

Unexpected Topologies and Burials in Chile: The Consumption of the Dead, the Animitas, and Illegal Burials in the Andes

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Abstract

This paper (number 4) in the research project ‘Burying the Dead’ follows the introductory comments and typology of previous papers (Aguilar, 2025) but moves the material context of historically state sanctioned cemeteries to a wider diversity of graves in Chile. Research visits to cemeteries in Chile and archives were carried out between June 2024 and March 2025, and work on mass graves and archives in Chile have been carried out since 1999.¹ This paper, in the context of Chile, outlines three further types of funeral diversity and graveyard topology, all three linked to violent phenomena: 1) the crash of FAU 571, an Uruguayan Air Force plane, on the Andes Mountains on 13 October 1972, and the memorial/burial of the victims built on the same sight of the crash upon the Andes; 2) the public memorials on streets and cemeteries (animitas) dedicated to children and the vulnerable who died violently in car accidents, as a result of crime or sadness; and 3) an example of the memorials and graveyards of those who died violently after been kidnapped and tortured by Armed Forces and police personnel during the years of the Pinochet military government 1973-1990 (Acuña, 2007), the tomb of Leopoldo Benítez Herrera (d.1973).

Keywords

Chile, Metropolitan Cemetery, Illegal Burials, Uruguayan Air Force Plane, Animitas, Public Memorials, Leopoldo Benítez Herrera, Chilean Military, Human Rights Violations, Identification of Bodies

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1. Introduction: Topologies and Social Abnormalities

This paper's main question relates to contextual moments in which the dead do not pass through the usual normative health and state provision of orderly identification and burial according to state norms. Those laws provide health measures for corpses that start decomposing with risks to public health and allow for processes of the afterlife to take place, "to rest in peace", "to get to heaven", "to be part of the communion of saints" within the ritual norms of the monotheistic religions. Thus, and as popularly understood, if the dead are not allowed to rest in peace the dead re-appear and the souls of the dead try to contact the living, particularly their loved ones. Indeed, there is a normative context of burial dictated by the state that is common to violent and non-violent deaths. However, the context of burials does not become normative and opens new avenues of research. For the contexts outlined in this paper point to a plane crash in a remote area, the unexplained circumstances of sad emotional deaths in the case of the *animitas*, and the violence of the illegal execution of Leopoldo Benítez without an order of arrest, without a proper trial and without sentencing by a state appointed judge.

It is theoretically important to realise that practices of burial and communication with *animitas*, and the dead in general have not changed over the past fifty years in Chile. These practices are engrained in popular piety and metaphysical communication so that even with the profound social changes that have taken place in Chile, the dead remain unchanged within their own world of graveyards and tombs. Thus, the *animitas*, for example, remain a unique popular construction of Chile whereby God is far away but the dead are close to people and mediate communication with God. I note that such mediation in other Latin American countries is conducted through indigenous understandings of the ancestors, and the dead live under the ground or in nature rather than in graveyards associated with Christianity or the state.

Indeed, indigenous practices even in rural Chile, apart from the Region of the Araucanía, have not been central to popular religiosity simply because of the small numbers of indigenous populations in Chile, after the massacres of indigenous peoples over the colonial period and by the state of Chile in the 19th and early 20th century. Those periods of state building coincided with the expropriation of indigenous lands, the arrival of European settlers, and over the past few years the inability to acknowledge indigenous populations within the Chilean Constitution.

This paper opens academic discussions on public policy, constitutional issues and faith-reason within the state of Chile and the anomalies within any national normative for burying the dead. In the case of Chile, the 1925 Chilean Constitution made a clear division between the roles of Church and State, allowing for the first time the legal existence of non-Catholic cemeteries. Indigenous burial places already existed and some of them have been kept as historical patrimony of Chile as well as Protestant cemeteries that were considered outside the constitutional norms such as the British cemeteries of Santiago and Valparaíso in 19th Century's Chile.

This paper introduces the socio-reality of monuments and memorials of the dead by continuing a previous investigation on the Patio 29 of the General Cemetery where the bodies of political prisoners were buried without the knowledge of their next-of-kin after the 1973 military coup in Chile (Aguilar, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2010d). Other burials within churches such as the Archbishops' Mausoleum in the Metropolitan Cathedral of Santiago respond to the social need of communicating with the dead. For other spaces, other social realities such as the *animas* become burial places in people's consciousness rather than within the limits of the state sanctioned cemeteries.

2. Diverse Types of Death and Burials

Despite diverse types of death, as outlined by Laura Marina Panizo, there seems to be a tendency in Chile to accept paranormal phenomena in which the dead appear regularly, particularly those who had a violent death. They appear in the consciousness and daily lives of the living who are quite happy to accept that the dead become ghosts and unwanted spirits when they trespass on the world of the living by crossing from their own world of the dead (Panizo, 2022). Such experience, traditionally associated with traditional rural societies occurs in 21st Century urban metropolis and certainly in Chilean urban centres, confirming the universality of death and the place it plays within contemporary society. Indeed, the daily experience of death during the Covid-19 pandemic in Chile intensified the daily reality of death in a country that following conceptions of modernity had forgotten how to share conversations about death as a biological and human phenomenon. Such understanding of death had been dormant in Chile during the 19th Century until the 1990s "when archaeology and forensic anthropology generated a renewed interest in understanding death in contemporary societies" (Insunza, 2023).

Unexpected and violent deaths support a lived experience of insecurity, community cooperation, tight family kin relations, and social friendships with a diachronic intensity. Beyond all these relations there is a deep belief that the dead communicate with the living and a theology of alternative actions beyond the established order of divine realms outlined by the Catholic Church. For the dead, in the popular experience and imaginary, appear regularly in need of consolation, and at the same time they support and console the living in ways that are believed and materially felt by the living.

