Voices Beneath the Concrete / 
Miñche kura pülli ñi awkiñ: An 
Imaginary for Urban Mapuche 
Jewellery / Warian Rütran

Cynthia Niko Salgado Silva
The sounds beneath the concrete
must speak, breathe
and manifest themselves
in order to hear their song with a voice of their own.

FROM INSIDE OUT, FROM SOUTH TO NORTH, FROM THE COUNTRYSIDE TO THE CITY

My parents were always travelling, due to my father Julio’s restlessness and work in the mines, my mother Lucía being a hardened trader, and their great capacity to adapt to all the places we have lived in. My grandmothers are of peasant origins. My maternal grandmother, ‘la mamita Vero’, is from Copiulemu, and my paternal grandmother, ‘la Carmencha’, is from Trabuncura. Both migrated to the uria at an early age as domestic workers. My grandfathers, ‘el Chamelo’ from Linares and ‘abuelo Gastón’ from Talca, were both travelling salesmen. I always heard about their lives over good peasant food – stories intermingled with discrimination, violence, alcohol, erased surnames, machismo and a long walk in search of direction in a society that is demanding of material things, but with deep, widespread poverty. In order to survive, they decided to adapt to the dominant system, leaving behind their own cultural belongings, erased and silenced by the concrete of the city, or abandoned to oblivion, rather than face the pain of their experiences.

The lives of my ancestors strongly marked my own itinerant way of life. Being from nowhere in particular, my rapid adaptation to different spaces and my strong need to relate to territories is marked by a nostalgic absence of belonging. I feel the need to be constantly on the move as if it were a biological necessity. There is a strong connection between my understanding of the present and my ancestors. When I travel, I sense their voices and acts in my own body; I realise that I carry knowledge and experiences that I have not experienced myself, but rather come from those before me, as if I were inhabited by other histories, other corporealities and other knowledges. All those voices accompany me from within: they are in my own words, in my walking, in my actions, in my thoughts. I am a living testimony of my ancestors. I am the latest version of them, in a convergence of times coexisting in a single instant: a body in resistance claiming and expressing itself through updated revolutions. In my journeys, I have observed how territories and their inhabitants relate, and how they are complicit with one another without the need to agree. With every step I take, I perceive how local people connect with each rock shaped in the architecture, blending with the smells of food, their bodies and the colours of their clothing. In their walking, I imagine the history of their ancestors, while different
Part II: Interventions: Champurria poetics

materialities vibrate on a similar note as if they were music. Everything is intertwined in wandering time.

After travelling from the coast to the Andean mountain range in Wallmapu, I became fascinated with the genesis of Mapuche jewellery and its strong territorial belonging, like everything else in the Mapuche cosmovision. When I came back to Santiago, I realised that there was no such thing as ‘local’ jewellery and clothing for urban Mapuche, but that it was brought from the lof in the south, which I had visited. While urban Mapuche identity is so clearly and strongly expressed in the city, with its own codes, when it comes to jewellery, I wondered if the south didn’t feel somehow ‘superimposed’ on it. Mapuche traditional jewellery is linked to each territory and is made according to specific places and their geographical features, family and personal characteristics, thus becoming testimonial portraits of cosmogonic spirituality and socio-political organisation. As affirmed by Painecura, jewels are divided into puwel che jewels and gulu che jewels at a broader level, and on a smaller territorial scale, for example in the context of the gulu che territory, they can be divided into lhafkenh che, wente che, naq che, willi che and pewen che jewels (Painecura 2011: 38). This only takes into account ancestral Mapuche territories, excluding Mapuche populations in cities. The Mapurbe are not linked to any specific jewellery. Despite the large Mapuche population in the varia, urban indigenous identity seems to not be defined in terms of particular clothing and/or jewellery. Rather, in the varia each individual mixes items (and feelings and senses of belonging) in a champurriado style, giving rise to heterogeneous identities. Yet, who can be sure that Mapuche gen cannot inhabit the varia?

Here begins ‘Voices under Concrete’, as a respectful experiment in the creative construction of an imaginary built around these identities and their stubborn (urban) emplacement, persevering in a territory claimed as their own. I chose to do this through jewellery because I feel close to it, being myself a designer of clothing and jewellery to be sold in fairs and markets, and having often shared with many lamgen spaces for reflection about the complex ways in which their bodies inhabit the territory of the champurria. Nevertheless, even though I feel mestiza myself, I did not want to appropriate their situated gaze and cultural belonging. So I decided to go back to these conversations with lamgen who grew up in Santiago and live there to this day, addressing them with a more ‘formal’ request to contribute to the development of an imaginary of urban Mapuche jewellery. Their words and reflections, recorded as part of several interviews, are part of the final artwork and constitute the background for the writing of this text. To me,

1 Thank you to all the lamgen who kindly agreed to be part of this process and openly shared their thoughts: Daniela Millaleo, Martín Llancaman Norma Huhe, Roberto Cayuqueo Martínez, Simona Mayo, David Aniñir Guiltraro, Marie Juliette Urrutia Leiva.
art is a tool to re-signify materialities and corporealities, a channel to transmute erased suffering through the courage of past and present voices, where our stolen ancestralities can find their lost words.

