

Article

'No State, No Masters': Café Lavandería in Tokyo, Music, and Anticapitalism in a Cultural Environment

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Abstract: This paper is part of a series of research that these authors are conducting to study the linguistic landscape of the Tokyo megacity. In this instance, our focus lies on Shinjuku city. However, our examination does not extend to the linguistic landscape of the city itself; rather, it zeroes in on a café situated at its core, the Café Lavandería. How did Café Lavandería contribute to the development of the Hispanic linguistic, sociolinguistic, and subversive landscape in central Tokyo? The research unfolds in various segments. Initially, contextualization introduces the reader to Tokyo and Shinjuku; subsequently, the significance of Café Lavandería and the subversive social and political movements in Japan are elucidated. Following this, the study's foundation, including the photographic evidence and corresponding data, is presented. Lastly, an analysis of these data is conducted, culminating in an evaluation of Café Lavandería's impact in Japan.

Keywords: Hispanic linguistic landscape in Japan; Café Lavandería; linguistic landscape; semi-otic landscape



Citation: González Dávila, María José, and Federico Fco. Pérez Garrido. 2024. 'No State, No Masters': Café Lavandería in Tokyo, Music, and Anticapitalism in a Cultural Environment. *Arts* 13: 134. <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts13040134>

Academic Editors: Inmaculada Rodríguez Cunill, Jose Cabeza-Lainez and Guido Cimadomo

Received: 30 April 2024

Revised: 7 August 2024

Accepted: 9 August 2024

Published: 12 August 2024



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The Café Lavandería in Tokyo had a rich history, starting as a left-wing-owned laundry before evolving into a Hispanic Latin American-themed café. Located in Shinjuku, and working since 2000, it became a hub for those interested in Hispanic culture, showcasing music, literature, and political activism. Its closure marks a loss for the community, but its legacy underscores the importance of inclusive, self-managed spaces and the cultural richness Hispanic influences bring to Japan. This paper aims to highlight the influence of Café Lavandería on the Hispanic linguistic landscape in Japan. This work, like all those studying the LL of a specific area, has been primarily carried out through environmental observation. To carry out this essay, a documented exploration in photographs of the Shinjuku city of Tokyo has been conducted.

1. Introduction

Should the reader of this article, or their acquaintances, be queried regarding the quintessential elements defining Japanese society, it is highly probable that their responses would be suffused with cultural constituents intertwined with their own traditions—be it technological, historical, artistic, or linguistic—oftentimes tinged with a Western lens. This is hardly astonishing, considering that, upon an initial inspection, we encounter an archipelago that, following its turbulent historical trajectory in the first half of the 20th century, has metamorphosed into a nation characterized by remarkable tranquility, boasting an almost negligible crime rate, a single political party maintaining near-uninterrupted governance with resounding majorities since the reinstatement of democracy, and a plethora of videos inundating social media, depicting myriad citizens punctiliously queuing to attend their occupations.

However, beneath this veneer of brilliance that simultaneously mesmerizes and magnetizes, and within which one might discern a touch of anachronistic postmodern orientalism, lies an indomitable society, as untamed as the very nature that has besieged Japan

since time immemorial. This society pulses with a tenacity and obscurity unbeknownst to many, transcending bestselling novels and iconic samurai films. The dawn of the 21st century brought news of assassinated former prime ministers, violent upheavals necessitating the closure of the university system for several years, Japanese combatants in the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War¹, and globally renowned authors, such as Yukio Mishima², performing ritual suicide before scores of journalists.

Japanese idiosyncrasy is a multifaceted enigma, a polyhedral puzzle that defies oversimplification. It demands and merits scrupulous study through the myriad tools afforded by the scientific method, with the linguistic landscape (hereinafter LL) being one such instrument. When characterizing Japan as ‘polyhedral’, it must be understood that no single perception of the country predominates over another. Instead, all these perspectives are complementary, collectively constituting the remarkable crucible that is Japan. The Café Lavandería in Tokyo epitomized a captivating historical narrative, mirroring the metamorphosis of a self-managed community enclave in the bustling heart of the city. Originally a laundromat owned by left-wing individuals, the space was imbued with a legacy of resistance and activism, which indubitably shaped the identity and ethos of Café Lavandería in its subsequent incarnation. Nestled in the Shinjuku district, this café transformed into a vibrant nexus for aficionados of Hispanic culture. It became a haven where music and literature, a *mélange* of languages, and the advocacy of specific political values could thrive and intertwine.

The burgeoning presence of Hispanic culture in Japan is a riveting phenomenon, steadily expanding with time. Globalization has bridged diverse cultures, and the Japanese populace has shown a burgeoning fascination with Spanish culture and language. This is evident in the inclusion of Spanish in educational curricula, the rising popularity of Latin American music and cinema, and the manifold facets of Japanese cultural life imbued with Hispanic influence. The closure of Café Lavandería signifies a palpable loss for the local community and for those who champion cultural diversity and community autonomy. Nevertheless, its enduring legacy will serve as a poignant reminder of the significance of inclusive, self-managed spaces, and the profound enrichment that Hispanic culture bestows upon the Japanese cultural tapestry.

2. Theoretical Background

Tokyo, a veritable multicultural metropolis, graciously embraces citizens from across the globe, whether as permanent residents or transient visitors. This cosmopolitan amalgamation of cultures and languages is uniquely situated within Japan, one of the most insular societies in the world. The juxtaposition of this insularity, along with Japan’s distinctive historical interactions with foreign nations, creates a striking contrast between the country’s intrinsic idiosyncrasies and the broader global society. This cultural *mélange* is vividly manifested in the city’s architecture, gastronomy, festivals, signage, advertisements, and beyond. A stroll through Tokyo’s streets reveals a tapestry of the Japanese people’s resilient character and their engagement with global countercultural, social, and political movements, epitomized by locales such as Café Lavandería. This paper will delve into the LL of Shinjuku, with a particular emphasis on Café Lavandería.

As articulated by Landry and Bourhis (1997), LL encompasses the linguistic signs that permeate the everyday life of any locale: from signs and billboards to government building signage and pamphlets from private establishments. Through meticulous observation and analysis of these elements, one can infer numerous insights about a language’s specific status—its vitality in a bilingual or multilingual context, its function within social relations, and its intended use, among other aspects. The urban linguistic landscape offers a fertile ground for the expression and mobilization of diverse social movements. Previous research (Gorter 2006; Blommaert 2010) illustrates that this environment mirrors the linguistic and ethnic diversity of an urban populace, thereby providing a stage for the visibility and representation of varied identities and sociocultural perspectives. In numerous cities, social movements strive for the inclusion and recognition of minority lan-

guages and dialects as fundamental components of linguistic and cultural diversity. Such endeavors often involve advocating for public policies that ensure equal access to services in multiple languages and promoting greater linguistic inclusion within the public and political spheres (Fishman 1991). Additionally, social movements may mobilize against language discrimination and linguisticism, seeking to dismantle the barriers that perpetuate the exclusion and marginalization of specific groups (Phillipson 1992). This activism can encompass the advocacy for bilingual education, the eradication of stigmas associated with certain dialects or accents, and the defense of language rights within the workplace and educational settings. Furthermore, in scenarios where minority languages are threatened by dominant languages, social movements may emerge to preserve and revitalize these endangered tongues. Such cultural and linguistic resilience initiatives may involve promoting minority language education programs, disseminating minority language literature and media, and raising awareness about the significance of linguistic diversity for social and cultural cohesion.

2.1. An Overview of Japan

It is imperative to underscore that Japanese culture, despite its widespread recognition, remains one of the most insular and resistant to foreign influence. This reality engenders a particularly distinctive public landscape (PL), laden with stereotypes and heavily adapted to the nation's social fabric. As elucidated by Pérez Garrido and González Dávila (2023, p. 96), anyone transitioning from the role of an enchanted visitor, beguiled by the Japanese concept of *omotenashi* —おもてなし (described by Nicol in his 2015 article on Japanese hospitality)—to that of a Western resident, must brace themselves for a continuous cultural shock that will invariably color their daily existence in Japan. This phenomenon is further explored in the works of Cid Lucas (2009), Vidal and Llopis (2000), Velloso (1994), and Sugimoto (2015), which delve into the palpable cultural paradoxes inherent in Japanese routine.

