

INDIGENIZING THE CITY TOGETHER:
ETHNIC PLACE PRODUCTION IN SANTIAGO DE CHILE

Abstract

The article examines the process of space appropriation and resignification by Indigenous migrant groups in cities. As a result of the repeated use of an urban space over time for cultural activities perceived as emblematic of a common identity, Indigenous individuals confer meanings onto space based on a social construction of their homeland, collectively resignifying the space, and transforming it into what is presented as a symbolically-based “ethnic place”. Building on the literature of place identity and original empirical information gathered through ethnographic fieldwork in Santiago de Chile, the article discusses three different paths followed by the Mapuche to gain spaces and produce their own ethnic places in the city, namely, institutional approach, illegal land occupation and symbolic space appropriation. By doing this, the Mapuche are giving new meanings to their identity while shaping the conception of belonging to what constitutes or not the current Indigenous territory.

Keywords: Cities; ethnic place; Indigenous peoples; Mapuche associations; urban space.

This article explores the production of ethnic places as a result of space appropriation and resignification by Indigenous migrant groups in a new milieu. More specifically, the article examines how the increasing number of Mapuche associations in Santiago de Chile have been negotiating the management of urban space with state authorities for the development of cultural activities. Building on the information gathered through an ethnographic fieldwork, the study discusses three approaches followed by these associations to gain access to use an urban space: institutional, illegal land occupation and symbolic space appropriation. Each of these paths have led to the collective resignification of an urban space by its repetitive use over time. Based on the imaginings of their rural homeland, Mapuche individuals have conferred different meanings on the space, rearranging it, and transforming the urban space into their own symbolically-based “ethnic place”. By exploring the production of ethnic places by rural-to-urban migrant Indigenous peoples like the Mapuche in Santiago, this article contributes to the broader discussion of collective space resignification by Indigenous migrant groups in new geographical locations.

Through a prevailing belief in neoliberalism, contemporary nation-states have fostered the exploitation of natural resources located in Indigenous territories, usually following a predatory economic approach (Collins, 2014). Political violence and natural disasters are not uncommon phenomena also affecting Indigenous territories. As a result, Indigenous peoples in the world, the Mapuche in Chile included, have been forced to leave their homelands and move to cities. More than 30% of Latin American Indigenous peoples lived in cities in 2000, and this number is likely to increase to 50% by 2030 (UN Habitat, 2010). According to the last census (2017), the Indigenous population in Chile constituted 12.8% of the country's total population, of whom 79.8% identified themselves as Mapuche. Currently, Santiago concentrates the largest proportion of Mapuche people at the country level with 35% (614,881 individuals).

Once native peoples move to cities, still dominant social conceptions assume that urban Indigenous migrants lose their attachment with their ancestral territory and, by extension, lose their Indigenous identities. Despite this belief, Mapuche identification has not decreased, being actively recreated through collective work in Santiago (Brablec, 2020). Following the scholarly mainstream, this article assumes identities as socially constructed, adaptable, and open to change, given the porous nature of ethnic boundaries that separate different ethnic groups. Yet, the malleability of ethnicity does not inevitably correspond with its operationalization by individuals. Building on the Mapuche case, Webb (2013) maintains that the Mapuche construct a sense of self that is rooted in the perception of “assumed givens”, using Geertz's (1973) words, such as territory and kinship, which can generate profound sentiments of group belonging. While some Mapuche tend to understand their ethnicity through primordial lenses, this does not determine their actions. Identity categories are, then, perceived as fixed, but in real terms, they are ‘imagined, invented, and constructed within social and temporal spheres as any other category of difference’ (Webb, 2013, p. 2071). These apparent fixities offer a temporary source of stability and differentiation from the identity of the majority “Others”, but they are nonetheless subject to interactional change. Mapuche identity constitutes an important claim of differentiation, gaining increasing exposure since the return to democracy in the 1990s. In a contemporary context of widespread discrimination and invisibility, Indigenous peoples in cities are increasingly questioning their labeling as a de-ethnicized element of the urban poor, returning to their ethnicity and revitalizing practices in the urban context (Canessa, 2006). Mapuche migrants to Santiago retained a collective memory of the Wallmapu as an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 2006), even by those generations born in the city.

City life has not necessarily meant an improvement in the Mapuche quality of life. Recent data indicate that the Indigenous population in Chile has a poverty rate twice as high as the non-Indigenous population (18.3% versus 9.9%). Moreover, 8.8% of Indigenous peoples in cities are unemployed, in contrast to 6.6% of the rural Indigenous population (CASEN, 2015). The joint consequences of poverty and racism have been reflected in a spatial distribution in socio-economically deprived areas of Santiago (Bertin and Basadre, 2018). Initially settled in deprived squatter settlements, in the last decades, social housing located in the peripheral areas of the city became the principal option for the lower socio-economic classes, the Mapuche included. Gradually, the reactivation of Indigenous identity since the late 1980s led Indigenous groups to look for locations in which to meet, ultimately transforming the geography of the city (Ehrkamp, 2010; Watson, 2010). These locations may take diverse forms and operate at different scales of ethnic symbolic understanding. They have comprised, among others, the construction or occupation of dwellings that generate predominantly Indigenous neighborhoods, Indigenous workers' active involvement in the urban labor market and the formation of Indigenous workers' unions (Imilan and Álvarez, 2008; Antileo, 2015), and the development of special sites in which to freely enact their culture. This diversity of sought-after urban sites has been characterized by the multiplicity of meanings both in terms of their urban positioning and the resignifications afforded by the new Indigenous occupants.

