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Articles

Configuration of identities in migratory contexts: investigation of daily practices in Dominican hairdressing salons in Santiago de Chile

Configuración de identidades en contextos migratorios: indagación de prácticas cotidianas en peluquerías dominicanas en Santiago de Chile

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to contribute to the field of study on identity configuration in migratory contexts, by investigating daily practices carried out in hairdressing salons in Santiago de Chile. The above was carried out through ethnographic research for 18 months (2015 and 2016). It was obtained that the hairdressing space is organized around the practice of Afro hair straightening and the so-called Dominican brushing, which together with ways of using the hairdressing salons, generate belonging and, at the same time, differences and hierarchies between women, produced in the intersectionality between nationality, gender and "race". From the hairdressing salon as an attempt at their own place, disputes, resistance and transactions are generated with the local context. A limitation of this article is not to account for the male perspective, its practices and conceptions regarding the beauty work of the body.

Keywords: Dominican migration, gender, ethnography, daily practices, identity, intersectionality.

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Resumen:

El propósito de este artículo es aportar al campo de estudio sobre configuración de identidades en contextos migratorios, por medio de la búsqueda de prácticas cotidianas realizadas en las peluquerías en Santiago de Chile. Lo anterior se llevó a cabo a través de una indagación etnográfica durante 18 meses (años 2015 y 2016). Se obtuvo que el espacio de la peluquería se organiza en torno a las prácticas del alisado del cabello afro y el llamado *brushing* do-



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minicano, las que, junto a maneras de usar la peluquería, generan pertenencia y, al mismo tiempo, diferencias y jerarquías entre mujeres, producidas en la interseccionalidad entre nacionalidad, género y “raza”. Desde la peluquería como intento de lugar propio, se generan disputas, resistencias y transacciones con el contexto local. Una limitación del presente artículo es no dar cuenta de la perspectiva masculina, de sus prácticas y concepciones respecto al trabajo de belleza del cuerpo. Palabras clave: migración dominicana, género, etnografía, prácticas cotidianas, identidad, interseccionalidad.

Introduction

This article seeks to contribute to the field of study on identity configuration in migratory contexts by investigating the daily practices carried out in international-Dominican hairdressing salons in a neighborhood of Central Station (Estación Central), which is a commune in Santiago de Chile. This is part of a completed doctoral study¹ on the configuration of subjectivities of Dominican women in Santiago from these spaces.

Following Candelario (2000), the space of Dominican hairdressing salons is relevant for the study of female subjectivities in that it is “a window into the contextualized complexity of Dominican identity (...), where girls and women learn to transform their bodies (...) into socially valued, culturally specific, and race-determining displays of femininity” (Candelario, 2000, p. 135). In these spaces, a sense of belonging is produced that, as Mansilla and Imilán (2018) point out in their article on Afro-Caribbean beauty salons in downtown Santiago de Chile, is put into practice and expressed through their bodies: “migrants produce territory on their bodies, communicating a sense of belonging through the expressiveness of their bodies” (Mansilla & Imilán, 2018, p. 254). However, in the migratory context, Dominican beauty salons do not constitute reproduction practices of “origin”, but rather, it is from there that differences are produced with the local context. That is, in such a space of contact between diverse sociocultural practices, a “contaminated yet connective fabric” is formed (Bhabha, 2010), where there are disputes, resistance and transactions generated with local beauty practices and their frameworks of self-valuation regarding the woman’s body.

The results presented here were obtained through ethnographic immersion (Velasco & Díaz de Rada, 1997) in the daily life of Dominican hairdressing salons in a neighborhood of the Central Station commune, located along Libertador Bernardo O’Higgins Avenue (Alameda), in Santiago de Chile. The following question guided the fieldwork: What are the daily practices carried out in the Dominican hairdressing salons of Central Station, and what meanings do they have? In this way, a dense ethnographic account was sought (De la Torre, 2018) that involves the translation of a practice and its meanings, codes and values.

¹ A preliminary version of the research results was presented in the VIII Jornadas de Investigación en Antropología Social “Santiago Wallace” (2016). <http://iiassw.filo.uba.ar/>

The questions addressed from the daily practices explored in “international-Dominican” hairdressing salons, considered as spaces where processes of identity production and racialized differentiation of Dominican women in Chile are constructed, are relevant to the extent that they provide empirical knowledge from a primary source to studies on Afro-descendant migrant women in Chile, who are usually excluded and made invisible. This work contributes to the field of studies on gender, ethno-racial and national identities in international migrations, from the discussion of daily and sociocultural practices linked to beauty, the body and, specifically, hair as an object. At the same time, the different ways of saying things can be analyzed, as a way of investigating transactions and resistance as subjective frameworks that operate in the area of identity problems, in the context of Latin American migration.

In the first section, the article presents the background of Dominican migration to Chile. The above refers to the emigration of Dominican women to their main destinations, Spain and the United States, as well as to Dominican immigration to Chile since 2010. The second section addresses the conceptual debates on Dominican hairdressing salons understood as places of identity production in the migratory context and on the notion of national identity and gender, as well as daily practices, understood as tactics and strategies that immigrants carry out in the city, its spaces and its places. In the third section, the results of ethnographic research are presented. In turn, this section is divided into three subsections. The first subsection describes the “international-Dominican” hairdressing salons in a neighborhood of the Central Station commune in Santiago. The second subsection analyzes the phrase “The hairdressing salon is like our embassy, the place where you feel at home”, to describe the way in which it operates as an identity strategy. In the third subsection, the designation of hairdressing salons as “international-Dominican” is analyzed in terms of spaces of dispute, resistance and transactions with the local context through the tactics used in the relocation process of Dominican hairdressing salons in Santiago de Chile. Finally, the last section presents the conclusions of the article.