One must grasp that Japan is a nation where dual codes are an essential component of an ambiguity that fosters cultural shock and shapes the format of advertisements and communication within the PL. Haruki Murakami captures this sentiment succinctly: “If you capture the tone, the story will become a real story” (Murakami 2009, p. 80). According to Lanzaco (2010), the Japanese propensity for indirect refusal exemplifies how, through formal and evasive expressions, two distinct realities are presented: the preservation of harmony versus the assertion of individuality. Moreover, the Japanese language encompasses various communication styles (formal, informal, honorific, and humble), which creates a dichotomy between the facade of what is socially acceptable and the private sphere (Rubio 2012). In the private sphere, behaviors and relationships may deviate from the socially prescribed norms. This duality influences the PL, labor relations, and language acquisition among Japanese learners, as documented by García Álvarez (2021), Martel Trujillo (2016), Wasa (2012), and Martínez (2002).

Japan's recent acclaim and the ensuing discourse on social media, as well as its presence in the headlines and scholarly literature of prominent newspapers and publications, have spanned nearly 150 years, anchored in the Meiji Restoration. This period marked Japan's modernization following internal conflicts in the late 19th century (Bharne 2010). Since this pivotal political and social reformation and subsequent integration into the global community, Japan's abandonment of self-imposed isolation has cyclically intrigued, captivated, and perturbed observers worldwide. The understanding of Japan varies significantly among foreigners, some of whom highlight Japan's absence of a standing military, its global cultural influence through graphic arts, technology, and animation, or its economic shift from manufacturing to other sectors.

Despite evolving perceptions, Japan continues to attract millions of global visitors. Its enduring cultural and societal influence, often steeped in stereotypes, remains pervasive, particularly in the era of clickbait journalism. Comprising an archipelago of approximately 7000 islands, with the four principal ones being Honshu, Hokkaido, Kyushu, and

Shikoku, as well as the Okinawan archipelago (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2020), Japan is home to a population of 130 million (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 2022), predominantly the Yamato people, alongside indigenous Ainu and Ryukyuan cultures that persist despite historical marginalization (Sugimoto 2015). Japan's history, marked by phases of expansion and militarism, has engendered territorial tensions and contentious relations with neighboring nations such as China, Russia, South Korea, and the Philippines (Rees 2022). Present-day Japan's pacifist stance contrasts sharply with its historical trajectory, necessitating scholarly inquiry to comprehend cultural symbols such as samurai, katana, bushido, and seppuku.

While a comprehensive summary of Japan's history is beyond the scope of this article, it is crucial to acknowledge that Japan's cultural heritage, rooted in the Edo period's isolation and subsequent forced modernization, profoundly shapes its contemporary identity. Delving into these historical nuances illuminates Japan's multifaceted character, bridging the gap between the reality and the stereotypes perpetuated by social media and global discourse.

2.1.1. Political and Social Context

The image of Japan that has been transmitted for years and popularized by numerous media outlets in the West presents a homogeneous, disciplined, and smooth-edged country whose political landscape over the last half-century has been almost entirely dominated by the conservative party. However, as Sugimoto (2015, pp. 1–30) points out, this vision is merely a construct popularized by the conservative ideological and research movement known as Nihonjinron (which, Sugimoto says, literally means 'theories on the Japanese'). It is essential, especially in academic work, to move away from biased views to understand the true social framework in which the research is based and to comprehend the real idiosyncrasies of the Japanese people. Therefore, in the following lines, the lesser-known history of social and protest movements that have shaken Japan in recent decades, which influence the local context central to this research, will be analyzed.

In the 1960s, Japan underwent a profound sociocultural revolution, wherein society began to gravitate towards more individualistic paradigms (Junqueras et al. 2012). This shift was largely catalyzed by socialist ideologies that had percolated among the intellectual elite, predominantly within university circles. The resultant saturation of progressive thought within academia positioned students as the vanguard of progressivism in Japan. As noted by Pérez Garrido (2015), while student movements across advanced nations shared common ideological foundations, the specific grievances they addressed were invariably rooted in the unique issues faced by their respective societies.

A pivotal social construct in Japan is the duality of *giri-ninjō*: *giri* denotes societal obligations and adherence to social norms, whereas *ninjō* represents individual emotions and desires. The tension between these constructs—what individuals should do versus what they wish to do—fomented a nascent individualism within a society hitherto governed by stringent behavioral codes. Key drivers of the student protests in Japan included latent disillusionment with American oversight post-World War II, the pacifist idealism that burgeoned after the defeat of militarism, the presence of foreign troops on Japanese soil, and a profound societal aversion to war and nuclear armament, especially against the backdrop of the Vietnam War's global discord.

Japan's post-war education system, heavily influenced by the pedagogical models of major world powers (e.g., France, Germany, USA), instilled a spirit of liberty and equality in students, which often clashed with Japan's prevailing societal realities. The domination of a single liberal party exacerbated frustrations among the youth, who yearned for genuine democracy and were well informed about global democratic movements (Junqueras et al. 2012). To comprehend the dynamics of the student movement, one must consider the ideological currents that fostered the first major protests in Japan in 1960, as detailed by Dowsey (2012) in *Zengakuren: Japan's Revolutionary Students*. These movements opposed the renewal of the Security Treaty with the USA, fearing entanglement in conflicts instigated by their ally (Rubio 2012), and protested the appointment of Nobusuke Kishi, a fig-

ure associated with wartime aggressions and political authoritarianism (Hane 2003). The student movements of the 1960s in Japan were organized with structures reminiscent of political parties. Prominent student leaders and alumni spearheaded various factions, each espousing radical, and distinct ideological stances. These factions, often aligned with specific faculties and universities, coalesced around shared educational and ideological principles (Pérez Garrido 2015). By the decade's end, mirroring global protest trends, Japanese student movements vehemently challenged the establishment. These movements were ideologically diverse: members of the Japanese Communist Party (PCJ) sought university reforms, Trotskyists, Maoists, and autonomists aimed to use universities as revolutionary platforms, while a minority right-wing countermovement was comprised largely of physical education club members. The ideological divergence among these groups often led to intense confrontations, not only with government forces but also among themselves, particularly between factions opposing the PCJ.

The "Japanese May 68" symbolized a watershed moment in Japanese society (Rubio 2012), driven by the fervent activism of university students. This movement significantly influenced contemporary Japanese society, fostering political engagement among youth, and instilling a spirit of dissent against governmental and institutional authority. Although the momentum of leftist and protest movements waned over time, their proponents integrated into broader society, effecting incremental yet enduring changes.

These transformations have led to more responsive government policies concerning education, environmental protection, and labor rights. The student movement has also spurred greater autonomy within the Japanese education system, challenging established pedagogical norms. Its legacy persists in the collective consciousness, continually invoking discussions on democracy, social justice, and human rights, albeit under stringent societal self-regulation rather than governmental oversight (Sugimoto 2015). Moreover, the Japanese student movement of the 1960s has inspired subsequent social movements domestically and internationally (Pérez Garrido 2015). Thus, the existence of spaces like Café Lavandería in Shinjuku can be seen as a testament to this enduring spirit of activism and cultural intersection.

2.1.2. Shinjuku, a Special Place to Learn

The idiosyncrasy of Shinjuku, one of Tokyo's most dynamic and eclectic districts, is a product of its rich history and vibrant cultural amalgamation. Originally a tranquil agricultural village during the Edo period, Shinjuku has undergone a remarkable transformation, becoming the epicenter of modern Tokyo. Its evolution is intricately tied to pivotal moments in Japanese history, including the post-World War II reconstruction and the subsequent economic boom. The latter half of the 20th century saw Shinjuku rise as a commercial and entertainment hub, drawing a diverse array of individuals and fostering its growth and development.

