

“No Hay Una Sola Historia”: Collective Framing of Urban Artistic Interventions in Argentine Northern Patagonia

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Abstract

This article looks at how a slow resistance to hegemonic settler colonial narratives of progress and the absencing of Indigenous Mapuche people is articulated by the discursive and material presence of urban artistic interventions (UAIs) in Argentine Northern Patagonia. This is done by looking at the temporalities and spatialities of UAIs as material interventions in public discourse. UAIs are analyzed through the framing categories of social communication, protest, utopian experimentation, and reactionary UAI. The question answered is: ‘How do local Indigenous and allied actors make their presence and resistance visible in public spaces, and how do these practices build alliances, consensus, and alternative imaginaries?’ Data is taken from photos taken by the author during fieldwork in 2023, semi-structured interviews with movement activists and participant observation from movement meetings, events and protest marches.

Keywords: *Urban Artistic Interventions (UAIs); Slow Resistance; Collective Framing; Present-Making; Settler Colonialism; Mapuche.*

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Introduction

The phrase “*El Pueblo Mapuche Vive*” (the Mapuche people live), written on walls, pavements and monuments is a common sight in Northern Patagonia on both the Chilean and Argentinian sides of the border. The simple statement contains a complex history of colonialism, forced displacement, genocide and resistance, explaining that despite all, the Mapuche remain. The importance of this phrase, in the Argentine context, lies in how it exposes an active production of absence of Indigenous Mapuche language and symbols in urban public space and discourse, a condition shaped both by processes of displacement (Paz Argel and Cabrapan Duarte 2025) and by historically inherited silences and disrupted identifications that structure Mapuche subjectivities (Cabrapan Duarte 2025).

The purpose of this article is to investigate strategies of resistance by urban social movements in Northern Patagonia through the medium of material urban artistic interventions in public discourse. The question to be answered is:

How do local Indigenous and allied actors make their presence and resistance visible in public spaces, and how do these practices build alliances, consensus, and alternative imaginaries?

This is particularly pertinent in the context of the settler colonial state of Argentina and historical conflicts of race and class. While conducting fieldwork in the city of Neuquén, Argentina between February and May 2023 I was struck by the almost total lack of visible Mapuche presence in a city and province which bears a Mapuche name and centralises the Mapuche symbol of the *pewen*¹ tree on its provincial flag. Rather, the few official representations of the Mapuche, that I saw, were an essentialised cartoon of an Indigenous girl, which is the logo of the provincial lottery, and the semi-official status of some murals at an open-air mural gallery on the walls of a city cemetery. The exception to this absence is the presence of Mapuche representations and Mapudungun (the Mapuche language) in urban artistic interventions, such as graffiti. While Mariluan (2023) focuses on musical performance, her discussion of Mapudungun as a symbolic vehicle of cultural resistance and the reclamation of linguistic presence provides a useful lens for understanding how the language similarly asserts Mapuche visibility in urban artistic interventions, even when few people can literally understand it.

Claudio Alvarado Lincopi (2020) explains how Mapuche objects, understood as artefacts, continue to be meaningful in, carrying cultural, and political

¹ The absurdly named ‘Monkey Puzzle’ tree in English.

significance over time. This perspective resonates with analyses of urban artistic interventions (UAIs) in Northern Patagonia, which demonstrate how UAIs can communicate counter-hegemonic narratives (Barreiro, Wainryb and Carretero 2017; Serafini 2018). While not museum objects, UAIs, although authorship is usually uncertain, can be considered artefacts when produced by Mapuche people. As such they would be active and performative interventions that assert presence and contest settler colonial narratives across space and time (Alvarado Lincopi 2020).

As part of what Hoop et al. (2022) refer to as ‘urban artistic interventions’ (UAIs), graffiti and other forms of UAIs, such as pastes, stencils and murals, as well as placards and banners displayed at protests, present a distinct platform for discourse intervention. By imposing their presence in public space and discourse, UAI artists seek to “promote alternative images that challenge state- and corporate sponsored imagery” (Latorre 2018, 87). In considering UAI from the perspective of resistance, the creator(s) are exercising agency and reaffirming presence in society (Awad, Wagoner and Glaveanu 2018, 162), by (re)imposing counter-hegemonic narratives into public discourse. Materially, UAIs that are illegal or without permission challenge state control of public space (Larruscahim 2014). In settler colonial contexts, what may legally be framed as vandalism, functions analytically as the sabotage of hegemonic narratives.

In this way UAIs, by their spatial placement can sabotage the material colonial narratives told by monuments and institutions by overlaying the architecture of the colonial city with the continuing presence of the dispossessed. In this way, UAIs can be similar to how social movements and activists are able to present themselves on social media, bypassing more established/mainstream media. However, while excellent work has been done on public discourse in Northern Patagonia, regarding social media (Raftopoulos and Specht 2022), and on the radio (Cárcamo-Huechante 2013) such media are not materially inscribed in the urban landscape in the same way as UAIs, as their circulation is not bound to a specific site. Whereas the physical presence of UAIs is able to provide clear counter-narratives that are amplified, contextualised and shaped by their spatial positioning and visibility relative to the message that they convey. In the same North Patagonian context, Serafini (2018) has demonstrated how environmental mobilisation against fracking has occurred through mural painting as a collective action, with the murals articulating resistance to fracking in their message as well as community cohesion in their making. This article will add to these works by looking particularly at the nexus between the temporalities and spatialities of UAIs.

