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Research paper

## “Machetear” : Surviving disability through mendicity in the North of Chile

### “Machetear” : *survivre en situation de handicap par la mendicité dans le Nord du Chili*

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#### ABSTRACT

In Antofagasta, Chile's Second Region, located at the North of the country and possessing the highest salaries throughout the country, there are many people with physical disabilities that resort to mendicity, which is a survival strategy locally known as “machetear.” According to spontaneous sociology, this scene is explained through cultural and moral protagonism that creates “solidarity” towards people with disabilities in Chile. Even though this country has endorsed international human rights treaties, handouts and this generous disposition towards people with disabilities have not been subjected to exclusive problematization within a thematic unit. While reporting the results of a qualitative research carried out in this space, this article analyses the social conditions regarding the possibility of this interaction and identifies the perceptions and dispositions awakened by a disabled body begging within a community. It also makes the denigrating effects of these social responses towards ways of living with a disability visible. The corpus comprises content analysis of the main disability laws, non-participant observations of interactions and 47 semi-structured interviews with people possessing physical disabilities that live through mendicity in the region, which are the key actors as regards disability, and who Chileans who donate alms or not.

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## R É S U M É

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Située dans le nord du pays, la deuxième région du Chili, Antofagasta, qui offre les salaires les plus élevés du pays, compte néanmoins de nombreuses personnes physiquement handicapées qui pratiquent la mendicité, « machetear » dans le vocabulaire local. Cette situation est spontanément expliquée par un contexte culturel et moral qui serait producteur de solidarité envers les personnes handicapées au Chili. Bien que ce pays ait signé les traités internationaux garantissant les droits de l'homme, l'importance de l'aumône et de la générosité supposée envers les personnes handicapées n'a jamais fait l'objet d'une réflexion spécifique unifiée. S'appuyant sur une enquête qualitative menée dans cette région, cet article a pour objectif d'analyser les conditions sociales de possibilité de ces interactions entre mendians handicapés et citoyens ordinaires, ainsi que les perceptions et attitudes que suscite la présence d'une personne handicapée pratiquant la mendicité. Il contribue aussi à mettre en lumière les effets négatifs de cette forme de réponse sociale sur la vie quotidienne des personnes handicapées. La méthodologie employée s'appuie sur une analyse de contenu des principales lois sur le handicap, des observations non participantes et 47 entretiens semi-directifs menés soit avec les principaux concernés, c'est-à-dire des personnes physiquement handicapées vivant de la mendicité, soit avec des citoyens ordinaires, qu'ils pratiquent ou non l'aumône.

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## 1. Introduction

The links between poverty and disability have been pointed out with concern by the international community during the last couple of years (WHO & WB, 2011). These are quite noticeable in the so-called “developing” countries where almost 80% of the world’s disabled people live. Within specialized literature, the scarcity of studies delving into these variables from such contexts has also been a matter of disquiet (Pantano, 2015; Grech, 2015).

This study departs from a qualitative investigation on disability and mendicity in the north of Chile. Even though this country is considered an example of success in macro-economic terms with respect to Latin America as a whole, it is also known for its high inequality levels, which currently reach 0.50% in the Gini index, making it one of the most inequitable nations worldwide (Department of Social Development, 2015). Many authors associate this asymmetry to the effects that the implementation of radical neoliberalism has had on the population’s living conditions during the last military dictatorship (1973–1990) (Moulian, 2002).

The persistent inequality in Chile particularly affects people with disabilities (Department of Social Development, 2016). Here, seven out of ten people with disabilities belong to the three poorest quintiles of population (Department of Social Development, 2016). At the same time, multidimensional poverty – which recognizes unfulfilled needs in matters of education, health, employment/Social Security and housing – is significantly superior in households where at least one member is disabled (22.6%) in comparison to the ones where none is (14.6%) (Department of Social Development, 2016). In addition, 60.8% of the adult population with disabilities find themselves outside the job market, while this percentage for the population without disabilities is reduced to 31% (Department of Social Development, 2016). From the 39.3% of the disabled people who are employed, all of them receive a pay 32% lower than non-disabled people, and 24.2% performs unskilled jobs, when only 17.1% of the non-disabled population performs this kind of jobs (Department of Social Development, 2016). This can be associated with the existing asymmetry in education; while 46.9% of the disabled population has

only completed basic education, only 22.4% of the non-disabled population has done so (Department of Social Development, 2016).

Antofagasta, which has the highest autonomous median household income per month nationwide and which is the world's mining capital (mainly oriented toward copper), is no stranger to these trends (Department of Social Development, 2015). This region is located at the north of the country, between the Pacific Ocean and The Andes, and it encompasses a great extent of the Atacama Desert. It borders Argentina on the east, Bolivia on the northeast, and Tarapacá, Chile's 1st Region at the north, which in turn borders Peru.

The region has 631,875 inhabitants and barely represents 3.4% of the total Chilean population (NSI, 2014). It is estimated that 9.3% of the regional adult population possesses some kind of disability and there is greater prevalence within the two poorest quintiles of the population (12.3%) compared to the three richest ones (8.5%) (Department of Social Development, 2016). Similarly, 74.4% of the work age disabled population in the region doesn't work and 44.5% of the disabled population has only completed up to or not even basic education (NSI, 2005).

A quick walk through the malls of the two main cities, Antofagasta (384,9 thousand inhabitants) and Calama (149,2 thousand inhabitants), shows a noticeable amount of physically disabled people who have turned to mendicity as a survival strategy. In this sense, during the 21st century, some scenes that root from medieval times are recreated. This trade has become a legitimate means of survival for the people considered today disabled considering themselves "honest beggars" (Geremek, 1998: 34). In this given case, "machetear" or the "macheteo", Chilean slang that makes reference to the act of requesting handouts, has turned into self-employment to survive disability and poverty. To do that, the protagonists display various performances through which they exhibit signs of stigma (Goffman, 2006) to trigger the monetary gift of the pedestrians. This is how the interactions they establish with the citizens in the public space become central in their daily lives and their experience of disability.