Theoretically, the material production of the dead's presence relates to the genre of urban murals and urban art that in Chile was known through the political murals of President Allende's sympathisers (Sandoval, 2001). Those who do not believe in the afterlife painted their comrades on walls to remember them. Those who believe in an afterlife build memorials on the side of the road where they deposit flowers, prayers and money to support the dead and request support for the living. In the words of John Barlett and Chile, walls and public buildings are blank canvases to express dissent, frustration and hope' (Barlett, 2024). Further,

and writing about Alejandro “Mono” González, one of the greatest muralists in Chile who has painted walls for six decades, Barlett asserted that Chile is “a nation of muralists” (Barlett, 2024). Indeed, within the authorised and created Chilean national memory, Juan Bragassi has argued that muralism as a social phenomenon in Chile ‘has been present from the end of the 20th Century’s third decade coinciding with the visit of the foremost Mexican muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros and the installation of his mural titled “Death to the conqueror” in the primary school of Chillán’ (Bragassi, 2010). These exercises on public material consciousness represent the foundation for the creation of memorials to the dead such as the memorial to the Uruguayan rugby players at the Valley of Tears, the *animitas*, or the reinvention of suppressed and repressed grief in the case of the Benitez Bessone family at the Metropolitan Cemetery in Santiago.

In Latin America such phenomenon was developed by the Mexican muralists, and in the UK through the urban interventions by the artist, political activist and film director Banksy whose identity is not known. Banksy becomes an undisclosed human being who leaves messages throughout the city using material artistic creations while others await such interventions.

Indeed, the diversity of public memorials to the dead aim not only at a solidarity with the powerless who cannot secure a tomb in the traditional cemeteries, but they act as socio-control mechanisms towards the dead who cannot be left to roam around disorderly as they wish. In fact, the living converse with the dead daily in Chile, and exchange protection by the dead through their prayers of eternal deliverance for the dead. The dead become part of the communion of saints, being souls that have not departed or return moaning their existence as part of the dead and of the living, becoming small souls, particularly those of children, i.e. the *animitas* (Didier et al., 2013).

While *animitas* are benevolent souls of the dead without blemish, such as children, those killed by political violence fall upon the same treatment by their relatives who push for their memory being actively remembered at the places where they were held in detention or where they were killed or buried. Those killed without a burial place and without a body to bury become part of hundreds of memorials and burial places that are not part of traditionally state approved cemeteries. Their topology and geography fall within landscapes and places that are marked by their relatives with flowers and messages, including places where the disappeared were last seen, those whose bodies were never returned to their relatives, an unresolved puzzle for a detective topology (Jensen & Cáceres, 1995). Those places of memory are comparable to sites of Commonwealth cemeteries where there are gravestones without bodies underneath, victims of violence who fought for an ideal world (Aguilar, 2024a). The memory of the dead whose bodies were not found also stands alone within newly created memorials and sites of memory quite different than traditional Chilean cemeteries (Aguilar, 2024b).

3. Burials in the Andes in 1973

One of those new memorials and burial places was built by the families of the

casualties from the crash of the Uruguayan Air Force plane that crashed in the Chilean side of the Andes on 13 October 1972. A Uruguayan rugby team on their way to an international match found themselves buried in snow in the Chilean/Argentinean Andes, and after a rescue operation 72 days later, 16 of them survived. Two of those survivors walked through the mountains to alert the world that after months on the snow they were alive and walked for days to secure help in Chile. In his memoirs on hope, Pope Francis recalls the courage of those who underwent that journey seeking help across the mountains. He stressed their togetherness, loyalty, friendship and solidarity through those 72 days. That sentiment and the memories of praying the rosary together was conveyed to Pope Francis in a letter by Gustavo Zerbinó, one of the survivors, on the fiftieth anniversary of the accident (Pope Francis, 2025).

The physical survival at the Andes was secured by the consumption of protein through the cutting and eating of soft tissues from the dead bodies of those who had died due to the crash and those who died later due to malnutrition, infections and lack of medical care (Vierci, 2024). Relatives of those who died in the Andes had to make choices on what to do with the human remains of those who died on the mountains, human remains that were left at the site of the crash after the swift rescue of survivors by the Chilean rescue teams that defied climatic conditions and landed for a few minutes at the site of the crash. The topic had not been discussed by the relatives because some of the bodies had been cut into pieces to nourish with protein the bodies of those who wanted to remain alive in the crash site. In the words of John Guiver “the general problem of what to do with the victims” remains was unusual. The passengers were Uruguayans, their bodies were in Argentina and the rescue operation had taken place from Chile. The anthropophagy and the difficulties to identify the remains added to such complex situation’ (‘Rafael ‘El Vasco’ Echavarren Vásquez 20-Aug-1950 - 18-Nov-1972,’ Guiver, 2023). Little was known about the conversations by the families of the deceased concerning these choices at that time, because not only the survivors but also their families tried to avoid media questions about the consumption of the dead bodies by survivors who had survived without food up in the mountains.

For years, some relatives of the dead decided not to speak to the press or those wanting to interview them and declared the plane crash a taboo subject during their lifetime. For example, the family of Jorge Alejo ‘Alexis’ Hounie Séré (1952-1972) always considered his death as part of a tragic accident that could have happened to any family, and they didn’t explore the facts any further, assuming that he had died at the moment of the crash and they remembered his happiness without reading any of the books published or being part of the interviews that followed over fifty years since the 13 October 1972 (“Jorge Alejo ‘Alexis’ Hounie Séré 31-Jan-1952 - 13 Oct 1972, Guiver, 2023).

