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The neoliberal multicultural state and the urban Indigenous associative model in Santiago de Chile

Dana Brablec

University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Correspondence
Dana Brablec.
Email: d.a.brablecova@uva.nl

Abstract

This article argues that since the recovery of democracy in Chile in the early 1990s, the state has been reshaping the Indigenous socio-political landscape by adopting neoliberal multiculturalism as a governance model. By not posing significant challenges to the state's neoliberal political and economic priorities, Indigenous cultural activity has been carefully channelled to meet state expectations of what constitutes urban indigeneity. Drawing on the minority and multicultural studies literature and ongoing ethnographic fieldwork, this article analyses how Mapuche civil society navigates the complexities of two relational models of state/ethnic minority interaction: ethno-bureaucracy and strategic essentialism. Although Mapuche associations have tried to accommodate their interests within the limits of neoliberal multiculturalism, the article argues that this governance model has established incentives for inclusion and exclusion in the socio-political apparatus, resulting in a fragmentation of the Mapuche associative landscape in urban Chile.

KEYWORDS

Chile, identity politics, Mapuche, neoliberal multiculturalism, urban Indigenous

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1 | INTRODUCTION

Urbanisation is a growing worldwide phenomenon for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, which has generated a series of socio-political challenges that are especially palpable for ethnic minorities (United Nations, 2018). Cities constitute places in which to generate, manage, negotiate and question identities: a 'difference machine' as Isin (2002) maintains. Given the confluence of different peoples and the many possibilities for diverse social encounters, cities are ideal sites for negotiating ethnic identities. Urban life has been seen as the context in which identities are found, created, and contested through a wide range of everyday spatial practices, allowing ethnic minorities, such as Indigenous peoples, to traverse the complexities of identity politics. Increasingly, however, Indigenous peoples' civil society organisations have found themselves struggling to gain ground in a hostile urban landscape, where the loyalties of their own members do not always work uniformly or unidirectionally.

From an economic perspective, neoliberalism has exacerbated rural-to-urban migration, class differentiation and inequality, creating new forms of urban exclusion (del Popolo et al., 2007). In this socio-political framework, states endeavour to accommodate ethnic diversity within their national borders. The Latin American region presents its own structural particularities. It would be impossible to discuss Indigenous experiences in Latin American cities without referring to the controlling processes involved in the historic, multi-sited, multi-purposed, and continuing postcolonial projects of modern nation-states. Over centuries, states have successfully displaced, absorbed, incorporated, assimilated, and destroyed Indigenous peoples. This has been particularly true with those urban residents, as indigeneity has generally been described as belonging to a rural environment (Furlan, 2017; Horn, 2019). Latin American cities were imagined, established, and developed by colonial powers as sites of progress, modernity, and whiteness/whitening processes (Porter & Yiftachel, 2019), excluding and rendering invisible those conceived as 'Others'. Yet despite myriad alarming predictions, many Indigenous peoples have steadfastly resisted and survived attempts at total assimilation (Clifford, 2013).

As Gardner and Richards (2019) maintain, Latin American governments reshaped the politics of recognition concerning Indigenous peoples by embracing neoliberal multiculturalism, a form of governance that does not challenge the economic and political priorities of the state. When carefully delimited, cultural rights pose little challenge to the state's projects and allow minorities to join the plan (Hale, 2005). In this sense, multiculturalism in Latin America was translated into a wide range of new legal norms that recognised some individual and collective rights of Indigenous peoples, including the acknowledgement of diversity, the right to collective land ownership, and the right to bilingual education, among other things (Lehmann, 2016). At the same time, the economic governance characterised by privatisation, economic deregulation, and withdrawal of the state from the public arena were strongly pursued. While the set of new cultural rights has broken the monocultural logic of states (Bello, 2004), it is alleged that these measures have mostly been implemented as compensatory actions to neutralise political opposition.

This article is premised on the importance of understanding how the 'urban Indigenous' category is currently shaped by the prevailing political and market rationales of the nation-state, as well as being re-defined by the same individuals who identify themselves as Indigenous. Although several authors have highlighted the key paradigms of urban Indigenous identities as being hybrid, fluid, multifaceted and dynamic (Furlan, 2017; Horn, 2019; Howard and Proulx, 2011), an issue that remains less researched refers to the practical implications of the approaches followed for Indigenous peoples' integration in societies that conceive themselves as multicultural. Most sociological literature on neoliberal multiculturalism has focussed on a top-down approach based on the power of states to direct the course of Indigenous peoples' affairs, but less attention has been paid to the creative ways in which Indigenous collectives utilise the same channels provided by the state to accommodate their collective cultural work in cities. With this lacuna in mind, this article fills these gaps by providing a detailed insight into the operation of Mapuche associations in Santiago de Chile, created under the umbrella of the neoliberal multicultural state. The article maintains that since the return to democracy in the 1990s, the state's ways of accommodating urban Indigenous diversity have focussed on the neoliberal multicultural governance model, providing the policy background for recognising urban Indigenous associations. This model of organising Indigenous collective activity in Santiago has given way to two related and,