From the common sense, it is believed that this activity constitutes a possible means of life given that within this space of prosperity "the solidarity of the Chileans can be seen in abundance" (DPBHF15), as one of the mendicity's protagonists points out. In Chile, "solidarity", widely understood as donating money on isolated occasions, is seen as a habitual altruistic willingness. It is considered to be a "moral value" and (...) a national identity referent (Román-Brugnoli et al., 2014: 100), mainly exercised towards disabled people. Nevertheless, the validity of this activity and the praising of "solidarity" as a positive social response towards disability have not been addressed as a problematic unit.

This absence is worrisome because in Chile, during the last decade, there has been a change in the disability paradigm, which is associated to the establishment of a human rights standpoint on the subject. Begging for handouts and generous willingness collide with this paradigm change because their effectiveness relies on the stigmatization and infringement of the protagonists' citizenship status. For that very reason, questioning the reduction of this population segment to objects of charity or assistance has been one of the core ideas in the struggle initiated by this minority for their acknowledgement (Ravaud & Stiker, 2001).

The main objective of this article is to analyze: what institutional practices and social relationships currently shape the possibility conditions of mendicity as a means of survival in Antofagasta? What perceptions and dispositions are awakened in citizens by disabled people who live by mendicity? How do these affect life with a disability?

## 2. Material and methods

This investigation followed a qualitative approach. This approach is relevant to find out the social production of meaning or the agents' points of view (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The fieldwork was carried out between February 2014 and October 2015 in Antofagasta and Calama. Three collection strategies were employed:

- documental analysis of the main laws on disability at a local level;
- non-participant observation of the interaction of giving and receiving handouts due to disability. The sites for requesting handouts, as well as strategies and links with pedestrians, were identified;
- semi-structured interviews with:

- (a) twenty-three key actors on a regional and national level, such as organizations' representatives, disabled people who do not mendicate, disability departments' officials and rehabilitation professionals,
- (b) fifteen people with motor and visual disabilities that mendicate. The study was restricted to these types of disabilities because they were the most frequently found. Eleven interviewees are motor disabled, three are visually disabled and one is motor and visually disabled. Following global trends, only three of the cases of disability are congenital. In the rest of the cases, it was acquired throughout life as a result of illnesses or accidents. The interviewees' ages range from 31 to 65 years. Only two of them were born in Antofagasta. Nine Chileans come from other latitudes and four are immigrants from neighboring countries. The sample is made up of 13 men and 2 women. This is due to the fact that even though the number of disabled women among the regional population is higher than the amount of men (11.8% versus 6.7%), the economic participation rate in Chile, just as it happens internationally due to androcentrism, is masculinized. Among the employed disabled people, 55.3% are males and only 37.2% are females (Department of Social Development, 2016). All the interviewees mendicate as a means of life and none of them are homeless. Except for one of the interviewees who is a home owner, the rest of them rent rooms or live in hostels,
- (c) nine adults that give or do not give handouts (4 males; 5 females).

In a, b and c the samples used were qualitative. They were determined by judgment in the first two cases and by snowball in the third. Their sizes were determined according to theoretical saturation criteria. The interviewees were requested to provide informed consent. The ethical aspects of the investigation were supervised by the Scientific Ethics Committee from Universidad Católica del Norte. To preserve the anonymity, the names were changed for codes, followed by the letter "M" if they were male or by the letter "F" if they were female, and their interview number. DPBH stands for disabled person who begs for handouts; D stands for potential donors; KA stands for key actor.

The material was interpreted following the content analysis guidelines, inferring the emerging categories in the discursive production (Krippendorff, 1990).

### 3. Mendicity and disability

#### 3.1. "Macheteo" scenes for "having" a disability Antofagasta

The preferred spaces to beg by the disabled who live from "macheteo" in Antofagasta and Calama are places of urban concentration such as promenades, mall accesses and supermarkets. Given that it is an activity exercised within the informal economy, there is no data about the amount of people that survive through mendicity in the region. Nonetheless, agreement arises during interviews as regards to "the great amount of people begging"<sup>1</sup> (KAM7, 42 years old) and even that, "there are too many disabled people begging [for money] in Antofagasta and Calama" (DF9, 33 years old).

Lying on the floor, displaying their amputations, sitting down in their wheelchairs or in their seats showing their walking canes, limping or approaching vehicles stopped at the traffic lights with their crutches, the "macheteo" protagonists exhibit their motor and visual disabilities as "transformation signs" to get the pedestrian's attention and get monetary gifts (Goffman, 2001). Some of them also make exclamations ("cooperate with the blind", "a little help for this handicapped person"), or carry signs with messages ("help me buy my prosthesis", "I need two million pesos to buy my wheelchair", "I'm unemployed"), or hang the state's disability credentials on their chests, or make gestures such as extending their hands to signal request and shake the cups they carry where coins are collected so that they make noise.

According to the scenes described, there is an identifiable "handout exchange" given that a suffering situation is generated by the requestor to foster the monetary gifts on the part of the pedestrians;

<sup>1</sup> The transcribed texts from the interviews are reproduced literally to maintain the meanings that were expressed verbally. We decided to add explanatory terms within square bracket only exceptionally to aid understanding.

the one who begs “provides” pity in exchange for money (Matta, 2012). In this way, the Chilean slang “machetear” is metaphorical in the sense that it tries to “hurt”, in a similar way to the usage of the homologous bladed weapon to cut down pasture or leafy spaces. Those who “machetear” because they “have” a disability, try to make way in urban life and survive through begging for money, resorting to mechanisms enabled by their stigmatization.

