

# AGEING WITH SMARTPHONES IN URBAN CHILE

THE EXPERIENCE OF  
PERUVIAN MIGRANTS



ALFONSO OTAEGUI

UCLPRESS



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Alfonso Otaegui

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## List of abbreviations

4G	The fourth generation of broadband cellular network technology
5G	The fifth generation of broadband cellular network technology
ASSA	The Anthropology of Smartphones and Smart Ageing (a project based at UCL Anthropology)
CIIR	Center for Intercultural and Indigenous Research
CLP	Chilean peso
CONICYT	Chilean National Commission for Scientific and Technological Research
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease (2019)
ERC	European Research Council
FONASA	National Health System in Chile
GB	Gigabyte
INCAMI	Chilean Catholic Institute for Migration
INEI	National Institute of Statistics and Informatics of Peru
ISAPRES	Private Health Insurers in Chile
UCL	University College London

## Series foreword

This book series is based on a project called ASSA – the Anthropology of Smartphones and Smart Ageing. It was primarily funded by the European Research Council (ERC) and located at the Department of Anthropology, UCL. The project had three main goals. The first was to study ageing. Our premise was that most studies of ageing focus on those defined by age, that is youth and the elderly. This project would focus upon people who did not regard themselves as either young or elderly. We anticipated that their sense of ageing would also be impacted by the recent spread of smartphone use. Smartphones were thereby transformed from a youth technology to a device used by anyone. This also meant that, for the first time, we could make a general assessment of the use and consequences of smartphones as a global technology, beyond those connotations of youth. The third goal was more practical. We wanted to consider how the smartphone has impacted upon the health of people in this age group and whether we could contribute to this field. More specifically, this would be the arena of mHealth, that is, smartphone apps designed for health purposes.

The project consists of 11 researchers working in 10 fieldsites across nine countries, as follows: Al-Quds (East Jerusalem) studied by Laila Abed Rabho and Maya de Vries; Bento, in São Paulo, Brazil studied by Marília Duque; Cuan in Ireland studied by Daniel Miller; Godown in Kampala, Uganda studied by Charlotte Hawkins; Kochi and Kyoto in Japan studied by Laura Haapio-Kirk; NoLo in Milan, Italy studied by Shireen Walton; Santiago in Chile studied by Alfonso Otaegui; Shanghai in China studied by Xinyuan Wang; Thornhill in Ireland studied by Pauline Garvey; and Yaoundé in Cameroon studied by Patrick Awondo. Several of the fieldsite names are pseudonyms.

Most of the researchers are funded by the European Research Council. The exceptions are Alfonso Otaegui, who is funded by the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, and Marília Duque, Laila Abed Rabho and Maya de Vries, who are mainly self-funded. Pauline Garvey is

based at Maynooth University. The research was simultaneous except for the research in Al-Quds, which has been extended since the researchers are also working as they research.

The project has published a comparative book about the use and consequences of smartphones called *The Global Smartphone*. In addition, we intend to publish an edited collection presenting our work in the area of mHealth. There will also be nine monographs representing our ethnographic research, the two fieldsites in Ireland being combined in a single volume. These ethnographic monographs will mostly have the same chapter headings. This will enable readers to consider our work comparatively. The project has been highly collaborative and comparative from the beginning. We have been blogging since its inception at <https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/assa/>. Further information about the project may be found on our project's main website, at <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/anthropology/assa/>. The core of this website is translated into the languages of our fieldsites and we hope that the comparative book and the monographs will also appear in translation. As far as possible, all our work is available without cost, under a creative commons licence.

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Last but not least, I want to express my deepest gratitude to all research participants who made me feel like a brother and offered me a glimpse into their vibrant and complex lives as Peruvian migrants in Chile.

All remaining errors or shortcomings are my own responsibility.





# 1

## Introduction

### Overall argument

Teresa is a 53-year-old domestic worker who has been living in Chile for many years. I have seen her at many events at the Latin American Church, where she usually helps out in the kitchen. I remember quite distinctly how she was waiting for any opportunity to crack a joke or tease someone, just before bursting into a loud laugh. The day we meet to talk, a Sunday morning at the church, she seems a little down. From the beginning, it is very clear that she does not want to think about her age. ‘Sometimes I feel the *achaques* – ailments resulting from old age; my hand hurts, but it is better not to think about age and keep working’, she says. She pays for the health needs of her mother, who is in a very delicate health condition in Peru. She talks to her through WhatsApp videocalls every day, explaining ‘I want to see her face; I want to see how she is really feeling’.

Throughout the whole conversation, Teresa stressed several times that she does not want to feel her own age, as she needs to keep going in order to send remittances to her family in Peru. She dyes her hair every two months to hide its greyness, probably from herself. Teresa has a son and a daughter, both of whom are living in Peru. Her daughter has three children, but Teresa does not like feeling like a grandmother. When she visits them in Peru she plays with them, but she does not want to see the indisputable signs that remind her how old she actually is. As she declares, ‘I do not want to think about my age. I want to hide it and keep going for as long as I can’. The interaction with her granddaughters is an inevitable reminder of her age.

Martin is a 65-year-old security guard living in the western part of Santiago. He had been married for 35 years before splitting up with his

wife four years ago. She is living in Peru. He explained, 'Our marriage did not work, so I armed myself with courage and talked to her. Everything is fine now'. Martin had migrated to Chile on his own some years before. He got used to being alone, setting his own schedule and managing his own time. 'Loneliness makes you think,' he observes, in a tone that conveys peace of mind but also a touch of sadness. He enjoys dressing well and going out with his girlfriend, but only on the weekends. He has a daughter in Peru who has decided to go back to university. Martin is helping to fund her there:

I will pay for your studies ... I will not leave you money but at least I will leave you a brain.

He claims to enjoy his commitment-free life at the age of 65 very much, especially when he feels 10 years younger and his body is in perfect functional order. But sometimes, he admits, loneliness is hard on him.

I enjoy living alone, you know? But sometimes, during the weekdays, I feel so alone in my room. I have watched all the Netflix movies and shows, I have seen them all. It is hard those nights, all by myself, alone.

On lonely nights like these, Martin picks up his smartphone and plays Candy Crush. He plays the game for a while and then falls asleep.

These two short stories lead us to the central questions of this book: What does it mean to be ageing in Chile as a migrant? What does it mean to be late middle-aged nowadays? How does living half of your life in a foreign country impact perspectives on later life? Is retirement an opportunity to go back to your home country? What will happen to the next generation, raised in a different country from their parents?

There is a vast literature on migration studies in Chile, mostly carried out in the last two decades. Within this literature, the Peruvian population has been one of the most researched, due in part to the higher flow of migrants coming to Chile from neighbouring countries in the late 1990s and early 2000s.<sup>1</sup> An incredibly wide variety of subjects have been covered in the study of Peruvian migrants in Chile, ranging from the entrance of migrants – mostly women – into the labour market to the spreading of Peruvian restaurants and discrimination suffered by migrant children at schools, among many others.<sup>2</sup> However, the experience of ageing for migrants in Chile has not been fully addressed, nor

has the experience of late middle age.<sup>3</sup> There is a growing literature on migration studies that analyses the entanglement of ageing and migration.<sup>4</sup> This monograph is an ethnographic contribution to that field.

This book studies the experience of ageing for Peruvian migrants aged around 60 – people who have been living in Chile for the last 20 or 30 years. It will be made clear throughout the book that the life of these middle-aged adults in Santiago is informed by a series of experiences of being ‘in between’.

These experiences of being in between are diverse and not directly comparable to one another. Some of these experiences of being in between refer to ageing and the passage of time, as well as to the fact that these Peruvians are finding themselves between two stages of life (and of age): on the one hand, the youth that they attempt to retain; on the other, the early frailty of old age, which they try to hide even from themselves. Other experiences of being ‘in between’ are of a more abstract and conceptual nature, such as the fact that they find themselves halfway between two generations: the one of their Peruvian parents and that of their Chilean children.

Some of these experiences of being in between will inevitably be resolved by time. In 10 or 15 years it will be harder for these late middle-aged adults to claim their retained youth as they do today. ‘I feel wonderful..!’ they say, while some of them affirm that ‘Everybody thinks I am 10 years younger than I am’. In due course the signs of age will have advanced and their work situation changed to the point that they will no longer be working, or doing much less than in their current workaholic lives.

Other examples of these in between experiences imply several dimensions at the same time and would probably continue existing as such. The most prominent example that illustrates the complex experience of being in between is that of being, in some aspects, in between two countries.

The notion of ‘in betweenness’ is quite usual in describing the experience of migrants. This notion is taken here in the sense of Stefoni and Bonhomme (2014), who in turn take it from Bhabha (1996). Stefoni and Bonhomme highlight that ‘in betweenness’ helps to depict the multifaceted experience of migration. Many migrants live in a ‘third space’ between two worlds, their origin country and the destination country, and struggle with belonging and identity (Stefoni and Bonhomme 2014, 83). This book also relies on the concept of ‘transnationalism’ by Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton (1992), defined as ‘the processes by which immigrants build social fields that link their country of origin

and their country of settlement' (1992, 1).<sup>5</sup> Both notions are essential to understand the experience of late middle-aged Peruvian migrants in Santiago.

The lives of the research participants certainly take place in Santiago, where they have been living for over 20 years. However, there are several aspects of their everyday experience that are linked to their home country of Peru: the food they eat, the spirituality that gives purpose to their lives, their family members in Peru with whom they talk on WhatsApp every day. This is where the smartphone plays an essential role in the in between experiences of these Peruvian migrants, from the Peruvian radios to which they listen daily to the constant communication with their loved ones spread throughout the world, to the international livestreaming of parties and processions. This study will show that instant communication through modern technologies helps migrants make this in betweenness more bearable, to the point of being a condition of possibility for transnational families.<sup>6</sup> These in between experiences will persist despite the passage of time.

Time has its effect on people, however, and at a certain age reflecting on the past and the future is only natural. At this point they might start to take stock of their lives. It seems that the research participants have not yet started to do so, at least not explicitly. However, in casual conversations, semi-formal interviews and general speech, one often comes across a series of 'veiled' reflections on their life. These oblique contemplations indicate that these late middle-aged adults are negotiating their own aspirations towards the future with themselves. One of these reflections points to the notion of continuity through the next generation. Although no participants in this study ever used this word, this notion permeates their actions, choices and desires.

Continuity is related to that which will remain when one is gone. It is about what one leaves behind and what the next generation will do with it. When it comes to what one brings to the table, these migrants brought with them many practices from Peru, some of which, such as the dedication to work, they have passed on to their children. Another of the best-known attributes the participants of this study have imported from Peru is religious devotion. I must highlight that fieldwork took place within a Peruvian religious brotherhood. Brotherhoods are groups of religious people who gather regularly, usually united by the common devotion to a specific patron saint or an image. All research participants belong to one or more Christian brotherhoods in Santiago, so their experiences cannot be considered representative of all Peruvian migrants (more on that below). The

participants, late middle-aged Peruvians, learned to live this intense spirituality at home, within their families while living in Peru, where the calendar is full of communal religious celebrations every month. Week after week, many Peruvians lead processions that honour the local patron saints who protect their neighbourhood or city and gift miracles to the devotees.

Many Peruvian migrants join Christian brotherhoods abroad to honour those Peruvian devotions. Yet many research participants did not belong to any brotherhood in Peru: the distance intensified their religious experience and devotion. Several of them claim that not having their closest family members near them has led them to this more intense spirituality. These participants thus retain a sense of having continued the legacy of their families and towns in Chile. As a religious Peruvian woman observed during a procession in Santiago:

When I see the Purple Christ [the most popular devotion in Peru] in these streets, I strongly feel that, for just a moment, I am back in Lima.

However, these devout Peruvians acknowledge that their children, raised in a less religious country such as Chile, do not experience religion in the same way that they had learned to live it while growing up in Peru. The migrants accept this discontinuity with an abnegation that is perhaps surprising.

Despite this discontinuity, when it comes to the future prospects of their children another kind of continuity for the older migrants goes *through* their children. This can be discovered in their stories of dedication to work and of difficult life decisions such as leaving their home country and going to live far away from their parents (some of whom never wanted their children to emigrate) – all tropes that point to the notion of sacrifice.<sup>7</sup> These late middle-aged Peruvian migrants have made sacrifices for their children. Some of them have given up on owning a property in order to be able to pay for the expensive education of their children. While they miss and are worried about their parents in Peru, they have chosen to stay in Chile because it is the country of their children. At this age, around 60, when most of their children have finished university and are starting a stable professional life in Chile, they can rest assured that the sacrifice paid off. It was all worth it. They ensured the future of their children (and therefore, their own continuity) by accepting, with abnegation, the non-continuity of their own traditions, the ones in which they were brought up.

While these Peruvian migrants do feel reassured, this is only to a certain extent. Their children are certainly 'set up' for life in Chile, but their own ageing parents are still alive and need care. Some of the participants have brought their parents to Chile, to live their final years abroad in the company of their family. Others do not have this chance and, like Teresa, find the distance difficult; many are riddled with fear and anxiety.

These late middle-aged Peruvian migrants have navigated through a series of experiences of being in between. They live between two countries, two generations (their Peruvian parents and their Chilean children), two different stages in life (retained youth and impending old age), between giving care (to their parents) and not wanting care (from their children) and between a continuing legacy (through their children, who have a promising future) and a legacy that will not transmit (their religious devotion will not pass on to the next generation).

The participants in this study have managed to cross this entanglement of living in between and come out successfully, albeit paying the price of accepting their children's lack of devotion with Christian determinism. They will live through their children, who will be very different from them.

The contribution of this volume resides in its ethnography, as guided by fieldwork. The fieldsite section will describe later how fieldwork led to the Brotherhood of Our Lord of Miracles and other Peruvian social circles. There will be no significant theoretical developments in this book, but rather an illustration of the experience of ageing and migration as lived by Peruvian migrants who have lived for over 20 years in Chile. This book aims at reconstructing the everyday life of middle-aged Peruvians, with its entanglement of spicy dishes and sacred images hanging on the walls as well as WhatsApp groups full of messages from all over the world. However, the order of the chapters responds to the pre-arranged format of the series, explained in the next section.

## The chapters: a brief summary

The second chapter of this book focuses on the experience of ageing. It explains that the participants claim to feel young although, through deeper conversations, it becomes apparent that they are experiencing the early signs of the frailty of advanced age. They resolve this through the dualism of the spirit and the body. This way they can claim to feel young in spirit, despite feeling their age in their physicality, with the

appearance of pain, high blood pressure and, in some cases, diabetes, as well as menopause for women. The chapter moves on to consider the bureaucratic implications of ageing as a migrant, such as not having an adequate pension after retirement. These 60-year-old migrants cannot picture themselves retiring.

**Chapter 3** focuses on the experience of the in between in everyday life. The participants live in Chile but try to re-create many everyday practices from Peru, such as eating Peruvian dishes or praying to Peruvian patron saints. The notion of adaptation and settlement is what underpins the whole chapter, showing how these migrants never seem to reach a point when they are fully settled in Chile. It seems rather that they came to appreciate, during a short visit to Peru a couple of years after the initial migration, that they are no longer adapted to the hassles of everyday life in Peru.

Another aspect of life in Peru that many participants re-create in Chile is their very intense social life with other Peruvian migrants. **Chapter 4** thus focuses solely on Peruvian social circles in Santiago – which does not imply, of course, that Peruvians only socialise with fellow countrymen. This chapter shows that the Latin American Church and its Peruvian religious brotherhoods work as a social hub. Peruvians join the *Hermandad del Señor de los Milagros* ('Brotherhood of Our Lord of Miracles'), for example; within this group they make the acquaintance of members of other social circles, such as the Peruvian Club or the Association of Citizens of Arequipa. In this way, their networks expand. Through the study of celebrations that gather people from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, it is argued that solidarity is at the base of many Peruvian social events. This point is illustrated with the analysis of chicken fundraising parties – a strategy initially used for coping with the economic difficulties in Lima in the late 1970s and brought on to Chile. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the tendency towards individualism within Chile and the sociality of traditional Peruvian events, which focus on community and solidarity.

The constant communication with their family members is addressed in **Chapter 5**, 'Crafting the smartphone'. Various forms of communicating through the smartphone are analysed, including live-streaming during processions and parties. All of these forms of constant communication allow them to cope with the constant in betweenness described in previous chapters. **Chapter 5** argues that the affordances of communication technologies (more specifically the smartphone, and WhatsApp in particular) are the condition of possibility of transnational

families. Transnational families, such as those of the participants in this book, are families whose members do not live in the same country.<sup>8</sup>

**Chapter 6** focuses on care and – more specifically – on the care the participants provide to their ageing parents, many of them living in Peru. In addition to an ethnography of the different arrangements, the chapter aims to highlight that, while the late middle-aged Peruvian migrants make a lot of effort to provide care to their parents, they do not want their children to have to care for them in the future. These still active hard-working individuals do not want to become a burden to their children, or even to feel that they may be. In addition to the dedication to work described in **Chapter 2**, another layer of sacrifice (aimed at the future) makes its appearance.

**Chapter 7** presents a study of the religious practices of Peruvian migrants in Santiago. It focuses on the Brotherhood of Our Lord of Miracles and the preparation of the main procession. Studying participants' religious practices helps us to understand migrants' dynamics and intergenerational relationships. Their religious practices relate them to their country and their Peruvian families. However, their children do not seem to experience religion in the same manner. As noted above, the participants find themselves 'in between' their very devout Peruvian parents and their not so religious Chilean children.

**Chapter 8** is a first step towards the conclusion. This chapter provides a rundown of insights from the book in order to address both the questions of the purpose of life at this age and of living as a migrant. It argues that the participants' faith and their upbringing in Peru leads them to accept life as already having a meaning from the start. All difficulties and challenges are understood within this religious framework: any outcome will have meaning in their Christian deterministic view. The chapter also explores other ways in which they give their life a purpose – primarily work and family. Work, to which they dedicate most of their time, has meaning not only as personal development but also as a sacrifice for their family. This notion of sacrifice is analysed more deeply in this chapter. The conclusion, **Chapter 9**, develops all the points presented through the book and attempts to answer the question of what it means to be growing older as a middle-aged migrant.

The rest of this introductory chapter consists of an introduction to the fieldsite, an explanation of the methodology of the research and, finally, a note on the ethical protocols followed during the project.



## The fieldsite: Santiago de Chile and the migrant population

Within the context of South America, Chile used to be the most stable country when it came to politics and economy. This at least this was the case during fieldwork, which ended in May 2019; social unrest in Chile started on 18 October that same year. From a political point of view Chile is usually seen as a neoliberal country, normally taken as an example by neoliberal economists in South America. Given the ongoing economic and political crises in Brazil and Argentina, and the closing of borders in Europe and the United States, Chile has been the main recipient of South American migrants in the last few years. This phenomenon has been called ‘South–South migration’. For the Peruvian migrants I have worked with, Chile – not Peru – is the image of order, of things actually working: the signs of a better quality of life. A 63-year-old Peruvian domestic worker (who has never been to the United States) comments how for her, in the 1990s, ‘Chile was the USA of South America’.

From the participants’ perspective, Peru is a rather chaotic country in terms of politics and economics. The corruption that characterises politics seems to be so commonplace that Peruvians’ expectations of politicians are already very low. One participant in the study remarked that

If you work in the government, you are going to put some money in your pocket, I understand that, but you also have to do something for the people.

This observation was made following the then-recent suicide of former president Alan García. He had been charged in the Odebrecht case – a corruption scandal related to the building of venues for the 2016 Olympic Games and the 2014 Football World Cup that implicated several Latin American leaders. Peru’s notorious traffic is a vivid image of this messiness. Some participants who have lived in Chile for a long time no longer drive when they are back in Peru. In contrast, Chile is the image and the experience of order, of people following the rules. It is also a place with a high degree of inequality.

The very first time I walked around Santiago I was puzzled by the sudden and stark changes in its architecture and general appearance. You can be walking on a beautiful cobbled street among Art Nouveau three-storey houses with ironwork in their wooden doors and then, just 50 metres (164 feet) later, find yourself looking at a whole block of

damaged, ugly, functionalist, six-storey buildings from the late 1960s. It is a situation that local Chileans are aware of and frequently comment on: the absence of transitional features that might soften these abrupt changes.

These stark contrasts are evident in Barrio Yungay, the neighbourhood where I came to live in January 2018. This neighbourhood, a protected heritage zone, was inhabited by the Chilean upper class in the early twentieth century. Nowadays this population has migrated eastwards and uphill, leaving many of these beautiful big old houses behind. These in turn have become ‘*conventillos*’ (tenement houses) mostly rented by migrants. By contrast, other old houses, restored as lofts, provide very comfortable living spaces for wealthier people. As a result there are a number of well-maintained homes among other, more dilapidated ones, while Art Nouveau houses are covered by colourful graffiti – all part of this architectural palimpsest of different eras and social classes.

These contrasts in the city’s urban landscape manifest a more profound material contrast: the income inequality gap. As is sadly the case for many countries in Latin America, Chile scores highly on the index of income inequality.<sup>9</sup> According to the National Institute of Statistics, the average income in Chile in 2016 was CLP 517,540 per month (roughly £577 at that time). However, only 28.6 per cent of the working population are paid this amount or more, with just 9.7 per cent of the working population earning over one million Chilean pesos a month (around £1,110 using the exchange rates valid at the time).

In the early 2000s Peruvian migration was in the spotlight in the Chilean media. However, this was not the first wave of Peruvian migrants. Two waves can be identified, during which the research participants for this book arrived in Chile. The first wave, in the late 1980s, was composed of few people, mostly businessmen and professionals fleeing the hyperinflation (over 2,500 per cent) caused by the policies of then-president Alan García (1985–1990) and terrorism from the Sendero Luminoso (‘Shining Path’) group. The wave of migrants who arrived in the 1990s and 2000s has been the one most widely covered in literature and the media; it encompasses a much higher number of people, as well as people from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Most of the participants in this book came to Chile during those years, but they are mainly upper middle-class professionals.

When it comes to this last wave, in 1996, there were around 3,500 Peruvian people in Chile. According to the National Institute of Statistics, in December 2018 the total number of foreign people living in Chile was 1,251,225 (around 6.6 per cent of the whole population). Venezuelans

(288,233 people) have now outnumbered Peruvians (223,923 people) as the biggest migrant group. Haitians, despite their higher profile in news and social media, constitute the third migrant group in terms of numbers (179,338 people).<sup>10</sup>

Despite Chile's high score on the index of income inequality, the country's rate of internet penetration is higher than the rest of Latin America. In 2016 over 71 per cent of the Chilean population had access to the internet; for the rest of Latin America, the average internet penetration rate was 56 per cent. The same study, conducted by IMS Mobile, showed that 9 out of 10 users connect to the internet through their smartphones.<sup>11</sup> Chile is the image of a modern country, and it is to here that this study's participants have decided to come in order to work hard and improve their wellbeing, as well as that of family members back in Peru. Chile is also the country in which they have lived the second half of their lives, as well as where they will most probably spend the rest of their lives.

## Methodology and how this book was written

I am based at the Center for Intercultural and Indigenous Research (CIIR), Pontifical Catholic University of Chile. As its name indicates, this is a research centre dedicated to the study of intercultural relations. Within the centre I am part of a research team called 'Diversity, Coexistence and Citizenship' – a group consisting of anthropologists, psychologists, historians and sociologists. Its aim is to study the everyday practices of intercultural coexistence in which conflicts might appear.

This volume belongs to the project 'Anthropology of Smartphones and Smart Ageing' (subsequently referred to as ASSA) – a global comparative project comprising 11 researchers, all of whom carried out ethnographic fieldwork simultaneously in 10 fieldsites. The ASSA project is funded mostly by the ERC (European Research Council) as well as by the Chilean National Commission for Scientific and Technological Research (CONICYT) in my case. This project has three entangled areas of research: ageing, smartphones and mobile health (also referred to as mHealth). When it comes to ageing, the last couple of decades have seen a shift in perspectives on ageing that has resulted in a certain ambivalence. Even though age has always been a source of authority, people around the age of 60 nowadays hesitate between claiming the traditional authority of age or retaining their youth status instead.<sup>12</sup> Smartphones, the second area of study, have become ubiquitous all over the world; for

many people they form the main channel through which they access the internet. The impact of such technology on the experience of ageing must be assessed. Lastly mobile health (mHealth) refers to the huge development in the area of health over the last couple of decades, specifically that which focuses on digital technologies. In the case of the ASSA project, we are concerned with the development of mHealth apps that could improve access to healthcare or the wellbeing of the populations among whom we are carrying our fieldwork.

Within the framework of this global comparative project, I came to Santiago in January 2018 to carry out 16 months of fieldwork. This fieldwork has developed along three lines. First, I did fieldwork among retired Chilean older adults. I volunteered as a teacher at cultural centres for older adults and public libraries. I taught smartphone workshops for over a year. In addition, I also spent a lot of time with the older adult students in my classes and workshops; we had lunch together, met in the evenings and went on field trips together. Some of the results of this very rewarding experience are shared in the collective volume *The Global Smartphone*.<sup>13</sup>

In addition, in line with the project's aim of having an applied outcome in terms of improving healthcare access, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork at an oncological clinic in a public hospital in a low-income area. The ethnography focused on nurse navigators,<sup>14</sup> tasked with mediating between oncological patients and the medical and bureaucratic system of the hospital. In doing this, the focus was on WhatsApp, the app that they use to co-ordinate patient treatment.

Finally, as a researcher from the 'Diversity, Coexistence and Citizenship' group at the Center for Intercultural and Indigenous Research, it was necessary to study the migrant component of Chilean citizenship. This is the reason the main component of fieldwork, which is the source for this book, was carried out among Peruvian migrants living in Santiago. At the beginning of fieldwork in early 2018, there was a lot of discussion in the media about migrants coming from Haiti and, later, from Venezuela. I decided to focus on Peruvian migrants, however, due to the fact that they were not newly arrived. Peruvians had been living in Chile for 20, even 30 years. One could assume that they had developed a certain typicality after being settled in Chile for so many years.

Following the research protocols dictated in the ERC project proposal, semi-formal interviews were conducted on the three areas of research, ageing, smartphones and health, with 25 selected research participants. Sixteen months of fieldwork were carried out in Santiago, Chile, from the beginning of February 2018 until the end of May 2019. Most of fieldwork consisted of participant observation and casual conversations

during social events, masses, processions, spiritual retreats, bingos, dancing parties, barbecues and chicken fundraising events. I settled in Barrio Yungay, a neighbourhood located in the western part of Santiago and an area with a high density of migrant population (more detail on this below). As I was born and raised in Argentina, my native language is Spanish, which is also the language spoken by the research participants.

### The serendipity of fieldwork

At first I tried to conduct a 'fieldsite' fieldwork. I duly moved into a specific neighbourhood and tried to address this location as a closed unit, within which I would carry out the fieldwork. This neighbourhood was lower middle-class, had a large migrant population and was located on the western side of Santiago. You needed only to walk along the streets of this neighbourhood, whose heritage is protected, to notice its large migrant population: there were over 20 Peruvian restaurants in one square kilometre. There were also migrants from several other countries, of course: Colombia, Venezuela and Haiti, to name just a few. In the course of the first weeks and even months, I talked to the owners of shops and off-licences, visited public libraries and spent a lot of time in public squares, but the fieldwork did not advance. I was not able to get to know the people living in the neighbourhood. Aside from my own limitations (mostly shyness), this was also probably due to my poor timing. When I attempted to start a conversation, I found that people were always working, always busy (if they were not attending to a customer, then they were arranging shelves or getting phone calls) and I was only able to have superficial conversations.

Before starting fieldwork, I reviewed the literature on Peruvian migrants in Chile, which was quite extensive. There seemed to be a certain consensus among the papers that Peruvians had slowly but surely occupied the urban space in Santiago,<sup>15</sup> mostly through the establishment of Peruvian product stores and Peruvian restaurants.<sup>16</sup> The literature I reviewed suggested that there were two main points of reference for Peruvians: the Plaza de Armas (Arms Square) and the Latin American Church.<sup>17</sup> Quite coincidentally, I asked a Peruvian colleague living in Belgium for advice on where in Santiago I could meet his fellow countrymen. His reply agreed with the printed text:

You either go to the snail gallery next to the Cathedral, by the Plaza de Armas [Arms Square] or to a church where you can find a Christian Peruvian brotherhood.

My Peruvian colleague was certainly right. When I first went to walk around Plaza de Armas, I found the place full of Peruvians selling food on the street, as well as Peruvian product stores (Fig. 1.1) and financial services offices similar to Western Union, used by migrants to send money back to their home countries.<sup>18</sup> The occupation of the Santiago urban space mentioned in the papers refers to the migration wave of the early 2000s. However, years before they were so visible to the Chilean people, Peruvians were already gathering in Plaza de Armas. Most of the research participants are middle-class to upper middle-class Peruvians; they came to Chile in the late 1980s and early to mid-1990s to escape the financial instability in which their country was mired. According to them, very few Peruvians were living in Chile when they first came in the late 1980s. Estefanía, a 57-year-old Peruvian secretary, remembers when she first came to Santiago, 32 years ago. Smiling a bit nostalgically, she recalls that ‘there were no foreigners in Chile; people here were fascinated by us and they would love the way we talked’. Marcos, now a call centre manager, came to Chile to study at the same time Estefanía did. He recalls that at the time one would only find four or five other Peruvians in the square:

I used to go to Plaza de Armas, to meet other fellow countrymen. I would bring the newspaper my mother sent me from Lima and we would play chess.



**Figure 1.1** A store next to Plaza de Armas. From a screenshot of ‘Introduction to the fieldsite’, a film by the Visual Anthropology Lab, Pontifical Catholic University of Chile.

What made Peruvians gather in Plaza de Armas specifically? How was it possible that my Peruvian colleague living in Belgium could be so spot on about Peruvians living in Santiago? Gerardo, a biochemist who has lived in Santiago for 22 years, was able to explain why. This proud *arequipeño* (a citizen of Arequipa, in Peru) described how in Peru people usually gather in the town or city's Plaza de Armas on Sundays, where they watch various ceremonies. Authorities raise the Peruvian flag and there is a short parade. Afterwards people stay in the square and hang out. Gerardo explained that when Peruvians migrate they tend to do the same, meaning that they go to the Plaza de Armas in their new country or city to meet their fellow countrymen. This was the first, fairly obvious hint that Peruvian migrants try to reproduce some of the customs in their home country when abroad. Sources I consulted during my literature review also mentioned a very big procession that started at the Cathedral, by Plaza de Armas. One of the largest processions in Chile was organised by Peruvian migrants. This is the procession of the Lord of Miracles, which assembles thousands of devotees on the streets of Santiago.<sup>19</sup>

The other point of reference for Peruvian migrants in Santiago, according to the literature on the topic, was the Latin American Church. The Latin American Church, then known as the 'Italian Church', was founded in 1942 in Santiago. In the 1990s, due to the wave of migrants from Peru, the Scalabrinian<sup>20</sup> priests in Santiago decided to open their church and activities to Latin American migrants (Fig. 1.2). It was no accident that this church was a point of reference for migrants, as it collaborated with the Chilean Catholic Institute for Migration (INCAMI).<sup>21</sup> Together they helped low-income migrants by giving them legal advice on visas, assisting them in finding a job and even providing shelter during their first weeks in the new country.

This church is also a point of reference for middle- and upper middle-class professional migrants, enabling them to broaden their social circles by getting to know other people. Following my colleague's advice and the literature I had consulted, I started to frequent the Latin American Church – in particular the migrants' mass – and I followed its Facebook page. The church would post their activities and, on many occasions, livestream their celebrations. When their Facebook page announced a *triduum* (three days of prayers) for the Virgin of Chapi, patron saint of Arequipa, I decided to join the event. I silently participated in the prayers for the whole of the three days. At the end of ceremony on the third day the organiser, a young Peruvian lady, invited me to come and celebrate with them, as they had really appreciated my participation. I accepted and found that around 20 to 30 people had



**Figure 1.2** A still from the film ‘Introduction to the fieldsite (Latin American Church)’ by the Visual Anthropology Lab, Pontifical Catholic University of Chile. <https://youtu.be/mnckxzWamrc>.

prepared a little party in the basement of the church. They offered me Peruvian dishes and made me try *anizado*, a strong, aniseed-based spirit typical of Arequipa. Most of the people there were middle- and upper middle-class professionals from Arequipa. I was introduced to them and discovered most were members of the Brotherhood of the Virgin of Chapi as well as the Arequipa Association, a social club for migrants from that city.

One of the members of the brotherhood and the association was a 79-year-old nun, mentioned in academic papers as being very supportive of migrants. She had organised job fairs for migrants and seemed to know everyone at the Chilean Catholic Institute for Migration. She was very well versed when it came to migrants and Peruvian devotions. This very active lady advised me to join the Brotherhood of Our Lord of Miracles, as they met regularly and had members from all over Peru and from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

Following her advice, I attended one brotherhood meeting and was soon invited to join. As a member, I attended monthly meetings, masses, spiritual retreats, barbecues, bingo nights, Peruvian National Day celebrations and processions in Santiago and in other cities nearby. The people I got to know through these activities became the research participants of this study (Fig. 1.3).





**Figure 1.3** ‘How I did fieldwork among Peruvian migrants’ by the Visual Anthropology Lab, Pontifical Catholic University of Chile. <https://youtu.be/ZkhuE2MhZN4>.

Three-quarters of the research participants who belong to this brotherhood or are related to one of its members are professionals with university degrees. As noted above, most of them are from upper middle-class or upper-class backgrounds and came to Chile in the late 1980s and 1990s; only a few arrived more recently, in the 2000s. On average, they have been living in Chile for over 20 years. Most of them are aged between 55 and 65 and all are very active and hardworking people.

I also got to know other Peruvian social circles through contacts at the brotherhood, in the same way that Peruvians living in Santiago often broaden their own social circles. I met people from the Peruvian Club, the Arequipa Association and the Paracas Group, among others, and joined them in various activities. These social circles are nested networks. Whenever there is an event that involves people from one of these social circles, people from the other social circles would also appear. In a way, it ended up being a big social network of influential Peruvian upper middle-class professionals. As time went by during fieldwork, the way all these networks were related to one another became clearer. This is why this fieldwork is best described as a network fieldwork – within the boundaries of Santiago – rather than a fieldsite fieldwork. Although many events took place at the Latin American Church, several others occurred in different parts of the city, including the migrants’ neighbourhood where I lived.

## Caveats and limitations

This fieldwork, then, has many limitations regarding its scope. First, the research participants belong to Christian brotherhoods which honour Peruvian patron saints and religiosity permeates their lives very deeply. We cannot assume then that participants represent all Peruvians in that sense. However, it seems that in general Peru is a more traditional and religiously devout country than Chile. As will be shown in [Chapter 7](#), Christian celebrations in Peru are part of communal life to a far greater extent than in Chile.

Another limitation of this study is that it took place in Santiago. This is not a limitation in itself, but a fact that is very important to point out. As Guizardi and Garcés indicate,<sup>22</sup> most studies that look at migration in Chile have Santiago as their place of study. Out of the 76 works these authors revised on the topic, 72 were cases of what they call ‘methodological Santiaguism’ (i.e. studies that are biased due to being Santiago-centric). This volume is not immune to that critique. It can be said, however, that this book does not claim to be an account of the experience of all Peruvian migrants in Chile. This book does not cover all of Chile or even Santiago. It follows the lives of professionals who have lived in this country for over 20 years and who experience several layers of ‘in betweenness’, their upbringing in another country being just one of them.

## Methodological shortcomings

Another problematic category used throughout this book is the term ‘migrant’. There is nothing problematic with the category in itself, but problems may arise when this category is linked to what Çaglar and Glick Schiller (2018) call ‘methodological nationalism’.<sup>23</sup> Methodological nationalists, according to these authors,

confine the concept of society within the boundaries of nation-states and assume that the members of these states share a common history and set of values, norms, social customs, and institutions.<sup>24</sup>

Çaglar and Glick Schiller trace the roots of this biased methodology and link it to what they call the ‘ethnic lens’. They point out that researchers who fall into this methodological trap ‘have tended to see differences in national origin as the most significant social and cultural division within the population of a nation-state’.<sup>25</sup> This is a valid point and, to a

certain extent, this book can be fairly accused of exercising ‘methodological nationalism’, in addition to the aforementioned ‘methodological Santiaguism’. This fieldwork started by trying to meet people living in Chile who had been born and raised in Peru. I moved to a neighbourhood that has a high density of migrants. Following a Peruvian friend’s advice, I attended various religious celebrations at the Latin American Church and ended up joining a brotherhood composed of Peruvians.<sup>26</sup> So, from the outset, I was trying to do an ethnography of Peruvian migrants living in Santiago based upon the (methodologically nationalistic) assumption that there would be some typicality emanating from those two conditions. That is the kind of ethnography that, unaware of its shortcomings, I intended to do at the beginning. Fieldwork, as usual, resulted in a more complex experience that provided a richer picture. I would like to mention two things to nuance this shortcoming.

On the one hand, the research participants regularly speak about Peru and are proud of being Peruvian. Through their discourse and their practices, one can see that they identify as migrants and, above all, as Peruvians. This does not mean that the research participants are to blame for my methodological mistakes. It must be said, however, that the participants stress the fact that they are Peruvian quite regularly and assertively. A couple of days before writing this introduction, an old and very widely respected member of the Brotherhood of Our Lord of Miracles passed away. In the WhatsApp group of the brotherhood, in addition to condolences for the families and prayers to God for having him in His glory, the brothers highlighted what an ‘excellent Peruvian’ [*sic*] he was. This does not mean, of course, that cultural identity equates citizenship nor that it is defined by state borders.

On the other hand, this book does not pretend to be a rendition of the whole life of the participants. I joined them on religious and non-religious occasions, most of them related to the fact that they are Peruvian. Whether it was a procession for a Peruvian patron saint, a party to celebrate the anniversary of a Peruvian city or a Peruvian businessmen’s lunch, it was always about Peru. When I talked to the participants casually during social meetings, they would discuss football and politics in Peru and tell stories of their childhood – possibly involving some religious event or memories of their beloved home towns. They would also comment on how they would like to prepare Peruvian dishes.

However, these things do not characterise the entirety of the participants’ lives. Some of them I met in their work environments, where their relationship to their home country did not come so strongly to the foreground. As explained in [Chapter 3](#), they were very dedicated to work,

so the occasions when I joined them would most often be at religious and social events, such as parties and *polladas* (chicken fundraising parties). This book, then, is biased in three senses. First, I worked within the boundaries of Santiago. Second, I spent time with Peruvian migrants mostly on occasions when their Peruvian roots were brought to the fore. Third, I did fieldwork with a group of mostly upper middle-class professionals who belonged to a religious brotherhood.

How this book was written (and how it is intended to be read)

This book has been written in a way that is accessible to the general public, with all academic discussion relegated to endnotes. The aim of the book is to provide the reader with an account of the life experience of Peruvian migrants living in Santiago, their struggles and the way that they cope with a general sense of being ‘in between’ two countries, two ages (youth and old age) and two generations – that of their parents and their children. In order to provide the reader with an ‘anchor’ and to help them follow the experience better, the same 17 main characters are deployed throughout the book.<sup>27</sup> These characters have been chosen because they illustrate the points made throughout the book very clearly; more detailed stories are provided about 10 men and seven women in particular. Three-quarters of the total of research participants are professionals and upper middle-class, while one-quarter of them are lower middle-class workers. As the chapters dwell upon specific topics – the experience of age, the use of the smartphone, their social lives – which are coexistent in everyday life, the characters serve to provide a sense of unity throughout different chapters. The individual illustrating a point about the experience of ageing in [Chapter 2](#) may appear again in [Chapter 5](#) to make a point about smartphone use, for example, or in [Chapter 8](#) to discuss the meaning of life.

In some chapters, I have made use of another technique. In [Chapters 3, 4 and 6](#), the reader is presented with three short life stories. These stories relate to the arguments made in the chapter. They also provide much more context for the reader, allowing them to visualise the life of that person and the topic in question more holistically.

## Ethics disclaimer

In line with the requirements established by the ethics committees of the ERC, UCL (University College, London, where the ASSA project is co-ordinated by Daniel Miller) and the Pontifical Catholic University of

Chile, all ethics standards were met. The research project was presented to the ethics committee of the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile in October 2017; it was subsequently approved after some modifications suggested by the said committee. The research project included protocols for the delimitation of the areas of study, recruiting participants, data analysis and anonymisation and the design of informed consent forms. All the individuals in this study have read, understood and signed consent forms before participating in the project.

For the sake of anonymity, several changes were made in order to protect the identity of the participants. These do not affect the integrity of the data. All participants' names were changed, and their professions were also modified. In some cases, changes to locations were made in order to prevent the designated places from being recognisable.

All of the bureaucratic requirements were properly adhered to, but the ethics commitment of an ethnographer goes beyond these necessary formalities. A genuine commitment to ethical behaviour, as applied in this book, implies being sensitive in order to prevent the research participants coming to any harm, whether during fieldwork or afterwards, through the publication of the results.

## Notes

1. In the last years the increase in migratory flows from Haiti and Venezuela has led to many migration studies in Chile focusing on these populations (e.g. Rojas Pedemonte et al. 2017; Aguirre 2017; Calderón and Saffirio 2017; Stefoni et al. 2018; Stefoni et al. 2021).
2. Without pretending to be exhaustive, we can point out at least five main research areas within Chile's migration studies that focus on Peruvian migrants. It is essential to highlight that many of these areas intersect and many researchers contribute to more than one area. First, a series of studies focused on border regions from a transnational perspective – though the transnational approach can be found in most migration studies in Chile – such as Guizardi 2015; Guizardi et al. 2019, among others. Second, several contributions focus on migrants' trajectories, their integration to Chile – mainly through work – and address matters of identity (Márquez and Correa 2015; Tijoux and Retamales 2015; Stefoni and Bonhomme 2014, 2015; Stefoni et al. 2017; Tijoux 2007; Stefoni 2004, 2011; Bonhomme 2013; Imilan et al. 2015). Third, a series of studies focused on urban space changes due to the presence of migrants (Torres and Hidalgo 2009; Ducci and Rojas 2010; Imilan 2013; Stefoni et al. 2008, 2015). Regarding the last two main areas of research, Stefoni and Stang (2017) have also pointed these out. In their critical review of the literature, these researchers identified two main topics in migration studies in Chile which intersect primarily with the first two areas mentioned. On the one hand, several studies focus on the racialisation of migrants: for the first time, flows of Latin American migrants come to Chile, challenging the imaginary of European migration at the beginning of the twentieth century (Tijoux 2013a, 2013b; Tijoux and Latelier 2014; Tijoux and Palominos Mandiola 2015). On the other hand, several studies focused on migrant women (Guizardi et al. 2019; Stefoni 2011, to name just a few collections of works), even though Stefoni and Stang make the criticism that such studies have not fully embraced a gender studies perspective (2017, 119). In most cases this monograph offers ethnographic illustrations of points already made by the works here referenced.
3. There are many studies on ageing in Chile (see, for example, Fuentes-García and Osorio-Parraguez 2020; Osorio-Parraguez 2013), but they have not focused on the migrant population nor on middle-aged individuals.