As articulated by Hidenobu (1995), Shinjuku serves as a crucible where tradition and modernity coexist in a symbiotic relationship. The district's labyrinthine network of narrow alleys, lined with traditional *izakayas* (Japanese pubs), stands in stark contrast to its towering skyscrapers and neon-lit streets, encapsulating Shinjuku's cultural diversity. Prominent cultural institutions like the National Noh Theatre and the Tokyo Art Museum further underscore the artistic heritage and richness that define this area. The district's pulsating nightlife and entertainment sectors, vividly described by Jordan Sand (2013), epitomize Shinjuku's vibrancy and vitality. Kabukicho, Shinjuku's famous entertainment district, is a nocturnal hive of activity, brimming with bars, clubs, and karaoke establishments. In stark contrast, the serene Shinjuku Gyoen National Garden offers a peaceful respite from the urban clamor, embodying the harmonious coexistence of nature and the metropolitan milieu.

Shinjuku's unique atmosphere arises from the dynamic interplay between the traditional and the contemporary, continually captivating both visitors and residents. This dis-

strict stands as a quintessential embodiment of Tokyo's diverse and ever-evolving urban tapestry, making it a focal point within the city's vibrant cultural landscape.

2.2. Linguistic Landscape Theoretical Description

Studies on the LL and its theoretical foundations represent a nascent yet burgeoning field of research, with a history spanning a mere three decades. The term “linguistic landscape” was first introduced in 1997 by Landry and Bourhis in their seminal work on the Canadian LL. According to [Luna Villalón \(2016, p. 4\)](#), who cites these pioneering authors, the term was proposed to describe the written language present in “public road signs, billboards, street and avenue names, names of commercial establishments, shop signs, and public signs on government buildings in a specific territory.”

Landry and Bourhis elucidated that there are two primary types of linguistic signs contributing to the LL, distinguished by their originator. Consequently, a specific LL encompasses both private and public signs. As noted by [Ben-Rafael et al. \(2006\)](#), the so-called top-down signs pertain to public signage, whereas bottom-up signs are of a private nature. Specifically, top-down signs are those issued by public, institutional entities such as national or municipal governments. In contrast, bottom-up signs originate from private entities, including businesses, restaurants, or companies in general.

This dichotomy between top-down and bottom-up signage is pivotal in understanding the dynamics of linguistic landscapes. Top-down signs often reflect official language policies and governmental regulations, serving as markers of authority and institutional control. Bottom-up signs, however, offer insights into the linguistic preferences and cultural expressions of the local populace, showcasing a more grassroots level of linguistic activity. The interplay between these two types of signs provides a comprehensive view of the linguistic and sociocultural fabric of a given area, revealing how language is both governed and organically utilized in public spaces. The information conveyed by private and public signs may be discordant, as [Landry and Bourhis \(1997, p. 27\)](#) state:

In some cases, the language profile of private signs and government signs may be quite similar and thus contribute to a consistent and coherent linguistic landscape. There are instances, however, in which the language of private signs is quite discordant with the language profile of government signs. More often than not, there is greater language diversity in private than in government signs.

The distinction between signs issued by public entities and those by private entities plays a crucial role in shaping the linguistic landscape (LL) of a particular locale. As [Luna Villalón \(2016\)](#) articulates, the LL reflects the groups that make up society. Publicly issued signs indicate societal acceptance of a multilingual community, signifying an acknowledgment of diverse linguistic groups within the society. Conversely, privately issued signs can serve various functions, such as attracting customers' attention to a specific brand or business.

The LL is characterized by multilingual signs that exhibit the linguistic diversity of each area. This diversity allows one to “deduce the relationship between different languages and their social status through the analysis of the prominence and predominance of each language in the exposed linguistic signs” ([Ma 2018, p. 2](#)). The presence or absence of signs in certain languages reveals the composition of the community, the dominance of specific languages or cultures, and the targeted clientele for businesses, particularly in the case of bottom-up signs. Thus, the LL is not only influenced by the sender but also by the receiver, as it conveys linguistic messages with distinct communicative intentions.

In this context, linguistic signs produce an affective effect on linguistic groups, reflecting the vitality of both languages and linguistic communities as a whole ([Ma 2018, p. 2](#)). Observing the types of signs in our surroundings provides insights into the linguistic hierarchy within a society or geographical region ([Landry and Bourhis 1997, p. 26](#)). Consequently, the LL of a place offers valuable sociolinguistic information, revealing the power dynamics of languages within a given community. For instance, a multilingual LL with a significant presence of minority languages suggests a community that embraces linguistic diversity and grants social recognition to these languages. Conversely, a predominantly

monolingual LL might indicate linguistic homogeneity or a societal preference for a dominant language.

Therefore, the analysis of the LL provides a window into the sociocultural and linguistic intricacies of a community, highlighting the interplay between language, identity, and power.

2.3. Semiotical Landscape: The Perception of the Urban Landscape

Following [Góngora Villabona \(2012\)](#), the urban landscape as an image is a construct of sensory perception by its inhabitants. The perception of a settlement is not based on its inherent reality, but on the personal and/or collective imagination that shapes it, constantly evolving in every moment and place. As a semiotic reality, the landscape carries cultural significance and unfolds symbolic potential, enabling inhabitants to enrich it through their creative subjectivity, imagination, values, traditions, myths, legends, projects, aspirations, and collective history, which forms the bedrock of their historical memory. The urban vista, depicted as a visual entity, results from sensory cognition regarding human settlements experienced by inhabitants in their daily lives. The apprehension of a settlement does not merely capture its essence but rather fabricates an image from personal and/or collective imaginings, continually evolving within each temporal and spatial context. These perceptual constructs crystallize into aesthetic encounters and serve as ethical benchmarks guiding civic conduct. Consequently, the urban vista significantly influences the fabric of urban cohabitation, providing citizens the means to navigate their daily personal and social endeavors, drawing upon not only the physical structures of the urban realm but also the globalized perceptions of the urban landscape as a nexus of human interactions, thus engendering and fortifying the urban settlement ([Góngora Villabona 2012](#)).

[Pickenhayn \(2007\)](#) posits that the landscape articulates its narrative through the interplay of spatial dimensions and volumetric configurations; through luminosity, chiaroscuro, chromatic palettes, geometric silhouettes, and contours; through olfactory and gustatory nuances; through sharp edges, promontories, smooth surfaces, and textures; through the cacophony of sounds and harmonious melodies. Yet, it also conveys its discourse through subjective human interpretation, hegemonic scripts, and narratives crafted by the mass media. The landscape is a sociocultural artifact, necessitating examination within the contexts of agricultural practices, livestock husbandry, industrial activities, maritime operations, and urban settlements. This amalgamation constitutes a picturesque embellishment to the idyllic vistas of pristine nature while simultaneously representing instances of environmental degradation, socioeconomic disparity, and urban congestion.

This multidimensional perspective underscores the landscape's role as both a physical and symbolic construct, shaped by and shaping the lived experiences of its inhabitants. It highlights the dynamic interplay between the tangible and intangible elements of the urban environment, reflecting and influencing the sociocultural fabric of the community. The landscape, therefore, is not merely a backdrop for human activity but an active participant in the creation and perpetuation of social meaning and identity.

2.4. Linguistic Landscape as a Social Weapon

In the year 2012, Martín Rojo published his scholarly work titled "Urban Landscapes of Indignation: Communicative Practices for Seizing the Plazas", examining communicative and linguistic strategies within the framework of social movements, with a particular focus on the encampment in Sol, Madrid, during the 2012 protests (commonly referred to as the Spanish 15M movement). The study underscores the pivotal role of communication in the reclamation of public spaces and the emergence of novel modes of protest. Emphasis is placed on how the invocation of actions and their contextual embedding can disrupt prevailing narratives and reframe the political landscape. Furthermore, the investigation delves into the impact of social media and mobile technologies in coordinating protest actions. Key themes explored include the reconfiguration of public spaces, the dissemination of discourses of discontent, and the strategic management of communication

as integral components in shaping nascent political and social initiatives. Additionally, the discourse examines the phenomenon of linguistic hybridity, shifts in the linguistic marketplace, and the subversive interrogation of linguistic ideologies within the context of these grassroots movements.

