



## FEELINGS OF INJUSTICE AND SUICIDE: THE ETHICAL AND POLITICAL DIMENSION OF MOURNING AMONG YOUNG STUDENTS<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

The suicide of a schoolmate constitutes a disruptive event that exceeds individual explanations and demands to be understood in its affective, ethical, and political density. This article aims to understand the feelings of injustice that emerge among secondary school students during the mourning process. It presents the results of a qualitative study conducted in two schools located in peripheral urban areas of Buenos Aires Province, Argentina. The analysis of the students' testimonies shows that the death of a peer is experienced as an unacceptable outcome, linked to structural conditions of violence and neglect that undermine the right to life and the promise of a future. In the face of this significant loss, young people engage in collective actions aimed not only at restoring the denied dignity of the deceased, but also at themselves, as agents capable of re-signifying their experiences, committing to the suffering of others, and resisting oblivion.

**Keywords:** Secondary school; Grief; Injustice; Young students; Suicide.

### How to cite

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## SENTIMIENTOS DE INJUSTICIA Y SUICIDIO: LA DIMENSIÓN ÉTICA Y POLÍTICA DEL DUELO DE JÓVENES ESTUDIANTES

**Resumen:** El suicidio de un compañero de escuela constituye un acontecimiento disruptivo que desborda las explicaciones individuales y demanda ser pensado en su densidad afectiva, ética y política. Este artículo se propone comprender los sentimientos de injusticia que emergen entre estudiantes de educación secundaria durante el proceso de duelo. Se presentan los resultados de un estudio cualitativo realizado en dos escuelas situadas en zonas urbanas periféricas de la Provincia de Buenos Aires, Argentina. El análisis de los testimonios permite afirmar que la muerte de un par generacional es vivida como un desenlace inadmisibles, asociado a condiciones estructurales de violencia y desamparo que vulneran el derecho a la vida y la promesa de un porvenir. Frente a esta pérdida significativa, las y los jóvenes despliegan acciones colectivas orientadas no solo a la restitución de la dignidad negada de la víctima, sino también hacia sí mismos, en tanto agentes capaces de resignificar lo vivido, de comprometerse con el sufrimiento ajeno y de resistir al olvido.

**Palabras clave:** Escuela secundaria; Duelo; Injusticia; Jóvenes estudiantes; Suicidio.

## SENTIMENTOS DE INJUSTIÇA E SUICÍDIO: A DIMENSÃO ÉTICA E POLÍTICA DO LUTO DE JOVENS ESTUDANTES

**Resumo:** O suicídio de um colega de escola constitui um acontecimento disruptivo que ultrapassa as explicações individuais e exige ser pensado em sua densidade afetiva, ética e política. Este artigo propõe compreender os sentimentos de injustiça que emergem entre estudantes do ensino secundário durante o processo de luto. Apresentam-se os resultados de um estudo qualitativo realizado em duas escolas situadas em áreas urbanas periféricas da Província de Buenos Aires, Argentina. A análise dos testemunhos permite afirmar que a morte de um par geracional é vivida como um desfecho inadmissível, associado a condições estruturais de violência e desamparo que violam o direito à vida e a promessa de um futuro. Diante dessa perda significativa, os jovens desenvolvem ações coletivas orientadas não apenas à restituição da dignidade negada da vítima, mas também a si mesmos, enquanto agentes capazes de ressignificar o vivido, comprometer-se com o sofrimento alheio e resistir ao esquecimento.

**Palavras-chave:** Ensino Médio; Luto; Injustiça; Jovens estudantes; Suicídio.

## **Introduction**

The suicide of a student constitutes a disruptive event that overwhelms the conventional frameworks for interpretation and institutional response in the school environment. Within spaces of social interaction, it represents a collective rupture that profoundly challenges the victim's closest bonds.

In addition to suffering, it can mobilize a keen perception of injustice among peers and friends. This is a sensitivity expressed in moral judgments about the social order, where what is expected is in tension with what is conceived as inadmissible. This is particularly true when the loss leaves unanswered questions about shared conditions of vulnerability.

This article aims to understand the feeling of injustice that emerges in the narratives of secondary school students facing the sudden suicide of a generational peer<sup>3</sup>. Based on qualitative research that included in-depth interviews, student testimonies are analyzed using Judith Shklar's (2013) notion of moral injustice, Miranda Fricker's (2017) testimonial injustice, and Axel Honneth's (2011) consciousness of injustice. These approaches allow for considering grief in the school setting from an ethical and political dimension in which demands for recognition and reparation are at stake.

This work is organized into four sections. First, three perspectives that place injustice at the center of moral reflection are presented. Second, the methodological strategy and ethical criteria adopted for the research are explained. Next, an analysis of student testimonies is developed concerning different dimensions of perceived injustice. Finally, some provisional conclusions are offered about the experience of grief and the school's role in the processing of individual and collective harms.

## **Three Perspectives on Injustice**

This section presents three theoretical perspectives that, from distinct standpoints, place injustice at the center of moral reflection. These viewpoints share the assumption that injustice cannot be understood in its complexity if we only consider it as the opposite pole of justice or as the result of a failure of the abstract principles that underpin social norms (Santiago Oropeza, 2019).