Such nexus can be seen in the layers and clusters of graffiti, pastes and stencils that take place over space and time (Baaz et al. 2026). With particular themes and grievances emerging and reemerging at times of crisis (Pavoni, Zimakis and Campos 2021), such as the environmental destruction caused by fracking (Serafini 2018). The spatiality of UAI clusters in urban centres becomes particularly relevant for resistance movements (Awad, Wagoner and Glăveanu 2018) against the actions of state authorities, since both are centralised in urban spaces with hot spots often being administrative buildings and national monuments. This resistance through UAIs has taken place over time as part of a historical struggle against settler colonial logics and exclusion. UAIs then, through a resistance lens, become part of Lilja's constructive resistance, with the reframing of hegemonic discourse as resistance narratives in new ways from different venues (Lilja 2021).

As an often illegal and multi-vocal urban discourse (Kane 2009), UAIs reject the ordered modernity of planned and permitted cities. Rather, the illegality of much UAI gives it a certain power, by rejecting hegemonic control and censorship of discourse (Sarmiento 2020), challenging the state's ability to control public space (Miladi 2015), and providing a counter narrative to a neo-colonial and neoliberal press (Latorre 2018). UAIs then, represent a resistance through reversal, whereby marginalised and excluded groups such as some Mapuche reclaim space through the (re)imposition of their presence, of their cause and language, and the rejection of hegemonic narratives of progress and Indigenous erasure, exemplified in Berry's (1960) concept of the "Vanishing Indian." UAIs then, as resistance, can highlight otherwise marginalised voices, resisting the epistemic injustice of their silencing (Bacharach 2018) by 'present-making' (Wade, Burman and Lilja 2026), with UAIs representing an agency of such voices as they make their presence felt through the materiality of their narratives as UAIs in public space.

Much literature on UAI's particularly graffiti, reflect on the artist as an individual and how they communicate through the intervention itself (Latorre 2018). In this vein, Marche (2012) points out that much graffiti is not meant to be understood by the general public, despite often being in public places, with examples being name tags, gang signs and pornographic pieces. Yet UAIs, as material objects in a particular place, even when they do not communicate legible meaning, make "forceful claims of space" (Marche 2012, 82). This is particularly relevant in settler colonial contexts. Smith (2018), demonstrates how Indigenous Canadians, make such claims for/at space, by using UAIs, in murals and graffiti to point out how the city of Montreal is on unceded Indigenous land. The purpose of such UAIs for Smith is for Indigenous artists to shock passersby, by implicating them in the painful

colonial history of Canada and its “hegemonic domination” over Indigenous peoples (Smith 2018, 254).

A Note on Mapuche Resistance

It’s important to recognise that to speak of a Mapuche movement as a homogenous group with corresponding goals is both counter-productive and incorrect. Firstly, many contacts and sources make it clear that there is a huge diversity of opinions and goals between different Mapuche groups. This includes groups as diverse as some that are pro-Mapuche independence whilst not speaking Mapudungun while other groups are primarily Mapudungun speakers that are pro-state evangelical Christians (Anonimo 2018). Thus, it is important to recognise that what is presented in this article (or any public discourse) is not indicative of a universal Mapuche resistance.

Slow Resistance and Presence

This article looks at UAIs such as resistance graffiti, as part of a slow resistance (See Saunders and Al Om 2022; Lilja. 2022; Wade, Burman and Lilja 2026). Such UAIs act as a material indicator of movement goals, presenting alliances and coalitions and mobilizing movement actors. This represents part of the ongoing and historical slow resistance to settler colonial and ecocidal practices by proclaiming their presence and narratives in public space. In the case of settler colonial states, such as Argentina, the claiming of urban space through artistic interventions becomes key for issues such as citizenship, exclusion, and the presence of marginalised groups (Smith 2018). In line with Rama’s (1996) concept of ‘the lettered city’ the historical exclusion of Indigenous peoples from urban areas in Latin America has led to an urban/rural dichotomy that posits wealthy urban spaces as white, and marginalised rural areas as Indigenous spaces (Wade et al. 2024).

The slowness of slow resistance refers to a transformation of values, as “countless acts of constructive resistance, enacted over a long period of time spread through society and open up the potential for new ideas and values to become acceptable” (Lilja 2021, x). With each act of constructive resistance (in this article, UAIs), however small, creating individually imperceptible cracks and fissures in hegemonic reality (Burman 2016; Lilja 2021). A lens of slow resistance through UAIs takes a material look at what Homi Bhabha described as the ‘time-lag’ (1991), of a post-colonial rejection of modernity, slowing and skewing its teleological narratives of progress and insisting on re-centralizing and bringing life to the past. As such, in settler colonial contexts, slow resistance highlights, the “long emergency of invasion”

(Wakeham 2022), of the slow, attritional violence (DeFalco and Sirik 2022) that continues after the forceful and violent incorporation of Indigenous peoples and their land into the liberal state (see Wolfe 2006).

In the case of settler colonial states, the claiming of urban space through UAIs becomes key for issues such as citizenship exclusion, presence and silencing of marginalised groups (Smith 2018). The focus on presence means we can also think of how physical presence is made through protests, particularly marches. The use of placards and flags, in line with Kane (2009), can be considered as legal and portable forms of UAIs, in that they are painted discourse that frame the debate through their presence in public space. UAIs represent resistance movements through different spatialities and temporalities, present-making counter narratives of resistance over space and time.