Since the recovery of democracy in Chile in the early 1990s, the Mapuche in Santiago have created and joined an increasing number of associations based upon their shared self-identification as Mapuche people. With the Indigenous Law of 1993, which is still in force, the state recognized Mapuche associations in cities as legal entities. After 30 years of dictatorship under Pinochet which suppressed collective social activity, this recognition has facilitated associational multiplication in the capital of Chile. From 19 urban associations in 1999, the number increased to 221 fifteen years later (Imilan 2009; Gobierno Regional Metropolitano de Santiago [GORE], 2016). Associational activities are not the only means through which identity re-configuration can be developed from a migrant context. As reflected in the work of Becerra, Merino, Webb and Larrañaga (2018), Mapuche women can maintain their ethnicity in the private realm through the recreation of cultural performances in their everyday life. However, Mapuche associations have facilitated multiple interactions with different people, things, and situations for the active recreation of traditions perceived as distinctive of their territory of origin, their homeland or Wallmapu, helping the Mapuche to maintain a symbolic connection with it. For the Mapuche in Santiago, the demand for legal entitlement to a space of their own for the development of cultural activities has been at the center of associational

claims in recent years. For Mapuche associational work, space is vital as it represents the material and basic support for social activity (Echeverría and Rincón, 2000; Cheuquelaf, 2012). While Mapuche associations are not the only routes available for the appropriation of urban space, their legal recognition has facilitated negotiations with the state as validated counterparts. The characteristics of the demanded spaces have varied in accordance to the main working area of associations, ranging from rooms in which to develop cultural workshops to open spaces in which to build *ruka* (traditional houses) or conduct religious ceremonies. The wide array of collectively performed activities reveals the fluidity of identity recreation experienced by Mapuche from different generations who have made Santiago their city. Therefore, securing urban spaces promotes the strengthening of identity through the collective practice of Mapuche-ness, which creates, in turn, new geographies of belonging in the urban milieu (Brown, 2011).

However, Mapuche associations in Santiago have faced a structural resistance from the state to meet their demands for space, which usually claims administrative limitations to deal with such requests. Ultimately, the lack of space in which to meet increases the associations' expenses and greatly hinders the achievement of their cultural goals. The use and appropriation of space are fundamental aspects in the study of minority peoples' urban lives. Therefore, it is critical not to overlook factors that may influence how urban spaces are accessed, used and interpreted (Brown, 2011). Building on the literature of place identity, the next section introduces "ethnic place" as a notion that aims to offer a more comprehensive theoretical understanding of the gaining of physical spaces and their symbolic transformation by Indigenous migrant groups like the Mapuche in Santiago.

ETHNIC PLACE

Identity reconstruction is intricately linked to the social production of place (Ehrkamp, 2010). While a challenge for many migrant groups in the host milieus, the use of spaces for the accommodation, resignification and durability of cultural practices leads to a resignification of spaces and creation of their own places (Lewicka, 2014; Becerra et al., 2018). One of the most salient theories to understand this process of space resignification is place identity understood as a "landscape of meaning" (Dixon and Durrheim, 2004). Building on Tuan's (1991) work on the relevance of speech for the formulation of ideas and materialization of action for place creation, place identity corresponds to arenas socially generated through discourse (Becerra et al., 2018), which allow people to give space a sense of belonging by articulating their location

through the use of language (Dixon and Durrheim, 2000; Becerra et al., 2018). Place identity, thus, creates a reciprocal relationship between individuals and places (Dixon and Durrheim, 2004) by looking at both how socio-cultural landscapes influence individuals' behavior and the way in which identities are reconfigured, as well as at how individuals' agency re-shape those existing landscapes (Becerra et al., 2018).

Notwithstanding the contributions of place identity to the understanding of attachment and sense of place, I suggest that language is one of the aspects of social interaction by which migrant groups collectively re-signify space to transform it into something else. To understand how the Mapuche collectively attach meanings to a space outside the Wallmapu and develop a sense of belonging to it, transforming its materiality into a symbolically-constructed site, I propose "ethnic place" as a notion that offers a more detailed understanding of this process. As conceptual clarification, the word "ethnic" is used as the process of symbolic production of place, as introduced in this article, and can be experienced by any Indigenous group in a migrant context. Here, the word "ethnic" could be replaced by "Mapuche"; that is, the production of Mapuche places in the city. However, the word "ethnic" is kept to denote the transferability to other cases beyond the Mapuche. By drawing on the notion of place identity (Dixon and Durrheim, 2000, 2004; Becerra et al., 2018) and on the literature on space and place (Tuan, 1975; Relph 1976; Portugali, 2006; Bello, 2011), I present five points that offer a more detailed account of the ways in which Mapuche associations produce their ethnic places in the city.

Firstly, ethnic place is a main result of social interactions, that is, a collective process of space resignification by an Indigenous migrant group in a new milieu. By the frequent use of a space over time, symbols are collectively attached by its users, providing the space with a set of meanings. The aggregation of personal meanings and their collective shaping gradually transform spaces into ethnic places now understood as centers of symbolic ethnic significance. This symbolic transformation of space into ethnic place fosters a sense of community, bonding and solidarity, which usually corresponds with the active participation of individuals in its transformation. This process enables individuals to belong and helps them to feel at home in the new milieu. The production of ethnic places is usually not explicit, conscious or verbalized, but rather occurs subconsciously through the sustained collective use of space (Tuan, 1975). In the process of interaction, language is relevant but not the only aspect for ethnic place production. It is important not to overlook the power of non-verbal communication, such as imitation resulting from the nurturing of individuals in the bosom of an ethnic-conscious family. Expanding the role of social interactions for discourse, I follow Tuan's (1975) experiential perspective. Lived experiences or those imagined through the experiences lived by

others in relation to the homeland and the migration process offer an array of events from which individuals and groups can create symbolisms and grant meanings to different spaces. Through social interactions, personal meanings, memories, and private experiences acquire a public expression, becoming open to being contested and re-shaped. This helps the production of ethnic place to take hold on public consciousness and thereby achieve a higher degree of stability. Moreover, shared feelings towards an ethnic place can develop spontaneously in confrontation with the non-Indigenous “Other” and become a shared tradition and a shared body of explicit knowledge (Tuan, 1975).

Secondly, time is necessary for individuals to develop attachment to space. When spaces are produced, lived and reproduced as ethnic (Maçano, 2004; Buccitelli, 2016), they acquire a symbolic-cultural scope facilitating their transformation into ethnic places. Ethnic places are, thus, created from the instrumental appropriation and subjective representation that individuals make of space over time (Bello, 2011), as ethnic places need a minimum period of stability to acquire significant “thickness” (Cheuquelaf, 2012). The passage of time itself does not warrant a sense of attachment to space as it does not ensure its active use to gradually transform it into ethnic place. Establishing a common margin of time for this process to unfold is a complicated task given that, ultimately, this depends on each group in relation to factors such as the level of use and characteristics of the space. Each group may promote the symbolic transformation of space into ethnic place in accordance with their own experiences, contexts and specificities (Bello, 2011). It is, then, not the space itself that has its own meaning, but the group that gives it value through a process of social interaction.