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<sup>3</sup> The results of postdoctoral research are presented.

The attempt to characterize injustice from the experiences of harm that affect individuals and groups will allow us to interpret the emergence of a critical consciousness in the face of events that weaken their sense of dignity and human value.

In this vein, Judith Shklar re-evaluates moral injustice as a starting point for social criticism; Miranda Fricker focuses on the ways in which certain individuals are dismissed as bearers of valid testimony (testimonial injustice); and Axel Honneth maintains that a consciousness of injustice is shaped by a lack of recognition.

### **Moral Injustice: The Suffering of Others as a Starting Point**

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In *The Faces of Injustice* (2013), philosopher Judith Shklar challenges the bias of the Western philosophical tradition, which has prioritized reflection on justice over injustice, unlike other narratives such as theater, fiction, or religious sermons. In response, she proposes a methodological shift, placing "the sense of injustice that inspires those who experience it" (p. 49) at the center of ethical analysis. This approach is deeply skeptical of the promises of normative models that interpret injustice as a failure to meet abstract ideals. Instead, it proposes prioritizing the victims' perspective, the subjective dimension of harm, and the social conditions that perpetuate it.

Shklar introduces the notion of moral injustice, which is manifested in concrete experiences of pain, humiliation, or exclusion, and in the inability of social institutions to recognize them as unjust. This means that, beyond cases where moral harm occurs that is not in accordance with the law, special attention must be paid to the daily experiences of harm not codified by norms, where people are hurt, silenced, or abandoned. These are diffuse, structural, or non-codified forms of injustice that occur both in societies subject to authoritarian regimes and in democracies "within the framework of established government systems, which have a legal operating system" (Shklar, 2013, p. 52).

From this perspective, the normative model of democracies is insufficient, as it focuses on abstract principles and neglects the affective, symbolic, and narrative dimension of the person who suffers injustice. It is not enough for a norm to be violated or for a court to rule on it. Often, what is unjust lies in how one suffers. Therefore, a theory of injustice must open itself to the testimonial, the emotional, and the ambiguous, not to replace law but to enrich it from what is excluded and silenced.

It is about considering "unjust experiences as phenomena independent in their own right" (Shklar, 2013, p. 48), making visible the experiences of harm that the normative model tends to ignore.

For the author, one of the obstacles to be faced is the way we signify injustice. When it is interpreted as a personal misfortune or a matter of chance, its structural character is obscured, and social responsibility is diluted. This displacement of meaning contributes to its perpetuation by not considering it a public problem.

Indifference to the suffering of others allows harm to persist, fracturing collective memory because the unjust events that mark a community's history remain unnamed. The lack of political commitment, which translates into an uncritical acceptance of the social order, weakens the bonds of solidarity. This is why a good citizen is not simply one who obeys the law, but also one who does not become an accomplice to unjust structures. This implies an ethics of everyday responsibility that challenges the fear of conflict, prejudice against victims, and the individualistic logic that prevents us from recognizing ourselves in the other.

Furthermore, Shklar warns that victims often have difficulty perceiving themselves as such. By blindly trusting the abstract ideals of justice that govern their community, they often interpret this experience as the result of a personal tragedy or bad fortune. It also happens that, in certain cases, they "are not capable of exposing their sufferings" (Shklar, 2013, p. 78), because they lack the symbolic conditions to express them. In contexts where harm is normalized, the fear of being discredited reinforces silence and hinders the understanding of subjective harm as part of social injustice.

The emphasis on victims' self-perception enables a sensitive reading of the silences, omissions, and absences that accompany suffering. This opens up a fertile ground for thinking about recognition and the need to generate narratives from the perspective of those who have been harmed. This ethical concern is linked to Miranda Fricker's notion of testimonial injustice, which explores how symbolic inequalities affect the credibility of certain individuals and the legitimacy of their testimony.

### **Testimonial Injustice: Recognizing the Voices of Victims**

In *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (2017), philosopher Miranda Fricker proposes understanding how social structures can deny certain people their status as subjects of knowledge. While Shklar focuses on the material and symbolic conditions that make

it difficult to recognize the suffering of others as injustice, Fricker focuses on the obstacles to naming and legitimizing experiences of harm. Difficulties in giving meaning to harm—whether from humiliation, exclusion, or violence—not only erode dignity but also perpetuate the power imbalance that runs through the social fabric.

The author introduces the concept of epistemic injustice to refer to prejudices that affect a person's ability to participate equally in the production, transmission, and validation of knowledge. This injustice manifests in two forms: testimonial and hermeneutical. The first occurs when a speaker's testimony is undervalued due to social prejudices based on their identity—such as gender, race, class, or age. The second occurs when a person lacks the necessary interpretive resources to express their experience of injustice because their community does not have conceptual frameworks to give it meaning. Thus, what cannot be said can hardly be identified as unjust, whether in the domestic or public sphere. This is the case, for example, for women who suffered sexual harassment in contexts where a socially recognized category to articulate that experience as moral harm did not yet exist. Hermeneutical injustice, in this sense, reveals how social inequalities affect not only the circulation of knowledge but the very possibility of its symbolic existence. If a community lacks the necessary concepts to describe certain harms, victims will be trapped in a silence imposed by the very structure of common language.