4. See, for example, the state-of-the art paper on the ageing–migration nexus by King et al. 2016 or the extensive work on older Peruvian migrants by Horn 2019.
5. The paper by Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton (1992), ‘Transnationalism: A new analytic framework for understanding migration’, has been highly influential in migration studies in Latin America (and of course beyond). This foundational paper argues for a new conceptualisation to understand the experience of new migrant populations.
6. It is crucial to make a disclaimer about the title of this volume, which may lead to erroneous assumptions and unfulfilled expectations. The book’s title is ‘Ageing with Smartphones’ because it belongs to a series. Even though this book addresses ageing and the use of smartphones, the direct relationship between these two is addressed only briefly in Chapter 2. Chapter 5, dedicated to smartphones, explains how digital communications make the ‘in betweenness’ more bearable. This general sense of being in between (to which the smartphone significantly contributes) is retaken later to address the experience of middle age and ageing for migrants. Perhaps a more suitable title would have been ‘Ageing in the in betweenness’.
7. See, for example, the edited book by Imilan et al. 2015, which contains several beautiful yet heart-breaking stories on migration and its emotional cost.
8. See Horn (2019, 22) for a critical analysis of the preconception of the notion of family as a locally based unit.
9. Index of 47.7, according to a 2015 World Bank estimate which measures the degree of inequality in wealth distribution.
10. By 2002 the Chilean census showed that 62,137 Peruvians were living in the country. By 2009 there were 352,344 foreign people living in Chile, amounting to about two per cent of the country’s population. Peruvians then represented just over one-third of the foreign population (37.1 per cent or 130,859 people), having surpassed Argentinians (who used to represent the highest figure but now stood at only 17.2 per cent) and Bolivians (6.8 per cent). According to the 2017 census, Peruvians are still the largest immigrant group in Chile, with 187,756 Peruvians living in the country (25.2 per cent of the migrant population). In the 2017 census a shift can be seen in terms of the presence of people from more recent waves of migration: Colombians (105,445 people), Venezuelans (83,045) and Haitians (62,683 people). The current migrant population in Chile amounts to 746,465 people (4.35 per cent of the entire Chilean population) in 2017. However, these figures have changed in the last two years due to the arrival of more Haitians and Venezuelans in large numbers.
11. There are four main mobile telephone operators in Chile: WOM, Movistar, Claro and Entel. They share the market in almost equal parts. When it comes to the 4G connections market share in 2018, according to the Subsecretary of Telecommunications, Entel received 32.3 per cent, Movistar 22.9 per cent, Claro 21.9 per cent, and WOM 21 per cent, giving a total of 98.1 per cent among the four companies. WOM had a growth of 35.2 per cent in the last 12 months. The cheapest plans of these companies start at CLP 9,900 per month (roughly £10) and include 9GB (Entel and Movistar), 10GB (Claro) and 15GB (WOM), from 300 minutes for calling to unlimited minutes and unlimited data for social media (WhatsApp, Facebook, etc.). There are many free Wi-Fi spots in public areas in Santiago. As of September 2018, 30 metro stations in Santiago offered free Wi-Fi. There is also free Wi-Fi in public libraries, squares and parks, totalling 1,244 spots all over the country. The cheapest smartphone available to buy in Chile starts at around 50,000 Chilean pesos (£49) for a Nokia 3 or a Motorola C or a ZTE A3. There are many mid-range offers, ranging from between 120,000 and 200,000 Chilean pesos (£116–£196), while the latest flagship smartphones cost over 400,000 Chilean pesos (£390). People in Chile mainly tend to access the internet through mobile devices. According to the Chilean Sub-secretary of Communications, 84.8 per cent of internet connections were through mobile devices, 93.4 per cent of which were smartphones (‘Conexiones 4G se disparan 35 por ciento en 2018 (...)’ 2019).
12. In addition, many researchers consider global ageing to be one of the big trends of the century, alongside rapid urbanisation and issues linked to climate change. According to the World Health Organization, ‘[b]etween 2000 and 2050, the proportion of the world’s population over 60 years will double from about 11 per cent to 22 per cent. The absolute number of people aged 60 years and over is expected to increase from 605 million to 2 billion over the same period.’ Extracted from <https://www.who.int/ageing/about/facts/en/>. Accessed on 26 August 2020.
13. Miller et al. 2021.
14. Devine 2017.

15. Torres and Hidalgo 2009; Ducci and Rojas 2010.
16. Bonhomme 2013; Imilan 2013.
17. Ducci and Rojas 2010, 107.
18. Altamirano 2004.
19. Imilan 2015; Chávez 2015.
20. Scalabrinian priests are members of the religious institute founded by Italian bishop G. Scalabrini in the late nineteenth century. These priests were originally dedicated exclusively to Italian migrants all over the world.
21. See <http://incami.cl>.
22. Guizardi and Garcés 2014.
23. Çağlar and Glick Schiller 2018.
24. Çağlar and Glick Schiller 2018, 3.
25. Çağlar and Glick Schiller 2018, 4.
26. With the exception of myself, from Argentina, and one other member who was from Chile. The two of us were the only non-Peruvian members of the brotherhood.
27. There are, of course, more than 17 people mentioned throughout the book. These 17 participants are the examples to whom the book keeps returning.

## 2

# The experience of ageing: between retained youth and early frailties

## Introduction

'I feel wonderful, *compadre!*' says Martin with fervour and enthusiasm, as if the answer were too obvious even to deserve the question. We are waiting for our food to arrive while we chat in a bar close to the central train station, situated in the lower middle-class neighbourhood where he lives. Martin has paid a great deal of attention – as always – to how he dresses. He is wearing his dark brown leather jacket, which matches his shoes, a colourful spotted shirt and his usual jewellery. He sports a shiny necklace and holds his sunglasses in his hands, which bear at least three golden rings. He exudes confidence and pride in his attitude and his attire. 'I like to dress well,' he would add later, also implying that it is obvious. Martin is 65 years old, but one could easily mistake him for a man 10 years younger.

People do not attribute to me the age I have, they think I am 50, 52, 55. I do not feel it [as if I am 65], I feel fine, despite suffering from hypertension and diabetes. I have had hypertension for 20 years and diabetes just for two years, and here I am, as you see me!

As Martin speaks, he opens both hands in a gesture as if he were saying '*voilà*'. In a way, conditions such as hypertension and diabetes are two frailties that reveal to Martin his actual age. The waiter brings our food: two hamburgers with fries. While we start eating, Martin reflects a little more on his experience of ageing successfully, yet a sense of doubt – and at the same time of hope – emerges through his words, even as he insists:



I feel very good ... I have nothing to envy a young boy for. Of course, it is true that, to put it shortly, being young has its advantages, right? But it is not always like that. I feel very good, my brother, I just hope God keeps me with the same looks and in the same good health I am now.

Just like Martin, most of the research participants are around the age of 60 and appear to be full of vitality, especially in relation to their own expectations of this age. They claim to look physically younger than they are, they keep working as if retirement will never come and are very enthusiastic in social meetings and communal events such as processions and chicken fundraising parties. Despite the fact that they have been living in Chile for over 20 years, many aspects of their lives are still influenced by their being Peruvian and, in a broader sense, by the fact of being first generation migrants.

This leads to the question of what the contemporary experience of ageing is when you are 60 and, in particular, what the implications are for ageing as a migrant.

This chapter focuses on the way these Peruvian migrants experience their age. It starts by focusing on speech, on the way participants refer to their age and the way they present themselves in public, at events and social meetings. It then moves beyond this first impression in order to read between the lines of this discourse and discover more details about their experience of ageing. This chapter will show that age is very much present for these migrants through the experience of frailties, such as hypertension and tiredness – and, above all, in the change of habits needed to confront such new frailties. In the case of female participants, menopause is also a clear sign of age that they accept quite naturally. This apparent contradiction between discourse and experience is in many cases resolved with a dichotomy: the body ages while the spirit remains young.

Some things can be either a sign of ageing or of retained youth. That is the case with the smartphone: for some, difficulties experienced when using a smartphone may be indicative of ageing; for others the smartphone is a crucial instrument for their hardworking and therefore vital lives. When it comes to family roles, some of the participants reject the ones associated with advanced age (such as grandparenting) – or at least the behaviours associated with them.

Finally, participants' experience of ageing with regards to aspirations towards the future will be addressed. Their condition as migrants plays a role here, as the limited time they have spent in Chile has not

enabled them to accumulate an acceptable retirement fund – at least not one that would enable them to continue having the quality of life they enjoy nowadays. These Peruvian migrants then cannot afford to retire any time soon. However, the bureaucratic and economic explanation for this does not give the complete picture. These Peruvian migrants do not want to retire: they cannot picture themselves not working. In a way, for them, not working and being inactive is comparable to death, or even to a fate worse than death.

## ‘I have been young all my life’: speaking about age

Mariano, a notary aged 62, describes the new perspective that growing older has brought him:

Sometimes I take myself [mentally] to 40 years ago, when my dad was at the same age I am today. To me, he looked much older – not ‘old’, older.<sup>1</sup> I was 20 and he looked older. I do not know if my children see me the way I saw my father then.

When speaking about age, most research participants declare that they are feeling very well. The usual trope employed to convey this point stresses the fact that they feel younger than their chronological age – in some cases by as much as 20 years. For example, Estefanía, a 57-year-old secretary, claims that chronological age and physical age are two different things. Many of them usually highlight, as a way of certifying their feeling of being younger than expected, that other people do not attribute their chronological age to them. Perhaps the example that comes closest to an enunciation of agelessness is the one by Javier, a 65-year-old welder, who said quite inadvertently: ‘I have always been a young man’. Javier says people see his youth in the firmness of his skin or in his energetic spirit; only his baldness indicates his age.

Age categories are blurred in participants’ discourses. Some of them define themselves as ‘adults’, others as ‘young adults’ in opposition to the institutional term employed in Chile for people older than 60 or 65: ‘*adulto mayor*’ (‘older adult’). ‘As for old, actually old, I will be old in 20 years’, adds again Javier.<sup>2</sup> Whatever category they use during conversations about the subject, the words ‘*mayor*’ (‘older’ when applied to ‘adult’) and (‘*viejo*’ – ‘old’, pejorative when applied to people), together with other categories with unwanted connotations of old age such as ‘grandpa’ (the issue of grandparenting is addressed below), do

not appear. Despite the lack of clarity that surrounds the categories in the participants' discourse, one thing is certain: there are connotations of advanced age in them. However, the discourse also points to a notion of retained youth, as Javier's quote clearly illustrates.

In attending social events, one can observe that these Peruvian migrants display a remarkable vitality – not only in the way they eat, drink, dance and party in general, but also in their passions and engagements with more solemn celebrations, such as processions which can last as long as 12 hours. Elena, a 49-year-old nurse, says that her daughters remind her that she is doing things that are no longer suitable at her (supposedly advanced) age:

My daughters point that out. Sometimes, I find myself dancing wildly at a party or shouting things at a football match in the stadium, which someone 49 years of age should not be doing.

Several of the research participants have children who have reached an age which allows them to be independent: they have either already formed their own families or they are at university. This situation allows these people in their late middle age to enjoy their free time at a wide range of social events (see [Chapter 4](#)). As one 61-year-old accountant said:

I feel like I am starting to live again. As a woman, you put yourself second to raise your children. Now my children are professionals, so we [her and her husband] have more time to enjoy as a couple (...) Two years ago our children became independent and we started this new life.

When most of the research participants speak about the vitality that they are enjoying at age 60 or older, there is one common point that they make (besides a certain change of habits, which is addressed below) when they talk about the reason for it: they attribute it to God. In the same way Martin expressed his hopes that God would keep him just the way he is right now, Javier also highlights this by always starting any phrase about his age with 'by the grace of the Lord'. Spirituality is very important for Javier, who has a minor role in the brotherhood; he refers to it again and again during our conversation about his experience of ageing. Another participant in her 60s stresses that without God one is nobody. She feels very well physically and spiritually, but reiterates that it is thanks to God, her guide.

This is what these research participants say explicitly about their age, as well as what can be read between the lines of their discourse. It shows that they are more energetic than they had expected to be, and that they feel really grateful for the vitality that they are experiencing. However, it is necessary to go beyond their own first impressions about their age to understand more specifically how they are living these years. It is necessary to see how they experience their age in everyday life.

## Living middle age: early frailties, useful dualisms

When the conversations start going into more detail, it becomes quite apparent that in the last couple of years, these late middle-aged men and women have had to make some changes to prevent the typical frailties of old age from making their appearance.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps the most frequent change they acknowledge – a very problematic one for Peruvians – is a change in their diet.

One example will illustrate this point. Pablo is a 60-year-old businessman who came to Chile 20 years ago. Like many other Peruvian hardworking migrants, he claims to feel fine, as if he were 30 or 40 years old. He also mentions that he grew accustomed to very good Peruvian cuisine back in Lima; his mother used to cook at home and sold the meals she prepared to companies and offices. He remembers the dedication to work shown by his mother, and how she was able to raise him and his two siblings, even sending them to university. As illustrated throughout the whole study, Peruvians display a strong connection to their home country through gastronomy (see more on this in [Chapter 3](#)). Yet other factors also come into play for older migrants. Pablo's doctor has advised him to start exercising again, as he used to do a bit of jogging but stopped a while ago. The physician also advised him, quite strongly, 'to be careful at mealtimes'. This has not been easy for Pablo, who also likes to prepare Peruvian dishes, following the instructions in recipes he finds on YouTube. Pablo tries to eat less and mostly reduce his sugar and salt intake. He has reduced his consumption of soft drinks, such as Inca Kola,<sup>4</sup> and has also had to change his drinking habits. He says that before he used to go to the supermarket to get a pack of beer – either the Peruvian 'Cuzqueña' or the Chilean 'Escudo', both low-priced and popular – but now he has stopped. 'If beer or Inca Kola is served on the table I will drink it, but I do not buy it any more,' he states.

Other participants have noticed the early signs of ageing in their lower resistance to stress, exemplified by the case of Roberto. He is a

60-year-old professional who came to Santiago almost 20 years ago. Roberto now manages a small factory, having got to this top position (he is the right hand of the owner) after years and years of hard work. He is also passionate about Peruvian food and likes to prepare *ceviche* – fresh raw fish cured in citrus juices – for the whole family. Ten years ago he had to start changing his eating habits, but continued to eat Peruvian food. There is nothing unhealthy about Peruvian food in itself; the issue is rather that some Peruvian dishes are fried (i.e. high in cholesterol) and are usually served in large quantities. In the last two years, Roberto acknowledges, he has had to pay even more attention to what he eats. He eats more salads, including fruit salads and yoghurt, and fewer fried dishes. However, Roberto confesses that, while he has been eating less, he cannot help but eat *aliñado*, a reference to Peruvian spicy dressings. He even likes to invent his own *aliños* (spicy dressings) when he prepares elaborate dishes.

A couple of years ago, some tests revealed that Roberto had high blood pressure. The doctor prescribed him medication, but Roberto did not want to take it. 'It did not seem right to me to be taking pills for that,' he says, a reluctance to taking medication that appeared among other participants as well. The doctor ran another test, this time with a portable blood pressure monitor that Roberto had to wear for 24 hours. This revealed that Roberto did not have permanent high blood pressure; it would rather peak during stressful moments at work, with the peaks occurring at specific times. He has many responsibilities at work, with deadlines for deliveries, many employees under his chain of command and a factory that he can control through an app on his phone, which gives him direct access to surveillance cameras. The doctor then advised him to 'forget about the pills, do some exercise and you will be fine'. Roberto bought an elliptical machine, which he keeps in his bedroom, along with images of the Lord of Miracles and other Peruvian icons whom he also thanks for his health. He now exercises every day and says he has kept his blood pressure within normal levels since. In a way, Roberto's experience shows that these late middle-aged Peruvians, rather than dealing directly with the threat of age frailties, often end up negotiating with them.

Eating less of certain Peruvian dishes or ingredients and replacing them with more salads is not a low price for these hardworking migrants to pay. Ignacio, aged 65 and logistics manager of a company's warehouse, has had to stop eating chili pepper, usually found in Peruvian dishes, and drinking coffee, due respectively to a bacterium in his stomach and his elevated blood pressure. It has been hard for him. He has managed to cut

down on the chili pepper for a couple of months, but he cannot just give up coffee:

The doctor advised me to take my coffee very light and decaffeinated ... That would not work. So I make my coffee using two full spoons [of instant coffee powder] and I am happy.

Having proudly overworked himself and lived an overly active life for over 40 years, it is very difficult for Ignacio to give up coffee. The same goes for Javiera, a 53-year-old domestic worker who is experiencing the symptoms of menopause and also starting to suffer from high blood pressure. She has also had to give up coffee and take blood pressure lowering pills, both changes that she does not like.

A sign of ageing: less heavy partying

While these late middle-aged Peruvians claim to feel full of vitality, which keeps them working and stops them from even thinking about the possibility of retirement, they might acknowledge that they do not have as much vigour when it comes to social life. Estefanía, the 57-year-old secretary, claims that she only feels 40 years old, but acknowledges that she feels her age in her aching knees and bones. She does not go out in the way that she used to 15 years ago, until 3 or 4 a.m. 'Now, it is midnight and I am already yawning...!' she admits. The same goes for Esteban, a 64-year-old businessman. Years ago, he confesses, he used to meet his friends from university for a big lunch twice a year. It would always end with everybody being very drunk – '*todo terminaba en una gran borrachera!*' – he said, laughing. Nowadays, when it is barely 4 or 5 p.m., he is already asking 'Shall we go?' Esteban, in common with most of these hardworking Peruvian migrants, suffers from stress. Two years ago his blood sugar went up due to stress caused by some tax issues, and now he has to take a pill to control the sugar in his blood. While in Peru he eats *yacon*, a plant excellent for blood sugar, he says. It is his mother who usually prepares this for him; she cuts the root vegetable into slices, puts it through a blender and mixes it, then mixes it again with pineapple. Esteban takes this instead of the pills while in Peru. He claims that his sugar level is now under control.

In general, it can be said that there is more of a continuity in the daily experience of the research participants' lives, albeit with a reduction in intensity. They thus continue eating their Peruvian food (albeit

in smaller quantities, with fewer fried dishes and less spicy dressing) and working (perhaps taking more weekends off). They also continue to enjoy parties and other social activities – just maybe not until 4 a.m.

## Smartphones and ageing

All the participants in the study own smartphones and they are quite intensive in their use of WhatsApp (discussed further in [Chapter 5](#)). The adoption of new technologies can be construed as a sign of retained youth, or the reluctance to adopt them as a sign of old age. This was particularly evident on a side project carried out among retired older adults who learned how to use a smartphone at cultural centres. In considering the relationship between the experience of ageing and smartphone use among the research participants, this appeared most clearly for those who had difficulties in adopting it. Martin knows very well how to use WhatsApp, for example, and enjoys playing certain video games to alleviate hours of boredom. However, he did not know how the Google photos app and the Gallery app worked, although he was eager to learn and grateful for my patience when I taught him a few things: *‘Uno debe modernizarse...!’* (‘One must modernise oneself...!’). He acknowledges that he did not know much before, but he had to learn how to use social media to stay in touch with his family. Martin is also curious about smartphone workshops, claiming that he is very capable of learning, but just needs a patient teacher – unlike the vendors at the little tech stores near the central train station, where he buys accessories for the smartphone.

In another example Enrique, a 69-year-old street vendor, acknowledges that he stills needs to discover how everything works in his smartphone, despite having been using smartphones for the last 10 years. He is fascinated with the camera feature of Google Translate, pointing the camera at a bottle of medicine to show how all the details appear translated on screen. Enrique also uses Google to look for information about some pills that his daughter had sent him from the United States, or to learn more about arthritis, as he can feel that sign of advanced age in his knee.

Other participants seem more versed in the use of the smartphone. When talking to them about this subject, it became apparent that the smartphone was not in itself important for them. What was important for them was what they did with it, which was mostly work. For these participants, an intense working life is a sign of retained youth. Pablo was happy to show his workflow in action by reading out loud some emails

and explaining how he can co-ordinate the logistics of his business at home through his smartphone and laptop. Pablo's brother Marcelo was another example of how a person's business life can make its way into the smartphone. Marcelo's phone, the latest iPhone model, has its three home screens carefully curated with the necessary apps in precisely named folders. Besides, each home screen is hierarchically placed: as soon as an app is used less frequently, it is relocated to a home screen on the right. For Esteban, the smartphone in itself was just a tool. In the middle of the conversation, it provided an occasion for him to talk about his busy working and social life:

I receive so many messages on so many WhatsApp groups, that I don't have the time to read them all.

In these latter cases smartphones, and their heavy usage, was not a sign of ageing, but rather an indication of the intense activity of the owners – and therefore a sign of their enduring vitality.

### Useful dualisms and menopause

As noted above, there seems to be an apparent contradiction between what the research participants overtly state about how they are feeling their age and the actual way they are experiencing it. This is revealed by the early frailties they are starting to face and the subsequent changes in habits they have had to make to cope with them.

There is certainly a dichotomy between what the participants say and what they experience. However, dichotomies can also be helpful in dealing with early, age-related frailties. Through the dichotomy between body and spirit, for instance, participants can claim some retained youth despite the natural and inevitable decay of the body. Javiera, the 53-year-old domestic worker, for example, says that she clearly notices her age in her body:

*Los huesitos van cambiando* ('the little bones change'). In my spirit I feel young, but when it comes to the body my little bones ache.

This way many can attribute the age they feel they are to their spirit or behaviour, even as they acknowledge the early signs of ageing in their bodies.

For the male participants, the changes associated with age mostly imply changes to their diet.<sup>5</sup> For the female participants, menopause is a clear sign of having reached a certain age. They discuss the issues



associated with it as part of a natural stage of life that one has to accept. The stresses of that stage, in particular, are widely discussed.

Elena, the 49-year-old nurse, has not yet experienced menopause, but she jokes about it a lot at work. If she gets hot on a summer day, she would say that menopause has finally got to her. She has several friends who have already gone through it and they often joke about it together. For example, they gave vaginal lubricant to a friend as a birthday present.

It seems that doctors and friends are the main sources of information for women going through menopause. Javiera and Ana María, both domestic workers, said they got all the information they have from their doctors. Javiera, in particular, suffered from changes in her mood, commenting that 'even your partner bothers you ... your husband wants to be with you, and you reject him'. Javiera believes it can even lead to the breakdown of a couple's relationship. 'You always take it out on someone, always,' she admits.

Javiera experiences menopause not only through the changes in her behaviour, but also in her body. She had been taking medication to treat hypertension for a couple of months, but insists that her mind is not like that of a grandmother who does not want to go out any more – another example of the body/spirit dualism. She admits to feeling more sensitive and irritable, sometimes seeing everything as wrong. This was not the case before, when she would come home and start cooking right away; now she gets home and she is tired, everything bothers her. The experience has not been unexpected for Javiera. She has a group of friends of the same age, so she knew from them what was likely to happen. 'It is not every day, however,' she points out, 'but one or two times a week that I feel like this'. When she is working at someone else's house, she can sometimes feel hot flushes coming on, together with the urgent need to jump under the shower – but she does not, explaining that this might be dangerous; her blood pressure could be high. The doctor advised her that if she feels a *bochorno* (hot flush) coming on she should go out and get some air, but avoid getting into water or splashing herself with water. After a list of the difficulties she is experiencing and the way she deals with them, Javiera concludes with resignation: 'This is how the stage is supposed to be'.

Even though Javiera is aware of the possible serious consequences of menopause symptoms, she sees these as natural and expected. Ana María, aged 63, reveals the same sense of acceptance. In her case the menopause came very early to her, at the age of 40. She slightly regretted not being able to have a child with her then new partner, but was relieved she did not have to deal with menstruation any more: 'Menstruation should not exist...!' she says, bursting into laughter. When it comes to

her physical symptoms, her doctor gave her a lubricant in case she experiences vaginal dryness. The changes that worried this energetic, hard-working woman were the ones affecting her behaviour. Ana María admits that she has experienced some episodes of depression, which she would quickly fight with music. 'Music cheers me up. I don't allow for depressing thoughts to get me,' she states.

All the women I spoke to for the study accepted menopause as a natural stage in their lives, while at the same time declaring how young they felt in spirit. None of them said they had used hormones: 'No medication, nothing,' said Javiera. 'The nature of the body is like that', she added, expressing a general sentiment.<sup>6</sup>

### Grandparenting: no time for grandpas

Apart from changes to their bodies, having to alter their diet and start taking medication, ageing is also experienced through a change in roles, such as when one becomes a grandparent. Some of the participants featured here do dedicate time to their grandchildren; others lack the time to do so. There are also the research participants who blatantly reject the category of 'grandparent'.

Some of the research participants are grandparents. Among them are those who enjoy spending time with their grandchildren. For example, Mariano, a 62-year-old notary, likes his grandchildren, who he and his wife take care of at weekends. 'They are like a vitamin, they keep me active,' he adds. He and his wife even got to the point of changing their working habits so as to have the weekends free for their grandchildren.<sup>7</sup> Javier's case is that of someone who enjoys being with his granddaughter, despite not having much time available. He has one granddaughter in Chile and four grandchildren from his first family in Peru. He stays in touch with his children and grandchildren through Facebook and Messenger, explaining 'I talk to my children every other day, and to my grandchildren [in Peru] every day'. Javier lives alone with his wife, but sometimes their granddaughter comes to spend the day. 'My wife takes care of her, as I am busy working all day.'

In other cases, however, research participants reject being called 'grandparents' and the implications of that category. Enrique, the 69-year-old street vendor, is one example. He used to sell clothes on the streets until this practice was banned by the mayor of that particular commune in Santiago, six months before the interview took place. He tried to find a job at the bus station, but says no one is going to hire someone his age. He is planning to move to the United States, where his two

daughters live. Enrique does not like the role of grandfather, however; he states, quite vividly:

I have two grandchildren and I have no interest in being ‘the little grandpa’. For them [grandchildren], I am ‘daddy’, I ain’t no bloody grandpa!

Enrique does not want to be a grandfather because it makes him feel old. He confesses that if his favourite daughter has a child, then he might relent. Two of his children live in Santiago and one of them has a young child, whom Enrique says he does not babysit:

No, everyone has their obligations, I do not do that thing [babysitting]. I love them but beyond that, I do not do that.

He claims to have taken good care of his children, however, even to the point of overprotecting them.

## **Ageing as a migrant: aspirations for the future**

### Prospects of retirement abroad

Ageing as a migrant has implications for the way in which people see their future. Retirement is one of the main aspects of people’s lives that the condition of being a migrant affects. The pension system in Chile (Administradoras de Fondos de Pensiones, or AFP) is a capitalisation system run by private-sector pension funds. Workers contribute a fixed percentage of their salary towards a fund managed by a private AFP. The AFP uses it and makes it grow (depending on the risks the worker is willing to take). Once the worker retires, this amount of money – which varies based on their contributions – is used to give them a meagre salary. This system has been the subject of many criticisms, especially in recent years, and its reform has been one of the main demands in the protests in Chile from October 2019 on.

A comparison with local Chileans facing retirement helps us to understand migrants’ perspectives. Retired Chileans were interviewed for a side project within the same comparative study. They were all lower to middle-class citizens who had completed high school education or had college degrees and lived in the western part of Santiago. They all agreed that the pension they receive is insufficient for proper living.

Some of them continue to work part time, or even full time, after retirement. However, some of these retirees are unable to do this due to age-related frailties or a lack of job offers. Whether still working or not, all of these Chilean retirees claimed to have always been 'very organised' when it comes to managing their money (especially the ones who are no longer working). By 'being organised', they mean that they have either been putting money aside their whole working life or, more likely, that they bought an apartment or a house whose mortgage they could pay in full before retirement. This long-term strategy allowed them to avoid paying rent once they retired, meaning that they are better able to live on their pensions.

However, the experience of these participants cannot be overly generalised. Older adults in Chile do not constitute a homogenous group. Authors Fuentes-García and Osorio-Parraguez adopt a lifetime approach to study social inequalities affecting older adults in Chile (2020). Such a perspective allows them to highlight that those inequalities accumulate throughout a lifetime and become more evident during old age (2020, 95). For example, an individual of 80 years of age, due to a lifetime of structural and historical inequalities in Chile, would possibly be among those receiving a pension below Chilean pesos (CLP) 202,000 (£194) per month (2020, 96).

Such a long-term strategy may be feasible for those who have had a stable job for over 30 years, but this is hardly the case for migrants; even those who have lived in Chile for a relatively long time are unlikely to have been able to build up a substantial savings pot. Even though these migrants have been working continuously, it was quite usual for them to change jobs during their first years in their new country. According to the participants' own stories, it would appear that many decided to change jobs relatively frequently during their first years in Chile until they found one that suited their education and expectations.

However, the literature on migration in Chile presents a far more complex and challenging picture. It describes thoroughly the many difficulties migrants find when trying to access the labour market in Chile, coupled with the significant problem of whether they can obtain a definitive visa.<sup>8</sup> Even though participants emphasise the huge effort they made during their early lives in Peru and as new migrants in Chile (see Chapter 8 on the aesthetics of sacrifice), their memories of those first years may now be influenced by their current good situation. This very positive recollection of those initial hard times was apparent for upper middle-class participants as well as for lower middle-class participants, such as Ana María, a 63-year-old domestic worker who came to Chile in

the mid-1990s. Like many other migrant women,<sup>9</sup> she worked the first years as an in-house domestic worker, having one free night every two weeks. As her story illustrates (see [Chapter 4](#)), she recalls those very hardworking times with a nostalgic allure and even a smile on her face.

The Peruvian research participants declared that they would not be able to live off their pensions and maintain the quality of life they have got used to, even though many have been living and working continuously in the country for over 20 or 30 years.

In addition, some of them had not managed to save money for the long term or to buy an apartment during their long years of continuous work; instead, they invested all their money into their children. Orlando, a 57-year-old janitor, sent all his savings back to his children in Peru to pay for their studies. Roberto, now a 60-year-old factory manager, invested all his money in his children's future, sending them to the top educational institutions in Chile. Neither of them has an apartment of their own; both still rent. At the same time, neither man regrets his decision: the welfare of their families took priority over their own future.

'Not working? I would die!'

When discussing pensions with the participants, they seemed to be very aware that they would not receive an amount on which they could realistically live. This was not a surprise to them at all. In a way, they already knew that long ago, when they moved to this country in their late thirties; they recognised there would not be enough time ahead to build up a good retirement fund. Furthermore, their response went beyond the material aspect of retirement, revealing their attitude towards life. Almost none of the Peruvian migrants in this age range with whom this matter was discussed could picture themselves as retired. 'Not working? I would die!' replied Esteban, the 64-year-old businessman, confidently. His response is almost the same as that provided by Ana María, the 63-year-old domestic worker. She has recently 'retired', but continues to work three 8–10 hour shifts a week.

This almost stoic acknowledgement of the inability to retire reveals something fundamental about these migrants' perspective on life. It seems as if death were not their biggest concern. These hardworking migrants rather fear the loss of autonomy in later years, a prospect that seems to be closer than death. 'Do nothing? I would go mad', declared Ignacio, the 65-year-old warehouse manager; he has not spent one day of his life without working since he was a teenager. This common trope hints at something deeper than merely being unable to afford a good

retirement. It is indicative that for these Peruvian hardworking migrants inaction is, in a way, a sort of premature death. Enrique, the 69-year-old street vendor, for example, had been unemployed for the six months prior to our interview, which took place at his house. He was bored to death:

You get to a point in which you make yourself paint the house, make yourself do anything. You get to a point when you get incredibly bored, you turn psychotic, you get anxiety, depression, my daughter [she is living in the US] knows this... I go out with the dog, I come back.

When asked if he would like to get a job in Chile, he does not hesitate in his response:

Of course! I applied for a job with the bus company, to be a ticket inspector. But they did not call me. I think it is due to my age.

He then concludes, in quite a sombre tone, that 'In this country, there is no place for someone like me'.

## **Conclusion: between retained youth and early frailties**

These late middle-aged migrants experience a quite unexpected vitality. They have trouble picturing themselves losing autonomy or being in need of care. When asked how much longer they thought they would live (or wanted to live), most participants responded in a similar way, all vaguely saying something along the lines of: '15 or 20 years from now' or a certain age, usually around 75. In a way, the number of years was not important. What mattered was that they pictured themselves as still having an acceptable level of autonomy through their lives. They wanted to avoid becoming dependent on others, a situation that they associate with old age.

During conversations about death, there was a certain calm when speaking about the subject and the various details that surround it: inheritance, cemeteries, funeral arrangements. This acceptance may be related to their Christian faith and their lives' journey, which most of them have found fulfilling and satisfactory. The question of this calm attitude and the purpose of life is addressed further in [Chapter 8](#). What matters here is that participants hope to keep living as long as they can remain active and independent. Some of them do want to retire from their current jobs,

but they have already projects for after retirement. Javiera the domestic worker, for example, also cooks meals that she delivers to friends and relatives every now and then. She is hoping she will be able to quit her job in time and dedicate herself fully to this activity. Martin, on the other hand, has obtained Chilean citizenship – a status that allows him to apply for a special credit. With that credit, along with some savings he has gathered in his years in Chile, he plans to buy a little house for security in his later years. Most of the other research participants do not yet picture themselves in this not-so-distant future; they keep working and focus on the present. When they say that without working, they would die, it is precisely because working is what they have been doing their whole lives. Work ‘fills up’ time and life. They have started to grasp the sense of their age due to the early frailties mentioned earlier, but they also feel they are still capable of doing all the hard work they do. For Enrique, not being able to work translates into anxiety, boredom and depression.

Despite the age differences among the research participants, they all seem to be able to retain some elements of youth: they are still working, still committing to social activities and certainly still partying whenever they have the chance. The frailties of age have started to present themselves in their bodies, but these are still manageable with the help of a few (important) changes in daily habits and possibly some medication. The early frailties of old age, however, do not seem to be acknowledged as the first step into a different era. The participants certainly uttered phrases that indicate entering a new stage of life, such as ‘one has to start doing check-ups more often’, but whenever the discussion of old age became the centre of the conversation, they would bat it away; this was something that would happen in the future, certainly not something that is happening now. Between the desire for retained youth and the menacing prospect of old age, the research participants certainly position themselves in or near the former. Any change in habits is an affordable price to pay to remain young, to feel as if one were still at the top of the mountain. Thankfully, the natural decline has not started yet and if it has, it must be just the body; the spirit is still young, with the grace of the Lord.

## Notes

1. Mariano says ‘*mayor, no viejo*’. ‘*Mayor*’ means ‘older’ when applied to ‘adult’ (thus ‘*adulto mayor*’ means ‘older adult’); ‘*viejo*’ (‘old’) has negative connotations in Spanish.
2. This contrasts with the experience of talking to older Chilean adults about age. As stated in the introduction, fieldwork was carried out in cultural centres teaching smartphone use to older adults. Most Chilean older adults would classify themselves as an ‘older adult’, even though they would quickly move on to clarify how well they thought this category would fit when it came to their own experience. It can be the case that among Chilean older adults the

institutional effects of age (retirement, discounts and access to cultural centres, among others) is more pronounced than among Peruvians.

3. These late middle-aged Peruvians do their health checks once a year. Most of the upper middle-class Peruvians are affiliated to private insurers (ISAPREs), while the lower-income workers have to rely on the national health service, FONASA.
4. 'Inca Kola', produced by the Coca Cola company, is a very popular soft drink in Peru. It can be found in any Peruvian restaurant or shop in Santiago, or at any event.
5. Some of the male participants name the possibility of prostate cancer as a concern. However, most of them admitted to have postponed prostate exams (recommended by doctors for men over the age of 40) because they consider them too invasive.
6. Javiera does take medication for her hypertension, however.
7. For more on the workaholism among Peruvians, see [Chapter 3](#), pp. 57–8.
8. See, for example, Stefoni et al. [2017](#); Contreras et al. [2013](#); Bonhomme [2021](#).
9. Cf. Stefoni and Bonhomme [2014](#).



### 3

## Everyday life: the invisible point of no return

### Introduction

‘That is a super difficult question, the one you are asking me,’ pointed out Marcos. He made the comment after almost three hours of conversation in a café, during which we had gone carefully over the last 28 years of his life (half his life, to be more precise) since he arrived in Chile. Marcos pauses the conversation for a couple of seconds, as if that short moment might be enough to find the answer he himself has not been able to produce in the last few decades. In the end he compromises: ‘If I said yes, I would be lying to you, but if I said no, I would be lying as well...’

The question I have asked is usually raised in interviews following a couple of hours talking to research participants. During that time we retrace their steps all the way through their lives in Peru, from their first impressions of Chile to discussions on what they think they found here, what was missing from their homeland and what they have been able to re-create here. The question is quite simple and straightforward, but it has hardly found simple and straightforward answers. It is: ‘Do you picture yourself going back to Peru [for good]?’

Every time Marcos has gone back to Peru with his family to visit, Marta (his Chilean wife and the mother of his third child) has suggested to him that they remain. Marcos’s mother, who lives in Peru, is now very old and in poor health, which is one good reason to stay there. ‘It is in the hands of the Lord,’ observes Marcos, revealing a stoicism, halfway between faith and fatalism. Meanwhile his two fathers, his biological one and the one who raised him, are also in very delicate conditions.

Marta insists, recalls Marcos, that saying goodbye to three of his most loved ones would constitute three hard hits, one after the other. She

advises him to stay in Peru where he could find a job. However, Marcos continues to reject his wife's proposal; according to him, children around the age of 12 and over have already started getting involved in criminal activity in the neighbourhood in Lima where they would live. He fears for the wellbeing of his youngest teenage son, his favourite. Marcos understands the desire of his wife and child to stay in Peru – and then, with a sad tone, he explains something that he implies his two closest ones would never understand:

As tourists, for them everything is different ... I don't want them to go through what I have had to go through. When I am here [in Chile], I miss a lot of there [Peru], that is why I read the [Peruvian] sports magazines, listen to Peruvian radio stations, use WhatsApp and Face[Book] to communicate with my brothers and my friends. When I am there in Peru, I am all right at the beginning ... but after 10 days I miss my home ... Chile.

The truth is that Marcos is homesick in both countries. His wife believes that she and their son are stopping him from going back to his country, so she insists on their return. However, Marcos says – this time, quite firmly – that he has already developed roots in Chile. He comments that 'When you get there [Peru], everything is hugs and joyfulness, but then you start to miss [Chile].' As much as he loves Peru, it is very difficult for him to picture himself going back. He is adamant that he does not want his wife and son to miss Chile. Yet his first answer indicates his reluctance to picture himself never going back. 'Perhaps if I were separated, defeated ... then I would go back,' he remarks, with a fatalist tone.

This chapter addresses the everyday lives of Peruvian migrants in Chile as a reflection of their adaptation to their new country. It will also address how their everyday lives relate to their ambivalent aspirations for the future. While some of the migrants express firm convictions about wanting to go back in a couple of years (always in a non-specific future) and others know for certain that they will spend their last years here, most of the research participants manifest the same ambiguity towards the question as Marcos does. Migration studies usually rely on an underlying notion of linearity: the idea that a migrant eventually settles. However, how – and when – do Peruvian migrants experience this 'point of settling'? Does 'settling' imply a definitive discarding of their aspirations of returning to their home country? Or are they 'settled' once they have finally achieved a 'good life' (Fischer 2014)?

Among Peruvian migrants, there is always the intention to grow and improve one's financial situation. The ambition to succeed can be found across all socio-economic strata. It is hard to find a moment or a position in these migrants' life stories that makes them realise they have achieved a 'good life' in Chile. Rather, what appears throughout their stories is the moment when they realised (during a brief return trip) that they were no longer comfortable with everyday life in Peru. In addition, they seem to develop a process of adaptation to Chile that implies the re-creation – or enhanced development – of certain Peruvian everyday practices in the new country. This chapter focuses particularly on two everyday practices that participants of this study have re-created and developed in Chile: Peruvian gastronomy and traditional religious expression. It will also reflect upon migrants' almost sacrificial dedication to work, and the pervasive presence of Peruvian music in their day to day lives. The [next chapter](#) will focus on the re-creation of Peruvian sociality.

## The intense flavour of the everyday: Peruvian gastronomy in Chile

One of the few constants when talking to Peruvians about their difficulties during their first years in Chile is quite simply, the food ([Fig. 3.1](#)).<sup>1</sup>



**Figure 3.1** Chicken prepared in a *pachamanca* ('pot in the earth') at the Peruvian Club. Photo by Alfonso Otaegui.

This pervasive aspect of their new everyday lives proved very challenging for them. While some participants would eventually acknowledge that certain Chilean dishes could be considered acceptable and that they had even started to like them, many others found Chilean food to be tasteless. The experience of appetising, familiar food seems to be a necessity for the normal development of life, and for special occasions as well.

Absolutely every one of the social meetings among Peruvian migrants, the brotherhood and other Peruvian groups that I attended during fieldwork has taken place at Peruvian restaurants in Santiago.<sup>2</sup> During public religious celebrations such as processions, certain dishes associated with these events are sold on the streets. At the time of the *Fiestas Patrias* (Peruvian Independence Day celebrations), food stalls are installed in the big park where the celebration is held. The most frequently practised fundraising event is a *pollada*, which consists of preparing chicken the Peruvian way – marinated, fried and well spiced (Fig. 3.2).

This section will focus first on the strategies that these late middle-aged Peruvians developed to keep enjoying Peruvian food during their first years in Chile. It will then explain what is so important about their gastronomy and what is meant by sharing food.

As mentioned in the introduction, most of the research participants came to Chile in the late 1980s or the mid- and late 1990s. Whenever they talked about their first years in Chile, they would highlight that in those



**Figure 3.2** Peruvians eating at an event at the Latin American Church. Screenshot of video captured by the Visual Anthropology Lab, Pontifical Catholic University of Chile.

times hardly any Peruvian products were available. ‘Everything I tried to cook [without Peruvian ingredients] came out horrible,’ explains Elena, remembering her first years in Santiago, 28 years ago. Nowadays the situation has changed dramatically. There are many shops that sell Peruvian products and cooking ingredients, with *La Tiendita Peruana* (‘the little Peruvian store’) being the most famous among Peruvians. There are also many Peruvian restaurants, discussed further below. In addition, fruits and vegetable street fairs usually have several stalls owned by Peruvians. Here one can buy *rocoto*<sup>3</sup> pepper, purple corn for *chicha morada*<sup>4</sup> and *cancha* corn to toast, among many other ingredients.

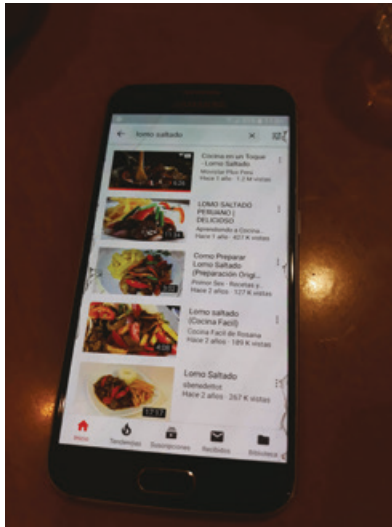
### Strategies for eating Peruvian in Chile

These Peruvian migrants, so used to the spicy and well-prepared gastronomy of their home country, had to develop some strategies to cope with these initial difficulties. Eugenia, a 60-year-old bank employee, is perhaps the most illustrative case. She is very assertive about her tastes, stating repeatedly – and very clearly – that she does not like and cannot eat Chilean food.