Background on Dominican Migration to Chile

Emigration of Dominican Women

The history of international migration from the Dominican Republic is long-standing. Experts on the subject (Tejeda, 2016; Alcalde, 2011; Sorensen, 2005; Bissainthe, 2003) converge in identifying that the massive outflow of Dominicans occurred during the economic recession of the 1980s. Currently, according to the Migration Profile of the Dominican Republic (Organización Internacional para las Migraciones [OIM], 2017), the emigration of Dominican men and women is equivalent to approximately 20% (including descendants) of the population of that nationality. As noted, the main destinations of Dominican emigration have been the United States, Puerto Rico and Spain. The patterns of international migration, since the mid-1990s, have remained relatively constant until today, that is, it is “a country that mainly emits migrants for

economic reasons, which in turn has high labor immigration” (OIM, 2017, p. 59), mostly from Haiti.

Regarding the migration of Dominican women to the United States, initial migrations comprised the skilled middle class who left the country during the Trujillo dictatorship and the government of its successor, José Antonio Balaguer (Bissainthe, 2003). The women who emigrated, in those years, did so as “accompanying wives” (Sorensen, 2005) and not as part of their own project. On the other hand, the massive emigration that occurred after the economic crisis of the 1980s “affected almost all social strata, especially the peasant classes, due to the collapse of the rural economy” (Bissainthe, 2003, p. 141). In this second migratory wave, there is a variation in the leadership of the process because female migration this time would be driven by the women’s own desire to seek employment options with their exit (Alcalde, 2011). It is this second wave of Dominican women that emigrated mostly to Spain.

According to various authors (Alcalde, 2011; Ariza, 2012; Gregorio, 1998; Sorensen, 2005, 2006), the high feminine component of the Dominican wave to Spain in the 1990s was a “trait that makes it unique in the broadest concert of Latin American nations” (Ariza, 2012, p. 16). Thus, it was characterized by women who assumed an “increasingly leading role” (Sorensen, 2005, p. 164) in their migration, a process that has been explained based on the work available to immigrant women in the services sector.

According to the Migratory Profile of the Dominican Republic (OIM, 2017), the current patterns of feminization of migratory flows in that country can be explained in part by the index of gender inequality, that is, “by the risk of gender-based discrimination and violence that women face” (p. 71) in the country, in addition to external factors, such as economic crises and tougher migration policies in the destination countries of Dominican migration (OIM, 2017).

Dominican Immigration of Women to Chile

Chile, for its part, was established after the return to democracy (late 1990s), due to its economic and political stability, as a pole of attraction for immigrants. Thus, with the onset of democracy, flows of people from neighboring countries such as Peru, Bolivia and Argentina began to arrive. Notable within this flow was the insertion of Peruvian women in domestic work. This was explained by the constitution of specific work niches for female migration, in “(...) activities considered being for ‘immigrant women’, whose emblematic case is domestic work and trade” (Mora, 2008, p. 289). Subsequently, since 2010, the flow of people from Colombia, the Dominican Republic and Haiti began to increase. One difference of these groups present in Chile, with respect to the previous groups, was that many of those were Afro-descendants, such that their phenotype distinguished them as immigrants in Chilean society where the representation of Afro-descendants in the population was small.

In relation to Dominican migration, after the closure of United States borders and the economic crisis in Spain, destinations diversified within the Latin American region, reaching, in recent years, Argentina, Uruguay and Chile (Galaz et al., 2016). Although

Dominican immigration had not been quantitatively prominent in the country, since 2010, it began to increase (Galaz et al., 2016) and is characterized by its notoriously feminine trend because 70% of immigrants were women (Galaz et al., 2016). Faced with the increase in Dominican immigration, the Chilean State applied a restrictive measure in 2012 by requiring a consular visa, which sought to discourage the entry of unwanted foreigners (Bravo, 2015). However, this initiative did not have the expected effect because there was an “artificial” drop in migration statistics: fewer permits were granted, but people continued to enter the national territory illegally (Galaz et al., 2016). In this regard, the *Information Bulletin of the Department of Immigration and Migration* states that “the levels of vulnerability of those women in an irregular situation are worrying, having arrived through human trafficking networks through unauthorized steps” (Galaz et al., 2016, p. 17). Thus, many people of Dominican nationality were left in an undocumented migratory situation, which increased the informal labor market.

In regard to the settlement of the Dominican collective in Chile, this occurred mostly in the national capital, Santiago, where they are inserted in low-skilled jobs in the services and commerce sectors as well as self-employed in “entrepreneurship in matters of beauty, clothing, hairdressing” (Galaz et al., 2016, pp. 13-14). Hairdressing salons are concentrated, like other immigrant businesses (Garcés, 2011), both in the central commune of Santiago and in the pericentral commune of Central Station.

Conceptual Debates

Dominican Hairdressing Salons as Places of Identity-Building in a Migratory Context

Dominican hairdressing has been studied in the context of the migration of this group to New York City as well as to Puerto Rico. Authors such as Candelario (2000, 2007) and Amezcuita (2010) have approached these spaces considering them not only as a flexible employment environment for women but also as a place of belonging and reproduction of Dominican culture and identity. Both agree that Dominican salons represent “an important socializing agent that facilitated immigrant and transmigrant adaptation to New York City and helped to sustain Dominican women’s ethno-racial identities as Indo-Hispanic” (Candelario, 2007, pp. 28-29). For Quiñones (2007) and Godreau (2002), hairdressing is a feminine space in which, to a certain extent, the interactions that occur there emancipate women from the restrictions they experience in their daily lives (Quiñones, 2007). In the same vein, Godreau notes that in a beauty parlor, “there is a shared time and intimate contact between women who let themselves to be touched, pulled and washed by others, either in exchange for payment or simply because” (Godreau, 2002, p. 121). Therefore, in these spaces, they provide temporary relief from the pressures and restrictions that fall on them.