Although distinct, both injustices share a structural root: they are born in an environment where power shapes how we interpret, listen, and believe<sup>4</sup>. There is a complementary relationship. While testimonial injustice is manifested in the act of legitimizing or dismissing what someone says, hermeneutical injustice operates more deeply, at the prior level of conceptual availability, conditioning even what can be said and understood as a meaningful experience. In other words, "the cause of testimonial injustice is a prejudice in the economy of credibility, while that of hermeneutical injustice is structural prejudices in the economy of collective hermeneutical resources" (Fricker, 2017, p. 18).

In particular, Fricker considers testimonial injustice to be one of the most frequent and damaging forms of epistemic injustice. The willingness to listen or believe is mediated by identity prejudices, which operate even against the listener's explicit ideology. Such prejudices

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<sup>4</sup> Fricker introduces the notion of **control** as part of a theory of power to understand how certain social practices determine the credibility and legitimacy of discourses. She points out that both individual subjects and broader social dynamics shape the conditions under which meaning is attributed and a testimony is heard. This perspective allows us to ask "who or what controls whom and why" (Fricker, 2017, p. 36), demonstrating how pre-existing social hierarchies distribute inequalities in the possibilities of signification and validation of voices.

are not merely individual but emerge from a shared social imagination: a set of images, narratives, and affective dispositions that circulate culturally and shape our expectations about who should be accepted as valid, reliable, rational, or emotionally competent interlocutors. The social imagination, in this framework, is a collective device that shapes the ways in which speakers' bodies, voices, and subjectivities are perceived.

From this perspective, we can say that the judgment on a person's credibility is not devoid of affective, perceptive, and social elements. Listening, far from being neutral, is part of a field crossed by relationships of symbolic power. Testimonial injustice is not just a failure to value testimony but a struggle for the right to give meaning to one's own experience. Listening, then, always implies a political and ethical stance: a situated practice where it is decided which voices deserve validation and which will be discredited.

In this regard, the author proposes developing adjustments and corrections to the testimonial sensibility that we have passively inherited through the socialization process and which constitutes an essential part of "our second epistemic nature" (Fricker, 2017, p. 145). It is about a critical reflection on our prejudices about the speaker. A form of ethical resistance for the construction of more just communities, where the testimonies of suffering, instead of being dismissed, are taken as a starting point to rethink the social conditions that produce them.

In times when who has the right to speak and be heard is in dispute, the commitment to justice demands interrupting the logics of discredit that weigh on the voices of victims. Recognizing their epistemic authority restores their dignity and makes visible injustices that would otherwise remain outside of public discourse.

The approach proposed by Fricker leads us to ask: what happens when the testimony of injustice is not only discredited by social prejudices, but when those who utter it lack the tools to articulate it? How, then, is a consciousness of injustice built from a lived experience, even in the absence of interpretive frameworks to give it meaning?

These questions open the way to the approach of Axel Honneth, who will focus on the affective, moral, and social dimension of the consciousness of injustice and its critical potential as a driver of collective transformation.

### **The Consciousness of Injustice in Societies of Contempt**

The sociologist and philosopher Axel Honneth, a leading exponent of the theory of recognition, proposes a critical approach to social justice based on concrete experiences of

contempt, exclusion, and humiliation. His starting point is not an abstract ideal of justice, but rather the way individuals and groups are affected by the denial of their dignity in social relations. From this perspective, the consciousness of injustice does not necessarily refer to what is discursive or reflective, but to what is affectively shaped by the violation of legitimate expectations of being recognized as valuable subjects.

In *The Society of Contempt* (2011), Honneth argues that this sensibility is marked by a practical experience of inequality, fundamentally confined "to the lower classes or to the youth population" (Honneth, 2011, p. 15). The exclusion from rights, material precarity, or stigmatization not only limit the opportunities of these groups but also damage self-esteem and hinder the experience of moral belonging to the community.

The consciousness of injustice, in this sense, does not require theoretical elaboration: it is expressed as a sensibility to inequality, indignation at mistreatment, and the intuition that "this should not be this way." Unlike the dominant classes, who often abstract their values into universal normative principles, the oppressed classes formulate their moral judgments from lived experience, without needing theoretical frameworks. Even without structured discourses, their perceptions of what is unjust contain an implicit moral knowledge, which is fundamental for understanding both their social expectations and their degree of vulnerability.

Attending to this affective dimension allows for the reconstruction of meanings, sensibilities, and demands for reparation that have been historically ignored. Within this framework, the criteria of moral disapproval from oppressed groups can offer more genuine indicators of aspirations for justice than conventional value systems, which are often developed from positions of privilege. "For this reason," Honneth notes, "a conception that intends to measure the normative potential of social groups through collective ideas of justice or through forms of moral consciousness, fails to grasp the implicit morality of these strata and classes" (Honneth, 2011, p. 62-63).