When she arrived in Chile 20 years ago, there were no good Peruvian restaurants near her office. Besides, at first, it was very difficult for her, as she did not know which places were good to go to – she recalled eating at some awful restaurants. Eugenia ended up carrying a couple of avocados in her bag; whenever she entered a restaurant she would order rice and then eat the avocado with it.

One of the places where research participants went to get Peruvian food in the early 2000s was the snail gallery, next to Plaza de Armas.<sup>5</sup> Many Peruvians who have been living in Chile for over 20 years remember going to this gallery in their early years; here they sent remittances to their families in Peru, met fellow countrymen or simply ate. Eugenia remembers seeing a man in the gallery selling *tamales*.<sup>6</sup> ‘He was not allowed to sell them there,’ she notes, ‘so he would hide them in a push-chair that he pretended to have a baby in.’<sup>7</sup>

Distaste for Chilean food would move some of the migrants to cook, even when they were not used to it. Such was the case of Daniel, a 44-year-old office worker who came to Chile over 10 years ago. Daniel says he has ‘discovered’ some Chilean dishes that he likes (implying that this required making an effort), but that, in general, he does not like the local food. He decided then to go to *La Vega Central*, the big central market, to get vegetables and prepare food for himself. Some other migrants, such as Pablo, the 60-year-old businessman introduced in [Chapter 2](#), would



**Figure 3.3** Pablo's phone, showing recipes for Peruvian dishes on YouTube. Photo by Alfonso Otaegui.

watch videos on YouTube to learn new recipes (Fig. 3.3). He explains that he usually cooks at weekends:

You can see in two minutes [on YouTube] how to prepare a good *ají de gallina*.<sup>8</sup> I always choose the shorter videos, no more than three-four minutes.

Pablo shows me a video on YouTube and highlights, with enthusiasm, the special tips shared by the chef: 'See? You have to set aside the sauce like this...'. As was shown in Chapter 2, most of the research participants love to eat '*aliñado*', i.e. with spicy Peruvian dressings. There is something to this intensity of spices, to the punchy, vivid colours of the food and its flavour, that can be recognised in other Peruvian practices.

Another strategy is that of Martin, the 65-year-old security guard mentioned in Chapter 2. He came to Chile 10 years ago and claims he only ate Chilean food for the first six months of his stay, a time when he still knew nobody. Martin says that there are perhaps one or two things he might like in Chilean gastronomy. He lives alone in a lower middle-class neighbourhood near the central train station. The *cité*<sup>9</sup> where he lives is where he met his closest friend in Chile, another Peruvian migrant. The men are very close friends; they joined the brotherhood at the same time and always show up together to the monthly meetings and to any

event. Martin asked his very close friend whether his wife might cook for him. She agreed, since when Martin has been giving her cooking ingredients or money and she, in turn, has been preparing home-made Peruvian food for him. We could say that in this case, other than the experience of taste, the preparation of food is a sign of deep friendship.

### Food as a sign of care and support

The attention paid to the preparation of food can also be a sign of care. Eugenia lives with her father, who is very old and in need of constant care. She hired a Chilean domestic worker to keep company with him while she works. A couple of times she has asked her to cook for her father, but he never liked the result and Eugenia had to throw everything away: 'The food was tasteless,' she complained, visibly annoyed. On another occasion, she grumbled:

My father loves soup, but what she cooked had no flavour at all. He did not eat the soup and he normally loves it.

Even though Eugenia phrases the deficiency as a matter of acquired taste and flavour, there is also something attributed to the effort that goes into the preparation.

After these problems, Eugenia started to cook at night for her father. She lives far away from her office and works until the late evening, so she is out of the house most of the time. However, she still manages to prepare a good amount of food for him, buying all of the ingredients in big quantities at Peruvian retailers and keeping everything (both cooked meals and raw ingredients) in her freezer. Her father now eats nothing other than what his loving daughter makes for him.

During most social events at fieldwork, research participants have been in charge of cooking. Elena, a very busy oncological nurse, likes to cook at church events as she finds it very relaxing – a pleasant distraction from the stress she accumulates at work. Participants also like to speak during such events about Peruvian food and their ways of preparing specific dishes, which they may also share on social media. Federico, for example, a 61-year-old entrepreneur, likes to post pictures on Facebook of the heavily loaded breakfasts he prepares almost daily.

Joaquín, a 46-year-old electrician, tells a similar story to Martin's. During the lockdown in Santiago in the first half of 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, he said that one of the most striking changes in his everyday routine was learning how to cook. He and other Peruvian

workers had been stranded in Chile, while their families had to stay in Peru due to the preventive closing of the borders. The men were used to relying on their wives for cooking. Joaquín said:

We are learning to cook a lot lately, as our wives are not here ... We were used to the wife being in charge of cooking – a big mistake! But the important thing is that I am now learning to cook.

Joaquín and his housemates are learning to cook just as Pablo did, by following recipes they find on YouTube. During these difficult times, sharing a communal meal is a sign of support. Attached to the group selfie Joaquín shared was the following message:

Here we are, making a communal meal to eat as a group, as everything has got too expensive. Now, more than ever, all unemployed, all united.

### Shaping the urban landscape

Peruvians' passion for their gastronomy, in conjunction with the waves of migrations in the 1990s and 2000s, has actually modified the urban landscape of Santiago. The research participants affirm this very proudly:

The city with the second highest number of Peruvian restaurants in the world, after Lima, is Santiago. Not any other Peruvian city: Santiago!

According to W. Imilan's paper on this topic,<sup>10</sup> the proliferation of Peruvian restaurants in Santiago is, on the one hand, indicative of the migratory flow of people from the Andean country to its southern neighbour. Most of the restaurants are concentrated in the central area of Santiago, which has come to be known as 'Little Lima'. This is the area where most low-income Peruvians used to gather to eat, chat, send remittances to their home country or, a couple of years ago, make cheap phone calls.

The presence of Peruvian restaurants in certain areas, on the other hand, can be seen as hinting at the acceptance of at least some aspects of the Peruvian heritage by the Chilean citizens. Peruvian restaurants have also occupied the eastern districts of Santiago, where the middle and upper classes live. According to Imilan,<sup>11</sup> this occupation is indicative of



the local acknowledgement of Peruvian gastronomy as a global trend and therefore a sign of status. Despite the discrimination against Peruvian migrants by Chileans documented in the literature,<sup>12</sup> their gastronomy is widely recognised and valued in Chile. This means that the customers coming to these restaurants are not only Peruvians missing their home country (what Imilan calls ‘the economy of nostalgia’), but also Chilean citizens.<sup>13</sup> Peruvian gastronomy has encompassed all socio-economic strata, from street-food vendors to fine dining and gourmet restaurants.<sup>14</sup>

### An everyday bodily experience

Food provides a material experience that is very relevant to Peruvian migrants in their everyday lives, from the ingredients they carefully select to the preparation of meals. Many of them say that some dishes requiring fresh Peruvian ingredients, mostly fish dishes, cannot be prepared in Chile, as there is no fresh Peruvian fish in Chile. They therefore have to find alternatives, as for example Roberto, the 60-year-old factory manager, does. He uses the Chilean fish *reyneta* to make *ceviche*, paying a great deal of attention to every step of the recipe.

According to Roberto, Chileans do not get too complicated with food; they prefer to cook simple things. Several of the research participants declared that they enjoy the activity of preparing the food and cooking for their families very much. Some of them even plan to do it after retirement or perceive it to be a possible way of making more money. Elena is allowed to retire at the age of 55 as she works in a high-stress job (she is an oncological nurse). She plans to start cooking and selling lunch after that. ‘I have already advertised it in advance,’ she adds, referring to the occasions on which she has brought home-made meals to the clinic to share.

Eating Peruvian gastronomy is a habit and a taste that the migrants have brought with them from their home country. Eugenia says that her father only eats Peruvian food. However, the children of these Peruvian migrants do not seem to be particularly attached to Peruvian gastronomy. These second-generation migrants, either born in Chile or born in Peru and raised in Chile, seem to be less prone to this passion. According to their parents, even if these children enjoy Peruvian food very much, it does not seem to have the same meaning for them as it does for their parents.

For the Peruvian migrants themselves, their gastronomy is certainly a matter of national pride. Roberto, for example, complained that a

couple of years ago the food sold at some of the brotherhood's events did not meet his expectations: 'Peru is a gastronomic power; the food [at any Peruvian event] should be excellent,' he explained. It must be said that, although there is a nationalist aspect to it, this is not about nostalgia.

The food is part of the simple experience of everyday life and seems to be very deeply rooted in their bodies. Almost all Peruvians I talked to mention the difficulty in the early years of finding the food they were used to as a sign of estrangement. Although it would be reasonable to think this is due to an exercise in nostalgia – a desire to focus on the roots of the past, on the country left behind – it seems that it is rather a very physical experience, rooted in the present. The passion is fired by something about the spice and the enhanced flavours of their gastronomy, which includes fresh ingredients (such the raw cured fish in *ceviche*) and spicy dressings (*aliños*). Ignacio, the 65-year-old warehouse manager, declares himself to be addicted to spicy pepper: he would even bring it to restaurants and add it to the dishes he would order. As Esteban, who has lived in Chile for almost 30 years, observed, repeating a well-known phrase:

When a Peruvian migrates, he brings with him his world-renowned gastronomy, his millenia-old culture and his religious devotion.

The following section will focus on the last of the three.

## Religious experiences in the everyday

Marcelo has been living in Chile for over 20 years. Yet every morning he still greets the Peruvian devotions of San Martin de Porres and the purple Christ, Our Lord of Miracles, whose images he brought from his home country. He describes this tenacity with modest pride:

Every day, when I wake up, I stand in front of the images and I say 'good morning San Martin, good morning my Lord'.

Even though it would be expected for these research participants to be religious – they were, after all, contacted for the study through a religious brotherhood – there is something distinctively intense about Christianity among Peruvians. The fact that the procession of Our Lord of Miracles in Santiago is the one that attracts the highest amount of people, thousands of them, is indicative of most Peruvians being devout, whether

they actively belong to a brotherhood or not.<sup>15</sup> Large events such as processions – and their organisation – will be analysed in [Chapter 7](#). This section focuses instead on the everyday, at home, private and intimate experience of religion. Beyond the particular devotions (the Virgin of La Puerta, Saint Rose of Lima and others), all of the research participants state that Peru is a very religious country. Elena comments that ‘My home town is very Catholic ... I was used to seeing my parents live with so much fervour and faith, ever since I was a child’.

### Sacred portable images

One of the most captivating aspects of these processions in both Peru and Chile is the value attributed to the sacred image itself. Devout spectators touch the procession float, rub their ID cards and some photos against its surface and take petals out of the flowers of the floral offering, to be kept as amulets of sorts; people hold their children high in front of the image for them to be blessed. Brothers, sisters and priests distribute religious stamps, which are deeply cherished by the attendees. Seeing the very image, touching the very procession float, keeping an item that was in contact with it are all part of the religious experience. While in other neighbouring countries the images provide a point of reference for devotions, a sign (something that stands for something), it seems that for Peruvians the images are closer to *being that something*.

In a way, the sacredness of the images and their materiality make them ideal for transportation. It is possible to bring a little bit of Peru with those images. Pablo, Marcelo’s oldest brother, who migrated 10 years later than he did, is one example of this:

My mother was a devotee of Our Lord [Señor de los Milagros]. She would work hard all year, preparing lunches and selling them to businessmen or at events. She would attend the procession in Lima every October to express gratitude to the Lord (...). When I was at the airport in Lima, my mother came with me to say goodbye. Before I left, she gave me an image of Our Lord of Miracles.

### Making a (blessed) home abroad

The religious images brought from Peru into Chile end up transforming the houses of these Peruvian migrants.<sup>16</sup> These images are certainly involved in the construction of their identity, but they also provide emotional comfort abroad.<sup>17</sup> The research carried out for this book was not

centred around the material objects of the participants' houses. The participants themselves highlighted the importance of these images, however, as well as the sense of comfort and protection they would offer during conversations about their difficult times. During a barbecue at the house of one of the brothers, a little ceremony took place. The brother's wife had just received an image of the Lord of Miracles; she asked the priest, a guest at the barbecue, to do the blessing. All the brothers gathered around the priest when he asked the image to protect the home and the family living there. In this ceremony home and family were tightly linked.

The images – and the faith they elicit – certainly provide their owners with emotional comfort. Nor are religious images limited to houses. Elena has an image of the Virgin of Chapi (patron saint of her home town Arequipa) hanging on the wall of her office. Her job, as the director of nursing in an oncological clinic, can be very stressful, and she explains how the presence of the image helps.

When I need to, I come to my office and lock the door, sit down and stare at the image of the Virgin for 10–15 minutes. When I am tired or having trouble, I just put the chair there, sit myself down and stare at the image, '*calladita*' [in deep, calm silence].

As she describes the process, Elena's voice instinctively adopts a calm and relaxed tone.

As stated earlier, these sacred images – and the peace of mind they bring – are portable. That is particularly evident in the case of Joaquín. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the long months of lockdown in Santiago, this 46-year-old electrician has lost his job; he has been moving from one place to another, switching between temporary hosts and temporary jobs. The one constant, he stresses, is his spirituality: he carries the image of the Lord of Miracles to every place to which he has had to move. 'I am the provider of my family and I have to get through this [pandemic]; my spirituality is always with me,' Joaquín declares (Fig. 3.4). He then sends a picture of the image of the Lord that he places on the door wherever he moves (Fig. 3.5).

### Religious expression in the smartphone

The smartphone provides another way to continue this religiosity in the everyday. Several of the research participants use angels or Christian images, the Lord of Miracles among them, as wallpapers (Fig. 3.6);



**Figure 3.4** A brotherhood gown bag. Picture shared by Joaquín through WhatsApp.



**Figure 3.5** An image of the Lord of Miracles hanging on the door. Picture shared by Joaquín through WhatsApp.

others have family pictures instead. The most obvious example of religion on the smartphone is the WhatsApp group of the brotherhood, in which everyday prayers and blessings are shared.<sup>18</sup> Apart from the



**Figure 3.6** A participant showing his smartphone wallpaper. Picture by Alfonso Otaegui.

brotherhood's multiple WhatsApp groups, there are other traits that display the user's religious beliefs.

Such is the case of Daniel, for example, who uses his smartphone to listen to the rosary when walking or travelling on the Santiago metro (underground) from home to work. He follows the webpage of the Knights of the Virgin, where audio files of people praying can be played. In silence, with his headphones on, he prays back, as in Christianity the rosary is prayed as a dialogue. Besides this specific scenario of religious smartphone use, most of the religiosity can also be noticed in the choice of content. Daniel goes on YouTube to watch videos on politics and the news, as do many non-religious people. However, his choice of content is carefully guided by his Catholic education, for example seeking out videos that are against abortion:

When you say something against abortion, the first thing people tell you is that [you think that because] you are Catholic ... [For example], this psychologist provides scientific arguments against abortion.

Other brothers' selection of content is also guided by their religious devotion, but the relationship is a bit more vague and more related to the general ethics of Christianity. This relationship is not evident, at least

not at the beginning. Taking a look at the smartphone of Javier, the 65-year-old welder, does not serve to reveal his religious devotions. Javier's smartphone wallpaper is not an image of the Purple Christ or a Saint (he is a devotee of San Martin de Porres as well), as it is in the case of other Peruvians. Instead it features Gojan, a character of Japanese anime Dragon Ball Z. During his commute, Javier likes to play a game similar to Space Invaders. It is when he watches series or films that his religious devotion comes to the foreground. He enthusiastically shows me lots of the Christian TV shows and films that he also likes to watch during his commute, explaining 'I like series or movies that deliver a message'.

### The everyday intimacy of prayers

It is not unusual for research participants to make reference to difficult moments in their lives when they are retracing their migration journeys. Often these may involve the story of a serious disease that they or a loved one has suffered from, or other difficulties experienced when migrating. In those cases, religious devotion is always part of the narrative. Right after finishing a story about a difficulty he had overcome, Roberto declares, in an assertive tone:

Every time I have had problems like this, when you think there is no way out, I have taken shelter in praying. I don't go often to the temple, the church, I'm not like that, but I am someone who prays, who asks, who believes and that has given me strength in difficult times ... I pray every day – not the rosary though! – but I do my prayer, come and look!

Roberto then moves on to show me his bedroom, where a nice big picture of the Lord of Miracles is hanging on the wall. Two other images of saints are on display on a chest of drawers. Just as Marcelo did, Roberto greets the images whenever he leaves and whenever he comes back. 'I have here my little sanctuary,' he remarks, in a tone that exudes peace of mind.

Many other participants spontaneously draw the same contrast between acknowledging that they do not attend mass as they are supposed to (in Catholicism devotees are expected to attend mass once a week) and making a point of saying that they pray every day.

It is necessary to make a clear distinction here between the verbs '*rezar*' and '*orar*' in Spanish, both of which can be translated into English as 'to pray'. *Rezar* implies the uttering, aloud or in one's head, of a specific prayer, such as 'Our Father' or 'Hail Mary'. However, the translation of

'rezar' as 'to recite a prayer' would not be accurate, as it fails to convey the heartfelt sense of the act, observed in so many rosaries throughout fieldwork.<sup>19</sup> This action is far more than mere verbal repetition, though that is at the centre of its definition.

'Orar', on the other hand, rather implies any words, desires, feelings, requests or expressions of gratitude directed towards God. It can be said that the discourse is much more personal, in the sense that it is not the repetition of a pre-defined prayer. Many research participants would say that they 'oran' a lot or that they find comfort in the 'oración' (performing the act of 'orar'). It can be said that many participants, through this everyday exercise of direct communication with God, seem to have a more personal relationship with Him. Gerardo, for example, a 49-year-old biochemist, is very devoted to the patron saints of his home town. He comments that, apart from going to mass every Sunday, he will 'ora' every night – even adding, while bursting out laughing:

I always ask God funny things ... I cannot be sad, I need to laugh!  
There are so many difficult things in life, that we have to laugh and  
to look up!

### Devotion gets deeper abroad

In Peru, religious expression is much more present in the public sphere. Whenever they were asked at the beginning of the study how they had got to know the Lord of Miracles, most of the participants would reply that it is, obviously, everywhere: 'When you are born in Peru, the first things you see is your mum, your dad and the Lord of Miracles'.<sup>20</sup> Migrants that have come to Chile find that country has much less faith and religious observance. As Ignacio says:

They are not very devoted in Chile. One notices that right away. It is rare to find a Chilean [who is a believer]. There is no devotion ... some [Chilean] people older than 50 are inclined to go to church. It is not like in Peru, where people are true believers and very devoted.

Peruvian migrants have brought their food, traditions and the images that they keep in their houses, in their wallets and as wallpapers on their smartphones. However, this is not an example of simple continuity of Peruvian practices carried out in the destination country. As migrants, they live an enhanced experience of devotion abroad. Most of them



highlighted the way in which they had become much more devout when living in Chile. 'I got closer to Our Lord while living as a migrant,' confesses Pablo. The reason might be (in their words) the emotional comfort that faith and tradition provide when they are away from their families. As Javier observes:

Here in Chile, I am closer to the church. [While] in Peru I had my family to pray for me; here I go [to church] more often.

His argument replicates one also expressed by Liliana (see below). These Peruvian migrants, so used to the pervasive presence of religion in the public sphere in Peru, come to Chile, a country that is less devout. They thus have to produce their own private and public forms of religious expression and integrate these into their daily lives.

### **Proud workaholics: the time-less everyday**

There is a third aspect of the everyday life of Peruvian migrants that may be regarded as typical: their strong dedication to work. Several studies on Peruvians in Santiago<sup>21</sup> focus on the work trajectories of migrants. Many of these stories feature an improvement in working conditions, with the migrants moving from precarious jobs into better roles where they are either more independent<sup>22</sup> or paid better salaries. Most of the research participants state that they can afford a better quality of life in Chile than they would have been able to in Peru. All of the participants in the study display great dedication (both in time and energy) to work, either in their discourse or in their actions.

Such a dedication to work has also had an impact upon fieldwork and its methodology. The interviews conducted in the participants' houses took place after one year of fieldwork. In the participants' own words, they saw this use of their free time as a favour they were doing to a fellow member of the brotherhood, rather than thinking of it as participating in a university study.

The brotherhood's regular monthly meetings are another example of the value that is placed on time dedicated to working. Attending these meetings is compulsory; if a member cannot attend, he or she must ask for permission for absence a couple of days before. 'Work' is by far the reason most frequently invoked to ask for a waiver. It is one that is accepted without any discussion: '*si es por trabajo, se entiende* ('if [the absence] is due to work, one understands'),' said the leader of a

battalion when urging his brothers to go to church more often. Javier, the 65-year-old welder who has a minor position in the brotherhood, highlights that he takes one Sunday off work each month in order to attend the meeting: ‘That Sunday is for the Lord,’ he declares, as if not working on Sunday implied taking a holiday. In the same way Martin, the 65-year-old security guard, takes that day off to go to the meeting, observing: ‘I am not going to be richer or poorer for working or not working that day’. The idea that one must be working all the time permeates all these declarations. It seems that they want to state how important the brotherhood meeting is – to do so they highlight that they go as far as missing a day of work in order to attend.

There is a certain value in their dedication to work that is closer to the notion of sacrifice. Some of them do not hide their pride when they say, with a barely contained smile, ‘My family says I am a workaholic ... and they are right!’ Others may not be as straightforward in using that category, but are nonetheless prepared to go into quite a lot of detail, explaining how busy they are every day. There are certain values that underpin every conversation: family, devotion and work. Many of the participants recount the story of their lives and their migration journey as a series of jobs, telling the story of how they managed to excel in each of them. In a way, work seems to be an everyday duty they fulfil to support their families, both back in Peru and here in Chile. [Chapter 2](#) showed that these late middle-aged Peruvian migrants are unable to picture themselves not working. Such a perspective is understandable: it is what they do most of the time. Life would be so full of time without work. Such dedication to work could be understood as a way of giving meaning to life. It seems that working is a form of sacrifice, a point that will be clarified in later chapters.

## The invisible point of no return

So far, this chapter has focused on the everyday practices that see Peruvian migrants bringing something from their country to Chile, such as gastronomy or religious devotion. This section will consider whether there is a certain point when the migrants feel they are really settled in Chile – a point when they feel they have achieved a standard of living that is acceptable to them. It has been difficult to find that point during conversations and even in semi-formal interviews, where explicit questions are asked about it. One common point that emerges

from the interviews is that the migrants had not imagined they would live in Chile for as long as they have. Another important point is the common story they tell about going on a trip to visit Peru just a couple of years or so after having migrated to Chile. During that short trip many realised that they could no longer picture themselves back in Peru. Rather than settling in Chile, they had dis-adapted from Peru. This realisation manifested itself in the simple everyday things, such as the noise of the city or the traffic.

Elena, for example, refuses to drive when in Peru, even though she drives to work in Chile every day. City traffic is way more disordered in Peru than it is in Chile: watching hundreds of cars entering and leaving a roundabout in Lima resembles cattle running into a pen too small to contain them. Lima, for example, is notorious for its chaotic traffic.<sup>23</sup> 'When I go back to Peru,' comments Elena, 'I just sit inside a taxi and close my eyes.'

The problem does not lie with the traffic in itself. It is rather than the traffic is a sign of disorder, of the things from her home country she does not like. Elena states that there are certain things that she dislikes about Peruvians: they have the tendency to yell, they push people in line, they sound their horns all the time and are bullies when it comes to being in traffic. Elena is one of the few people who are certain about staying in Chile after retirement. One of the reasons for this is that her daughters do not want to live in Peru.

For Roberto and his wife, the final decision to stay in Chile was also made by and for their children. While in Santiago, time went by and their two children grew up. Six years after their arrival in Chile, the whole family travelled back to Lima for a short visit. They showed the city and the country to their sons, then teenagers, and asked them whether they wanted to live in the country in which they had been born. Both boys replied that they liked the people and the food, but that they would not live in Lima. Roberto pointed out that if they could afford to have the same standard of living and the quality of life they have in Santiago, they could reasonably consider the possibility of returning. The family then travelled back to Lima two or three more times, but came to the same conclusion. Santiago is more ordered, there are more possibilities here.

The idea of the point of no return is that there comes a moment when the migrant goes back, only to realise that they have become accustomed to the way things are in Chile and find it difficult to picture themselves being back in Peru. Another aspect of this point (as exemplified by

the stories of Elena and Roberto) is that, in a way, the major argument for staying in Chile is simply that it is where their children are. The story of Orlando illustrates this last argument.

While most of the research participants' nuclear families are in Chile, Orlando's family is split between Peru and Chile. A 57-year-old working-class man, he has worked as a carpenter, caretaker, builder and, recently, as a gas repairman. His wife has been working in Chile as a domestic worker. He comes from a little village in the Amazonian rainforest and is shyer and quieter than the other members of the brotherhood. Orlando has a Chilean granddaughter here, through his daughter's marriage to a Chilean man. His other two children are living in Peru. He is now planning to split his time between living in Chile and living in Peru, choosing to spend six months in each. He intends to live in Chile during the winter, as it is the peak season for repairing heaters, and in Peru for the rest of the year (both in the Amazonian rainforest where he is from and in Lima, where he would earn an income by driving a motorcycle taxi). Yet he maintains 'I will always come to Chile, I have roots here, my daughter is here', and so does not fit the 'never coming back to Peru' line that was discussed earlier.

Orlando is probably suffering from some depression here in Chile, a feeling that his shy personality does not allow him to communicate directly. However, he is able to express it indirectly when talking about the weather:

My body feels different in Chile. It feels heavier, I don't have the strength to lift any weight, it is not as in the rainforest. I think Chile is lower [*sic*] than Peru. The air is different, you don't feel the same energy, you don't eat the same.

When he speaks about the rainforest, Orlando cannot help smiling and tapping his stomach with pride:

These last months that I spent there [in the rainforest in Peru] I felt strong, people even said I had put on some weight..!

In a way, Orlando illustrates the 'point of no return' through a contradiction. He cannot go back to Peru for good, as he has developed roots in Chile. At the same time he does not really feel at ease in Chile, not enough to be able to stay here forever. The situation is not uncommon among migrants. In the following section, the story of Liliana illustrates the contradictory emotions and decisions that migration and the possible return to the homeland might imply.

## Liliana and the long-awaited return

The story of Liliana perfectly illustrates the ambivalence of reaching late middle age as a migrant and having to confront the decision of whether to stay in the destination country or return to the beloved home in Peru. Liliana, now 61 years old, has been living in Chile for over 30 years. In many ways, throughout our conversation, it might seem as if she had just started to live a new life in a new country.

We meet at a café near the Latin American Church, although I have met her on several other occasions at events organised by the Peruvian community. Liliana displays elegance in her way of dressing, her careful manners, her soft tone of voice. After every question or comment, she pauses and reflects for a while before answering. There is something in her gaze that says she has overcome a long period of sadness, as if the peace and tranquillity she transmits were also new to herself.

‘Adapting to a new country is hard,’ she asserts quite plainly at the beginning of the conversation, setting the tone for the rest of it. She is perhaps the research participant who has struggled to adapt to Chile the longest, or at least the one who dares to express that difficulty in the most vivid and straightforward way. Back in Peru, in the 1980s, she had a very good job as an accountant for a Swedish company. She was doing well, but her husband was not. He worked in the healthcare sector and knew he would get paid double or triple the amount he got in Peru if he practised his profession in Chile, so they decided to migrate.

As happens to most Peruvian migrants, Liliana found Chilean food to be a very strong reminder that she was abroad. For her it became a metaphor for the experience of migration and the difficulties of adaptation:

At first, I would try to cook Peruvian food with Chilean ingredients, but that wouldn’t work at all. Everything I tried to prepare came out wrong.

Like many others who followed their partners to Chile, Liliana expresses ambivalence towards those first years. She stills feels deeply grateful to their Chilean neighbours who had been very supportive to her, then a mother with a three-year-old child. ‘They would bring me milk for the baby, they would lend me pots to cook in, they made it a nice experience,’ she recalls. Yet she also recalls quite distinctly how deeply she regretted coming to Chile.

I left my house, my job, my family, my friends to come here. It was a decision that was too traumatic for me. Until 10 years ago, I still regretted that decision.

Bureaucratic issues and differences in the legal systems of Chile prevented her from working in similar professional roles to the ones she had held in Peru. Liliana remembered how comfortable she had felt in her home country and wanted to go back, but her husband was doing well in his new job in Chile; with his salary, they could afford a better quality of life than before. She started working as a secretary, but discovered one day that their nanny had mistreated their two children. She fired her. 'I had to choose between being a mum or being a professional,' Liliana states clearly, a trait typical of her. She started working part-time instead, enabling her to take care of their children fully. A couple of decades later, although she does not feel fulfilled as a professional, she still believes that she made the right choice, feeling that she did a good job as a mother.

Later on Liliana found a sense of fulfilment in helping out with welfare-related initiatives. She went on to join the Peruvian Ladies, a social club originally founded by the wives of Peruvian diplomats, and participated in many welfare initiatives aimed at migrants, usually in collaboration with the Latin American Church.

As with other research participants, Liliana finds that she is more active as a religious person in Chile than she had been in Peru. She reflects on whether her migrant status might be the reason for this:

Perhaps it is the distance ... perhaps it is the loneliness, [when] not having your family in Chile, you grab onto God. In Peru you have your mum, your uncles and you tend to forget [religion] a little, it moves into the background. Here it doesn't. God is in the foreground. In Peru, family covers that space.

Liliana struggled on a daily basis with the fact that she was living in Chile, a situation that continued for many, many years. She did not really want to come in the first place, and subsequently found it difficult to get used to the life here. 'It was like living like a fakir, dealing with the pain every day,' she asserts. She decided to undergo psychological counselling. After talking to her, the counsellor stated the obvious: that she had problems adapting. Gradually Liliana started to accept the fact that she had moved to Chile. This was 10 years ago and since then she has been feeling better. She now looks like someone at peace with herself.

When the question of going back to Peru is finally asked, her reply is no different from the other participants, who seem to have adapted to years earlier than she did.

When you go back there, it is for [your] holidays. People are busy working, you barely see them. For one or two days you do your family visits, but then you get bored...

Eventually Liliana made friends here, her children made friends here, and things changed. As she explains, there comes a moment when *'uno se va dejando'* ('you let yourself go', i.e. 'you abandon your return projects'). Liliana seems much more rooted in Chile now:

I love very much my Chile. I am Peruvian but I am also a nationalised Chilean. I owe a lot to Chile. (Notice the possessive adjective before 'Chile')

Sometimes, Liliana and her husband think about going back to Peru for good, but she no longer has a strong opinion on this. Besides, they have already bought a house here. Their older parents needing care has become the main reason to go back for good. Once her husband retires in a couple of years, she believes they will be going back and forth between the two countries: three months there, three months here. That way, Liliana will become the embodiment of in betweenness: not living definitely here, not definitely there.

## Peru with me ... through music

*Cuando despiertan mis ojos y veo  
Que sigo viviendo contigo Perú  
Emocionado doy gracias al cielo  
Por darme la vida contigo Perú*

*When my eyes wake up, and I see  
That I still live with you, Peru  
Moved, I thank the Heaven  
For giving me life with you, Peru*

'Peru with you', a song by Augusto Polo Campos popularised by Arturo 'Zambo' Cavero and Óscar Avilés

Another everyday experience that links Peruvian migrants to their home country is listening to the radio or to some cherished piece of music. All events organised by Peruvian migrants, whether religious or not, are accompanied by music – loud music, cheerful music, dance music such as salsa and traditional Peruvian music. At many dinners at the Peruvian Brotherhood, it was common to hire a singer<sup>24</sup> who would sing popular songs, for example ‘Peru with you’ quoted above. Music sets an ambiance charged with memories and affectivity at all of these events. However, this also happens as the participants go about their everyday lives.

Music is very much present in the migrants’ daily lives (whenever possible). During interviews conducted in the participants’ homes, it was not unusual for them to have the radio playing music in the background, sometimes a little bit loudly. As mentioned in the [previous chapter](#), Ana María battles depressive thoughts, possibly caused due to menopause, with cheerful music – usually something that lifts the mood, like salsa or other genres of danceable music. Marcelo, a 58-year-old businessman whom we met in [Chapter 2](#), has several apps on his smartphone which he uses to listen to Peruvian music or salsa. Javier, the middle-class welder living north of Santiago, likes to listen to salsa on his commute to work. Marcelo and his brother Pablo also like to listen to Peruvian radio in order to keep up with the news on politics and the economy in their home country. This practice of listening to music helps them to establish a connection that media anthropologist Jo Tacchi describes as an ‘affective rhythm’.<sup>25</sup>

By doing fieldwork among low-income workers in Bristol in the UK, Tacchi observed that radio has the ability to generate certain moods; it can even evoke – and in my terms, re-create – affective states. Tacchi has shown that the sound of radio can create and maintain what she calls ‘domestic soundscapes’; these in turn help to maintain a dynamic and affective equilibrium.<sup>26</sup> Even though Tacchi’s fieldwork took place in the mid-1990s and her ethnography refers to the practice of listening to the traditional radio, her analysis also applies to listening to a smartphone radio app. These apps set an affective rhythm by playing Peruvian music and salsa. In addition, some of these Peruvian migrants continue to listen to news about and from Peru in their daily lives. There is company in music and, thanks to the affordance of the smartphone, it can be enjoyed anywhere.

This does not mean, of course, that all Peruvian migrants are listening to Peruvian music all of the time. Some of them listen to music (and share it through Facebook) that relates to a specific time in their lives rather than to Peru itself. Pablo, for instance, likes to listen to INXS,



Soda Stereo and Vilma Palma – all music groups typical of the 1980s in South America and worldwide, in his words. To take another example, were someone to guess Ignacio's nationality based on his musical preferences, they would most likely – and erroneously – think that he comes from Mexico: after all one can find, all over his Facebook, posts of videos and lyrics from the Mexican group Mana. Certainly Mana are an important part of Ignacio's life, as he noted several times.

Mana is my favourite band. I had the pleasure and the honour of attending a concert while in Arica.

These 'affective rhythms', as Tacchi calls them, are tuned to the migrants' own personal experiences. These Peruvian migrants develop a continuity of practices when moving to a new country. They continue to listen to the music that made a mark on them at a certain time in their lives, music that might remind them of their country or of their past experiences there.

## Conclusion

This chapter is titled 'Everyday life', but what it actually refers to is the everyday life of a migrant who cannot picture himself or herself going back to his home country for good. In a way, the whole chapter dwells upon the everyday experience of living an existence founded on 'in betweenness'. The chapter has then focused on the aspects that most resonate with Peruvians in Chile: food, devotion and work, all with music in the background.

There is an underlying common thread to the whole chapter: the notion of adaptation. Marcos, the subject of the first ethnographic vignette, does not feel at ease back in Peru, even though he misses it a lot when in Chile and does not want the same to happen to his son. Peruvian migrants are in constant adaptation to the new country, re-creating and perpetuating old practices in Chile. In their own way, they have managed to stay in between the two countries for many years. Some of them, for example Orlando and Liliana, are effectively poised halfway between Chile and Peru. Orlando is planning to live in each country for half the year. Liliana had managed to develop roots in Chile many years after having been uprooted from Peru, but now faces the possibility of going back and forth between the two countries in a couple of years.

The everyday practices described in this chapter constitute, in some cases, re-creations of what is done in Peru (for example, Peruvian gastronomy). In some others, such as everyday religious expression, the experience is enhanced by the distance. Preparing Peruvian food with Chilean ingredients is a concrete act, yet it is also a metaphor for the lives of migrants as they seek to establish themselves. Roberto has learned to prepare *ceviche* with Chilean fish, while Gerardo will never accept a *ceviche* with white onion (Peruvian purple onion is an essential for him). These are examples of recurring negotiations, from the relatively simple choice of which ingredients to cook with to the changes in aspirations towards the future. Being a migrant implies a series of negotiations, with the children of these Peruvian migrants often being a crucial factor in many of the decisions they have to make. For Roberto and Elena, it is clear that they will spend their retirement years in Chile, as their children plan to stay here. The children's desires are put before those of the parents, leading to the notion of sacrifice: they have made this decision for their children. The notion of sacrifice is also what underpins the migrants' religious practices and their strong commitment to work.

What about ageing? While the term is not explicitly used in this chapter, it permeates the practices described in this chapter in two ways. On the one hand, these Peruvian migrants are reaching an age that is closer and closer to retirement. Even if they are not planning on retiring yet (as shown in the [previous chapter](#)), turning 60 poses a question about the future, about where to spend the last 15 or 20 years of their life. The future seems not to be about them, however, but about their children. The latter are starting to become independent, allowing the migrants more time for themselves. On the other hand, age is not mentioned because it is in a way (at least in their discourse) a non-issue. As argued in [Chapter 3](#), these migrants are experiencing an unexpected vitality. Their activities remain those they used to do a few years ago, albeit carried out with less intensity (not so much partying, fewer spicy dressings, less coffee and so on). In a way, they find themselves to be somewhere in between the experience of intense youth they enjoyed some years ago and the inevitable natural decay of old age.

As with most comparative studies, referring to someone as ageing does not mean they are 'elderly'; instead, it refers to the period of life that is neither youth nor old age. In their everyday life, these migrants are also in between two countries. However, it seems that they have finally managed to re-create some of the experience of Peruvian food and faith in Chile, a country that is more ordered and offers opportunities yet – from the migrants' perspective – lacks the keynotes of taste and faith.

## Notes

1. Another of the first things mentioned by migrants about their early days in Chile is the cold weather. Several mentioned how hard the first winters were for them. Despite this, it would seem that the most difficult step in their adaptation to Chile was not the cold weather but the food. The migrants had either to get used to Chilean food or find one way or another of obtaining Peruvian food.
2. Even during a meeting to edit a Christian magazine, they would buy *tamales* at the big market *La Vega Central*. The customers were upper middle-class Peruvians and they bought from street vendors that they trusted.
3. *Capsicum pubescens* is a spicy pepper, native to Peru and Bolivia.
4. A refreshing beverage originally from Peru, prepared with purple corn, sugar, pineapple peels, cloves, cinnamon and lemon. It is usually sold in the street and in restaurants.
5. Stefoni 2008.
6. A Peruvian *tamal* is a variety of *tamal* dating from pre-Columbian times. It is made of corn-based dough, chicken and spicy condiments.
7. Eugenia's story is just a hint of the resourcefulness of Peruvians. I witnessed something similar in the migrants' neighbourhood where I live in Santiago, where on Sunday there is a fruit and vegetable market. Besides the stalls authorised by the municipality, there are many people – mostly Peruvian and Venezuelan migrants – who sell food prepared on the street on re-arranged supermarket trolleys. Whenever the police appear, these street-food sellers have to run away and hide. I usually buy *shambar*, a thick soup typically from the northern city of Trujillo, from the same Peruvian vendor. On one of these weekends there was a very strong police presence patrolling the streets and no street vendors could be seen. However, this vendor was still at his usual corner. When I passed close to him, he mumbled, in a very soft tone: '*shambar, patasca, shambar*', as usual naming his products for sale. I approached him and told him I wanted to buy *shambar*. He glanced to both sides, to check that the police were not coming, then took me to an old communal house on that same corner. Inside the central interior patio were two or three trolleys of food vendors, a couple of tables and people eating. There I was able to buy my usual Sunday Peruvian dish, safely hidden from the police.
8. A chicken stew with a typical yellow colour due to the use of *ají amarillo* ('yellow pepper'), a cultivar of *Capsicum baccatum*.
9. *Cité* is a collective housing model. It was established in Santiago in the beginning of the twentieth century to provide a solution for inadequate supplies of housing (Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes, 2015. *La Ruta del Cité. El Diseño de una Forma de Vida*). Broadly speaking, it consists of groups of similar houses sharing the same courtyard, towards which all the house fronts are oriented.
10. Imilan 2013.
11. Imilan 2013, 26. See also Imilan 2015.
12. Tjijoux 2013b.
13. During the 'XXth Migration Conference INCAMI 2018' organised by the National Catholic Institute for Migration, the director of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Migration was a guest speaker. He tried to elicit the sympathy of a difficult audience – mostly consisting of NGO workers criticising the State immigration policies – by listing the many good things that migrants had brought to Chile. The first item on his list was Peruvian gastronomy.
14. At the lowest socio-economic level there are food vendors on the street. As described in Note 7 above, they tend to sell their dishes on modified supermarket trolleys and usually have to hide whenever the local police appear. A *shambar*, for example, would cost CLP 2,500 (£2.50). There are also many restaurants that are cheap and serve huge portions of food for affordable prices; here an *arroz chaufa* would cost CLP 5,000–7,000 (£5–7). After that comes a big diversity of restaurants progressively increasing in price and aiming at a more gourmet market. Prices in these start at CLP 15,000 (£15) for a main dish.
15. As part of fieldwork, I went on a trip with a small group of the research participants to Puno and Arequipa in October 2019. Its aim was to participate in the processions of Our Lord of Miracles in those Peruvian cities. Both were massive events, with worshippers following the procession through sun and rain, past many, many 'homages' – little altars with offerings prepared by the house owners – every 50 metres (164 feet). Both processions looked and felt like popular communal events.

16. As M. Csikszentmihalyi and E. Rochberg-Halton have noted: 'Although one has little control over the things encountered outside the home, household objects are chosen [...]. Thus household objects constitute an ecology of signs that reflects as well as shapes the pattern of the owner's self' (2002, 17).
17. Macarena Bonhomme has carried out research on the material culture in the houses of migrants (2011), including specifically among Peruvian migrants in Chile (2013). She found that Peru is reflected in photographs and in food, while Chile was represented by technological devices, a sign of their hard work and sacrifice. Bonhomme interviewed 14 individuals, 12 of whom were female domestic workers. She points out that most of the houses and rooms of her research participants display a common pattern: photographs on the walls, framed photos on the shelves, as well as what the author describes as 'posters of religious character', diplomas of their children or drawings (2013, 72). The participants in that study identified objects that reminded them of Peru (mostly family photographs) as the ones that were most precious to them.
18. See Chapter 5 for more details on this WhatsApp group.
19. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, rosaries have moved on to Zoom. In twice-weekly meetings over 40 people pray together, half of them with their webcams on. Some of them point the webcam to images or candles, while others allow their faces to be seen during the rosary. The passion and concentration they display is not conveyed by the translation 'to recite a rosary'.
20. In Chapter 7 it will be argued that religious expression also permeates communal life throughout the year. The calendar in Peru is full of communal religious celebrations every month, not just during Holy Week and Christmas, the most important dates of the liturgic year.
21. Stefoni and Bonhomme 2014, 2015.
22. For example, a live-in domestic worker becoming a live-out domestic worker.
23. See, for example, 'Lima – the third worst congested city in the world'. Retrieved from <https://www.perutelegraph.com/news/peruvian-economy/lima-the-third-worst-congested-city-in-the-world>.
24. The singer later joined the brotherhood.
25. Tacchi 2009, 172.
26. Tacchi 2009, 172; 2002.

## 4

# Social relations: intensified Peruvian sociality abroad

### Introduction: coming to a new country

As noted in the introduction, the research for this book initially focused on an area delineated as a fieldsite but ended up being more of a networked field research, dispersed within the boundaries of Santiago. This network is constituted by Peruvian migrants who came to Chile in the late 1980s and 1990s, as well as some who came in the 2000s. Peruvians in Chile sooner or later end up building up networks around other Peruvian migrants. Many of these migrants came to Chile over 20 years ago with no network in the country at all, apart from the occasional relative who had migrated earlier. How did these Peruvian migrants build up their Peruvian social circles? What exactly is there about these social circles that reminds them of their home country?