Methodology

Collective framing and UAIs

Collective framing looks at discourse production by movements from the perspective of the tricky yet necessary work of organizing, galvanizing and mobilizing movement participants to action (Benford and Snow 2000). Such as, the mobilizing of movement actors, around key themes and slogans. This will be analysed in this article by treating the “embedded function” of the unrequested discursual intervention of UAIs as micro-level political discourse (Hanauer 2011). UAIs are treated as text “central to understanding the character and processes of social movements” (Raftopoulos and Specht 2022, 601), with frames providing meaning to events and memories, organizing and interpreting experience. This is done to simplify the world, mobilizing movement actors and potential allies, while demobilizing and challenging antagonists (Benford and Snow 2000).

Framing is done with variable features of problem identification, inclusivity and motivation (Benford and Snow, 2000). The collective frames of UAIs in this article (following Correa 2023) are split into two fundamental frames: frameworks of injustice, which articulate injustice from hegemonic power (the state, the police etc.) and frameworks of agency which organise a movement’s idea for change (Correa 2023, 2). Alongside this a modified version of Hoop et al.’s (2022) typology of UAIs will be applied. This article will use the categories of social communication, protest and utopian experimentation (Hoop et al. 2022), and add ‘Reactionary UAI.’ These are

explained in relation to their, primary goals, and relations to urban space. The modified typology is explained in the following table.

Urban Artistic Intervention	Primary goals	Relations to Urban Space
Social Communication	Mobilisation of movement actors and potential allies. Articulating alliances and coalitions between movements. Framing of Agency and Injustice	Place-based attachment, community ideals, solidarity and alliances and coalitions-often national monuments and institutions that are symbols of hegemonic power
Protest UAI	Challenging Hegemonic Power Structures through clear demands. Framing of Injustice	The city as an arena for protest
Utopian Experimentation	Alternative visions of the future. Framing of Agency	The city as an experimental space articulating utopian visions
Reactionary UAI	Supporting Hegemonic Power, rejecting resistance narratives	Often placed alongside or overlaying, but in opposition to other UAIs.

Table 1. Adapted from Hoop et al. (2022, 8)

Each of the four types of UAIs will be examined with the data through the lens of collective framing. The purpose of this categorisation is to explain the strategic implications of UAIs as discursual interventions and their role in the creation and maintenance of consensus, alliances and coalitions between diverse groups. This will be crucial in answering the research question of this article.

Data

Data collection was carried out through an initial four months fieldwork in the provinces of Neuquén, Rio Negro and Mendoza (the Vaca Muerta shale play crosscuts all three). Between February 19th 2023 and June 1st 2023.

UAIs

I took photos of UAIs that I saw whilst attending protest marches, events and walking in the urban centres of Neuquén city, Cipolletti, Mendoza city and General Roca/Fiske Menuco². Photos, as images that are made, are

² General Roca, its official title, is named after the former President of Argentina who had

themselves representative of the researcher's intent (Holm 2014). As such, I will explain my process of selecting which photographs to use. Photos were taken and chosen for inclusion in the article based on their textual and spatial political relevance to Indigenous activism. This was decided by myself, the researcher and based on my knowledge of the issue. Of interest is what I will term UAI clusters, which is where UAIs with different but generally solidarical themes are clustered in the same space, with other pastes, murals, stencils and graffiti. Solidarity is assumed, based on my contextual knowledge. For instance: I can assume that a graffiti calling for justice and remembrance of the teacher Carlos Fuentealba³ and the clustered graffiti calling for the release of Mapuche political prisoners are in solidarity because I have seen groups calling for both attend the same marches, people being members of both groups, as well as speakers referencing both in their speeches. Reactionary graffiti as a UAI, conversely, enters into an explicitly antagonistic dialogue with the counter-hegemonic narratives of UAI, overlaying or delegitimizing the former. This can be seen in that their text, is clearly negating what is being overwritten.

Attending marches was a useful source of data. The article makes use of protest placards as a mobile and legal form of street art, shifting through public spaces and declaring and redeclaring solidarity by their use in multiple protests over multiple spaces. I made it a point to ask permission when taking pictures of personal placards, totems and signs, which felt respectful as well as allowing the person to hold them in a way as to make the photograph easier to take.

Participant observation allowed me to immerse myself into the local context getting to know community members and activists, reading their behaviour and, at the same time, as a foreigner, be read by them (Kawulich 2005). This included listening to speakers, informal talks with activists and reading and collecting any literature that is handed out.

Between February and May 2023, I attended five protest marches in Neuquén, and one in Mendoza. Additionally, I attended an *asamblea* (a citizens group) meeting, an open radio- an open speaking event where participants sit in a circle and pass around a microphone (see Serafini 2018)- and six movement events in Neuquén.

previously been the military commander of the genocidal conquest of the desert from 1879..

³ Carlos Fuentealba was killed by security forces in 2007 at a protest in Arroyito, Neuquén province. Murals of his face and the slogan Carlos Fuentealba Presente! (Carlos Fuentealba is present) are common in the city. I saw murals of his face in local schools as well as a placard with his name written on it placed in the window of the national bank office in Neuquén city.