Amezcuita (2010), on the other hand, has studied hairdressing salons in the context of migration as places where a sense of community and socialization is created, in which Dominican women can feel a sense of belonging and, in that sense,

acceptance by their culture. Candelario (2007) wondered how Dominican standards of beauty—understood in national and racial terms—interact with American standards in Dominican hairdressing salons. In this regard, she notes that for Dominicans, identifying themselves as Hispanic, both in the United States and in the Dominican Republic, offers them the alternative of being recognized as “black” because Hispanic constitutes a racialized category that is nonwhite and nonblack (Candelario, 2000). Based on these contributions, we set out to investigate the Dominican hairdressing salons of Central Station. What function does Dominican hairdressing salons have for women? What daily practices characterize the space of Dominican hairdressing in Central Station and what are their ideals of beauty? How do those interact with the ideals of beauty prevailing in Santiago?

Ethno-National, Racial and Gender Identities in Daily Practices

As has been seen in the aforementioned studies, hairdressing in the migratory context is considered a space that provides belonging in the migratory context based on the unravelling of a certain identity.

However, the notion of identity must be considered here from a critical perspective that highlights its ideological character (Laclau, 1993; Hall, 2003). Identities constitute those

(...) discursive forms through which a society tries to institute itself as such on the basis of closure, of the fixation of meaning, of the non-recognition of the infinite play of differences. The ideological would be the will to “totality” of any totalizing discourse (Laclau, 1993, p. 20).

In a similar vein, Hall (2003) highlights that the unity and homogeneity that an identity supposes does not have a natural character but is constructed in relation to another because “(...) every identity names as its necessary other, although silenced and tacit, that which it ‘lacks’” (Hall, 2003, p. 19). That is, it is its constitutive outside to the extent that identity is constituted in relation to a difference, “(...) acts through difference, involves discursive work, marking and verification of symbolic limits, the production of ‘boundary effects’. It needs what is outside, its constitutive outside, to consolidate the process” (Hall, 2003, p. 16). In this way, the notion of identity with which we worked refers to discursive practices (Foucault, 2001) that are used strategically and positionally (Hall, 2003).

For her part, Butler (2005), in her critique of identity essentialism, argues that gender identities are not established in a stable manner; “(...) they are never fully and definitively constructed; are reconstituted incessantly and, therefore, are subject to the volatile logic of iterability” (p. 159). That is, there is no “constant substance” that defines them, but they are constituted repetitively.

Now, from postcolonial studies, national identity is conceived as constituted by “ideological maneuvers, through which the ‘imagined communities’ are endowed with essentialist identities” (Bhabha, 2010, p. 396), which are translated as customs, idiosyncrasies, patriotic values, etc. At the same time, in these maneuvers, as Segato

(2007) points out, they “generate otherness” as “hegemonic representations of the nation (...)” (Segato, 2007, p. 29). These representations constitute social and cultural ideals to which individuals should adhere. Those ideals that generate identification and belonging do not operate in a neutral way; that is, they do not all have the same social value, but as they are crossed by dimensions of power, they are organized hierarchically.

Similarly, gender relations are unequally constituted. From the field of migration and gender studies, the way in which these inequalities are at the base of migratory dynamics (Mora, 2008), the way in which they are structured (Barral Mallimaci, 2011) and their social practices (Oso & Parella, 2012) has been made clear.

Regarding the area of social practices studied here, the body and beauty work (Arango, 2011; Candelario, 2000) of hairdressing salons put cultural conceptions and ideals regarding gender into practice. Along these lines, Arango (2011) notes that “(...) cultural mandates are exercised in a different way on men and women, the latter being the main recipients of esthetic imperatives” (Arango, 2011, p. 6), which constitute the female body as a “body for someone else”. As Butler (2017) points out, what makes a body exist is the perspective of others: “[and] I exist, as a body, (...), not even in the first instance for myself, but (...) my body is established through perspectives that I cannot inhabit, but that surely inhabit me” (Butler, 2017, p. 81). In this way, hair and beauty work for women, conceptualized as personal services of body and emotional work (Arango, 2011), is aimed at showing how the image of the body approaches the sociocultural ideal of femininity (Tubert, 2010).

This is how in the field of sociocultural ideals that are put into practice in the hairdressing space, the gender category cannot be considered in isolation because, as Magliano (2015) points out, social classifications are produced. It is necessary to “think of gender as ethnicized, always racialized, always influenced by class, and so on” (Magliano, 2015, p. 697), that is, in intersection with other categories that perpetuate inequalities that work through intimate, reciprocal and contradictory relationships between them (McClintock, 1995).

In the Latin American context, the processes of female migration are linked “[to] the perception that the imaginaries that racialize and marginalize migrants cross borders and often have a stronger impact on migrant women” (Guizardi et al., 2018, p. 47). Thus, the intersectional perspective allows us to understand the social position of migrant women as a product of “[a] complex mechanism of power in which there are structures of discrimination that pressure them in a multitude of ways simultaneously” (Cea-Merino et al., 2015, p. 36), producing situated and temporal identities according to migration contexts.

In this way, identity-building processes in contexts of dislocation and estrangement do not necessarily imply fixations on a subjective position; on the contrary, they often characterize struggles for identity (Bartkowski, 1995) that are put into play in everyday sociocultural practices. We understand everyday sociocultural practices as “underlying value systems that structure the fundamental issues at stake in everyday life, unnoticed through the consciousness of the subjects, but decisive for their individual and group identity” (Mayol, 1999, p. 7). Thus, identities imply a social location from which to enunciate and dispute, associate and negotiate or trade with others, constituting the “art of daily warfare” (De Certeau, 1996b, p. 44). In this “polemic” conception of daily

life, as De Certeau (1996b) calls it, strategies are distinguished from tactics. Regarding the former, he understands them as “(...) a specific type of knowledge through the power to provide oneself with one’s own place, (...) a victory of space over time, insofar as one can capitalize on its advantages” (De Certeau, 1996b, p. 43). Tactics constitute “ways of moving through the place of the other, taking advantage of ‘opportunities’ (...), establishing a sort of *plurality* and creativity, thanks to the art of interval” (De Certeau, 1996b, p. 36). Thus, because tactics have no place and bet on time, they allow mobility, while strategies depend on place.