Thirdly, the value attached to the ethnic place is based on ideas of the homeland which are shaped, in turn, by the milieu in which ethnic places are embedded. The myth of homeland usually serves as the basis for space resignification. This is helped by what Becerra et al., (2018) understand as “place-referent continuity”; that is, when the characteristics of the homeland are transferable to a space, allowing individuals to transform the new environment through the recreation of cultural practices that contribute to a sense of belonging. This process does not mean a replacement or imposition of the homeland in the new milieu. On the contrary, it operates as an intervention to adapt the spaces. Some authors have understood this process as a territorialization of the urban scene (Cheuquelaf, 2012; Sepúlveda and Zúñiga, 2015) while others have presented it as an appropriation of space for ethnic purposes (Thiers, 2014). While they understand the process similarly, I opt for the word “appropriation” instead of “territorialization” as a lexical distinction. By doing this, I seek to prevent possible confusions between the understanding this study has of territory as homeland and ethnic place as a

delimited space in the host setting that has been collectively re-signified based on meanings extracted from the homeland. In the process of meaning attachment, the physical context plays a key role (Hornecker, 2005). Physical contexts, as well as socio-political circumstances, may influence perception and shape our expectations in relation to space, affecting its symbolic transformation into ethnic place.

Fourthly, as Indigenous migrant groups are not always able to obtain the use of a space given a series of socio-economic inequalities in the host setting, ethnic places can be produced from spaces that have only been symbolically appropriated. In other words, space does not guarantee its transformation into an ethnic place. However, for this transformation to happen, the use of space over time, even when control is not legally attained, is a necessary condition for ethnic place production. While some ethnic places may have been gained materially and symbolically, others may have only been gained from a symbolic perspective, which usually triggers a struggle for its legal management.

Finally, the appropriation of space and its transformation into ethnic place are not exempt from tensions. The use and control of space are inscribed in a field of power, especially evident when an Indigenous group challenges the established dominant hierarchies of the new milieu. In turn, as ethnic places are produced from the symbolic resignification of spaces, these are demarcated by boundaries that separate an “inside” from an “outside”, which are usually defended against the intrusion of outsiders. In the case of Indigenous peoples, in which indigeneity has been mostly understood as rooted in a rural setting, appropriation and control of space for ethno-cultural preservation represent an exercise of political defiance in dominant and discriminating non-Indigenous societies.

Mapuche spatial mobility has resulted in a socio-political transformation of parts of Santiago. An increasing number of urban spaces are being managed by Mapuche associations. Currently, 11 Indigenous ceremonial centers and 21 *ruka* in Santiago are operative, with the main objective of developing cultural workshops and traditional ceremonies (GORE, 2016). Legally attained or not, Mapuche associations, based on conceptions of the homeland, have been adapting these spaces to appropriate them under their own terms, transforming the materiality of space into symbolic ethnic places. According to Watson (2010), to understand the dynamics and subtleties of the migratory process, it is important to analyze the relationship established between spaces and the ethnic identities of the people who occupy them. The next sections present the trajectory of ethnic place production of three Indigenous associations in Santiago de Chile through the narratives of their Mapuche members.

METHODOLOGY

This article is part of an ongoing ethnographic study on Mapuche associational structures and dynamics followed in the urban areas of Santiago de Chile that started in 2016. Participant observation was developed in 11 Mapuche associations located in eight municipalities of Santiago. The selection process relied on a mixed random/snowball sampling approach, which resulted in a set of associations that prioritized cultural recovery. Although the associations included in the research are very different from each other in terms of their internal structure, goals, and strategies to achieve their aims, they all tended, albeit in various degrees, to collaborate with the state. Additionally, 34 in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with Mapuche participants of the 11 associations in consideration, resulting in a sample that included Mapuche from different migrant generations, diverse longevity in the association and varying ages, among other characteristics.

The information gathered revealed three main strategies to collectively appropriate urban space for collective cultural purposes: institutional approach, illegal occupation of urban land and symbolic appropriation. Although the Mapuche members of associations maintain a strong bond of belonging with their homeland, the narratives of the participants of this study showed that, after the continued use of a space for Indigenous cultural activities, it begins to be reinterpreted on the basis of territorial characteristics which the Mapuche use to describe the Wallmapu. However, they were emphatic in stating the difference between their Mapuche ancestral territory (their homeland or Wallmapu) and the re-signified spaces in the city (ethnic places). To illustrate the appropriation and “ethnification” of space and its transformation into ethnic place, the cases of three associations are presented through an in-depth analysis of the narratives of their memberships; all names are pseudonyms.

The selection of these associations stems from several reasons. Each association selected exemplifies one of the three main paths followed for ethnic place production: Choyituyiñ Warria Meu exemplifies a Mapuche association’s capacity to negotiate with the state to ensure the legal control of an urban space and its subsequent transformation along ethnic lines; Mahuidache produced its ethnic place after illegally occupying an urban dump, that was later legally granted to the association by the local municipality so as to “ethnify” it over the years; and We Dakin Püllü represents an association that, despite its repeated negotiation attempts, has only been able to symbolically appropriate a space. However, after its sustained use for various Mapuche ceremonies, the space has been transformed into We Dakin Püllü’s own ethnic place. While there are subtleties that make each case unique, these

associations exemplify the experiences lived by most urban Mapuche associations legally registered with the state which seek space for ethnic collective use in the city.

Institutional approach

Choyituyiñ Warria Meu is an association located at the intersection of two major capital avenues, Quilín and Marathon. Given its central position, the area occupied by Choyituyiñ Warria Meu is visible to any curious passer-by, although it is fenced to deter the entrance of unwelcome guests. Offered under a *commodatum*, the association has the indefinite right to use the plot for cultural purposes while it remains the property of the municipality of Macul, one of the 52 municipalities into which the city of Santiago is divided. According to Article 2174 from the Chilean Civil Code, *commodatum* is a loan of use, in which the use of a property is freely conferred to an actor who has to restore the property, in case of being sued, in the same conditions as received. While not restricted to Indigenous peoples, this free loan of use system has characterized the Mapuche associational interaction with public authorities when applying for the management of an urban space.