in some cases, interdependent dynamics: ethno-bureaucracy and strategic essentialism. Drawing on a theoretical framework that elaborates and expands studies on minorities and multicultural studies and on ongoing ethnographic research that started in 2015, the article maintains that the Chilean state has contributed to shaping urban Mapuche civil society by conditioning public support to those groups that comply with its socio-cultural imaginations of indigeneity. Although many Mapuche associations have resisted the relational paradigms established by the state, this article sustains that, in practice, neoliberal multiculturalism reifies new forms of institutional inclusion and exclusion by regulating urban Indigenous collective action. Consequently, Indigenous civil society organisations in Chile find themselves caught between the co-optation attempts executed by the state and their efforts to regulate their internal affairs within the framework of the urban Indigenous associational landscape.

2 | STATE CO-OPTATION OR ETHNO-CULTURAL SUPPORT? MULTICULTURALISM, NEOLIBERALISM AND NEOLIBERAL MULTICULTURALISM

Classic understandings of ethnic assimilation are widely considered unsuitable for enabling ethnic minorities to access full socio-political membership given their homogenous understandings whereby individuals from ethnic minorities are expected to conform to the majority culture of a society (Kymlicka, 2013). On the contrary, widely accepted views for accommodating ethnic diversity have been those multicultural integrative approaches in which minorities (e.g., ethnic national minorities and immigrants) and their cultural identities are tolerated in the public sphere so long as they are expressed within the boundaries established by the state (Uitermark et al., 2005). In this way, they offer better opportunities for negotiating ethnic heterogeneity and, in doing so, help develop plural societies in cosmopolitan contexts (Calhoun, 2003). Nevertheless, in increasingly diverse societies, multicultural integration strategies have been critiqued for their inability to accommodate different peoples and cultures equally, with ethnic hierarchies still very present in the structural configuration of societies. In this sense, multicultural policies have been viewed as contributing to the creation of new forms of exclusion (Lehmann, 2016). These limitations are based on the notion that given the impossibility of recognising all cultures as equal, the cultures of these 'Other' minority groups are, at best, tolerated. In addition, multicultural integration has been a unilateral recognition exercised by states, where the same conceptions of integration articulated by minority groups are often overlooked (Lehmann, 2016). These critiques hold that attempts to institutionalise ethnic diversity are often used by governments simply as tools to manage real or imagined social tensions. In turn, attempts to incorporate ethnic groups into institutions, sometimes by state co-optation practices, can tend to the formation of elites of ethnic leaders who claim to represent their respective communities. The formal recognition of ethnic communities is also perceived as problematic: endeavours to negotiate with 'ethnic' leaders may lead to an essentialisation of culture by overemphasising differences between ethnic groups and minimising diversity within ethnic groups. As Wimmer (2009) maintains, major paradigms in integration research, multiculturalism included, do not fully consider the nuances of in-group solidarity networks and identity discrepancies that may lead to alliances of different strengths with the state. Although new reflexive approaches to multiculturalism have been discussed in recent years which highlight the dynamic ethnic nature of societies (Lehmann, 2016), several Latin American countries, including Chile, opted for a highly institutionalised type of multiculturalism that integrates a political, cultural, and economic perspective into the relationship established with Indigenous peoples.

During the 1980s, Latin American countries experienced one of the worst periods of economic recession, which opened the doors to aggressive neoliberal economic reforms to address states' debts and inefficiencies. Chile has been widely considered the experimental field of neoliberalism under Pinochet's dictatorship, allowing the implementation of structural adjustment and market-driven reforms by the economists known as the Chicago Boys inspired by Milton Friedman. This approach threatened Indigenous livelihoods, as waves of privatisation and violent reduction in public social expenditure imposed additional challenges on rural and urban residents. As the region's economies opened the doors to international investment (Gardner & Richards, 2019; Hale, 2005), in some cases, Indigenous

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claims to land and natural resources were seen as obstacles to generating profits. In others, neoliberal extractive and development projects meant the over-exploitation of Indigenous territories, prompting their migration to cities in search of better life opportunities (Chartock, 2013). Meanwhile, from a political perspective, fissures in power exercised by military regimes slowly led to waves of political democratisation that translated into a reduction of institutionalised repression in some countries and an increase in the states' capacities for responding to Indigenous demands (Jackson & Warren, 2005; Salinas de Dosch, 2012). Stimulated by commemorations of the fifth centenary of the 'discovery of America' in 1992, this decade of crisis and structural adjustment also saw the consolidation of major Indigenous organisations throughout the continent that demanded social and economic rights, thus broadening the meaning of democracy for all members of society (Lucero, 2008). The arrival of the 1990s also reshaped the international arena by ratifying the International Labour Organisation Convention 169, the only binding international instrument regulating Indigenous peoples' rights (Contesse & Lovera, 2011; Montt & Matta, 2011). This recognition and set of legal rights are especially remarkable in a region marked by a history of Indigenous racial exclusion and *mestizaje* (race mixture) as one of the central founding myths of nation-states. Paradoxically, then, while immersed in an orthodox neoliberal landscape, Indigenous peoples also found that this period was characterised by an openness of state elites to re-design the political framework in a multicultural direction.