Social Communication

A reemergence of Mapuche movements in Chile and Argentina beginning in the 1970s and rising in the late 1980s and 1990s (Aguirre 2021), coincided with resistance to, and the fall of, both countries' dictatorships. This was also part of the regional rise of top-down neoliberal multicultural policies (Burman 2020; Michel 2019). The Mapuche flag (*Wenufoye*) for instance, which is used in both Chile and Argentina, whilst representing a historical and pre-colonial trans-Andean territory of the Mapuche, was designed and adopted in 1992 (Labra Mocarquer 2020). Detractors often use this to claim that Mapuche groups and movement actors are somehow delegitimised in their historical struggle (Labra Mocarquer 2020). However, slow resistance over time, whilst it is often done by staying in place, is neither ontologically nor tactically static. In building alliances and coalitions, and adapting resistance to hegemonic power, movements and movement actors are able to mobilise and galvanise resistance through social communication. UAI's that are social communication, aim at mobilizing movement actors and potential allies into collective action. This action can be mobilizing and internalizing discourse.

Much UAI's produced in the name of the Mapuche and allied movements are aimed at demonstrating solidarity and reaffirming presence. Solidarity between movements is often shown in the agency of individual actors, as many people are involved in different organisations. At a protest march in Neuquén city on the 4th April, 2023 led by the teaching union ATEN, I met a Mapuche contact, wearing an ATEN bib (they are a teacher). This was quite common, and I often saw Mapuche contacts, representing different groups at different times, marching with a different group to a flag/placard they were waving, or a bib they were wearing, or marching with one group whilst carrying Mapuche symbols. This itself shows complex solidarity networks, and the building of alliances and coalitions through the sharing of movement actors. Demonstrating broader sets of values and positions throughout movements.

Linkages between resistance movements can also be seen in how the *conquista del desierto* (conquest of the desert) and political repression by the military dictatorship are often referred to in movement literature and graffiti as the two genocides. The conquest of the desert was the genocidal invasion of Northern Patagonia beginning in 1878 by the Argentine military (Pérez 2011), beginning with the Argentine military's crossing of the River Neuquén (see Map 1 and 2). The second genocide refers specifically to the violent repression and murder during the 1976-1983 dictatorship and the

state orchestrated ‘disappearing’ of over 30 000 people (Radio Nauta 2015; Del Castillo Troncoso 2011).

Figure 1



Figure 1 shows a banner held up at an open radio event at the central park of Neuquén on May 20th 2023. Bounded by writing in Mapudungun, *Si Tocan a La Mapu, Nos Tocan a Todas* (If you touch the *Mapu* you touch all of us) and below stating the hashtag *Abortemos el extractivismo* (let's abort extractivism). *Mapu* here is a Mapudungun word that refers to the land or Mapuche⁴ territory. The slogans, in the name of the *asamblea APCA* (Permanent Assembly of Comahue for Water), represent a triple framing that combines a feminist framing (let's abort is itself an explicit reference to the fight for abortion rights in Argentina), solidarity with the Mapuche and an environmentalist message. This demonstrates, key solidarity framings as social communication by combining the issues in one banner. One interviewee who is Mapuche and a spokesperson for a Mapuche organisation explained to me how younger Mapuche university students who are active in other groups contribute:

We've been incorporating the fact that many of the young people who are joining the organisation have their experience at the University, with other organisations. All that experience. The volcano within the organisation provides tremendous groundwork for political discussion (interview 2023).

⁴ Mapuche is a portmanteau of *Mapu* (land/territory) and *Che* (people).

The banner and the above quote highlights how diverse collective framings, solidarity and alliances can be articulated through activists participating across different movements. Feminist, student, environmental, and Indigenous political experiences are shared, with the banner presenting a united front of counter-hegemonic discourse around territory, extractivism, and collective rights and the quote demonstrating how the diffusion of activists across movements can be utilised.

Figure 2



Figure 2, is of a placard, taken at a large protest in Mendoza on March 3rd 2023. The march was organised in order to protest proposed changes to a provincial law (7722) that guarantees clean water and prevents mining companies from using certain chemicals such as cyanide and sulfuric acid. The placard states: *No Hay Una Sola Historia. Les Mapuches Resisten* (There is not only one History/Story- The Mapuche Resist). The phrase 'there is not only one history' directly challenges hegemonic nationalist narratives that render Indigenous peoples absent from Argentine history and territorial belonging. This resonates with Ngozi Adichie's lecture *The Danger of a*

Single Story, which discusses the coloniality of African history being told by primarily Western sources. One interviewee, explained this coloniality in the context of the settler colonial state of Argentina. The interviewee, who is Mapuche, explained to me “There’s a big problem of collective amnesia in society and a white state built on a lie. So there’s a process of social identity that’s taking place” (interview 2023). Gordillo explains that historical efforts by the Argentine state to present itself as a White, European nation has “downplayed and silenced” Indigenous presence in the country (2014: 34). I argue that the placard functions as part of this social identity process, an act of present-making with a public assertion of ongoing Indigenous existence and resistance. This is the slow resistance of present-making, a resistance that is undertaken by staying in place and being Mapuche, of making ones presence felt. It is important to note that a neutral gender form is used here with the neutral ‘les’ as opposed to the masculine dominant *los*. This will be explored further in the following section.

Figure 3



Figure 3 is of a police station on the Rio Negro side of the bridge between the city of Neuquén and the city of Cipolletti (province of Rio Negro), which states: *El Pueblo Mapuche Vive!* (The Mapuche people live!). As mentioned in the introduction to this article, this is a common sight as graffiti in the region, and represents a resistance to the absencing of the Mapuche people

by hegemonic discourse, as part of the settler colonial myth of the “Vanishing Indian” (Berry 1960). Neuquén city is a Mapudungun name which comes from one of the two rivers that reach their confluence at the city. It is, however, a colonial city, founded in 1904 as part of the state-sponsored migration of European, white settlers to the region and forced displacement of Mapuche people during the genocidal conquest of the desert (Cabraran Duarte, 2025). The violence of the conquest was followed by what Gordillo calls the construction of a “positive geography” (2016: 247), the construction of European looking urban centres.

