

EDITORIAL COMMENTARY

We are pleased to present to the international, national and regional university community the first number for the year 2010 of the CUHSO Review of the Faculty of Social Sciences of UC Temuco. We have been pleasantly surprised by the excellent response which has greeted this special number coordinated by Professor Marcelo Berho of the School of Anthropology of our university. All the contributions received from researchers, specialists and academics of various Chilean and Argentinean universities demonstrate the importance of the vast field of anthropology presented by persons who live in conditions of extreme urban marginalisation. As may be inferred from the initial analytic comment, “The Social Anthropology of Homelessness in Latin America: comments from southern Europe” by Pedro José Cabrera Cabrera of the Dept. of Sociology and Social Work of the Faculty of Human and Social Sciences of the Universidad Pontificia Comillas de Madrid, which introduces the present volume, the articles brought together between these covers represent a major international effort of the social sciences to advance in anthropological knowledge of the social and cultural processes and situations associated with people who live in the street, principally in the two Latin American countries which have been the subject of the ethnographic and anthropological analyses which we enumerate here:

The first article “Social isolation as a supposed articulator of theories on exclusion and homelessness: ethnographic critiques and contributions” by *Santiago Bachiller* discusses the assumption of social isolation as an axis of articulation of theories on social exclusion in general, and the explanatory and analytical models of those who find themselves obliged to live in the streets, arguing that perspectives which concentrate solely on social isolation take quantitative methodologies as their reference.

In the work of *Marcelo Berho C.*, “Two

tales, an analysis and an excursus on identities and the relationship with the city among “Street-dwellers” in Temuco”, the author describes two cases of people who live in the street in the city of Temuco, in central southern Chile. Starting from an ethnographic perspective he investigates some of their modes of action and interaction in the city, showing the logic of their acts and the way in which these form part of complex and fragmented processes of identity configuration.

The article entitled “Of stigmas and insults: when discriminatory practices become part of the daily life of street-people” by *Mariana Biaggio* studies in particular the various social programmes aimed at addressing the “accommodation emergency” in the city of Buenos Aires, with the appearance of a new subject “deserving” of these policies: *street-dwellers*.

The following article by *Martin Boy*, “People who live in the street: a political problem in the making. City of Buenos Aires, 2007-2009” tells of the transformations produced in the city of Buenos Aires and postulates that the crystallization of these manifestations of poverty are the result of the consolidation of a new social issue shot through with social exclusion and vulnerability.

The work “Homeless persons in Rosario. Considerations on the uses of urban public space” by *Mariel Bufarini* analyses the uses made of urban public space by homeless people, the conflicts that their daily practices generate and disputes over the meaning of the “legitimate” use of public space in the city of Rosario (Santa Fe, Argentina).

The article “Documentation and Identity on the Margins, an Ethnographic approach to the Process of Identification and Documentation of the Homeless Community in

Temuco” by *César González Moris*, presents a summary of a work of anthropological research of an ethnographic nature, carried out in the framework of the author’s participation as a collaborating student in a project of the Civil and Identification Registry called “*Identifying persons with social incapacity*”.

Meanwhile the article by *Héctor Muñoz*, entitled “Representations, models of institutional action and transformation on the homeless individual. The case of the ‘Programme for the care of Street-people in Temuco’” reflects on the treatment and approach of extreme poverty by local institutionality in the city of Temuco, Chile, from an anthropological approach initiated during 2004 when the author took part in the ‘Programme for the care of Street-people in Temuco’ run by the District of Temuco and the ‘Support network for street people’ which unites various civil organizations around the same programme.

The work “Sociospatial re-signification and the construction of subjectivity. Homeless persons in the city of Buenos Aires”, by *Griselda Palleres*, studies life on the street using public spaces, as experienced by children, youths and families who are “on the street”. The article shows that, although this is a multi-dimensional problem which is clearly on the rise, and despite the fact that it is considered the most extreme and the most visible form of social exclusion, the conceptualizations arising around homeless people do not take into account the substantial aspects of the daily experience faced by people in this state.

The article by *Paula C. Rosa*, “Experiences and meanings: Perceptions of street-people on different moments in their lives”, concentrates on the perceptions and

experiences of street-people along three axes of analysis in the Greater City of Buenos Aires: their past, present and future reality. These interpretations were obtained from work with focal groups. The participants in these groups were people who spent their nights in temporary homes and overnight lodgings provided by the city government of Buenos Aires.

In summary, all these cases are works developed principally from the framework of social anthropology in effective dialogue with sociological and public policy approaches, which betray a common concern to discover from within the ways of life of people who live in the streets. Beyond the differences of focus, accent or emphasis, all the articles seek to offer a more or less objective picture of the physical, material and relational conditions of life for thousands of our compatriots in South American cities. Likewise, they all relativise the frameworks of understanding and judgement of common sense from which relations and significates towards these groups are organised, making us familiar with what we find alien - even if this “alien” is often very close to us. Finally, in providing new horizons of comprehension based on first hand knowledge (ethnographic - empirical), the articles have inescapable intellectual, ethical and political implications. These may be channelled in the following terms: given that internal “otherness” is a reality which co-exists with us, we must learn to co-exist with it; likewise, if we want to reduce the inequality in our Latin American societies, we must clear away our prejudices and broaden our thresholds of tolerance and recognition of these others, far and near. The “social anthropology of homelessness” may thus contribute to this effort of comprehension of the critical and applied social sciences.

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