To apply Martín Rojo's theory to Tokyo, a city characterized by its unique cultural and social dynamics, several adaptations and approaches warrant consideration. Initially, a meticulous examination of local linguistic landscapes becomes imperative. This entails a thorough analysis of the diverse languages, writing systems, and non-verbal communication modalities prevalent in Tokyo's urban milieu. This step would involve identifying multilingual signs, symbols, and graffiti that reflect the city's linguistic diversity and social dynamics. Careful observation of communicative practices enacted within Tokyo's public spaces, including squares, parks, and thoroughfares, becomes paramount. Attention should be directed towards elucidating patterns of sign mobility, bodily expressions, and interpersonal interactions among citizens. This involves understanding how different groups use public spaces for expression and communication.

Encouraging Tokyo's inhabitants to actively contribute to the creation of visual messages and articulate their perspectives through gestural and performative means within public arenas could significantly bolster collective identity and foster a sense of solidarity among residents. Workshops and public forums can be organized to gather and amplify the voices of diverse community members. Crafting strategies for non-verbal communication mandates a nuanced understanding of Tokyo's cultural and linguistic idiosyncrasies. Ensuring the accessibility and relevance of messages to the local populace, while adhering to cultural norms and sensitivities, becomes imperative in this regard. This could include using culturally resonant symbols, colors, and imagery in public messages. Leveraging technology and popular social media platforms prevalent in Tokyo presents an opportunity to disseminate visual messages and facilitate sign mobility through digital mediums. Harnessing these digital platforms can effectively enhance citizen connectivity and amplify the impact of communicative initiatives. Campaigns and movements can use hashtags, virtual events, and online forums to engage a wider audience.

A café like Café Lavandería could serve as a potent element within the linguistic landscape, functioning as a nexus for social interaction and communication. Herein, various linguistic and discursive practices converge, thereby playing a pivotal role in shaping identities and fostering social connections. On the one hand, the multilingual environment prevalent in this café fosters linguistic diversity and cultural exchange. Individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds engage in conversations, contributing to a rich tapestry of languages and expressions. On the other hand, Café Lavandería serves as a platform for cultural exchange, facilitating the sharing of ideas, experiences, and perspectives. Through interactions in different languages and exposure to novel forms of expression, clients are exposed to a plethora of cultural nuances. A café like Café Lavandería can serve as a microcosm of this broader strategy, fostering a vibrant, inclusive, and dynamic urban landscape that reflects Tokyo's unique cultural and social dynamics.

3. Field Research: Shinjuku and Café Lavandería

The locus of our study is the vibrant ward of Shinjuku-ku (新宿区), a crucial segment of the Tokyo megacity. Shinjuku comprises various districts integral to the capital's dynamism, including Shin-Okubo, the heart of the Korean community in Tokyo; Shinjuku Gyoen, famed for its resplendent cherry blossoms and lush deciduous flora; and the imposing metropolitan government building. Our investigation zeroes in on the central nexus of Shinjuku, the namesake of this special ward, encompassing the city hall, the world's largest and busiest train station, and myriad tourist magnets such as Kabukicho, the infamous red-light district, and Omoide Yokocho, a nostalgic alleyway brimming with vintage food stalls, drawing millions of visitors annually.

Shinjuku's administrative district, the pulsating heart of this special ward, stands as a nexus of tourism, commerce, and entertainment. It is home to over three hundred and

fifty thousand residents, predominantly young trendsetters, students from illustrious institutions like Waseda University, affluent executives, and actors. This demographic mix, coupled with spatial constraints, results in a relative scarcity of basic services compared to the more suburban locales. This milieu fosters a transient population, where the sense of rootedness is elusive, and diverse ethnic communities are sparse, unlike the vibrant multiculturalism evident around Shin-Okubo station, Tokyo's Koreatown. Consequently, Shinjuku's LL reflects this reality: it is shaped by tourism, transient populations, expansive commercial zones, and a plethora of services.

Café Lavandería has historically served as a bastion of artistic expression, hosting poetry readings, musical performances, and art exhibitions. These artistic pursuits enrich the linguistic landscape through non-verbal communication and creative expression. Furthermore, the café has been a crucible for intellectual discourse and debate, where patrons engage in discussions spanning myriad topics, fostering a diverse exchange of viewpoints and collective dialogue. Notably, establishments like Café Lavandería operate as quasi-community centers, engendering a sense of belonging among their clientele. Through its embrace of linguistic diversity, cultural interchange, artistic expression, intellectual engagement, and community building, Café Lavandería has significantly contributed to the construction of a Hispanic rebel identity within the local milieu. This multifaceted role underscores the café's importance in the sociocultural tapestry of Shinjuku, amplifying its impact on the linguistic and cultural landscape of the area.

3.1. Data Analysis

It is noteworthy, firstly, that during the period when the corpus of this paper was compiled, the number of tourists visiting the country has experienced an exponential rebound compared to the years of restrictions accompanying the COVID-19 pandemic (Kitado 2024). This situation is clearly perceivable as numerous information and assistance services have flourished, such as the availability of brochures at tourist offices, certain governmental initiatives, or the assistance provided by volunteer tourist guides. At the same time, sadly, the pandemic period dealt a severe blow to many businesses and private initiatives, resulting in the closure of establishments as emblematic as the one occupying these pages.

This empirical study has relied on data collection through observation of the LL, consultation of social media platforms related to the establishment, analysis of content shared by customers and users on search platforms, and the researchers' prior experience and knowledge of Japanese sociology.

3.1.1. Collected Photographic Material

Following the acquisition of over 15 photographs (Figures 1–15), a meticulous curation process has led to the selection of 15 images deemed most pertinent in showcasing the distinct features of the establishment and the linguistic environment under scrutiny in this study. Notably, the café has since ceased operations. Consequently, to access visual documentation capturing the interior ambiance and various performances hosted at the venue, the authors of this paper have diligently scoured online platforms for photographs shared by patrons.

Following the closure of the café, this retrospective examination of customer-contributed photographs serves as a valuable resource for preserving the memory and essence of the establishment. Through these images, glimpses into the vibrant cultural and linguistic dynamics once thriving within its walls are afforded, enriching the narrative of this study.

The analysis will be divided into two parts: examination of the exterior of the premises and exploration of the interior space. This segmentation allows for a comprehensive understanding of both the physical setting and the atmospheric characteristics contributing to the establishment's linguistic and cultural significance.

Exterior and Architectural Elements

In the intricate design of Café Lavandería's mechanical door, even in its closed state, one can discern the Café's rich semiotic landscape, deeply rooted in anarchist symbolism. Prominently featured is the symbol of the letter A within a circle, universally recognized as a representation of anarchy, complemented by the motto 'No state, no masters'. Alongside these potent symbols lies the emblem of the squatting movement, a radical social endeavor advocating for the occupation of vacant properties—be they homes or premises—for various purposes such as housing, shelters, agriculture, meeting spaces, and centers for sociopolitical and cultural activities. This movement serves as a response to perceived economic injustices, aiming to challenge the prevailing norms of property rights and labor exploitation.



Figure 1. Source: Taken by Federico Fco. Perez Garrido.

Notably, the imagery of the cat adorning the mechanical door, as well as within the café itself, adds another layer of symbolism to the establishment's ethos. While cats hold symbolic significance in diverse cultures worldwide, they also serve as a powerful emblem of anarcho-syndicalism. This association traces back to the early 20th century when cats were adopted as symbols of autonomous strikes—actions taken without authorization from union leadership—within the American labor movement, notably by the Industrial Workers of the World. The term 'wildcat strikes' underscores the untamed nature of these actions, aligning with the spirit of radical unionism and grassroots activism.

In the Spanish context, the image of the cat evokes profound cultural resonance, particularly among generations who grew up during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. The song "El gato López" by the anarchist ska group Ska-P stands as a testament to this enduring cultural connection. Through the lyrics, El Gato López is a resilient and untamed figure, born in the streets and unyielding in the face of societal oppression. The song's message resonates with listeners, urging them to emulate López's defiance and resist the forces of tyranny and injustice.



Figure 2. Source: Taken by Federico Fco. Pérez Garrido.