The body as a territory to be inhabited

I consider my body as a political territory because I understand it as historical and not biological. Consequently, I assume that it has been named and constructed based on ideologies, discourses and ideas that have justified its oppression, exploitation, subjugation, alienation and devaluation. This way, I recognise my body as a territory with history, memory and knowledge, both ancestral and from my own personal history. On the other hand, I consider my body as the political territory that I can really inhabit in this space–time, based on my decision to rethink myself and to construct my own history from a reflective, critical and constructive stance. This process of inhabiting my body has acquired a holistic dimension, since I have been doing it more and more from an integral perspective, interweaving the emotional, spiritual and rational dimensions. I do not consider that there are hierarchies between them because the three dimensions are equally important to revaluing the meaning and the way I want to interface with life through this body. (Gómez Grijalva 2012: 6–7)

The body is the living testimony of a territory. We are the territories we inhabit; we are bodies that interact with space constantly. This is how places influence our behaviour, habits and ways of relating to each other. At the same time, through our bodies, we show what we want to say and through our gestures, we express ourselves as well as through our ornaments; clothing and accessories can become a discursive means of expression. Our bodily discourse in the city is constructed as political, social and cosmological. From a Mapúrbe perspective, it is related to the body in resistance of the ancestors who travelled from the countryside to the city, who lived through marginality, racism, the dispossession of rural life and tradition taken away by the indifference of discrimination; it determines with impetus and rebelliousness a resignification of one’s own racialised bodies. There is no desire to be, it is just being: showing with pride corporeal traces in a city that does not accept difference, and continues to flatter the neoliberal mercantilist and capitalist model, sedated by Eurocentric Western fashion trends.

In this context, clothing and ornaments infringe the traditional and become revolutionary bodies that connote their corporealities as political. From there, with precision and courage, they incorporate their ancestors: these bodies are their ultimate representatives. The rural south and the ancestors continue to inhabit them, still vivid through the recontextualised objects used in the urban territory. Dressing bodies with Mapuché elements
...Un colgante de plata de wangel, es espiritual y de conexión igual que la lanita roja en mano izquierda, lisa o con unas bolitas llev llev, mi hija también la tiene.

Tengo cierta iconografía, un chaway, unos tokicura, un cultxún, pero nuestra vestimenta es totalmente de cuidad.

Chapetuwé ocupo coles con campanas.  
Pulsera roja y los chawal.

Me gusta usar plata, las ocupo de este material por protección.

Me representa el hierro forjado, rejas para ventanas, paso mirando ese tipo de cosas, me llama la atención por el proceso creativo lo que requiere forjar el hierro: inteligencia y fuerza física.

Símbolo el río Mapocho está harto en mi imaginario poético.

Me represento más con las piedras.

...Si tuviera que pensar en Ngen warria, los buscaría en la naturaleza que está presente acá: la cordillera, los cerros, yo creo que el Ngen warria son puros cerros...pura mahuida.

Yo creo que de algo me tengo que proteger en la ciudad es de los pacos, la plata me protege siempre.

Mi materialidad las plantas, lo que está en resistencia en la cuidad son las plantas, igual que yo.

Tiene una intención política, de resistencia y educar.

Yo le digo el asfalto, a mí no me gusta el asfalto encuentro lindo el gesto de cuando crecen las plantas y “rompen” el asfalto.

Debajo del asfalto duerme nuestra madre.

Materiales rudos para enfrentar la rudeza de la cuidad, la ira, la forma de destruir la imagen la pulsa y la tensión.

Para mí el cemento es como camino, ruta, sin una connotación tan negativa.

Ngen warria, si hay, en los cerros, en las plantas, el viento también... están medios secuestrados... yo hablo del río Mapocho como un río secuestrado.
in the city is a gesture of resistance, a *champurria* impetus for cultural reproduction and reinvention. In this mixture, there are still vestiges of southern traditions such as the red ribbon, the *chaway, makuñ, kupal, tokikura, txarilogko* and symbols that continue to represent elements of power and protection for those who wear them, often accompanied by rings, scarves and colourful shirts, with fabrics made in Asia, the use of jeans as a material symbol of peasant resistance, the abundant use of black as the colour of festivity, violet for feminism and blue as the colour of the Mapuche people since Leftraru, or the hair combed into braids. The instances of usability are determined according to social context, occasions for celebration or ceremonies, or as ways of carrying one’s *tuwün* throughout everyday life. For some, the choice of ornaments does not necessarily belong to a specific territory but is rather a mixture of feelings and experiences, or memories of places as diverse as Ireland, Argentina or *Wallmapu*. Moreover, jewellery that was once only for women is now beginning to be used by men as well, questioning the gendered idea that people carry with them energies that must be categorised according to the male/female divide, and in some cases even claiming both energies converging within each being, thus opening up different possibilities of using ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ jewellery (energies defined until today in traditional Mapuche jewellery).\(^2\)