In the case of Guido Magri, his family has had a philosophical view of the tragedy, and they had rejected the idea of requesting opinions from the 16 survivors. Particularly in relation to what happened on the mountain, they consider such

time a private and intimate one to be assessed only by the survivors. They have maintained social relations with other families through the Old Christians Club and the rugby club. In August 1973, Guido's mother, Susana, became one of the founding mothers of the library Biblioteca Nuestros Hijos, opened to remember the victims and to help those less privileged of Uruguayan society. Guido's sister-in-law, Susana, has continued such activities as well ("Guido Macri 20-Feb-1949 – 13 Oct 1972, Guiver, 2023). Guido was engaged to a Chilean, Angeles Mardones, and their wedding date was set for 14th December 1972. Of course, Guido died in the accident and later, Adolfo Gelsi, Guido's cousin started going out with Angeles. On the 2nd of September 1974 Adolfo and Angeles got married in Montevideo. By the end of 1975 they had their first son, and they made plans to visit Chile and introduced the baby to Angeles' parents. Adolfo didn't want to cross the Andes by air, so they agreed to cross the mountains by car with Angeles' brother Ricardo. They lost their way on one of the bends, and Ricardo Mardones and Adolfo Gelsi died in the accident. Angela's baby also died. Angeles married a second time and made his own career at the Colegio Craighouse in Santiago and had several grandchildren ("Guido Macri 20-Feb-1949 - 13 Oct 1972, Guiver, 2023). As a result of having lost two loves to the Andes, she never mentioned the mountains ever again.

However, the full narrative about a group from the Old Christians Club had one exception: Juan Carlos Menéndez (died 29 October 1972) who was not a member of the Old Christians, had no links with the Carrasco community, and had no personal relations with the passengers of the plane while he knew some of those who had studied Law and were passengers of Flight 571.

Despite those few families who remained away from the press attention, by March 2025 when this paper was written, the families and many others had written several memoirs, collected documents and even opened a museum about the plane crash in Montevideo. John Guiver pointed to forty books about this plane crash and collated most documents, interviews in his monumental work *To Play the Game: A History of Flight 571* (Guiver, 2022), translated into Spanish as *Arriba en la cordillera: La historia completa de la tragedia en los Andes*. By 1974, and the consolidation of the single mass grave up in the mountains, the book *¡Viven!* was the book chosen internationally to be written by a Catholic author and survivors attended events promoting the book and the memory of the plane crash in several countries. Translations in different languages and their rights were also negotiated after the successful launching of the first edition in English.

3.1. The Burial of Uruguayan Remains

By Christmas 1972 the survivors had some time for holidays and on return to Santiago took time to rest at the Sheraton Hotel. Most of them returned by plane or bus to Montevideo to spend some private time with their families during the summer season. Rafael Echavarren's father had remained in Santiago throughout the rescue because once he knew that his son had died, he wanted to bring his body to Uruguay for burial. As Ricardo Echavarren was not allowed to rake part

in the burial preparations in the Valley of Tears, he spoke to Sergio Díaz, a member of the Cuerpo de Socorro Andino, and he disclosed what his intentions were. He also gave to Sergio Díaz a photograph of his son Rafael so that Sergio Díaz could identify him. His instructions to Sergio Díaz who was sympathetic to Ricardo Echavarren's feelings were for him to identify the body, to put it in a plastic bag and to bury it separately from the others so that eventually the body could be found and brought down from the mountain to be buried in Uruguay. Rafael Echavarren's mother also wrote to Sergio Díaz in an envelope that contained a religious medal as well as a letter from her to his son, both objects to be attached to Rafael Echavarren's body up in the Andes. She also sent some Uruguayan soil to be put on the bodies of the deceased Uruguayans. I note that Sergio Diaz had been the first member of the rescue team to come out of the helicopter and meet the survivors after 72 days of their ordeal. Because of the weather they had to remain until the following day at the plane and Sergio Diaz spent the night talking to them and was more aware than anybody else of the ordeal they had suffered in the mountains. Sergio Diaz had brought letters to Carlitos Paez and spent with the survivors from the 22 to the 23 December 1972. It was Sergio's birthday, and he read them the poem 'Cultivo una rosa blanca', poem that they remember whenever they reflect on their experience of being survivors.

The reaction of the other families had been different so that pushed by the media interest on the bodies eaten by the survivors, they wanted for the human remains to be buried in a common grave and left at the site of the plane crash in the Andes. The place is difficult to reach during summer, and mountain guides and horses are needed. For most of the year, the place of the crash cannot be reached because of the snow and wind. Thus, they requested permission from the Argentinean authorities that was given to them on the second week of January 1973, authorising all the gathering and burial of human remains at the Valley of Tears to the Chilean authorities ("Rafael 'El Vasco' Echavarren Vásquez 20-Aug-1950 - 18-Nov-1972," [Guiver, 2023](#)).

With the consent of the different families, the human remains would remain at the Valley of Tears in a makeshift graveyard marked with a cross. Such place had for centuries been recognised by indigenous populations as a place where the dead met their ancestors and walked with them to 'the other side'. The Chilean authorities together with the families decided that burial would be carried out by a specialist team made of those who had already been involved in the finding and evacuation of the crash victims, including personnel from the Cuerpo de Socorro Andino and personnel from the Chilean Air Force Rescue Team (Servicio Aéreo de Rescate), accompanied by Captain Crossa of the Uruguayan Air Force and the Parish Priest of San Fernando Fr Iván Caviedes ([Guiver, 2023](#)). Fr Caviedes volunteered as a mountaineer himself and became chaplain to the Cuerpo de Socorro Andino.

