

The house as ontological archive:

Housing transformations and identity security in urban Bogotá (1930–2020)

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This research examines how material transformations in Bogotá's housing—from single-family homes to modular apartments—function as physical and emotional archives that sustain or challenge the ontological security of the families who inhabit them. Through an ethnographic and historical study across three Zonal Planning Units (UPZs)—Ciudad Montes, El Refugio, and Calandaima—the project traces the symbiotic relationship between domestic architecture, care practices, and cultural memory over nine decades of urban change.

Inspired by Jane Grenville's (2007) conceptual framework on the built environment and ontological security, the study argues that houses are not passive containers but active agents in the construction of belonging, continuity, and resilience.

In contexts marked by migration, urban densification, and socioeconomic segregation, spatial adaptations—such as expansions, subdivisions, and repurposing of rooms—operate as material strategies to preserve family memory and maintain a sense of stability amid uncertainty.

Ontological security is negotiated daily through the materiality of housing: inherited objects, marks on walls, the arrangement of care spaces, and domestic rituals all serve as identity anchors. In contrast to Augé's "non-places," the studied homes emerge as "socio-places" (Paramo, 2017)—spaces saturated with meaning where the past is performatively reactivated to cope with present pressures.

Methodologically, the research employs a situated, qualitative approach that combines archival analysis, visual documentation, and semi-structured interviews with residents across generations. This allows for a nuanced understanding of how urban policies, housing typologies, and intimate care practices intersect in shaping the lived experience of Bogotá's neighborhoods.

By framing housing as lived heritage, this project contributes to broader discussions on memory, identity, and urban belonging. It highlights how domestic spaces in cities like Bogotá act as crucial repositories of ontological security—offering not only shelter but also a sense of place, history, and continuity in an ever-changing urban landscape.

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