Prominently emblazoned upon the wall of Café Lavandería is an assertive sign proclaiming the establishment as an ‘Antifa Zone,’ signifying an unequivocal allegiance to the principles and activism championed by the Antifa movement. This movement, which found its origins in the 1980s, has burgeoned not only within the United States but has also spread its influence across Europe and Asia, epitomizing a global resistance against oppressive ideologies and systemic injustices. At its ideological core, Antifa is profoundly intertwined with the antifascist movements that arose in Europe during the fraught decades of the 1920s and 1930s. These historical movements stood resolutely against the burgeoning threats of fascism in Italy, Nazism in Germany, and Francoist authoritarianism in Spain, serving as enduring symbols of resistance and solidarity amidst the encroaching shadows of tyranny.

The inscription of the sign in Spanish serves as a testament to the movement’s inclusive and internationalist ethos, transcending linguistic and cultural barriers to unite individuals in a common cause against oppression. Furthermore, the deliberate choice of anarchist colors in the sign’s design reflects the movement’s rejection of hierarchical power structures and its advocacy for decentralized, grassroots activism. By prominently displaying this sign, the café not only aligns itself with the values of Antifa but also serves as a symbolic space for fostering dialogue, solidarity, and collective action in the ongoing struggle for social justice and equality.



Figure 3. Source: Google Maps. Published by the user おはな.

This was Café Lavandería, an establishment that, according to its signage, offers ‘music and anticapitalism’. In the accompanying photograph, one can discern various linguistic and cultural elements derived from the Hispanic world: the signage of the café, inscribed in Spanish, and the presence of the Mexican icon, La Catrina.

The signage imbues the establishment with a distinct linguistic profile, intertwining messages comprehensible to Spanish speakers with potent communist and anti-establishment symbolism, including flags and stars. The presence of La Catrina, amidst a plethora of potential cultural icons, invites a nuanced interpretation. This skeletal figure evokes the notion of Santa Muerte and the broader culture of death, themes that, while deeply embedded in Mexican heritage for centuries, have in contemporary times become entangled with subcultures associated with the underworld. However, the authors choose to examine this icon through the lens of cultural idiosyncrasy and the Día de los Muertos—a cultural phenomenon. This analysis encompasses the historical use of All Saints’ Day as a veil for preserving Aztec traditions and explores how Día de los Muertos has evolved into a quintessential representation of Mexican, and by extension, Hispanic culture, as exemplified by mainstream productions like Disney’s *Coco*.

Window Display and Café Design

In these photographs, in which *La Catrina* analyzed in the previous document can be seen again, there is an opportunity to observe in detail other elements that make up the LL of the entrance to the establishment. Despite finding numerous elements with various languages (English, German, Valencian, etc.), in this study, we will focus on those in Spanish.



Figure 4. Source: Google Maps. Published by the user おはな.

This photograph vividly captures an array of elements crafted by individuals—presumably patrons of Café Lavandería—such as stickers. These artifacts reflect the vibrant and dynamic interactions fostered by the café with various movements and sensibilities worldwide, underscored by the presence of multiple languages. Particularly noteworthy in the Spanish linguistic landscape is a sticker advocating for Sanctuary Cities.³ These urban centers or jurisdictions, despite prevailing state legislation on immigration and deportations, adopt a more lenient stance, thereby creating safe havens for undocumented immigrants within their borders. This phenomenon, prevalent across Europe, South America, and North America, is often associated with regions facing significant migratory pressures due to wars, famines, or the quest for a better life away from the structural poverty endemic to many territories.

The presence of Spanish in this photograph, juxtaposed with the almost complete unawareness of this phenomenon in Spain and a different perspective on the migratory process, suggests a connection to communities and cities in Latin America or the United States. In these regions, migration flows are predominantly Latin American, with an increasing number of undocumented migrants attempting to enter US territory annually,

subsequently encountering various immigration regulations imposed by governments of varying political orientations. The linguistic and cultural elements present in this café underscore its role as a nexus for global discourses on migration and sanctuary, reflecting broader sociopolitical dynamics and the complexities of transnational identities.



Figure 5. Source: Google Maps. User: Karla Santos.

In Photo 5, the presence of *La Catrina* serves as a captivating iconographic feature within the café's semiotic landscape, accompanied by a Spanish narrative detailing the depicted festivity. This imagery prompts reflection on the fascinating evolution of cultural symbols, notably exemplified by *La Catrina*, originally conceived by Mexican artist José Guadalupe Posada in the late 19th century. Over time, this artistic creation has transcended its initial form to become an enduring emblem of Hispanic heritage, particularly entrenched within Mexican culture. Its association with ancient traditions highlights its remarkable capacity to intertwine with the cultural fabric and collective identity of a people.

La Catrina's ascent as a cultural icon underscores the enduring power of artistic expression to shape and reflect societal values and narratives. Its journey from a mere artistic creation to a symbol deeply ingrained in the essence of Mexican identity speaks volumes about the resilience and adaptability of cultural symbols over time. This phenomenon resonates not only within Mexican culture but also reverberates across the broader Hispanic community, symbolizing shared values and experiences that transcend geographical boundaries.

Furthermore, *La Catrina's* prominence within the café's ambiance serves as a poignant reminder of the significance of the Día de los Muertos, a celebration deeply rooted in Catholic tradition yet enriched with indigenous customs dating back to pre-colonial times. This tradition, as elucidated by the Mexican government ([Patrimonio Cultural y Turismo 2006](#)), contributes to the rich tapestry of cultures that constitute the Spanish-speaking world, serving as a testament to the enduring legacy of cultural exchange and synthesis.

Mexico's status as the largest hub of native Spanish speakers, with a population of 131 million ([Gobierno de México 2023](#)), positions it as a global beacon for Hispanic culture, amplifying its visibility on the world stage. The country's cultural influence extends beyond its borders, shaped in part by its proximity to and interaction with the United States, a dominant force in global soft power⁴ dynamics. This interplay between cultural heritage, societal dynamics, and geopolitical context underscores the complex interrelationships that shape cultural expression and influence on a global scale.



Figure 6. Source: Café Lavandería's Facebook page.

Throughout the comprehensive process of selecting, analyzing, and reflecting on the linguistic and semiotic landscape of Café Lavandería, the authors of this paper have observed a notable proliferation of elements that originated in Mexican culture that gradually surface in the examined photographs. Initially, *La Catrina* emerges as a pivotal symbol within the café's symbology, encapsulating the richness and depth of Mexican cultural heritage. However, a deeper exploration of the linguistic landscape in Photo 4 reveals a shift in focus towards the initials of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, commonly known as the Zapatistas (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, EZLN), from which the Café derives its name. This deliberate incorporation of Zapatista symbolism suggests a meaningful connection between the café, its patrons, and the sociopolitical movement it represents.

The presence of two Mexican peasants, presumably hailing from the state of Chiapas, alongside the EZLN initials in the photograph, serves as a poignant reminder of the movement's origins and ongoing struggle against the Mexican state. The enduring symbolism of the ski mask, prominently displayed, underscores the movement's defiance and resilience, echoing the timeless narrative of David versus Goliath (Losada Zambrano and Silva Ojeda 2017). Indeed, the peaceful resistance witnessed in places like Caracoles, coupled with the movement's ideological alignment with the principles espoused by Emiliano Zapata, has garnered widespread admiration and support among disenfranchised communities and activists globally.

Despite the inherent controversy surrounding the Zapatista movement, it is imperative to approach its analysis with objectivity and nuance. Both Subcomandante Marcos and the broader social movements in Southern Mexico represent cultural expressions that give voice to marginalized communities and articulate their grievances. Just as the *La Catrina* and *tacos* symbolize aspects of Mexican identity and cultural heritage for some, the Zapatista movement holds comparable significance for others, reflecting the diversity and complexity of Mexican society and its sociopolitical landscape. Thus, a comprehensive understanding of Café Lavandería's semiotic landscape necessitates a nuanced examination of the multifaceted cultural symbols and their broader political and social implications.

Building upon the previously analyzed elements, Photo 7 provides yet another glimpse into the symbolic narrative of forgotten Mexico and the enduring legacy of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, EZLN). The semiotic landscape of the signage reveals an evocative representation: an indigenous female figure proudly adorned with hallmark attributes of the indigenous peoples from Chiapas. Her traditional attire, authentic hairstyle, and rich brown complexion are prominently dis-

played. Significantly, a scarf veils her face, echoing the ski masks worn by EZLN fighters during their resistance against the state. This imagery eloquently encapsulates the resilience and determination of marginalized communities in their relentless quest for autonomy and social justice.