In turn, with reference to time, the author relates the notion of space with tactics, saying that:

(...) space is a practiced place (...) it is a crossing of mobilities. It is somewhat animated by the set of movements that unfold there. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it (...) In contradistinction to the place, it has thus none of the univocity or stability of a “proper” (De Certeau, 1996a, p. 129).

Thus, in a situation of migration, subjects resort to tactics and strategies that allow them to move in the place of the Other, finding deviations and shortcuts in the “prevailing order”, in which they use identities (or an aspect of them) to their advantage. At the same time, they make certain spaces their own through the ways in which they practice culture.

Methodology

The investigation was carried out through ethnographic immersion (Velasco & Díaz de Rada, 1997) in the space of the international-Dominican hairdressing salons of Central Station. Thus, from the perspective of daily life (De Certeau, 1996b; Reguillo, 2000), participant observation was carried out regarding the practices that occur in these hairdressing salons, ways of doing and saying (De Certeau, 1996b), of Dominican women in Santiago de Chile.

The fieldwork lasted 18 months (between 2015 and 2016) and was carried out in three hairdressing salons in an area encompassing twenty blocks where a dozen of these salons could be found. Among the group of salons where the ethnography was performed are those belonging to Juan and Raquel,² from which the fragments presented here have been extracted from the ethnographic accounts of the daily practices of these hairdressing salons.

For the investigation, observation guides on the daily practices and of beauty work of women in the hairdressing salons were used, as well as interviews conducted in the same salon with some of the women, the male or female owners, hairdressers, weekly customers and those who visited regularly. At the time of the fieldwork, the ages of the women ranged from 19 to 50 years, and they had migrated to Chile at different times. Raquel, for example, had been living in Chile for sixteen years, while Juan had only

² Fictional names are used.

been there for two years. Among the customers and regular visitors to the salon, the majority had been in Chile for two to four years and were engaged in domestic services and customer service work. A smaller number of women in hairdressing salons had small businesses selling products (Dominican and others) or services, and very rarely, there were those who were professionals with a university or technical education.

Results

The “International-Dominican” Hairdressing Salons of Central Station

In the capital of Chile, Santiago, the central commune of the same name is the commune with the largest number of immigrants (21% of its population), followed by the pericentral communes of Independencia (19.7%), Central Station (11, 5%) and Recoleta (9.1%) (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas de Chile [INE], 2018). These three communes constitute a “central macrozone” that “encompasses 45% of the country’s immigrants” (Atisba Monitor, 2018, p. 9).

It is not by chance that this commune concentrates the residence of Latin American immigrants because historically it was the gateway to the capital through the main railway station of the country. In effect, the Central Station of Santiago was built at the end of the 19th century and was a forced passage for rural immigrants who came to work in the capital. Currently, the train station maintains limited service, connecting the capital only with surrounding rural areas, which is mainly used by workers and students.

From the train station, advancing along Libertador Bernardo O’Higgins Avenue (Alameda)—the main artery of the capital—towards the west, in an area of approximately twenty blocks, there are about ten Dominican beauty salons, which are recognizable by the flag on their signs.

If the commercial premises of this area—restaurants, grocery stores and call centers—are considered, as an indication of the nationalities of those who live and work in the sector, it can be deduced that, in addition to the Dominican population, there are Peruvians and Colombians. When walking along the south side of Alameda Avenue, one can see various commercial stores, including one that sells Peruvian beers and food, *Cevichería*, and another that sells grilled chicken, *La Shoppería*. Next, to this place is the international *El flow* hairdressing salon, which consists of two premises whose facade stands out for its red and black tiles. It is a chain of Dominican hairdressing salons aimed at male audiences, mostly Afro-descendants. These locations usually have a large influx of customers, who are situated inside and outside the premises, in the village, while waiting to be served, talking and listening to bachata or *reggaeton* music. Two blocks from *El flow*, Raquel’s hairdressing salon is located on the first floor of a set of medium-rise buildings, built in the 1990s. Raquel’s place is next to the entryway of the set of buildings; therefore, there is a large number of people who enter and leave the building, one of which is where she lives along with other Dominican men and women who go to get their hair brushed, say hello or talk in her salon.

As in the *El flow* salon and others in the sector (Francisca's and Juan's hairdressing salons), Raquel's salon announces itself with a sign that bears the Dominican flag and with the name "Beauty parlor and hairdressing salon. Raquel. International-Dominican". When asking Raquel about the use of the terms "beauty parlor" and "hairdressing salon", she notes that it is to have the two ways in which they are called: the first is the term used in the Dominican Republic and the second in Chile, so as to attract customers from both countries. Likewise, with respect to the terms "international" and "Dominican", she says that "we are outside my country, and we bring a style of haircutting and styling with an international flair". The use of the term refers both to bringing a style from "outside" and to the fact that the hairdresser herself is "outside" of her country and, therefore, could not be called "purely" Dominican. Thus, in a strategic use of the term "international", Raquel seeks to partially denationalize the reference and, in turn, not limit her hairdressing shop only to the Dominican clientele because she knows that if that were the case, her business would never stand a chance.

In the observations made in the hairdressing salons of the sector, during the weekdays, the influx of public is low (approximately five people per day), and the clientele varies between men of Chilean or Peruvian nationality and older Chilean women. As Juan explained, "Dominican men do not cut their hair in women's salons but in those of Dominican men" such as the hair salon *El flow*. Thus, even when hairdressing salons do not specify whether they service women, men or both (unisex), as Chilean salons often advertise, among Dominicans, "it is known" that the majority of Dominican men will not go to hairdressing salons aimed at women.