In the space provided by the municipality of Macul, Choyituyiñ Warria Meu built a *ruka* enclosed by an herb-and-vegetable garden. Xaviera is one of the oldest and most active members of Choyituyiñ Warria Meu and its current leader. Xaviera pointed out the multiple complications they had to face before being able to build the *ruka*:

The *ruka* is an achievement. Before, it was super difficult to get together. Sometimes we booked a municipality room and it was closed. Many times, we ended up gathering in a courtyard. Imagine the elderly and people with babies outside, in the heat and cold.

Because of the diverse demands of urban life as well as the prevailing racism in contemporary Chilean society, many Mapuche disassociated themselves from ancestral traditions and ceremonies (Carmona, 2017). However, this detachment is not complete. Gradually, and with the help of associations such as Choyituyiñ Warria Meu, the reactivation of religious ceremonies in the urban context has grown and, with them, the encounter with other Mapuche migrants in Santiago. The re-creation of ceremonies has become a fundamental pillar of Mapuche identity for those living outside the homeland (Millaleo, 2014), strengthening, in turn, a sense of urban indigeneity. The increasing complexity of the activities developed by Choyituyiñ Warria Meu encouraged them to start a legal process for the

management of space in Macul, the municipality where they were registered as an association as well as where most of the members reside.

Differently to other Mapuche associations based in Santiago, Choyituyiñ Warria Meu opted for an institutional way to express its spatial demands. However, to increase the chances of attaining the administration of an urban space, Mapuche groups are required to be registered as urban Indigenous associations with the state. The state offers the possibility of registering urban Indigenous associations upon fulfilment of a series of demands, including a minimum of 25 Indigenous individuals all in possession of a certificate that guarantees their Indigenous ancestry. In addition to the minimum number of individuals, the groups must comply with a basic internal structure for their legal registry, in which a board of directors must be elected, formed by a president, a secretary and a treasurer. Several critiques have been articulated in opposition to this Indigenous associational design, including its tendency to bureaucratize Indigenous social structures and the disconnection with traditional forms of organizing (Vergara, Gundermann and Foerster, 2006). Some urban Mapuche associations have become, in practice, vehicles to channel Mapuche participation at the city level, formalizing the expression of demands when negotiating with the state.

Associations develop a sense of local-urban belonging that emerges from the repetitive use of the same space for activities that recreate notions of the homeland. As the case of Choyituyiñ Warria Meu reveals, spaces in which Mapuche associations operate in Santiago are diverse and break with traditional rural organizational schemes based on descent and place of origin. However, as the Mapuche researcher Ramón Curivil (1997) maintains, ‘today, Mapuche identity is no longer territorial, which does not mean that currently there is no Mapuche territory. This rather means that inhabiting a certain territory is no longer decisive in the construction of the identity of a people’ (p.5). Space for cultural associational use in Santiago depends, rather, on the opportunities that are presented to Mapuche associations for their management and not necessarily on a primordial connection with a particular space. The space in which Choyituyiñ Warria Meu is established used to host a Chilean folk festival. When conferred to Choyituyiñ Warria Meu, its members had to adapt the space to make it adequate for the association’s use, marking with this the onset of their ethnic place production. As Ximena, a second-generation Mapuche in Santiago and current leader of Choyituyiñ Warria Meu, stated:

Although we received the space, we could not make much use of this land before because there was nothing, only mud.

Ritual, cultural practices carried out in the homeland are frequently developed based on a long-established symbolic-spiritual relationship with the territory. As Carmona (2017) points out, in Santiago, this relationship does not emerge in the same way, since the sites in which ceremonies are performed are loaded with multiple meanings related to city life. That is, spaces have been granted with different meanings (usually beyond the ceremonial arena), by different actors, at different times. As in the case of Choyituyiñ Warria Meu, most urban spaces claimed by Mapuche associations, have been used as wasteland or dumpsites. Despite the resignification of spaces, their previous uses appear in the narratives of their current Indigenous occupants when describing their ethnic place. The appropriation and resignification imbue urban space with new meanings without completely eradicating its previous significances, evidencing the multi-layered nature of space. To be able to build a *ruka*, Choyituyiñ Warria Meu's leaders once again negotiated with the state, both at the national and municipality levels, to advance their application for funds. After getting the approval of the state counterpart, and receiving the funds for this purpose, Choyituyiñ Warria Meu's membership began the modification of an urban space. One of the key elements that marked Choyituyiñ Warria Meu's transformation of space into ethnic place was the construction of their *ruka*. *Ruka* in Santiago are not like any other houses but constitute a visual display of urban indigeneity while being deeply attached to conceptions of the Wallmapu. To make the transformation of space possible, the association's membership had to re-signify the ground over which the *ruka* were going to be erected through the development of a traditional ceremony. This ceremony is marked by a collective rogation which is a solemn supplication to *chawngechen* (*chaw*: father; *ngen*: spirit), with the members of the association and special Mapuche and non-Mapuche guests, during which the Mapuche pray for the prosperous future of the *ruka* and its users. Every step followed for the construction of the *ruka* was thought to indigenize the space: with the money obtained through a state project, Choyituyiñ Warria Meu acquired traditional construction materials (e.g. *tatora*, *coirón*, and *colihue*) with which *ruka* in the Wallmapu are built. *Ruka* in the city are, then, contemporary constructions modeled on *ruka* located in the ancestral homeland (Carmona, 2015).