The team arrived in several shifts with other personnel at the Valley of Tears on 18th January 1973, and worked on the gathering of the human remains, their

preservation in bags and the construction of the mass grave with a cross until the 21st of January 1973. Fr Caviedes celebrated the Requiem Mass on the 21st January 1973. Later that year, Fr Caviedes climbed the Volcan Osorno on 13th December 1973 with a German filming crew and disappeared. His remains were found on 19th February 1982 and given to his brother Fr Miguel Caviedes who presided his burial at the Coltauco Cemetery.

3.2. Burying the Dead at the Valley of Tears

On the morning of the 18th of January 1973, a base was established at the Termas del Flaco Hotel, 25 kilometres south of the crash site (Guiver, 2023). Among those who took part was SAR Lieutenant Mario Ávila who had been part of the first rescue team in December 1972, and who took more than ten helicopter journeys with personnel from the Termas del Flaco to the Valley of Tears.

The base camp at the Valley of Tears was built with extreme care, fearing avalanches. The work started at 1pm on the 18th of January, slowly as to acclimatise personnel to the mountain's altitude. One team started separating bodies and human remains from the plane that balanced itself on snow a meter high. The human remains were deposited in plastic bags. The second team started building the tomb after locating a spot hundreds of metres away from the plane above the glazier on the only area that wasn't covered with snow. The amount of snow deposited in the past winter, the hot afternoon and the angle of the mountain meant perfect conditions for an avalanche. And so it was that at 2.15pm the priest and three CSA volunteers avoided an avalanche (Guiver, 2023). At 2.20 pm another avalanche severed one of the plane's wings and moved two bodies that were located higher in the mountain. The wing stopped a hundred meters from the plane's fuselage.

On the second day, 19th January 1973, work started at 7.30 am. While those in-charge of the burial place continued their work, the fuselage team started transporting bodies and human remains to the burial place (Guiver, 2023). Three volunteers climbed until the place in which the plane had impacted on the mountain, to recover the rest of the bodies. By the afternoon, 19 avalanches took place within one hour, and one of them knocked down an engine of the plane that was located near the plane's wing. It was clear that the volunteers were in danger and that intense work was urgent so that Captain Mario Jiménez (SAR) took the decision that any efforts to recover the bodies would not continue beyond that second day. Digging was hard, and therefore the tomb was designed as to cover a large amount of space (6 × 6 metres) but with only one meter of depth. All the bodies and human remains were placed in the tomb and covered with rocks and soil. Sergio Díaz managed to identify Rafael Echavarren's body that was placed near the cross with signs to locate it later.

On the third day, 20th January, with everybody gathered around the tomb, Fr Caviedes commended all those in the tomb to their final resting place with the following words:

Ante la tumba de estos hermanos uruguayos, estamos celebrando la Cena del

Señor. Dios está aquí. Y en el silencio y soledad de la cordillera no se quedarán solos, les dejamos una cruz, ella les hará compañía. Esta cruz llevará también al mundo entero un mensaje de Esperanza y un mensaje de Fraternidad. ¡Más cerca, oh, Dios, ¡de tí! ... La cruz que dejamos en esta montaña, gritará insistentemente, a través de vientos y huracanes, un segundo mensaje, pues en ella también se lee. El mundo a sus hermanos uruguayos. Mensaje de fraternidad universal, de hermandad que es lucha verdadera en favor de cada uno de los hombres, hasta que se hagan realidad la justicia y su fruto que es la paz. Lucha que se realiza con amor, como Cristo lo ha querido, con ese amor que es el único capaz de transformar la tierra, cuando es verdadero. Esperanza y Fraternidad es el canto que quedarán entonando para siempre esta Cruz y esta Comunidad de uruguayos que reposan junto a ella, hasta que se levanten gloriosos. Su melodía podrá escucharla permanentemente toda la tierra venir desde plena Cordillera de los Andes.' (Guiver, 2023).

The mass grave for the Uruguayans that died on the mountain became part of thousands of Chilean memorials and burial places that are not part of state approved cemeteries. They constitute landscapes and places that are marked by the memory of flowers and gravestones through which peace and hope are found by relatives, comparable sites to Commonwealth cemeteries where there are gravestones without bodies underneath and human beings remembered without the actual burial of bodies. For in the case of the human remains buried with the fuselage of the Uruguayan plane FAU 571: when you arrive at the Valley of Tears nearly two hours later, almost 13,000 ft (4000 m) in altitude and right in the centre of the cordillera of the Andes, on the border between Chile and Argentina, the panorama is grand and terrifying. It looks like a monumental amphitheatre. At the centre, on a promontory of rock, there stands an iron cross where the remains are buried of those who died in the accident (Vierci, 2024, chapter 1).

In the case of the plane crash of October 1972, public concern was expressed regarding the consumption of dead bodies by the passengers of FAU 571 with the possibility of having left the dead and the unburied to their own devices at the Valley of Tears up in the Andes. A rugby team on their way to an international match found themselves buried in snow in the Chilean Andes, and after 16 of them survived two of them walked for weeks to secure help, the survivors had to make choices on what to do with the human remains on the mountain. They were buried and blessed by a priest, and by mutual accord between the different families, they remained there in a makeshift graveyard marked with a cross on the top of the mountain.