Indeed, within this “macheteo”, the physical stigma (Goffman, 2001), a disqualifying attribute that questions the full human character, is “used” to explicitly appeal to the rupture of the civil inattention rule (Goffman, 1966) that governs the encounters between strangers in modern society. This civil inattention stipulates that, in interactions between strangers, each participant shows that they are visually aware of each other’s presence, but then they look away quickly to express that there is no special curiosity or hostility. Therefore, this respect requirement avoids “bothering others and interfering in their affairs” (Goffman, 2006: 118) by being respectful “of the integrity attributed to the actor” (Goffman, 2006: 80). Nevertheless, this ritual is generally broken in encounters with physically disabled people. The person with a disability becomes an object of unscrupulous scrutiny and, consequently, is received as a “non-person” (Goffman, 1966). This invasion of privacy operates as a stigma amplifier and constitutes one of the biggest obstacles to be faced in their daily lives (Goffman, 1966).

When it comes to the “macheteo”, this process appeals to a survival necessity. More precisely, the disabled body is forced to create a personal façade (Goffman, 2006), with its appearance and manners, that is a pity generator in order to legitimate the practice of mendicity, given the “biological” reason of their inability to work and their condition of “poor and deserving”.

### 3.2. Settings: the disabled body, the “poor and deserving” façade in the Western world

Far from being natural, this elective similarity results from a wider social context that serves as explanation and from the synergy between institutional practices and social relationships towards those considered as “disabled” (Gutiérrez, 2014). This similarity is reproduced, strained or questioned as a system of dispositions, that is, a matrix generating perceptions, evaluations and practices on the part of the agents, who are socialized into such social worlds (Martínez, 2007). This dynamic conjunction creates social responses towards disability, which are facilitators for settings where processes and rhetorics about social exclusion/inclusion of this local minority are unfolded.

Accordingly, it is inevitable to refer to the fact that reducing disabled people to the role of “poor and deserving” has a strong and long-lasting imprint in Western tradition. As it was previously mentioned in the introduction, Christianity determined that disability was a “criterion of ineptitude for work [and for the expression of] human suffering” (Castel, 1997: 49), given that it resembled Christ’s ailments on Earth. Within the Church’s social doctrine, charity was central and disabled people’s mendicity activated a space to exercise piety and expiate their guilt and sins (Mullett, 1990). The economy of salvation enabled was based on a “discriminatory perception of the poor who deserved help” (Castel, 1997: 47) according to which a distinction was made between “poor and deserving” (non-responsible for their situation) and “poor and non-deserving” (responsible for their situation). Therefore, the incapacitated and non-chosen disabled body as a subject generating pity would result in a credential for handouts (Geremek, 1998). As a result, “professional mendicity techniques” entailed exposing one’s “own maladies” (Geremek, 1998: 58) and proved humility. The exercise of this practice meant the humiliation of the mendicating person and their subordination to the donors.

This perception permeated disability policies from the beginning until the end of the Early Middle Ages, which were first administered by the Church and their institutions, and after the French Revolution, by the Social Security office of the town and according to scientific data bases (Ravaud & Stiker, 2001). The overflow of poverty and the extension of epidemics promoted mendicity more and more, which made social assistance become rationalized. From the 14th century onwards and progressively, during the 16th and the 17th centuries in Europe, mendicity policies proliferated that discouraged private charity since it was considered to stimulate dependency (Geremek, 1998). The “fake poor”, that is to say, the ones who had able bodies were sanctioned through physical punishments, deportation, forced labor and imprisonment. This is how the population was divided according to cultural and

moral categories, namely, the “respectable” population and the “questionable” population (Mullett, 1990: 84). In popular culture, these criteria derived from Christianity would accumulate sediment in an ethos of poverty through which fear of death would be channeled, constituting a powerful social control mechanism (Mullett, 1990).

Towards the 18th century, these measures spread out in America, though with less rigor than in the Anglo-Saxon world. They were propelled from Spain to calm the social unrest and guarantee public order while avoiding the feared local uprisings. In the piety and charity practices, the Creole elites had protagonism (Langue, 1994) and this process was a mechanism to show off power without altering wealth distribution.

For some of authors, these power technologies resulted in the liberation of the productive forces for the development of capitalism, promoting employment as a duty linked to the regulation of the free job market<sup>2</sup> (Spicker et al., 2009).

The materialistic and English Disability Studies' branch considers the beginning of all forms of oppression experienced by disabled people until now to have been established in this historical moment of capitalism's ascent (Oliver & Barnes, 2012). Being sentenced to forced idleness and dependence, in a society where work is the main element that introduces people into the social structure and provides meaning, has a negative social effect in social identity (Castel, 1997).

According to these English authors, through State policies, the institutionalized denigration of disabled people is established when they are reduced to the role of owners of a personal medical tragedy that incapacitates them for work and turns them into social welfare dependents (Oliver & Barnes, 2012). Thus, exclusion through assistance conditionally integrates disabled people in exchange for reducing them to an inferior state that denied their status as a citizen (Ravaud & Stiker, 2001). Through this inclusion/exclusion processes a *social façade* was created in the Western world (Goffman, 2006), that is, the institutionalization of a social role according to stereotyped expectations that fixed disabled people into the idea of “incapacity”, tragedy, dependency, passivity and charity.

Since the seventies, the international movement for disabled people rights tried to revert this perception. Some important achievements have been made during the last couple of years as regards the formal recognition of this minority, for instance, the signing of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006 (hereafter referred to as the Convention). Nevertheless, materializing this spirit into the State's mechanisms is a pending matter. The policies do not only maintain their denigrating character. Given the social and economic regressive processes generated by Neoliberalism, they have even acquired new stigmatizing nuances associated with the rejection of this paradigm towards all forms of social dependency (Oliver & Barnes, 2012).