Following Hale (2002, 2005), neoliberal multiculturalism is understood as a governance model that implies the recognition of a limited set of cultural rights and the strengthening of ethnic civil society organisations while, at the same time, pursuing neoliberal economic policies. In other words, while adopting a neoliberal economic doctrine, states also engaged in a reshaping of society. At first glance, this approach may seem counterintuitive as neoliberalism is associated with radical individualism. However, under neoliberal multiculturalism, rights are granted to disadvantaged social groups as compensatory measures. Moreover, after decades of harsh authoritarianism that inhibited minorities' socio-political articulations, multiculturalism represented a way not only to prevent dissent around economic policies, but embracing diversity meant as a source of legitimacy at both the domestic and international spheres. According to Gardner and Richards (2019), this form of multicultural recognition does not threaten the economic and political priorities of the elites, resulting in a controlled integration process of minorities. Nevertheless, as empirical analysis will show, not all minorities are equally recognised and granted the same access to rights. According to Rath (1991), the recognition process comprises a political component based on an ideologically constructed hierarchy. That is, how much or how little access an ethnic minority has to scarce resources depends on their position in that hierarchy. In the case of Latin American Indigenous peoples, this hierarchy is mainly determined by the socio-political category of the *indio permitido* (permitted Indigenous) firstly introduced by the Bolivian sociologist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2010) to refer to those Indigenous individuals who have experienced a subjugation process at the hands of the state by complying with its imaginations on indigeneity. In contrast, those seen as challenging the established model through political activism, for example, are portrayed as less Indigenous, extremist, and undeserving of state support. In this regard, urban Indigenous organisations may face even greater difficulties as their labelling within the category of the *indio permitido* has had to be constantly negotiated by being emplaced in what is conceived as a non-authentic place to exercise their identity. One of the most evident results from the *indio permitido* categorisation is a hierarchy based on dominant ideological ethnic inclusion and exclusion processes, which influence the approaches taken by the institutional apparatus towards Indigenous peoples. The effects at the grassroots are not uniform: as maintained by Hale (2004), those who occupy the *indio permitido* space rarely submit fully to the constraints of the state yet it is also important to note that the growing inclusion of Indigenous people within the state apparatus as models of the *indio permitido* cannot be unequivocally interpreted as ethnic empowerment.

Many Indigenous organisations were optimistic about the national and international rhetoric of inclusion working within the ethno-development frameworks proposed by the state, while others were reluctant to accept state proposals without seeing real social changes. However, the assertion of rights did not necessarily translate into effective guarantees that challenged the structural racism that continued to operate institutionally. Indigenous peoples thus found themselves immersed in a complex and paradoxical governance system, with the opening of new socio-cultural rights such as intercultural education but, at the same time, with the same old state practices

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tending to deny and violate rights, especially political and territorial rights. Consequently, the responses to neoliberal multiculturalism by the region's Indigenous organisations have been heterogeneous, marked by both resistance and accommodation. What is clear, then, is that neither Indigenous accommodation nor resistance fully account for the intricacies of the contemporary state/Indigenous relationship in Latin American cities, revealing the dynamic nature that neoliberal multiculturalism adopts in the region.

3 | FROM ADVERSARY TO ARBITER: THE CHILEAN STATE AND THE INDIGENOUS ASSOCIATIVE MODEL

Today, the majority of the world's Indigenous peoples live in cities. Chile is no exception: the Mapuche, who comprise 80% of the Indigenous and 10% of the country's total population (Censo, 2017), are constituent members of the Chilean urban scene. The reasons that triggered their rural-to-urban migration can be traced to the historical land dispossession resulting from an organised military campaign to exploit their lands in the 19th and 20th centuries known as the *Pacificación de la Araucanía* (Pacification of the Araucanía). The Mapuche became relegated to only five percent of their ancestral lands. Since the 1980s, the consolidation of neoliberalism involved structural transformations in Chile which targeted the remaining Mapuche lands—those that had survived colonisation—as fertile places for development projects such as dams and the timber industry. Within the Latin American context, Chile represents a unique case in which Pinochet's dictatorship paved the way for applying comprehensive market reforms without significant opposition (Rodríguez, 2021). The resulting poverty, lack of opportunities, and deterioration of traditional livelihoods were translated into migration waves to Santiago (Salazar, 2012). Today, 35% of the Mapuche live in Santiago (Censo, 2017), the city that concentrates the largest proportion of Mapuche individuals in the country.