While the methodology of this paper remains historical, some of the elements used by those involved in three diverse phenomenon of burying or remembering the dead outside cemeteries in Chile assumes a direct departure from a mere historical materialist understanding and a sociological analysis of social facts and materially visible monuments, graveyards and cemeteries. Indeed, those burying the dead are not using the state apparatus to ad bodies or memorials to an existent

cemetery. Instead, they are creating new ways of burying the dead with the consequences that not everybody would see those sites as part of the state cities of the dead. In the case of the victims of the FAU 571, relatives agreed in a public declaration that their human remains should remain in the Valley of Tears in the Andes Mountains but there was one dissent, Ricardo Echavarren and family who wanted to bury their son Rafael in Uruguay. Mr Echavarren instructed Sergio Díaz, head of the burial team to identify Rafael's body, put it in an appropriate plastic bag and bury him apart from the other bodies so that in the future Rafael's body would be easily identifiable by those transporting it outside Chile (Guiver, 2023).

Thus, different types of death, as outlined by John Guiver, connect the type of death with the type of burial, a challenge to any universalised sense of death that stresses the experiential and diverse sense of life, death and the afterlife.

4. The World and Presence of the Non-Dead: The Animita

If the burial at the Andes does not comply with the topology of cemeteries as bounded parameters of human architecture, those who died violent deaths in Chile are also beyond the usual boundaries of human existence. Usually known as *animitas*, they remain alive weeping for the living amid human life, thus they remain as non-dead, as those who have not left the world of the living. The *animita* or *anima* comes from the phenomenon of the soul (*Anima*) In Chile, as an aesthetic and religious phenomenon, an art of expression within Chilean society, of expression by people, of a world of popular religiosity. For the cult of *animitas* outlines the popular closeness with God for those, many who cannot find God in dogmatic or systematic theologies of the orderly good Christian who is baptised, and through an orderly life finds happiness in God and dies being buried in an orderly manner, crossing over to an eternal life with God. Small houses or temples on the ground express the devotion of families and devotees towards those *animas* that are very human, they suffer because they have been violently taken before old age. The *animitas* outline faith and sorrow in a world in which there is pain and injustice rather than the prosperity and sure way to Heaven. The world of the *animitas* is very Chilean, the uncertain world of everyday life in which a small house on the ground creates a connection between the goodness of simple human beings and the world of the dead who are 'not dead' but communicate with the living.

The *animitas* can be traced to the history of relations with the indigenous worlds, the *apacheta*, rock formations and small hills formed with stones considered sacred. During the colonial period, the *animitas* can be traced back to the south of Spain where small altars were built on roads and grounds to remember the dead or to prevent misfortune on long journeys between sacred places. Thus, the *animitas* represent a popular perception of the dead who feel closer to contemporary human beings because when they were alive, they suffered as human beings. They are remembered by the public in the public sphere because they remain close to humans who are trying to attain immortality as well as a good life

in this world. Animitas as small houses beside the road represent burial places that are not present within cemeteries but that are present throughout the urban centres and roads of Chile and represent the dead who can help the living while the living can help them.

Within the period of violation of human rights by the military (1973-1990) illegal inhumations beside the road and disposal of corpses near cemeteries took place whereby members of the public transported dead bodies to the Santiago Morgue and later identified the dead as animitas erecting small houses where the suffering living had been killed. These phenomena happened where bodies were thrown out of military trucks during the night and particularly outside the boundaries of the Metropolitan Cemetery of Santiago where large motorways connect Metropolitan Santiago with other regions.

5. Violent Deaths at the Metropolitan Cemetery of Santiago

The Metropolitan Cemetery of Santiago was founded on the 31 July 1964 as the first ecumenical private cemetery in Chile. It has a variety of gardens, statues and side chapels, including one dedicated to Saint Teresa de Los Andes, and it prides itself on its privacy, uniformity and the real possibility of spending time with loved ones who have died. Its orderly lay out means that visitors can find tombs very easily.

Located in the most inhabited part of Santiago, Avenida José Joaquín Prieto Vial 8521, Lo Espejo (Autopista Central and Vespucio Sur) there have been 80,000 families who have accessed funeral services in the cemetery. There is no nearby Metro Station and at the time of the 1973 military coup it was a remote area of Santiago where some of those executed by the military were thrown away in the cemetery's neighbourhood.

Thus, the late singer Victor Jara's body was thrown near the cemetery after he was arrested on 12 September 1973 at the Technical University where he had remained. He was detained, tortured and killed at the Estadio Chile (Estadio Victor Jara) and killed after horrific tortures. His body was found by civil servants and his widow, Joan Jara, a British citizen buried the body illegally at Santiago General Cemetery. On 3 December 2009, Jara's body was re-buried after a large and popular celebration of his life among those executed by the military at the entrance to the General Cemetery together with many other victims of the military regime.

The lack of accountability by the military, particularly in 1973 after the military coup, meant that the diversity of burials needed to be carried out within a context in which a citizen got arrested, tortured, and eliminated by soldiers without any arrest warrant, trial or a legal sentence passed by a judge. Thus, the body, as in the case study of Leopoldo Benítez was found on the street in September 1973, after his execution and brought to the Santiago Morgue without identification and without any notification to the family. If a body was not identified within 48 hours, it was thrown into a common grave at the General Cemetery without identification and classified as a person without a name (N.N.). The case of Leopoldo Benítez is an important one when it comes to the discussion of burials in Chile after the military

coup because of the availability of all legal papers at the Archives of the Vicariate of Solidarity. His family, a powerful family of Santiago, went to seek legal advice and started a legal process at the Vicariate of Solidarity that led to prosecution of those responsible for his death many years later. The history of Leopoldo Benítez represents a citizen who died without his family nearby after a violent death like the Uruguayans, then became an *animita* because his body was not found and finally became a buried person in the Metropolitan Cemetery. Leopoldo Benítez was buried at the Metropolitan Cemetery as not to attract attention from the military while his father and sister are buried at the Catholic Cemetery. In summary, they were united in life and separated in death.