Figure 4



The hegemonic narrative of the city as European and settler colonial (as in the ‘single history/story’ referred to in Figure 2) is communicated by an ox-cart, placed as a monument outside the *Consejo Deliberante* (the city’s council). This cart is shown in Figure 4. Attributed to the settler Rosa family, the cart is typical of those used by European settlers to transport themselves and goods to the city in its earliest days.

Mapuche representation in UAI works as a rejection of the ordered modernity of such settler narratives, a social communication articulating a framing of agency, and enforcing Mapuche presence in public space. This accompanies the physical presence of Mapuche activists during protests and events, where the Wenufoye is displayed prominently and often in solidarity with other causes.

Figure 5



Figures 3 and 5 are both from the aforementioned police station, which is also next to a rebuilt military guard tower, that represents a fortification built by the Argentines during the conquest of the desert. The historical and social significance of these sites make them a magnet for UAI, since they themselves represent hegemonic state authority. This is an example of how the spatiality of UAIs, uses frames of injustice and agency as social communication pieces. The message of what is explicitly said by the graffiti being amplified and contextualised by the space it occupies. Figure 5 shows the phrase ‘*Amulepe Taiñ Weichan*’ (Let our struggle continue), which is a common phrase shouted at Mapuche meetings. Due to the fact that few people can be expected to read Mapudungun, the presence of the language itself is a UAI of social communication with the framing of agency. During the fieldwork period, other than in some place names⁵ there was a distinct absence of Mapuche symbols and language. This is in stark contrast to Chile where in areas of Gulumapu (Eastern/Chilean Wallmapu), such as Temuco, trilingual (Spanish, Mapudungun and English) signs at tourist destinations are common along with the prominent display of the Wallmapu flag. This is

⁵ Whilst Neuquén is a Mapudungun name, many places were renamed by the colonisers. The city of General Roca, named after a leading officer of the conquest of the desert and a future Argentine president, is called Fiske Menuco in Mapudungun. Many Mapuche and those in solidarity with them have taken to calling the city Fiske, and I often heard it named as a combined Fiske Roca.

partly due to successes of the Mapuche struggle there, but also the form that neoliberal multiculturalism has taken in Chile (Michel 2019). This means that in Puelmapu (Western/Argentine Wallmapu) presencing Mapudungun is very much “one front of a many fronted struggle”, as one Mapuche contact told me (interview 2023). In Puelmapu. The organisation *Kizu Iñchiñ* is an organisation of Mapuche activists at the local University of Comahue (UNCO, Comahue is also a Mapudungun name) that calls for more Mapuche and Mapudungun representation through bilingual signage and also running workshops for teaching Mapuche culture and history.

Figure 6



Figure 6 shows part of a mural and graffiti cluster at the UNCO campus in Neuquén. The depiction is of Santiago Maldonado, an activist from Buenos Aires who disappeared in 2017 after a protest was dispersed by security forces in Chubut, and whose body was found a few weeks later in the Chubut river. The book *Wenüy: Por la Memoria Rebelde de Santiago Maldonado* (Anonimo 2018), was compiled in his memory with *Wenüy* being a Mapuche word for friend. This solidarity is represented in Figure 6, which is a mural of Santiago Maldonado, with the colours of the Wenufoye flag above him. The protests in Chubut, which is the province to the south of Rio Negro, were both in support of Mapuche occupations of land owned by Benetton. Maldonado, as a non-Mapuche is often depicted alongside Mapuche symbols and colours. In this mural he is depicted standing in front of a beautifully painted vista of rivers mountains and plains representing Patagonia, and below a stylised version of the Wenufoye. In memorialising *Wenüy* such as Santiago Maldonado, clear linkages of solidarity are expressed exemplifying memorials as an intervention of social communication. Unlike previous examples of social

communicative UAI, the memorialisation of killed comrades is a framing of injustice, articulating a slow resistance of present-making through memory.

Figure 7



Figure 7, is another mural from the UNCO campus, which functions as a relatively safe space for mural painting,⁶ though artists do not sign the pieces unlike at the *museo del aire libre* (discussed below). The mural commemorates the assassination, by a European immigrant anarchist, of an Argentine police chief, Ramón Lorenzo Falcón in 1909. This was in revenge for a police led massacre of workers at a rally in Buenos Aires. The mural entitled ‘100 years of direct action’ interestingly points out on the left-hand side that Falcón was a *militar* (military officer) who served in the conquest of the desert. This serves as a social communication, historically linking the leftist/workers movement and the Mapuche movement- pointing out that the leaders of the genocide campaigns against the Mapuche are not only the same ruling class, but often the same people. It became apparent during fieldwork that the acceptance of the conquest as a genocide is a common signifier of professed solidarity with the Mapuche. One interviewee, who is not Mapuche, but claims solidarity with the Mapuche, channelled a sentiment that was perhaps first expressed in the work of Eduardo Galeano about the Latin American region in general

⁶ Law enforcement in Argentina must be invited onto public university campuses.

(1971). They explained the inherent relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous in Northern Patagonia: “We all have Mapuche blood, in our veins or on our hands” (interview 2023). This refers to complex narratives and histories of victims and perpetrators in places that have experienced colonial violence against Indigenous peoples.