The impoverishment of living conditions generated disabilities and a decline in living standards endemically due to the exclusion from employment governed by a logic of survival of the fittest (Oliver & Barnes, 2012). Neoliberalism extrapolates the rules of the market onto society and demands individuals that they become entrepreneurs of their destiny and social risk, abandoning the old protective functions of the State. The latter become perversions of the system and are only applied to extremely vulnerable populations to avoid social conflict (Román-Brugnoli et al., 2014). Considering this layout, success and social failure are measured by consumption power and explained by the ability to organize one's own life. This leads to an exaltation of independence, which, by opposition, deems dependency as a shameful condition and a personal failure (Sennett, 2000). Within this frame, social assistance for disabled people are focused and cut back, especially in peripheral countries, where such assistance is not enough to cover for basic needs, generating terrifying poverty levels experienced by this minority. This lack of aid forces them to turn to different forms of charity and dependency to survive (Oliver & Barnes, 2012). In Latin America, the most unequal region on the planet, there is a daily unfolding of this scenery where different means of expressing charity are the main protagonists within the disability-related poverty spaces.

<sup>2</sup> While for others, the transition from feudalism to capitalism was explained by demographic causes, the development of productive forces or by the class struggle (Brenner, 1988).



#### 4. Disability and “macheteo”: social conditions of possibility

As it was previously explained, the possibility conditions for “macheteo” as a means of life for disabled people allude to the reciprocal encounter between ways of life and perception principles generated by the material and symbolic effects of social responses existing towards this population segment in a given social space. From the interviews carried out, four factors were identified as triggers of “macheteo” as a survival strategy in Antofagasta.

##### 4.1. Disadvantages overlap

Those who beg due to their disability present an overlap of disadvantages that positions them in areas of social disaffiliation where unemployment and the frailty of the networks generating positive recognition and social protection combine (Castel, 1997; Paugam, 2006). The interviewees possess extremely low education levels, which are consistent with national trends. Four of them have not completed basic education, seven have completed basic education, two have incomplete middle education, one has completed middle education and one has completed higher education. In 13 cases, this is related to a lower social class origin, and only in two cases is it related to having obstacles in accessing education for disabled people.

This educational profile generates a limitation when it comes to finding a job. Their labor trajectories are marked by informality, which affects more than half of Chile’s employed populations (51.5%) (Fundación Sol, 2011). This is one of the consequences of the Labor Plan’s application during the military dictatorship that changed unidirectionally the systems of Social Security achieved by the unions’ movement between 1924 and 1973. The plan introduced scarcity and employment flexibility, aspects that legislative transformations during the 90’s decade normalized (Valdés et al., 2014).

Among the interviewees, three of them had had no other economic activity than mendicity. 12 have been self-employed or worked informally. Their income, after becoming disabled, was less than the minimum wage. Only one of the interviewees had access to a formal job but quit after three months given that his wage was not enough to cover for his existence. His answer was “I wasn’t paid much because here in Chile they pay a paltry wage for being disabled” (DPBHM4, 41 years old).

In 13 out of 15 cases, the interviewees are heads of household. Their households are usually shared with their spouses and children (six cases) or consanguineous relatives (three cases) or they are single parents (six cases).

For the majority of the interviewees, the impossibility of having access to a job is the element that describes life with a disability in Antofagasta and the main path that leads to begging: “This is the real living death (. . .) they don’t let you work, they don’t let you live.” (DPBHM9, 65 years old); “It is very difficult to live with a disability. There are few opportunities given to people here in Antofagasta.” (DPBHM6, 32 years old).

Disabled interviewees who do not exercise mendicity agree that, “There is no labor inclusion for disability” (KAM7, 42 years old); “Employment for a disabled person is very little because they discriminate against disabled people (. . .) they think little of us.” (KAM6, 45 years old).

Two factors influence this situation. First of all, the regional economic profile associated with mining, the main local source of qualified work, which demands high educational requirements that the interviewees do not meet, and physical requirements that entail undergoing staff selection processes in which any deviation from “normality” is a synonym of labor risk and expulsion. In the non-skilled employment sector, they must compete with other national or immigrant workers who go to the region searching for opportunities.

Secondly, the existence of prejudices as regards disabled people’s unemployability. One of the protagonists of mendicity points out, “I tried to get a job. . . Do you know what was the answer they gave me? That I was going to cost them too much because I could have accidents” (DPBHM12, 65 years old). Forced unemployment negatively affects these agents’ subjectivity.

## 4.2. Ambivalent disability policies

### 4.2.1. At a national level

The analysis of the current disability policies in Chile shows that there is a State ambivalence as regards recognition of rights in paper and social disqualification in practice, which has a particular effect on the way of life and perception of the links between poverty and disability.

In 2008, Chile signed and ratified the Convention. Since then, some disability laws were transformed and citizenship was incorporated as a point of view. An example of this trend is Law N°20,422 that Establishes Standards for Equal Opportunities and Social Inclusion of People with Disabilities ([National Congress of Chile, 2010](#)). From the National Disability Service, it is considered that, according to these measures, a human rights viewpoint as regards disability was established, and assistentialist and charitable answers towards this population segment were left behind.

According to the key actors, even though Law N°20,422 is a great measure, it has not been concretized in practice, “It is a dead law that had nine months to accomplish certain things which have not been accomplished. The State has been resting on its laurels on that matter” (KAF1, 31 years old). What’s the use in having such a wonderful law if there is no organ of control? What happens when rights are infringed, where can a person complain?” (KA20, 38 years old).