This chapter will focus mostly on the social networks of middle-class professional migrants. It will present the way new migrants come to know about these Peruvian social circles and how they integrate into them. In so doing, it will try to answer questions about the sense of belonging deployed and exercised through these Peruvian social circles. What is distinctive about these social circles, besides the nationality of their members? It will be argued that, apart from the usual answers – Peruvian food and Peruvian national days – an aura of communal solidarity, according to participants quite rare in Chile, permeates certain gatherings. This chapter is a continuation of [Chapter 3](#), which discussed participants' re-creation in Chile of some aspects of their lives in Peru. A good part of Peru's re-creation in Chile consists of maintaining an active social life with other Peruvian migrants. This chapter thus concentrates on the strategies deployed by participants first to meet fellow citizens in Chile and then to engage in the typically intense Peruvian sociality there.

However, this chapter's emphasis on Peruvian social circles does not mean that participants only socialise with other Peruvian migrants.

This chapter displays the data through a chronological arrangement. First, it presents an account of research participants' experiences during their early years in Chile. Their reasons for migrating are discussed, as are the ways in which they managed to settle in. The space of Plaza de Armas – one of the main gathering points for Peruvian migrants – is also described, together with the various ways in which Peruvians from different socio-economic backgrounds see this urban space, traditionally associated with migrants. The chapter then moves on to consider another core meeting place for Latin American migrants: the Latin American Church. Here the focus is more upon the social aspects of the church as a point of encounter and network building. The story of a domestic worker provides a clear depiction of the way in which the Latin American Church forms part of the experience of migrants in Santiago.

Within that church, religious brotherhoods will be analysed as social hubs which can serve as a point of entry into several Peruvian networks. (The analysis of the communal religiosity of Peruvian migrants and the organisation of processions is explored in more detail in [Chapter 7](#).) These networks are presented through the life of a particular individual, a successful professional actively involved in many of them. After depicting these social circles and the events they organise, the chapter will attempt to find an underlying common thread. This leads on to the study of the most iconic type of Peruvian meeting, the *pollada* (a chicken party thrown in order to raise funds for various causes). The study of the *pollada* will be helpful in understanding the way in which Peruvian sociality is deployed, and hopefully the reason why Peruvian migrants need to recreate this Peruvian sociality in Chile.

## Coming to Chile – or rather leaving Peru

Why do people migrate? The question is very large and the reasons multicausal. Each specific reply from each research participant had the shape of a life story. However, it can be said that most of them came to Chile to look for better work opportunities and to achieve an economic stability they could not find in Peru.

Some participants had come to Chile in the late 1980s, seeking to escape the economic crisis during the government of Alan García, Peru's president at the time, as well as the constant threat of terrorism. Such was the case of Esteban, a businessman then aged 34, whose story is

given below, and of Marcelo, another businessman. Other migrants, such as Eugenia and Roberto, arrived later, in the 1990s; they had established successful careers in Peru, but found themselves without work or having to accept poor salaries. Their age at the time, around 40, made it difficult to compete with more energetic young workers willing to accept lower salaries, so they decided to migrate.

Half of the research participants said that they did not know anyone, such as a sibling or a friend, who was already living here. The other half already knew someone living in Chile who could help them in their first months: a sister, a cousin or a brother. In some cases one half of a couple would migrate first and the other partner would join them there. Such was the case of Roberto, whose wife migrated first as her sister lived in Chile. Roberto stayed in Peru to take care of their young children. Almost a year later he came to Chile as a tourist and managed to complete his immigration paperwork just before his tourist visa expired. Accounts from lower-income migrants contain more elements of risk; Teresa, for example, describes how she had to travel illegally in the luggage compartment of a bus, as the border police would not allow her to enter the country. Most of them were able to get their official papers in a relatively short time compared to today.

However, it must be said that not everyone came specifically to look for a job or a better economic position. Estefanía, for example, came to Chile in the late 1980s, partly for a holiday but also to have a break from her conservative family. She ended up liking the country very much and, after a short return trip to Peru, she migrated, despite her father's disapproval. The same goes for Javier, who came to Chile as a tourist at about the same time as Estefanía. He liked it so much that he decided to stay for good and formed a new family in Chile.

Some cases are halfway between coming for the stability and just happening to like it while being here. These are the cases of Gerardo and Alberto, for example, both of whom came from the city of Arequipa and went to Chile to do their postgraduate studies. They came in the mid-1990s in order to specialise within their areas of expertise. Gerardo had planned to go back to Peru after completing his studies, but the opportunities here – and the lack of them back in Arequipa – made him stay. Alberto had also promised his wife Elena that they would go back to Peru, but a sudden condition – a brain haemorrhage – delayed their return. In the end they decided to stay in Santiago for good. Elena is happy now in Chile, after 28 years, but it was not like that at that time. 'I was counting down the time: minus two months, minus one month [until I could return],' she recalls, with a hint of nostalgia. She had even left her job

in Chile when Alberto had the cerebral haemorrhage, but leaving then became problematic: he was not allowed to fly and they had stay for regular check-ups.

Despite the diversity of experiences and the subtleties of their personal stories, an underlying common thread begins to emerge. These migrants came to Chile to look for a certain predictability they could not have in Peru (as noted above some of them, such as Javier and Estefanía, unexpectedly came across this stability during a holiday trip and then decided to stay).

Most of them use the vague category of 'for a better future' to describe their reasons for migrating. After many conversations about their life experience 20 to 30 years ago, a clearer picture appears. It seems that rather than coming to Chile, the migrants were leaving Peru. They were not leaving the country or rejecting their whole life experience in their home country, but they were escaping the aspects they could no longer bear: the economic crisis, insecurity, job instability, etc. There was a lot from Peru they would still love: the people (including family and friends), some simple things (food and customs), music and religion. Some parts of this they would bring later, for instance brothers, sisters or their parents (see [Chapter 6](#)), while other aspects were re-created in Chile: gastronomy (see [Chapter 3](#)), religious experience (see [Chapters 7 and 8](#)) and sociality. This chapter focuses on this last aspect.

Thirty years later, none of the research participants regrets coming to Chile. They miss their parents and relatives, but they are happy that they stayed. Not even Liliana regrets it, despite her difficulties adapting during the 30 years she has been here (see [Chapter 3](#)), nor Elena, who once used to count down the days until she was able to return to her home country.

## First years: working on settling

[Chapter 3](#) showed that Peruvians continue to reproduce certain practices from their home country abroad, for example consuming Peruvian food and practising their religion every day. What happens, then, with Peruvian sociality? Many of the research participants reported having no meetings with other Peruvian migrants in their first years living in Chile; only after three or four years did they start to meet other fellow countrymen. Why did this happen? Why did they not meet other people from their home country right away? A good reason for this might be that during their first years in the new country these migrants were focused on



working hard and establishing themselves in their jobs. In cases such as Elena's, discussed above, they are simply not yet sure whether they would like to stay for good. Some of them may have initially come for short-term projects, such as pursuing postgraduate studies, or may have been accompanying their partner there. Finally, some of them came because they were offered a job, but were unsure at the beginning whether they would stay for long (certainly not as long as they ended up staying).

Chapter 3 described the ways in which migrants tried to continue eating Peruvian food from day one. When it comes to social life, however, it would seem that it is only once these migrants have settled in Chile – or rather un-settled from Peru – that they begin to regain the desire to meet other Peruvians or to attend Peruvian events. Once they have decided to do this, where do they tend to go? Middle-class professionals tend to go to the Latin American Church. However, there is another point of reference for Peruvian migrants that should be analysed first.

## Plaza de Armas: the landing strip for Peruvian migrants

Joaquín, the 46-year-old electrician, has been living in Chile for four years.<sup>1</sup> In June 2020, speaking through Zoom in locked-down Santiago, he describes his decision to go to Chile. He went to Chile with no actual work opportunity, only the promise a friend had made. The reason was simple:

I came to Chile because a friend living here called me and said: come here and work, you can get one million pesos for a month's salary!<sup>2</sup> ... I asked for a loan, bought the ticket, packed my suitcase and came.

Joaquín left his family behind (wife, children and grandchildren), but they would join him later. When he arrived at Santiago International Airport he did not know where to go; it was his first time in Chile – in fact, his first time outside Peru. An older man, also travelling from Peru, said that he would help Joaquín and invited him into his cab. 'He took me to Plaza de Armas and said "This is it, here is where you should go". So I got out of the car and started wandering down the street next to the Cathedral,' he explains (Fig. 4.1). Joaquín was supposed to meet his friend there, but the friend did not pick up his phone.

As the hours went by, it got dark. Joaquín started to wander backwards and forwards along Cathedral Street, between Plaza de Armas and



**Figure 4.1** A still from the film 'Plaza de Armas' by the Visual Anthropology Lab, Pontifical Catholic University of Chile.

[https://youtu.be/UO\\_nrORRAS8](https://youtu.be/UO_nrORRAS8).

the corner of a snail gallery, which is full of Peruvian shops. Then something puzzling happened to him. Even now Joaquín still has a puzzled look on his face as he recalls:

I was just walking, worried, dragging my suitcase with me. I was in a new city and this friend was not reachable. I just kept walking back and forth when, at one point, one person stopped me and gave 1,000 pesos. I did not understand why and I kept walking. Then another man stopped me and gave 3,000 pesos. 'What's going on?' I asked him. 'Why is everybody giving me money?' 'You seem to be lost, my friend. You are Peruvian, did you just arrive in Chile?' he asked. 'This is to help you out, we all started like this. [Do] you know the shop that is just around here? You can get lunch there for 2,000 pesos.' I thanked him and went there to have lunch. I was starving, so that was great..!

Even though some hours later, Joaquín managed to reach his friend by phone and this contact promised to come and fetch him, he never did. 'I am still waiting for him,' observes Joaquín four years later, with a touch of irony not unusual for him. Instead he went to a hotel near Plaza de Armas for the night. There, using the hotel's computer, he reached a friend in Peru through Facebook. After reproaching him for going to Chile without a concrete plan, this Peruvian friend made some arrangements

for Joaquín. Her brother lived in Santiago, so she called him and gave him some instructions for Joaquín. This friend's brother finally hosted Joaquín for the first weeks and even helped him to get a job, just before his visa expired.

## Peruvian perspectives on Plaza de Armas

Joaquín's account of Plaza de Armas as a place of gathering for Peruvian migrants is not surprising. This area has been described in the literature on Peruvian migrants in Chile as 'Little Lima', a reference to the capital city of Peru.<sup>3</sup> However, there was something in Joaquín's account that was indeed surprising: he presented the Plaza de Armas area and its people in a very positive light. This depiction was at odds with what most of the other research participants – middle-class professionals and some upper middle-class businesspeople – had stated. Usually, when I met them for the first time or during our initial conversations at a dinner or a religious celebration, they would highlight the fact that they were all professionals, as if I had de facto different expectations.<sup>4</sup> This is not at all surprising, given the general association in Chile between Latin American migrants and low-income workers.<sup>5</sup> These professionals tended to criticise the way people behave in the Plaza de Armas area. They wanted to distance themselves from Plaza de Armas, or at least from the image of it in the early 2000s. There is something about the image of Peru projected by this space that they tend to reject. Gerardo, who had explained why Peruvians would gather in places like Plaza de Armas anywhere in the world (see [Chapter 1](#)), highlights that he never went there in Santiago, adding:

It was full of Peruvians in the 2000s and 2010s, people spoke about 'Little Lima'. Rubbish was a problem, some people would urinate, we Peruvians became stigmatised as filthy people, but it has got better since.

The depiction of Plaza de Armas as seen by upper middle-class Peruvians shows that certain socio-economic differences are also brought into the new country. This is also a first hint of how important the projected image of Peru in the receiving country is for Peruvian migrants. This point is developed further later in this chapter and revisited in [Chapter 7](#), when discussing the display of popular devotion in the streets of Santiago.

This distinction, between the Peruvian migrants seen at Plaza de Armas and the professional migrants, comes up every now and then, especially when talking to the professional participants. 'At least you get to know another type of migrant,' commented Pablo, the 60-year-old businessman, when we chatted about his life journey and his arrival in Chile.<sup>6</sup> However, there is a place where migrants from all socio-economic strata gather: the Latin American Church.

## The Latin American Church

Certainly, the Latin American Church is another point of reference for Peruvian migrants. While Plaza de Armas can be associated with lower-income migrants, the Latin American Church gathers Peruvian migrants from all socio-economic strata. At this church Peruvians from a lower socio-economic background receive support and legal advice on visas, job offers and the possibility of affordable housing for the first days. Peruvians from the middle- and upper middle-class find in the religious brotherhoods hosted at the church an opportunity to socialise and develop networks. Crucially, however, all migrants can find spiritual support in the Latin American Church, together with the opportunity to honour their patron saints from their home countries.

Some of the participants did not know about the existence of this church during their first years in Chile, nor about the Peruvian brotherhoods hosted there. Eugenia, for example, the 60-year-old bank employee, first discovered it back in 1999, when walking with her sister not far from the church. As they strolled, they noticed a couple of purple balloons. Purple is the distinctive colour of the gowns of the Lord of the Miracle devotees, also known as 'the purple Christ', so this immediately caught their attention. Eugenia and Estefanía speeded up their walk. They followed the balloons until they spotted a small car carrying an A4-sized image of the Lord of Miracles, the most venerated Christian icon in Peru. Those were the early days of the brotherhood, when they had just started organising short processions near the church. Eugenia and Estefanía would later join the brotherhood and other Peruvian networks; they have remained members to this day.

Other participants already knew that the Latin American Church was a place of gathering for migrants, so they decided to come. Liliana, the 61-year-old accountant, claims that coming to this church is a very obvious thing to do. We were chatting in a café just a few blocks from the church, on one of the streets where the procession of the Virgin of Chapi

(patron saint of her home town, Arequipa) passes by in Santiago. I asked her how she got to know about this church. Her reply had nuances of inevitability:

We all end up coming to the Latin American Church ... We are migrants and we come to celebrate our roots. The celebration of 28 July<sup>7</sup> brings us here.

### A refuge for low-income workers

This church was founded in 1942, but it was then called the ‘Italian Church’. It was in the 1990s, due to the wave of migrants from Peru, that the Scalabrinian<sup>8</sup> priests in Santiago also decided to welcome Latin American migrants. It is fairly logical why the church would be a reference point for low-income migrants, as it works together with the Chilean Catholic Institute for Migration (INCAMI).<sup>9</sup> This institution has helped migrants for many years by giving them legal advice on visas, helping them to find work and even providing them with shelter during their first weeks in the new country. Teresa, for example, a 53-year-old domestic worker, came directly to the ‘Casa de Acogida’ (‘Shelter House’) when she arrived in Santiago nine years ago. She would have accommodation for two weeks, during which time she would have to attend the free – yet mandatory – training course for domestic workers. Once she had completed this, she was hired right away. Now, 12 years later, Teresa still sleeps there on Saturday nights, her only day off as an in-house domestic worker.

For the migrants, the church is also a place of gathering, as illustrated by the story of Ana María, the domestic worker introduced in [Chapter 2](#). She arrived in Chile in the early 1990s and her account shows how the church became a point of reference for the big wave of Peruvian migrants who came to Chile in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

## Ana María and the Latin American Church

The story of Ana María, a very hardworking 63-year-old domestic worker, clearly depicts how the Latin American Church is entangled with the lives of Peruvian migrants in Santiago. She came to Chile in 1993, aged 36. When she was 16, she had become pregnant in Lima. As her father was very strict, she had to run away from home and started working as a cleaner in a rich family’s house. She lived in the house where she worked,

an arrangement also known as ‘working indoors’ (*trabajar puertas adentro*, live-in domestic worker). The father of the baby never showed up. Her daughter Francisca was born and Ana María kept working in that house until she was five years old. As Ana María could not afford to send her daughter to nursery school in the rich neighbourhood where she worked, they moved to another neighbourhood; here she was able to get a job working for another rich family in their house. By then Ana María had met a new partner and, when Francisca was eight, her second son Maximiliano was born. Her partner was a nice man, she said, but he used to drink too much. When her son Maximiliano grew up, he started to ask his mother why his parents were not married, why their relationship lacked God’s blessing. Her son insisted so much that, after several years of co-habitation, Ana María decided to marry Maximiliano’s father. ‘God knows why He does what He does,’ said Ana María. ‘The night of the wedding that marriage was over. God said: up to here, no more!’ That night Maximiliano’s father got drunk at the party; by 2 a.m. he had taken off his wedding ring and thrown it in Ana María’s face, shouting ‘I don’t know why I married you!’

This happened in March 1993. Four months later Ana María had moved to Chile to start working there. Her daughter Francisca had just returned from Switzerland, where she had been living for three years, hosted by the cousin of a former boss. She had found European ways of life to be refreshing, in contrast with the more conservative country of Peru. Francisca encouraged her mother to accept the job offer in Chile and promised to take care of her 10-year-old half-brother. Ana María then went to Chile to work as a live-in domestic worker.

The Latin American Church was a reference point for her, as it was for migrants, especially Peruvians. Ana María had heard that, at the church, they were giving away visas to Peruvians (since they worked together with the Catholic Institute for Migration) and that there was a mass for migrants every Sunday at 1 p.m. A few years later she was able to bring her teenage son Maximiliano and her daughter Francisca with her. Both of them are still living here. Ana María has very good memories of these early years. She was completely alone for the initial 18 months, but for her the first year was one of freedom. As her daughter explains:

*Se le soltaron las trenzas!* (‘She let her hair down!’) ... As she had me when she was so young, she never had the time to party, so she did it when she was older, 36, here in Chile.

The ‘heavy partying’ that Ana María enjoyed actually took place twice a month. She and her Peruvian friends were all nannies working in the

same conditions, i.e. only one day off every two weeks. These underpaid workers would leave their boss's house on Saturday at 8 p.m. and return at the same hour on Sunday. As they slept where they worked, they had nowhere to stay on their day off. Ana María would tell me what they did with a smile on her face, remembering these golden times with fondness:

On our day off, on Saturday, we would go dance in O'Higgins Park until 5 a.m. We danced all night! Then we would take the bus and sit on the seats at the back and sleep. The bus would keep going until driver would shout 'last stop, end of journey!' and we would then go out and take the same bus in the opposite direction. Again, sitting in the last row and sleeping all the way until the driver shouted 'last stop!' We would do this until 7 a.m. or so, then we would go to a restaurant near Plaza de Armas. The waiter already knew us [what we did]. We would go to the first floor and have breakfast and then sleep on the chairs and sofa until 11 a.m., when this waiter would wake us up. Then we would walk around Ahumada street and see the shops, or we would go to the Latin American Church, to the migrants' mass. There was always lunch and food in the basement room after mass.<sup>10</sup> We would stay there, as it was warm and cozy; outside it was so cold and rainy.<sup>11</sup> We would stay there chatting, until it was time to go back to work, on Sunday evening.

Ana María's story is one of a hardworking domestic worker, but she does not come across as someone who complains about it or someone who has suffered throughout her life. She is very thankful for what she was able to get in Chile, and is also very proud of her work. With one exception, she has had very good relationships with all her employers, having had problems with only one woman, who mistreated and underpaid her. Ana María has a similar work ethic to the rest of the Peruvian migrants that I met during fieldwork. She says she hates holidays and admits she gets bored. Her daughter Francisca comments, laughing, that 'She cannot even handle holidays ... after two weeks of not working she gets anxious and difficult to deal with'. Ana María would not take holidays, preferring to 'sell them' to her employers, i.e. she would go on holiday with them to clean everything and take care of the kids, receiving double or triple pay for it. She retired last year but continues to work, nowadays three times a week, as '*puertas afuera*' ('outdoors', i.e. as a live-out domestic worker).

In the mid-1990s Ana María asked Father Roman (a famous priest, well-acquainted with migrants and still working in the church) to bring

an image of the Lords of Miracles from Peru to be honoured in their worship. Her son Maximiliano notes with pride:

My mum was there at the very beginning. She is one of the founders of the Santiago Brotherhood of Our Lord of Miracles.

## Migrants' associations at the church

The Latin American Church hosts many events organised by associations of migrants from different countries. Underneath the temple there is a big room in the basement where national day parties for different countries are usually held; lunch is prepared and sold every Sunday after the end of the 1 p.m. celebration, also known as 'the migrants' mass'. These events allow the different associations to gather funds for religious celebrations and other purposes.

According to papers published over 10 years ago, it would seem that the Latin American Church was, above all, the church of Peruvian migrants.<sup>12</sup> This appears to have changed somewhat over the last few years, as noticed during a discussion held by active Peruvian members of the church. The meeting had two aims: the first to discuss the relationship of the church with the Peruvian community and the second to organise the upcoming Peruvian National Day celebration (*Fiestas Patrias*), which was to be held in the basement room. At this meeting, aside from the Scalabrinian priest and his Venezuelan assistant, were members of different Peruvian religious brotherhoods, such as Juan XXIII, the Virgin of La Puerta (patron saint of the northern city of Otuzco) and the Virgin of Chapi (patron saint of the southern city of Arequipa), as well as other Peruvians who usually go to the church and give a helping hand with the day's chores. During the meeting the active Peruvian members told the priest that they felt displaced by the Venezuelans; they believed the church was paying more attention to those migrants. Certainly the stronger presence of the Venezuelans in the church could be felt at the 1 p.m. Sunday migrants' mass. At the end of the celebration, when all Latin American countries are greeted in turn (*'Where are the people from Colombia? – Here..!!'*), the Venezuelans were by far the loudest and the biggest crowd. Second to them, by quite a bit, were the Peruvians.

The priest responded that the church is a place of '*acogida*' ('welcome') for all recently arrived migrants, and that its aim was to provide shelter and advice during those first years. In continuing, he highlighted



that Peruvians were already at a different stage of their lives in Chile, not at the beginning. Venezuelans were the newcomers,<sup>13</sup> whereas the Peruvians had been there for a longer time. This meant that, for him, it was only natural for Peruvians to be attending other local churches once they had settled, meaning that fewer of them were now to be seen at the Latin American Church. The priest's reply confirms that the church is well aware of its position as a reference point for migrants, especially during their early days in the country. As this chapter will show, however, the church also remains a reference point for migrants who have lived in Chile for several years and have already settled down.

The meeting went on to discuss the details of the Peruvian National Day to be celebrated in the basement room (more on this later). Having people present from the different regions of Peru, all equally passionate about Peruvian food, did not make it easy to agree on the best way to prepare the *ceviche* or the *combinado* (both very popular Peruvian dishes). Discussions became quite heated, but the group finally agreed on a quite Solomonic way to make the event work. Each faction would prepare a different dish out of the three or four that were to be offered.

## Religious brotherhoods as social hubs for middle-class Peruvians

The Latin American Church is also a place of gathering for Peruvian migrants of middle-class and upper-class backgrounds. This section will show how, through participation in religious brotherhoods, upper middle-class Peruvian migrants can expand their networks.

One of the ways in which religious experience is structured among Peruvian migrants is through brotherhoods. These are groups of religious people who gather regularly, usually united by the common devotion to a specific patron saint or an image. The explicit and major aim of a brotherhood is the organisation of a religious event, such as a celebration or a procession, that honours that patron saint or image. Religious brotherhoods are also social hubs in which people get to meet other people with similar interests and similar, or different, backgrounds. As stated in the introduction, among the many Peruvian brotherhoods at the Latin American Church, I decided to join the Brotherhood of Our Lord of Miracles for three reasons. First, this brotherhood is active all year long; it has regular meetings every last Sunday of the month, in addition to organising other events such as barbecues, spiritual retreats, bingos, chains of prayers, rosaries, etc. Second, this brotherhood includes people

from all over Peru, not just Lima, where the devotion originated. Third, it encompasses people of all socio-economic levels.

The brotherhood primarily offers a place of welcoming for Peruvians who want to honour the image of the Lord of Miracles, the most traditional devotion of Peru. As regular meetings, dinners, processions and also barbecues go by, people get to know each other; in this way, it also provides opportunities for socialisation. Some of the members did know each other before joining the brotherhood, but these were usually isolated clusters of two friends, three brothers, two colleagues, two sisters, a husband and a wife, and such like. Most of them expanded their social circles by joining the brotherhood. It was inside this group that they got to meet people from other regions of Peru and of different socio-economic levels. It was also inside this particular brotherhood that several of them met members of other Peruvian social circles, such as the Peruvian Club, the Arequipa Association, the Peruvian Ladies or the Paracas Group, among others.

The story of Esteban, a 64-year-old businessman who came to Chile in the late 1980s, will illustrate how all of these groups are linked together. 'I have meetings and appointments all the time,' he declares proudly when I managed to interview him during a Holy Friday at the church, a couple of hours before the procession at the Latin American Church. He explains:

Last Friday, it was the birthday of a sister-in-law, on Saturday the birthday of Daniela from the Peruvian Club and on Sunday the birthday of my daughter Virginia. On Monday [it was] a meeting with another compadre. On Tuesday I went to Concepción for work, and I returned yesterday, Thursday evening, and...

Esteban goes on, listing his calendar's appointments. Throughout the conversation, these lists – of friends, events, associations and anecdotes – will be repeated several times. Esteban is 64 and arrived in Chile over 30 years ago, when the international company that employed him in Peru closed their offices there due to the economic crisis and terrorist threats. A man of creativity and action, Esteban has set up several groups and initiatives during his life in Chile. Within the brotherhood, his opinion is as assertive as it is respected. He is one of the leaders of the brotherhood and, during our conversation, his leadership skills emerge through several stories.

Esteban came to Chile in 1988, brought here by his company. He was entirely by himself, as he had no relatives or friends here. In his own

words, the ‘order’ he found then in Chile impressed him so much that a year and a half after his arrival, he brought his ex-wife – they were already divorced before he migrated – and three children over from Peru. ‘I wanted to raise my daughters here,’ remembers Esteban, cracking a smile. A sense of awe appears in his eyes, as if he were reliving those early years, those first impressions. In Chile he met a widow with two children and they have been together ever since, constituting a big transnational reconstituted family. Esteban later helped his two brothers migrate to Chile in the following years. As with many other Peruvians, he did not frequent the same circles as his countrymen during his first years in Chile. Aside from the fact that, as he notes, there were relatively few Peruvians when he arrived, Esteban also stresses that he was working very hard during those early years, trying to secure his position in the job market.

It was almost 10 years after his arrival when he heard that there was a mass for migrants at the Latin American Church and that they were forming a brotherhood. That is how Esteban got to the church. The procession’s route was very short, barely doing a tour around the church (over the years it increased, gradually expanding to become the nine-hour route that is performed nowadays). At the church and within the brotherhood Esteban met several influential businessmen who invited him to become a member of the Peruvian Club.

## The Peruvian Club

The Peruvian Club is a social club founded in 1905. As Esteban comments:

That was the first wave of Peruvian migrants into Chile. They were entrepreneurs from Arequipa who came to this country to establish large stores.

He describes it now as a social and cultural organisation, but also notes its origins as a sports club, where they used to host football championships. Although not exclusively for entrepreneurs or businesspeople, the club’s monthly fees (20,000 Chilean pesos, roughly £20) make it inaccessible to people on lower incomes.<sup>14</sup> The Peruvian Club has a venue in the countryside, one hour south of Santiago, where they organise events such as gala dinners, Inti Raymi celebrations<sup>15</sup> or *huaynadas* (*huayno* dance parties – *huayno* is a genre of popular Peruvian music and dance). In December 2019 the Peruvian Club hosted the final all-day celebration of the brotherhood, one that all members could attend together with their

families. The venue is a large area with a big pool, a large patio for eating and sound and lighting facilities for parties; there is also a spectacular view of the mountains. Some of the members of the Club have weekend houses next to the Peruvian Club. This is a social club for middle-class and upper middle-class Peruvian migrants, but there is more to it than that. In a way, for these successful businesspeople, sociality is tightly linked to leadership and solidarity. The events described below will help to illustrate this point and set the foundation for this discussion.

## Celebration of *Fiestas Patrias*

Perhaps the clearest example of the diverse socio-economic levels encompassed by the Peruvian networks is the celebration of the *Fiestas Patrias*, the Peruvian National Day on 28 July. During one event organised by the brotherhood Esteban's wife described how elegant the National Day celebration at the Peruvian Club the previous year had been. Those attending had to wear very formal attire and there was a horse parade with the mountains in the background, creating a beautiful scenario. The entry fee was so expensive that it was prohibitive for most people.

However, I had also attended a *Fiestas Patrias* event, the one at the Quinta Normal Park in the west part of Santiago. This was a two-day event which was held over a weekend and resembled a big festival. There were many food stalls with Peruvian dishes, thousands of people coming and going, several stands with games, other stands advertising transfer money services, very loud music and a huge theatre where bands would play salsa and other dance music genres (Fig. 4.2). It was very popular, as seen both in the extent of the displays and in the numbers of people attending the event.

Unsurprisingly, when talking about the Quinta Normal celebration with the upper middle-class research participants, they made comments quite similar to the ones about Plaza de Armas projecting a bad image of Peru. Roberto, the 60-year-old factory manager, observed:

I did not like the *Fiestas Patrias* at Quinta Normal at all. I did not like the filthiness, the bad [customer] service, so I wrote a letter to the consulate to complain.

The comment related to a *Fiestas Patrias* that took place five years before the one I had attended, but Roberto still sounded very upset. The consulate promised to do something to improve the event. The event did not



**Figure 4.2** *Fiestas Patrias* at Quinta Normal Park, Santiago. Salsa concert. Note the red banner above the theatre: ‘Peru Passion. The great party of Peru in Chile’. Screenshot of video captured by Alfonso Otaegui.

strike me as filthy, but it was certainly loud and the music could be heard from far away. The celebration at the Quinta Normal Park is actually organised by a member of the brotherhood; a journalist and entrepreneur, he is very well-known in the Peruvian community.<sup>16</sup> The celebration at the Peruvian Club and the one at Quinta Normal could in fact be seen as two extreme versions of the same thing: both are expressions of Peruvian identity abroad. The peculiarities of these two events reflect the different social strata of the people attending the events. What the two celebrations do have in common is the presence of Peruvian gastronomy, Peruvian music and explicit national pride. A middle ground between the upper-class and the popular version can perhaps be found in the way this event is celebrated within the Latin American Church.

The *Fiestas Patrias* event at the church was, in some ways, closer to the Quinta Normal celebration. It featured loud music and lots of food, but also drew on the spirit of the community. The mass that Sunday (the Sunday nearest 28 July) was dedicated to the Peruvians. In the basement room, the Peruvians who are usually active at the church – from different brotherhoods – helped a lot in the kitchen. In spending the whole day with them while manning the tills, I could see how eager people were to eat the Peruvian dishes – and above all to order *picarones*,<sup>17</sup> a Peruvian dessert which happened to be very scarce that day. The venue was decorated with the colours of the Peruvian flag and there were traditional dances, such as *Marinera*, as well as some traditional singing. It felt much



**Figure 4.3** A still from the film 'Peruvian "*Fiestas Patrias*" in Santiago' by the Visual Anthropology Lab, Pontifical Catholic University of Chile. <https://youtu.be/EKSk81ioO5k>.

more folkloric in a way. Those working with me behind the bar included Alberto, whose story was described earlier, and his wife Elena. Both of them belong to the Arequipa Association, an organisation that will be discussed later.

The presence of Elena and Alberto at this event is perhaps the simplest illustration of the church working as a middle ground and a meeting place for various socio-economic levels. They are not businesspeople but middle-class professionals who also attend very fancy events at the Peruvian Club and the Arequipa Association, dressed very elegantly. At that very same kitchen there was Teresa, the live-in domestic worker who sleeps in the Shelter House for migrants once a week on her day off. That day, during that event, they were all equals: everyone working for the church and to honour their country. There is something about these big celebrations that enables them to work as moments of equality.

## Business partners and Peruvian leaders

In the room where the brotherhood has its monthly meetings, Esteban continues to speak about the members of the Peruvian Club he got to meet through brotherhood events. He also comments that several of them also belong to the Paracas Group. This name sounded familiar to me; it had been mentioned several times by the leader of the brotherhood

during monthly meetings, for example when discussing who to ask for donations to organise the procession or to repair the image of Our Lord of Miracles. 'The Paracas Group is a social club but also a commercial club,' Esteban explains, going on to tell me how he got a job at one of those lunches. A member remarked that he needed someone for a specific task in his business and that it was so difficult to find that kind of know-how – referring precisely to Esteban's area of expertise. Everybody laughed and pointed at Esteban. 'Well, you have the perfect man for the job just right here,' they said, according to him. Listening to Esteban, it would appear that he happened to be in the right place at the right time.

These places and moments, however, are just instances of social networks doing what they do: connecting people and providing opportunities. According to Esteban, the Paracas Group was formed by a Peruvian entrepreneur in 1986–7, when he started holding business meetings at a Peruvian restaurant. At the time the venue was called the *Mare Nostrum*, a restaurant mentioned by several other migrants who had arrived in the late 1980s. The group had a different name at the beginning, but this was an acronym with unintended and unfortunate second meanings. They decided instead to take the name of the ancient culture of Paracas in Peru, says Esteban, expressing pride in uttering the word.<sup>18</sup> 'At the first lunch of every year, the consul and the ambassador are our guests of honour,' he adds.

When Esteban speaks, he gives the impression of being a leader. This trait seems to be widely shared among the members of the social circles to which he belongs (such as the Peruvian Club or the Paracas Club) or the ones whose events he attends, such as the Arequipa Association. It is as if part of the members' social lives has to be a deployment of leadership, expressed through the organisation of welfare initiatives.

Esteban's wife belongs to the Peruvian Ladies, a group originally formed by the Ambassador's wife and those of other diplomats. It usually undertakes welfare initiatives and has more recently been joined by the wives of influential men; some of the ladies also belong to the Arequipa Association.

In contrast with the pride he displayed when describing these upper-class social circles, Esteban was quick to point out that the people occupying Plaza de Armas were not representing his country in a positive light.<sup>19</sup> Esteban also adds that the Peruvian consul asked him and several groups (the Peruvian Club, the brotherhood and the Trujillo Club, among others) to educate the newly arrived migrant population. He and other businessmen (mostly entrepreneurs from the hotel and gastronomy sectors) agreed and organised free workshops for these low-income workers.

Meanwhile the Peruvian Ladies set up free courses and seminars for the *nanas* (domestic workers) to help them overcome difficulties relating to the meaning of certain words in the Chilean variant of Spanish and the Peruvian one. He recollects the effort with deep satisfaction.

We did all that work and now the Peruvians are fully integrated into Chilean society.

Even though his words might come across as condescending towards his newly arrived, lower-income countrymen, every now and then a common sense of national pride overrides the condescending tone.

Chileans marvel at how well the Peruvian *nanas* cook. Whenever Chileans say that they have a Peruvian *nana* working for them, it is with pride, as it means they are eating well.

The importance attributed to the image of Peru in Chile also emerges throughout many conversations and events. In a way, Esteban and his Peruvian friends seem to feel that they are fellow leaders, responsible for improving the image of their home country abroad. For these men, part of their duty appears to consist of guarding their heritage throughout the world. At the beginning of our conversation Esteban remarked:

When a Peruvian migrates, he brings with him his world-renowned gastronomy, his millenia-old culture and his religious devotion.

In a way, these leaders re-create much of this in Chile, from a very conscious position. One good example of how the three elements are re-created is provided by the Arequipa Association and its main event, which aims to honour their city.

## The Arequipa Association

The annual celebration organised by the Arequipa Association constitutes both an illustration and a synthesis of various themes discussed in this chapter. As mentioned in the introduction, I first met the research participants at the Latin American Church. I attended a three-day prayer to honour the Virgin of Chapi and was invited to join them afterwards at a little party in the basement room. There I met several professionals who belong to the Arequipa Association.<sup>20</sup> By the time I met them in early



2018, the Arequipa Association had been running for several years.<sup>21</sup> I would meet several of their members again in the brotherhood at social events, for example at the Peruvian Consulate.<sup>22</sup>

The association is officially a social club for people from Arequipa living in Chile, but to me it appeared more like a group of friends who hang out together. They attend many events together, from large-scale ones organised by the Peruvian Club or the Latin American Church to casual dinners to support a fellow gastronomic entrepreneur. Aside from editing a Christian magazine, a couple of members usually travel to Peru every October to attend the processions of Our Lord of Miracles in Puno and in their home town of Arequipa.<sup>23</sup>

The main event of the year for this association is the celebration of the anniversary of the foundation of Arequipa in 1540. The preparation for the event, which happens every August, takes months and the (quite expensive) tickets must be bought well in advance, as they usually sell out quickly. In 2018, the year that I attended, the party took place at a very elegant Peruvian restaurant with two floors. The ambiance was reminiscent of a wedding: men in suits, women in evening dresses, decorations that alluded to Arequipa all over the place, two ladies – one of them Elena – standing at the entrance with the list of guests. Most *arequipeños* were wearing typical white hats and ponchos from their city. Official photographers were present and there was an official backdrop for photographs. This consisted of a wooden armchair that men would sit upon, their wives standing next to them. The chair was set against a wall that featured the names of the various brands sponsoring the event.

The event had three stages: the awards ceremony, the dinner and finally the party. The president of the association started the ceremony by speaking on a little stage. Behind him was a big Peruvian flag with the words '*Te amo Perú*' ('I love you Peru') on it. After sharing some heartfelt observations about his home town of Arequipa, he thanked the Peruvian Club and the Peruvian Ladies, then proceeded to give awards to various successful Peruvians, in recognition of them having helped to make Peruvian heritage better known abroad. Each prize consisted of a miniature white stone cathedral, a replica of the one in Arequipa. The consul of Peru was also invited to speak. A couple of years before, the association had given an award to a nun known for her work among migrants at the Latin American Church – the very one, in fact, who had advised me to join the brotherhood (see [Chapter 1](#)). It was certainly an acknowledgment of those projecting a good image of Peru abroad.

The dinner consisted, naturally, of typical dishes from Peru. There were many guests, most of whom I knew from the Brotherhood of Our



**Figure 4.4** Music creates an affective ambiance at the anniversary celebration of the founding of Arequipa. Screenshot of video captured by Alfonso Otaegui.

Lord of Miracles, as well as members of the Peruvian Club and the Peruvian Ladies. Needless to say, Esteban was also present with his wife. I also spotted Joaquín, the electrician who told the story about Plaza de Armas. He was not a guest, however; he was working as a caretaker in the restaurant. After the dinner, as a form of *digestif*, Elena and Alberto (the latter wearing his typical Arequipa hat) offered *anizado* (a type of sweet alcohol) inside a *rocoto* (a spicy pepper) to all the guests. During the dinner there was live traditional music (Fig. 4.4), which set a calm and affective ambiance.<sup>24</sup>

After the dinner came the party. Following a couple of traditional dances in traditional costumes, the music morphed into more universal genres, such as salsa or electronic. The party continued until dawn, with all of these 50- to 60-year-old people dancing through the night. I would meet their tired faces again the following day at the Latin American Church, as the brotherhood organised a bingo to raise funds.

This celebration is in many ways iconic of the various points made throughout this chapter. First, all the members of the different Peruvian social networks can be found here: members of the Brotherhood of Our Lord of Miracles, the Virgin of Chapi, the Peruvian Ladies, the Peruvian Club and even the Paracas Group. They all tend to show up at one another's events – for example, the *arequipeños* at a Peruvian Club lunch, and so on. The event is very formal in its structure, in the expected attire and in its programme. It exudes tradition: Peruvian dishes are served, while

Andean music is played and professional dancers perform. It is also clear that most of the guests are influential people: the guests of honour are diplomats. Finally, there is an intensity to the whole event – an intensity in remembering Peru, in re-creating some of it here and in getting together to celebrate it. I recognise such communal intensity of tradition as typical of Peruvian migrants here in Santiago. As the president of the association observed in his opening address about the citizens of Arequipa (something that also applies to all Peruvians), ‘The *arequipeño* is intense when it comes to faith, love, food and life’.

Faith, love, food and life: there is no denial that a certain idealisation permeates all of the events described in this chapter, only natural for people living away from their home country. However, there is also some truth in these four words. When it comes to sociality, we can find in all of these events an opportunity for the individual to celebrate (Peruvian) community. It seems to be about re-creating communal events from Peru, but in fact involves much more. This is an intensified experience of sociality, presenting a stark contrast with what the research participants perceive as a more individualistic society in Chile. In [Chapter 7](#) I will address processions, an explicitly religious communal event. In this chapter, however, I want to analyse in the following section – the final one – the event that to me represents Peruvian sociality at its best: the *polladas*, or chicken fundraising parties.

## ***Polladas*: the greatest example of Peruvian sociality**

‘Have you ever been to a *pollada* before?’ asked Pablo, right at the beginning of our conversation in a shopping centre located in the east, the most affluent part of Santiago. He was not the first of the brothers to ask me that question. The *pollada* was definitely a type of event that they identified as being typically Peruvian. The answer was yes: I had already attended a few *polladas*, mostly those organised by other battalions of the brotherhood. *Polladas* was also a word that came up in brotherhood meetings when people were proposing ideas to raise funds or when the brotherhood had to respond to an invitation – other religious groups had sent *pollada* tickets to be sold among us.

The *pollada* is an event that lasts for hours. It usually starts at noon. At a community club or a church the organisers prepare everything ahead, in order to deliver the food on time. It is usually fried chicken<sup>25</sup> – which has been marinating in spices overnight – with rice and fried onions, served in a take-away box. People usually go at noon, grab their boxes

and go home to eat. They would then return much later, in the late afternoon, when the party starts. 'That is the way we make most money in a *pollada*, with the drinks,' said Esteban during a '*pollada pro-salud*' he had organised with the brothers of his battalion. '*Pro-salud*' ('for the health') refers to a *pollada* that raises funds to cover the expenses of someone's medical treatment.

The *pollada* has a history which starts in Peru, due to the sustained economic crisis that was ongoing a couple of decades ago. As Béjar and Alvarez (2010) explain,<sup>26</sup> this practice constituted a display of resourcefulness and solidarity among low-income workers from the provinces who came to work to Lima in the late 1970s. Most of the particularities of the *polladas* described by these authors match what was observed during fieldwork in Santiago: the choice of the day (Saturday), the loud music, the income model (based on selling alcohol), some of the rules that govern the event, such as '*tarjeta aceptada, tarjeta pagada*' (i.e. if you accepted one ticket, you have to show up and pay) and, above all, the underlying notion of reciprocal solidarity: '*hoy por ti, mañana por mí*' ('I help you today, you will help me tomorrow').<sup>27</sup>

This basis of solidarity does not mean that the *polladas* always help to pay for someone's medical treatment, although this is the reason most frequently invoked. As is also the case in Peru, someone can organise *pollada*-like events to raise funds simply to sustain themselves through difficult times. This is the case of one brother, a singer who usually organises concerts in his little apartment. Here he sings for hours while his wife sells food that she has prepared to his friends and neighbours.<sup>28</sup>

It can be said that *polladas* are the quintessential example of Peruvian sociality due to their underlying notion of solidarity. It is not only about the food, prepared in a traditional spicy fashion, nor the dancing and heavy drinking. The event's significance lies in its whole enhanced social experience and its communal aura. People attending the *pollada* are not being supportive for free. It is a display of solidarity, of course, but supporters always get something out of it: a very long party, very well-prepared affordable food and a sense of community that lasts for hours. The *pollada* is another example of Peruvian resourcefulness. The organiser of a *pollada* has found a way of making a solution out of nothing, of producing a respectable amount of money with relatively manageable effort. The *pollada* thus establishes a dialogue between an individual and the community. It is an invitation through which the individual poses a question; attending it is the answer given to that individual by a neighbourhood, brotherhood, club or association. Attending a *pollada* is consequently a civic duty.