While Chile was the first in the Latin American region to embrace neoliberalism, it was one of the last to undertake multiculturalism. Undoubtedly, the Pinochet dictatorship played a key role in the socio-political configuration of Indigenous public affairs, contributing to the uniqueness of Chile as a case study. The unparalleled violence perpetrated against the opposition and the early devotion to neoliberalism set the country on a different neoliberal multicultural path from other countries. From the beginning of the democratic transition, Indigenous organisations repeatedly proposed the constitutional recognition of the Indigenous population in the country as well as greater expansion of their rights. However, this proposal has been systematically rejected, especially by the conservative political elites. In addition, as Fuentes and De Cea (2017) and Pairican (2014) maintain, neoliberalism favours an extractivist model of economic progress. This has resulted in ongoing tensions between Indigenous and political and economic interests as these projects, especially considering the timber industry, have been developed in the ancestral territory claimed by Mapuche communities.

Consequently, after decades of concealing their presence in cities, it was not until 1992 that the post-authoritarian state decided to implement a national census that included a question about Indigenous peoples' identification. The results revealed that more than 10% of the national population identified with an 'Indigenous culture' and that the Indigenous peoples in Chile were an urban population. Consequently, the government of Patricio Aylwin, part of the centre-left coalition *Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia* (Concert of Parties for Democracy), succeeding Pinochet's dictatorship, was confronted with the need to take measures to deal with this newly uncovered societal panorama in the country. The answer for Aylwin's government was to continue with the neoliberal reforms initiated by Pinochet while regulating Indigenous diversity by implementing a multicultural governance model for which the Indigenous Law of 1993, still in force, was enacted. The basis of the current Indigenous Law was established in an agreement between the *Concertación* and a selection of Indigenous representatives. Nevertheless, some Mapuche researchers have maintained that the centre-left instrumentalised the demands of Indigenous peoples, resulting in a loss of a authentically Mapuche-Indigenous project. As a result, splits emerged in the Mapuche organisational scene of the 1990s. Only surviving fragments from this split were prepared to negotiate with the new democratic government (Pairican, 2014). Together with the approval of the Indigenous Law, the *Corporación Nacional de Desarrollo Indígena* (National Corporation for Indigenous Development—CONADI) was created.

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Considering the important urban Indigenous population, a multicultural framework orientated to the institutional recognition of ethnic minorities emerged. This, as Fuentes and De Cea (2017) maintain, has been conceived as a strategy of the elites to stop further advances in terms of political and territorial autonomy. That is, the formal recognition of multiculturalism is accepted to prevent larger-scale demands such as autonomy and self-determination. The recognition of ethnic identities in the city through the Indigenous Law has resulted in a proliferation of collective activity. In Santiago alone, there are now over 90 legally registered urban Mapuche associations engaged in promoting and preserving their culture (GORE, 2017). Several critiques have been articulated in opposition to this legally-embedded Indigenous associational design, including its tendency to bureaucratise Indigenous organisational structures and the lack of connection with traditional forms of organising based on family and territorial ties. In turn, the Indigenous Law has been criticised for its eminently rural focus, with a static conception of indigeneity, resulting, in practice, in demands of authenticity by recognising the rights of those Indigenous who "have been relatively untouched by history" (Paradies, 2006, p. 361). That is, to those *indios permitidos* who comply with the social, political, and economic criteria of the state (Vergara et al., 2006). In parallel to this multicultural recognition in the city, there was a clear neoliberal developmental rhetoric that led to the exploitation of natural resources especially timber in rural Mapuche territories. Those Mapuche who opposed these projects were branded as terrorists or insurrectionary Indians (Gardner & Richards, 2019). Accordingly, Indigenous policy adopted a double stance, one that focussed on those *indios permitidos*, emphasising participation and cultural development of 'authentic' Indigenous culture, and another that followed the general principles of internal state security, criminalising and repressing Indigenous action, especially that which was directed towards the recovery of their stolen territory (Boccara & Ayala, 2011).

While registering a Mapuche group with the state has not been the option chosen by all collectives, it certainly opened the doors to the possibility of applying to competitive grant projects to fund cultural collective work. Cultural revitalisation has become a critical focus of Indigenous collective efforts, serving as a stronghold to preserve a sense of identity under threat because of the workings of systemic racism. As members of the most marginalised urban stratum, the Mapuche often rely on the economic and logistical support provided by the state to sustain their associations. Consequently, the idea of fully independent groups remains more of an aspiration for the majority rather than a present reality. By diverting attention away from harsh neoliberal projects, the state's paternalistic cultural funding system has served as a tool to prevent major ethno-political opposition and reduce the threat of political fragmentation (Lucero, 2008). Resulting from this approach in urban areas, two main relational state/Indigenous models have emerged: ethno-bureaucracy and strategic essentialism. Both models imply controlled access to power in areas well-defined by the state, such as intercultural health and education. However, spaces of political influence and negotiation that may be conducive to actual change in the urban Indigenous policy field have remained closed. As discussed empirically in this article, the main consequence has been a collective Indigenous de-politicisation in Santiago rather than effective negotiation of urban Indigenous diversity. Thus, the neoliberal multicultural approach implemented in the urban state/Indigenous institutional relations by governments of the centre-left and the right suggests a denial of ethnic heterogeneity beyond the socio-cultural frameworks stipulated by the state. This has reinforced power inequalities by valuing Indigenous collective work according to their level of cooperation with the state apparatus. Therefore, the findings show how neoliberal multiculturalism produces new forms of institutional inclusion and exclusion by conditioning how ethnicity has to be expressed in the public sphere to conform with state standards. The following section introduces the methodology of this article.