Similarly, as regards labor inclusion, there is consensus about the absence of policies to promote equal employment access for disabled people ([UN, 2016](#)). At the same time, disability certification, carried out by the Commission of Preventive Medicine for Disability (sic), is reduced to assigning an illness code that requires focused assistance ([UN, 2016](#)). This entails a form of intervention where the vulnerability condition, and not the citizenship status legitimizes the right.

Disabled people who have never made financial contributions to the Social Security capitalization system can apply for disability assistance pensions (sic), created by the Decree-Law N° 869 in 1975 ([Gana, 1990](#)). Currently, this benefit reaches only 23% of the disabled people in Chile, among which we can find all of the Chilean interviewees begging for handouts ([Department of Social Development, 2015](#)). According to the 2008 Law N°20,255, any “person declared disabled (...) who doesn’t have a right to request a Social Security pension”, that is between the ages of 18 and 65, and that is part “of the poorest 60% of the Chilean population” can apply for them ([Department of Labor and Social Security, 2008](#)).

According to the 1980 Law-Decree N°3,500, “disabled” people are those who, “resulting from an illness or weakness of physical or intellectual strength, suffer a permanent reduction of their ability to work, or who possess an intellectual disability and are under the age of 18” ([Department of Social Development, 1980](#)). This device, by providing a “work disability” percentage, generates a social disqualification of disabled people that is out of touch with the rights point of view ([Paugam, 2006](#)).

In addition, these pensions, protected by the fact that they try not to discourage contributions and guarantee their sustainability ([Gana, 1990](#)), provide sums of money that do not guarantee survival. The pensions received by the interviewees are approximately 80000 Chilean pesos (122.5 dollars), which are below the 91,274 Chilean pesos, (139.7 dollars) established as the extreme poverty line for uniparental households ([Department of Social Development, 2015](#)).

The shortage of this figure is another factor identified as leading to handouts and a generator of humiliation, “If they gave you more money, we wouldn’t be begging for money this way which is so awful” (DPBHM7, 52 years old); “What can I do with the 82 thousand bucks that the State gives us? The State couldn’ care less. They are completely apathetic towards us.” (DPBHM8, 45 years old).

### 4.2.2. At a regional level

Although SENADIS (National Service for Disability) is present regionally and reproduces the diagnostic of the existence of a change in paradigms in matters of disability, their operation is limited to an assistential level (providing technical support to apply for public assistance to access social benefits such as canes, wheelchairs and pensions) and some training.

At the local level, there are support networks destined to disability. In Antofagasta, there are free rehabilitation services, recreational activities and some efforts were made in terms of labor inclusion, but it is well-known that they are quite limited given the regional economic profile, the prejudices of business owners, the low educational levels of the applicants and the small wages offered. These



options are not known by any of the disabled people interviewed in the city, which is a trend also reported by other investigations on disability and poverty (Pantano, 2015). In Calama, the office named after the offensive euphemism “differential capabilities” offers assistance intervention in the form of assessments on benefits application, such as disability credential, technical assistance and pensions. They also support organizations in their annual collection.

When consulting local officials about disabled people who beg for handouts in these cities, one of them answered that this situation is not worrisome given that these individuals receive more income than those with formal jobs “I am not worried because I know they make a lot of money” (KAH20). Another official answered that this situation reflects the exclusion problems affecting disabled people in the region and that in some occasions, they show an “advantage-taking” attitude: “Some of them take advantage of the charitable situation and [say] “I am disabled, I can’t work, I can’t do anything and things are not quite like that” (KAF22, 35 years old).

In both cases, as opposed to SENADIS, there is evidence of the difficulty to implement a human rights-standpoint as regards disability at a local level given the strength of charity in the area, “there are still some years left and maybe a couple of generations to be educated in order not to objectify these people as an agent subject of compassion, charity and pity” (KAM21, 33 years old).

According to all the key actors, within the everyday nature of Antofagasta, this difficulty can be understood as a multiplication of the barriers for the participation of this minority. This is evidenced in the unsatisfied rehabilitation needs, the inaccessibility of public space and transportation, the conflicts in the access to education, the insufficiency of pensions, the lack of State support for middle classes to cover for the additional costs of disability, the discrimination, the impossibility of access to the employment world, the lack of recreational activities, and the lack of rights observance and awareness.

#### 4.3. Exalting charity towards disabled people as a social value

As it was indicated in the introduction, “solidarity” is an element of great importance in Chile and their citizens consider that it is their most characterizing feature (Román-Brugnoli et al., 2014). Even though “solidarity” encompasses different meanings, the most extended one, according to the studies carried out on this subject, is the one associated with the exercise of charity in particular, which is valued as an altruistic and selfless practice (Román-Brugnoli et al., 2014).

In “the cultural tradition of solidarity in Chile” there are three key moments that “the military dictatorship that began in 1973” went through: before, during and after (Román-Brugnoli et al., 2014: 99). Previous to the coup, solidarity was linked to two meanings. One of them derived from Christian charity, and after the seventies, another one associated with the idea of “social justice”, born with the Labor Movement and the Church’s social doctrine. In the development of the dictatorship two new meanings were added to the ones previously mentioned. One of them related to the human rights’ protection and another one associated with “the solidarity promoted by television and associated with the consumption of products, the companies’ advertising and the showbiz” (Román-Brugnoli et al., 2014: 99). Finally, when democracy arrived, after the nineties, “a meaning related to poverty, social protection and equality of opportunities started to be highlighted, especially in the speech of social actors belonging to the public sector, the third sector”, and also, with the withdrawal of the State’s intervention, it became a “matter concerning all Chileans” (Román-Brugnoli et al., 2014: 99–100). Similarly, some anti-solidarity and exacerbated individualism features became identifiable (Román-Brugnoli et al., 2014).