In the following section I examine in detail the life, death and burial of Leopoldo Benítez, case that on its own right advances the practice of transformative and diverse burials and shows a burial in the context of state policies that dictated his death and the initial disappearance of his body.

6. The Tomb of Leopoldo Benítez (d. 1973) at the Metropolitan Cemetery

Born in Concepción on the 12th of March of 1936, Leopoldo Benítez studied at the Instituto Alemán of Frutillar, at the Instituto de Humanidades Luis Campino and at the San Pedro Nolasco School in Santiago.² Benítez spent six months of his life as part of a research team at the Chilean bases in the Antarctic territories and later studied architecture at the Catholic University in Santiago, graduating in 1964.³ Immediately after his graduation he gained a scholarship from the Ford Foundation and studied for a master's degree in architecture at Rice University, Houston, Texas, from where he graduated in 1966.⁴ On his return, he worked on several urbanisation projects in Santiago and joined the teaching staff at the Catholic University's School of Architecture, where from 1970 he served as director of the Department of Architecture. At the same time, he built a wooden house in the hills of Santiago on plots of land commonly owned by families who knew each other from their younger years.⁵ There he could paint and draw his architectural projects.

In 1969, and within the turmoil of the university reforms in which traditional

²‘Reseña biográfica y curriculum de Leopoldo Benítez Herrera’ - REL 455-90; ‘Certificado de Nacimiento Leopoldo Benítez Herrera’ - CERT 5232, Carpeta SAE 850, Fundación Archivo y Documentación de la Vicaría de la Solidaridad.

³‘Carta sobre viaje a la Antártica’ [letter to his mother from the Antarctic], Sunday 15 December 1957 in Comité de Derechos Humanos y Ciudadanos Colegio de Arquitectos de Chile, *Ocho Arquitectos en la Memoria*, Santiago, Chile: Edición Fundación Espacio y Desarrollo, Colegio de Arquitectos de Chile, p. 183. After graduation he joined the Chilean College of Architects - Colegio de Arquitectos membership number 1687.

⁴With a thesis entitled: ‘Análisis de diseño de un grupo habitacional para una comunidad en Houston, Texas’. The thesis was published in December 1973 by his colleagues and part of the original text is reproduced in a publication by the Chilean College of Architects, *Ocho Arquitectos en la Memoria*, pp. 173-178.

⁵‘Una casa en El Arrayán’; Mónica Naudón de Mayne, ‘Testimonio: Una amistad durante la vida y que sobrevivió a la muerte’; Daniel Mayne Viñas, ‘Testimonio’, and, Eduardo Palma Carvajal, ‘Testimonio: En voz alta’, *Ocho Arquitectos en la Memoria*, pp. 189, 195, 196, 197-198.

roles and divisions were questioned, Benítez, along with other university professors, signed the political manifesto 'Yes, to the revolution'.⁶ In accordance with that manifesto, on the 24th of November 1969 those university professors who had signed the letter resigned their posts, but were reinstated through the efforts of the university rector, the architect Fernando Castillo Velasco, who did not want to lose them. Thereafter, the School of Architecture was divided between a department of urbanisation and works and another of architecture, which amalgamated all those professors for the revolution under the academic leadership of Leopoldo Benítez. The mission undertaken by those university teachers was to contribute with their skills to the advancement of a more just society not only in Chile but throughout Latin America.⁷

Benítez had in his younger years supported the Christian Democratic Party (PDC); however, after the formation of the Movimiento de Acción Popular Unitaria (MAPU) on the 9th of May 1969 he joined them. The MAPU was a splinter group of the PDC that amalgamated Christians who embraced Marxism, and who therefore supported the Popular Unity coalition of Salvador Allende. As part of that political party, Benítez spent his weekends painting houses in shantytowns and supporting solidarity campaigns with workers and peasants. At the same time, he underwent a personal conversion: he had been brought up as a middle-class Catholic person, an economic situation reinforced by the fact that he was a well-paid architect who had studied in the United States. His search for his own personal commitment to a socialist society made him change his own lifestyle and his time became dedicated to community work as well as personal reflection on the motivations for 'a new man' and a new society in Latin America.⁸ Shortly before the military coup, Benítez joined the Chilean Communist Party.

Behind every one of those killed or made to disappear there was an idealistic human being who, instead of seeking refuge and comfort, dreamed of a new world and a new and more just society. The case of Benítez followed those lines, and his complex family life has not been discussed within the legal processes and the summary investigations. He was married twice. With his first French wife, Jacqueline, he had two children: Carolina and Cristóbal. After he separated from Jacqueline and during the summer of 1970 at the sea resort of Tongoy he met a pair of twins: Miriam and Magdalena Bessone. He fell in love with Miriam, and they married in February 1971.⁹ In March 1972 their son Leopoldo Daniel was born with a chronic

⁶Regarding teaching at the university he wrote: 'El problema de la docencia se ha transformado entonces de un transmitir conocimiento para el hacer mejor del educando, a transmitir el cómo conocer para el mejor hacer', Páginas de un diario de vida, April 1968, *Ocho Arquitectos en la Memoria*, p. 188.

⁷They wrote: 'Penetrar en América es desentrañar su cultura, es hacer su historia, es participar en su lucha. Es ser pueblo, en sus ciudades, en sus calles, poblados, cordilleras, selvas y valles. Es penetrar con violencia en nuestro propio interior', p. 179.