Figure 7. Source: Café Lavandería's Facebook page.

However, embedded within this potent symbolism lies a layer of complexity and ambiguity. The very essence of the EZLN's anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist struggle appears to be at odds with the commercialization and mainstream assimilation of their cause. The presence of a take-out service within this narrative raises questions about the commodification of revolutionary ideals and the extent to which they may be diluted or co-opted by capitalist forces. This juxtaposition challenges viewers to critically examine the intersection of political activism and consumer culture, prompting reflection on the authenticity and integrity of social movements within the context of a market-driven society.

Interior and Its Architectural Elements

This is the cover image on Café Lavandería's Facebook page. It serves as a significant visual representation of the establishment, offering a glimpse into its identity and values. The deliberate choice of anarchist colors and symbols associated with the CNT (Confederación Nacional Del Trabajo) speaks volumes about the café's ideological stance and historical affiliations. The CNT, a federation of unions rooted in anarchist principles and aligned with the anarcho-sindicalist movement in Spain, played a pivotal role in shaping the country's political landscape during the early 20th century. Its emergence marked a transformative moment in the history of anarchism, particularly in Spain, where it stood in stark contrast to the decline witnessed by anarchist movements in other parts of the world during the same period. Throughout Spain's complex political and social history, the CNT has been a steadfast advocate for assembly-based collectivization of the economy and society, both during its historical phase from 1910 to 1939 and in its subsequent legal resurgence post-1977 following the end of the Franco regime.



Figure 8. Source: Google Maps, taken by the user Joaquín Betencour.

The photograph featured on the café's Facebook page depicts the bar area, serving as the central hub of the establishment where patrons gather to enjoy meals and drinks. This choice of imagery underscores the significance of the café's interior design, particularly in its representation of anarchist and CNT-related elements within the most prominent space of the premises. By adorning the bar with colors and symbols associated with anarchism and the CNT, Café Lavandería sends a clear message about its commitment to these ideological principles and its desire to create a space that reflects and celebrates them. Furthermore, the presence of such symbolism within a public-facing platform like Facebook underscores the café's intention to engage with its audience and communicate its values in a visually compelling manner.



Figure 9. Source: Google Maps, taken by the user Tiffany Ross.

In this photograph, the presence of Emiliano Zapata serves as a powerful symbol, intertwining his legacy as a champion of the Mexican people's liberation with his pivotal role as a leader of the peasant movement during the revolution.

Alongside the previously observed symbolism of the EZLN, Zapata's image resonates both within Mexico and globally as an enduring icon of resistance against injustice, oppressive landowners, and abuses of power. As the commander of the Liberation Army of the South, Zapata epitomized the ideals of social justice, freedom, equality, and democracy, advocating fiercely for the rights and dignity of indigenous, peasant, and working-class communities.

Through his unwavering commitment to these principles, Zapata brought to the forefront the age-old struggles faced by indigenous peoples and peasants, who sought to safeguard their ancestral lands, water sources, forests, and natural resources from exploitation and usurpation. His movement not only galvanized marginalized communities but also shed light on the systemic injustices and neglect that plagued rural territories across Mexico.

The Government of Mexico itself acknowledges Zapata's profound impact ([Gobierno de México 2021](#)), recognizing his relentless efforts to effect transformative change in rural areas marred by neglect and abandonment. Indeed, Zapata's ultimate sacrifice in the pursuit of justice, democracy, freedom, and the preservation of sovereignty underscores his indelible mark on Mexican history and his enduring legacy as a champion of the oppressed.

In the context of this photograph, the inclusion of the iconic slogan "Viva Zapata!" further amplifies the image's resonance, serving as a rallying cry that reverberates with the spirit of resistance and resilience embodied by Emiliano Zapata and his enduring struggle for social justice and liberation.



Figure 10. Source: Google Maps, taken by the user Tuu.

The wall designated for customer inscriptions serves as a unique canvas reflecting the collective identity and diversity of those who have graced the café with their presence, whether as regular patrons or occasional visitors. While a comprehensive sociological study of these individuals remains unfeasible due to the current closure of the café, certain observations can be made regarding the shared characteristics and inclinations of the café's clientele.

Evident upon the wall are a multitude of inscriptions in various languages, with a prominent presence of messages inscribed in Spanish. Among these expressions, expressions of gratitude prevail, ranging from simple "*gracias*" to more elaborate acknowledgments such as "*gracias por la experiencia*" or "*muchas gracias por esta maravillosa velada*". These messages, though seemingly mundane, offer emotional hints into the lived experiences of the café's regulars, serving as intimate reflections of their interactions and connections with the space.

Furthermore, interspersed among the written expressions are visual representations, including drawings, which add depth and richness to the tapestry of the café's communal wall. Each inscription, whether verbal or visual, contributes to the intricate linguistic and semiotic landscape of the café, embodying the collective memories, emotions, and shared experiences of its patrons.

While the precise sociopolitical leanings and cultural backgrounds of the café's clientele cannot be definitively ascertained without further research, the prevalence of left-wing political ideologies and a shared sociocultural affinity among the inscriptions hint at a cohesive community united by common values and beliefs. Thus, the wall stands not only as a repository of individual expressions but also as a testament to the vibrant and inclusive character cultivated within the café.



Figure 11. Source: Café Lavandería's Facebook page.

In this photo, once again, there are references to the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, EZLN). This small doll, wearing a ski mask and resembling Subcomandante Marcos, symbolizes a Zapatista guerrillero, embodying armed resistance. The ski mask, the aesthetics, and the weapon are also ways of configuring political space. According to [Martín Rojo \(2012\)](#), the body serves as a space of representation that carries with it claims or critiques as it moves through the city. In this way, the mobility of the landscape increases, and its transformation is shaped by the

movement of people who express themselves. The signs and posters they carry function as a text designed to encourage action or, at the very least, to provoke reflection on the current state of society.

Following the ideas explained by [González \(2004\)](#), the Zapatistas represent the universal expression of a wide range of individual or collective beings, dispossessed by the system, seemingly devoid of historical significance and free from all ties or in the process of becoming so. In this sense, once again, the semiotic landscape of the café leads us to the politics of the Hispanic world and to sociopolitical contexts, as well as to left-wing ideologies rooted in Marxism.

Once again, it is noteworthy how Subcomandante Marcos is represented. This character remains highly significant. In the article “Subcomandante Marcos: ¿Guerrillero del siglo XIX o del siglo XX?”, [Pérez Herrero \(2006\)](#) presents the two prevailing views of him today: for some analysts, the conflict has ended as it has crashed against a wall it could not overcome. For others, it has only just begun, as they interpret that the struggle is not confined to the region of Chiapas but represents a new model for organizing the world. For the former, Marcos represents the anachronistic continuation of a mid-20th-century guerrilla, the struggle for the continuation of the past; for others, he personifies the 21st-century revolutionary, the fighter of the future.

Overall, what we encounter is the representation of a landscape of resistance, yet at the same time, once again intertwined with capitalist ethics, as the doll is nothing more than merchandise of the Zapatista armed struggle.

Products

In this photograph, the LL seamlessly intertwines with the visual identity and branding of the café. The prominent display of the “Café Lavandería” sign, coupled with a range of merchandise T-shirts emblazoned with Spanish messages, underscores the profound synergy between language and the establishment’s public persona. This fusion of linguistic and visual elements fortifies the café’s distinct identity and cultural ethos, accentuating its commitment to a vibrant, Spanish-speaking community. The incorporation of Spanish on the merchandise not only highlights the café’s engagement with its predominantly Spanish-speaking patrons but also amplifies its sense of community and inclusivity. These elements serve as an intimate reflection of the café’s dedication to creating a space where language and identity are celebrated in tandem.

Significantly, the presence of a red star within this linguistic and semiotic landscape serves as a potent visual cue, evoking a rich tapestry of historical and ideological connotations. Historically emblematic of anarchism, the red star also resonates with various leftist movements, including the Zapatista uprising in Mexico, Fidel Castro’s Cuban revolution, and communist ideology in China. Its integration into the café’s visual narrative not only communicates a distinct political stance but also fosters a sense of solidarity with global movements advocating for social change and liberation. Thus, the confluence of linguistic and visual symbolism within the café’s environment not only enhances its aesthetic allure but also contributes to its broader narrative as a haven of political engagement and cultural expression.