## Conclusion: re-creating Peruvian sociality abroad

Do all the events described in this chapter constitute the entire social life of the late middle-aged research participants of this study? Probably not. Some of them say that they have Chilean friends and one can assume they meet them on social occasions. It can be said, however, that the research participants do engage in all these Peruvian social events and that they clearly consider them important. It is difficult to say, from an analytical point of view, whether people in a certain country are more collective-driven or individual-driven. However, I can give an account of what the research participants claim. Joaquín, for example, the 46-year-old electrician, says that people in Chile are not festive at all, giving as an example the pervasive silence during Christmas week. He recalls organising meetings at his house in Peru, setting the music very loud, and observes:

My neighbour from out front would notice that I was getting ready for a party and she would join us.

It would seem that, when it comes to socialising, Peruvians like to organise big communal events.

Solidarity is a feature of all the examples of this chapter, from the stranger who helped Joaquín in Plaza de Armas to the *polladas* organised by Esteban and the brothers. Among upper-class participants, there is a sense of solidarity in the free workshops they organised for low-income workers, albeit with a scent of paternalism.

If, for a moment, we recall everything these Peruvian migrants seemed to like about Chile, discussed at the beginning of this chapter – the order, the economic stability, the efficiency – it is not surprising to find that Chile can appear to Peruvians to be a bit more individualistic. When the participants talk about the things they disliked about Peru (things they usually notice when they go back for visits, see [Chapter 3](#)), one that stands out is a general sense of informality, a lack of seriousness. It would seem that Chile is, in many aspects, more formal and stricter than Peru – again, according to the research participants. They like this efficiency, but after a while they miss some of the enhanced sense of life they remember from Peru.

I believe this is the reason they tend to re-create – usually after a couple of years – this Peruvian sociality in Chile. It is not merely about spending good moments together; there has to be a sense of community. The *polladas* (in the strict sense or in the broader sense, as most of the events described in this chapter are a form of *polladas*)



### ■ ¿QUIÉNES SOMOS?

Somos un grupo de **organizaciones peruanas** sin fines de lucro que nos hemos unido para trabajar por una causa común: ayudar a nuestros compatriotas que, debido a la pandemia, están alojados en albergues a la espera de ser repatriados.



### ■ ¿CÓMO PUEDES AYUDAR?

El costo de alimentación por día (desayuno, almuerzo y cena), por cada uno de nuestros compatriotas alojados en los albergues es de **\$5.000**.

Para ayudarlos, puedes donar un día de comida link: [peruayudaperu.cl](http://peruayudaperu.cl)

El total del dinero recaudado se destinará a nuestros compatriotas **alojados en los albergues**. Fecha Límite para donación **31 de Julio 2020**

UNIENDO FUERZAS, PERÚ AYUDA A PERÚ  
¡AYÚDANOS A AYUDAR!

SIGUENOS



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Figure 4.5 A flyer for the 'Peru helps Peru' initiative, July 2020.

Source: <http://peruayudaperu.cl>.

combine resourcefulness with solidarity. Peruvian sociality is not merely re-created in Chile. It cannot be Peruvian sociality as in Peru, because they are not in Peru any more. In a way, it is an 'enhanced-by-being-away-in-a-neoliberal-individualistic-country' sociality.<sup>29</sup> This type of sociality is not only enhanced by the distance; it also contrasts with what they

experience as a less intense Chilean sociality. Besides, some bonds cannot be re-created. Family bonds can reach across borders, but they have to be kept alive through constant communication, the subject of the [next chapter](#).

It is July 2020. There have been four long months of strict lockdown in Santiago due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Joaquín remains unemployed, the monthly brotherhood meetings have turned into weekly Zoom rosaries and some *polladas* have moved to Facebook. I receive a message from the *mayordomo* of the brotherhood. It is about a solidarity event named ‘*Perú ayuda a Perú*’ (Peru helps Peru) to raise funds for low-income workers in these difficult times. The flyer has the logos of the Peruvian Club, the Brotherhood of Our Lord of Miracles, the Peruvian Ladies and the Arequipa Association on it (Fig. 4.5).<sup>30</sup> Donors are given the opportunity to buy a good deal of food for Peruvian migrants in need.

## Notes

1. Most of the research participants have been living in Chile for over 20 years. Joaquín is perhaps the one among them who migrated most recently.
2. In 2016, using the exchange rates that were valid at the time, 1,000,000 Chilean pesos amounted to approximately £1,110.
3. See Ducci and Rojas 2010. See also Stefoni 2015.
4. The fieldwork within the Brotherhood of Our Lord of Miracles provided the chance to meet Peruvians from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. However, three-quarters of the research participants are professional middle-class and upper middle-class Peruvians.
5. Tijoux and Diaz Latelier 2014; Tijoux 2013a.
6. Pablo is a member of the brotherhood, along with his brother Marcelo, and he is familiar with the Paracas Group. Marcelo belongs both to the Peruvian Club and the Paracas Group. All of them are upper-class social groups analysed in this chapter.
7. 28 July is Peru’s Independence Day.
8. Scalabrinian priests are members of the religious institute founded by the Italian bishop G. Scalabrini in the late nineteenth century. The priests of this order were originally dedicated to help exclusively Italian migrants all over the world.
9. <http://incami.cl>. See also INCAMI 2018.
10. Every Sunday there is a lunch after mass so a specific migrant community can gather some funds.
11. Many Peruvians complain about the cold weather when arriving in Chile.
12. Ducci and Rojas 2010.
13. According to the National Institute of Statistics, in December 2018 Venezuelans (288,233 people) have overtaken Peruvians (223,923 people) as the biggest migrant group in Chile.
14. According to the National Institute of Statistics, the average salary in Chile in 2016 was 517,540 Chilean pesos (roughly £577 at that time). However, only 28.6 per cent of the working population receive this amount or a higher salary.
15. The traditional Inca celebration of the winter solstice.
16. I remember standing next to him, dressed in our brotherhood gowns, inside the Cathedral, just before the beginning of the procession. As the consul of Peru was coming out of the church, following the sacred image, he stopped just to shake hands with this journalist. Many other brothers did the same.

17. *Picarones* is a traditional Peruvian dessert, dating back at least to the early nineteenth century. People would eat it in Plaza de Armas.
18. These businessmen gather to have lunch once a month. Over 30 years after their first meeting, thanks to Esteban's recommendation, I was allowed to attend one of these events. The lunch takes place in a nice restaurant in the upper-class neighbourhood of Las Condes, or sometimes another venue in another upper-class neighbourhood. The setting is quite simple: a couple of reserved tables at a Peruvian restaurant (a smart one) with a fixed menu costing around 20,000 Chilean pesos (£20). The atmosphere was friendly and informal. Around 20 people – two-thirds of them men and one-third women – attended on that occasion. There were lawyers, investors, real estate agents, mostly businesspeople and mostly between 50 and 60 years old. There were conversations about their lives and about Peru, and also about their businesses: how they were faring, how they expected the economy or politics in Chile and Peru to move forward and so on. Some exchanges of business cards took place among those who did not know each other. It was a social club for businesspeople.
19. Esteban refers to this quite explicitly: 'In the 2000s, a mass of Peruvians coming from the provinces arrived. Those Peruvians took hold of Plaza de Armas. They were of a low cultural and social level – and then all of us Peruvians are identified as being from Plaza de Armas'.
20. Several of the members of the Brotherhood of the Virgin of Chapi belong to the Arequipa Association. This is not the only brotherhood of Chapi that exists in Santiago. During a *pollada* organised by the Brotherhood of Our Lord of Miracles in a popular neighbourhood near Quinta Normal Park, I was chatting to some Peruvians about processions and the different brotherhoods in Santiago. They mentioned a brotherhood of Chapi in Independencia – another popular neighbourhood where many Peruvians live – and I asked if it was the same one that I knew. 'No, no,' they explained, with condescending smiles. 'That one [the one at the Latin American Church] is the one of the rich *arequipeños*.' The ones saying this and the ones mentioned in the statement all belong to the Brotherhood of Our Lord of Miracles.
21. Liliana, one of the four founding members of the Arequipa Association, told me the story of its inception. A beloved old man who had recently passed away was the instigator. Some years before he had asked the Peruvian Embassy for a list of citizens who came from Arequipa in Chile. He found her on that list and invited her to a meeting at the Latin American Church, the inevitable place they all end up in, according to Liliana (see above). They later had a more formal meeting at the headquarters of the Lions Club in Providencia and, together with two other men, founded the association. One of these two men was a former *mayordomo* of the brotherhood and the one who gave me *anizado* to taste.
22. Liliana, still a member of the Arequipa Association, also belongs to the Peruvian Ladies.
23. I was invited to contribute to the 2018 edition of the magazine, and also had the chance to join them on their last trip to Puno and Arequipa in 2019.
24. In reference to the notion of 'affective rhythm' by Jo Tacchi 2009, see Chapter 3.
25. The reason why chicken is prepared at most of these events is simply its lower price (Béjar and Alvarez 2010, 266).
26. Béjar and Alvarez 2010.
27. Béjar and Alvarez 2010, 268–70.
28. The long months of lockdown during the COVID-19 crisis in Santiago have prevented this brother from earning money by singing on the Chilean underground. Instead he has started singing live on Facebook while asking for donations and selling raffle tickets. Many of the brothers attend the Facebook concerts to support him and ask him to sing old Peruvian waltzes.
29. However, individualism has been described as a trait typical of Chilean society. See Gonzalez (2017), in particular Chapter 2 on the tension between individualism and inequality in Chile.
30. The webpage also states: 'with the support of the Peruvian Embassy and the Peruvian Consulate in Santiago'.



## 5

# Crafting the smartphone: keeping up through digital bridges

## Introduction: the smartphone, a necessary hassle

‘Uffffff...!’ Elena picks up her smartphone and takes a look at the screen: a notification had just popped up, making the sound of a bell. The expression in her eyes exactly matches the sound she just produced: one of annoyance. Elena puts the smartphone back on her desk, face down, and gives me a quizzical look, as if she were asking for her next question (she does not have much time, come on!). We are sitting in her office. Elena is the chief nurse at an oncological clinic in a public hospital. She is very busy and – after many cancelled arrangements, text messages and short talks in the clinic’s hallways – I have succeeded in getting her to concede me over 40 continuous minutes of her scarce time. Elena is 49 years old and has lived in Chile for exactly half of her life. Behind me is a picture hanging on the wall of the little office. It is an image of the Virgin of Chapi, the patron saint of Arequipa, Elena’s home town. Every now and then she casts a glance at the image of the Virgin. During those brief moments her gaze is infused with serenity and her lips form an almost imperceptible smile.

A couple of minutes into our conversation, it is crystal clear that Elena does not like having a smartphone. To be more precise, Elena does not like the way the smartphone has made her continually ‘available’. She dislikes being contactable through this device when she is actually available in person, face to face, all day long at her office. Wherever she goes, she tends to leave the smartphone behind – forgetting it almost by habit, as if she had made an unconscious effort not to take it with her. As she explains:

Some things do bother me, and I tend to lose those things. The keys to the clinic or my nurse ID, on the contrary, I have all the time with me.

Elena is a very hardworking and dedicated nurse. She rose through the ranks to become the chief nurse of all the oncological nurses in Chile. 'From Arica to Punta Arenas,' she observes,<sup>1</sup> in a tone poised halfway between denoting pride in herself and gratitude towards the country in which she has spent half her life. Elena experiences the smartphone as an imposition; her boss made her get one years ago. Why do they need the device to reach her, when she is at the hospital all day long? She does not like communicating through the smartphone, preferring face-to-face interaction. So what is the point of this device for her?

Elena's attitude towards the smartphone is not an affectation. I met her in enough different contexts to know that she does not waste time digressing. She states what she really thinks, loudly and clearly. Our interactions through WhatsApp are short and to the point: functionality at its best. However, I have seen Elena make use of the smartphone for tasks that are not actually that pragmatic. As part of another project on mHealth initiatives within the ASSA project,<sup>2</sup> I regularly visited the oncological clinic where Elena works. People from Chile, Ecuador, Peru, Colombia and Venezuela work in this clinic and it is easier to talk to them in the kitchen. The kitchen is a space of socialisation and relaxation. It provides the ambiance for a necessary break within the intensive day-to-day rhythm of an oncological clinic full of patients.

On one of these occasions, Elena was showing the nurses and doctors a video on her smartphone. It was a prank she had played on one of the nurses. On the screen, Elena could be seen crouching on the floor, hiding behind a panel, waiting for the prank victim with a bucket full of water. Everybody was laughing and remembering other pranks. 'This job is very hard,' she would explain on another occasion, 'we have to keep our spirits up.' Elena is also the one who in that same office, over a year before, explained to me the wonders of the smartphone in providing care to cancer patients. Thanks to the smartphone – WhatsApp in particular – Elena explained the way the hospital's team of nurses could provide care at a distance, following up on as many as 150 patients each.<sup>3</sup> After decades of experience working with low-income cancer patients (in many cases with limited education), Elena knows very well that the follow-up – being there for the patients – is fundamental to improving their quality of life. This chapter is all about ways of being there.

Elena vividly complains about the hassles of the smartphone. However, this device now permeates both her professional and personal life. Although she clearly prefers face-to-face interaction, the smartphone enables her to stay in touch with family and friends in her home town of

Arequipa. Yet even in these calls with her family, there is something missing, something that bothers her. 'I prefer videocalls, but it bothers me [when it is too long] ... Sometimes I tell them I am having connection issues and I hang up,' she confesses in a quieter yet still assertive tone. Although Elena might be an extreme case when it comes to reluctance to use the smartphone, she illustrates two points that will be developed later in this chapter. First, the way in which social media is a necessary form of communication for migrants, even if it cannot replace the experience of being back home. Second, the way in which the smartphone – despite her rejection of it – permeates her whole life. The chapter will address the many ways in which the smartphone impacts upon the lives of transnational migrants.

As noted in the introduction to this book, the problem lies in understanding the 'in between' aspect of the lives of Peruvian migrants in Chile. This quality refers to the fact that they are poised between Chile and Peru. Their extended families and the first half of their lives are in Peru; their nuclear families and their second half of their lives are in Chile. This chapter studies the way in which digital mediations help Peruvian migrants to cope with the 'in between' quality of their lives, at least in a couple of specific areas. Being a transnational migrant certainly infuses all aspects of the research participants' everyday lives, the use of the smartphone among them. This does not mean, however, that all of their uses and configurations of the device emanate from this condition of transnationality. This chapter will focus solely on the aspects related to them as Peruvians living in Chile, and on the way in which their transnational experience has crafted itself into the smartphone. Rather than directly addressing the relationship between ageing and smartphones, it focuses instead on how communication with the home country and digital mediations allow for the construction of a tolerable 'in between' experience for research participants in Chile throughout their life stories, regardless of their age. I will revisit this 'in between' dimension later in the book, as it will help to explain the ambivalent experience of middle age for transnational migrants.

First, this chapter explores how Peruvian migrants in Chile stay in touch with their relatives and friends in Peru and across the world; it also shows how these interactions shape their experience of family relations and social life in general. The second part of the chapter analyses the use of livestreaming during collective events such as parties and processions. Finally, the chapter will offer a reflection on how all of these ways of using the smartphone allow people to cope with living permanently 'in between'.

## Staying in touch with family today: easier, faster and more often

'It was more difficult in those times [the 1990s],' explains Javiera, while scrolling down the chats page of her WhatsApp. The last three messages are from less than an hour ago. 'Once a week we would go [to the phone booth] to make a phone call. We even had to queue,' she adds. Javiera, aged 53, has lived in Chile with her husband and children for the last 22 years. Her elderly mother still lives in Peru while her father, who never wanted her to come to Chile, passed away many years ago. Javiera is still wearing her work outfit as we chat in a noisy café close to the Latin American Church. She has come all the way down from Vitacura, an upper-class neighbourhood in East Santiago, where she works as a domestic worker.

Life in Chile has not been easy for Javiera, but rather a long and sinuous path of effort and endurance. She remembers the many ways in which her children were discriminated against at school<sup>4</sup> and how hard it was for her and her husband to find acceptable jobs.<sup>5</sup> They came to Chile because they could not make a living in their home town, just two hours away from Lima. For Javiera, the most difficult sacrifice was leaving her beloved father behind. However, she and her family did manage to make it here in Chile, she explains. Her eldest daughter finished her college degree and was able to buy an apartment. Her middle son has his own little business and is able to support his wife and child. Her youngest son is doing well at school. Even though Javiera's whole nuclear family is based in Chile, her family bonds stretch over the borders. She has regular contact with her brother and mother in Peru; keeping in the loop about how her loved ones are doing there is of great emotional significance. Her brother is the official communications technician: he calls Javiera and puts her in touch with her mother.

It should be fairly obvious by now that whenever one starts a conversation about the smartphone with Peruvian migrants, this always ends up being a conversation about their families. As mentioned before, Javiera – and most of the research participants – have their families spread across different countries, even in many cases across different continents. Javiera and her relatives, who are now scattered across four countries, constitute a 'transnational family'.<sup>6</sup>

The reason why research participants end up referring to their families whenever they start a discussion about the smartphone is that communication plays a fundamental role in their families' cohesion. These families do not share a geographical space, that much is certain, but they do create an affective space, made up of news and updates about even small things that happen in their lives in different countries.

The current affordances of smartphones and their apps allow for instant contact, as soon as something significant and worthy of sharing comes up. As Javiera explains:

If someone in the family had had a dream about me, then they would call me. If there was an earthquake in Peru, or a strong storm, then I call them to find out how they are, same if there was an earthquake here.

She goes on to assert that ‘communication now is easier, faster and happens more often’.

Several migration studies scholars analyse migrants’ experience of communication through smartphones or other devices. Although none of these scholars believe this mediated communication can replace face-to-face interactions, some of them are more positive than others. Parreñas (2014) is very critical on the possibilities of re-creating intimacy through digital mediation, stating that ‘intimacy across distance is constructed primarily via routine while intimacy in proximity is mainly premised on instantaneity’ (2014, 426, as cited in Horn 2019, 21). This refers to the fact that relationships across transnational borders require a certain type of time management (arranging a specific day and time to call or Skype), while people who live together or in the same city have immediate access to one another. Even though this general point is still correct, the current affordances of smartphone apps and data plans allows for very frequent communication, closer to the premise of immediate intimacy.

WhatsApp is the app that dominates these research participants’ communications with their families living in Peru and all over the world. As of 2020, WhatsApp offers several ways of communicating: text messages, voice messages, photos, voice calls, videocalls and even status updates (videos, photos, text) which last for 24 hours before vanishing.<sup>7</sup> The Peruvian migrants in this study make use of all of these possibilities on different occasions. Yet there is one clearly preferred way of getting in touch: the videocal.<sup>8</sup>

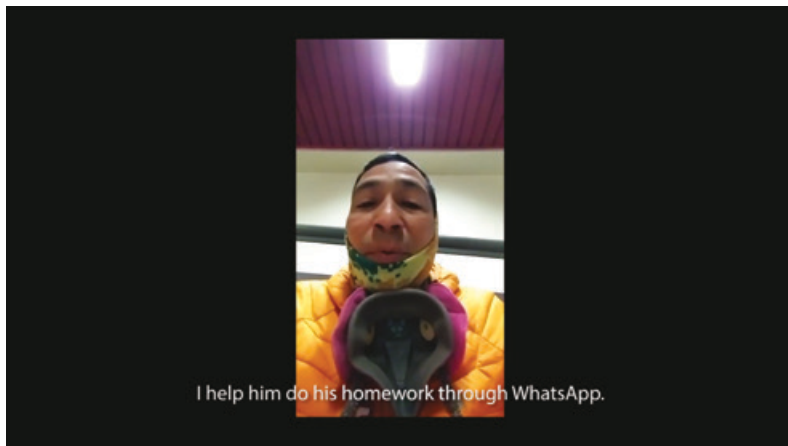
## Videocalls: ‘I want to see how you are (really) feeling’

Most of the research participants highlight videocalls as an important feature of current communication with their families. Certainly there is little doubt that videocalls are a significant feature of smartphones nowadays. What would be special for the Peruvian migrants? It can be argued that there is something about the truthfulness and spontaneity

attributed to the non-verbal communication underlying this preference. The story of one of the research participants provides a clear illustration.

Joaquín is 46 years old and has been living in Chile for four years.<sup>9</sup> As in his home country, he has only ever worked as a welder and electrician. He has been married for 24 years and he and his wife have three children. His two elder sons, aged 27 and 25, live in Chile with their wives and children, while his youngest child is seven years old, only two years older than Joaquín's first grandson. He has always been as hard-working as he is cheerful, always on the verge of making a joke. However, his naturally joyful personality stands in stark contrast with the way he has been feeling during the initial months of lockdown when the COVID-19 pandemic hit Santiago.

In a way, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Joaquín went through the experience of every low-income migrant in Chile but intensified and concentrated into a couple of weeks. In March 2020 he came back to Chile to work after a month's holiday in Peru. His family was supposed to join him a couple of weeks later, but immediately after he returned the Chilean government declared a 'national state of catastrophe': borders were closed, mass gatherings were banned and people had to stay at home. While his family were stuck in Lima, Joaquín and his two older sons were in Santiago. As he had lost his job, he moved into a little room in a house with other Peruvian migrants. The situation was hard for Joaquín, as he wanted to provide for his family back in Peru, as well as help his two adult sons here in Santiago (Fig. 5.1).



**Figure 5.1** A still from the film 'Separated by the pandemic. Connected through the smartphone' by the Visual Anthropology Lab, Pontifical Catholic University of Chile. <https://youtu.be/fX1FjvavdOU>.

Joaquín, usually so cheerful, started to feel down and stressed as never before. However, he has always been someone who does not give up. He explained that constant communication with his family is what helped him overcome these difficult times:

We start talking, how they are doing with the school, how the family is, because we are in a troublesome situation, so we try to be there for each other, lifting up each other's spirit [...] being at home all the time, it is stressful if you are used to working, you can get sick. That's it. The only thing we have is to get stronger through communication and I do that every day talking to my wife, my children, my grandchildren, my daughters-in-law, you know?

Joaquín's mother, in particular, wanted to know how he was doing in Chile. He usually talks with her through videocalls, as his mother insists on getting in touch frequently. 'Nowadays [i.e. during the pandemic], if I don't call, my mum thinks I am hiding that I am not well or something like that,' says Joaquín.

Joaquín's mother's complaint is not unusual and illustrates a widespread phenomenon among migrants. According to Horn,<sup>10</sup> migrants tend to present to their families back home an improved and nicer version of their experiences in the new country (2019). It is not surprising then, that under the intense and difficult circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, Joaquín's mother insisted on seeing her son so strongly. It seems as if visual contact carries a deeper level of truthfulness. It could be said that Joaquín's mother's insistence on communication is, in a way, a form of surveillance. However, for families with tight bonds, used to the constant flow of information, surveillance is also a form of care.

Fieldwork in Santiago has shown that the assumption that the other side is not sharing information can also take place the other way around. Migrants may fear, for example, that they are not getting the whole story from relatives who stayed in the home country. This is the case of Teresa, the domestic worker who has lived in Chile for the past nine years. Her widowed mother, still living in Peru, now has cancer and Teresa does not trust her brothers to take care of her. 'They are there ... but they are men,' she observes with a tone of distrust. The visual dimension emerges in her discourse every now and then, for example when she asks her sister-in-law to 'take a look' at her mother. Teresa talks to her mother by videocall every night. 'I am always checking on her, through the camera I see her. I call her every day,' says Teresa, stressing the word 'see' in a deeper and more intense tone.<sup>11</sup>

The need for visual communication in order to overcome an intentional information gap can work both ways. This is also the case for Javiera, who says that she uses voice messages while on the street. This is probably due to security concerns, as using the smartphone screen could be distracting in public and may make her a target for pickpockets.<sup>12</sup> However, Javiera prefers videocalls for communicating with her family. Again, an underlying idea of visual contact equating to truthfulness is evident in Javiera's statements:

Through audio they can tell you they are all right, but in the video you can see the smile, the look. You can see how they really are, if they are feeling bad, if they look tired or emaciated.

Javiera's mother also insists on using video, as she thinks Javiera might not be feeling well and hiding it from her.

Visual communication allows Teresa, Javiera and Joaquín's mother to have the 'whole picture' of their beloved ones' lives. As becomes evident through the statements of Javiera and Teresa, there is a deeper sense that facial expressions and general appearance cannot be manipulated in the way that voice or text can be. There is a certain spontaneity but also a certain intimacy of this closer yet digitally mediated communication. Peruvian migrants make videocalls in the same manner anyone does (non-Peruvians, non-migrants, etc.), but in their case this behaviour is in response to the particular concerns of transnational families, such as the fear of being subjected to an intentional information gap. Videocalls are an example of the way in which transnational experience can craft itself into the smartphone: the same tools, available to anybody, have different and deeper meanings for these users. This is particularly true of WhatsApp. It just so happens that WhatsApp is more than a tool of communication for Peruvian migrants. Through habitual use and this involuntary crafting, the app has become a metaphor for their social relationships, as the next section will show.

## The socially charged life of WhatsApp

WhatsApp is not the only messaging app Peruvian migrants use to stay in touch with their families. They also use Facebook, Facebook Messenger or, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Zoom, among other apps.

As expected, many of my research participants are in transnational WhatsApp groups comprising former members of their primary



school, secondary or high school, or university. Many members of these groups no longer live in Peru but in Chile, the United States or Argentina, among other typical destinations for Peruvian migrants. The same goes for family groups, of which my research participants have several. For example Joaquín, the 46-year-old electrician, had a group with his wife and daughter-in-law, both of whom had to remain in Peru during the pandemic. He used the group to help his son and grandson with school duties during this time. Joaquín also has other family groups, such as one consisting of cousins, aunts and uncles which reunites several close and distant relatives scattered across various urban and rural areas of Peru. All of these dispersed transnational families share a common space in the chat group.

WhatsApp groups organise and represent different domains of everyday life. It is not unusual to find within participants' WhatsApp, apart from the mandatory couple of family groups, a group related to work and another group centred around a particular interest. One example of a particular interest group is that formed around a Christian magazine. As part of fieldwork, I helped to edit this Christian magazine, produced by members of the Peruvian brotherhood. A WhatsApp group was created to co-ordinate the meetings and revisions of articles. This is a very functional group. Even though some photos of social events and religious reflections are also shared, most of the messages have a functional aim: agreeing on dates, editorial changes and the like.

Work-related groups tend to be rather functional. During an interview Ignacio, the 65-year-old warehouse supervisor, revealed the interactions in his two work-related groups. The messages mostly concern UV radiation and temperatures that can affect the warehouse, as well as the welfare of employees. Ignacio does not spend too much time explaining the nature of these groups, as the exchanges are quite straightforward and to the point. However, he does go into full detail when explaining the process of looking for the prayers of the day on Google, selecting a representative image to go along with them and pasting all of this together into a message sent to the Peruvian brotherhood WhatsApp group.

The brotherhood WhatsApp group: building a sense of belonging through everyday messages

The Santiago Brotherhood of Our Lord of Miracles has several WhatsApp groups. There are at least seven: one for the directors of the brotherhood, one for each division of women (Singers, Incense Burners and Emergency Assistants) and one for each battalion of men's divisions (the

First Battalion, the Second Battalion and the Third Battalion). Besides these, newly merged groups can also be formed for special occasions. In 2018, for example, a new 'Ending Ceremony group' was created, including the members of the Third Battalion and the Emergency Assistants' group. These two groups were in charge of organising the ritual entrance of the image of the Lord of Miracles back into the church after a nine-hour long procession, so the newly formed WhatsApp group actually lasted several months. As part of fieldwork I joined the Third Battalion, and remained in their WhatsApp group for over two years.

The behaviour of this WhatsApp group says something about how these media allow Peruvian migrants in Santiago to express their beliefs and build a sense of belonging abroad. When it comes to regular, everyday messages in the Third Battalion WhatsApp group, every morning either the *capataz* (leader of the Battalion) or the secretary would send the Bible passages for the day to the group, together with a picture or an animated gif of Jesus or the Virgin. Ignacio, the *capataz* of the group, would explain how he did all of this at 5 a.m. before going to work. Most brothers would respond with 'Amén' or 'Blessings to everyone, brothers'. Typically, the *capataz* would also send functional messages, reminding members about upcoming engagements such as monthly meetings, masses, spiritual retreats, fundraising events, reminders to pay various fees and the like. Another typical usage would be sending members birthday wishes on their birthday. These greetings would always have a Christian theme to them: 'may the Lord give you and your family blessings'. Within these regular messages, visual components are very much present: photos of processions, religious memes, gifs, links to videos of ceremonies flow constantly through the chat. There are other messages which are more occasional, such as chains of prayers for the recovery of a member or a member's relative, expressions of gratitude when that person has recovered from their illness, expressions of condolence and, on some occasions, fundraising for brothers who might be struggling financially (Figs 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4).

There are no personal messages or dialogues within this group. Apart from the organisational/functional messages reminding members of upcoming events, the dynamics are as follows: one brother posts a message, such as a prayer, a request for prayers or a death notice and the rest of the brothers respond to the message accordingly. This group is all about reaffirming the group's identity, its members' faith, their sense of belonging and the support they offered to each other, all united with the same objective: devotion to this sacred Peruvian image. A sense of unity is enacted in and through this WhatsApp group, as well as a sense of new



**Figure 5.2** A message shared in the brotherhood's WhatsApp group. Screenshot by Alfonso Otaegui.



**Figure 5.3** Another message shared in the brotherhood's WhatsApp group. Screenshot by Alfonso Otaegui.



**Figure 5.4** Another message shared in the brotherhood's WhatsApp group. 'I didn't ask to be born in Peru. God just blessed me. Happy Independence Day.' Screenshot by Alfonso Otaegui.

community; most of the members of the brotherhood in Santiago did not know each other when they joined. As argued in the [previous chapter](#), the brotherhood can also be the point of entry into other Peruvian social circles. This devotion, and what it means for Peruvian migrants, will be analysed further in [Chapters 7 and 8](#).

Aside from religious communities, the sense of belonging to a group can go back to common roots, shared things that people have lived through in the past. Many research participants are in WhatsApp groups with former colleagues from school or university. When it comes to reconnecting with old school mates, that is where Facebook comes in, seeming to serve the function of a telephone directory. It is through Facebook that many Peruvians got back in touch with former school friends.<sup>13</sup> Several of these Peruvian migrants report using Facebook less and less compared to four or five years ago. This is probably due to the fact that a large amount of personal communication (even in Facebook groups) may have moved to WhatsApp.

I befriended over 25 research participants on Facebook. Scrolling through their posts and responses to mutual friends, they are reminiscent of the 'community news' section of a newspaper: one reads announcements of births, deaths, dinners, holidays and work meetings abroad. It seems to involve regular public display of social life, just as those newspapers' sections used to do. People usually reply to those posts as expected: likes, congratulations, condolences, jokes and greetings. Besides using Facebook for the above, the research participants also post about religious events (processions, memes, reflections) and a lot of

music videos – Peruvian and non-Peruvian, most of them non-religious songs. Their Facebook posts constitute more of a display of social life, while their WhatsApp groups and chats seem to be the actual exercise of their social life.

Has it always been like this? Is this constant communication, this pervasive exercise of sociality, the mere result of the affordances of the device? Were Peruvian migrants less in touch with their families 20 years ago? These questions will be answered in the following section, which considers communication before the era of the smartphone.

## Keeping up in the times before smartphones

‘Now, with technology, there is communication with video, but there has always been communication, we have never been apart,’ says Estefanía, aged 57. Estefanía came to Chile in the late 1980s and has been living here ever since. She was the pioneer of the family when she migrated to Chile. Her four sisters have since moved here, while one brother lives in Japan and the other in the United States. Since she first came to this country to the present, they have been a transnational family. Estefanía stresses that, as a family, they had always been in contact through visits, phone calls and letters.

Seen from the perspective of today’s WhatsApp-powered instant communication, Estefanía recalls how different – and how much more difficult – it was back then.

In those days you wrote letters and waited for weeks for them to arrive. Or it was ‘long-distance’ calls.

However, as Estefanía highlights, her family never stopped communicating with one another. She acknowledges that it was more difficult then, but constant contact with her family never stopped. Many other research participants remember the difficulties they had staying in touch during those years, but they claim to have always stayed in touch.

In the 1990s and early 2000s a proliferation of call centres existed in Santiago,<sup>14</sup> many of them located in ‘Little Lima’, the area next to Plaza de Armas. This was a Peruvian space in the middle of urban Santiago, an area where Peruvians would gather and share tips on various aspects of their lives as migrants. One of these tips would be about ways of ‘tricking’ phone booths, enabling them to communicate more cheaply with family members back home. Javiera remembers that:

A one-minute phone call to Peru cost 1,000 Chilean pesos,<sup>15</sup> it was too expensive! So we would steal in a way, making calls last much longer for less money by using the old 100 pesos coins in public booths and also by using codes to make the booth charge it as a local call, so for 2,000 pesos we would speak for half an hour. We would share information on which phone booths could be used for this, as the company kept repairing the phone booths.

Marcos, the 56-year-old man who has also lived half of his life in Chile (see [Chapter 3](#)), remembers those times with a shade of bitterness. ‘There was a black market of call cards,’ he recalls, shaking his head in disapproval.

These cheap calls, whether paid in full or used through cheating, were essential for the families of the research participants. The communication through cheap phone calls served as a ‘social glue’<sup>16</sup> which maintained the ties between migrants and their family members. In the last couple of years, communication has become much more accessible in Chile and Peru.<sup>17</sup>

## Livestreams: the sudden exercise of co-presence

The fieldwork conducted among Peruvian migrants consisted of attending numerous processions (see [Chapter 7](#)), *polladas* (chicken fundraising parties), parties from city associations (see [Chapter 4](#)) and similar events. One of the most surprising observations was the fact that many people would take out their smartphones and livestream the social event through Facebook. Perhaps the occasions that best illustrate this behaviour are religious processions. What is so special about the processions? Why do so many Peruvians want to share them with others in real time? There is clearly something special about the experience of the procession and what it means for a Peruvian migrant.

One Saturday afternoon I was attending a chicken party organised by another battalion of the Peruvian brotherhood. As usual, there were the people preparing the chicken and others selling beer and Inca Kola. Cheerful music was playing, creating a calm ambiance on that sunny afternoon in January. After eating the fried chicken with red onions and rice in the company of some of the brothers, I stayed a little longer, talking about Peru, Chile, the upcoming football championship organised for that afternoon and the procession to be held in October. Maximiliano, a man of 30-something who had lived in Chile since the age of 11, started to tell me

about the processions in Lima, explaining how big and moving they were. He seemed to feel that words were not enough, so he pulled his smartphone out of his pocket and started to look for videos on YouTube. ‘This one..! Take a look at this – the image of the Lord is about to come out!’, he said, while hitting the play button on a video of the beginning of the procession. It was an aerial shot, probably taken with a drone. ‘Look how many people are there, millions!’ he added, smiling with enthusiasm. In the video, the doors of the *Nazarenas* convent opened and the loud cheers of thousands of tiny people – at least they appeared so within the 5-inch (c. 12.5-cm) screen of the smartphone – drowned out the already loud music the band was playing. Maximiliano shook his head as he told me that the video would not do justice to what he had intended to show me.

It is such an experience ... you have to be there to live it.

This section explores this unattainable sense of being there.

Peruvians in Chile organise several processions in Santiago and in other cities (more on this in [Chapter 7](#)). When speaking about these processions in Chile, there is a common point shared by most Peruvians. During these religious events, they commented that they felt as though they were briefly back in Peru. Teresa, the domestic worker, is a devotee of the Virgin of Chapi, whose celebration (including the procession) is held at the Latin American Church in Santiago in the first week of May. Teresa, who struggles between staying in Chile working and going back to Peru to assist her old and ill mother, expresses it very clearly:

With my devotion, I feel like I am in my country. I don’t feel that I am away.

Fieldwork for this book required attending many processions in Chile, as well as in Puno and Arequipa in Peru. There is something very strong and very moving about the experience of the processions: people cry, stare in awe, hold hands and pray while following the image, some of them barefoot, under the sun or the rain. Being allowed to carry the image is an honour that moves most people to tears. In addition, spectators pull out their smartphones and aim them at the sacred images. This was the case with the biggest procession in Santiago, which took place at the end of October 2018 and lasted for nine hours. Daniel, a Peruvian devotee who was the leader of the brotherhood a couple of years ago, and I were in charge of the ‘official’ livestream through the brotherhood’s Facebook



**Figure 5.5** The Facebook livestream of the procession of Our Lord of Miracles in Santiago (28 October 2018) which attracted 219 comments and 18,000 views. Comments included: ‘Bless your Peruvian people and the whole world’; ‘Great and almighty you are, my Lord of Miracles’. Official Facebook account of the brotherhood; screenshot by Alfonso Otaegui.

and Instagram pages (Fig. 5.5). ‘The social media are exploding..!’ exclaimed Daniel. He was fascinated by the thousands of people who followed the procession on Facebook and posted expressions of gratitude and requests for miracles, usually related to health (Fig. 5.6).

Processions are very experiential events. Their impact is very hard to convey for Peruvians, who would usually show each other a video, but understand that, just as Maximiliano told me, being there is actually quite different and much more intense. People pull out their smartphones and livestream these events as an ‘exercise of co-presence’. Peruvian migrants insist on the uniqueness of the experience so much, however, that one cannot help but wonder why they would want to share such a deeply-felt personal experience. It can be argued that they want to share the experience precisely because it is impossible to convey. This leads me to the argument that there is a hierarchy in co-presence. Between the migrant livestreaming and the family member or friend





hmsch



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**Figure 5.6** An Instagram post during the procession of Our Lord of Miracles in Santiago (28 October 2018). Official Instagram account of the brotherhood; screenshot by Alfonso Otaegui.

watching, there is no equality of living the same experience. It is not possible to live a procession through a video. Rather the broadcaster is living the actual experience and letting their relatives and friends know about it at the very same time. The spectators online are not co-living the experience: they are watching the broadcaster live the experience. The livestream, rather than a 'live this with me', is thus more an expression of 'I wish you were here'. The spectators in Peru, or anywhere in the

world, send blessings and greetings, acknowledging the experience of the broadcaster.

Part of the experience goes beyond the relationship between individual and divinity – it relates too to the collective attendance and performance of the ceremony. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, livestreams are not only used for religious processions; they are also a feature of chicken parties, Peruvian dance contests or regular parties with dancing and singing.

Whether they are intense Peruvian religious events or intense Peruvian parties, all these collective events serve to re-create something of Peru abroad. [Chapter 3](#) showed that Peruvians in Chile have mostly succeeded in re-creating Peruvian gastronomy in Chile. The discussion of social relationships in [Chapter 4](#) has shown that Peruvian migrants are able to re-create some of their sociality here in Chile. [Chapter 7](#) will analyse the re-creation of the Peruvian religious collective experience that takes place in Santiago. In all of these contexts seeking to re-create elements of Peruvian community, the re-created experience is then sent back to Peru, to be shared by their family members still living in their home country. This invitation to watch and participate as spectators seems to be more prominent in these collective experiences of Peruvian traditions re-created in Chile.

## Conclusion: coping with living ‘in between’

The smartphone helps these Peruvian migrants to cope with the sense of being ‘in between’ that permeates their whole lives. The way in which communicating via cheap telephone calls in the 1990s helped them to deal with this feeling of having a life here, while still having half a life there has been explored throughout this chapter; so has the nature of modern communication that also helps to manage the ‘in between’ experience. Some experiences can be re-created to a certain extent (for example, food, sociality and religious expression). Others, such as a mother’s hug or day-to-day intimacy, cannot. In one way, therefore, the smartphone does allow migrants to cope with this sense of being ‘in between’. In another way, taking the argument even further, it can be said that the smartphone – and its almost instant communication – is the condition of possibility within such ‘in between’ lives.

The research participants whom I met for this study seem to be very sensitive to bodily experiences, from the subtle taste of *ceviche* to the feeling of carrying a sacred image upon their shoulders. They describe these

experiences with an intensity that is hard to reproduce: sometimes it is shown in the smile with which they recall a memory, the way they caress their fingertips with their thumb when speaking about the texture of food or the serenity in their eyes when they remember a procession – just as Elena showed in her glance at the Virgin of Chapi on the wall of her office at the public hospital. Those participants who have been living in a foreign country for over 20 years have managed to reproduce and re-create several of their Peruvian experiences in Chile, for instance Peruvian gastronomy in Santiago (see [Chapter 3](#)), now a city with an incredibly high number of Peruvian restaurants. As argued in [Chapter 4](#), Peruvians in Chile have skilfully re-created Peruvian sociality through chicken parties, National Day parties, dance contests, *pachamancas*, *huaynadas* and the like. They have even managed to develop to some extent their religious experience in their personal everyday lives (see [Chapter 3](#)), and also through communal events such as processions (see [Chapter 7](#)). Yet the research participants do admit that some of these experiences are not as intense as in Peru.

Other experiences are more intense, however, precisely because of the distance. Teresa, one of the domestic workers and a devotee of the Virgin of Chapi, says that she experiences her devotion more deeply and more intensely than in Peru because she is so far away. In a way, Peruvian migrants in Chile have managed to re-create these three fundamental aspects of their lives in the destination country. However, one aspect cannot be re-created here: family. Yes, the participants have formed their own families here and met new Peruvian friends, as shown in [Chapter 4](#). Yet they cannot re-create their parents, siblings and cousins who are still living in Peru or elsewhere. Despite this, the participants do keep in touch very frequently with their parents, their nephews and nieces, as well as their friends from Peru, to a point that these emotional links overcome geographical borders.

Without these means of communication being available, transnational families would not exist.<sup>18</sup> Traditionally one would think that being a family depends on an ability to share the same location. As this is not the case in a transnational family, another meeting place has to be generated – an affective space, created by the use of communication technologies. This affective space is a constant flow of information: keeping up is being family. Through the use of the smartphone, Peruvian migrants keep in constant contact with their families and friends in Peru, and continue to be engaged family members and friends. This flow of information is limited and can never replace the experience of talking face to face, as Elena clearly states. Yet these communication technologies do

help Peruvian migrants to bear the difficulty of their parents being away from them, even though it cannot replace a human encounter. This is why almost all the participants keep travelling back to Peru whenever possible.

Through the use of the smartphone, Peruvian migrants can share various re-created experiences, such as a procession or Peruvian National Day celebrations in Chile, back with their parents who took them to mass as children (see [Chapter 7](#)). Affectivity can undoubtedly flow through digital communications, but what about care? Can Peruvian migrants send care – or take care, in any meaningful way – of their ageing parents in Peru? This question will be addressed in the [next chapter](#). Taking care of parents seems to be a clearly established duty for these late middle-aged Peruvian migrants, as if it pertained to the very definition of family. We will see that family and care seem to go hand in hand, the latter perceived as an idiom of affectivity.

Elena's smartphone rings for the third or fourth time during our intermittent conversation in her office at the oncological clinic. I can read the caller ID on her screen: 'daughter'. Elena picks up quickly, explains something kindly but assertively and then hangs up. I ask her if it was one of her two daughters, both born in Chile. 'No, no,' she replies, 'it was Vivi [one of the nurses]. I call all of them "daughter"'.

