Competing claims of belonging in a diverse Latin American neighbourhood

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Abstract

Patronato is a diverse neighbourhood in Santiago, Chile. During centuries, a changing population has been making a place for themselves there though settlement, entrepreneurship and multiple territorial landmarks. Unlike other diverse city places, this Latin-American neighbourhood is neither located in a global city, nor its influx of immigrants has been perceived by the “local” population as changing an original “native” or “homogenous” social landscape. Patronato was indeed founded by “others” (including poor Spaniards and indigenous people in the XVIII century). Nowadays Patronato is commonly recognised (and exoticised) as “Santiago’s cosmopolitan neighbourhood”. Ancestries that include Palestine, Syria, Korea, China, India, Peru and other Latin American countries converge there. This analysis focuses on Palestinians, who came to the neighbourhood in the 1940s, and Koreans, who did so in the late-1970s. Experiencing an upward social mobility, these groups have progressively lefted Patronato as place of residency. Yet, both keep interacting there through key positions in business, mutual experience of place—change and daily conviviality with a wider milieu. Based on participant observation and interviews, this paper reflects on their competing claims of belonging to Patronato. These competing claims, I argue, are made by interlacing this neighbourhood’s trajectory with their own personal and collective stories of mobility (spatial and socio-economic), and by creating new boundaries, particularly through distinctions between “old” and “new migrants”. Their declared positions will be contrasted with those actually enacted daily in the place. This intervention turns our attention to processes of diversification and migration taking place in Latin-American local urban places.