⁸He wrote: 'La revolución es contra el hombre por el hombre y será hecha por hombres. Entiendo entonces (como el Ché, creo) ella no es posible sin la conversión personal. Y esto no es posible sin la concientización personal y la concientización de la masa adolescente (domesticada)', Apuntes manuscritos 14 April 1969, *Ocho Arquitectos en la Memoria*, p. 182.

illness and died after twenty-one days. However, in March 1973 their daughter Katia was born, only months before the military coup in Chile.¹⁰

After the military coup, Benítez tried to continue a normal life, even when so many of his friends were being arrested and taken by the new authorities. A normal life was full of restrictions on movement and as Carlos Altamirano has recently said ‘the political leadership could not do anything or very little for its militants’.¹¹ On the 17th of September he was staying at his parents-in-law’s house (Los Olmos Street 2930, Macul, Santiago) together with his wife and daughter. At 7:30 pm a group of twenty *carabineros* (uniformed police from the Escuela de Suboficiales de Carabineros) entered the house.¹² They asked for the identity of all those present and became particularly interested when they found out that Polo (the nickname of Leopoldo Benítez) was there.¹³ The policemen found some hunting guns and a revolver, property of Benítez’ father-in-law, and took the arms together with Benítez into a police bus that arrived at 8:00 pm.¹⁴ They were going to take his brother-in-law Eduardo Bessone as well, but after pleas from his mother he was not taken.¹⁵

The family looked for his name in the list of prisoners at the National Stadium; while on the morning of the 18th of September the flat of Benítez’ sister, Gabriela, in Obispo Donoso Street 20, Providencia, was searched by the police. His wife managed to check the prisoners’ book at the Training School of the Carabineros in Pedro de Valdivia Avenue with Rodrigo de Araya Street and found an entry in which he appeared accused of having shot a policeman a few days before his arrest. The officer-in-charge gave her a couple of phone numbers in which to request information through Lieutenant Sergio Jiménez Albornoz. As the family could not get through, they requested help from a neighbour, Lieutenant Hernán Covarrubias, who managed to contact Lieutenant Jiménez and then phoned Dr. Mayne – a friend of Leopoldo Benítez – telling him that they should look for an unidentified body in the Santiago Morgue with a particular number. Thus, on the 24th of September Dr Mayne found the body that had been brought to the Santiago Morgue

⁹Certificado de Matrimonio, Providencia 7/11/73 of wedding on 5/2/71 10:00 am’ – CERT 5234, Carpeta SAE 850, Fundación Archivo y Documentación de la Vicaría de la Solidaridad.

¹⁰Miriam Bessone, ‘Testimonio’, *Ocho Arquitectos en la Memoria*, pp. 191-192; ‘Certificado de Nacimiento Katia Lorena Benítez Bessone 1/03/73 Departamento de Santiago’, CERT 5235, Carpeta SAE 850, Fundación Archivo y Documentación de la Vicaría de la Solidaridad.

¹¹Gabriel Salazar, *Conversaciones con Carlos Altamirano: Memorias Críticas*, Santiago: Random House Mondadori, 2010, p. 385.

¹²REL 456-90 and ‘Declaración Eva Magali Bessone Barolo 25/06/90’, REL 836-90, Carpeta SAE 850, Fundación Archivo y Documentación de la Vicaría de la Solidaridad.

¹³‘Declaración Jurada Mercedes Yolanda Barolo Cáceres 25/06/90’- REL 834-90 and ‘Declaración de Miriam Bessone Barolo 25/06/90’ – REL 837-90, Carpeta SAE 850, Fundación Archivo y Documentación de la Vicaría de la Solidaridad.

¹⁴*Report of the Chilean National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation* I: 181-182 and ‘Vicaría de la Solidaridad Departamento Jurídico, LBH Muerto, Santiago 9/73’, Carpeta SAE 850, Fundación Archivo y Documentación de la Vicaría de la Solidaridad.

¹⁵‘Declaración Daniel Eduardo Bessone Barolo 26/06/90’, REL 835-90, Carpeta SAE 850, Fundación Archivo y Documentación de la Vicaría de la Solidaridad.

on the 18th of September at 1:35 pm and showed multiple bullet wounds.¹⁶ The body was found on the street.¹⁷

The legal case for the assassination of Leopoldo Benítez was only filed on the 25th of June 1990, because his widow worked for the civil service and because his parents did not want any publicity.¹⁸ His wife did not want to lose her job in the civil service, although she was let go in 1980.¹⁹ His father, Raúl Benítez, had been a supporter of the military government and was placed in charge of the Intercontinental Bank the day after the military coup. After Leopoldo Benítez' arrest he resigned from his post and led a secluded life until his death in January 1994 of Alzheimer's disease. Leopoldo Benítez' mother, a distinguished poet, wrote a moving poetic tribute to her son and faced the censorship of the military authorities.²⁰ Leopoldo Benítez' former wife and their children Carolina and Cristóbal left for France in December 1973 (they had French passports) while his widow Miriam and their daughter Katia remained in Chile.²¹ Katia years later studied at the same School of Architecture where her father had taught.²² The legal case was closed in 1995 due to the fact that Lieutenant Covarrubias denied having provided any information about the location of Leopoldo Benítez' body. However, in 1998 the Chilean College of Architects filed a new legal demand involving all architects

¹⁶'Certificado Médico de Defunción', Dr. Exequiel Jiménez Ferry, Avda. La Paz 24/9/73, Providencia Inscripción 2122, No. 2662, Carpeta SAE 850, Fundación Archivo y Documentación de la Vicaría de la Solidaridad.