The consciousness of injustice is inscribed under historical, material, and symbolic conditions that restrict access to the cultural means required to express and legitimize one's own values. Inspired by Pierre Bourdieu, Honneth argues that educational inequality reproduces a moral hierarchy where popular sectors do not have access to the languages recognized by academic discourse. Therefore, the values that emerge from their daily experience are often excluded from public debates or delegitimized for not being "theorized." The lack of "verbal stylization" does not imply an absence of moral thought or lesser cognitive ability, but rather results from the structural exclusion from the circuits that confer symbolic authority.

Even so, this type of consciousness has a transformative potential. When feelings of injustice are collectivized as a moral demand, they can become a critical force capable of challenging the established order.

The ideas of justice (...) can be found in the case of the oppressed strata rather implicitly in the typical sensations of injustice (...) Although for socio-structural reasons it may not reach the threshold of outlines for a just society, it can point out unused paths for moral progress (Honneth, 2011, p. 63).

The feeling of injustice in this way is not based solely on moral disapproval of the existing situation, but also on a subjective vision of what a more just and dignified life could be.

## **Methodology**

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The methodological design aims to understand the social pain in the face of peer suicide from the perspective of secondary school students from peripheral urban areas in the Province of Buenos Aires, Argentina. The research provides a socio-educational view on emotional experiences in the face of a significant death, valuing "the meanings and feelings of the actors as constitutive of daily school life" (Kaplan; García, 2023, p. 140).

A qualitative approach was used (Porta; Silva, 2003) with an interpretive design (Gómez-Gómez, 1995; Gutiérrez, 2005). This approach seeks to overcome both the empiricism that separates data from theory and the theoreticism that develops concepts without an empirical basis (Bourdieu et al., 2002).

The sample included 34 students (male and female) from morning and afternoon shifts, who attend state-run public schools located in peripheral urban areas of the Province of Buenos Aires. Two schools were selected where, according to district supervision data, suicides had occurred in recent years.

In-depth interviews were conducted using a semi-structured guide (Piovani, 2018) to promote a conversational discourse that would allow us to understand the ideas and conceptions of the interviewees. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. They were conducted in empty rooms provided by the administrative teams. Certain premises were taken into account for their development. The invitation to participate was always made by the researcher, trying to avoid the intermediation of any school counselor or teacher. In all cases, it was explicitly

stated that participation was voluntary—with prior authorization signed by parents and/or guardians—and anonymous, in order to protect the identity of the students<sup>5</sup>. A new presentation of the research work was made at the start of each conversation. The idea was reinforced that the objective was to talk about certain topics and that there were no correct or incorrect answers.

The dimensions of inquiry were as follows: suicide of generational peers and social pain; collective memory in school social life and trauma processing; collective grief and emotional support in school.

The material was processed with Atlas.ti, applying strategies from grounded theory (Glasser; Strauss, 1967), especially for categorization. However, this perspective was not adopted in its entirety, since the epistemological approach of the present work differs from its original postulates. A preliminary categorization of the data was carried out, along with the identification of its properties and relationships between categories, and the articulation between planned and emergent dimensions (Hernández Sampieri et al., 2014); with the aim of defining core meanings and characterizing the different subjective positions present in the narratives.

### **Fieldwork and School Characterization**

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Fieldwork was conducted during the 2023 school year. The selection of students was based on the following criteria:

a) Heterogeneity: The aim was to interview students of different genders and from different shifts at each school. b) Accessibility: Participation was entirely voluntary and depended on their willingness to take part.

A total of 34 in-depth interviews were conducted: 20 at School A (8 males and 12 females from the 4th and 6th years) and 14 at School B (6 males and 8 females from the 3rd year).

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<sup>5</sup> Following CONICET Resolution No. 2857 (2006), the corresponding ethical safeguards were taken to preserve the anonymity, confidentiality, and integrity of the participants. Participation was voluntary and informed, with written consent from students, families, and authorities. The data are presented safeguarding any possible identification.

## **School A**

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School A is a state-run public school with a history of more than 30 years. Its student population comes mostly from the same neighborhood or nearby areas and belongs to working-class sectors.

According to information gathered from the district supervision and confirmed by the administrative team, the suicide of a 6th-year student (referenced in the testimonies as P) occurred in 2022. Most of the interviewees knew them from having lived in the same neighborhood or having participated in inter-grade activities at school.

## **School B**

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School B is a state-run public school with a history of about 15 years. Its students belong to working-class sectors of the neighborhood where it is located.

In 2023, according to information provided by the district supervision and the administrative team, the suicide of a 3rd-year student (referenced as Q) occurred. The students who participated in the interviews were classmates of Q.

## **Analysis of Testimonies**

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Upon examining the student narratives regarding the suicide of a school peer, we have found that the young people's subjective experience is profoundly permeated by perceptions of injustice. Investigating this sensibility is key to understanding the impact of a significant death on relationships, values, and conceptions about the meaning of one's own existence.

