came to recognise over time. Colleagues and acquaintances in Santiago, and even Hospiceños themselves have questioned my choice of such a marginal city as a field site for this project. In response, I usually explain that studies of social media are most often based in metropolitan centres, including New York, Madrid, Cairo or indeed Santiago, where new forms of capitalism, cosmopolitan identities or mass demonstrations are forged in online spheres. In looking at the use of social media in these already cosmopolitan contexts we see digital technologies as forces of global citizenship, homogenisation, democracy and modernity. Yet looking at social media in peripheral places reveals how individuals' adoption of social media in everyday life contests these grand narratives of homogenisation. This book explores the ways in which Hospiceños use social media – ways that conflict with and challenge assumptions about such media's cosmopolitan and revolutionary powers.

While some critics suggest that a project on social media might be successfully carried out entirely online, an important contribution of this particular project is the study of the *relationship* between what happens online and what happens through other media and face-to-face interactions. This combination is essential to maintaining the anthropological commitment to a holistic study of human beings.<sup>64</sup> If I had never set foot in Alto Hospicio, I would have never appreciated the ways in which the history of Chile and the region, as well as the founding of Alto Hospicio itself and its current political economy, so intricately influence how social media is used. Understanding marginalised citizenship 'on the ground' was essential for understanding it 'online'. I hope this book will contribute to a better understanding of the ways in which identification, normativity, marginality and citizenship are practiced through social media, but will also challenge essentialised depictions of social media as a universally democratising technology

This book is based on 15 months of field work in Alto Hospicio, spaced between September 2013 and June 2015. As part of this ethnographic project I lived with Hospiceños, ate with them, travelled on public buses and in private cars, attended neighbourhood committee

meetings, birthday parties and funerals, shared beers and even survived major earthquakes alongside them. I also watched what Hospiceños did on social networking sites, including Facebook (110 friends), Instagram (following 75 users), Tumblr (following 40 users), Twitter (following 30 accounts) and WhatsApp (25 individual contacts and 5 groups). Rather than taking the users' actions at face value, I also asked them to reflect on these practices in interviews, casual conversations and two different surveys. In conducting these surveys, the help of my research assistant Jorge Castro Gárate was invaluable.

I also spent many evenings chatting with my informants on Facebook messenger or planning weekend parties through WhatsApp. Liking and commenting on Facebook posts was essential to the job, though never insincere. And finally, during the writing of this book, I have constantly kept in touch via Facebook and WhatsApp in order to fact check and clarify details. Just like the in-person methods of ethnographic research described above, social media equally allows the ethnographer to interact with informants, to see how informants interact with others and to gain valuable insights into people's lives.

Because Alto Hospicio is such a distinct place, there was little point in anonymising the city. However, the names of people and some institutions that appear here are pseudonyms. I am lucky to have done this work in a city, rather than a small town, so that it is not obvious to a local reader that I am writing about their cousin's friend; I could be referring to any one of hundreds of miners who lives in the city with his wife and three children and enjoys riding his motorbike on weekends. Of course, when anonymising, some of the richness of individuals and their lives is inevitably lost. My hope is that by using information with care I have struck a balance between protecting informants' interests and providing the reader with details that allow understanding of those I write about as real humans, rather than two-dimensional characters or simply sources of 'data'.

Beyond Alto Hospicio, this project strives to be comparative. Few ethnographic projects use comparison explicitly, but this work is part of a global study in which nine different anthropologists have studied social media in the same ways, at the same time, in field sites around the world. The *Why We Post* series is not only able to provide in-depth analysis of social media practices in each particular place, but also to allow for direct comparison with the other sites.

Like the other titles in the *Why We Post* series this book follows a standard format, though keeping with themes of citizenship, marginality and normativity discussed in this introduction. Chapter 2

explores the different forms of social media used in Alto Hospicio and how these are at times conditioned by marginality, while at other times they may be used to contest the life conditions which Hospiceños find disagreeable. Chapter 3 gives clear examples of Hospiceños' images on social media, looking at how presenting oneself as a 'good citizen' is central to curation even in visual communications. In Chapter 4 I describe the ways in which Hospiceños use social media to create, strengthen and represent intimate relationships – those between family, friends and romantic partners, often in the service of maintaining forms of normativity within the community. Chapter 5 concentrates on tensions between presenting the self as a productive citizen rather than a consumer, and the ways in which these tendencies are conditioned by gender and sexuality. In Chapter 6 I look at how Hospiceños imagine their place within a wider world, and the ways in which concentrating on local concerns reinforces community solidarity and a general sense of marginalised identification rather than more specific subaltern forms of identification. Finally in Chapter 7 I condense the information I learned through both in-person ethnography and involvement with Hospiceños on social media, giving insight into how such usage is important in people's lives and exploring what this may tell us more broadly about marginality, citizenship and normativity in the twenty-first century. As this book demonstrates in various social spheres, from the family to politics, it is precisely the normativity of social media in Alto Hospicio that makes a seemingly ordinary medium quite extraordinary.