## Notes

1. Arica and Punta Arenas are respectively the northernmost and southernmost cities in Chile.
2. As stated in the introduction, the ASSA project has the applied aim of improving the access to healthcare or the wellbeing of the populations among whom we carry out our fieldwork.
3. This model of nursing is called the 'nurse navigator' (Devine 2017). This team of nurses is appointed specifically to carry out the follow up with patients and to manage their treatment from a medical and administrative point of view. The nurses use WhatsApp to remind patients about their appointments and ask them how they are feeling. They receive questions about the side effects of chemotherapy (which they pass on to the oncologists) and send requests for medical tests and other functions (Otaegui 2020).
4. See Tijoux 2013b.
5. See Tijoux 2007 and Tijoux and Retamales 2015.
6. As pointed out by Horn (2019, 22), the preconception of the notion of family as a locally based unit still informs many sociological studies. Such a preconception may lead to the perception of transnational families as dysfunctional. See Baldassar and Merla (2014) and Baldassar et al. (2007) for studies on the circulation of care within transnational families.
7. All of these ways of communicating were not available on WhatsApp when the messaging app was first launched. WhatsApp was made available for iOS in 2009 and Android in 2010; it introduced voice messages in 2013 and one-to-one voice calls between users in 2015. In 2016 WhatsApp added one-to-one videocalls and then, in 2018, group videocalls of up to four users (augmented to eight users in April 2020). Source: Wikipedia, accessed on 26 June 2020: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline\\_of\\_WhatsApp](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_WhatsApp).

8. WhatsApp launched the videocall service in November 2016. Source: Forbes, accessed on 26 June 2020: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/amitchowdhry/2016/11/15/whatsapp-video-calling-launches/#d958436e456d>.
9. Most of the research participants have been living in Chile for over 20 years. Joaquín is perhaps the one who migrated the most recently.
10. '[W]hereas migrants usually have a good idea about the lives of their relatives in the country of origin, non-migrant family members rely primarily upon the migrants' narratives, media coverage and visits abroad. It is a well-known phenomenon that migrants provide brightened images of their lives' (Horn 2019, 19).
11. For a more contextualised depiction of Teresa, see the story of her life in [Chapter 6](#).
12. I witnessed a pickpocket on a bus grabbing a young woman's smartphone and running away. An older research participant told me about a similar episode that had happened to him on the street.
13. Even though WhatsApp takes the centre stage in this section, it is worth noting that Facebook Messenger is also used for chats with friends and relatives.
14. Vertovec's analysis of communication in the 1990s is quite on point when it comes to understanding the way in which our research participants stayed in touch with their families abroad. The 1990s saw a big rise in international communication. According to Held et al. (referenced by Vertovec 2009, 54), international telephone calls went from 12.7 billion call minutes in 1982 to 42.7 billion call minutes in 1992, reaching 154 billion by 2001 (Held et al. 1999, 344).
15. This would amount to around £1.23 per minute, using the average conversion rate in 1998.
16. Vertovec 2009.
17. Although Peru lags behind Chile when it comes to access to the internet, smartphone use is very widespread. In Peru, even though by 2013 very few households (22 per cent) had access to the internet, four of every five households at that time already possessed at least one mobile device. In 2013 82 per cent of households in Peru had one mobile phone (INEI 2014, referred to by Horn 2019, 22).
18. Without communication, there are no transnational families. This was the case for very poor families of Spaniards and Italians, who migrated to South America in the late nineteenth century. Most of those migrants lost contact with their remaining family in Europe.

## 6

# Health and care: in between dynamics of care

## Introduction

This chapter will address another of the particular issues migrants face while living abroad: having a family spread across national borders. As explained in the introduction, the research participants in this book first came to Chile around 20 years ago. With slight delays, they were all able to bring their nuclear family, i.e. their spouses and children, to Chile sooner or later. In most cases their parents remained in Peru. When the research participants came to Chile, their parents were around 50 or 60 years old and in good health. Some decades later, the research participants have reached the threshold of late middle-age and their parents are around 80 or 90 years old and in need of care.

This chapter focuses on the way in which the research participants provide care to their parents, in order to help them face the frailties of a more advanced age. A wide variety of arrangements allows them to provide good care to their ageing parents. The personal relationship between these late middle-aged adults and their older parents is also explored. The structure of this chapter is quite straightforward. First, it shows how these late middle-aged Peruvians provide care to their elder parents and their feelings about doing so. Despite the diversity of scenarios, the constant of filial obligation and devotion is clearly apparent. The chapter then moves on to discuss how these late middle-aged Peruvians picture their own future as people in need of care and reflects upon their expectations towards younger generations. It will be argued that these committed caregivers are not ready in turn to become care receivers in a couple of decades.

## Providing care at a huge distance

Migrating implies a huge emotional cost, a fact illustrated by Elena in [Chapter 4](#) and Liliana in [Chapter 3](#). Both women told powerful stories about leaving their families and the home cities in which they felt at ease. Elena even remembered counting down the days until she was going to return, only to be prevented by the sudden onset of her husband's medical condition. In more recent times Joaquín's situation during the COVID-19 pandemic, presented in [Chapter 5](#), describes an intensification of the usual emotional conundrum experienced by migrants: being here while eagerly wanting to be back there. [Chapter 5](#) has also considered the ways in which Peruvians keep their affective bonds alive through borders, years and distance.

The process of migrating implies a big emotional cost.<sup>1</sup> Among the studies dedicated to this subject, the one of Baldassar<sup>2</sup> on the guilt felt by migrants is particularly relevant for this chapter. Baldassar's work stems from a study of Italian migrants in Australia, whose ageing parents live in the home country. The researcher found that the feeling of guilt among these migrants is closely linked to the obligation of taking care of elderly parents, and the inability to accomplish that with actual physical presence.

The Peruvian migrants who have participated in this study are very open about their feelings, the things they miss about Peru or the intense emotions they experience during religious processions. They do not seem to feel guilt about their family members living in Peru, however – not at least in the way described by Baldassar. Yet they are, without a doubt, constantly worried about their parents. When they spoke about providing care to their parents, it was presented as a natural responsibility: they were fulfilling something that was a natural expectation of them. It seems that the obligation of providing care is also a factor here (as it is in Baldassar's study). The care provided to their parents was never called into question, which is not in itself surprising. What is surprising, however, is finding out how different their expectations of care are towards the newer generations, i.e. their own children (discussed in more detail below).

Migration studies scholar Vincent Horn has thoroughly analysed the extensive literature on transnational families.<sup>3</sup> In so doing, he has synthesised several phenomena into a series of categories to describe the situation of older adults within transnational families (Horn 2019, 25–40). These categories are preliminary and fluid, of course, given

that some individuals may move from one category to another throughout their lives. They help to organise the diverse situations of research participants' parents. First there are 'the stayers', those who have remained in Peru. Second are 'the transnational travellers', those who travel back and forth between Peru and Chile for a couple of months each year. Third are the 'late-in-life family joiners', those who come to live to Chile at a relatively advanced age, supported by their migrant children. Finally there are 'the ones ageing abroad' – a category that does not apply to the participants' parents, but to the participants of this study themselves.

## The stayers

The first category proposed by Horn applies to situations in which the parents stayed in Peru and the children moved to the destination country. This category is the most common among the research participants. The sons and daughters of the parents staying in Peru manage to provide care one way or another from Chile. One method – for those who can afford it – is to travel frequently to Peru. Such is the case of Esteban and his brothers, Mariano and Guillermo. Their story helps to illustrate the particular features of this scenario.

Esteban is the 64-year-old businessman who was introduced in [Chapter 4](#). He arrived in Chile in the late 1980s, to be followed a few years later, in the early and mid-1990s, by his two younger brothers. The three brothers run a family enterprise together, with offices in Lima and Santiago. Mariano, aged 62 and a notary, is the one who stays in Santiago most of the time. After living in Santiago for many years, Guillermo returned to Lima; he has managed the local business office since then. Esteban travels back and forth between Santiago and Lima, although he emphasises that his roots are now in Chile.

Esteban's father is in Lima and is 91 years old. 'He is as strong as a bull,' says Esteban, 'but he can't remember anything'. Meanwhile his mother, now 89, has a prodigious memory but is in a wheelchair. Esteban wants to provide a good quality of life to his parents. On more than one occasion he and his two brothers have tried to convince their parents to migrate to Chile. They have so far refused, stating that their friends and their whole way of life are in Peru. Their mother replied: 'You three and my grandchildren, you all work, who am I going to stay with?' This remark by Esteban's mother is not unusual and has been reported in the



literature on transnational families.<sup>4</sup> Esteban's mother implies that she would mostly be alone in Chile, in contrast to her life in Peru. 'In Lima I have my friends, I attend the older adults' club'.

Esteban and his brothers send remittances to their parents, who also have a pension. Esteban praises his father's foresight in thinking about the future long ago and building a three-storey house, one storey for each son. When the children migrated to Chile, their parents rented out the second and third floors. The three brothers hired a female employee who goes every other day to check on the building and do the cleaning. Guillermo, the brother who returned to Peru, lives three blocks away from them. Esteban travels to Lima quite frequently; when he does, he stays with his parents. Esteban assures me quite calmly that their parents do not want for anything.

Esteban's parents are strongly attached to Peru. He explained that his parents were going to come in for a visit, but that they would only stay for a fortnight at most because they missed their homeland. In this respect they are very different from Esteban, as he acknowledges. He lived in Japan for a year and a half due to a role he held in his younger years and has always been travelling due to work. In a way, it seems that Esteban's parents constitute his last strong link to Peru:

I can go to any place on earth, but my home is here (in Chile) ...  
I am waiting for my parents to go to heaven, then everything is closed for me there. My roots are here.

It is surprising to hear Esteban say this. As shown in [Chapter 4](#), he is one of the leaders of the Peruvian Club in Santiago. He dances traditional Peruvian Marinera, including performances at the presidential palace in Santiago, and is one of the key members of the Brotherhood of Our Lord of Miracles. His statement definitely does not mean that he is less attached to his country, perhaps only that is he is less attached to it as a place, as a geographical location. Esteban may have his roots in Chile now, but most of what he does – religious activities, social life, charitable work – is clearly directed towards the Peruvian community.

The particular geographical distribution of the members of a transnational family can lead to specific arrangements concerning family care. In some cases the children living abroad provide financial resources, while those staying with the parents in the home country are in charge of everyday care.<sup>5</sup> Such was the case with the family of Pablo and Marcelo, both introduced in [Chapter 2](#). Marcelo is a 58-year-old businessman who

came to Chile in the late 1980s, while his older brother Pablo, now aged 60, came to Chile 20 years ago. Their younger sister, who remained single, stayed in Peru and took good care of their parents, an arrangement that worked well for a couple of decades. Unfortunately the sister passed away two years ago due to a chronic illness. Since then, given the new situation, Marcelo and Pablo have been travelling to Lima quite frequently to take care of their parents. Every two weeks, one of the two brothers flies there. 'I travel very frequently, so I do not miss that many things from Peru,' comments Pablo. Their parents are now quite old: their mother is in her eighties, while their father has already reached his nineties. They need their children to be present. Pablo and Marcelo are considering bringing their parents to Chile, but the brothers are still not sure.

These two examples of upper middle-class Peruvian migrants are quite similar. Esteban, Mariano, Marcelo and Pablo have lived here in Chile for many years and have their lives here. Their parents, on the other hand, have their lives in Peru and could not afford emotionally to come to Chile. The two businessmen seem to be satisfied with the care they provide to their parents. They travel frequently for work, but also to provide direct care to their parents. This is facilitated not only by their financial status, but also by the proximity between Chile and Peru. According to the 'Primera Encuesta a la Comunidad Peruana en el Exterior' ('First worldwide survey on the Peruvian community abroad') survey, as analysed by Horn (2019, 134), family visits among Peruvian migrants were the most frequent for those migrants living in Chile (out of a comparison between Peruvian migrants living in the US, Spain, Italy, Argentina and Chile).

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, the research participants, though certainly engaged with the situation, did not seem to be feeling the guilt described by Baldassar. These upper middle-class Peruvians were concerned about their parents, but did not seem anxious. Arguably, being able to travel at very short notice and all that this entails (money to buy flights at any time and the legal status to leave the country) gives them peace of mind. This is not, of course, the same for lower-income migrants.

Peruvian migrants from lower-income strata, such as care and domestic workers, cannot afford to travel that often. They consequently experience more anxiety over the distance from relatives, as in the case of Javiera. Aged 53, she comes from a town near Lima. She goes back to Peru with her family once a year rather than every two weeks. Javiera's father passed away a long time ago, when she came to Chile to work in the early 2000s. Javiera observes, with a sad note in her voice, '*Mi papa se murió de pena*' ('my father died out of sorrow'), referring to how much he missed

her; she herself was very attached to him. The emotional cost of migration is high not only for migrants, but also for those who remain behind.

Javiera initially had to endure separation from her children as well as from her parents. A common arrangement within transnational families, she first left her children under the care of her mother. Three years later she was able to bring them to Chile. Now, 22 years after first arriving in Chile, her mother in Peru is her main concern. Her children are with her in Chile, although one of them has sadly passed away here. As stated in [Chapter 5](#), the development of information and communication technologies has gone some way towards easing the pain of the distance: Javiera talks to her mother every day.

The anxieties and emotional struggle of being in Chile while wanting to provide good care for parents in Peru seem to be more intense for lower-income workers. This is understandable if we take into account how important physical presence is for the participants; middle-class and upper-class professionals and businesspeople have more opportunities to travel to Peru in situations where urgent care is required. Lower-income workers, such as Javiera or Joaquín, cannot afford to be that available. This situation has an impact on their experience of life in Chile. The story of a lower-income worker will illustrate this point better.

### Teresa, the Virgin and the sewing machine

Teresa, introduced at the beginning of this book, is a 53-year-old domestic worker who has lived in Chile for 12 years. Her story depicts some of the conundrums described in [Chapter 3](#) (the question of going back set against the need to stay here), coupled with the concerns of providing care to ageing parents, the emotional storm this constant situation creates for her and the support she finds in her Christian faith.

I have seen Teresa at many events at the Latin American Church, where she usually helps out in the kitchen. I remember quite distinctly how she waited for any opportunity to crack a joke or tease someone, just before bursting into a loud laugh. The day we meet to talk, a Sunday morning at the church, she seems a little down. From the start, it is very apparent that Teresa does not want to think about her age. As she explains:

Sometimes I feel the *achagues* (ailments resulting from old age). My hand hurts, but it is better not to think about age and keep working.

She pays for the medical needs of her mother, who is in very delicate health in Peru.

Teresa's migration journey started long ago, before coming to Chile. She first migrated to the capital of Peru from her home city, Arequipa. Teresa's parents were separated and by the age of 17 she had two children. As a single mother, she left her children with her father and moved to Lima to work. One day she suddenly decided to move to Chile: she took a loan from the bank and moved to Santiago. Teresa came to Chile because she wanted something better for her family in Arequipa. As stated in the literature on migration, while middle-class and upper middle-class migrants tend to migrate to improve their own quality of life, lower-income migrants tend to migrate to support their family back in their home country.

Her father never wanted Teresa to come to Chile. Her mother took care of her children and she came from Arequipa to Santiago by bus. It was a long journey. She did not have the required papers to enter the country, so at one point had to buy an unofficial 'ticket', meaning that she had to travel hidden in the luggage compartment of a bus. 'That trip was very, very cold!' she remembers. She made it safely to Santiago and went straight to the Latin American Church. She stayed at the house for newly arrived migrants, a place where she still spends her Saturday nights – her only nights off as a live-in domestic worker.

After completing the domestic worker workshop at the house, Teresa got a job almost immediately. She had submitted her visa application, now possible because she had an employment contract. Luckily this was at the time the Chilean government approved the 2009 migratory amnesty, enabling many migrants in irregular situations to legalise their status. Teresa cancelled her application and asked for a work visa instead. This meant that she would not be tied to a contract and could leave her position without renouncing her visa. She has worked as a domestic worker since and is currently working at a house in Vitacura, an upper-class neighbourhood in Santiago. Like many live-in domestic workers, Teresa works 14 hours a day, from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. Only at this late hour does she return to her room. She has her day off on weekends, leaving the house at 2 p.m. on Saturday and returning on Sunday evening.

Teresa usually spends the weekend at the church, where she can meet her friends and assist the priest. Her friends say she does not look her age, as she does so much at church and she is so vital and hard-working. She is proud to say she is the priest's right-hand woman, and acknowledges that she tries to forget her problems by laughing.

What do we have left? Laughing and joking..! From Monday to Friday we are caged within four walls; on weekends I spend my time in the church kitchen, fooling around, joking.

Teresa has thought of returning to Peru more than once, as her mother has breast cancer. On one visit, seeing her sick mother, she almost decided to stay. However, she has no job in Peru and no one there to support her. Her brothers are there with her mother, but for Teresa that is no reassurance. 'They are there, but they are men,' she says, implying that they cannot provide good enough care. As stated in the literature on transnational families, Teresa is an example of the fact that women are usually expected to be more involved in taking care of elderly parents as compared to male family members. She told the priest two years ago that she wanted to return to Peru, but he changed her mind. He pointed out that in Santiago at least she could work and send money to help her family: who would support her mother if she did not work?

As someone from Arequipa, Teresa is devoted to the Virgin of Chapi, as she had learned from her father. She brought the first image of the Virgin of Chapi to the Latin American Church from Arequipa. 'I am bringing the Virgin to Santiago,' she explained to her father during a visit to her home town. A couple of months later, he passed away. On the trip by bus to Santiago, quite unexpectedly, the custom officer did not inspect her suitcase, which had the image inside: 'The Virgin did not want to be seen,' Teresa notes. She recalls the first celebration of the Virgin in Santiago in much detail. For the event she prepared *rocoto relleno* (filled *rocoto*, a spicy pepper from Peru) and over 300 people showed up. The priest wondered if there would be enough food for everyone but Teresa was not concerned. 'If the Virgin wants to share, there will be enough for everybody,' she declared, and there was. Years passed by and now she has been appointed to be the *mayordoma* (chief of the celebration) for the second time in Santiago, which has delayed her possible return to Arequipa.

Like many Peruvians, Teresa has the ambition of starting a business and becoming self-employed. With huge effort, she has bought a couple of sewing machines in Chile, and has already got them delivered to her house in Peru. She wants to set up a sewing workshop in Arequipa and start repairing clothes. This way, she could be in Arequipa and support her family. Her mother was a seamstress and her daughter knows how to sew, she emphasises. Once the business gets going, Teresa plans to develop it and to start doing embroidery. Her mother said it was a fine plan.

Teresa is careful about her health, as she says she has almost no one in Chile who has enough free time to take care of her, should anything happen. She even wears extra warm clothes in winter to avoid catching a cold or pneumonia. At least in Santiago, she convinces herself, she can make money for her mother's medications as well as her flights. Teresa

calls her mother every day through WhatsApp. For this participant, hiding her own age-related frailties from herself is a way of keeping going, and thus ensuring that her mother has the financial support she needs. In the end, Teresa is still uncertain about going back to Peru. The Virgin is the one who will decide her fate, she says; it is up to her whether Teresa goes back or stays another year. She does not want to think about it.

I always say ‘only you, *mamita* [“mum”, i.e. Virgin of Arequipa], only you know’.

## The transnational travellers

The second category taken from Horn is the one of the ‘transnational travellers’. These are cases of older parents who visit their migrant children quite frequently. This has been described in literature under several names, but perhaps the most accurate for this case is that of ‘transnational travellers’. According to Horn’s literature review (2019, 28–31), the case of ‘transnational travellers’ usually applies to grandmothers travelling to another country where their children live, to help them cope with caring for their new-born babies.<sup>6</sup> There is one case of ‘transnational travellers’ among the research participants’ parents, but they do not travel for the purpose of taking care of their grandchildren. This is the case of the parents of Gerardo, the 49-year-old biochemist. He came here at the age of 27 to undertake postgraduate studies with his then-fiancée, but ended up getting a job and staying for 22 years. His parents were professors and had a good financial situation, so he never had to send remittances. They used to visit on special family occasions, such as the births of Gerardo’s daughters and his nieces (Gerardo’s sister had moved to Chile some years before him). Since 2010 his parents have been coming to visit more often, so Gerardo and his wife decided to help them apply for Chilean ID cards. These would allow his parents to come more frequently and to stay longer than under a tourist visa.

Currently, Gerardo’s parents visit Santiago for two or three months at a time. They rent a house here, followed by two to three months in their home town of Arequipa. They rented out their big house in Arequipa and moved in with Gerardo’s uncle. In order to be able to travel this frequently, the parents need to be in good health. Gerardo’s parents are now 80 and 82 years old; they are currently able to travel, but it is not unlikely that in a couple of years they will settle back in Arequipa. Gerardo and his wife are two of the few among the research participants who declared

very assertively that they plan to return to their home town, not only to take care of their parents but also to 'give back' to their communities. Other than good health, economic resources are the other requirement for these 'transnational travellers'. The relatively small distance between Chile and Peru is also helpful (a direct flight from Arequipa to Santiago takes 3 hours, while a flight with a stop over in Lima takes between 6 and 7 hours).

As this case shows, these categories are fluid. The same people may go from one category to another throughout their lifetime. For instance, Gerardo's parents were 'stayers' 20 years ago, with Gerardo and his sister living in Chile. The frequent travelling then made them fit into that category, but it is quite likely that will go back to Arequipa for good in a year or so (thereby becoming 'stayers' once again). Changes in categories are not of course, mandatory. The parents of Esteban and Pablo ('stayers'), for example, have refused to come to Chile for good. In other cases, transnational travellers may accept the invitation from their migrant children and stay in the receiving country for good. This was the case of Roberto's parents, who migrated to Chile in 2009. They thus fall into the next category outlined above: 'the late-in-life family joiners'.

## The late-in-life family joiners

This category refers to older parents who join their migrant children in the destination country at an advanced age. Horn points out that most research on this situation is carried out on migrants who have a degree of financial stability, and that is also the case in this chapter.<sup>7</sup> The research participants of this study, perhaps due to their relative prosperity tended to focus more on the affective dimension of their parents' experience, rather than on economic difficulties, which, although manageable, are not absent.

In the two cases presented here, the older parents' migration was also the final point in the migration of an entire family. Take Roberto's story, for example. He is now 60 years old and was 37 when he came to Chile in 1997. His wife had migrated first, as her brother was already living here and could find her a job. Roberto joined her almost a year later, having first stayed behind in Lima to take care of their very young children while working at an underpaid job. Roberto still remembers how hard it was to be separated from his wife for all these months. Over 22 years later, he is the right-hand man of the director of a factory and all his brothers and sisters have moved to Chile. Roberto and his four

siblings see no reason to go back to Peru; they have a stable and very good financial situation in Chile, one that they could not have had in their home country. They go back to visit, but not to live. All the members of Roberto's close family now live in Chile: his two children, his Chilean grandchildren, his brother and his Chilean nephews, his sisters and his parents.

As is the case with so many of his fellow countrymen, Roberto and his family did not initially think they would stay in Chile forever. However, this is what ended up happening. As is common in these stories (see [Chapter 3](#)), Roberto went back to Peru two years after first migrating to Chile and realised, with surprise, that he could no longer live in hectic Lima.

Roberto's parents used to come to visit their children and grandchildren quite frequently before they finally moved to Chile a little over 10 years ago. Although at the time the decision seemed quite obvious and logical for Roberto and his brother Sandro, it was not easy for their parents. When Roberto, his brother and their sisters first suggested to their parents that they should join them in Chile for good, they vehemently opposed the idea. Their father was the most reluctant, as he had his circle of friends in Lima, as well as his cousins and other people he knew. The emotional cost of leaving all of his friendships, relatives and everyday life was at that point, he felt, too high a price to pay. Eventually, as is sadly the case at that stage of one's life, many of his father's friends and cousins eventually passed away. So, at the age of 82, Roberto's father accepted his son's proposal to migrate and moved to this new country with his wife 10 years ago.

It is important to highlight here that although the life experience of these 'late-in-life family joiners' is discussed here, it is described from the perspective of their children (the research participants). Although I did meet the participants' parents on social occasions during fieldwork (such as the ones described in [Chapter 4](#)), no conversations with them have been used in this study. As with previous categories, this chapter reflects the experience of the adult children who are taking care of their parents (rather than their parents' experience of receiving care). Beneath all of the relationships between children and ageing parents lies the subtle, deep-rooted acceptance of unquestionable filial obligation, especially in the final years of their parents' lives.

Roberto's parents had come to Chile with all their savings and were expecting to enjoy these in their new home. Shortly after their arrival, however, Roberto's mother was unfortunately diagnosed with cancer. Having barely arrived, she was already facing the difficulties migrants



usually encounter: on only a tourist visa at the time, she had no health insurance. All of her savings – and additional funds, contributed by her children – had to be spent on surgery and treatment. Although she survived the cancer, she lost a lot of weight due to the severe illness and the strict treatment she had to follow. ‘My mum used to be a robust lady, who enjoyed eating,’ Roberto remembers with a subtle smile. Sadly, his mother could no longer recognise this now too thin version of herself in the mirror. Roberto, his smile gone, recounts the sequence of events with regret and a certain irony; one day his mother got a cold and this became pneumonia, which ended up being fatal.

She fell into a depression because she could not accept herself. Her voice faded away ... We succeeded in saving her from cancer and she ends up dying of pneumonia.

Roberto’s mother was cremated and her ashes placed in a funeral urn. Roberto’s father resisted the idea of cremation at first, but he finally accepted it, even requesting that he should be cremated when his time came and his ashes mixed with those of his late wife. [Chapter 8](#) will show that cremation is more common than expected among Peruvian migrants.

When talking about his father, Roberto says that he was very strong for a couple of years. However, in the last years he developed several medical problems with his urinary tracts, including a form of cancer. Roberto and his siblings used to co-ordinate their father’s care through a WhatsApp group. Last year Roberto’s father asked the remaining extended family members in Peru to come for to Chile for New Year’s Eve, as he thought it would be his last. Unfortunately, he was right. Roberto’s family organised the whole reunion and also prepared a big surprise for him. Roberto’s father had always wanted to be a singer but never sang in front of anyone; as Roberto observed, ‘he was a frustrated singer’. The whole family rented a venue with a stage and sound equipment, preparing the place so that the whole family could attend the concert. His father sang for two hours. His dream had come true. After that his health worsened and he passed away in the last week of April 2020.

The coming of Roberto’s parents to Santiago was the last step in the process of their family leaving Peru. Roberto was certainly happy and sad at the same time when, at one of the brotherhood’s meetings, he told the story of the concert and how his father’s dream had come true. It was just two months since his father had passed away, and his declining health had prompted several chains of prayers started by members of the brotherhood.

In other stories about taking care of parents in the destination country, this eventual reunion seems to be an opportunity for these late middle-aged Peruvians to make peace with their pasts. This was the case with Eugenia and her sister Estefanía, both introduced in previous chapters. In a way Eugenia and Estefanía came to be closer to their mother and father respectively during and through this care relationship. It is necessary to retrace their journeys as migrants in order to understand their devoted relationship with their parents and the reasons why they brought them to Chile. Eugenia, now aged 60, migrated to Chile over 20 years ago when she was 38. The second child in a family of seven children, she has a 62-year-old brother living in the United States and another brother, aged 58, living in Japan. Her four younger sisters also live in Chile, having migrated one after the other. The pioneer in this transnational family was her sister Estefanía, who came to Chile in the late 1980s.

Eugenia lives in Santiago with her 88-year-old father; her mother passed away six years ago. She had studied to become an accountant and now works as a bank employee. Even though Eugenia does not state it directly, one can perceive that she had a hard life in her early years, due in large part to her relationship with her mother. Through anecdotes and stories about her obligations as a child, a sense of overwhelming tasks emerges. During her childhood in Peru, Eugenia was the eldest daughter, in charge of all her siblings; aged only nine, she had to take care of all of them. At the time Peru was undergoing a period of recession imposed by the military regime, so there was very little food to buy. 'We could only buy 1 kilo of rice at this one shop, 1 kilo of meat in that another shop,' she says, speaking in her usual rapid pace. Her mother used to have to wake up at 3 a.m. to go to the street market or the shops. In order to get up that early, she went to bed very early as well, leaving Eugenia in charge of the house (their father was always working outside their home). She would cook potatoes and burn some of them, as she did not really know how to cook. She would hide the burnt potatoes, but her mother would find them and make her eat them, saying this would teach her what burnt potatoes tasted like. The same would happen with rice: her mother used to scrape any burnt rice off the bottom of the pan and give it to Eugenia to eat. 'That is why people say I am a good cook, as I learned very well when I was a child,' comments Eugenia, hinting at a certain calm attitude towards life that is discussed in [Chapter 8](#).

Eugenia finished high school and completed a degree at university three years later. She worked for a very important company for 14 years and then with a broker for a couple of years until the broker went bankrupt

and everything was taken from him. The moment in which Eugenia realised she had to look for opportunities in Chile came to her between youth and middle age. As she explains, speaking even faster than normal,

I was 38 years old and I knew I was not going to get a job. I could not compete with those younger candidates, those ones would work for half the salary. The employers did not care about experience any more!

She phoned her sister, who was living in Chile, and asked her for a job. She already had two sisters living in Chile, one of whom was Estefanía. Her call came just at the right moment. The secretary of her sister's boss had just quit, so Eugenia had a job in Chile right from the start.

In the year 2000, her older brother decided to move to Texas. He sold his house and moved to the United States with his whole nuclear family. This was bad news for her mother, as, according to Eugenia, he had been her mother's favourite. Her health deteriorated quickly and she had a cardiac problem. Eugenia then suggested to her sisters that they should bring their mother to Chile, to which they agreed. Eventually all of Eugenia and Estefanía's family moved out of Peru. Only their house in Lima remains.

Eugenia's mother had been a housewife all her life and had never worked for anyone. A couple of years after her mother arrived in Chile, the country's president at the time, Michelle Bachelet, carried out a huge reform of the pension system; this entitled her mother to receive benefit as well. Her mother then went to the bank to receive her first ever payment. At the bank Silvia, another of the sisters, started to count the notes, but the counter assistant stopped her. She explained:

This is her [the mother's] money. She is the one who must receive it and count it.

Her mother could not believe what was happening. She had never received any money from an employer in her whole life; now, as she counted the notes, tears rolled down her face. Her mother felt very grateful to the country of Chile and was astonished that 'a country in which I have never worked pays me'. Eugenia looked exultant as she told this story about her mother. It is as if she felt the gratitude towards Chile through her mother.

In 2012 Eugenia's mother was diagnosed with a severe lung disease and given six months left to live. Her mother did not want to be

in a hospital, so they arranged for her to live at Eugenia's house. She had a mechanical respirator for when she was in bed and a portable one for when she got up. In total, she lived for another two years, four times as long as expected. 'The doctor said that she lived that long because of the good quality of life I gave her,' says Eugenia with a sense of pride and fulfilment. During this period, the community of the Latin American Church were always there for them. She remembers that the Scalabrinian priest, in particular, was always very kind and made time for them.

He would call every Sunday before mass to ask how she felt and to give her a blessing by phone.

It was during those late years in Chile that a discreet reconciliation finally took place for Eugenia. In a move not deprived of *pudor* ('modesty', although this translation is insufficient),<sup>8</sup> she would refute the need for this reconciliation even as she told the story. In the last years of her life, her mother asked Eugenia for forgiveness for the treatment she had received as a child. Eugenia says that she replied that she had nothing to forgive. Although not denying that the reconciliation occurred, she does not accept the need for it. It seems that Eugenia's mother was doing what mothers are supposed to do when Eugenia was young, while Eugenia was doing what she is supposed to do when her mother is old. A similar story of late-in-life reconciliation took place between Eugenia's sister Estefanía and their father.

Estefanía was also very vocal about her gratitude to the Latin American Church for all they did for their mother, especially the various Christian brotherhoods. 'My mother was never alone,' she says. She came to Chile when still young, around 25 years of age. Even though she highlights how impressed she was by Chile's order and cleanliness in the late 1980s, the desire for freedom emerges clearly from her story. Estefanía remembers that her family was as united as it was traditional and conservative. As a young girl, she was not allowed to have a boyfriend, go to a party without a brother accompanying her or even to stay at a friend's house to study. She told her parents that she was coming to Chile as a tourist for two weeks, then ended up staying for one month as she really enjoyed the experience. Estefanía then had to return to Peru as her father had to undergo surgery. After spending some time back in Peru, she decided to migrate to Chile and look for a job. Her father never forgave Estefanía for this decision and never gave her his blessing, although her mother eventually came to terms with it.

Thirty years have passed since Estefanía moved to Chile. As mentioned above, Eugenia, Estefanía and their sisters brought their parents to Chile 20 years ago. Today Estefanía much enjoys taking care of her father; no resentment seems to be present. Caring for her father is one of the things she likes to dedicate time to at this stage of her life. It is important to note that neither Eugenia nor Estefanía have any children, so they have time available to dedicate to their father. Estefanía says she has always been very fond of her father and now feels she wants to help him. 'Not all sons or daughters feel this way, but it is natural for me to want to take care of him,' comments Estefanía. It is not easy, however, as this 88-year-old man tends to forget things and his hearing is quite poor.

Estefanía likes to take her father with her when she goes on holiday. She dedicates a good part of her life to him although he actually lives with her sister Eugenia, just as their mother did. Beyond these two daughters, there are three other sisters and it seems that they have arranged a way of managing their father's care. As described by Eugenia, it seems that each sister has a role when it comes to their father's care. Eugenia lives with him, Silvia is the 'doctor', the one in charge of all the medical stuff, Estefanía takes him out to do sightseeing, Inés brings him grandchildren (and therefore joy) and Sara is the distant, not-so-present one.

The case of Eugenia and Estefanía is notable for the care they provide to their parents, despite the differences they might have had with them in the past. In the case of Roberto and his siblings, the migration of their parents was the last step in a series of transnational processes of moving that had started in the early 1990s. In the case of Eugenia and Estefanía's family, they have already sold their family house in Peru, so, as Eugenia says, they have no place to go back to. As with other transnational Peruvian families, Eugenia and Estefanía's sisters are scattered throughout the world. Despite the differences, what is remarkable in these two families is the constancy of care. Arranging daily chores for him on a day-to-day basis, i.e. who will take him to an appointment, etc. implies organising the whole life of an adult who is in need of care.

The relationship between Roberto and his brother Sandro and their parents as well as Estefanía and Eugenia's relationship with their father appears to me to be closer than in the other cases. On many occasions, Eugenia and Estefanía's father has joined events arranged by the organisations described in [Chapter 4](#): the Peruvian Club, the Arequipa Association, the Latin American Church. On these occasions, it was not only the filial devotion of these two daughters that was evident, but also the respect paid to him by the rest of the late middle-aged Peruvians. Besides the fact that he was a former member of the Brotherhood of Our

Lord of Miracles in Peru, there was a clear sense of great respect due to his age. He was praised for his experience. His mere presence, as put into words by many attendants, was an honour. In the previous stories about ageing parents staying in Peru or travelling frequently, the points of discussion were most concerned with organisation of different affairs: who pays for what, who is there to provide care in person or the anxiety that results from the inability to be present, as in the low-income workers' stories.

In these stories of late-in-life family joiners, it seems as if all of the organisational and anxiety-inducing factors were out of the picture, and they could focus more on their actual relationship with their parents. Despite what has been argued in the [previous chapter](#) on constant communication allowing for the continuity of a transnational family, when the main concern is taking care of ageing parents, it seems that nothing can beat physical presence. This is perhaps the reason why Esteban and his brothers as well as Marcelo and Pablo were so eager to bring their parents to Chile.

## The ones ageing abroad

This last category is intended to cover 'older migrants who have spent a considerable part of their life outside their country of origin' (Horn 2019, 34). This is not the case of the parents of these late middle-aged Peruvians, as they have spent most of their lives Peru, even the late-in-life family joiners. This is actually the case of the research participants, precisely these late middle-aged Peruvians. Many of them have spent literally half of their lives in Chile; a few of them have even lived in the host country for longer than in their country of origin.

Horn highlights that migrants tend to reconnect to their country of origin later in life, which would be the reason behind the more frequent visits of migrants to their home countries (2019, 35). As older migrants are less limited by work, they might engage in what is called 'pendular migration' (going back and forth to their home country).<sup>9</sup> However, the late middle-aged Peruvians met during fieldwork do not fit these patterns, at least not yet. They are in constant contact with their family and friends in Peru and have accessed several Peruvian social circles in Santiago. It does not seem to be the case that they re-engage with Peruvian life in this later stage of life, but rather that they have always stayed in contact with their roots. They always kept in touch with their relatives and friends in Peru, sending remittances and visiting whenever possible. However,

in their first years in Santiago, several participants did not frequent any Peruvian social circles, nor did they have many Peruvian connections in Chile. They focused on securing a job (see [Chapter 4](#)). Once settled, they started to attend the Latin American Church more frequently or joined a Peruvian city association in Santiago. It seems that once they had secured some financial stability, they began to join Christian brotherhoods or Peruvian clubs and to produce Peruvian cultural events.

As shown in [Chapter 2](#), most of the research participants, people around the ages of 50 or 60 something, had started to experience the early signs of old age. Yet these emerging frailties – high blood pressure, some minor pains here and there – are not enough to become an obstacle to their working life. They are in acceptably good health, which allows them to keep living their life, especially their working life, with relative success. When it comes to providing care, this chapter has shown the various ways they provide care to their older parents, whether they live in Peru, in Chile or in both. But what about the future? What will these late middle-aged Peruvians do when they start to require care? If not now, this is likely to happen in around 10 to 15 years. In the years to come, they will face more significant frailties living here in Chile. Despite how they are feeling today, they will certainly require care. Do these committed care providers picture themselves as care receivers? The final section addresses these questions.

## The years to come

Peruvian migrants put a huge and continuous effort into providing care to their ageing parents. Some of them travel back to Peru, some of them bring their parents to Chile, while those who cannot afford to do any of those things (usually lower-income migrants) still send remittances or stay in touch with them very frequently, often on a daily basis. Given this effort, it is quite surprising to hear them stating very firmly that they do not want their children to take care of them in the future. The usual justification for this is that they do not want to be a burden on their children. An important factor at play here is that these late middle-aged Peruvians cannot picture the (in fact not so distant) time when they will need care. When asked how much longer they expect to live, they usually respond with ‘another fifteen years, I guess’ or ‘until the age of seventy-something...’. The constant that underlies their answers is an inability to accept natural decay, or at least to picture it. This is understandable, given the fact that most of them have a very active life, almost as active

(in their experience) as it has always been.<sup>10</sup> As shown in [Chapter 2](#) on the experience of age, these late middle-aged Peruvians cannot imagine themselves not working. This reluctance to be without work is related to their experiencing of age-related frailties. It explains why they can only picture themselves in 15 years' time: in a way, they imagine themselves as either an autonomous individual or a dead one. This may in turn shed a light on the reason why they do not want their children to take care of them: not only to avoid being a burden to their children but also, and most importantly, to avoid *feeling* like a burden. These hyperactive people who continue to resist the approaches of age and frailty find it very difficult to see themselves as passive recipients of care.

Care certainly does not mean the same thing from the perspective of the *caregiver* as it does from the *care receiver*. Late middle-aged adults from Peru are in their sixties and still have their parents under their care. However, they neither expect nor want their children to take of them in the same way that they care for their parents. One reason could be precisely this effort: knowing how hard it is, they do not want their children to undergo the same experience. For them, it did not seem to be the case, as the participants never complained about the effort required to provide this care. Rather they believed it was what they should be doing at this stage of life.

The reason not to want this care from their children seems to be twofold. On the one hand, participants are proud workaholics who in most cases can support their parents and their children simultaneously. For them, turning into a recipient of care would mean becoming a burden. Their strong statements about not becoming passive recipients in the future are in fact veiled statements about the present: they make a declaration about their vitality nowadays. On the other hand, rejecting the prospect of receiving care from their children in the future fits well with the underlying narrative of continuous effort and dedication that has informed most of the participants' lives.

These late middle-aged Peruvians display a strong desire to give their children a better life than the one they had growing up. This determination hints at the notion of sacrifice, a concept of paramount importance in understanding life purpose that is considered in [Chapter 8](#). This apparent contradiction between providing care to their parents yet being unwilling to receive care from their children in turn also echoes an ethnographic insight about the discontinuity of certain traditions between these Peruvian migrants and their Chilean children. Such discontinuity is the subject of the [next chapter](#).



## Notes

1. According to Baldassar (2015, 81) the study of emotions is usually overlooked in migration studies.
2. Baldassar 2015.
3. According to Horn (2019, 25), studies of transnational families – i.e. families whose members live across national borders – have usually focused on transnational parenthood. Only recently has the focus shifted towards other members, older parents among them, and other phenomena such as grandparenthood.
4. For example, see Lamb 2002 on older adult Indians living with their children in the United States. Older adults complain that their children have no time for them (299).
5. Díaz Gorfinkiel and Escrivá 2012; Mazzucato 2008.
6. Plaza describes this phenomenon as ‘international flying grannies’ (2000, 97) in her study of Caribbean migrants in Britain. See also Goulbourne et al. 2010.
7. ‘Still, little is known about late in life family joiners in an irregular migration situation and their transnational families. In fact, most research in this field is on economically rather well-off migrants, particularly from Asian countries, residing in the United States or Canada’ (Horn 2019, 31).
8. *Pudor* is translated by the dictionaries as ‘modesty; decency’. It is difficult to find a completely accurate translation in English, but the word encompasses the notion of a public decency with a Christian tone to it.
9. See, for example, Krumme 2004, on retired Turkish migrants who ‘*pendeln*’ (a German verb meaning ‘to swing to and fro as a pendulum’) between Germany and Turkey.
10. There is one unusual case, that of an extremely hard-working migrant who may be starting to experience some symptoms of Alzheimer’s. This will be addressed in Chapter 8, which focuses on life purpose.

## 7

# The devotion of Peruvian migrants

### Introduction: through the lens of popular religion

As stated in the introduction to this book, the participants in this study belong to Christian brotherhoods that honour Peruvian patron saints. The aim of this chapter is to explore the religiosity of these Peruvian migrants and see how it relates to their experiences of ageing in Chile. The chapter reveals that the study of their religious practices allows for a deeper understanding of migrants' dynamics, and even intergenerational relationships. 'Popular religion' or 'folk religion' is a concept from social sciences that indicates ways of practising faith that are in some ways rather outside of the official doctrine.<sup>1</sup> Christian popular religion is very common throughout Latin America and its practices have been mostly accepted by the Catholic Church.

This chapter will start at the Latin American Church and focus on the spiritual practices carried out there.<sup>2</sup> Then it moves to trace the roots of participants' Christian devotion back in their home country and in their family experiences as children. The chapter then considers the ethnography of the devotion to Our Lord of Miracles, which has brotherhoods all over the world. The brotherhood of Santiago is studied in detail, as it is the one to which most of the research participants belong. In the process the three principles that underlie the religious practices within this brotherhood will be unveiled, all of which pertain to migrants' dynamics. The first concerns participants' relations with their home country. The second relates to their condition of being transnational migrants. The third unveils some of the aspects pertaining to participants' relationships with the receiving country, Chile. Finally, the chapter addresses these religious practices as a metaphor and a metonymy of the participants' relations to their home country and to Chile, as well as to the generations of their parents and their children. A final

reflection on continuity closes the discussion, leading to the following chapter that explores life purpose.