Protest UAI

Protest UAI functions as direct calls to and for action, blurring boundaries between action that is political and artistic which “not only try to raise consciousness, they also call for socio-political change” (Hoop et al. 2022, 6). This aspect means that the framing of the message and the spatiality are configured differently to social communication according to intended audience and purpose.

The protection of drinking water, aquifers, rivers and lakes is often a unifying factor for many UAIs and movements that make explicit demands around environmental issues in the region. This is likely exacerbated by the aridity of the region outside of the river valleys (see Map 2). UAIs that discuss water issues are common at protest marches, often painted, stencilled or printed on placards and held aloft. Protest marches and placards combine the literality, materiality and spatiality of graffiti, literally (as text) moving their message through the city, adjacent to particular places, often centres of political power.

Figure 8



Figure 8 is a placard taken from the aforementioned protest march in Mendoza city. The photo shows a placard reading *La Ley 7722 No Se Toca. No Al Fracking* (Don't touch law 7722. No to Fracking). An oil well is placed within a water drop, below yellow mountains, which the carrier told me represents *Cerro Amarillo* (Yellow Mountain, a proposed gold mining site). A famous Argentine children's cartoon, *Mafalda*,⁷ is depicted as making the demand. As aforementioned, water is a common unifying theme between movements in Argentina, with the focus on clean (potable) water, often being linked with Mapuche cosmology (explored later in this article) and environmental frames.

Figure 9



Much explicitly Mapuche UAIs calls for the release of Mapuche political prisoners. This is common on both sides of the Andes, both in solidarity and due to both governments systematically incarcerating Mapuche activists or 'terrorists'.⁸ Figure 9 consists of three references to this in a graffiti cluster, on the wall of a bank on the central Avendida Argentina in Neuquén. The graffiti and pastes are relatively new with a previous layer of graffiti that has been cleaned or washed away over time being just visible, the word *Justicia*

⁷ Her character is based on well informed but idiosyncratic opinions.

⁸ Both the Argentine and Chilean state authorities refer to 'Mapuche Terrorism' in order to delegitimise Mapuche Protests

(Justice) being still legible. To the right is a graffiti stencil that states *Libertad A Las Presas Mapuches* (Liberate the Mapuche-Female-Prisoners). The Graffiti likely refers to the particular crisis point of seven *Machi* (spiritual leaders) who were placed under house arrest on charges of sedition in November 2022 after a police raid on the reclaimed community land of the *Lafken Winkul Mapu Lof*. This is near Bariloche in Rio Negro province (*Pagina 12* 2023). The left-hand paste is a slogan in Mapudungun: *Wiñotupe Taiñ Machi Ñi Rewe Mew Mariwew* (Return our *Machi* to their *Rewe*). *Machi* refers to a Mapuche who acts as a medium between the terrestrial and the spiritual world. *Rewe* means a sacred place, where ceremonies are performed.

The use of Mapudungun here shows us how the lines of protest graffiti, that makes specific demands and social communication in UAIs become blurred. Mapudungun is not understood widely in the city, so anything written in the language functions as social communication of presence. Here though, the demand and its relationship to the other UAIs in the cluster show a protest UAI framing. While the meaning of the paste is a relatively exclusive framing (due to language) it serves to articulate a key demand for the Mapuche. A demand which is effectively repeated in the aforementioned stencil to the right in Spanish, that the Mapuche prisoners must be released, yet with the spiritual and cultural framing of *machi* and *rewe* removed. Instead, the framing in Spanish becomes that the Mapuche women prisoners must be released.

This itself is significant, as aforementioned non-gendered terms are often used in Mapuche UAIs. In Spanish the 'a' letters in *Las Presas* denote them as female while *Los Presos* would be the male form, which is traditionally dominant. Whilst the female form is used here to denote specifically female prisoners, I have seen the same slogan written as *Lxs Presxs*, in Chile (where it is referring to prisoners of different sexes) which is a non-gendered version, the 'lxs' being a different variation of the also neutral 'les' seen earlier. This is used rather than the more conventional use of the masculine form as dominant. Carolina Tosi (2021) explains how activists' shifting use of non-gendered forms in Spanish function as a 'glotopolitical intervention' in public discourse dissenting from patriarchal discourse. The Spanish text of Figure 9 explicitly refers to, Mapuche female prisoners, while the Mapudungun refers to the same prisoners only by their spiritual role, *Machi*. *Machi* are predominantly women but may be men or non-conforming to binary gender categories, with the term being ungendered in Mapudungun (Bacigalupo 2004). The ethnic and female framing in the Spanish text could be understood as a strategic choice used to emphasise the specific identity of the women targeted by the state. The coexistence of these UAI framings

demonstrates complex layers of negotiations that shift depending on the audience.

Figure 10



Figure 10 is a memorial for Cristina Linkopan a *Lonko* (chief) from the Gelay Ko Lof. A Mapuche anti-fracking activist and leader whose death from pulmonary hypertension in 2013 is blamed on drinking contaminated water caused by the oil extraction company Apache (*Resumen Latinoamericano* 2022). The stencil is an image of Cristina's face with the accompanying words: *A Cristina lo mato Apache. No al fracking* (Apache killed Cristina. No to Fracking). Here we can see the aforementioned memorialisation of killed comrades being used in the context of protest UAI, demanding an end to fracking, within a framing of injustice.