The analysis of the testimonies is organized based on three main axes: a) Injustice due to the victim's violated rights; b) Injustice due to the death of someone who "had everything ahead of them"; c) Restorative actions in the face of injustice in the grieving process.

Beyond the specificities of each of these axes, it is possible to read a transversal, generational perception of injustice in the face of a life horizon that is permanently closed.

## A) Injustice Due to the Victim's Violated Rights

The sudden occurrence of a significant death mobilizes the development of conjectures about shared structural conditions of violence and helplessness. As can be seen in the testimonies below, the feeling of injustice condenses a profound indignation toward an outcome that "should not" have happened, a moral disapproval of the existing social order (Honneth, 2011).

Interviewee: Everything that happened to Q is bullshit, sorry for the word... Every now and then something happens that shouldn't, as happened with Z<sup>6</sup>. What happened to Q makes you angry, feel helpless [...] And the more you find out how everything was, that nobody helped her at home, that they ignored her, the more you want to go to the house and I don't know... (Student, male, third year, School B)

Interviewee: I think he [referring to P], no matter how bad his attitudes were, was a good person and shouldn't have had reasons to not be here anymore [...] Because I believe that everyone, more than a motive, has a reason and has a right to be alive. (Student, female, sixth year, School A)

Interviewee: I felt helpless... because you go out on the street trying to avoid those kinds of things, rapes and mistreatment, trying to be careful not to get killed, not to be abused, and then you feel that your life is worth nothing inside your house, where you are all day, where you live [...] And if you're having a bad time at home, you're going to have a bad time everywhere. And for young people, that's worse, everything affects us more, it makes me angry for that. (Student, female, sixth year, School A)

The students' experience of loss is intertwined with a consciousness of moral injustice (Shklar, 2013), as they confirm that "nobody helped" the victim, "they ignored her," and made her feel that her life "was worth nothing." Here, indignation translates into an ethical condemnation of the lack of emotional support that allows for the affirmation of subjectivity and the unfolding of a social biography (AUTHOR, 2021).

The assertion that "if you're having a bad time at home, you're going to have a bad time everywhere" highlights the invisible chains of contempt that permeate today's youth. In this framework, the consciousness of injustice (Honneth, 2011) is constituted by the certainty that society does not guarantee them the basic right "to be alive." The broken promises of every young person's "should be," as a result of the material and symbolic conditions that limit the possibility of growing and projecting a dignified life, constitute a shared existential harm.

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<sup>6</sup> Z was a young woman who was murdered by her partner during the fieldwork at School B. She had a family connection to two students who were part of the research sample.

The moral injustice identified in the student accounts also takes on a testimonial dimension (Fricker, 2017), especially when they refer to the inattention of significant adults to the signs of suffering, which were minimized or silenced.

Interviewee: And the truth is it's a shame that they had to wait for this to happen to talk to us [referring to the adults at the school]. If I feel bad, I'm not always going to take the first step to say "hey, I feel bad, I want to talk to you," especially when it's about things that can be uncomfortable, intimate to you [...] Do I have to say "hey, I want to kill myself today," "can someone please come talk to me, because I see that no one is noticing"? (Student, female, third year, School B)

Interviewee: I would have done it too, because if the person you trust ignores you, it's horrible. Oh, sorry, I'm getting upset about Q [cries]... Because what she suffered is horrible, why would your daughter lie to you? (Student, female, third year, School B)

Interviewee: People say a lot of things about P's suicide related to his girlfriend, but I, being the sister of his best friend, know that was the trigger for other things: at his house everything was a mess, there was always trouble, nobody paid attention to him. (Student, female, fourth year, School A)

The students' demand for spaces for active, genuine, and empathetic listening to process experiences that are difficult to name constitutes a call to bear witness to their experiences in order to survive them (Kaufman, 2014). The invalidation of their voices is intertwined with a broader awareness of living conditions marked by indifference toward this social group. It highlights a form of **epistemic injustice** where their perceptions of harm are not recognized as meaningful, and, consequently, these individuals are stripped of their ability to give them meaning on their own terms.

In the testimonies analyzed in this section, the feeling of injustice that mobilizes an affective network linked to "anger," "rage," and "helplessness" refers to the deep conviction that there was a violated life that deserved to be lived. This sensibility shows the most human side of those processing grief, by placing the suffering of others, recognized as their own, at the center of their moral reflection.

## **B) Injustice Due to the Death of Someone Who "Had Everything Ahead of Them"**

The feeling of injustice that emerges from the testimonies is not limited to the structural conditions that violated the peer's rights, but also refers to a heartbreaking awareness that a life has been cut short too soon. In certain sociocultural contexts, the perception of young death as

a concrete possibility in daily life is in tension with one's own life expectations (Kaplan, 2013). Here, the victim's age transforms into a threshold of what is expected and what is inadmissible.