4 | METHODOLOGY

This article is based on ongoing ethnographic fieldwork that started in 2015 in Santiago de Chile. The fieldwork contemplated participant observation on 11 Mapuche associations located in eight different municipalities around the city of Santiago. These 11 associations had an average membership that ranged between 10 and 30 active members each. Additionally, all associations under examination collaborate with or have collaborated with the state at the national, regional, or local levels at some point since their formation. Therefore, concerns about their possible

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unwillingness to integrate or cooperate with the state would not be relevant. Hence, most associations have prioritised cultural activities, such as workshops on the Mapuche language and health. The methods employed included in-depth interviews and participant observation. Both male and female individuals were involved, covering a wide age range from the early twenties to the late seventies. Interviews were conducted in Spanish, and the questions broadly focussed on the participants' experiences and the challenges they have encountered while being part of a Mapuche association in the urban setting.

To appreciate how state institutions interact with Mapuche associations, interviews with public servants working in urban Indigenous affairs were also conducted. The interviewee sample was comprised of five municipal officials, all in charge of the respective Indigenous Affairs Office (IAO) in Santiago, one person responsible for the Intercultural Programme of the South-Eastern Health Service of the Metropolitan Region of Santiago, the official responsible for CONADI for the central zone of Chile, and the person in charge of the Indigenous Affairs Unit of the Regional Government of Santiago. Four of these interviewees identified themselves as Mapuche. Interviews were conducted to comprehend their own experiences, perceptions, tensions, and the possible obstacles they experience when working with and for the Mapuche population in Santiago. As a non-Indigenous researcher, gaining access to the Mapuche community involved a continuous process of negotiating rapport. In order to avoid the development of hierarchies, this study aimed to overcome paternalistic limitations by taking on a role determined by the Mapuche members themselves. This approach resulted in a diverse range of reciprocal activities between the researcher and the Mapuche. During the years of the Covid-19 pandemic in which international travel was restricted, contact with Mapuche associations was carried out virtually, maintaining cooperation networks.

When asked about state/Indigenous relations conducive to logistical and material support for ethno-organisational advancement, the interviewees offered explanations that revolved around two categories understood by this article as ethno-bureaucracy and strategic essentialism. Subsequent conversations with the Mapuche interviewees were maintained to re-frame the empirical analysis considering their observations. The result of these multiple discussions is presented in the following sections.

5 | ETHNO-BUREAUCRACY

As members of the Chilean nation-state, the Mapuche have, in theory, access to the enjoyment of the same civil and political rights and obligations as any non-Indigenous citizen. However, given their historically forced incorporation into what is today Chile, as well as the continually-working forces of structural racism, the Mapuche have had to negotiate their membership into the urban imagined community—one founded upon ideals of whiteness and conceived as alien to indigeneity (Nahuelpan & Antimil, 2019). These hurdles have only reproduced the discriminatory ideological representation of the Mapuche, consolidating a racialised representation based on rurality and authenticity. It is within this framework that in the 1990s, a change of focus in the relationship between the state and Indigenous peoples was introduced, an ethno-governmentality approach, which was accompanied by new political intervention strategies. Instead of intervening from the outside, the neoliberal multicultural state sought to involve Indigenous individuals and hold them accountable for their development, following the motto of helping them to help themselves. Controlled political spaces were opened up to these racialised Indigenous urbanites, inviting them to be part of the state bureaucracy. Luciano is a Mapuche anthropologist who leads an IAO based in a municipality that has one of the largest proportions of Mapuche people in Santiago. When asked about his bureaucratic leadership role, he said:

> Our Indigenous Affairs Office exists to provide a space for direct communication with the resident Indigenous population for them to express their social demands. However, as in other municipalities in Santiago, we do not have a specific policy or significant budget to deal with Indigenous issues, we mostly support them logistically in the organisation of cultural activities.

To legitimise the institutionalisation of Indigenous affairs at the local-municipal level, and in virtue of the relevance of place attachment for the Mapuche diaspora in Santiago—even when outside the ancestral territory (Brablec, 2020),

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a network of 30 IAOs currently operates in the capital, the first of which was created in 1996. Their primary purpose is to provide information on the existing services and institutions within the Indigenous bureaucratic framework. This includes offering training to navigate the application system for restricted funds used for organising cultural events or obtaining a certificate that serves as proof of their indigeneity according to a specific state's requirements as indicated in the Indigenous Law (including, among other points, evidence of kinship with an Indigenous person up to three generations) (Sepúlveda & Zúñiga, 2015). As Luciano maintains, more than half of the 52 municipalities in which the city of Santiago is administratively divided, have embraced their multicultural diversity by providing limited spaces for discussion between the resident Indigenous population and the state at the local level. On the other hand, the recognition of multicultural diversity has been coupled with the bureaucratisation of the urban Indigenous scene in Santiago. With a limited budget to spend on urban Indigenous affairs, IAOs have supported Indigenous activities primarily through logistical assistance and the provision of physical spaces for cultural collective action. Without the support of the local state, as part of the most economically disadvantaged strata of urban society, Indigenous activities would be at risk of ceasing. In the words of María, a Mapuche leader based in the same municipality where Luciano works:

> We want more autonomy, we want to decide for ourselves. Every time we want to use the space that is designated for us, we have to ask permission. We cannot do anything without the municipality and the Regional Government's authorisation. It is very frustrating, but it is the only way we can organise our language workshops.

Due to their urban residence in Santiago, Mapuche associations have relied on spiritual connections to their ancestral territories and communities to re-create and preserve their culture within the city. As other urban Mapuche leaders, María was open about her support to the land recovery struggle held in the Mapuche ancestral territory. Similarly, she recognised that her fight is currently from the city, focussing on the revitalisation of the Mapuche language as a vital aspect of their identity. Nevertheless, María perceives a lack of trust and cultural understanding from the state when exercising her association's rights to deliver Indigenous-based activities. She views these factors as the primary limitation in her interaction with the local government. When asked about the requirement for state permission to use public spaces designated for Indigenous associations, María points out that this lack of trust has manifested in paternalistic behaviour, with the state making decisions on their behalf. Similarly, as introduced by Lorena, leader of a female-only Mapuche association:

> There is a tremendous lack of sensitivity on the part of the state regarding our situation in the city. A complete lack of support. There is no political will to improve anything or space for us to improve anything. They just want a photo with us as if that were proof of their supposed interest in our cause.

As María and Lorena mentioned, lack of understanding, cultural sensitivity, and paternalism from state authorities have hindered their ability as Mapuche associations to exercise autonomy generating a vicious cycle of mistrust and persistent power inequities. To effectively fulfil their association's mission, María and Lorena have chosen to prioritise small-scale projects instead of pursuing more radical objectives, such as María's initial plan to establish an autonomous space in the city to promote their culture. One of the main strategies followed by the state to face the intricate state/Indigenous relationship within its neoliberal multicultural logic has been hiring self-identified Indigenous bureaucrats, such as Luciano, to help re-build broken communication channels. As Luciano maintains:

> After many crashes with previous leaders, they selected me to lead the Office in this municipality because, as a Mapuche, I know their reality first-hand.

Luciano asserts that he was chosen to oversee an IAO due to his self-identification as a Mapuche, which provided him with the essential legitimacy to represent, as a state bureaucrat, his own people. Their representative role in front of the state was a common issue raised by ethno-bureaucrats given their alleged sensitivity for being members of the

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same people they represent before the state. The role of ethno-bureaucrats has been determined by mechanisms of domination, technification, and intermediation. Thus, Mapuche ethno-bureaucrats circulate between different social spaces: the urban-bureaucratic and Indigenous-community spheres (Boccara & Bolados, 2010). While serving as representatives of the state in front of their people, these individuals also function as racialised public servants within the state apparatus. Their legitimacy within the intercultural bureaucratic realm heavily relies on their Mapuche identity, as illustrated by Yasna, a regional-level Mapuche bureaucrat:

> I am deeply aware of my heritage, as it enables me to comprehend the Mapuche social needs. Despite my dual affiliation, both as a representative of the state and my own people, from the state's perspective, I am regarded as an Indigenous individual, qualifying me to advocate on their behalf. On the other hand, for the Indigenous communities, I am viewed as a government official, serving as a mediator—a role they also require to understand the state's programmes for them. I am positioned in the middle, actively collaborating and assisting both sides.

Yasna's account accurately encapsulates the role of Mapuche bureaucrats within the state. It highlights the challenging and often uncomfortable position these individuals find themselves in as representatives of two historically opposed entities. The role of ethno-bureaucrats further unveils intricate dynamics concerning racial hierarchies, (neo)colonial political structures, and the state's influence in shaping the activities of urban Indigenous individuals and groups. The ethno-bureaucrat role has been the target of criticism from the urban Mapuche community further promoting an already tense state/Indigenous scene in the city. In this respect, ethno-bureaucrats have been perceived as co-opted subalterns, or as Radcliffe and Webb (2015) maintain, the understanding of ethno-bureaucrats within the *indio permitido* category, that is, their "incorporation into state projects of subalterns willing to relinquish racialised identifications and endorse state policy" (p.255). Accordingly, the state would open up spaces of limited influence to control and ultimately depoliticize Mapuche associations by assimilating key Indigenous actors into its bureaucratic logic. This opinion is shared by Valeria, leader of a Mapuche association, who says:

> A Mapuche individual working for the state always faces the risk of taking sides, potentially aligning with financial incentives or the interests of their own network. It is unlikely that they will be able to represent the entire Mapuche population as a people.