Raquel explains that the hairdressing business "has its seasons", with days of very few customers and times of the year in which revenue drops substantially: "Sometimes it is not enough because Santiago is not New York and living here is expensive". Believing the hairdressing business as economically unstable means that its owners are constantly evaluating the feasibility of keeping the salons open or closing them and instead working as hairdressers in other establishments. In fact, during the almost two years in which the fieldwork was carried out in the area under study, some of the salons visited did close or changed ownership, and new hairdressing salons were also opened. It is therefore a business that sometimes fails to sustain itself over time or to capitalize on its profits. Despite the above, Raquel explains the proliferation of these hairdressing salons is because "some women work in houses for three years, and when they are given the final [visa], they go to work as a hairdresser. In people's homes, they are exploited for a few *chelititos*".³ Juan, on the other hand, explains that "there is a boom of Dominican hairdressing salons in Chile because it is easy to start one and everyone who comes from the Dominican Republic knows how to use a *blower* (hairdryer)".

Regarding Dominican immigration, Raquel recounted the change that the immigration visa implemented by the Chilean State meant:

³ The name of money, used by Dominican women in the hairdressing salons.

At that time, no visa was needed, most worked as a *nana*,⁴ and there were also doctors and professionals. As the flow became so strong, the door was closed (...). Now many illegal people arrive; they bring them in deceived, undocumented; there are many people entering 'through the hole'.

In this explanation, Raquel uses an expression widely used by Dominican women in hairdressing salons: "enter through the hole", which refers to clandestine entry into the country through human trafficking networks:

They charge them for bringing them in; they tell them they have the papers, and it is a lie. On the way, overland from Ecuador or Peru, they charge them more, and sometimes they dump them and take away their things. They tell them that they have to walk through the desert and only then do they realize that they are going to enter illegally.

This issue was observed in conversations in hairdressing salons, where women expressed concern about how to regularize their immigration status in Chile and what procedures were necessary to obtain a visa, to bring their children or to formalize their status as immigrant workers. In this way, the hairdressing salon functioned for them as a space where they could seek advice on how to solve their immigration documentation problems, which in part gives meaning to Raquel's phrase: "Old customers or people who need guidance come here. They say I am a little embassy".

"The Hairdressing Salon is Like Our Embassy, the Place You Feel at Home"

In visits to Dominican hairdressing salons in the same neighborhood, the importance of hairdressing for both Dominican women and men was repeatedly explained through Juan's phrase: "the hairdressing salon is like our embassy". On one occasion, a young Dominican man who had recently arrived in Santiago and was visiting Juan's salon stated:

Yes, it's that the hairdressing salon is like our embassy, the place where you feel at home, where they play the music of your country, eat the food of your country and talk about what happens there.

Thus, hairdressing is not only referred to as the place where one can access information and shortcuts for carrying out immigration procedures but is associated with those daily practices: ways of preparing food, ways of combing and straightening hair, music that is listened to and the ways of speaking with which they identify. In addition, as long as those practices link them to their daily life in the Dominican Republic, it means being and feeling "at home".

Thus, in the metaphor of a hairdressing salon as the embassy and the embassy as the house, it is a space that at times feels like Dominican territory, as a space of

⁴ The name domestic workers in Chile are referred to.

practices identified as those of that nation. This helped him cope with his life in Santiago: "(...) it is difficult to be alone here; it is a sacrifice to be eating at the wrong time, surrounded by things that you are not used to, being cold, without seeing your family". We interpret the constitution of these spaces of nationalized practices as a strategy that allows restoring, at least while they are there, a sense of identity continuity that, at times, is threatened in migratory transit. Thus, this space fulfills the function of providing some relief in their daily lives as low-skilled migrant women and men in Santiago.

However, despite being a space where "Dominican" ways of practicing culture are shared, which provides a "place of their own" (De Certeau, 1996b), Dominican hairdressing salons in Central Station are precarious; therefore, it is important to highlight that this is an attempt and that it operates in a fluctuating manner.

However, regarding those daily practices that make them feel at home, it is about the way in which Dominican women occupy the hairdressing space. On Saturdays, when hairdressing salons used to be very busy in the afternoons, when women left work and their clientele was mostly Dominican women, there were times when, at first glance, it was not evident who the hairdressers were and who the customers were. Thus, one could see some of the women with curlers on their heads, that is, looking like customers, combing another woman's hair. This is because many of the Dominican women who go as customers to the salons also know—without needing specialized studies—to wash and comb with a blower dryer. As explained by Juan, "everyone coming from the Dominican Republic knows how to blow dry because they comb their hair with each other on the patios of the houses", referring to so-called "patio salons" which, as noted by Candelario (2000), are shops typically "located in a converted front room, patio, or garage space and consisted of an owner-operator and a young neighborhood assistant" (Candelario, 2000, p. 132).

Thus, even when hairdressing salons such as that of Raquel or Juan were established on commercial premises on Alameda Avenue, this scene of women combing their hair as if they were on a home patio could be observed. In this way, while some women drank beer, others looked at their cell phones or ate a banana, one told the others about the problem she had at work or with her husband, and the women gave her opinions or advice, while others slept under the hair dryer.

Most of the collective conversations in the hairdressing salon took place at such a volume that at times gave the impression that they were shouting in fight, while the tune of some famous bachatero was heard during silences in the conversations. In short, it can be said that what was observed there made one think of an intimate public space (a business selling beauty services) (in the inner patio of a house), where a group of friends meet to wash and comb their hair "with each other".

Another aspect of the way they occupy the space of hairdressing salons that makes them feel at home is with respect to conversations and ways of speaking, understood as "(...) ways of appropriating a language" (De Certeau, 1996b, p. 36). This refers both to the idioms as to the ways of using words, i.e., their intonations and to accents of speech, in which a certain national identification operates. Thus, understanding accents as the shaping of the voice by the reference to a nation, modulating its tones in a melody that sounds familiar, it is identified as "belonging" to a nation.⁵

⁵ This concept was developed in another published article (Lara, 2019).