In the second stage, a media phenomenon was born. The Telethon was of central importance in Chile, constructing a perception of disability as a “solidarity” matter and contributing to the exaltation of charity towards this population segment as a social value (Húmeres, 2017; Gutiérrez, 2014, Ferrante, 2017).

Telethon is a charity institution that, following its homologous twin in the United States, raises money to rehabilitate disabled poor children through televised campaigns after 1978. The mechanism employed is the reduction of disability to a tributary biological misfortune of medical assistance and monetary gifts. Since its origins, the donors can participate by offering money and purchasing products from the brands that sponsor the fundraising campaign (Húmeres, 2017).

The possibility conditions of this campaign are linked to the disarticulation of the disabled rights' movement by the dictatorship and the emergence of unsatisfied rehabilitation needs that the neoliberal revolution generated through the commercialization of health (Ferrante, 2017). Far from disappearing, they are nowadays persistent in Chile and manifest themselves through the State's ambivalent actions towards disability, channeling some of the meanings that "solidarity" acquired after the return of democracy mentioned before.

The Telethon is experienced as a great national party "for all the Chileans" and it is associated with the idea of love for your neighbor, it is the major event that makes national identity swell with pride according to opinion studies (Húmeres, 2017). That is why it enjoys great popularity and support by citizens. In 2016, the show managed to collect more than 47 million dollars and it is estimated that 70% of donations were made by individual citizens (Ferrante, 2017). In Chile, this makes disability a synonym of Telethon and good deed: "I think that if you ask any Chilean, disability? They will focus on Telethon" (DF2, 37 years old). The problem is that, as an interviewee of civil society points out: "The Telethon is a discriminating element and very strong, it fosters donations because the poor thing is miserable, is worse than the worst kind of human being" (KAF2, 60 years old).

This is not seen as a problem by the Chilean State, which makes contributions to the institution in order to set up rehabilitation centers and which encourages citizens to donate as well. The United Nations (2016:3) recommended Chile to guarantee access to rehabilitation for disabled people and to combat this showbiz that creates prejudices towards disabled people portrayed as "objects of charity" and not as "subjects of human rights".

These false beliefs create stereotypes that strengthen the disabled's inferiority, unemployment and right to beg. Although many of the interviewees realize what Telethon does, they value the good deeds generated by the institutions, providing the access to rehabilitation that the State does not provide: "In the end, this is all there is, so it's good that it exists" (DF8, 25 years old). The construction of disability as a "national solidarity cause" and its handouts logic leads to the resigned acceptance of a subsidiary State that is not accountable for health as a social right and masks private charity as a value: "The trap is that we are all solidary and all of Chile works the pay [job] that the State should be doing. Through Telethon we institutionalize handouts" (KAF16, 47 years old).

The influence exercised by Telethon is extrapolated to Antofagasta, where disability organizations reproduce the pity/charity system. There are no groups dedicated to the demand of rights, they are all in a hurry to collect funds to pay salaries of the professionals hired to cover for unsatisfied rehabilitation needs.

According to the actors of civil society, this tragic vision is the one they face in daily lives. Even though being perceived in stigmatizing terms offends them, they are aware that they are the ones promoting this perspective through fundraising. Once again, conformism solves the dilemma, "the end justifies the means" (KAM14, 53 years old).

#### 4.4. Moral positioning: accepting the right to beg for handouts

For the exercise of mendicancy to result in a means of life, a moral positioning is necessary on the part of the agent so that the activity is accepted as a right and/or demand towards society. Thus, besides of the necessity situation there is a biographical process. This process starts from the typical interaction with social answers received for being disabled. The "macheteo" results in a life option and a fulcrum to get out of a forced superfluity.

Before begging for handouts, the interviewees turned to street vending of small goods. Notwithstanding, the amounts perceived were insufficient to exist and many times they had problems with the customs guards, who confiscated the goods due to lack of a city permit, "I used to work as a street vendor but we had to avoid customs guards, they bothered us" (DPBH7, 52 years old). Begging for handouts displaying a disabled body exempts them from police questioning. That is to say, the official perception of disability as employment "incapacity" together with the exaltation of charity as a social value, allow the disabled body to become a potential instrument for generating pity and resources.

The main motivation to jump into mendicancy is the amount of funds received, which are linked to high wages Antofagasta according to the interviewees. In fact, the secondary benefits (Goffman, 2001) contextually acquired by disability make the area fertile for "macheteo". As it was previously

pointed out, most of the interviewees are internal or external migrants. To preserve the immigrants' anonymity, we will only mention that they come from neighboring countries due to reasons, such as lack of work, impossibility of begging for handouts in their nations of origin due to heavy social sanctions making it inviable, knowing that this possibility as a profitable activity exists in the North of Chile and the convenient exchange rate given their country's currency.

The denigrating nature of begging in a neoliberal society that praises independency is what makes a portion of the disabled people interviewed, which are in similar conditions to the ones who beg for handouts, opt for street vending even when it means less income, "I might be a fool for not extending my hand, but I like earning my money by the sweat of my brow" (KAM7, 42 years old); "I think that those who also beg for money do so because of their low self-esteem or [because] their values are scarce, one can [choose to] sell [instead of begging for money] (. . .) I think it [selling things instead of begging for money is] very correct" (KAF6, 45 years old).

For those who beg, this feeling was eliminated or accepted by becoming accustomed to it. Moreover, by interacting with citizens, begging was given on a smaller scale the meaning of work since people are taught to be good to people. On a larger scale, begging was given the meaning of a way of life since people request compensation for being excluded. This idea will be recapitulated later on.