While there have been some limited opportunities for advancement within the neoliberal multicultural framework, such as broader rights recognition and progress towards self-governance, possibilities that were unimaginable decades ago, a closer look reveals a troubling reality. Indigenous individuals still struggle to secure positions of influence within central structures, resulting in their continued marginalisation within the broader political landscape. The allocation of limited funds for urban Indigenous initiatives and a market-driven approach to exploiting the remaining Mapuche lands have left neoliberalism largely untouched. As a consequence, Indigenous communities continue to occupy subordinate positions within the urban institutional framework.

6 | STRATEGIC ESSENTIALISM

Indigenous rural-to-urban migration has led to a series of adaptations to Mapuche ways of life in their ancestral territory. Like any ethnic identity, Mapuche-ness has gone through an intense process of modification, which has recently been marked by a growing projection of Indigenous identity in the public sphere as performance and advocacy. Indigenous cultures, the Mapuche included, have been the object of exoticisation and essentialism that has equated indigeneity with a rural, traditional, and anachronistic ways of living (Brablec, 2021). The Mapuche in Santiago have faced challenges to their identity both from their peers and from Chilean society in general, given the alleged incompatibility of their urban residence with the survival of their culture in such a non-traditional environment. This has led some urban Mapuche associations to what Boccara and Ayala (2011) call playing an Indigenous role; that is, to consciously

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adopt practices that define Indigenous identities as pure and fixed to take advantage of the few political and economic benefits existing in the neoliberal multicultural framework. In this sense, neoliberal multiculturalism operates by structuring Indigenous cultural capital, legitimising—or not—the authentication of identities by deciding who is Indigenous enough to access state support in virtue of cultural recognition. In this respect, Valeria comments the following:

> Many things have become folklorised: health, ceremonies, culture. There is some money involved in the development of Indigenous cultural activities, and you have to take advantage of it.

This approach is, nevertheless, not exclusive to the Chilean case. As Overmyer-Velázquez (2010) maintains regarding Mexico in the 1990s, the state started borrowing official discourses on multiculturalism and human rights to establish a new relationship with Indigenous peoples, which was based on a folkloric understanding of identity. This situation led, among other dynamics, to a constant questioning of the authenticity of those Indigenous identities which did not meet these expectations. In this respect, as Valeria says, certain Mapuche associations have adopted a simplified approach to their identity when engaging with the state. This strategic essentialism allows them to access limited resources available for the development of collective cultural activities. To favour the re-creation of cultural traits at risk of extinction in the city (Lagos, 2012), Mapuche associations in Santiago have thus been discouraged from pursuing economic and political rights that could challenge the foundations of neoliberalism. The strategic identity essentialisation, sometimes understood as folklorisation of Indigenous identities, has been a dominant validation approach before the state. Hence, an important proportion of urban Mapuche associations have felt compelled to demonstrate their indigeneity in a more explicit way by confirming to the socio-political expectations of the *indio permitido* category. Soledad, a Mapuche leader of a large association located in central Santiago, briefly summarises this experience:

> In order to be seen, to challenge invisibility in the city, you have to show that you are Mapuche (…) If you do not do this, if you do not show that you are a Mapuche, you risk missing funding opportunities to develop your association's cultural workshops.

Urban Indigenous policies in Chile have had a 'one-size-fits-all' approach, with a tendency to homogenise, essentialise, and economically support the work of Indigenous associations that unambiguously conform with the state's expectations of how a 'good Indigenous person' should behave. Aware of the unequal socioeconomic position of the Mapuche in Santiago, the state has introduced incentives for Indigenous leaders, like Soledad and Valeria, to exercise a quintessentially rural understanding of indigeneity, thus engaging with *indio permitido* narratives. By doing so, Mapuche associations position themselves as competitors for limited grants and funding opportunities, which, if successful, would enable them to sustain their cultural activities in the short- and mid-term. This apparent endorsement of a multicultural society creates a dilemma for Mapuche associations, as it ensnares them in a cycle of financial dependence in order to ensure their long-term survival. Simultaneously, due to the neoliberal priorities of the state, efforts towards socio-political autonomy are curtailed and, in some instances, publicly denounced as a menace to social cohesion (Lastra, 2022). Consequently, this dynamic reinforces historical power inequalities, allowing the elites to maintain their dominance with minimal resistance in urban areas and perpetuating the transfer of wealth derived from natural resources from the ancestral Mapuche territory to public/private entities.

Carla is a prominent Mapuche leader who heads a well-known association known for its collaborative efforts with the local municipality. According to Carla:

> We actively participate and always with our Mapuche attire, sometimes including our jewellery. The mayor knows us, invites us to participate, and gives us the place that corresponds to us in the events organised by the municipality.