In the migration between Spanish-speaking countries, Central and South America in this case, the differences in the way in which words are used, pronounced and intoned confront the immigrant with the experience of not fully understanding or being understood in what he or she says and what he or she is told. In daily life, they are required to change their way of speaking to speak like the locals. On the other hand, in the hairdressing space, speaking like Dominicans eliminates the effort of articulating meaning and deciphering intonations. In this regard, on various occasions during the fieldwork, the following expression was heard: “How great is it to talk like this, *relaxing*, like in *charcha*”, that is, jokes with double *entendres*, in a space shared between women. Thus, “relaxation” is a function that women attributed to hairdressing, explaining that it is “our way to relax”. This is how María expressed it, when she explained that before going to work as a waitress in a restaurant in the center of Santiago, she stopped by the hairdressing salon “to drink a *chín* (cup) of coffee and get motivated to deal with the restaurant. I laugh with my people for a while and continue on”.

On Saturday afternoons, the hairdressing salon used to be more crowded, and most of the clientele were Dominican women, who got to do their hair or chat after their weekly workday. On one occasion, there was a conversation to which most of the women were paying attention to, and a few men, companions or visitors were present in the room. The topic of discussion was whether a woman feels pleasure having sexual relations with a man, even when she does not want to. One of the women stated, “you don’t feel a thing, you only move thinking about the *chelitos* (money)”. Another woman said that, even when the woman initially did not want to have sex, the friction and the movements of the body already made her feel something, which she explained by gyrating against the chair. This demonstration with the body caused a burst of laughter, and the women present nodded or shook their heads, supporting one opinion or another. This conversation was very loud, almost shouting and with laughter, especially when one of them used words of direct sexual connotation, even in the presence of the researcher, which did not go completely unnoticed. This is corroborated by Altagracia, when she explained that Dominican women were careful when speaking about these issues in front of Chilean people, so as not to be associated with prostitution: “We are careful in front of Chilean women because sometimes they misunderstand and believe we are into prostitution and all that, but it’s that we talk more openly about that”.

In such a way, there were moments in the hairdressing salon, in which they could “relax” and talk as if in *charcha*, without being judged or identified with the stereotype of the Afro-descendant and Caribbean woman dedicated to prostitution.

Another area of daily practices that makes them feel “at home” is with respect to the ways of straightening Afro hair, also called “*pelo malo* (bad hair)” (Godreau, 2002). This method refers to combing through the hair with so-called Dominican *brushing*, which is “the most characteristic of Dominican women”. This process consists of combing Afro hair by means of a manual blow dryer (*blower*). Thus, combing the hair is “passing the blower”, applying heat to a strand of curly hair, while stretching using the brush with enough force to sometimes elicit an outcry of discomfort or pain. This procedure for combing Afro hair constitutes “a specific type of knowledge that sustains and determines the power to give oneself a place” (De Certeau, 1996b, p. 43). This explains the way in which Dominican women use the hairdressing salon: “Dominican

women use salons for regular weekly hair care, not for intermittent haircuts and hair treatments” (Candelario, 2000, p. 134); they return every week to get their hair washed and combed with Dominican *brushing*, which constitutes a ritualized practice.⁶ In this practice, it is about the evaluative and regulatory frameworks, that is, “(...) discursive coagulations of what ‘I am?, what ‘I am not’, what ‘I should be’ and what ‘I should not be’ (...)” (Bleichman, 2010, p. 13), regarding the feminine, which convey the feeling of belonging to the “self” to one of “us” from which to enunciate.

Thus, despite considering the straightening of Afro hair as a practice of constriction to esthetic-moral norms (Godreau, 2002) over a woman’s body, going to the hairdressing salon is considered by the women themselves as a moment of relaxation for them. As noted by Rangelova (2013), “(...) women in Dominican hairdressing salons can take a break from the other pressures and demands that fall on them, in a place where they can receive pleasant attention to the body and their emotions” (Rangelova, 2013, p. 110). However, in the international-Dominican hairdressing salons of Central Station, although these elements of attention to the body and emotions among women in hairdressing salons are present, at the same time, the relationships between them are not exempt from ethno-hierarchical differences in terms of ethno-racial, national and class differences.

The first difference that can be identified is that with Haitian women. In the eyes of the group of Dominican women who visit the hairdressing salons weekly, the grooming practices of Haitian women was negatively viewed, of which it was said: “they never go to the hairdressing salon and they don’t style their hair”. This negative valuation is not a product of the migration to Chile of Dominican and Haitian women but has roots back in the Dominican Republic.

Haitian immigration in the Dominican Republic is characterized by performing low-skilled jobs, such as construction, agriculture and tourism (OIM, 2017). Its increase and undocumented situation “continues to generate rejection by social sectors that press for an increase in deportations of those to their country” (OIM, 2017, p. 66). This negative social view is fed by the history of territorial disputes between neighboring countries in which what Torres-Saillant (2012) calls anti-Haitianism: “[a]n attitude of racial contempt towards Haitians, codified in the term anti-Haitianism as an integral ingredient of their national identity. Dominicans, according to this reasoning, define them as non-haitians; anti-Haitianism appears as a defining component of Dominicanness” (Torres-Saillant, 2012, p. 16).

In this way, Dominican women in hairdressing salons think of Haitians in racial terms, to the extent that Haiti represents the place of the “pure black” (Godreau, 2002), as opposed to the Dominican Republic as a nation of Hispanic character (Reyes-Santos, 2008). The above and the fact that Haitian people are placed in low-skilled jobs in the Dominican Republic places them in the lowest place on the scale of social standing for Dominican hairdressing salons. This could be seen in the conversations in the hairdressing salon, for example, when one of the customers recounting their relationship problems pointed out the following: “because I told him: I’ll be black, but not Haitian”.

⁶ This topic was analyzed in another published article (Lara, 2020).

A second order of hierarchical differences, derived from the above, is verified within the group of regular female Dominican customers of hairdressing salon. These are the differences that women recognized with respect to Dominicans of Haitian descent; for example, after a group conversation in which María had made a joke explicitly referring to what it was like having sex with Chilean men, making all the women present in the room laugh, Raquel explains “it’s because she is Dominican, but his family is all Haitian”.