Old-timer status in the development of the activity is achieved after approximately nine years of begging. The minimum amount is five years and the maximum amount is 25 years. The begging workday is determined by the amount of money that covers the costs of existence. The number of hours worked depends on the "impression" produced by the disability on the pedestrians: the greater the vulnerability perceived, the lesser the necessary amount of time to beg. While the great majority exercises mendicancy between 10 and 12 hours, a small portion of the interviewees can cover those sums in 6 hours.

With the development of the activity, there is a whole wisdom they acquire on how to "awaken pity". First of all, the disability should be physically evident and it should cast no doubt about its "truthfulness". Secondly, lamentation should not be abused while begging. Thirdly, the person should be clean but not so well dressed. Also, donors should not know the amount collected daily. Moreover, no alcohol or drug consumption should be detected. In addition, it is necessary to be respectful and thankful to donors. Finally, it is a good idea to regularly change the place for begging because people "get tired" of giving handouts.

## 5. Agreements and disagreements

The knowledge acquired through the exercise of "macheteo" does not guarantee that in face-to-face interactions pedestrians will recognize the social façade proposed. This generates agreements and disagreements between three different perceptions at stake.

### 5.1. Disability as labor incapacity: biologization and pity

From this perspective, disability is understood as a biological deficit, "a condition that prevents the realization of certain activities such as working, studying or, simply, daily activities or moving" (DM5, 27 years old). In contrast to those having a "healthy body", these agents are perceived as "poor and deserving", given "disabled people are those who actually can't work, can't do something" (DF7, 65 years old). This perception is nurtured by the State's assistentialist response and by private charity. It is believed that society has a moral responsibility to assist and help disabled people to confront their existence, which is a task that the State should accomplish but is not doing so: "The government doesn't care about people with disabilities. We have to campaign for that yes the government needs to care about health and everything" (DF7, 65 years old).

This biological and fatalistic undervaluing perceived as foreign and external is the one generating compassion in people, activating handouts due to piety: "I feel sorry for them and you give" (DF7 65 years old); "I feel sad and helpless, maybe some kind of guilt for sometimes being, I don't know, like when you feel saddened for personal problems. Actually, life is hard and it's even harder in other cases" (DM5, 27 years old).

The giving of handouts in the first case releases them from discomfort: “I’m left at ease and say, Lord, that was my good deed for the day and I am happy because I did something positive” (DF7 65 years old). This doesn’t happen in the second case given that he knows his action is not going to change the person’s situation: “I can give them handouts but that’s not going to change the situation” (DM5, 27 years old). Guilt emerges as motivator or result of monetary gifts. In the first case, it is religious, and in the second one, it is the result of living in an unequal society.

### 5.2. Disability as a form of abuse: individual accountability and moral blindness

In a similar way to the previous conception, this standpoint understands disability as a biological deficit but not enough to exonerate the person from the imperative to work: “Disability is a person’s condition limiting their normal development of certain activities but doesn’t disqualify them from work” (DM6, 74 years old).

Disabled people are citizens like the rest; therefore, they are not entitled to any special treatment neither on the State’s part nor on society’s. Through overadaptation, they need to solve their survival like everybody else does without anybody else’s support than themselves.

This standpoint is nurtured by the meritocratic neoliberal ideology that understands disability as a form of social parasitism and rejects State assistance (Sennett, 2000). It can be associated with the anti-solidarity syndrome mentioned before (Román-Brugnoli et al., 2014). From this perspective, disabled people who beg are “deadbeat”, “abusive” or “lazy”: “There are disabled people who are lazy because they don’t like to work, that is, they abuse the options given by the State for being disabled in preference over many other things” (DM6, 74 years old); “In many cases, there is, maybe, a hint of eagerness to take advantage of handouts. . . [there is] some speculation in the sense that sometimes you realize that being within an easy system [is convenient] because it appeals to the people’s compassion, to their feelings” (DM1, 41 years old).

Here, there is no difference between those who beg without having any disabilities and those who do having one; they are all made equal under the individual responsibility of not wanting to get out of their comfort zone. Their attitude generates rejection or indifference: “It is abusive because people are professionals at mendicity and earn more money than oneself (. . .) I ignore the ones who beg for money” (DM6, 74 years old). “I don’t feel pity nor get caught up with the feeling (. . .) The fact that you are in a place and you can’t get out or you don’t want to get out” (DH1, 41 years old). The disposition awakened is moral blindness given that it does not generate handouts or piety because it is not believed that there should be any moral obligations towards disabled people begging for money. That is to say, there is a distancing from their “own sensitivity zone” given “the ability not to respond or respond as if something happened not to people, but to physical objects, to things or non-humans” (Bauman & Donskis, 2016: 53). In this sense, “things that happen are insignificant, [because] they don’t happen to us or we are not involved with them” (Bauman & Donskis, 2016: 53).

### 5.3. Disability as injustice: social pain and compassion

This perception is the most frequent among the interviewees and it regards disability as the result of a society “that doesn’t provide opportunities”, that is “cruel” or that “looks down on” disabled people: “It is the surroundings that don’t provide the opportunity to include them in the system. Rather he’s disabled, he’s useless, and everybody is kind of trapped within this sort of logic which is mechanized and makes them invisible” (DF3, 33 years old).

Disabled people are seen as unfairly excluded by a society that, when the individual is unable to enter the market by selling their labor force, reduces them to “useless” or “garbage”. The scene of disabled people begging creates cruel and hard to process images: “It is hard for me to see a disabled person alone, in abandonment because that would be even more cruel, even more difficult, I imagine, their life” (DF8, 25 years old); “Having people humiliate themselves to make money, it’s like something to apologize for, we don’t consider ourselves accountable for things that might complicate our lives” (DM4, 24 years old).