The beer featured in photograph number 13, branded as “Amigos”, serves as a touching embodiment of the café’s thematic essence. The name “Amigos” not only signifies a Mexican beer, but also incorporates elements of tequila and lime, echoing the quintessential flavors of Mexico. This choice of beverage deepens the café’s connection to Mexican traditions, linking its identity to the rich sociopolitical fabric of the nation, where culinary practices frequently intersect with broader cultural movements. The combination of tequila and beer holds considerable cultural weight in Mexico, symbolizing festivity, conviviality, and the strengthening of communal ties.



Figure 12. Source: Google Maps, taken by the user Choucho.

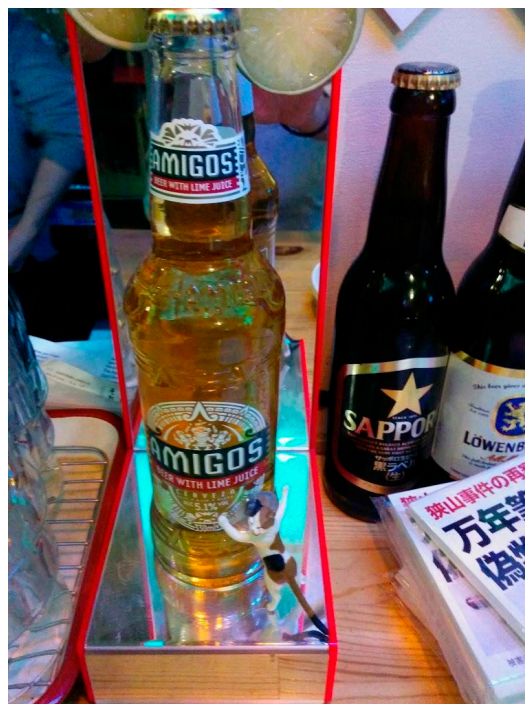


Figure 13. Source: Google Maps, taken by the user María S.

Moreover, the term “Amigos” possesses a universal appeal, effortlessly transcending linguistic and cultural barriers to evoke sentiments of camaraderie, friendship, and merriment. Its prominent placement on the product label not only highlights the café’s Mexican heritage but also cultivates an atmosphere of warmth and inclusivity. This aligns seamlessly with the café’s mission to create a hospitable space where patrons can gather, socialize, and revel in a shared sense of community.

Decoration

Within the café’s interior, there are evocative references to the Durruti Column (Martínez Catalán 2019), an iconic entity of the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939). Named after Buenaventura Durruti, a revered Spanish anarchist leader, this column was a notable anarchist militia unit composed predominantly of anarchist fighters. Distinguished by its commitment to self-management and egalitarian principles, the Durruti Column played a pivotal role in the struggle against the fascist forces led by Francisco Franco. Although it was not formally part of the Republican Popular Army, its collaboration with other Republican factions and its staunch defense of revolutionary ideals rendered it one of the most emblematic units of the anarchist movement during the conflict. Its legacy remains a significant subject of study and admiration within both the anarchist tradition and Spanish history. The café’s linguistic landscape features a striking representation of this legacy through a historical image of two militia members—a man and a woman—coupled with the slogan of the CNT (Confederación Nacional del Trabajo), underscoring its historical and ideological resonance.



Figure 14. Source: Google Maps, taken by the user Tania Úbeda Cobos.

Additionally, the political engagement of Japanese individuals in the Spanish Civil War further enriches the café’s ideological tapestry. Although the precise number of Japanese participants remains debated, it is well documented that at least three Japanese nationals joined the International Brigades, with Jack Shirai (1900–1937) emerging as the most notable. Shirai’s death in the Battle of Brunete and his longstanding involvement in leftist movements render him a symbolic figure of international solidarity and social justice. His presence highlights the transnational reach of progressive movements and illustrates the global nature of political engagement. Shirai’s story not only echoes the café’s ideological

narrative but also serves as a poignant reminder of the global commitment to social justice and the international dimensions of historical struggles.



Figure 15. Source: Google Maps, taken by the user Aner Sertutxa.

The examination of the photographs unveils a richly woven tableau of symbols and iconography that transcends mere aesthetic embellishment. Among the diverse array of images, there is a notable prominence of symbols tied to social struggle, independence movements, and revolutionary fervor both within the Iberian Peninsula and the wider Hispanic world. For example, the Basque Country flag stands out as a poignant emblem of the region's protracted and turbulent quest for independence—a quest fraught with conflict and marked by a violent struggle that has left an indelible mark on Spanish history. This flag, emblematic of a complex sociopolitical narrative, evokes the legacy of a separatist movement that, over decades, has significantly influenced Spain's collective memory, extending its impact well into the 21st century.

Furthermore, the photograph draws a compelling analogy between the Basque Country's independence aspirations and global liberation movements, suggesting a resonant parallel with similar anti-system and resistance movements around the world. This is vividly illustrated by the reference to the Zapatista snails in Chiapas, Mexico—where grassroots efforts champion indigenous rights and autonomy through symbolic representation. Both the Basque and Zapatista symbols, while geographically and contextually distinct, converge in their use of potent imagery to articulate universal themes of resistance, self-determination, and the quest for justice. This cross-cultural resonance highlights the enduring power of symbolic imagery in bridging disparate struggles and amplifying the shared aspirations of marginalized communities seeking liberation and equality across global landscapes.

4. Interpretation of Findings and Discussion

The analysis of the eclectic array of cultural elements within Café Lavandería reveals a dynamic confluence of Hispanic traditions, harmoniously interwoven with the diverse cultural tapestry of Latin America and Spain, all set against the vibrant backdrop of Tokyo. This unique cultural amalgamation underscores the café's intentional divergence from con-

ventional symbols and slogans typically associated with Hispanic or Spanish left-wing and anarchist movements. Notably absent are iconic figures such as Che Guevara and slogans like “¡Hasta la victoria, siempre!” This deliberate omission reflects a conscious decision by the café’s proprietors and patrons to distance themselves from entrenched stereotypes and traditional representations of political and sociocultural ideologies. By eschewing these familiar symbols, the café endeavors to establish a distinctive identity that transcends conventional expectations, fostering a more nuanced and sophisticated appreciation of Hispanic culture and ideology within a global framework. This approach can be interpreted as a form of cultural reappropriation, wherein the café’s patrons seek to redefine and contemporize their heritage, presenting it through a fresh and innovative lens. Consequently, Café Lavandería emerges not merely as a physical space but as a symbolic epicenter of cultural exchange and reinterpretation, emblematic of the fluid and evolving nature of identity in our increasingly interconnected world.

In the realm of LL analysis, top-down elements typically refer to those linguistic features that are imposed from higher echelons, such as institutional or governmental authorities. These elements include language policies, official signage, and mandated language norms that often disregard local preferences or needs. However, Café Lavandería represents a notable deviation from these top-down influences. The absence of government-sponsored signage or prescribed language use indicates a departure from external directives. Instead, the café’s LL is characterized by organic, internally generated elements, reflecting an authentic and self-determined expression of its identity. This autonomy highlights a profound commitment to preserving a unique linguistic and cultural character, demonstrating that the café’s LL is a deliberate manifestation of its own values and spirit rather than a mere reflection of external pressures. Furthermore, the cultural tapestry of Café Lavandería illustrates a pronounced affinity with Mexican culture, vividly conveyed through its vibrant imagery and cultural references. This connection provides a striking contrast to the impersonal urban environment of Tokyo, offering a sanctuary that immerses patrons in a Mexican cultural oasis. The infusion of Mexican elements, both tangible and abstract, transports visitors beyond the confines of urban monotony into a realm that celebrates cultural richness and diversity.

Central to this cultural exploration are the stereotypes shaping perceptions of Japanese and Hispanic cultures. Japan is often perceived as a bastion of tradition, discipline, and ancient wisdom, while the Hispanic world is depicted as a vibrant, spontaneous, and resilient mosaic with a propensity for challenging authority. These contrasting stereotypes not only enhance the allure of Café Lavandería but also influence how visitors engage with the space. By offering an immersive experience that contrasts sharply with the everyday routine, the café serves as a refuge where patrons can temporarily escape the predictability of urban life and engage with a celebration of diversity and resistance.