The transformation of Choyituyiñ Warria Meu's space into an ethnic place has been mirrored in the narratives of its membership: from describing it as just a muddy space, after the construction of the *ruka*, Soledad, former president of Choyituyiñ Warria Meu, referred to it as "my home", Ximena as "the oasis in the city" and Yasna, a young Mapuche student born in Santiago, as "the community". Choyituyiñ Warria Meu's ethnic place embodied in the *ruka*

not only encompasses the materiality conferred by a physical homeland view. *Ruka* also comprehend a unique sensorial experience full of smells and colors, moving the individual closer to a homeland imaginary while still being actively engaged in city life. Surrounded by this environment, each of Choyituyiñ Warria Meu's members conferred different meanings to a seemingly objective space, transforming its materiality into an ethnic place. Both the interior and exterior of the adapted urban space reveal a sense of belonging to a common territory of origin while reclaiming diverse images of the Wallmapu from within the city. Attachment to space, then, was not intrinsic to space. Attachment developed from the sustained collective use by Mapuche peers over time and was facilitated by place-referent continuity elements and practices by which meanings of the homeland were transferred to space. The transformation of Choyituyiñ Warria Meu's space into an ethnic place, marked by the construction of the *ruka* with traditional materials, presented a context that the Mapuche feel is their own for the teaching, learning and practice of Mapuche-ness in Santiago. Ethnic places, thereby, represent contexts in which the Mapuche, by being together, can help their identity to be re-affirmed in the city.

Illegal land occupation

While Choyituyiñ Warria Meu initially opted for an institutional way to express its demands, during the first decade of the return to democracy, some Mapuche groups followed a strategy based on the illegal occupation of land for space attainment. After confrontations with the authorities and police, most of these groups have opted for regularizing their legal situation to formalize the use of space over the years. To be considered as valid interlocutors in front of the authorities, the groups were required to be registered as urban Indigenous associations with the state. Only then could associations initiate the application process for a *commodatum* to secure the use of an urban space for the development of their activities.

Among these group of organizations is Petu Mogueleñ Mahuidache. Mahuidache is a prominent association in the southern area of Santiago in terms of the space controlled through a *commodatum* agreement established with the municipality of El Bosque. Mahuidache also organizes a variety of cultural events held throughout the year, bringing together not only its large membership but frequently non-Mapuche individuals interested in Indigenous affairs. Over the years after its legal registration, Mahuidache has been able to build four *ruka* in what has been constituted as the Mahuidache Ceremonial Centre of the Original Peoples, one of the most active of this type in Santiago. However, the beginnings of Mahuidache are far from being

without difficulties. This is revealed in a conversation between Vicente, a founding member of Mahuidache and its current president, and Fernando, an active member of Mahuidache. Regarding the origins of the association, Fernando pointed out the following:

A group of three Mapuche began to meet in a square and later they held meetings scattered in different venues in El Bosque. Little by little, they were growing, becoming stronger. Mahuidache, what you see here, was a dump.

Similarly to Choyituyiñ Waria Meu's trajectory, Mahuidache's case also reflects the most common pattern of urban Mapuche associations: prior to their formal constitution by the legal registration with the state and the attainment of space for the development of various activities, either starting as an institutionalized or outlawed process, Mapuche groups met in different venues out of a shared desire to be together and to recreate a shared culture in the city. The growing number of Mapuche involved in the group, the increasing complexity and regularity of the organized events, and the difficulty in generating symbolic attachment given the variety of sites in use, led the founding members of Mahuidache to start looking for a more stable location where they could finally establish themselves in the long term. However, unlike Choyituyiñ Waria Meu, the reasons that led Mahuidache to appropriate their space in the city were not initially motivated by a search for urban space based on an institutionalized dialogue with the authorities. Instead, Vicente and other founding members were determined to appropriate a specific space which was identified as suitable for the activities that they were planning for the future of Mahuidache. In this regard, Vicente commented:

We were walking with my father, and we saw a dump full of rubble. He looked at us and said that we needed a space like that to continue growing as a group. We all felt that that space had to be our new home.

After years of meetings dispersed in different venues, Mahuidache collectively organized the occupation of a plot of land located in the municipality of El Bosque, the area where most Mahuidache members reside. Similar to Choyituyiñ Warria Meu's experience, the members of Mahuidache developed a sense of belonging to their local area. As posited by Ehrkamp (2010), this sense of local belonging leads groups to transform their immediate environments, implanting their identities in their neighborhoods and thus generating local ties. The collective practice of traits that allegedly characterize a group leads migrants, including

rural-to-urban Indigenous peoples, to search for areas in which they can continue expressing a common identity, a process that fosters, once again, a sense of belonging to the homeland as well as to the urban milieu (Brown, 2011).

Historical injustices faced by the Mapuche population in Santiago have resulted in restricted access to urban space which has contributed to this second strategy of space appropriation. The members of Mahuidache coordinately resisted the state's repeated attempts to evict them from the occupied site and were able to start a process of space transformation that led to ethnic place production. With permission from the mayor, and because of sustained negotiation, the space was ceded to Mahuidache and its legal status regularized in 2000 under a *commodatum* agreement which followed the legal registration of the group as an Indigenous association. Throughout the years, the members of Mahuidache cleaned and enclosed the space. According to Vicente,

Mahuidache is not like other parts of the city. These *ruka* were built with great work, with prayer. The process was marked by Mapuche spirituality. Here we have done dozens of ceremonies.

The active participation of Mahuidache's membership in the adaptation and resignification of the space led members such as Vicente and Fernando to conceive the site as different from other urban areas. According to Fernando,

Mahuidache is my home and family; I learned to recognize myself as Mapuche here. Here, I use my Mapuche clothes and learn about the culture every day. Outside of Mahuidache, I feel that I disguise myself, but within Mahuidache, I can be myself.

For Mahuidache, ethnic place production began at the margins of the law. As a result of the persistence of Mahuidache's members and the positive impact generated in the area by the cleaning of the dump and the cultural activities offered to the El Bosque broader community, the municipality agreed to grant Mahuidache the appropriated space under a *commodatum*. Based on images of the homeland, the membership conferred meanings onto the urban space, rearranging it, and transforming the initial dump into their own ethnic place. While the symbolic adaptation was already in course, after its legal regularization, Mahuidache was able to materially indigenize the space by the construction of *ruka* for the development of activities identified as emblematic of the Mapuche identity. The active symbolic and material

use of Mahuidache's ethnic place has not only led to the development of a sense of urban belonging, but also to new bonds of community attachment.