Utopian Experimentation

UAIs as utopian experimentation are pieces that are placed in a framing of agency. Similar to social communication in the fact they are aimed at an intervention in order to foster solidarity, these pieces tend to have a more universally acceptable and understood message. They are utopian in their presentation of a possible future, often presenting causes, such as environmentalism and Indigenous struggles as somewhat inherently intertwined, rather than arguing for a particular cause or solidarity. Such work can be powerful and is often reflected in the fact that pieces are usually brightly painted, complex murals.

Figure 11



Figure 11 is a mural painted opposite the central park of Neuquén city. It depicts a flaring oil well, set inside a landscape of the mountains and lakes that are a feature of Neuquén Province's western portions. The stars are a common Mapuche symbol as is the Pewen tree. Two figures are hunched low on a sandy coloured ground covered with aridity mud cracks. This is another feature of the landscape, a contrast between the meltwater of the Andes forming lakes and rivers, and the dryness of the surrounding desert. The two figures represent *Ngenko*, water spirits from Mapuche cosmology. A water spring erupts from under them in a flow that contains swimming fish and then the slogan: *El Agua Vale mas Que El Petroleo* (water is worth more than oil). The mural is attributed to the aforementioned APCA, which is quite prominent in supporting anti-fracking and Mapuche causes. APCA has a significant number of Mapuche members. The slogan itself is potentially quite controversial in Neuquén, considering the province produces more than 50% of Argentina's oil and gas (Forni et al. 2021).

Figure 12



Figure 12 is a mural painted by the artist *Turkas*. It is part of the open air gallery on the city cemetery wall “*Museo del Aire Libre*”(Open Air Museum) and is entitled “*Derechos de los Pueblos y Comunidades Indigenas*” (Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Communities). The mural displays a Mapuche Machi with a traditional *kultrún* (drum) which is painted with the central symbol of the Wenufoye flag. The figure is surrounded by local plants with the mountains and lakes of the region stylised as the background.

The depiction of Indigenous peoples as inherently tied to nature has historical and colonial linkages, including the essentialisation captured in Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui’s concept of the *indio permitido* (permitted Indian) in the context of neoliberal multicultural policies (in Hale 2004). While Indigenous cosmologies are sometimes co-opted or represented in ways that commodify or oversimplify them, such as in Western conservation or environmental governance frameworks (Robbins 2019; Mann and Wainwright 2018), they are also mobilised by Indigenous peoples and allies as part of utopian experimentation, envisioning alternative futures and post-capitalist possibilities (Escobar 2008).

The legal legitimacy of such murals, which can be seen in the fact that the artists have added their name and Instagram accounts to the pieces, (also there are information boards, that give the name of the piece provided with the seal of the city government), limits their potential as resistance to hegemonic power somewhat. As such, the pieces often don’t have particularly controversial slogans and are not direct calls to action. Latorre (2018) states that such pieces are often aimed at creating new relationships with the state and reforming national identities in the post-dictatorship world of the region.

Reactionary UAI

Unlike anti-extractivist and pro-Mapuche interventions, I encountered almost no street art celebrating fracking or extractive development during fieldwork. This absence is significant not because extractivist discourse lacks visibility, but because it already occupies a dominant position within the urban landscape and public discourse of the city. UAIs often operate in dubious legality because they are counter-hegemonic whereas extractive materialities and their narratives of progress are already prevalent in the legalised discourses of the city. During the Neuquén provincial governor election campaign of 2023, the largest political parties and candidates (with the exception of the Frente Izquierda, leftist alliance) used images of fracking wells, smiling *Petroleros* (oil industry workers) in clean orange overalls as representations of prosperity. This was true particularly of the incumbent

mayor of Neuquén city Mariano Gaido, of the provincial Peronist party (MPN) whose catchy theme song and videos of him wearing high visibility clothing and hard hats were inescapable in the city during the campaign.

The presence of the extractive industries, and their supporters runs through with sponsorship deals for local sports teams and events, signage for the wells themselves on the roads to the fracking boom towns such as Añelo. More affluent areas of the cities contain many of the work vehicles from oil industry workers, with large Toyota Landcruiser pickup trucks, with YPF (state oil company) or private oil company branding on the doors. This is the more legitimated discourse of presence and hegemonic power, that UAI's often aim to counter.

Mapuche and Indigenous representation and present-making threatens nationalist narratives of the conquest of the desert and the settler colonial history of the state. A rise in anti-Mapuche and pro-state narratives have emerged concurrently with resistance movements. They reject characterisations of the conquest of the desert as genocide and often deny massacres that were committed by state forces. Reactionary UAI, is a framing device that attempts to negate this challenge to hegemonic settler narratives by the delegitimisation of UAI counter hegemonic narratives. They emerge as attempts to reassert dominant settler narratives when such narratives are challenged by UAI's, by contesting claims of genocide, state violence or Indigenous presence.

Figure 13



Figure 13 is a Mural at the Neuquén UNCO campus that depicts state violence. A Soldier dressed in an antique Argentine military uniform is shown shooting at blindfolded people, with blindfolded corpses lying in front of them. The victims are stylised and unidentifiable. Yet the uniform of the executioner points to the period of the conquest of the desert- or of massacres of leftists by the state during the same period. However, on the left side is a stylised representation of the *madres de la plaza del mayo* (Mothers of the Plaza del Mayo), recognisable by their white *pañuelos* (head scarves). The protests of these women against the atrocities committed by the 1976-1983 military dictatorship, the aforementioned second genocide, have made them symbols of resistance. The words (in Spanish) ‘memory’ and ‘identity’ are written in the centre, with the mural serving as a memorial likely for both genocides. The Mural has been overlain with a reactionary graffiti that states *No Fueron* – (they were not). The graffiti is attempting to delegitimise the mural by stating that it doesn’t represent the truth. Right wing narratives in Argentina often claim that the claims of genocide in both cases are illegitimate, and that the number 30 000 (disappeared people during the dictatorship) is far too high.