## The Latin American Church: a welcome for all local expressions of Christianity

The Scalabrinian priests at the Latin American Church, devoted to helping migrants, have a particular sensitivity to what has been called ‘popular religion’. Father Lucius, a Brazilian Scalabrinian priest who is also a member of a Christian Peruvian brotherhood, describes it as ‘the way God decided to present Himself to different peoples’. Popular religion in Latin America provides a sense of belonging that migrants try to cultivate abroad: all countries and most cities have their own patron saints. The Latin American Church organises the celebrations of many Latin American patron saints and Virgins, such as the Virgin of Cochabamba (Bolivia), the Virgin of Chapi (Peru) and the Virgin of Cormoto (Venezuela), among many others (Fig. 7.1).

The church organises national day parties for every Latin American country, which helps migrant organisations raise some money. Many Christian Peruvian brotherhoods gather at this church, including the Brotherhood of the Virgin of Chapi, the Brotherhood of the Virgin of La Puerta (The Door), the Brotherhood of San Martin de Porres and the Brotherhood of Our Lord of Miracles. The explicit aim of these



**Figure 7.1** The Latin American Church: Marian devotion. Photo by Alfonso Otaegui.

brotherhoods is to raise funds for the organisation of the celebration of the Virgin or patron saint they honour. Every Sunday at 1 p.m. the church celebrates the ‘migrants’ mass’. These celebrations – usually broadcast live on Facebook – are very entertaining. The Scalabrinian priests are usually quite charismatic and the music band plays Caribbean rhythms for the hymns, almost to the point of making the attendees dance in church – something not very common in traditional Catholic celebrations.

The Latin American Church is a spiritual reference for migrants from many Latin American countries. The devotion towards patron saints is a practice linked both to their home countries and to their families. In order to understand why Christian devotion is so important to Peruvian migrants in particular, it is necessary to travel back to Peru and also to go back in time, retracing earlier religious experiences within the context of their families.

## Devotions in Peru

According to the participants in this study, popular religion is deeply rooted in the everyday life of Peru. They highlight that their country is, in many aspects, more traditional and more religious than Chile.<sup>3</sup> In addition, each little town or big city has its own patron saint, Christ or Virgin and its own processions and celebrations. The calendar of processions of the city of Arequipa will illustrate how communal life is deeply charged with religious celebrations (Fig. 7.2).

Several patron saints are taken out in procession throughout the year. In the photo here, only the different patron saints are counted. For example, ‘Virgen de la Candelaria’ is counted as one patron saint, celebrated in February, even if several processions in different towns and neighbourhoods take place within Arequipa; each honours the same patron saint, albeit using their own local image. The month-by-month calendar of celebrations runs as follows:

January: Celebrations for three different patron saints: Jesús Nazareno;<sup>4</sup> San Antonio Abad and the Beata Ana de los Angeles Monteagudo.

February: one: Virgin of Candelaria.

March: one: Jesús Nazareno.

April: two: Jesús Nazareno and Señor de la Divina Misericordia.

Holy Week (between March and April): processions every day (except Thursday) with Señor del Perdón, Jesús del Gran Poder, Señor de

## CALENDARIO DE PROCESIONES EN AREQUIPA

### Enero

Jesús Nazareno (barrio de San Isidro). San Antonio Abad (Miraflores). Beata Ana de los Angeles Monteaudo (Convento de Santa Catalina)

### Febrero

Virgen de la Candelaria (Cercado, Cayma, Characato, Chapi y otros pueblos).

### Marzo

Jesús Nazareno (Amargura) (Paucarpata, principalmente, pero también: Cayma, Characato, Miraflores, Mollebaya, Yanahuara).

### Abril

Jesús Nazareno (Cuasimodo) en Tiabaya y Pócsi. Señor de la Divina Misericordia (templo de Santo Domingo).

Semana Santa se celebra en fecha móvil, entre marzo y abril. Todos los días, excepto jueves, salen en procesión, entre otros: el Señor del Perdón, del mercado San Camilo; Jesús del Gran Poder, de la Basílica Catedral; el Señor de la Caridad, de Santa Marta; el Jesús Cautivo, Justo Juez y La Macarena, de la Compañía; el Señor de la Sentencia de la Merced; el Señor del Santo Sepulcro, de Santo Domingo; la Virgen de las Angustias, de San Francisco. Entre martes y miércoles se realiza la procesión de El Encuentro en Yanahuara, Tiabaya, Sabandía, Paucarpata, Characato, Cerro Colorado. El viernes salen más de veinte procesiones del Santo Sepulcro, siendo la más característica la que recorre el centro histórico.

### Mayo

Virgen de Chapi en esa localidad, pero también en la Tercera Orden, Miraflores, Charcani, etc. María Auxiliadora en los Salesianos. San Benito de Palermo en San Francisco.

### Junio

Corpus Christi (Basílica Catedral). Jesús Nazareno (Sachaca, Carmen Alto). San Antonio de Padua (Sogay). Señor del Espíritu Santo (Chiguata). Corazón de Jesús (Los Tunales, Tiabaya).

### Julio

Virgen del Carmen (templo de Santa Teresa, Tingo, La Pampilla y Carmen Alto). Divino Niño (La Recoleta).

### Agosto

Señor de la Caña (barrio León XIII). Virgen de Copacabana (templo de San Agustín). Virgen de la Asunción (Yumina y Zamácola). Santa Rosa de Lima (templo de Santo Domingo y monasterio de su nombre).

### Septiembre

Virgen de la Alta Gracia (Miraflores). Virgen de los Remedios (Santa Catalina y Socabaya). Señor de Huanca (templo La Merced y Selva Alegre). Virgen del Perpetuo Socorro (Sachaca). Virgen de la Merced (su templo).

### Octubre

Tránsito de San Francisco (su templo). Virgen del Rosario (Cerro Viejo, Sabandía, Yura, etc.) Señor de los Milagros (templo San Agustín y casi todas las parroquias: Miraflores, Mariano Melgar, Alto Selva Alegre, etc.). San Judas Tadeo (templo San Francisco).

### Noviembre

San Martín de Porras (Santo Domingo, Santa Catalina y otros). Santa Gertrudis (Sachaca). Santa Cecilia (San Francisco). Virgen del Rosario (barrio del Solar).

### Diciembre

Inmaculada Concepción (templo San Francisco).

**Figure 7.2** A calendar showing the different processions held in the city of Arequipa throughout the year. Picture taken at the sixteenth-century Monastery of Santa Catalina de Siena in Arequipa, Peru, now a museum. Photo by Alfonso Otaegui.

la Caridad, Jesús Cautivo, Justo Juez, Señor de la Sentencia, Señor del Santo Sepulcro and Virgen de las Angustias, among others.

Good Friday only: over 20.

May: three: Virgen of Chapi, María Auxiliadora, San Benito de Palermo.

June: five: Corpus Christi, Jesús Nazareno, San Antonio de Padua, Señor del Espíritu Santo and Corazón de Jesús.

July: two: Virgen of Carmen and Divino Niño.

August: four: Señor de la Caña, Virgen of Copacabana, Virgen of the Assumption and Santa Rosa de Lima.

September: five: Virgen of the Alta Gracia, Virgen of Los Remedios, Señor de Huanca, Virgen of Perpetual Help and Virgen of La Merced.

October: four: Tránsito of Saint Francis, Virgin of the Rosary, the Lord of Miracles and San Judas Tadeo.

November: three: San Martin de Porras (Porres), Santa Gertrudis and Santa Cecilia, Virgin of the Rosary.

December: one: Immaculate Conception.

These processions are communal events in which all neighbourhoods and towns participate. Each town has its own particularities. In the little city of Puno, for example, processions continue despite harsh rain and wind; little offerings or '*homenajes*' (literally 'hommages') are placed every 10 metres (32 feet) in front of peoples' houses along the path of the procession (Fig. 7.3). The procession in Arequipa<sup>5</sup> would have far fewer offerings, despite having a population 10 times that of Puno. In Arequipa's procession a larger number of people carry the image, which requires more complex planning. The co-ordination of the change of bearers every 100 metres (328 feet) was performed admirably. The two processions were dedicated to Our Lord of Miracles. They were different in their settings (one a small town on the coast of the Titicaca lake, the other a big city at the foot of a volcano) and in their performances (Puno's took place in a more traditional, old-fashioned way while Arequipa's was more professional and modern). However, both were huge communal events that attracted people of all ages and socio-economic levels.



**Figure 7.3** The Lord of Miracles procession in Puno, Peru (October 2019). Photo by Alfonso Otaegui.



**Figure 7.4** Here and there: Peruvian migrants livestreaming the Lord of Miracles procession in Santiago. Photo by Alfonso Otaegui.

Peruvians continue to follow these communal celebrations when living abroad. This is the case for Javiera, the 53-year-old domestic worker who has lived in Chile for 22 years. When she talks about her home town just two hours away from Lima, she describes the Holy Week processions with enthusiasm.

There are 13 processions during Holy Week. It's beautiful! We usually travel back on those days every year.

She is eager to show videos of the procession on her smartphone, but is unable to find them. 'I think Angel [her husband] filmed them,' she explains. This is common practice among Peruvians in Santiago (Fig. 7.4). They film the processions or broadcast them live through Facebook, so that their relatives in their home country can also follow the event in real time (see Chapter 5).

## Devotions run through the family

The fact that Peruvians practise their devotions abroad does not mean that these are just an exercise in nostalgia. First, these are communal events in Peru; they bring together all of the people in a neighbourhood to occupy the streets with images, candles, prayers, songs, food

and drinks. Second, for Peruvians religious expression is tightly linked to their families (Fig. 7.5). When talking to Peruvians about the patron saints to whom they are devoted, participants would often highlight from whom they inherited their faith. Javiera, for example, explains: 'I am a



**Figure 7.5** Devotions run through the family. Photo by Alfonso Otaegui.



devotee of San Martin de Porres *through* my mum' (author's emphasis), meaning that it was her mother's devotion and education that led her to honour the patron saint of nurses and healthcare personnel. Besides, all her family are devotees of a certain Virgin; as her birthday is the day that this particular Virgin is celebrated, she was named after her.<sup>6</sup>

For Gerardo, a 49-year-old old biochemist from Arequipa, processions and celebrations of a patron saint are as much national feelings as they are family memories.

[Virgin of Chapi and Our Lord of Miracles] devotions are feelings. Our Lord of Miracles [from Lima] is a national [feeling]. Watching the devotees dressed in purple in the TV makes you feel that you are in October; you see it in the news [that it is that time of the year]. [Devotion] is a family matter. In my family, we would celebrate on the last week of May the *Santísima Cruz* [Holy Cross]. The grandfather of my grandfather had made a wooden cross. May is the month of crosses. In June, my maternal grandfather would prepare the chapel for the venerations of the Sacred Heart. It took place the last week of June. On Saturday people set *capo* on fire [*capo*' is a herb which produces a lot of heat]. It does not smell, it provides heat; burning it feels very nice. You put it in the centre and people offer you an *anizado* or a *pisco* (spiritous drinks). It is a wonderful moment for all families. Then on Sunday we would have the mass at nine in the morning, then go out in procession at noon. It was a neighbourhood celebration. Every year I would go out a couple of days before with my grandfather to decorate the streets. We would prepare '*bombillas*' with reed, candles and cones made of coloured papers. At night, all the houses in the neighbourhood would be illuminated by the *bombillas* with different colours. We would distribute them to our neighbours, my grandfather and I. That celebration was sacred; it led me intensely to a religious feeling. I lived with my grandfather, we had breakfast very early; for the mass, at nine o'clock, [we had to] take out the benches, set up the awning and so on. Then we grew up and moved to another house, but every Sunday we would visit our grandparents and then go to mass.

Popular religion is not just a tradition linking Gerardo to Peru, as his experience shows. It is tradition, of course, but also much more. It is an exercise of faith and also a family memory – something related to their childhood, to the experiences they shared with their parents and

grandparents. The Brotherhood of Our Lord of Miracles in Santiago edits a Christian magazine once a year. In the 2018 edition the magazine's editor-in-chief tells the story of his childhood in the editorial. His early memories link three elements: his grandmother, the Sunday mass at six in the morning and his neighbourhood in Arequipa.

When living abroad, one of the main concerns of migrants are the family members left behind in the home country, in particular their ageing parents. As shown in [Chapter 6](#), Peruvian migrants have developed different strategies to provide care to their older parents. Some migrants, such as Estefanía and Eugenia, have brought their parents to Chile to live with them. Others, such as Pablo or Esteban, travel back to Peru frequently or invite their parents to stay in Santiago for a couple of months a year, as Gerardo does. However, there are many migrants who cannot travel so often and have always suffered due to being so far away from the older generation. Elena, the 49-year-old nurse who has lived in Chile for half of her life, still remarks how hard it had been to leave her father behind in Peru. Javiera also emphasised the pain of separation, as she had been very attached to her father.

When I came to Chile, my father died of sorrow, as I was so close to him. It was difficult for me to go back to Peru and accept that he was not there.

As illustrated by Teresa's story in the [previous chapter](#), devotion is one of the main affective links between migrants and their parents, as much as constant care and constant concern.

## Devotions for export: the Brotherhood of Our Lord of Miracles in Santiago

The Lord of the Miracles is the most  
exported non-traditional Peruvian product

Popular Peruvian saying

The Brotherhood of Our Lord of Miracles meets regularly; its members are drawn from all over Peru and from diverse socio-economic classes. This brotherhood honours the devotion of 'Our Lord of Miracles', an image painted by an Angolan slave on a mud wall in the seventeenth century in the outskirts of Lima (Peru).<sup>7</sup> Several miracles have been attributed to this image since that century. At first the Catholic Church was

reluctant to accept this popular religion icon, but it has since embraced its devotion. October is the 'purple month' dedicated to this image; an oil reproduction of the fresco is taken out in procession around the streets of Lima, and in every single neighbourhood and town in Peru. Peruvians have formed brotherhoods dedicated to this image all over the world, ranging from Santiago to Hamamatsu (Japan), Milan and New York, among many others. They are proud to quote Monseñor Hidalgo, the spiritual guide of the main brotherhood at the Nazarenas church in Lima:

Wherever there is a Peruvian, there is the Lord of Miracles.

The Brotherhood of Our Lord of Miracles in Santiago was founded in the late 1990s. It now has around 150 members, both men and women; men are organised into three battalions and women into three groups: Singers, Incense Burners and Emergency Assistants, dedicated to assisting the carriers of the image by providing water and first aid if needed. The central event of the whole year is the long procession, celebrated on the last Sunday of October, at which the image of Our Lord of Miracles is taken to the Cathedral. After the mass at noon, led by the archbishop, the long procession starts at 1 p.m. Thirty people take it in turns to carry the sacred image, which weighs one and a half tonnes, for 100 metres (328 feet). After nine hours of procession covering a distance of 4 km (2.5 miles), the image arrives back at the Latin American Church.

Another two very short processions take place on Good Friday and on All Saints' Day, 1 November. Other smaller brotherhoods also celebrate processions in October, such as the Our Lord of the Miracles Brotherhood of Quilicura (a neighbourhood to the north of Santiago) or the brotherhood from Valparaíso, a port city on the Pacific coast. The brotherhood organises the whole year around the month of October, known as 'the purple month' in reference to the colour of the brothers' and sisters' habits.

The procession of Our Lord of Miracles on Good Friday will help to convey the atmosphere of the event (see the film still in [Fig. 7.6](#)). The procession that is held on Good Friday is much smaller and more intimate, yet all the crucial elements of the experience are clearly present for those watching: the sacred image, devotion, music and people sharing the moment, both in person and through livestreaming.

The organisation of the main procession in October ([Fig. 7.7](#)) takes a whole year. Many other minor events are held to raise funds and, ultimately, to bind the brotherhood together. Throughout the year the brotherhood has monthly meetings; it also organises chicken



**Figure 7.6** The evening procession on Good Friday. A still from the film 'Procession in the night' by the Visual Anthropology Lab, Pontifical Catholic University of Chile. <https://youtu.be/kT46i-QpR1A>.



**Figure 7.7** The beginning of the procession at Plaza de Armas, October 2018. Photo by Alfonso Otaegui.

fundraising parties (*polladas*), barbeques, spiritual retreats and a bingo night. Members also attend events to which they are invited – usually processions and masses elsewhere. When migrants develop these social circles and organise such large religious events in their destination countries, the study of their religious practices can provide valuable insight into their life experiences abroad. Argentinian researcher Ana Mallimaci Barral made this point in her study of Bolivian migrants in Ushuaia, Argentina.<sup>8</sup> She studied the dynamics of Bolivian migrants around the organisation of the annual celebration of the Virgin of Urkupiña. The exploration of popular religious practices in Santiago can also be helpful in understanding how ageing migrants may shift their expectations, both towards themselves and towards future generations.

In her research Mallimaci Barral identifies three principles that underlie the celebration held by Bolivian migrants in Ushuaia. First, the celebration helps Bolivian migrants to form a group rooted in shared origins (in that instance Bolivia). Second, the celebration expresses several issues directly related to the condition of being a migrant. Third, the celebration can be interpreted as a way of making Bolivian migrants visible and worthy of being integrated into Argentinian society – not least because the celebration showcases the rich cultural heritage of Bolivian people, which is helpful against negative stereotypes.

Three similar underlying principles appear throughout fieldwork among the members of the brotherhood: one that binds these people on the basis of a shared origin, another that highlights their lives as migrants and a third that tells us something about the image of their home country that they want to project in Chile.

When it comes to the first principle, it is important to make a clear point. It is not the case that many Peruvians already know one another and then decide to form the brotherhood to organise the procession.<sup>9</sup> On the contrary, exactly the opposite is true: individuals come to the Latin American Church to venerate a Peruvian devotion or perhaps to join a brotherhood. Once they join a brotherhood, they end up getting to know many people in Peruvian social circles. As shown in [Chapter 4](#), the Latin American Church is the reference point for recently arrived migrants, especially those on a low income. However, it is also true that this church is also a reference for middle- and upper middle-class migrants who have lived in Santiago for several years. According to the latter, they spent their first years in Chile focusing on achieving a certain economic stability, perhaps also bringing relatives still living in Peru to the country. Once settled, often after several years they make the attempt to reach fellow Peruvians. The church – the October procession in particular – then

opens the door to other Peruvian social circles. Even as the celebration of the Virgin of Chapi was an opportunity for me to be introduced to the Arequipa Association, many Peruvians join the brotherhood and so gain access to other Peruvian social spaces, for example the Peruvian Club, the Paracas Group and the Peruvian Ladies (see [Chapter 4](#)). This brotherhood and many others help to create a community of Peruvian migrants in Santiago, one that did not exist in this form before.

In the case of the second principle, many aspects of this brotherhood and these religious celebrations express the migrant condition of these devotees. It has been pointed out that there are religious brotherhoods all over Peru; how can this brotherhood in Santiago be in some way ‘distinctively migrant’? It may be argued that even though all of the Santiago brotherhood’s members had active religious lives within their families, many did not participate in formal brotherhoods in Peru.<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps the most illustrative example is Gerardo, the biochemist who used to help his grandfather decorate the neighbourhood in Arequipa for the celebration of the Sacred Heart. Gerardo would participate every year in the procession of the Lord of Miracles by being with his family, selling candles to raise funds and simply following the image. However, he would never be ‘inside the rope’, as the expression goes. During these processions there are two spaces which are clearly and hierarchically marked: ‘outside the rope’ and ‘inside the rope’. Only the bearers of the image are allowed to enter the latter, more privileged space – those who actually carry the image as well as the authorities who accompany the procession. The brothers mark this space by holding one long rope or tying together the ropes hanging from their habits. In Arequipa, Gerardo was part of the general public. In Santiago, however, he became the ‘*mayordomo*’, the leader of the brotherhood. He even got re-elected for a second term, with the approval of the archbishop.<sup>11</sup> In their home country, many of these brothers and sisters were part of the audience of the event. As migrants, they have become the producers of the processions.

Regarding the third principle, many aspects of the procession are actually modified to fit the destination country better, in order to produce a good image of Peru in Chile. The brotherhood has many formal rules that must be followed during every event. There is usually a strict dress code: one must wear suits to meetings, purple habit for mass and processions, smart casual attire when going to more casual dinners and so on. There is also a strong hierarchy of positions: the board of directors with its secretary, the accountant, the ‘*mayordomo*’ (leader), the ‘*vice-mayordomo*’, the general chief, the secretary of the battalion and so

on, as well as a formal, written code of discipline. On one occasion, on Thursday of Holy Week, some of the brothers broke the code. The brotherhood had been invited to join the mass, as were other brotherhoods and groups of worshippers. On the Thursday night, people pray through the dark hours into Good Friday. This is called the 'Holy Thursday night watch' and it honours Jesus's prayers in the olive garden.

The brotherhood was scheduled to lead the night watch prayers at midnight, so there was a two-hour break between the end of mass and the beginning of the assigned shift of prayers. Some members of the brotherhood used this break to go out for dinner and have a couple of beers. When they came back to join the prayers, they smelled of alcohol. The rest of the brothers saw this behaviour as offensive to the church and, above all, to Our Lord of Miracles, and asked for formal punishment. This event continued to come up in conversations throughout the following year, as a deplorable example of unacceptable behaviour.

This disapproval was consistent with the formality that authorities and regular brothers always emphasise. However, it seems that this is not how people usually behave back in Peru, according to some of the brothers. On one of the innumerable occasions when some of the brothers were criticising those members for the beer incident, one of them said casually: '*bueno, fiesta patronal y alcohol...*' ('well, [you know], patron saint celebrations and alcohol [go together]'). They explained then that in Peru, immediately after carrying the image for a certain distance, the brothers leave the rope area, making room for the next group of carriers, and go off to a pub to celebrate. One brother, very observant of the formalities in Santiago and one of the few members who also belongs to the brotherhood in Lima, pointed out that in his battalion in Lima members would show decency by going far away when drinking, usually to another neighbourhood, away from the crowds. The face projected by the brotherhood is clearly important and the event seems to be more formal in Chile than in Peru.<sup>12</sup>

One of the brothers was the '*mayordomo*' in the early 2000s. At the time, the image would go out for a very short procession around the park in front of the church. As was typical in Peru, Peruvians would set their tables on the playground next to the church, selling traditional dishes associated with this celebration. The former leader commented:

When the image was back on church premises, it would enter through the playground. People would be eating standing and drinking alcohol. I did not like that. It was not mystical.

He thus proposed changing the ceremony so that the mass was celebrated in the park, in a more solemn ambiance; the suggestion was accepted. A similar strictness permeates the WhatsApp group of the battalion I joined. One brother, usually sloppy in his use of WhatsApp, once sent an inappropriate video to the group by mistake. For this he received a warning, even though in person the brothers teased him with many jokes, but that was all. However, a couple of months later this brother sent a far more explicit image to the group, to which several of the brothers in the group reacted angrily. He was then penalised by being removed from the WhatsApp group. In addition, he stopped coming to the meetings. Sometime later, during a conversation with the brother who belongs to the brotherhood in Lima, he acknowledged that in his Lima brothers' WhatsApp group sharing those kind of pictures was quite common. In a sense, the Peruvian brotherhood in Santiago seems to be much more careful about the image they display in the public sphere, conscious that bad stereotypes are easily attached to migrants as soon as the opportunity arises.

It is quite clear, then, that Peruvians in Chile are not seeking merely to reproduce what Peruvians do in their home country, but rather to display a migrant take on their own cultural heritage. In some ways, for many of them, joining the procession is a way of being back in Peru for a little while, only to return in due course to their normal lives in Chile. This 'in between' condition of a Peruvian procession held on the streets of Santiago is also evident in these migrants' perspectives on ageing.

## Between Peruvian parents and Chilean children

The section above has argued that the study of popular religion practices can provide insight into the dynamics of migrants' lives. What does this study reveal about the experience of ageing for participants? Two short stories about devotion and family serve to set the mood for this discussion. The first relates the experience of the procession to participants' relationships with younger generations. The second account illustrates the way in which religious devotions are interwoven with the affectivity and care participants give to their ageing parents.

Some months after the large procession, the brothers of the battalion I had joined organised a big barbeque. The ambiance was convivial and increasingly joyful as the hours passed, accompanied by roasted pieces of meat and beers. At one point the conversation turned to the '*guardada*' of the previous year's procession.<sup>13</sup> The *guardada* is the



name for the last stretch of the procession, the point at which the image enters the church again. This entrance is a festive ceremony, complete with fireworks, music and giant carpets on the street, made of flowers and coloured sawdust; it provides a vibrant, dramatic closure to the nine-hour long procession. Every year battalions take turns in organising the *guardada*. The previous year had been our battalion's turn. Federico, a 61-year-old businessman from Arequipa, recalled the experience vividly.

I was on the corner, we had just stood up and were holding Our Lord and my daughter Sofia came and kissed me on the cheek and she said 'Well done, dad!' The Lord just floated on our shoulders and we advanced, one-two, one-two, all at the same pace. It was so moving and tears rolled down my cheek.

We now turn again to Eugenia, the bank employee introduced in previous chapters. The sister of Estefanía, she is also a good friend of Federico and all the members of the Arequipa Association<sup>14</sup> and the Brotherhood of Our Lord of Miracles. Even though she is from Lima, she was appointed '*mayordoma*' of the Virgin of Chapi (patron saint of Arequipa) and was in charge of organising the devotion procession in Her honour a couple of years ago. She and her sisters, all of whom live in Chile, decided 20 years ago to bring their parents to live with them in Santiago. In 2012 their mother was diagnosed with a very severe disease and was told that she did not have much time left to live. Two years later, in October 2014, Eugenia wanted to go to Lima with Federico and his partner to attend the procession of Our Lord of Miracles. It had been a difficult decision and then, two days before leaving, her mother had said to her 'I am not going to be here when you come back'. Eugenia asked her anxiously what was wrong.

What are you saying, mum? Then I won't go, I will suspend everything, if you are not feeling well. I will stay here with you.

However, her mother turned down this offer.

No, you go and you tell our Lord that if he has to take me, then he can take me, but ask him to do it without suffering.

Eugenia left Santiago on a Friday. The following day, just before dawn, she received the call she feared the most: her mother had passed away from a heart attack. The whole Peruvian community of the Latin American

Church helped with the wake at the church. Estefanía, Eugenia's sister, commented gratefully that 'My mum was never alone in those difficult times'. Eugenia managed to get a flight back to Santiago on Sunday. She arrived at the church late at night, entered the room for the wake and, bursting into tears, reproached her mother: 'Why? Why didn't you wait for me?' However, when she took a closer look at her mother's face, Eugenia realised that she had a faint smile. After all the pain, her mother was finally at peace. 'The Lord did it for us,' explained Eugenia, 'she did not suffer.'

Popular devotion permeates all aspects of these migrants' lives. It is a link to their families and to their home country. It is also a way of facing the challenges that life brings and giving meaning to life itself. Popular devotion is the vivid expression of their deeply felt Christian faith; in many ways, it is as pervasive as their sense of being Peruvian. Popular devotion is part of being Peruvian in Santiago, as well as a good metaphor for it. Gerardo explains how moved he was when he first saw the procession in Santiago.

You see the cathedral, you hear the bells, [people eating] sweet apple, *ceviche*: you are in Peru. You are behind the procession, eating while hidden, standing, you drop food, you are in Peru. [It is] your moment of peruanity [*sic*] when the Lord of Miracles is passing by.<sup>15</sup>

Popular devotion serves to bind these late middle-aged migrants to their parents, to the older generation, who are more strongly rooted in Peru. They have inherited this devotion through their upbringing in Peru. However, it is important to mention that they do not share this devotion with their Chilean children in the same way that their parents share it with them. Roberto, the 60-year-old factory manager from Lima, acknowledges, with a hint of defeat, that both of his children are agnostic. They were raised and educated in Chile. Liliana, the 61-year-old accountant mentioned at the beginning, also highlights that her two young adult children are not as religious as she is. She blames the Catholic school to which she sent them: having to go to mass so often has exhausted them.

Of course, not everyone follows this pattern. Gerardo's daughters, for example, are practising Catholics. His two elder daughters have joined a Catholic group at another church (not the Latin American one) and the youngest is getting ready for her First Communion. However, Gerardo does not believe that they have the 'roots' to participate in a brotherhood. When he and his wife, also from Arequipa, come to the Latin American

Church for the Virgin of Chapi celebrations, their daughter joins them, 'but not with much enthusiasm,' as Gerardo observes. There is something that is just not passed on to the next generation, be this the first Chilean-born children or children born in Peru but raised in Chile.

This severed link in the traditional transmission of devotion seems to replicate the dynamics of care explored in [Chapter 6](#). The late middle-aged Peruvian migrants provide care for their ageing parents in all situations, whether they still live still in Peru, come to visit for a couple of months every year or have moved to Chile. The frailties and diseases that older parents (aged around 80 to 90) suffer from are a constant source of anxiety for these Peruvian migrants, now aged around 50 and 60. However, these dedicated migrants do not want their children to take care of them in the future – or at least not in the same way. They declare wholeheartedly that they do not want to be a burden to their children. Late middle-aged migrants remove themselves from the equation altogether. 'They have their own lives' is a common response to questions about future care.

However, there is more to such declarations than a shift in expectations of care. A certain aesthetic of sacrifice underpins many conversations with Peruvian migrants. They came to a foreign country to work hard and achieve a better quality of life for themselves and especially for their children. Because they only came to Chile just over 20 years ago, most of the participants will not be able to live on their retirement pensions. Paying into retirement funds or pension funds for 20 years is not enough to accumulate a viable amount of money on which to retire (see [Chapter 2](#)).

In the end, they have also sacrificed stability. Many of them had not planned to stay in Chile forever. Gerardo came to do a Master's degree. Elena came to accompany her husband for three years. Javiera wanted to go back to Peru but had to stay in Chile to work so that she could send money back to her children. There was not a conscious point of settlement when these migrants decided they would stay in Chile. Rather, as explained in [Chapter 3](#), what happened is a gradual realisation that they could no longer live in Peru. After two or three years of living in Chile, they returned to Peru for a short visit, only to discover it was too messy and too noisy. They had become too accustomed to the order, quality of life and higher incomes to be found in Chile.

However, this does not mean that the participants are settled in Chile for good. When asked about where they think they will spend this stage of their life, many reply that they believe they would stay in Chile; they have nothing arranged in Peru. Very few are definite about



**Figure 7.8** A still from the film 'Religious devotion' by the Visual Anthropology Lab, Pontifical Catholic University of Chile. <https://youtu.be/ZyWf0ViZ9Zw>.

going back. This is the case of Gerardo and his wife, however, both of whom have elderly parents back in Arequipa. Yet all of them express a certain ambivalence when confronted with the idea of spending their last years in Chile. It is the same ambivalence that the participants express when asked if they would like to spend their last years in Peru. Even those who picture themselves going back to Peru cannot help but plan on coming back to Chile often, as their Chilean-born children and grandchildren will still be living here. These late middle-aged Peruvians are indeed transnational migrants – but this is not the case for their children.

Perhaps the most intriguing sacrifice involved here is the sacrifice of tradition, especially in regard to religion (Fig. 7.8). These Peruvian migrants have fully accepted that their children will not experience popular devotions in the way they themselves did in Peru, back in their childhood. Nor do their children experience religion in the intense way that they do nowadays.

## Conclusion

Ageing as a migrant implies a series of negotiations with oneself as well as, perhaps, a series of changes in aspirations. These late middle-aged

Peruvian migrants are very active and hardworking and therefore cannot picture themselves retiring. Nevertheless, the study of their religious practices provides a useful glimpse into their future aspirations. These devotions are an important component of their daily lives, but they also form a metaphor for their whole experience of being Peruvian transnational migrants. They have networks and traditions linking them to Peru and their parents, as well as new roots in Chile, where they display their sense of belonging through the organisation of social circles and religious events. Their Chilean children do join them in these Peruvian events, but mainly to show support. These adult children do not feel the same emotion of seeing a sacred image, of being briefly back in a country in which they were not raised. The dynamic that is displayed in Peruvian devotions is reproduced when it comes to matters of care. These Peruvian migrants take good care of their ageing parents and will do so until their final hour, but they do not expect their children to do the same for them. They do not even want their children to do so, as they are still active and cannot countenance the prospect of turning into a burden.

Perhaps the most striking feature of ageing as a migrant revealed by the participants of this study is their expectations regarding future generations. Throughout all conversations, parties and processions, the pleasures of life in Peru keep coming up – and coming back. These migrants are settled in Chile, but in a way they are constantly returning to Peru, or re-creating it in Santiago. When they miss Peru they go for a visit, only to find that, after a couple of days, they start to miss their life in Chile. Although most of the research participants have lived in Chile for over 20 years, in a way they continue to move back and forth. They also accept all of the caveats relating to younger generations with an almost religious abnegation. They recognise that their children will not honour their family devotions, at least not in the way they learned to from their parents, and that they do not expect them to take care of them – at least not the way they care for their own parents.

In essence, these devoted Peruvian migrants always refer to such changes as something general, inevitable and even generational; they are predictable evidence that times simply change and that is all. There seems to be a certain combination of an aesthetic of sacrifice, a desire for continuity through the lives of their children and a deterministic yet Christian way of facing life. Such an interweaving of sacrifice, continuity and Christian determinism will be the subject of the [next chapter](#), which focuses on life purpose.

## Notes

1. Yoder 1974; Vergote 1982.
2. In Chapter 4 this church was discussed in the context of being both a social hub for middle-class Peruvians and a point of reference for newly arrived, low-income migrants, for whom it provided free legal advice and affordable accommodation.
3. Most of the married late middle-aged men who participated in this research told me about the moment when they had to ask their future father-in-law for his daughter's hand in marriage. Take, for example, the story of Elena. Her fiancé had found a job in Chile and asked her to come to live with him, as they were missing each other so much. They planned to get married a few months later. Elena's father forbade her from doing this. 'You are not going anywhere. Tell Alberto [her fiancé] that if he wants to take you to Chile he must marry you first. He did not find you standing on a corner; you are not going there as a "*cualquiera*" ['anyone', meaning a 'woman who is not respectable']'. Elena's whole family sided with her father. So she and her fiancé organised the ceremony in less than two weeks; he came to Arequipa for three days, married Elena and went back to Chile. Elena joined him here a couple of weeks later.
4. Each time the same patron saint appears it means that it is celebrated in a different neighbourhood.
5. During fieldwork I took a trip to Puno and Arequipa in October 2019 to attend the processions in the company of brothers and sisters from the brotherhood of Santiago.
6. All names in this book are pseudonyms. For the sake of the participant's anonymity, the Virgin in question is not named here.
7. The 'Lord of Miracles' is an image of Christ on the Cross. It was painted in the seventeenth century by an Angolan slave, with no education at all, on a mud wall in the outskirts of Lima (Peru). A couple of years later, a strong earthquake shook Lima. Many buildings were destroyed, with the remarkable exception of this weak mud wall where the image was painted. Since then this image has been known as 'El Señor de los temblores' ('The Lord of tremors'). Many (health-related) miracles started to be attributed to the image. Two decades later the same thing happened: Lima experienced a terrible earthquake, but the mud wall again stood firm. Local people made a copy of the image in oil and took this copy out in procession for the first time in 1687. The following year the reproduced image visited the Santa Ana Hospital during the procession, giving its blessing to its patients and workers.

On 28 October 1746 Lima suffered the deadliest earthquake in its history (approximately 9 degrees of magnitude), but it is said that when the image was taken out to be carried in a procession the earth ceased to shake. Devotion to this image has increased since then, and October was established as the special month to honour and celebrate this image. During this month the oil reproduction of the painting, which is kept safe where no one can see it for the whole year, is taken out in procession for a couple of days.
8. Mallimaci Barral 2016.
9. It was perhaps a little more like this at the very beginning (some Peruvian migrants gathered and then decided to form a brotherhood). However, it is also true that – even in those early days – these migrants got to know each other at the Latin American Church.
10. All of them declare that they knew the Lord of Miracles: 'when you are born in Peru, the first thing you see is an image of the Lord of Miracles'. However, many of them did not belong to a brotherhood.
11. Gerardo acknowledges that he learned many things in Santiago that he did not know back in Arequipa, such as even the right way (Lima style) to carry the image.
12. Some events, for instance spiritual retreats, have two parts. The first and more formal one is the retreat itself: the brothers and sisters follow the indications of the priest or deacon leading the retreat. The second and informal part, known as the 'after retreat', involves eating meat and drinking beer. We also did this in the church, albeit in one of the rooms used for meetings. At one point some brothers took their cans of beer outside, to carry on drinking while chatting on a sunny Saturday afternoon. The priest reprimanded the whole battalion, as brothers drinking alcohol did not project a good image of the church. This was one occasion when the duality between what took place 'inside the group' as opposed to what was visible 'in front of the rest of the community' was clearly apparent.

13. As the night went on, conversations ranged from the *guardada* to political disputes inside the brotherhood, to the football league in Peru and to future barbeques, as well as the uncertain future of the Brotherhood of Our Lord of Miracles. Some members were concerned about not raising young people to participate in the devotion of the image. They discussed supporting more strongly the Children's Brotherhood of Our Lord of Miracles, also hosted at the Latin American Church, as a possible solution.
14. See [Chapter 4](#) on social relations.
15. Ducci and Rojas also highlight the strong sense of belonging and pride Peruvians feel in relation to their country and its traditions ([2010](#), 105).

## 8

# Life purpose: work, family and sacrifice

## Introduction

Ignacio spoke to me quietly, in a tone that indicated confidentiality; he did not want what he said to be known.

I have been noticing it lately ... Words get mixed up in my mouth and I tend to forget things – this did not happen before. I feel I am losing my touch for conversation.

Ignacio is 65 and currently works as the manager of a warehouse, a position he gained with a lot of effort. His life has been a long list of one job after another, ever since his teenage years in the heart of a lower-income family in Lima. He is also the enthusiastic leader of one of the brotherhood's battalions, always trying to talk his fellow brothers into attending church more often and encouraging them through WhatsApp messages containing the daily Bible reading. 'I do my best to try to follow the Word of God,' he commented on more than one occasion. Just two hours before, when our morning discussion at a café near the church started by retracing his working experience as teenager, he had smiled with vague pride and nostalgia as he claimed to have been a hardworking man from an early age:

[When I was 18] I was good for conversation, I would go and chat with people and they were delighted. I used to sell encyclopaedias at universities.

Almost 50 years and over a dozen jobs later, Ignacio has started to experience what may be the early symptoms of Alzheimer's. This is not confirmed, however, as he has not consulted a specialist yet, despite noticing changes



in his cognitive abilities over the last two years. These have got worse in the last seven months. His wife Micaela – ‘a great woman!’, Ignacio adds – is very worried. The couple have been together since he was 17 and she got pregnant with their first child very soon after they met. Ignacio does not know what may be happening to him, though he accepts that he must see a doctor. ‘Maybe it is just my age,’ he suggests, without sounding too convinced. He has developed simple strategies to cope with these frailties and also, in a way, to conceal them. For instance, he now writes everything down, to prevent simple instructions that he receives at work or promised commitments from fading into oblivion. His boss has noticed these changes in him, but Ignacio states that everything is fine:

I have a board where I write down the things I am asked to do. My boss noticed that I started to do that (which I never did before), but it is all right, he is a friend, no problem there.

In his own words, Ignacio is facing the likelihood of having Alzheimer’s. When one hears of the possibility of someone having this condition, it prompts one to think about memory and the way in which it is tightly related to identity, the possibility of losing one’s personal story and of becoming dependent. However, Ignacio is, above all, concerned about his performance at work.

I am worried that it might affect how people see me at work. I am worried that they might see this [his forgetfulness] as lack of interest in work.

Ignacio is confronting one of the most feared frailties of old age: losing part of his cognitive abilities. Yet, with the help of his faith, he views this possibility with a certain resignation. His wife and family are very worried, but Ignacio does not complain about what the future may hold. He dedicates himself to work, trying to keep his life going by doing well at his job, attending the meetings of the brotherhood and being there for his family. In a way, Ignacio is putting himself aside as a way of putting himself in the centre. By neglecting himself, sacrificing himself for others, he is fulfilling his own life purpose.

## The question of life purpose

As the title suggests, this chapter attempts to unveil what the purpose of life is for these late middle-aged migrants. It has no philosophical

pretensions. It will merely attempt to answer that question from the perspective of the research participants, based on what was observed and heard during fieldwork.

The question of the purpose of life may change at different moments in life. On some occasions this purpose is presented by participants in a teleological fashion, that is, as an explicit aim that had already existed at a certain moment in the past and went on to guide their subsequent actions. 'I wanted to raise my daughters here,' explained Esteban (see [Chapter 4](#)). He was proud of everything that he and his daughters have achieved in Chile over the last 30 years, as if achieving their current level of success was what had guided them when they made that first decision. For other participants, life purpose seems to be more related to projects aimed at the future, something still to be achieved.

This chapter will start by showing that the purpose of life seems to be a given for the more religious Peruvian migrants. Their Christian faith provides a purpose and gives meaning to life from the start. However, that is not the whole story. If it were, there would be no need for further reflections. In reality this chapter reveals that, beyond the sense of life as a gift, through and from God, these long-term migrants actually accumulate other purposes to life in their everyday lives, most notably work and family. The latter, in turn, also provides a sense of continuity: much of the effort made in this life is dedicated to a future to be enjoyed not by these late middle-aged migrants but by their children. This altruistic reversal of purpose – 'them before me' – is unveiled through a narrative of sacrifice. It will be shown that such an aesthetic of sacrifice even extends beyond death.

This chapter tries to infer the purpose of life from conversations about experiences such as facing severe diseases and mortality (either one's own death or the loss of a loved one or relative), about life-changing experiences (migrating, forming a family and so on), about aspirations towards the future and about values that the participants defend explicitly, as well as the general narrative they build about their lives.

This study tries, in general, to rely more on the observation of participants and casual conversations with them than on interviews. People usually tend to respond in interviews with what they believe they are expected to say, i.e. the normative.<sup>1</sup> The question on life purpose is elusive in itself, but it may be inferred from other data, for instance the reasons behind carrying out certain projects at certain moments, or how and why particular life choices are made. Through many casual conversations and participant observation in several social and religious events, an underlying narrative about motivations, aims and efforts begins to emerge. Then, taking into account these narratives and the life paths

of these late middle-aged migrants, some recurring patterns start to become apparent.

## When life already has a purpose

The purpose of life for these religious migrants seems to come from their Christian upbringing in Peru. They have learned from an early age that life has a given meaning. The faith of their parents made a mark on them during their childhood in Peru. One participant would recall, with nostalgia, some of the weekly activities in their household, including very early rising on Sundays, when they would wake up and walk to the church to attend the 6 a.m. mass. Other participants (as shown in [Chapter 7](#)) recalled big communal events such as celebrations of patron saints carried out at their houses, organised by their grandmother or grandfather and attended by the whole neighbourhood. This sense of tradition and continuity rooted in the past and in Peru is interwoven with an experience of the present here in Chile.

The emotion that research participants display when praying to a sacred image is very vivid and heartfelt. This is where faith comes in. They make requests of the Lord, usually wishing for good health for themselves and their loved ones, and express their gratitude for favours received. October is the most important month of the year, which is when the large procession of Our Lord of Miracles takes place. It is a moment of reflection, a time to look back on the year and on life in general. After the procession, devotees approach the image and rest their head against it. If they are brothers and wearing the official purple gown, they touch the procession float with the rope attached to their gown, then sit there silently ([Fig. 8.1](#)).