Interviewee: I know that people aren't eternal and sooner or later these things will happen to them. Not in that way, but these things of facing death, I think it's natural if you have an illness or have reached a certain age... But it didn't seem fair to me that a fifteen-year-old girl had to live through things that you aren't prepared to face at that age. (Student, male, third year, School B)

Interviewee: It makes me angry because of the injustice of the situation, and also, a minor girl... and I think about how she couldn't get out. Maybe it was a difficult issue to get out of that situation. And no, it made me angry... she was 15, something that's not right. (Student, male, third year, School B)

In these accounts, the students express a clear awareness that death is part of the human life cycle. However, they establish a moral boundary between what is assumed as "natural"—due to illness or old age—and what is profoundly unjust: the interruption of a life journey in full development. The moral judgment does not fall solely on the act of dying, but on when and how one dies.

For a young person to face situations for which they are "not prepared" or that "aren't right" to happen to them, as the interviewees point out, constitutes a transgression of what is expected, of what is culturally considered just. This transgression, in addition to sadness, produces anger. Death, in this case, appears as a structural failure that frustrates a life in progress, which makes grief an experience marked by a sense of what is inadmissible.

The age proximity to the peer acts as a catalyst for an existential shock where a close person was denied their dignity (Shklar, 2013). The suicide of a generational peer, at this point, can confront young people with their own vulnerability.

Interviewee: It hit me hard, because he was only a year older than me, it wasn't that much. So, when someone like that dies, close to your age range, it hits you hard, because it could have easily been you. Or you start to think, "what would have happened if it had been me? What would I have done in this situation?" (Student, male, fourth year, School A)

Grief thus becomes a mirror of their living conditions. The pain of loss is intertwined with a questioning of their place in the social fabric, where unanswered questions about the meaning, value, and fragility of life emerge.

Interviewee: It was all very unjust.

Interviewer: Unjust...

Interviewee: Unjust because Q shouldn't have gone through what she went through, shouldn't have suffered like that, she had everything ahead of her, she should have been alive. (Student, female, third year, School B)

Interviewee: It hurt all of us, especially those of us who were his friends. It's not fair that he decided to end his life like that. It's hard to know that you're never going to see him again, everything we were going to do, the championships, the get-togethers, it's never going to be the same. (Student, male, sixth year, School A)

The expression "everything ahead of them" condenses the idea of a broken promise of the future marked by the hindrance of an intersubjective affirmation process. The death not only cuts short an individual biography but also a part of the journey that can no longer be traveled with that other person. Here, the consciousness of injustice (Honneth, 2011) is articulated with a legitimate moral expectation: to be able to live, grow, and outline a future alongside those we have chosen to share our affection and care with.

In addition to a life cut short prematurely, what is also unjust is that the relationships, experiences, and expectations that were projected were also cut short. What is inadmissible, then, is inscribed in a wounded time, in the grief for an event that will not take place. The evocation of the "championships" and "get-togethers" refers to a symbolic framework of significant moments of youth that have been abruptly truncated. The fracture of the co-existence among friends leaves possible scenarios that cannot be inhabited together in suspense. Thus, the expression "it's never going to be the same" translates the pain of a lost collective horizon.

The student narratives do not reduce grief to an intimate experience but rather turn it into an ethical stance against the unacceptable, a generational denunciation against the order of things that makes it imaginable, and even feasible, for someone so young to end their life. In the interruption of this vital becoming, injustice translates a sensibility toward a destiny that should not have been.

### **C) Restorative Actions in the Face of Injustice in the Grieving Process**

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The sudden suicide of a peer mobilizes students to develop a set of collective strategies to restore the victim's violated dignity.

The testimonies analyzed in this section affirm that grief is revealed not only as a deeply emotional experience but also in its ethical and political dimensions (Author, 2025). The

creation of memories, tributes, and commemorations in social networks and institutional spaces like the school are interpreted as an active form of care and a struggle against forgetting.

Interviewee: I went out to hand out flyers to raise money to give to Q's mom but I ended up detained at the police station. I didn't know, it was Saturday and there was an electoral ban. That's why they detained me. My aunt picked me up, because if my mom or grandma went, they would have punished me. And when I was calmer, talking to my grandma, she understood me, because it wasn't that serious [...] The man who hired me and was running for mayor was going to give me four thousand pesos, but, since I ended up detained, he gave me twenty thousand, me and my cousin. So, out of those twenty, I gave fifteen thousand to Q's mom and I kept five.

Interviewer: Can I ask you why you gave her money?

Interviewee: Because her family isn't doing well economically. I'm not either, but I felt the need to help so they could have a wake for Q like any other person deserves. (Student, male, third year, School B)

In this testimony, we observe how, even in a situation of precarity, the young man decided to donate money to Q's mom to help with the funeral expenses. The act of "giving" here constitutes a way of counterbalancing the family's lack of resources, based on a principle of justice: everyone should be treated the same way despite the social conditions that weaken the fundamental equality between individuals (Dubet, 2020). The gesture of solidarity, by contributing financially so that his peer could have "a wake as she deserves," is a way of publicly affirming that her presence in the world was as valuable as that of "any other person."

In friendship groups, restorative actions are aimed at vindicating the mark the victim left on their collective identity.