Symbolic space appropriation

We Dakin Püllü is an association based in Peñalolén created in 2013, which has been able to temporarily appropriate a space within the Quebrada de Macul Natural Park located in the municipality of Peñalolén. With its abundant vegetation, Quebrada de Macul provides the association's members with familiar environmental features that enable them to experience a sense of continuity between city and homeland. The Park was created to protect and sustainably manage the foothill ecosystem while guaranteeing access to all individuals free of charge. To protect the ecosystem, it is not allowed to stay overnight or to light fires. We Dakin Püllü has been challenging these norms over the years, and it has been able to use a portion of space with the right to exclude non-guests in their cultural activities, which include, in turn, the overnight stay of hundreds of individuals for ceremonies that require lighting fires.

According to María, the current president of We Dakin Püllü, the members have been able to organize several Mapuche ceremonies, including the *nguillatün*. Doubtlessly, *nguillatün* occupies a prominent position as the grand sacred ceremony of the Mapuche and has become established as a symbol of identity recreation in the city (Castro, 2000). As a Mapuche ancestral ceremony, the *nguillatün* is inextricably connected with the Wallmapu, including both its physical and spiritual dimensions. The search for a space to develop the *nguillatün* led We Dakin Püllü to look towards the Quebrada de Macul given its unique environmental characteristics and, as in the case of the two previous associations, its proximity to the dwellings of most of its members.

The basis of Mapuche spirituality is the relationship of dependency on and gratitude towards nature. For the Mapuche in Santiago, the reverence for nature has become more complex, leading to a spiritual worship. Helped by place-referent continuity elements, religious ceremonies like the *nguillatün*, have taken place in the city based on the spiritual connection the Mapuche cultivate with their territory of origin. As Jones (2005) maintains, when recalling something, we use our imagination, and, by imagining something, we use memory. Ceremonies such as the *nguillatün* in the city, which are intimately sheltered by memories, experiences and interpretations, are transformed into imagined emotional representations of the Wallmapu in Santiago. The urban *nguillatün*, then, has developed as a result of emotionally remembering when enacting, at the same time, new memories from the city. The performance of rituals,

which work as symbols to reify Mapuche-ness in the city, has led to urban space resignification, being in turn endowed with the necessary spiritual meaning to transform it into a *nguillatuwe* (the setting of the *nguillatün*).

The *nguillatuwe* of We Dakin Püllü is in a corner of the Quebrada de Macul Natural Park. María believes that its location constitutes a special spiritual area, as they can receive vital energy from the mountain next to the *nguillatuwe*. According to María, this condition gives We Dakin Püllü a comparative advantage in relation to other associations in Santiago that have had to develop their ceremonies in unsuitable sites. Quebrada de Macul, on the contrary, by offering physical conditions that resemble those of the Wallmapu, makes the *nguillatuwe* an allegedly purer ethnic place for the recreation of sacred ceremonies such as the *nguillatün*. According to María:

The Mapuche have the need to be in contact with nature. I have gone to other *nguillatün* between buildings, on sports courts, where non-Mapuche people go by, noisy spaces. Our *nguillatuwe* is purer. It is a parenthesis within the city. It gives us more strength as Mapuche.

As Carmona (2015) points out, through the rituals that form *nguillatün*, it is possible to appreciate images and signs that reveal a Mapuche history adapted to the limitations of the urban milieu. As in the cases of Choyituyiñ Warria Meu and Mahuidache, one of the main compromises We Dakin Püllü faces in the city is that their ethnic place was not produced following traditional rules based on community and territorial ties. Thus, the *nguillatün* in the city challenges family and land bonds by creating a new conception of togetherness.

The transformative process of space into ethnic place develops in intimate harmony with the re-enactment of spirituality, which is tied to an imagined homeland, but with the ability to be adapted for its development in the city. In this way, María maintains that after the development of their first *nguillatün*, the space was no longer the same as it was marked with the energy of the Mapuche who occupied that space for the ceremony, transforming it into something different. Especially important for this process of space resignification is the planting of a *rewe*, a carved wooden pole topped with a humanoid face along with steps in the trunk that, according to the Mapuche religious view, connects the earth with the spiritual worlds when the *machi* or shaman enters into a trance and climbs them during the *nguillatün*. As indicated by Alcavil and Henríquez (2007), ritual practices and religious symbolisms have played a fundamental role in spatial resignification both individually and collectively among

Mapuche residents in Santiago. In the case of the *nguillatün*, the *rewe* acts as a sacred symbol, which serves as a referent for a spatial-temporal demarcation of the Indigenous presence in the city. The relationship with what was a simple space changed after the performance of the ceremony, leading to its transformation into We Dakin Püllü's ethnic place. The symbolic re-conceptualization of space led the association to understand the *nguillatuwe* as a "non-human agent" (Becerra et al., 2018) with which a relationship of balance was established: for its use, permission has to be requested to the *Wenu Mapu*, the sacred space inhabited by good spirits and Mapuche ancestors. According to María:

Our space in Quebrada de Macul is marked. Our strength is there. In the *nguillatün*, we slaughtered a lamb and roasted half of it as a way of expressing gratitude to the *Wenu Mapu*. There is always a payment, we do not occupy the space as if we were a scout group.

The need to be together as a group to share and learn cultural traits has led We Dakin Püllü to organize different social activities, which has resulted into a symbolic appropriation of the ethnic place to be enhanced. In a conversation between Vanesa, member of We Dakin Püllü, and María, they claimed:

We Dakin Püllü has been using the *nguillatuwe* for many years, our energy is there. We have been going there for five years and we have held four *nguillatün*. It is our need to be together. We would like the *nguillatuwe* to be ours so that all of us who share the Mapuche spirituality can meet.