**SOUNDS UNDER THE CONCRETE**

Silver jewellery has sound. My mother said that if the earth sounds differently when you step on it, there is a burial or a cemetery, and there, jewels sound clearer. The sound of Mapuche jewels cleans the path. That’s what I feel; I confirm my dear mother’s theory. (Elisa Del Carmen Avendaño Curaqueo)\(^3\)

It is curious to think that the material for spiritual protection of the people of *Wallmapu* comes from their invader and is what gives them strength. It is an act of rebellion against the oppressor to take their most precious good – the silver of their coins – and transmute it into something with a very different, almost opposing, spiritual-political identity: it is a gesture of neutralisation, to erase the traces and marks of the coloniser. As a result of this reflection, I started thinking about concrete as a kind of ‘invader’. Although it does not generate the same level of violence as the Spanish conquest, it distances us from direct connection with the earth; it destroys in order to build, and the process of its extraction exterminates any possibility of life sprouting up in its place. Although we have been living with this

\(^2\) These questions and ideas were raised during the conversations held for this project. They are not intended to define the gender usability of the jewellery in any way.

\(^3\) Quoted from //www.genero.patrimonio-cultural.gob.cl/651/w3-article-55387.html?_noredirect=1.
material since the days of ancient Greece, and in a much more disruptive way during the twentieth century, its pervasive presence results in distance, density, infertility and impermeability, perhaps because it removes earth from our daily life, leading us to walk on and be surrounded by its grey materiality.

This grey is cumbersome on the urban landscape: little community life, electric cables, asphalt pavements, few trees, constant glare and noise, stimuli that are not always friendly, everything is intruded by human beings for the supposed comfort of habitability. Even the course of the Mapocho River has been disrupted, including its water flow, with the hills reshaped, some poorly cared for, and others used aggressively for tourism. Despite this, there can still be some kind of cosmological connection with the waria. Perhaps the gen continue to inhabit this city, around the Mapocho River, in the island hills that are part of it, in the few animals. Indeed, they continue to breathe under the asphalt; as Daniela Millaleo says in her interview: ‘gen waria do exist in the hills, in the plants, in the wind too. They are kind of abducted. I think of the Mapocho as an abducted river’. Moreover, concrete derives from the earth and its minerals: it is a mixture of clay and calcareous materials. With water, it solidifies and hardens into a new substance, resistant to heat and cold, to blows and earthquakes. As concrete comes from the earth and the hills, we could think that perhaps some kind of entity belongs to it that could even give us protection, just as Spanish silver coins, appropriated and transformed into traditional jewellery, have been doing for centuries.

Once it was defined as my central element, I began to test the materiality of cement in different ways. As jewellery is usually made of relatively small pieces, it was more difficult to achieve the material’s own rigidity without it falling apart. I also learned to make Mapuche bells with the rütxafe Martín Llancaman, considering sound as one of the important factors of spiritual protection. The rest of the creations are reworkings of Mapuche symbolism that I considered important to keep; for example wagülhen, the epew of the blue star of world creation and fertility, a symbol of protection for some langen. I also included – with respectful hesitation – new symbolism created with what I was told could be the gen of the city, bringing to life an imaginary of dialogical creation not directly related to any traditional iconography. My main inspirations were natural elements such as the river and the hills in the waria. I also tried to work through the materiality of concrete forms and shapes that spoke to me of the city, some rather straight, angular and smooth, at the same time bearing in mind the Mapuche cosmosvision and its circumferences. I considered the braiding, the colours, the materialities and the sounds as key elements for protection.

The imaginary of Mapurbe jewellery takes hold in the context of a champurria city that is rigid, full of stimuli, activities and dynamism, filled
Voices beneath the concrete

with condensed stories, conversations, and infinite time suspended in static architecture. Bodies cohabit in these diversities with their own voices rooted in political and cultural convictions, spiritual beliefs and stubborn memories. As such, a champurria history of the Mapuche in the city manifests itself in the materiality of concrete, in a political gesture that claims its ‘resistance’ as a place of enunciation. The jewel represents the channel of transmutation to be carried on the body itself: it is how the corporeal and spatial atmospheres come together in perfect symbiosis, coexisting and cohabiting time and memories in the champurriada city of the Mapurbe.