5. Conclusions

The comprehensive analysis of Café Lavandería and its linguistic landscape yields several crucial insights and reflections, contributing to a deeper understanding of the sociolinguistic dynamics at play within Japanese society. This concluding section aims to synthesize the key findings of this study, while also providing a foundation for future research into the role of Spanish in Tokyo’s neighborhoods and across Japan.

Primarily, Café Lavandería stands out for its distinctive thematic integration, which seamlessly blends Hispanic culture, cuisine, and events in a manner unparalleled in Tokyo. Unlike other establishments in the bustling metropolis, Café Lavandería carves out a unique niche by immersing its patrons in a vibrant celebration of Latin American and Spanish traditions. This immersive experience is not confined to its décor or menu but extends to its cultural programming, which includes music, art exhibitions, and discussions rooted in Hispanic cultural and political themes. The café’s distinctive fusion of assertive Hispanic cultural elements with global revolutionary and social movement symbols creates an environment that stands out not only within Shinjuku but across the entire Tokyo metropoli-

tan area. This integration manifests in the café's choice of décor, signage, and promotional materials, which prominently feature symbols of historical and contemporary social struggles. The inclusion of imagery and slogans associated with revolutionary movements—such as the red star and the symbols of the Zapatista movement—underscores the café's rebellious spirit and its role as a gathering place for like-minded individuals passionate about social justice and cultural exchange. By embedding these elements into its identity, Café Lavandería challenges the often-stereotyped, homogeneous image of Japanese society. This stereotypical portrayal, as critiqued in the works of Sugimoto (2015), Junqueras et al. (2012), Pérez Garrido (2015), and Pérez Garrido and González Dávila (2023), tends to emphasize uniformity and conformity within Japanese culture. In contrast, Café Lavandería disrupts this narrative by presenting a dynamic and eclectic cultural space that defies conventional expectations. It embodies a nuanced, multifaceted approach to cultural expression and social engagement, providing a counter-narrative to the pervasive stereotypes of Japanese society as monolithic and insular. In doing so, the café not only offers a unique cultural and social experience but also enriches the linguistic and cultural landscape of Tokyo. It serves as a testament to the city's capacity for embracing and integrating diverse cultural influences, and as a catalyst for broader discussions on cultural identity and global solidarity.

It is particularly striking that, despite its global prominence, Spanish serves as the primary medium for the café's messaging, imagery, and signage. This choice of language marks a notable departure from the more prevalent dominance of English, Chinese, Korean, and even Portuguese within Tokyo's linguistic landscape, as highlighted in other studies of the city's public language (LL) environment. In a metropolis where these languages typically overshadow others, Café Lavandería's embrace of Spanish not only signifies a deliberate and distinctive choice but also underscores the founders' cultural intent and personal connections. The predominance of Spanish within the café's visual and verbal communication reflects a conscious effort to position the café as a cultural enclave deeply rooted in Hispanic traditions and ideologies. This linguistic choice is not merely a stylistic preference but an intentional statement about the café's identity and values. It illustrates how Spanish, while not the most widespread language in Japan's urban centers, is leveraged here to articulate a rich tapestry of expressions and concerns. The founders' decision to foreground Spanish can be viewed as a strategic endeavor to cultivate a unique cultural space that stands apart from the usual linguistic trends of Tokyo. It highlights the café's role as a platform for Hispanic cultural discourse, offering a distinct narrative that diverges from the more dominant linguistic influences of the city. By foregrounding Spanish, the café not only amplifies the visibility of Hispanic culture but also fosters a deeper engagement with the language and its associated cultural and political significances. This choice enriches the café's thematic coherence and reinforces its position as a vibrant and multifaceted cultural hub within the urban fabric of Tokyo.

The multipolar and multicentric nature of Spanish, with its intricate historical layers, diverse sociocultural contexts, and inherent conflicts, is central to shaping the linguistic and cultural milieu of Café Lavandería. Spanish, as a language steeped in rich historical narratives and varying sociopolitical landscapes, contributes to a complex and vibrant tapestry within the café's environment. Spanish culture's multifaceted character, marked by significant historical figures, revolutionary icons, and landmark events, profoundly influences the café's LL. This influence manifests through a curated collection of symbols and messages that echo broader social and political movements. The incorporation of these elements within the café's décor and communication channels not only enriches the café's ambiance but also serves as a conduit for expressing a wider array of cultural and ideological themes. For instance, the café's use of Spanish extends beyond mere aesthetic choice to reflect a deliberate engagement with historical and revolutionary motifs that resonate with both local and global contexts. The inclusion of symbols associated with significant figures, such as Emiliano Zapata, and revolutionary movements, such as the Durruti Column, provides a window into the café's thematic focus on resistance, social justice, and

cultural heritage. This thematic richness situates Café Lavandería within a broader narrative of historical and ideological significance, linking its identity to the pulsating currents of Spanish-speaking societies.

The analysis of these linguistic and cultural elements reveals several key themes. Foremost among them is the café's role in bridging cultural divides, offering patrons a tangible connection to the vibrant and complex heritage of Spanish-speaking communities. By integrating these themes into its LL, Café Lavandería not only enhances its own cultural and ideological coherence but also contributes to the broader cultural mosaic of Shinjuku. Thus, Café Lavandería stands as a testament to the dynamic interplay between language, culture, and identity. Its contributions to Shinjuku's linguistic and cultural landscape offer a rich, multifaceted understanding of how global and historical elements can converge within a localized setting. This analysis underscores the café's significant role in both reflecting and shaping the diverse cultural narrative of its environment.

The presence of Café Lavandería within the Shinjuku neighborhood profoundly enhances the local linguistic landscape (LL) and contributes significantly to the area's cultural diversity. This establishment's innovative application of Spanish—employed not only for ideological and cultural expression but also for its commercial and institutional purposes—provides a unique lens through which to appreciate its impact on the surrounding LL. The café's distinctive use of Spanish, which encompasses everything from symbolic messaging to thematic décor, highlights a deliberate effort to infuse the local environment with a rich tapestry of Hispanic cultural and ideological elements. This approach contrasts with the more conventional use of dominant global languages like English, Chinese, and Korean, thereby carving out a unique niche within Tokyo's vast metropolitan expanse.

Future research should delve deeper into the use of Spanish across various urban and public spaces, examining how its application compares with other linguistic studies and contexts. This inquiry would benefit from a comparative analysis of Spanish's role and presence in diverse settings, providing insights into its broader implications for global sociolinguistic dynamics. In conducting this research, it is essential to embrace not only traditional data collection and analysis but also action research methodologies. This dual approach aims to both understand and actively promote the Spanish language within a globalized world. By addressing the challenges and leveraging the strengths encountered in such studies, we can advance the appreciation and presence of Spanish in various sociolinguistic landscapes, thereby contributing to a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of global linguistic and cultural interactions.

Author Contributions: Methodology, M.J.G.D. and F.F.P.G.; Investigation, F.F.P.G.; Resources, F.F.P.G.; Writing—original draft, M.J.G.D. and F.F.P.G.; Writing—review & editing, M.J.G.D. and F.F.P.G.; Supervision, M.J.G.D. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Notes

- ¹ Refereces to Yukio Mishima can be found all over the press archives. Here is an example: <https://www.nytimes.com/1970/11/27/archives/mishimas-suicide-linked-to-plot-to-oust-the-regime.html> (accessed on 1 March 2024).
- ² In order to mention proper nouns referring to people, this paper is using the Western order, which is name–last name. The Japanese form would be last name–name.
- ³ For further information on Sanctuary Cities (Ciudades Santuario), we refer to Lippert and Rehaag (2012). *Sanctuary Practices in International Perspectives: Migration, Citizenship and Social Movements*. New York: Routledge.
- ⁴ For further information on the meaning of the concept of 'soft power', it can be consulted in the book by Nye (2004). *Soft Power: The Means To Success In World Politics*. Michigan: Public Affairs.

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