In the participants' everyday speech, many expressions refer to the pervasive presence of God in their lives. Some would say 'with the grace of God' before mentioning anything that is positive about their lives, such as being in good physical shape, doing well at work or their children being successful at school.<sup>2</sup> Others would emphasise anything good that happens to them as being designed by God. Elena used the words 'God put her in my way' to describe how happy she was with her domestic worker, for example, whom she trusted to take care of her daughters when they were children. It is important to mention that, although these are usually formulaic phrases uttered in a nonchalant way, they convey a general sense of how everything in life happens for these religious migrants, as well as the reason behind it.



**Figure 8.1** A member of the brotherhood touches the procession float with the rope attached to his gown during the October procession. Photo by Alfonso Otaegui.

A couple of times a year, the brotherhood organises group spiritual retreats for its members. These are occasions to reflect on the importance of faith and the support of God. Such reflections generally take place either as spiritual exercises during the retreat or in casual conversations during a meal afterwards. Beyond these religious meetings, conversations about the meaning and purpose of life (without explicitly

mentioning the subject itself) arise in more relaxed environments, such as barbeques and other social events. These talks usually take the shape of stories about miracles – a wife who finally got pregnant, a baby who survived a serious condition against all odds, a man who could not walk until he confessed his infidelity to his wife. Such events usually happened at crucial moments in the protagonists' lives and had long-lasting consequences. To put it briefly, these miracles confirmed their perceived purpose of life (the three cases above all relate to having a family) through the presence of God.

As shown in [Chapter 3](#), for the research participants, religiosity permeates their everyday lives. In addition, every now and then, experiencing the occasional miracle and the subsequent dissemination of the story to their peers strongly confirms their religious-based perspective on life's meaning.

## Building up meaning and purpose in everyday events

There is a reason why this chapter comes last. In a way, most of what was argued in previous chapters is again referred to here. The insights about Peruvian migrants' experience of age ([Chapter 2](#)), the importance of religion in everyday life, the participants' dedication to work ([Chapter 3](#)), their relationship with their parents and their children ([Chapters 6 and 7](#)) all build up to the main argument of this section and the concluding chapter.

Despite the expected purpose given to life by faith, it became apparent throughout fieldwork that other dimensions appear to be the source of meaning of the lives of these late middle-aged Peruvians. The two which stand out most clearly are, without any doubt, work and family.

[Chapter 2](#) showed that many of the research participants are simply unable to picture themselves not working. For some, thinking of themselves no longer working required a huge effort of imagination. Enrique,<sup>3</sup> for example, is planning to leave Chile, after having lived here for over 20 years and turning 69. This is because he has not had the chance to work in the last six months. Esteban, the 64-year-old businessman,<sup>4</sup> could not bear the mere thought of not working, of becoming his idea of a typical fully retired older adult.

No, I believe that in that case, I would definitely die...! I have to be doing something, it cannot be otherwise.

This anxiety of the jobless working man is linked to a sense of purpose. Ignacio, for example, came to Chile 10 years ago. His wife had come a year earlier to support their eldest daughter, who was living with her partner in Santiago and has suffered from a heart condition since birth. Ignacio joined them, but went through his savings quickly. He had a couple of friends already living in Santiago, Roberto and his brother Sandro.<sup>5</sup> He asked Sandro, who was running a restaurant, to allow him to work as a waiter. 'I didn't even want to be paid. I just wanted to do something, I needed to feel useful,' Ignacio recalls. He eventually did get paid, then got another job, then another, until he reached his current position as a warehouse manager.

For these Peruvian migrants, working in itself implies certain ethics. This is not necessarily related to prosperity – though successful professionals would highlight this proudly – but rather to the value of sustained effort. For these participants, who come from varying socio-economic levels, hard work is in itself a value and a source of self-worth. Ignacio always needs to be working, no matter what the occupation. If he needed to, for example, he would quit his well-respected job in Peru as an accountant at a foreign trade firm because he wanted a higher salary and the following day – if another, better paying firm did not hire him – he would grab his car and start working as a taxi driver. 'If I needed to work to provide for my daughters, I would drive a taxi, I would go out to sell plastic bags,' he declares. His quote illustrates another point: hard work is a source of value and self-worth, but it has meaning in itself as something you do for your family.

Chapter 2 showed that these Peruvians cannot picture themselves not working in the future. Chapter 3 made it clear how much work fills up their everyday lives. Working occupies body and mind so much, and so intensively, that in a way they are never confronted with questions about the meaning of life. There is just no time for such concerns – and when these do arise, their faith is there for these participants, offering the comfort of meaning for anything that happens, whether good or bad. When it comes to life purpose, it seems that work, as depicted in Ignacio's quote, is a profound source of self-worth. It is not about the work itself, however, but rather about what work involves: an everyday exercise of sacrifice for the family. This notion of sacrifice is addressed later in this chapter.

## Facing life's obstacles

Another way to explore the life purpose of research participants is through reflecting upon how they face the difficulties of life.

Ignacio, as noted above, has been experiencing cognitive issues for a while and is facing the possibility of having a serious condition. It is not known at the time of writing whether he is suffering from Alzheimer's or from another disease affecting his cognitive abilities. His attitude and reflections on the situation illustrate a point made by other participants in different circumstances and scenarios, so it will be developed here.

Ignacio is a man who has dedicated his life to work and family (or rather working to support his family). He now faces a situation or condition that could put an end to what he has been doing his whole life. In addition to the reduction in his cognitive abilities, he is also suffering from a type of stomach bacteria (he could not remember the exact name) that he has struggled with for a while. According to the doctor, in order to fight these bacteria he needs to reduce his daily intake of spicy condiments and black coffee. Not only has this required a difficult change to his diet, but it has also brought changes to his experience of life. When Ignacio has strong black coffee he works harder and feels energised, allowing him to talk to and engage with people. This last year has been radically different for him, due to this stomach illness and the episodes of forgetfulness. These days he comes home from work (where he is starting to forget stuff), feels the pain in his stomach due to the unresolved infection and starts to reflect on the future course of his life. Facing these doubts, he directs them towards God.

I ask the Lord to make my path clear, so I can follow it, I can choose and get tested, because I want to keep living... One tends to think in a positive way and not in a negative one, because one wants to keep living, that's the truth.

In these first statements, it seems clear that Ignacio's desire is to keep living. When the conversation advances, however, he states that he is ready to accept God's will, whatever that might be. As he explains, 'I have never asked the Lord to give me health, so I can keep living, no. I have always said "thy will be done"<sup>6</sup> because it is true'. Despite the contradictory nature of these statements, they are true to Ignacio's feelings as a believer. In a way, it can be inferred from conversations with these believers that they are always moderating their expectations of what might happen. Ignacio wants to live; if God grants him healing, he will be more than grateful. At the same time, however, he emphasises that his faith and devotion extend beyond specific outcomes.

Ignacio displays an attitude of profound acceptance when it comes to facing life. It is possible that his stomach infection will be resolved and

that he will not develop Alzheimer's: that outcome will have a meaning and will be an expression of God's will. It is also possible that he will not recover from either: for Ignacio, that outcome will also have a meaning as God's will. Other research participants have also displayed this attitude and trust in their Peruvian Christian faith, and on several occasions. Here this approach is referred to as 'Christian determinism', using the term to convey participants' disposition of acceptance towards fate and the further attribution of divine purpose to any fate that may come to pass. It describes the attitude towards the difficulties and obstacles of life that Ignacio displays. Throughout fieldwork, many research participants revealed the same attitude.

This attitude towards expectations and outcomes relating to important matters was usually quite evident when it came to health matters and requested miracles. No matter what the outcome, no action or event could be labelled as meaningless or lacking in purpose.

The delicate health of Roberto's father provides an example. At the beginning of 2020 Roberto's father's condition degenerated, due to a malfunction in his liver and associated complications. As in previous instances, Roberto asked for a chain of prayers for his father, who had to stay in bed. Everyone responded with prayers and blessings. A couple of weeks later, the brotherhood's monthly meeting took place at the end of February. Roberto said that a miracle had happened. He and his brothers called a priest to give their father a blessing. His father reacted and took the holy communion, after which his mood notably improved. He sat down, wanted to eat and even enjoyed the soup. 'It is a miracle,' said Roberto, smiling. Having said that, Roberto acknowledged that his father's condition remained critical and the family were prepared for the worst. Two months later, his father passed away. His father's sudden and brief recovery was still considered to be of a miraculous nature, and his eventual death did not negate that.

Such a situation had happened on other occasions too, when the brothers asked in a chain of prayers for the Lord to heal someone's relative or loved one. In these instances everyone then responds with prayers, expressing hope that God will intercede and save the individual in question. If this does not happen, they would accept that God had taken this person to His glory. This way, miracles can never be seen as incomplete. Either way God had played a significant part in them, reaffirming that life had a purpose.<sup>7</sup>

Sometimes, however, this calm attitude does not provide enough consolation. In some cases the loss of a loved one is so great, the wound left by their absence so deep, that there is no place for the attitude of



Christian determinism described above. This is what happened to Javiera, whose story was presented in [Chapter 5](#). Her daughter, the one who had finished college, passed away from cancer at the age of 29. As they had state-run health insurance, her expensive treatment was authorised too late to be effective. ‘Sometimes I question myself “why did I come to Chile?” Chile took away a child from me,’ says Javiera, who still struggles to overcome such a painful loss. For Javiera’s family this was too much to bear; her children could not accept that God had allowed this to happen. As she recalls:

Before [my children] were very attached to religion ... but they drifted away [from religion] once [God] did not grant them the miracle of saving their sister.

Javiera was angry for a very long time. Eventually she found comfort in thoughts similar to the advice that oncological nurse Elena gives to her cancer patients (‘Pray to God that you don’t suffer’). Javiera and her husband both suffered from depression when their daughter was battling cancer. They went to the church and stood in front of the image.

We asked Him to do His Will. If He was going to take her, He should do it now, He should not allow her suffering to keep going... Two days went by ... and the Lord took my daughter away. I blamed Him for a long time, until I understood it was a miracle that she did not have to suffer any longer.

In the end, after a long time, even Javiera got to the point of finding consolation, and therefore purpose, in the early death of her daughter as it meant she no longer had to suffer. Nowadays her second son is an active member of the brotherhood.

This attitude towards life, illustrated through the most extreme examples of accepting the mortality of one’s self and loved ones, is also revealed in less emotionally charged aspects of life. Esteban, for example, after going through the details of suffering a peak in his sugar levels due to stress, appreciates the value of this kind of calm attitude towards life in general.

If people owe you money, or you owe money to someone, it doesn’t matter. If your wife says ‘it is white’ and you see it as black, then it is white. Forget about it; do not stress yourself, because you are going to go [i.e. die] and everything will stay the same.

This attitude is also a strategy for Esteban to avoid health issues. This acceptance of fate gives these devout migrants the enduring comfort of meaning, in spite of unexpected changes in life. The next section dwells upon a rather unexpected and even ironic twist of this Christian determinism.

## The non-religious children of religious migrants

The acceptance of whatever destiny might bring, rooted in participants' Christian faith, also applies to their children. Both [Chapter 3](#) and [Chapter 7](#) showed how these Peruvian migrants re-create and further develop some of the aspects of their religious practices in Chile. They join brotherhoods and organise processions – things that they had not done in Peru. They remember their religious activities as something they learned from their parents. According to them, their children – either those born in Chile or those born in Peru and raised in Chile – are not going to continue this tradition.<sup>8</sup> Some admittedly are believers and go to church, even joining some the activities that take place there, but they do not engage in brotherhoods. Other are believers but are distanced from the church, only attending events to accompany their parents. Very few seem to want to continue the tradition of their parents, although there are rare exceptions. One example of such a case is that of Marcos's son, who belongs to the Children's Brotherhood of Our Lord of Miracles.

It could be the case that this attitude of accepting whatever comes, referred to here as Christian determinism, is the very reason why these devout Peruvians accept the lack of devotion in their own children. When it comes to causality, some of the research participants attribute their children's lack of devotion to specific causes. Liliana, for example, says it was the fault of the Catholic school she sent them to. 'They were too rigid, made them go to church too often and they got tired.' Some other participants are vaguer. Roberto says that his two children are agnostic, seeming to imply that this is the result of living in Chile, a much less religious country (see [Chapter 3](#)).

The very same Christian attitude that helps them to face difficulties in life and provides it with a sense of purpose also seems to apply to the issue of their children not living their faith in the same way that these participants do. They seem to have accepted that they will not be able to transmit their faith to their own children, at least not in the traditional Peruvian way. Despite acknowledging this discontinuity of traditions,

there remains a certain desire for continuity in these migrants' narratives of life and aspirations for the future.

## Continuity through the next generations

The participants seem to accept that their children will not be as devout as they are. Nevertheless, their children do provide a sense of meaning to their lives, offering a chance of continuity. Securing the future of their children implies achieving a goal that relates to achievement beyond themselves. Besides, the wellbeing of their children is the visible outcome of their dedication to work and family.

This has implied, for some of the research participants, giving up something for the sake of their children. Roberto still rents an apartment at the age of 60, for example, despite having worked as the right hand of a textile company director for many years. 'I decided to pay for the education of my children instead,' he says, conveying the feeling that life consists of negotiating one's own aspirations. Private education in Chile can be very expensive, with fees for a private secondary school at around £400 per month or even higher. However, Roberto asserts that the investment paid off. Nowadays, his children have embarked upon successful careers and are good at their jobs. One of them has bought a house and an apartment, which his brother rents. Roberto's son has offered his father that same apartment to live in once they have retired.

A similar story can be found among migrants who come from lower socio-economic classes. This is the case with Orlando, for instance, a lower-income migrant now aged 57 who still rents a house in the southern part of Santiago. In a conversation about sacrifice and aspirations, he gives the same answer as Roberto, with almost the same tone of determination. He wanted to pay for the education of his two children, who were living back in Peru. Sometimes having their children's future in mind adds a 'bonus of meaning' to a personal project. This is the case for Martin, the 65-year-old security guard (see [Chapter 2](#)) who plans to get a loan to buy himself a house. While this is his big personal project, he also states that he will eventually leave the house to his daughter, now living in Peru.<sup>9</sup>

Other participants were in a better financial position than Roberto and Orlando, so they did not have to give up on owning property. However, they too made life choices that affected them, choices that also worked out in favour of their children. It seems that for most of the participants, accepting that they would stay in Chile for good goes along

with the wishes – sometimes explicit, sometimes not – of their children. This is the case of Elena, one of the few participants who was quite clear about her desire to stay in Chile after she retires. The reason was that her children wanted to live in Chile.<sup>10</sup> A similar point was made by Liliana (see her story in [Chapter 3](#)), who stated that she started to abandon the project of returning to Peru as her children had made so many friendships in Chile.<sup>11</sup>

For some participants, education is a tool for advancing in life. It is also a gift enabling their children to become resilient and independent. Elena explains this in a straightforward way.

I only ask God two things, that I may die without pain and that [by the time I die] my daughters do not need me any more. With those two things, I would be done.

She emphasises that at the moment her daughters – aged 18 and 21 respectively – still need her. Elena lost her own mother at the age of 22, so she knows from experience how hard that is and feels reassured by the knowledge that she provided her two daughters with a good education. ‘With that tool, one can move forward,’ she adds. Javier makes a similar point, indicating that he still funds the education of his children living in Peru. As migrants, they are convinced about the value of education as an asset for self-development.

For other participants, a certain desire for continuity through their children is also related to their education, but not so much in the sense of securing their financial status. It is rather about the fruitful consequences of gaining knowledge. Javier, for example, also attributes a more transcendental meaning to education, although he also highlights its pragmatic advantages.

You have to be yourself, do what you were born for. I am a welder and I have taught many, many people, 200 to 300 people have passed through my hands! People call me ‘maestro’ [‘teacher’<sup>12</sup>] on the street. [An actual] ‘Maestro’ is Jesús [not me]. I always advise [young people] to study. For me, Jesús is the [real] maestro up there. We are barely maestros down here.

Javier then dwelled upon the importance of education for society, recounting his experiences of teaching illiterate children in Peru when he was a volunteer. He mentions all the people he taught: that is his legacy. For many of the research participants, their legacy is their children

and the education they have equipped them with to face life.<sup>13</sup> Martin, for example, is only able to save a certain amount of money (on top of the money needed to finance his house project); what he does save, he sends back to his daughter in Peru. After some struggles with her mental health, she wanted to return to university. Despite his limited resources, Martin decided to fund her education again. He comments:

I will not leave you [his daughter] money [as an inheritance] but at least I will leave you a brain [i.e. education].

Whether in the form of having completed education, a good financial status or a good standard of living in general, children provide these hard-working migrants with a sense of continuity. This is of a concrete nature, anchored in this world and this life and visible in the present time. Such continuity, achieved through their children, implied sacrifices made in the past, in the present and even beyond death.

## An aesthetic of sacrifice

In all the life stories of these migrants, effort is always a strong component. Their narratives revolve around the non-explicit notions of effort and sacrifice – concepts very noticeable in the stories of, for example, Ana María and Teresa.<sup>14</sup> Both women came to Chile to work as domestic workers. They were able to go out just once a week and also had to bear the absence of their children, then still living in Peru. Ana María's account reveals how, after quite a while, she managed to save enough money to bring her daughter and son to Chile. The story of Javiera and her husband depicts other struggles faced by migrants on arriving in a new country.<sup>15</sup> Initially they had a miserable time trying to find acceptably paid jobs, while their children experienced discrimination at school. Ignacio's story of hard work and dedication to his family in Peru and Chile paints a similar picture.

Several of the participants highlight their admiration of their own parents' dedication to work. Pablo remembers the efforts of his mother who, by preparing home-made meals to sell, was able to send her three children to college. Nowadays Pablo and his brother Marcelo are both successful businessmen. Eugenia and Estefanía remember the very long hours that their father worked at a very noisy factory; he is now almost deaf. Esteban, the successful businessman and brother of Mariano (introduced in [Chapter 2](#)), recalls the strength and commitment of his parents with admiration.

I am so thankful to God. My dad was a builder, my mother was a washerwoman. They managed to get their three sons to become professionals. The three of us have grown a lot in Chile, economically and socially.

The stories of migration are usually stories of sacrifice: coming to a new country and leaving behind so many relatives, friends and everyday simple customs is a high price to pay. Now, 20 years or more after having migrated, there is a sense of sacrifice in the participants' continuous negotiations of their own aspirations for the future. These religious Peruvian migrants calmly accept that their children will not continue certain traditions. The roots their children developed in Chile have also played a part in influencing their decisions to stay in Chile for the last 20 or so years of their lives. In addition, this sense of selflessness in favours done for their children also implies another sacrifice projected into the future, once the participants themselves are gone.

## A portable burial for migrants

Paying respect to the dead is essential in the Catholic tradition.<sup>16</sup> Several participants recall visiting the cemetery in Peru to honour their grandparents, or even family members they had never met. Despite burial being more common, most of them have decided that cremation will be a better way of disposing of their own bodies.<sup>17</sup> In a way, this is another example of a sacrifice they will make for the sake of their children.

Two significant justifications appear in conversations about the subject. The first one is somewhat technical and pragmatic: burial of a migrant in their home country raises many difficulties. That was the experience of Liliana when her sister passed away in the United States. The bureaucracy involved in moving a corpse to another country proved such a nightmare, and the process of repatriation so expensive, that her family finally decided that her sister's remains should stay in the destination country. The other reason is rooted in the discontinuity of traditions, an aspect of the migrants' lives discussed in this and the previous two chapters. As Mariano explains, in a tone that blends elements of the Christian determinism described above with hints of nostalgia:

Families used to go to the cemetery to put flowers on their dead ones' graves ... but that [tradition] is lost, they start to forget you... What would be the point [of a burial]? Even I go to the cemetery less often when I visit Peru.

Mariano acknowledges that people tend to go to the cemetery less and accepts it as a natural change that comes with a new generation: some customs just fade away. He is considering cremation so if his children want to spread his ashes they can do it. In a way, he also wants to release his children from the duty of visiting the cemetery.<sup>18</sup> Elena is straightforward about this point.

Cremation. It is the most pragmatic for my daughters, so they can forget about going to the cemetery and laying down flowers.

The choice of cremation combines not being a burden to their children (see [Chapter 6](#)) with the participants' acceptance that their children will not honour many traditions. Besides, cremation and the portability of funeral urns seem especially suitable for these Peruvian migrants: it is a movable burial for moving people. Perhaps a more explicit illustration of this point can be found in the story of Marcos, told at the beginning of [Chapter 3](#); it clearly exemplifies the notion of being poised 'in between' two countries. Marcos's mother still lives in Peru, as do his natural father and his stepfather. He also has two daughters from his first marriage divided across the two countries – one lives in Peru, the other in Chile. His second and current wife and their son also live in Chile. When talking about the future, death and the practicalities of what happens afterwards, Marcos chooses cremation without hesitation, observing 'Half of me will be here, the other half will be there'. His firm decision only became apparent two or three years ago, as he acknowledges.

I used to say that I wanted to be buried in Peru. But then my son said that I was only thinking about myself, and not about the son wanting to see his father.

Marcos says that argument was strong enough to make up his mind on cremation. He plans that his ashes will then be scattered in both Peru and Chile: the country of his mother and the country of his son.

## Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to find the purpose of life from these migrants' perspective – in part through studying casual conversations about their lives, but mainly by extrapolating from their daily activities. The first and obvious layer of meaning attributing purpose to life is the one derived from religion. As shown in previous chapters, religious experience is an

aspect of life that links participants to their parents, their home country and their childhood. From the religious perspective of these devout migrants, life has always had a purpose. Yet further analysis of the stories of their lives and participant observation from fieldwork reveal that in day-to-day experience other aspects add layers of meaning to life. These are, fundamentally, the participants' commitment to work and their dedication to their families. These two seem to go in tandem: working hard means putting a lot of effort into supporting one's family.

This was very clear in the vignette that opened the chapter. Ignacio is facing a potentially serious condition, yet what he worries most about is his performance at work. Ignacio's experience serves to illustrate an attitude displayed by many of the research participants when facing difficulties in life: a sort of Christian determinism which, in a way, guarantees that whatever happens there may be a (divine) reason for it. Sometimes, however, as in the case of Javiera, whose daughter died at a very early age, an attitude of Christian determinism can only go so far in providing meaning and comfort.

The participants' perspective seems to apply to less life-changing events as well. It is also the way in which these devout migrants deal with the lack of religion on the part of their children, born in Chile or Peru, who were raised here. According to them, their children do not experience religious devotion in the intense way they themselves learned to experience it during childhood in Peru; some of them are even agnostic. These devout Peruvian migrants accept their children's lack of religious conviction thanks to the Christian determinism that permeates their whole lives.

This discontinuity in tradition does not mean discontinuity is pervasive between them and their children. In fact, it seems that the success of their children imbues the participants' own lives with a sense of purpose and continuity. Education will be the gift that they have given to their children, with huge effort. In a way their children, now educated and successful, are their legacy, the one that gives purpose to their lives and justifies all the sacrifices they have made along the way. An aesthetic of sacrifice permeates all of the participants' life stories, from their (often humble) beginnings in Peru to the successful lifestyles they now enjoy.

These Peruvian migrants have reached late middle age and yet, as shown in previous chapters, they feel extremely alive. They continue to work full time and are not even considering retirement. However, they are aware of their age and, when asked, say they believe or hope to live another 15 years or so. Some of them have now independent children with successful careers and their own property, but most of their children



are still at university or just starting their professional careers. The hope and expectation is that these children will soon be completely independent. These late middle-aged migrants are getting closer to the age of retirement – even if they do not plan to stop working, it means a certain threshold has been crossed in terms of age. Seeing their children almost finishing university and starting their professional lives means that they have succeeded as both parents and migrants. By sacrificing themselves for others, just as Ignacio did, these Peruvian migrants are fulfilling their own life's purpose.

## Notes

1. In addition, being interviewer and interviewee members of religious brotherhoods also had an impact upon the answers. Linguistic anthropologist Charles Briggs explains in his work *Learning How to Ask* (1986) the complexities of the interview as an act of speech. Drawing on Jakobson's model, Briggs explains how, in interviews it is *referentiality* that is supposed to be in the foreground, whereas in fact there are more elements of *indexicality* playing a part. *Referentiality* is centred around the 'referent' element in Jakobson's model, referring to what is being talked about in an exchange (the subject of the interview). *Indexicality* refers to contextual elements of the exchange. In many cases, notes Briggs, research participants may seem to be talking about the subject under discussion (*referentiality*) but they are in fact responding to other elements of the context of the interview (*indexicality*). The following are examples of such elements: the setting of the interview, socio-economic and age differences between the interviewer and interviewee, any previously existing relationship between the two, among other factors. Taking into account the fact that the research participants were talking to a fellow member of a Christian brotherhood, usually in a religious setting, it is quite likely that their explicit replies about the sense and purpose of life were influenced by those settings, rather than communicating something specific about the referent (the theme that was being discussed).
2. See, for example, Javier in [Chapter 3](#).
3. See [Chapter 2](#).
4. See [Chapter 4](#).
5. Roberto also appears in [Chapters 4 and 6](#).
6. In the Lord's Prayer, there is a line that says: 'Thy will be done on earth as is in Heaven', referring to the will of God. Ignacio is quoting the line from this prayer.
7. Elena made a similar point when talking about her patients. As she works at an oncological clinic, she regularly talks to people who may be dealing with imminent death. She believes that faith can be comforting and reassuring. She tells her patients to believe in a superior being, a being who might not be able to heal them but may help them to avoid suffering and face the disease more calmly. In this statement Elena acknowledges that advising her patients to adopt a certain sort of Christian determinism, one that relies on accepting fate (in this case, death), will bring them a certain peace.
8. In addition, [Chapter 7](#) showed a parallel between this non-continuity of religious practices and the fact that these late middle-aged Peruvian migrants, who take good care of their ageing parents, do not want their children to have to care for them in the future.
9. Martin's project of buying a house required multiple steps, some of which have not yet been completed. He became a Chilean citizen in order to apply for a special type of loan, which he will use to pay for part of the house.
10. This was also the case for Roberto, as was shown in [Chapter 3](#). After having lived in Chile for six years, he and his wife visited Peru with their teenage children and asked them if they wanted to live in the country they had been born in. The children said no, so Roberto and his family decided to stay in Chile for good.
11. Mariano (see [Chapters 2 and 6](#)), who has lived in Chile for over 20 years, asserts that he and his wife have made Chilean friends, but not as many as his children.

12. 'Maestro' is also the way in which Jesus is addressed in the New Testament. The English translation 'master' does not convey the nuances of teaching, guidance and warm teacher–pupil relationship that are implicit in 'maestro'.
13. Some participants spoke about their own businesses or other projects they would like to leave to their children. Marcos, for example, wants to set up a call centre and an NGO for older adults with his wife. For his son, saved at birth by a miracle for which he thanks the Lord of Miracles, he wants to leave a better brotherhood. Other participants do not see their businesses being passed on. Esteban, like many other participants, proudly describes how his children are enjoying good lives and how they received a good education, but he regrets that none of them want to continue his business. 'When I die, that will be the end of the matter. I have no heir [to the business].'
14. See their stories in [Chapters 4 and 6](#) respectively.
15. See [Chapter 5](#).
16. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, 'The bodies of the dead must be treated with respect and charity, in faith and hope of the Resurrection. The burial of the dead is a corporal work of mercy; it honors the children of God, who are temples of the Holy Spirit' (Catholic Church, p.554, 2300). <https://penandthepad.com/cite-catholic-catechism-7852709.html>.
17. When it comes to cremation, the Catechism of the Catholic Church states that 'The Church permits cremation provided that it does not demonstrate a denial of faith in the resurrection of the body' (Catholic Church, p.554, 2301). <https://penandthepad.com/cite-catholic-catechism-7852709.html>.
18. Some research participants may accept cremation, even if not by choice. Ana María, for example, says she already has a small burial plot, paid for in instalments, in Chile for her remains ('my little bones will stay here'). Jokingly, she added that her daughter and son will probably cremate her so they can sell the burial space and divide up the money. Even though it was said half in jest, she stated quite firmly that she was fine with it.

## Conclusion: the sacrifice of continuity

### The questions

What does it mean to be ageing in Chile as a migrant? What does it mean to be late middle-aged nowadays? How does being in a different country impact the process of ageing? This final chapter will respond to these questions by focusing on the aspirations of the late middle-aged Peruvian migrants with whom this study was conducted.

### Navigating multiple instances of living ‘in between’

Throughout its chapters, this book has illustrated several experiences of living ‘in between’. This notion has been the common thread that unites all the experiences of these late middle-aged Peruvian migrants.

These experiences can be grouped into two main axes that cut across the overall experience of ageing for the research participants as migrants in Santiago de Chile. In the first place, it is the axis of age itself. Peruvian migrants now aged around 60 are precisely ‘in between’ two experiences of age. Previous chapters have shown that they claim to feel young. What’s more, they claim to look young, providing the remarks of others in praising their looks as evidence of this: beneath lies the tacit assumption that if other people see them this way, it must be true. Through deeper and longer conversations about other aspects of life, however, some cracks begin to emerge in this discourse. It is made clear that old age is starting to appear in their lives as an unwanted, yet inevitable companion. It is the elephant in the room they all want to deny is there.

There is even a sort of exaggeration of youth in their comments. ‘I feel as if I were 40,’ claims a 60-year-old participant. However, the

elephant shows its presence through indisputable facts: the risk of high blood pressure, the possibility of developing diabetes, the necessary changes to their diet and other routines. The work that has to be done to prevent these early signs developing into actual frailty is not that hard: less salt, less fried food, less coffee, the mandatory physical exercise. Participants do not portray these changes simply as healthy habits unrelated to ageing – a very viable excuse nowadays. Instead they admit, without excuses, that these changes are due to medical advice – a point at which the elephant is finally out in the open. They admit, then, that these bodily changes are the first signs of advanced age. The women research participants accept menopause as a natural part of ageing. Both men and women also acknowledge the early signs of age in bones and muscles that hurt and in the fatigue that manifests itself at every party that they want to leave early.

This limbo, halfway between the vigour of retained youth and the menace of inevitable old age, may be considered as a dualism: the one between body and mind/spirit/soul so common to Western thought and such a central tenet in Christianity. Youth can thus be attributed to the spirit, to how one feels, while physical age shows in the body or in one's chronological age. 'My bones ache, but I do not feel like a grandmother,' observes one of the research participants.

The participants are still living in the window of middle age (extended in the last couple of decades) that sees certain duties (such as taking care of children) diminish, while the definitive signs of more advanced age, such as inactivity and lack of autonomy, have not yet arrived. As illustrated in [Chapter 4](#) with regard to their social activity, these late middle-aged Peruvians are very much enjoying their empty nests, or their nests with almost independent children about to fledge. This is due, in large part, to their good socio-economic status; after 20 years or so in Chile, many can enjoy the security of a stable job and income. Some even dare not to work at weekends, in order to take care of their grandchildren or attend social meetings.

This is acknowledged to be a halfway point; participants are aware that the 'point of destination' (i.e. more advanced age) is not far away. However, this point of arrival is postponed as much as possible. It is true that, at the bureaucratic level, these migrants declare that they did not have the chance to accumulate a retirement fund sufficient to maintain their current quality of life after retirement. It is also true that retiring is not in their immediate plans, however, and is not present emotionally even as a possibility. These participants cannot think of themselves as not working. On the one hand, this is due to the fact that work is what they

dedicate most of their time to: to stop doing so would open up a void in life that would be too deep and too sudden, as well as difficult to picture ('Not working? I would be too bored, I would die!' they protest). On the other, this approach can also be explained by the fact that much of their self-worth derives from working, from the sense of being dedicated to a task and useful, as well as from making a sacrifice.

The stage in life that these migrants find themselves in leads to a necessary reflection on life, at a point when they still feel some of the vitality of their youth. This is not the sort of reflection on life made on one's deathbed. It is rather a point at which reflections on mortality and on the finite nature of life make their appearance. Like many more personal and conceptual topics, these issues emerge between the lines of casual conversations, particularly those in which the participants remember difficult times in their lives. Moments such as these are never explicit. The general feeling is of being poised at the top of the rollercoaster, just before the descent begins. They have not yet started to go down (there are just some early signs), but one can feel the vertigo in the stomach. It is this moment of unexpected and undefined middle age that permeates their whole experience of this time.

The second axis cutting across these migrants' lives, present ever since they left Peru, and likely to remain after they are gone, is the sense of being poised 'in between' two countries. This is not a question of national identity or of assimilation in the destination country: neither of these themes is of any concern to this study. The sense of being 'in between' two countries refers simply to the participants' concrete experience of everyday life, in all its dullness and repetition: simple, common ordinary activities as observed and discussed during fieldwork. It is about the reflections they make about life, when they look back and realise that half their lives have been spent in Peru and half in Chile. These two halves of their experience are intertwined in simple, everyday actions, such as eating or praying.

It could be said that these two experiences of living 'in between' follow the same dualism of body and soul. Eating is a simple bodily experience, however deeply charged with meaning it may be for these Peruvian migrants. Not being able to adapt to the local food is one of the main difficulties that those who arrived in Chile over two decades ago can remember. Twenty years later, the fact that Santiago is a city full of Peruvian restaurants and shops selling Peruvian products not only shows how much Chileans appreciate Peruvian gastronomy; it also means that eating Peruvian on a daily basis is easy to accomplish. There is something about the concentration of the flavours and the intensity of its punchy

colours that makes Peruvian gastronomy a metaphor of sorts. Perhaps it is an experience enhanced by distance. The research participants claim continuity in this respect: they were used to enjoying Peruvian food at home and they keep on doing so in Chile.

However, the research participants do acknowledge that they live their spirituality in a more intense way in Chile than they did before. This is the aspect of the everyday that pertains to the soul, the other side to this body–soul dualism. They describe themselves as being more devout in Chile, a country which, as many of them observe, is less religious. The faith they possess is deeply related to their early lives in Peru; they worship Peruvian patron saints and Peruvian Virgins. In a way, this devotion is not only to an entity protecting their home towns, but also to a devotion that derives from their education and the way that they were raised by their parents. The sacred images these participants brought from Peru and keep in their houses, their pockets and in their smartphones are a metaphorical rosary of intersected significance: family, Peru, communal celebration, protection, company, purpose, sacrifice, certainty. Many say the reason why they have become more religious abroad is due to their having to endure separation from their family. While they experience the underlying sense of living ‘in between’ through simple, everyday things, such as a spicy lunch or a morning prayer, their families contain within themselves the inherently ‘in between’ experience of transnationalism.

## The smartphone and its necessary affordances

A transnational family is one whose members are spread across two or more countries. This is the case for almost all these participants, although one of them managed to bring his whole family, ageing parents included, to Chile. Their families usually stay in Peru, however, or live in one of the countries that Peruvians are most likely to migrate to – usually the United States, Spain, Argentina or Italy. Although a transnational family is not a geographically-based unit, the constant contact between its members enables it to remain a viable family. This is where the smartphone plays a fundamental role for these Peruvian migrants. The affordances of today’s channels of communication have the potential to make one feel closer to the instant intimacy of actual co-presence. The smartphone (and the constant use that these migrants make of it) is the condition of possibility for the transnational family. ‘It is much easier now,’ participants acknowledge, referring to the distance and how much they miss their families. It even seems as though migrating were less hard today, due to



**Figure 9.1** The smartphone and the procession: a procession of Peruvian migrants takes place in Santiago, Chile. Photo by Alfonso Otaegui.

the availability of constant communication. Smartphones are not only used to keep up with family members' everyday lives or for seeing how their ageing parents (the main concern of these participants) are doing. They are also used to exercise a sort of co-presence, for instance by live-streaming parties and processions (Fig. 9.1).

### **Leaving something behind: the quest for continuity through the next generation**

The multiple instances of living 'in between' gain meaning, are made worthwhile and achieve a sense of purpose through the concept of sacrifice for the next generation. They are aligned, thanks to the notion of going beyond one's boundaries as an individual with one's own life. This is where the participants' religious practices, the organisation of processions in particular, serve as a metaphor not only for the multiple instances of living 'in between', but also as an expression of the limits of their desire for continuity through their children.

The religious practices of this study's participants illustrate the complex instances of living 'in between' described in the book. On the

one hand, the intensity of Peruvian devotion is something the participants share with their parents, a practice learned as children deep within the heart of their families. Some recall going to mass with their grandmother; others remember decorating the neighbourhood with coloured candles in preparation for the celebration of a patron saint. This Peruvian devotion, on the other hand, is something that these migrants do not share with their children. Raising them in Chile, where very few communal religious celebrations take place, did not ignite a spiritual spark, as was the case for the participants when growing up in Peru. The experience of the procession is a brief return to Peru, as many of them like to say, from presenting offers to the image to eating *turron* (Spanish nougat) so typical of October, to the people cheering and crying along the way. As noted above, October, the purple month dedicated to Our Lord of Miracles, is the central month of the year – the one that gives meaning to all those daily morning and evening prayers. It is a time for requests, hope and gratitude; ‘Miracles’ is in the very name of the icon. In carrying the Peruvian image through the streets of Santiago, while the Lord floats over their shoulders, these migrants feel that they are back in Peru. The occasion inspires a deeply felt sense of this living ‘in between’. These late middle-aged Peruvian migrants thank the Lord for their health, for their enduring youthful looks and for their work; they also ask for Him to preserve the wellbeing of their parents in Peru and their children in Chile.

Between their devout ageing Peruvian parents and their non-religious Chilean children, participants in this study are poised right in the middle. According to these very devout migrants, their children are not as religious as they are – or at least not in this traditional popular way. Some are even agnostic. The religious practices provide a metaphor for the experience of living ‘in between’ two generations and two countries, but not for the notion of continuity. This legacy of religious practices will not continue among second-generation migrants.

These devout Peruvian migrants know this and accept it calmly enough. This does not mean, however, that they have renounced the desire for continuity through the next generation. Their religious beliefs may not live through their children, or at least not in the same way, but their commitment and determination have certainly secured their children’s future. This is where other aspects of their lives play a part in the unveiled search for continuity: work, family and their migration journeys. The dedication to work and making the difficult choice to migrate can both be seen as a form of sacrifice – one that they have made, and are still making, for their families.



Some of the participants also seek a sense of ‘leaving something behind’ that extends beyond their own families. Some of them plan on going back to their home towns to ‘give back’ something of what they have learned in Chile. Most usually join in fundraising activities organised by the church. A general sense of Christian charity permeates all these initiatives and certainly brings a sense of purpose to their individual lives. Through the social clubs described in [Chapter 4](#), many have taken part in welfare initiatives that aim to improve the education and wellbeing of their fellow countrymen. The results can often be a source of pride. ‘We did all that work and now the Peruvian migrant is integrated [sic] into Chilean society,’ commented one of them. Beyond the question of integration, however, there is also a sense of accomplished purpose, of something that will outlast them.

Their lives, before and now, have meaning – a sense of being rooted in their Christian faith, the one they learned from their parents in Peru. This faith also comes to the fore when facing difficulties, such as deciding to migrate or taking care of an ageing parent. The messages on the brotherhood’s WhatsApp group reveal their main concerns and the ways in which participants deal with them. They may ask for a chain of prayers for a severely ill brother, hoping for the miracle of healing. Or this brother might pass away, in which case they would express condolences and send blessings. The Lord has spared this brother from suffering and therefore He must be praised: either way was the Lord’s way. This attitude, named ‘Christian determinism’ in [Chapter 8](#), gives these migrants comfort and helps them in difficult moments. Such ‘Christian determinism’ is perhaps the reason why they accept that their children will not honour the Peruvian devotions with which they grew up. This does not mean that continuity through the next generation is out of the question. Rather it asks participants to negotiate with themselves to find how to leave something behind through their children.

These middle-aged Peruvian migrants are happy with their lives in Chile. However, their satisfaction goes further and gains a deeper meaning when all the effort they make can be signified as sacrifice for someone else. All the experiences of living ‘in between’ – all of the struggles, all that distance away from home – are worth it because they have succeeded in raising their children. It is at this moment, poised at the tipping point of a long middle age, that they start to see their children finishing their careers, starting their own professional lives and – in some cases – even buying a property of their own.

Many of these migrants have sacrificed their own retirement for the sake of their children. Some do not own property, as they invested

their hard-earned money in their children's education instead. This was observed across several participants, from the upper middle-class factory manager to the lower middle-class security guard, both living on opposite sides of Santiago and the socio-economic spectrum. Such a sacrifice is a migrant's sacrifice. Their ageing parents in Peru are not migrants (not even the late-in-life family joiners)<sup>1</sup> and their children in Chile are not migrants either. This is also a migrant's sacrifice in another sense. These late middle-aged Peruvians do not want to be a burden to their children when they themselves face old age. Their desire not to be a burden even extends beyond death. Many of the research participants said they want to be cremated, a commitment that releases their children from going to the cemetery or feeling guilty for not going.

However, this method of the disposal of the body has other implications too. A buried body implies a fixed place, a grave, a commitment to a physical space. But a funeral urn is quite the opposite: a portable object, it is less of a hassle. It is as if these late middle-aged migrants, who have moved from their country at a central point in their lives, do not want to leave their children with something that, in a concrete way, is an anchor or a tie. They seek to liberate their children from themselves. They have secured the wellbeing of the next generation (and, in so doing, have left something significant behind), but at the price of not passing on their deepfelt devotion. Their children have received a good education and will lead better professional lives in Chile than the ones the participants had before they left Peru. Their children will not lead processions in the streets of Santiago, however, nor will they be eating *anticuchos* (a grilled meat dish) on the pavement. Their children will be successful like their parents were, but they will not be like their parents in every way. The apple will fall far from the tree. These Peruvian migrants hope that it will fall further ahead, making every bit of their sacrifice worthwhile.

## Note

1. In Chapter 6 the 'late-in-life family joiners' category (by Horn 2019) refers to ageing parents who have been brought to Chile by their children, the research participants. Although these elderly adults are migrating to a different country they do not need to work; their children cover all expenses and they have everything arranged in Chile. They are not facing the difficulties encountered by their children, which is why they are considered a different group for the argument of this paragraph.

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What does it mean to be ageing in Chile as a migrant? What does it mean to be late middle-aged nowadays? How does living half of your life in a foreign country impact perspectives on later life? Is retirement an opportunity to go back to the home country? What will happen to the next generation, raised in a different country from their parents?

Based on 16 months of ethnographic fieldwork, *Ageing with Smartphones in Urban Chile* analyses the experience of ageing for Peruvian migrants aged around 60, who have lived in Chile for over 20 years. Their lives are informed by a series of experiences of being in between. They live between two countries, two generations (their Peruvian parents and their Chilean children), two different stages in life (retained youth and menacing old age), between giving care (to their parents) and not wanting care (from their children) and between a continuing legacy (through their children, who have a promising future) and not transmitting legacy (some traditions will not pass on to the next generation).

Peruvian migration has been one of the most studied in Chile. However, neither the experience of ageing of migrants in Chile nor the experience of late middle age has been fully addressed yet. By focusing on the entanglement of ageing, migration and technology, this monograph is an ethnographic contribution to an unexplored subject in the vast literature on migration studies in Chile.

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