Conforming to the state's expectations of Indigenous authenticity, some individuals have resorted to participating in public events while wearing traditional Mapuche attire and jewellery, typically reserved for Indigenous ceremonies. In

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the predominantly non-Indigenous urban environment of Santiago, the public display of indigeneity holds significant relevance for many Mapuche individuals, especially in their interactions with the state. This demonstration serves as a means of asserting their cultural identity within the broader urban society. Nevertheless, this display of indigeneity has generated a widespread expectation for the Mapuche to demonstrate their Indigenous authenticity through their cultural expressions. Margarita is a member of one of the largest Mapuche associations in Santiago dedicated to intercultural health. Unlike some members of her association, including those in leadership positions, who have taken a more lenient stance towards the consequences of strategic essentialism, Margarita asserts:

> I think that the non-Mapuche people always see us as a tourist attraction. They do not understand our culture, and they expect us to act a certain way, dress in a certain way. And that can impact future Indigenous policies.

Margarita's opinion has been shared by ethno-bureaucrats in Santiago such as Lorenzo, who has led an IAO in a peripheral municipality for 2 years. One of the main consequences of strategic essentialism, Lorenzo maintains, has been the state dictating how indigeneity has to be publicly performed. Lorenzo says:

> I must acknowledge that as a result of the dynamics between the state and Mapuche associations, certain cultural events can occasionally appear more like a spectacle rather than a representation of Indigenous culture.

Lorenzo contends that this phenomenon has been particularly noticeable when implementing ceremonies, especially the *wiñol tripantu* or annual Mapuche spiritual renewal. In order to sustain their cultural activities over time, Mapuche associations have found themselves compelled to adopt an essentialist perspective on indigeneity. Consequently, the endeavours to revitalise Indigenous cultural traditions in urban areas, backed by public funding and logistical support, are susceptible to state co-optation. In cities, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous state authorities play significant roles in the decision-making processes of Mapuche associations, exerting influence over the actions and direction of Indigenous civil society.

7 | CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A POST-NEOLIBERAL MULTICULTURALIST SCENARIO?

Through a post-authoritarian institutional design, the Chilean urban Indigenous field was envisaged as a service-provision landscape for Indigenous users of public services in cities. Following a neoliberal multicultural approach, the state systematically disregarded the political agency of Indigenous associations, channelling their role through its bureaucratic logic and restricting their margin of action to the cultural arena. To fund their activities, Mapuche associations have been framed within a project-based system in which they have to compete against each other to access limited resources as well as spend them within a fixed period of time, usually between 6 months to a year. Consequently, any long-term socio-political goal is frustrated, with Indigenous associations remaining subalternised to Western non-Indigenous paradigms. In an attempt to navigate the intricacies posed by neoliberal multiculturalism, as discussed empirically, most active urban Mapuche associations have engaged in ethno-bureaucracy or strategic essentialism. To be recognised as legitimate groups by the state, the Mapuche in Santiago have had to either work within the state apparatus as ethno-bureaucrats or present a simplified version of their identity that aligns with the concept of "*indio permitido*". Conversely, associations that seek to challenge the political and economic status quo of their people and advocate for structural change often find themselves marginalised within neoliberal multiculturalism.

However, a ray of hope for Indigenous peoples emerged with the introduction of a progressive new constitutional draft that was supposed to transform Chile into a plurinational state, departing from its previous status as an ethnically unified republic. Resulting from the social outburst of 2019, Chile opted for an institutional solution and called for a constitutional plebiscite. Nonetheless, the proposal put forth by a democratically elected constitutional body, which included 17 Indigenous representatives occupying reserved seats, to draft the new constitution did not

succeed, as it was rejected by 62% of the votes. The plurinational provisions were among the most controversial, directly contributing to its final rejection. Mapuche historian Fernando Pairican (2022) argues that the constitutional project represented a significant step forward by recognising Indigenous peoples as political actors, moving beyond a narrow cultural perspective. However, critics of the constitutional text expressed concerns about the potential for Indigenous separatism disguised under the concept of plurinationality.

In the May 2023 election to select members of a new Constitutional Council, Alihuen Antileo, a Mapuche lawyer, achieved a significant feat by becoming the sole Indigenous representative elected. Antileo has been entrusted with the task of advocating for the rights of Indigenous peoples before the Constitutional Council. This Council is responsible for deliberating and approving a new proposal for a constitutional text, leading up to a national referendum scheduled for mid-December 2023. Despite the limitations on Antileo's sphere of influence, the process of drafting a new constitution offers a chance to transcend the stagnant state of Indigenous politics and challenge the reinforcement of neoliberal multiculturalism. To advance towards a more inclusive democracy, it is essential to envision a new constitution that establishes a fair relationship between the state and Indigenous peoples. This includes the crucial task of addressing the specific needs of Indigenous individuals living in cities. This, in turn, will contribute to the creation of a more inclusive and democratic society that upholds the rights and aspirations of all its citizens, including those Indigenous residing in urban settings.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

No conflicts of interest to disclose.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to ethical restrictions.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The vast amount of the ethnographic material in this article has been through a process of ethical approval by the Sociology Ethics and Risk Assessment for Research at the University of Cambridge.

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Yes.

ORCID

Dana Brablec https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0816-5526

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