A third order of hierarchical differences was identified in relation to class differences. Melisa was a fair-haired and light-skinned professional Dominican woman who went to Raquel’s salon every week to comb her hair with Dominican *brushing*. However, she actively removed herself from participating in the social life of the place. While she was in the salon, she kept silent while looking at her cell phone, without interacting with those who were there. Melisa explained that she did not feel part of that group of women because in a class assignment, she pointed out that she belonged to a higher socioeconomic stratum: “I go to the salon just to do my hair, and I leave. I do not like all that relaxing that is done there”. In this way, she expressed her displeasure at the atmosphere of “relaxation” that was formed on Saturdays in that space, but at the same time, she could not stop going every week, to the extent that she considered that “only a Dominican woman knows how to comb our hair”. Thus, Melisa marked a certain class difference with the hairdressing women, while sharing with them a common substrate of ethno-racial order that materialized in what she called “our hair”.

International-Dominican Hairdressing Salons in Santiago as Spaces of Dispute, Resistance and Transactions

As has been said, the establishment of Dominican hairdressing salons in Central Station is considered an identity strategy of this group that attempts to provide itself with a place from which to dispute other norms and valuations regarding the ways of straightening hair and “beauty work” for a woman’s body. These disputes occur in an order of hierarchical differences with women based on the assignment of certain nationalized attributes in a hierarchy of unequal positions on the global scale (Piscitelli, 2008).

Regarding the disputes that occur regarding the hair styles of women present in the context of Central Station, from the international-Dominican hairdressing salon, Colombian women are considered similar in their concern for hair style and body appearance. Based on the identification with this aspect, alliances were generated (they are considered potential customers), as well as disputes and competition. On the other hand, regarding how Peruvian and Chilean women take care of themselves, it was considered that their self-care was lacking, as when Raquel said (addressing the researcher): “You do not do yourself up. You don’t comb your hair, you leave with your hair all messy, and you look, as you say, *chasconas*”. As has been said, Haitian women were rated in the lowest place on the scale regarding their concern for hair styling; therefore, with respect to them, it was frank opposition and contempt.

On the one hand, in relation to Colombian women of African descent, they were scored highly for their concern for straightening their hair, which made them potential customers. This was confirmed by Colombian women who usually went to the Dominican hairdressing salon for Dominican hair straightening and *brushing*. Ramona, a Colombian woman who has lived in Chile four years and worked in domestic service, was a customer of Juan's hairdressing salon and said that "I went to a Chilean hairdressing salon where they burned [my hair], and then a friend recommended to come here because they know how to do it well". Thus, while curly hair is considered a bodily trait of her African descent that is common with Dominican women, she values the knowledge of the hairdressing salons of that nationality regarding how to straighten it without damaging it.

However, as has been said, there were also disputes with Colombian women. On one occasion, a Colombian woman entered the hairdressing salon looking to decorate her nails with "Colombian" designs. Lorena, a Dominican woman who did *manicures* in Raquel's hair salon on Saturdays, seemed to not understand what the woman meant by "Colombian designs"; therefore, the potential customer searched her cell phone for some examples and showed them saying: "look how pretty; that's how they do it there, with many drawings". Lorena answered that she did not know how to do that. She gave the impression of being annoyed by what the woman said and, even when she finally did the work, when it was finished, the Colombian customer commented that the nail art was very simple and too expensive: "You do not do it as in my country". This marks a nationalized difference, where there is a dispute about the way to do nail art.

In relation to Peruvian women in the sector who occasionally came to the salon, Raquel noted differences in the way they view straightening and styling. She thought that they did not spend much time and importance on styling their hair: "they do not let you spend time on the 'blowout', it bothers them (...) They do not like their ends to be turned under; they prefer it straight," which seemed to Raquel too simple and without grace.

Thus, while the positive value of straight hair was not exclusive to Dominican women but also to Colombian, Chilean and Peruvian women, they occasionally went to comb and straighten their hair at Raquel's salon. However, the majority did not remain as regular customers due to the differences and disputes that occurred regarding the ways of doing it, that is, the procedures with which it is achieved.

Regarding the procedures of Chilean women for hair straightening, Raquel explained:

Here, they use a flat iron a lot, and that is not good because it burns the hair (...) the Chileans do not like to be dried a lot with the blow dryer because they say that it damages their hair (...) they prefer the flat iron, but that is what burns more! Although it is much easier and faster, I felt that I wasn't doing anything!

Thus, regarding the differences and disputes that occurred with Colombian, Peruvian and Chilean women, it must be said, on the one hand, that the international-Dominican hairdressing salons of Central Station are configured as a "culturally constructed and hierarchically ordered space, by a set of relationships that produce differences" (Sorensen, 2005, p. 167). That is, we find not only practices that produce

identification and belonging in a national context but also processes of differentiation with other practices of female body care in the local context.

As we have pointed out, these differentiations do not operate homogeneously but are differentially distributed according to how they are discursively located in the valuation hierarchy, shared by women in hairdressing salons.

However, in studies on hairdressing salons in a migratory context, they have been considered transnational spaces because they reproduce norms of the Dominican social and cultural context "(...) regardless of whether women are in the Dominican Republic or in New York" (Amezquita, 2010, p. 15). However, in the relocation of Dominican hairdressing salons in Central Station, it is noted that although those frames of reference and cultural valuations that travel with Dominican women are put into practice in hairdressing salons, they enter into dispute with the local context. Thus, it is not about the reproduction of the norms regardless of where they are located, but rather, there are transactions between ways of doing it, in this case with hair straightening, such that procedures are incorporated into practice of the local context even when they are not valued by them. Such is the case of the procedure of using the "iron", that electrical device that is used to straighten hair and that Raquel considers harmful and capable of only producing simple results. However, with the purpose of attracting Chilean and Peruvian customers, she has incorporated a straightener into her daily hair straightening practices in her hairdressing salon, using it "situationally" (Piscitelli, 2008) for certain purposes.

