

Report on Fieldwork in Chile for PhD Thesis: Musical Niches and the Foodways of Chilean Wine

My PhD thesis explores music used in various contexts related to the wine industry in Chile. This research involved conducting ethnographic fieldwork from October 2022 – April 2023 in Chile across four interconnected contexts: 1. Annual local Vendimias (wine harvest) festivals; 2. Wine tours, tastings, and private museums within vineyard grounds; 3. Privately-run wine tasting events or workshops organised by vendors and/or wine enthusiasts; and 4. Public museums. These fieldwork sites represent a surprisingly multifaceted co-optation of musical cultures, including sonic frequencies used in wine fermentation. Musical choices in each of these contexts (e.g., Gregorian Chant, Jazz, and Chilean folk music) are not arbitrary. Culturally-shaped dispositions towards various musical genres undoubtedly play a role in projecting a certain corporate image to consumers, and urban/rural narratives in the case of Vendimias. Additionally, historic/political associations with particular musical genres in Chile add complexity to these meaning-making practices.

The fieldwork I completed includes some unforgettable highlights. Firstly, I interviewed Ian Hutcheon, oenologist and founder of Observatorio de Tagua Tagua (Tagua Tagua Astronomical Observatory), who age wines using sonic frequencies emitted from Jupiter transmitted via radio waves. Fieldwork also included attending a private event involving a blind tasting experiment with wines aged to music composed by Juan Ledesma – classical guitarist, oenologist, and owner of vineyard Viña Ineditas. In April 2023, I visited Mr. Ledesma at his vineyard in Chillán, where the barrel room displays speakers plunged into wine barrels.

In January 2023 I travelled to the Colchagua region; an important wine-growing region in Chile. Fieldwork sites included the Museum of Colchagua and Viña Santa Cruz, which holds a private museum within vineyard grounds called Museo del Vino (Museum of Wine). The history behind the museum and vineyard owner, Carlos Cardoen – who also owns the Museum of Colchagua – is intriguing and controversial. Wanted by Interpol since 1993, Cardoen is accused by the U.S.A of illegally importing bomb-making element zirconium from the USA to enhance the incendiary component of cluster bombs his company, Cardoen Industries, sold to Saddam Hussein's regime during the 1980s and 1990s. Further fieldwork included a visit to Montes Wines (Viña Montes), who age their wines with Gregorian Chant music.

Vendimias festivals, organised and run by local municipal councils across various wine-growing regions, began in earnest with the Santa Cruz Vendimias from 3-6th March 2023. I also conducted fieldwork at Vendimias festivals in Molina (10th-12th March); Peralillo (18th-19th March); Curicó (23rd-26th March); San Felipe (1st-2nd April); and Santiago (15th-16th April).

Festivities usually start each day between 11am-12pm, and run into the early hours of the morning. Musical performances encompass street artists, musicians performing on multiple stages within a certain catchment area, and even stadium performances in the case of Santa Cruz.

I remain deeply grateful for the financial assistance provided by the Doctoral School Research Award of 2023, which enabled me to recuperate some travel costs and fulfil research tasks. I also remain deeply grateful for the recognition the Doctoral School has given to this research.



Image: Barrel Room at Vinna Ineditas, Ñuble, Chillán, Chile, showing an amplification system and wires from speakers plunged inside wine barrels, April 2023.



Image: A band playing *Cueca* music at wine harvest festival Vendimias de Colchagua in Santa Cruz, Chile, March 2023.