Interviewee: P's graduating class last year, they made a toast for him when they went on their senior trip. And this year, the other kids on their trip, since there were also some of his friends, they wore the Argentina shirt, made a toast, and put on the music he liked: RKT [...] In addition to the toast, they uploaded pictures they had with him from when they were little to their social media. And then I think to myself "wow, they're lifelong friends, they're almost brothers. How crazy, what a huge void." (Student, female, fourth year, School A)

Interviewee: My boyfriend, with his friends, got "P" tattooed, his date of birth, and next to it an infinity sign [...] I think those who got the name tattooed did it to hold on to him, to say "look, I haven't forgotten you, you're here engraved on my skin" [...] Remembering is keeping an important person present, but also remembering is healing yourself. Especially when you remember the good things about someone you love. (Student, female, sixth year, School A)

Interviewee: My boyfriend told me that at the wake they put the graduating class flag on him, they put it on the casket. Also, each of his friends has a

highlighted photo of him on Instagram [...] The highlighted photo is like something important, it's always there. It's a way of saying "P, I won't forget you," I'll always keep you present. (Student, female, sixth year, School A)

Interviewee: Q's friends said goodbye on social media. They posted things saying they loved her very much, that they missed her... They also put up statuses on WhatsApp [...] I felt bad for them. (Student, female, third year, School B)

Just as Halbwachs (2004) argues, remembering is always a practice sustained by certain social frameworks. In these testimonies, those frameworks are recreated in spaces like social media, the senior trip, and even on one's own body, as a creative source of vital meaning where the opening to new symbolic horizons is inscribed.

The group of friends thus becomes an emotional support for the production of a living memory, where remembrance transcends solitary nostalgia and becomes a collective act of reparation against the "void" of loss. The tattoos, the highlighted photos on Instagram, the WhatsApp statuses, the flag on the casket, or the toast in his honor during the senior trip are symbols that re-signify memory as a social word, as a public declaration about the importance the victim had in their lives. "Remembering someone you love," "keeping them always present," are expressions that proclaim the ethical affirmation of reinstating in the various shared settings the resistance to forgetting someone who has been denied as a subject.

Although no longer physically present, the figure of the generational peer becomes an emotional axis that reconfigures the collective identity, reaffirms the "we" (Elias, 2008), and sustains the continuity of the bond beyond death (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 1996; Walter, 2007)<sup>7</sup>. In a social space of high symbolic value like school, however, expectations of honoring their memory can be disappointed by bureaucratic decisions.

In the testimonies of the students at School B, it is possible to interpret how certain institutional actions increased the pain of the bereaved.

Interviewee: When we found out the news, when they came to tell us, there was the usual minute of silence. That was the only thing the school did as a tribute. In my class we asked the principal if they were going to have days of mourning but she denied us, she told us they couldn't keep losing class days [...] They could have given at least one or two days. Not act like "nothing happened here," you know? She was someone from the school, a friend of several people who come here. (Student, female, third year, School B)

<sup>7</sup> These authors argue that, unlike the traditional ways of relating to the deceased that we have inherited from 20th-century modern grief psychology, other modes of relationship are currently emerging where the bereaved continue their lives along with their dead and not without them.

Interviewee: We [referring to Q's group of friends] proposed they have a single day of mourning here, at the school. But there wasn't. They had the permission, everything, but they didn't do it. The principal didn't want to. She said it was a loss of... how can I say it? Of class instruction. Interviewer: What do you think about that? Interviewee: Nothing, that it's wrong. We're proposing just one day, it's not like we're proposing the whole week. (Student, male, third year, School B)

Interviewee: A tribute at school, which could have happened, there was none, it wouldn't have cost them anything, it was a lack of respect. It wouldn't have cost them anything, I mean, I'm not saying a tribute where we put "Q," no, a tribute in the sense of raising awareness about suicide. (Student, female, third year, School B)

The moral disapproval of the refusal to declare days of mourning, to "act as if nothing happened here," is experienced as a shutting down of the pain that, with all its intensity, affects school groups. It expresses a demand for greater testimonial sensibility in the face of the events that move them (Fricker, 2017). This claim is not only for the "lack of respect" toward the victim but for the public invalidation of the feelings of those who need to process her absence. The demand to be recognized for their existential concerns, which even transcends the specific case of Q, is a call to reaffirm the bonds of trust with institutional adults that in this case have been eroded by the school routine.

The students at School A, for their part<sup>8</sup>, perceiving an openness from the institution to the processing of suffering, developed joint actions with adults and their families to restore their peer's dignity and honor his memory.