These processes of contact with the difference in practices and their evaluative and normative frameworks are bidirectional because, on the one hand, it was considered that Dominican women in Santiago have lost the ability to straighten hair: "Here, the Dominicans relax with that". On the other hand, there is a shared appreciation that Chilean women "take better care of themselves and have been influenced by the contagion", that is, the practice of grooming by Dominican and Colombian women. The above shows a mutual affectation in contact, contagion with cultural differences (Bhabha, 2011). In other words, the space of hairdressing salons can be conceived as a zone of affectations between diverse practices and the normative and evaluative frameworks that sustain them.

Another area of transactions is in the situational use of expressions, the use of idioms to achieve their goals. An example of this was when, when talking to a Chilean customer, Raquel used the word "chascón"⁷ to generate trust in the customer. These tactics constitute transactions with the local context, ways of "using the ways of saying of the place as cunning and tactics" (De Certeau, 1996b, p. 46), which allow them to move throughout different social spaces in their daily life in Santiago.

However, in the place of the incorporation of idioms, there were also resistances, that is, as Salazar Parreñas (2001) points out, attempts to mitigate or even eliminate their dislocation. This was put into play when having a conversation with Chilean people, where it was necessary for them to explain the reference of the word before using it, indicating: "*como dicen ustedes* (as you wish)", clarifying that it is used to make oneself understood but that it does not belong to them. When speaking among Dominican women, it did not seem necessary to mention their national reference, but

⁷ What messy hair is called in Chile.

their spontaneous use was interpreted as “being Chileanized”. This process was often resisted by women, as Raquel pointed out that she does not use the word “*cacha*”⁸ because it seemed to her that it sounds badly when they said it: “for us, it does not sound as good as when we hear you say it; it does not sound good when we say it”. This operates as resistance insofar as it is conceived that the national accent corresponds, for it to be coherent, to a nationality —only one—, so that all hybrid phonation and mixed accent that does not adhere to the expected form, to the national canon, is disturbing and sometimes annoying.

Finally, another mode of resistance to incorporating idioms was identified; this consisted of using the words considered Chilean by doing a mimesis (Bhabha, 2011) or exaggerated performance at the time of saying it. Thus, the word was expressed with an intensely pronounced pronunciation and modulation, demonstrating that they are used but that they are not “their own”. Thus, on one occasion late Saturday, the beer had run out, and one of the men present stood up and said “we are going to make *a vaca*”, which, in Chile, is a common way of saying “make a collection” of money among the people present. Thus, while he was collecting the money, he said “put in a *luca!*”, making an exaggerated mimesis that made it clear that he was not Chilean but that by using those words he acted like one. These resistances and transactions described in the use of certain local idioms are understood as marks in the ways of speaking that they account for a certain subjective position regarding their migratory experience.

Conclusions

In this article, some of the daily practices that are carried out in the space of international-Dominican hairdressing salons in Central Station and the role they play in the daily life of Dominican women who visit there were documented and described. It is concluded that these spaces constitute, on the one hand, an identity strategy that attempts to make a place for the group of Dominican women and men who live or work in the Central Station sector. Thus, a hairdressing salon is conceived “as our embassy”, that is, “the place where you feel at home”, which provides them with a space to relax from the pressures in their daily life in Santiago as immigrant women of low social standing. This is expressed in the fact that women there “comb their hair with each other” as if they were on the patios of their houses, they can “talk as well as gossip”, and they can have coffee while they tell each other about their problems with work, with migration documents or with husbands. This makes hairdressing salons act as public spaces, as beauty service businesses, and at times as intimate and relaxing spaces for women. Likewise, hairdressing salons, in their attempt to provide a place for the group of Dominican women who are stable clientele, are organized around the practice of Afro hair straightening and Dominican *brushing*, which is considered by them “the most characteristic of Dominican women”.

However, the daily practices of “international-Dominican” hairdressing salons do not reproduce themselves or their “Dominican” originality, regardless of where they are located. In contrast, from the space of hairdressing salons, as an attempt at their

⁸ In Chile, the way of saying “understand?”, which is usually used at the end of a phrase.

own place, there are disputes, resistances and transactions with the local context that partially modify their practices.

Those resistances, transactions and disputes refer both to the ways of speaking as well as the ways of combing and straightening Afro hair and to what is understood as “beauty work” for the woman’s body. Thus, hairdressing salons, being relocated to Santiago, are configured as a space of contact with cultural difference: of alliance and disputes with Colombian women, of differentiation and superiority with Chilean and Peruvian women, and of open rejection of Haitian women. At the same time, when the identity strategy fails and a hairdressing salon fails to sustain itself economically with Afro hair straightening services, tactics are used with which situational hair straightening procedures and idioms are incorporated from the local context to attract customers from other nationalities.

These tactics form a “contaminated but connective fabric (...) a complex act that generates affections and boundary identifications, ‘singular types of sympathy and clash between cultures’ (...) the ‘in-between’ of culture, disconcertingly similar and different” (Bhabha, 2011, p. 96). This is expressed in the valuation of Dominican women in Chile who “relax” by straightening Afro hair as well as of Chilean women who have been “contaminated” with the grooming practices of Dominican women and Colombians. In this way, these processes move away from a linear and unidirectional logic in the processes of acculturation, such as the idea of assimilation, which operates with the assumption of the passive absorption of the culture of the other by migrants. It is rather a process of mutual affectation that configures hairdressing salons as spaces that are not purely Dominican or purely international but rather intermediate zones in an interval indicated by that script “international-Dominican;” that is, its practices and valuations are located both within and outside the national territory.

This is how in the dissemination of Dominicans in the world, in those cities where they are concentrated, hairdressing salons function as contact spaces with the difference and identification as “Dominicans abroad”. That is, without leaving the national anchor, they are recognized as being outside, and this exteriority is expressed both in the ways of doing and saying. A limitation of this investigation, however, is not being able to explore these practices from the gender dimension incorporating the male perspective, which is also present in Dominican hairdressing salons in Santiago.

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