These rejections of counter-narratives often aim at supporting the hegemonic vanishing of the Mapuche, recasting them and their history as illegitimate. In and of themselves, reactionary UAI do not often present powerful messages or visuals, relying on direct negation, or delegitimizing narratives.

Figure 14



Figure 14 is a mural in the centre of Neuquén, five blocks from the central Avenida Argentina in Neuquén capital. The mural itself depicts Mapuche people. A reactionary graffiti overlay has been painted that states: *Mapus=Inglaterra* (pejorative for Mapuche people equal the United Kingdom). The graffiti's meaning comes from a Right Wing Argentinian slur that Mapuche resistance is funded by the United Kingdom (*La Izquierda Diario* 2017). This is a particularly painful accusation considering the key role played by British finance in the colonisation of Patagonia (Bandieri 2000). The UK is often represented in graffiti from both pro-state and anti-capitalist perspectives. This is likely due to the coloniality of the control of the Malvinas Islands and the continued ownership of large amounts of land and wealth by the descendants of British families in Patagonia. Despite such reactionary graffiti being aimed at delegitimisation, the support of dominant nationalist narratives is part of a wider campaign of Indigenous erasure and delegitimisation. On March 30th 2023 the provincial legislature of Mendoza enacted the racist and exclusive decision that Mapuche people were in fact not legitimately '*pueblos originarios*' (Indigenous peoples⁹) in the context of Mendoza, which is the limit of their authority (*Chequeado* 2023). This represents a narrative pushed by right-wing Argentine groups, that the Mapuche were in fact invaders from what is now Chile (see Wade, Burman and Lilja 2026). Differing versions of this narrative circulate, often instrumentalizing the historical presence of Mapuche workers born in what is now Chile who moved to Argentina as labourers, while ignoring the long-standing territorial continuities and displacement processes that shaped these movements (Paz Argel and Cabrapan Duarte 2025; Huiliñir-Curio 2025).

Concluding Remarks

In looking at UAIs the article has shown common discursive threads running through counter-hegemonic narratives in the region as they articulate slow resistance. This has been done by looking at the collective framings of agency and injustice. Framings of agency call attention to the slow resistance of Mapuche people and their allies, by highlighting their presence, and rejecting hegemonic narratives of extractive capital and the absence of Indigenous people.

Not all UAIs that state Mapuche causes can be confidently attributed to Mapuche actors. Some may be created by allies or other movements, or perhaps anyone. This article focuses on the effects of these interventions

⁹ The Spanish terms *pueblos originarios* and *indigena* is collapsed in English as Indigenous.

in asserting presence, contesting settler colonial narratives, and making counter-hegemonic claims, rather than on individual authorship. In this sense, UAIs can be understood both as collective artefacts of resistance and as text, in which Mapuche issues are often centralised, even when direct attribution is uncertain

Framings of Injustice explicitly highlight the historical and continuing conflict, repeatedly linking the struggles of today with the history of settler colonial genocide, using memory, such as the present-making of fallen comrades as part of a resistance through time. By using a modified version of Hoop et al.'s (2022) typology of artistic urban interventions the article has looked at how strategies of social communication for mobilizing actors, protest graffiti for making specific demands and utopian experimentation for providing visions of the future, are utilised by movements as discursual interventions that are marked by both what they say, and where they are saying it. Additionally, reactionary UAI, produced by reactionary forces, has been looked at, showing how UAIs can enter into dialogue with each other.

Slow resistance, through its implacable rejection of hegemonic narratives, creates cracks and fissures in hegemonic notions of the real (Burman 2017; Lilja 2021) with the discourse produced by many apparently Mapuche UAIs rejecting many Argentine state-founding national myths. Such UAIs present counter-hegemonic narratives, demonstrating that "*No Hay Una Sola Historia*" (There is not only one History/Story). This is part of a slow resistance through time, utilizing a memorialisation of the struggle through martyrdom, and presence with the spatialities of UAIs contextualised within the history of resistance in the region. Such spatialities are always pertinent as "space, place, and territory have become both physical and discursive sites of Indigenous resistance" (Latorre 2018, 91). This historical linkage is seen through different groups presenting solidarity with the Mapuche national movement, while themselves having different and potentially conflicting relations with the state. This may ultimately come down to conflicting and intertwining conceptualisations, identities and impositions of citizenship. In answering the question, 'how do local Indigenous and allied actors make their presence and resistance visible in public spaces, and how do these practices build alliances, consensus, and alternative imaginaries?' the article has attempted to demonstrate how resistance to the epistemes of extractive capital, national narratives of progress and wealth, and the myth of the Vanishing Indian, is performed through the present-making of counter-narratives in urban spaces through UAIs. By looking at UAIs, the article shows how such resistance takes place across time and space, with discourse highlighting historical context, memorialisation and spatialities. Linkages between groups through alliances and coalitions are demonstrated

in such pieces. It is also open to discussion how contradictions between different conceptualisations of identity and citizenship, as well as the goals of different movements, such as Indigenous rights, and environmentalist groups are understood, smoothed out or brought to the fore. The scale of the social, political, economic and cultural shifts taking place in Northern Patagonia calls for further research to examine often new and complex forms of resistance and conflict.

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