After years of negotiation with the local municipal authorities, We Dakin Püllü's attempts to secure the control of the *nguillatuwe* have been ineffective. Permission to develop private activities, especially those with many guests as in the *nguillatün*, ultimately depends on the discretion of the local municipality. However, as seen from the narratives of Vanesa and María, this has not prevented its membership from generating a sense of belonging from materially (cleaning) and spiritually (praying) looking after the *nguillatuwe*. The re-creation of the *nguillatün* in Santiago leads the Mapuche to activate their Indigenous identity through a process of collective interaction framed by this sacred ceremony. While helped by the place-referent continuity characteristics of Quebrada de Macul, the recreation of *nguillatün* in the city demands a predisposition of the Mapuche to adapt homeland conceptions to the conditions

established in Santiago. However, through the collective use sustained over time, We Dakin Püllü gradually developed a sense of attachment to an urban public space. This was re-signified by the attribution of symbolisms that enabled its transformation into their ethnic place. Given its symbolic appropriation for social and ceremonial purposes, the *nguillatuwe* has received spiritual characteristics by We Dakin Püllü's membership who conceive it as distinct from other urban sites. The ritual that is enacted is no longer a simple image of the past but is positioned in the present through the bodies of rural-to-urban Mapuche migrants, thus actively recreating identity from the city.

CONCLUSION

This article has provided an ethnographic exploration of three different ways in which Mapuche associations in Santiago have appropriated space and symbolically transformed it into ethnic place: institutional approach, illegal land occupation and symbolic temporary space appropriation. As Indigenous cultural activities require a physical setting to take shape, Mapuche members of Indigenous associations have been engaged in a search for urban space. This search originates from a common desire to recreate emblematic features of the homeland and to thus be together in a culturally familiar and protected environment. The resignification of urban space and its transformation into ethnic place enable the reconstruction of an identity deeply attached to conceptions of the Wallmapu while being far from the same homeland.

While using different spatial appropriation strategies, the three cases discussed in this article reveal a similar tendency towards the adoption of the bureaucratic demands imposed by the state for the successful acquisition of the right to use a space in the city. Negotiation of space with authorities, especially with those working at the local-municipality level, is seen as a productive tactic that may provide Mapuche associations with the management of a space for the collective re-configuration of their ethnicity. Initially adopting an institutional approach by complying with the state demands for its space application claims, Choyituiñ Warria Meu was able to successfully access the use of an urban space through a relatively smooth negotiation process after the formalization of the group with a legal entity number. The security conferred by this institutional process has been materialized in an active use of the space, indigenizing it with the construction of *ruka*, so that it has now been transformed into Choyituiñ Warria Meu's ethnic place. While Mahuidache followed a strategy that was initially based on the illegal occupation of a plot of land, as a result of multiple negotiations - originated from an initial violent process of confrontation with the police and local authorities - the association finally

followed a similar path as Choyituiñ Warria Meu, adopting the structures instituted by the state to be able to negotiate the management of the space legally. Even We Dakin Püllü, which has been unsuccessful in its attempts to secure an urban space, has regularized its internal structure to comply with the state demands. This was appreciated as a strategy that would allow the association to persist with formal talks with relevant authorities for the exclusive management of their *nguillatuwe* in Quebrada de Macul.

The negotiation model that has been established between Mapuche associations and state authorities reveals a predisposition towards a neoliberal multicultural model of interaction in the city. Neoliberal multicultural governance allows marginalized social groups such as Indigenous peoples to affirm themselves by being offered limited development projects as a strategy both to reduce government spending and to develop self-improvement practices (Hale, 2005). However, more recent studies identify neoliberal multiculturalism by its inclination towards bureaucratization and commercialization of Indigenous cultures under the logic of the neoliberal market and the sanctioning of seemingly “authentic” cultural expressions of indigeneity (Di Giminiani, 2018). As illustrated by the cases of Choyituiñ Warria Meu and Mahuidache, compliance with specific bureaucratic criteria led to the provision of urban spaces through *commodatum* agreements, whilst We Dakin Püllü is still undergoing negotiations. While *commodatum* contracts between public institutions and Indigenous associations allow the material “ethnification” of urban spaces, property rights are not in Mapuche hands. Thus, the practice of Mapuche ethnic place-making that facilitates identity recreation in Santiago is, partly, mediated by power structures of state control.

Notwithstanding these political intricacies, Mapuche associations have presented a context for the collective re-enactment of activities that foster a sense of belonging not only to the homeland but also to the host milieu. Borrowing Clifford’s (1994) words, the appropriation of space and production of ethnic place by Mapuche associations is an important conduit for constructing ‘home away from home’ (p.302). As Valenzuela and Unzueta (2015) point out, for identity to persist through generations, even in environments perceived as alien, a sense of place is relevant. Thus, Mapuche associations in Santiago have gradually developed a sense of belonging in the city through the production of ethnic places.

REFERENCES

Alcavil, X. and Henríquez, S. (2007). *Significados, usos y representaciones del Rewe en espacios urbanos de la Región Metropolitana*. (Undergraduate thesis, Universidad de

- Humanismo Cristiano, Santiago, Chile). Retrieved from: <https://asuntosindigenas.gobiernosantiago.cl/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Significados-usos-y-representaciones-mapuche-del-Rewe-en-los-espacios-urbanos-de-la-RM-1.pdf>
- Anderson, B. (2006). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Rev. ed.). London; New York: Verso.
- Antileo, E. 2015. Trabajo racializado. Una reflexión a partir de datos de población indígena y testimonios de la migración y residencia mapuche en Santiago de Chile. *Meridional*, 4:71–96.
- Becerra, S., Merino, M., Webb, A. and Larrañaga, D. 2018. Recreated practices by Mapuche women that strengthen place identity in new urban spaces of residence in Santiago, Chile. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 41(7):1255–1273.
- Bello, Á. 2011. Espacio y territorio en perspectiva antropológica. El caso de los purhépechas de Nurío y Michoacán en México. *Revista CUHSO*, 21(1):41–60.
- Bertin, X. and Basadre, P. (2018, May 7). En la RM vive casi el doble de mapuches que en La Araucanía. *La Tercera*. Retrieved from: <https://www.latercera.com/nacional/noticia/la-rm-vive-casi-doble-mapuches-la-araucania/156628/>
- Brablec, D. (2020). Who Counts as an Authentic Indigenous? Collective Identity Negotiations in the Chilean Urban Context. *Sociology*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038520915435>
- Brown, J. 2011. Expressions of diasporic belonging: The divergent emotional geographies of Britain’s Polish communities. *Emotion, Space and Society*, 4(4):229–237.
- Buccitelli, A. 2016. *City of Neighborhoods: Memory, Folklore, and Ethnic Place in Boston*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Canessa, A. 2006. ‘Todos somos indígenas: Towards a New Language of National Political Identity’. *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 25(2):241–263.
- Carmona, R. 2015. Rukas en la ciudad. Cultura y participación política Mapuche en la región Metropolitana. *Revista Antropologías del Sur*, 4:67–87.
- Carmona, R. (2017). *Rukas mapuche en la ciudad: cartografía patrimonial de la Región Metropolitana*. Santiago, Chile: Universidad Humanismo Cristiano.
- CASEN – Encuesta de Caracterización Socioeconómica Nacional (2015). Retrieved from: <http://www.observatoriourbano.cl/indurb/indicadores.asp>
- Castro, P. 2000. El Rito del Nguillatun: Identidad Encarnada. *Actas Teológicas de la Universidad de Temuco*, 66:87–99.
- Census. 2017. Retrieved from: <https://www.censo2017.cl/>