¹⁷Servicio de Registro Civil e Identificación Independencia, 'Certificado de defunción 2275, Inscripción E2122 copy issued on 12 July 1999, and 'Copia íntegra de la página 123 del registro No. 11 Inscripción E2122 24/09/73', dated 13/10/76 Registro Civil de Independencia, CERT 5229; 'Certificado de Defunción Leopoldo Raúl Benítez Herrera 21/3/74' - CERT 5232, Carpeta SAE 850, Fundación Archivo y Documentación de la Vicaría de la Solidaridad. See also Mario I. Aguilar, 'The Executed', in Adam Jones, ed., *Third World Men: An Anthology*. London: Zed Books, 2006, pp. 252-253.

¹⁸'Presentación a los tribunales' (Comité de Derechos Humanos y Ciudadanos Colegio de Arquitectos de Chile 2005: 198-202); 'Homenaje del Colegio de Arquitectos a los Arquitectos DD y Ejecutados', 27 July 1990 - REL 810-90; 'Remoción del cargo, carta a Myriam Bessone Barolo de Arturo Aguilar Moller, Jefe Subrogante División de Desarrollo Social 29/01/81' - CERT 5233; Miriam Bessone, 'Querella' - 'Interpongo querella por los delitos de secuestro agravado y asociación ilícita en contra de mi cónyuge Leopoldo Benítez Herrera' - JC 11/04/92, Carpeta SAE 850, Fundación Archivo y Documentación de la Vicaría de la Solidaridad.

¹⁹Ministerio del Interior remueve de sus cargos a funcionarios que indica, Decreto No. 1532 26/12/80, signed by Enrique Montero Marx, General de Brigada Aérea, Ministro Subsecretario del Interior', CERT 5230, Carpeta SAE 850, Fundación Archivo y Documentación de la Vicaría de la Solidaridad.

²⁰Her introduction to *Requiem para un hijo* reads as follows: 'En su tierra quedan sus veneradas cenizas y en la pluma de una poetisa chilena sus recuerdos de hombre y profesional. Inclino esa pluma ante el lápiz del eximio dibujante quien impactó nuestro espíritu con una vida a ritmo de vértigo, la mano tendida en gesto fraterno, el tierno ademán, la actitud modesta, el aire indefinible del artista, ser de extraordinaria calidad humana y múltiples facetas', Sara Herrera, *Requiem Para un Hijo: Poemas*. Santiago, Chile: Talleres de Artesanía Gráfica R. Neupert, 1974, p. 7. In 1990 she authorised Miriam Bessone as the only credible witness of Benítez' arrest who could give testimony to the Chilean National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation, 'Declaración de Sara Herrera de Benítez, RUT 1.136.578-7, Santiago, June 1990', REL 833-90, Carpeta SAE 850, Fundación Archivo y Documentación de la Vicaría de la Solidaridad.

²¹Cristóbal Benítez Mouesca, 'Testimonio', *Ocho Arquitectos en la Memoria*, p. 193.

²²Katia Benítez Bessone, 'Testimonio', *Ocho Arquitectos en la Memoria*, p. 194.

who were killed or disappeared during the period of the military government.²³ Benítez' widow and Dr. Mayne gave sworn legal declarations to the ongoing legal process on the 5th of March 2004.²⁴

This case was not unusual in that the Chilean police and the military searching for arms incriminated many innocent civilians and used the opportunity to harass and to terrify the defeated supporters of President Salvador Allende. Those arrested and killed had been supporters of President Salvador Allende's new socialist way of looking at Chilean society and his supporters had their time, professional skills and enthusiasm to build a more just society in which the poor and the marginalized would have a chance.

Every September, and while she was alive, his mother organized a Mass on the anniversary of his death at a church in the city centre ran by the priests who knew him as an alumnus of the San Pedro Nolasco School of Santiago. A bright architect and a gifted man, Leopoldo Benítez was killed solely because he thought differently and the military after the military coup and until 1990 didn't allow free thought or diversity in politics.

Leopoldo Benítez was an ordinary man like many others in that he got married, he fathered children, and he also went through a divorce. However, he was an extraordinary man in that despite his good upbringing and his educational and financial possibilities in life showed solidarity to others. Finally, he lost his life because of his own beliefs in a more just society. As in many cases, his body was thrown on the streets beside the Metropolitan Cemetery, and missing for two days, until somebody recognised his face and he was eventually buried together with his son Daniel.

7. Conclusion

This paper outlines diverse ways of burial in Chile, namely a memorial grave in indigenous territories in the Andes where the victims of the crash of the Uruguayan Air Force plane of October 1972 were buried, the small houses of the *animitas* who for the most part died violent deaths, and Leopoldo Benítez Herrera, an architect killed by the Chilean military and who was buried at the Metropolitan Cemetery after his body was left unattended on the streets near the Metropolitan Cemetery.

This paper 4 of "Burying the Dead" research project outlines burials and memorials in Chile that have arisen out of violent moments, and in which citizens have taken upon themselves the burial and making of graveyards within contexts in which they feel that the state cannot operate through bounded legal cemeteries. Hundreds of these sites do exist in Chile reminding us that graveyards and burials represent a human contextual understanding of processes that humans respect

²³Desaparecidos y ejecutados por la dictadura; Arquitectos se comprometieron a aclarar muerte de siete colegas', REL P: 253-90, Carpeta SAE 850, Fundación Archivo y Documentación de la Vicaría de la Solidaridad.

²⁴Causa Rol No. 2182-98 'Francisco Aedo y otros', oficio 707-2004 Corte de Apelaciones, Ministro de Fuego Don Juan Guzmán Tapia.

because of their violence, their anonymity and their significance for human beings' lives.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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