Interviewee: I know that P's family couldn't cover all the funeral expenses. That's why the school supported them, they created a WhatsApp group with the families who wanted to contribute. I know this because many parents helped, my mom also contributed. Interviewer: And what do you think about that? Interviewee: I think it's a good thing they did. The school always helps, the principal set up a closet with clothes that people donate for those who need them a while ago, especially for the winter. And with P's situation it would be like the same thing. It's helping him and his family. (Student, female, sixth year, School A)

Interviewee: I think the school helped with the funeral or something like that because P's family is humble. The school was very involved with all that, I

<sup>8</sup> It is important to note that the purpose of this analysis is not to make a comparison between institutions or to make judgments about their intervention in grief. The methodological approach adopted seeks to understand the ways in which students, in diverse school contexts, elaborate senses of injustice and deploy restorative actions in the face of pain. The differences observed between the schools are not addressed as evaluative contrasts, but as singular expressions of the collective experience of grief.

remember seeing the principal crying. Like, it really is something that did affect the whole institution [...] When it's ESI week or things like that, or, for example, when we're learning about a topic, I don't know, in history, and it happens that a historical person resorted to suicide, we branch off into that and end up talking about things like that. (Student, male, sixth year, School A)

Interviewee: I think a part of him remains in each person and in the school. That's why it was very good that the principal and his friends on the day of graduation gave recognition to his family and paid tribute to him. (Student, female, sixth year, School A)

The interviewees' appreciation for the school's ability to accommodate collective grief through practices of solidarity and public recognition shows the place it occupies as an emotional refuge (Kaplan, 2022). In the daily task of caring for and listening to those who are grieving, as well as inscribing the memory of the one who was part of the school community into institutional rituals, an ethical and political stance of high value is revealed: not to replace, but to preserve their place through affection.

Interviewee: It was a very great pain because this boy was going to be the flag bearer and, after what happened, when there were ceremonies, his place was occupied by a different flag bearer [...] It was a request from P's friends to the school principal [...] In all the ceremonies that were held last year, they changed the flag bearer, in the first one, P's place was occupied by his best friend, then by his other best friend, and, well, like that, all his closest friends. They asked the principal if they could do that tribute for him, that recognition. (Student, female, fourth year, School A)

The gesture of occupying the flag bearer's role in each school ceremony, at the request of the group of friends, tangibly inscribes the place that P continues to hold in the educational community. It is a way of ritualizing his presence from an active memory where each bond is willing to "put their body" into it. Vindicating someone who is no longer physically present opens a symbolic space for the collective processing of grief, introducing a logic of respect for the uniqueness of what was lost.

The restorative actions of justice through tributes and commemorations woven from within the school, while not reversing death, transform its meaning. In the face of a shock that overwhelms every institutional framework, these reparatory actions that emerge in daily life lay the groundwork for the reconstruction of bonds and the restoration of humanity, right where the violence of suicide—and the world that made it possible—tried to deny it.

In the gestures of care and memory collected in these testimonies, it is possible to visualize a generational struggle that challenges the social conditions surrounding death. The

processing of pain in spaces of school social life challenges helplessness, invisibility, and disaffection, reconfiguring the "we" and, with it, the possibility of continuing to live. In the face of social injustice that exceeds the limits of the school and compromises the historical time they must go through, the students build vital narratives that allow them to imagine other ways of being together and opening paths, where existence—their own and that of others—never ceases to matter.

## **To Conclude**

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A student's suicide in the school environment not only creates an emotional rupture among those who shared their daily life but also ushers in a profound ethical and political questioning.

This article sought to understand how, following a significant death, students interpret its causes, make moral judgments, create memories, denounce silences, and attempt gestures of symbolic reparation, in some cases, in collaboration with adults at the school.

Following Judith Shklar (2013), the moral judgment in grief does not respond to an abstract logic but arises from a raw feeling in the face of an inadmissible outcome. In the first section, testimonies evoke situations in which the victim "received no help" or "nobody listened to her," expressing an injustice rooted in a social structure that violates the most basic right: to be alive.

Miranda Fricker's (2013) perspective helps us understand how identity prejudices can affect the willingness to listen, understand, and believe. In the second section, the accounts show how a peer's death confronts them with their own experiences of being dismissed. The silence of significant adults is hurtful not only because it is an omission but because it prevents the construction of shared meanings in the face of an event that marks them as a generation.

The search for emotional recognition at school highlights its symbolic value. As the third section shows, this institution is valued as a legitimate space for the development of solidarity gestures, rituals, and tributes to the peer. These actions restore dignity, not only to the one who died but to themselves, in their agency to give meaning to what they have experienced and resist being forgotten.

The processing of grief finds a privileged place in social networks and collective memory. There, the figure of the generational peer acts as an **affective valence** (Elias, 2008), a

symbolic center from which bonds, identities, and shared feelings are reconfigured. In this context, remembering together is, above all, an act of dignification.

As Halbwachs (2004) points out, collective memory needs frameworks to sustain itself: networks, rituals, languages. In the student narratives, these appear both in social spaces and in school initiatives: the flag on the coffin, the rotation of the flag bearer, the public recognition of the family. These commemorations restore a humanity that was denied.

The appeal to the school to listen, accompany, and enable the production of a narrative of meaning in the face of a peer's death is an ethical and political stance for the affirmation of life. Because in every gesture of memory, in every shared word, in every place not left empty of meaning, the existence of the one who has left, as well as those who remain, is honored as part of a common history that continues to be written, even in moments of shock.

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