- Cheuquela, M. 2012. Espacios de Representación Mapuche: Un Caso de Re-Territorialización de la Identidad Cultural en una Comuna Periférica del Gran Santiago. (Undergraduate thesis, Universidad de Chile, Santiago, Chile). Retrieved from: <http://repositorio.uchile.cl/handle/2250/111678>
- Chilean Civil Code. Retrieved from: <https://www.leychile.cl/Navegar?idNorma=172986>
- Clifford, J. 1994. Diasporas. *Cultural Anthropology*, 9:302–338.
- Collins, S. (2014). Mapurbe: Spiritual decolonization and the Word in the Chilean Mierdópolis. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 3(1):23-47.
- Curivil, R. 1997. *Estudio de identidad mapuche en la comuna de Cerro Navia, Santiago, Chile*. Santiago, Chile: Centro Comunicaciones *Mapuche Jvfken Mapu*.
- Di Giminiani, P. (2018). Entrepreneurs in the making: indigenous entrepreneurship and the governance of hope in Chile. *Journal Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies*, 13(3):259–281.
- Dixon, J. and Durrheim, K. 2000. Displacing place–identity: A discursive approach to locating self and other. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 39(1):27–44
- Dixon, J. and Durrheim, K. 2004. Dislocating identity: Desegregation and the transformation of place. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 24(4):455–473.
- Echeverría, M. and Rincón, A. 2000. *Ciudad de territorialidades: Polémicas de Medellín*. Medellín, Colombia: Centro de Estudios del Hábitat Popular.
- Ehrkamp, P. 2010. Placing identities: Transnational practices and local attachments of Turkish immigrants in Germany. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 31(2):345–364.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Gobierno Regional Metropolitano de Santiago – GORE. 2016. *Mapa temático de los pueblos originarios región Metropolitana de Santiago*. Retrieved from: <https://www.gobiernosantiago.cl/unidad-asuntos-indigenas>
- Hale, C. (2005), Neoliberal Multiculturalism. *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, 28:10-19.
- Hornecker, E. 2005. *Space and Place – setting the stage for social interaction*. Position paper for ECSCW05 workshop ‘Settings for Collaboration: the role of place’.
- Imilan, W. and Álvarez, V. 2008. El pan mapuche. Un acercamiento a la migración mapuche en la ciudad de Santiago. *Revista Austral de Ciencias Sociales*, 14:23–49.
- Imilan, W. 2009. *Urban Ethnicity in Santiago de Chile, Mapuche Migration and Urban Space* (PhD thesis, Technischen Universität Berlin, Berlin, Germany). Retrieved from: <https://d-nb.info/995253986/34>

- Jones, O. 2005. An emotional ecology of memory, self and landscape. In J. Davidson, L. Bondi, and M. Smith (Eds.), *Emotional Geographies* (pp.205–218). Oxford, UK: Ashgate.
- Lewicka, M. 2014. In search of Roots: Memory as an Enable of Place Attachment. In L.C. Manzo and P. Devine–Wright (Eds.), *Place Attachment: Advances in Theory, Methods and Applications* (49–60). London, UK: Routledge.
- Mançano, B. 2004. Movimientos socioterritoriales y movimientos socioespaciales. Contribución teórica para una lectura geográfica de los movimientos sociales. Retrieved from: www.acaoterra.org/IMG/pdf/Movimientos-socioterritoriales-y-movimientos-socioespaciales.pdf
- Millaleo, A. (2014). La autorrepresentación mapuche contemporánea, a propósito del mapuchómetro. *Mapuexpress*. Retrieved from: <http://www.mapuexpress.org/?p=472>
- Portugali, J. 2006. Complexity theory as a link between space and place. *Environment and Planning*, 38:647–664
- Relph, E. 1976. *Place and placelessness*. London, UK: Pion.
- Sepúlveda, B and Zúñiga, P. 2015. Geografías indígenas urbanas: el caso mapuche en La Pintana, Santiago de Chile. *Revista Geografía Norte Grande*, 62:127–149.
- Thiers, J. 2014. Santiago Mapuche. La Dimensión Indígena del Espacio Urbano en Chile. *Scripta Nova: Revista Electrónica de Geografía y Ciencias Sociales*, 493(47):1-24.
- Tuan, Y. 1975. An Experiential Perspective. *Geographical Review*, 65(2):151–165.
- Tuan, Y. 1991. Language and the Making of Place: A Narrative–Descriptive Approach. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 81(4):684–696.
- UN Habitat. (2010). *State of the World's Cities 2010/2011— Cities for All: Bridging the Urban Divide*. Retrieved from: <http://www.unhabitat.org>
- Valenzuela, E. and Unzueta, M. 2015. Parental transmission of ethnic identification in mixed couples in Latin America: the Mapuche case. *Journal Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 38(12):2090–2107.
- Vergara, J.; Gundermann, H.; and Foerster, R. 2006. Legalidad y legitimidad: ley indígena, Estado chileno y pueblos originarios (1989–2004). *Estudios Sociológicos*, 24(2):331–361.
- Watson, M. 2010. Diasporic Indigeneity: place and the articulation of Ainu identity in Tokyo, Japan. *Environment and Planning*, 42:268–284.
- Webb, A. (2013). Negotiating optimum distinctiveness: cognitive tendencies toward primordialism among Mapuche youth. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 36(12):2055–2074.