Mendicating disability arouses in these agents a type of suffering which is social and associated with the perception of injustice and neglect of the individuals facing vulnerabilities in a context where

the State is absent in the provision of general well-being and where social insecurity proliferates (Bourdieu, 2010): “There are no policies implemented as regards disabled people and if there are, they are extremely limited because they are not generating any changes” (DM4, 24 years old). This perception is consistent with a disability rights standpoint and it is influenced by the visibility of the policies’ ambivalent character in that matter; the persistence of charity and the desolation regarding the lack of hope for this situation to change. Fear in the face of generalized social insecurity from which nobody is exempt can also be identified.

Donation due to compassion is generated where the motivation arises from a reference to oneself and to others as members of a community reigned by hopelessness and scarcity: “I don’t find it indifferent. I feel I did have opportunities and those people don’t, I feel the need to, maybe, provide some help. That makes me feel more relieved by handing, maybe, a bit” (DF2, 37 years old).

After giving handouts, people share the frustration of knowing that the situation for the disabled person will not be solved: “After giving, I feel a degree of anguish, I have, like, this consciousness that my contribution is not going to be something magnificent or will take him out [of his situation]” (DF3, 33 years old); “It’s only a momentary help for somebody who needs it” (DF9, 33 years old).

## 6. Final words on agreements, disagreements and citizens made dregs

“Machetear” as a survival strategy for disabled people in Antofagasta is the result of historical possibility conditions that reveal social answers coexisting as regards disability in the current Chilean society. In these institutional practices and social relationships towards disabled people, the effects of radical neoliberalism on the living conditions of the Chilean population can be observed. Still at present, the advance in human rights matters registered during the last decade has not been able to reverse these conditions.

Disabled people who beg for handouts not only awaken solidary dispositions among Chileans, as common sense orders, but also, invisible forms of rejection. Disdain is materialized in daily insults and assaults: “At the farmers’ market, I was begging for my coins and a lady came and hit me in the face” (DPBHM13, 51 years old). “Chileans some are generous but they have insulted me as a monkey vest [as if I was scum]” (DPBHM5, 33 years old).

Thus, between the broken hearts that generously donate handouts and the moral blindness that blames others for the failure, the citizenship status of disabled people who “macheteo” is infringed. Not only because this activity is based on stigmatization, which leads to the undervaluing and denial of the protagonist’s human condition when the handouts exchange takes place, but also because of the exposure to open violence.

The experiences linked to living with a disability vary according to the way “macheteo” is signified. When it is understood as work, which only happens in four cases, the interviewees interiorize the acceptance of a “labor incapacity” and re-signify this activity as a way of teaching people how to be “kind-hearted”. This echoes the stigma and the exaltation of charity as a social value: “I am teaching people because by seeing me like this, they look, and I teach them how to be kind. I think it’s a virtue they will take up” (DPBHM11, 44 years old). In these cases, the questionings received are ignored and they cling to the perception returned by those who are “generous”: “Chileans are very caring, help a lot. There are people who even congratulate you and that makes you feel good, useful” (DPBHM2, 65 years old).

However, when “macheteo” is understood as a means of survival for people with disabilities, which happens in 11 cases, the interviewees feel humiliated when society reduces them to the trash of the world: “Here we are looked down upon, there is no social stratum as we want, because we are discriminated against in every sense anyway, we are not given jobs, we are looked down on, we are the scum of the world. There are people who are uncool about begging, as if we were unworthy, they tell you go get a job, that I am a rascal, that I hide my legs (. . .) I beg to survive, if not. . . I don’t know. . . what would I do, po’? I would have to kill myself!” (DPBHM4, 41 years old).

In these cases, the attacks received hurt the interviewees profoundly and demanding handouts seems to operate as a way of requesting from society some kind of symbolic compensation in the face of exclusion: “It is frustrating, psychologically hard, because anyways you don’t want to depend on

people, but I also think the lesson is clear, if people don't hire you, they should help you with money. Which is not correct but it is one thing or the other" (DPBHM, 42 years old).

Using the term "scum" in mining cities is significant. Within exploitation sites, even though the scum is waste material, it is a necessary element in order to commercialize materials. Therefore, it has a very important function. Just as in the Middle Ages, where the institutionalization of disabled peoples' mendicity served to activate a salvation economy maintained by Christian charity and allowed the reproduction of an unequal order, the fact that the role played by a mendicating disabled body "considered scum" in a neoliberal society mobilizes rhetorics that make the existence of a polarized collectivity bearable cannot be underestimated.

When charity takes place, it is not the result of altruism but of a situation of social unrest generated by the perception of a suffering biography (Matta, 2012). While in monetary gifts resulting from piety, a purely biological rhetoric of social exclusion can be identified; in monetary gifts resulting from compassion, this reproduction is accepted resignedly. As regards moral blindness, the rhetoric articulated allows the reproduction of the illusion that social success depends on personal effort, avoiding the discomfort and fear generated by awareness of the insecurity present in a society where social scarcity proliferates.

As it can be observed, whether handouts are generated or not, in every interaction possibility with disabled people who mendicate, the same asymmetry that leads to mendicity is reproduced. Based on the commitments adopted by Chile before the UN, it is imperative to combat the social conditions of stigmatization as a means for survival through Chilean disability policies. To do this, firstly, it is necessary to generate worthy employment for disabled people. Secondly, the State should provide a platform to exercise basic rights for disabled people. Thirdly, it is mandatory to denaturalize handouts giving to disabled people as a positive social response.

As regards this last point, Social Sciences can collaborate in making the oppressive nature of charity visible, highlight the role of contextual factors and raise awareness about how respect and inclusion of disabled people constitute necessary elements in the construction of a fairer society where everybody can be fully recognized as human.

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The author declare that they have no competing interest.

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