The Decolonization of Knowledge, and Being Mapuche in Chile

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Abstract

This study focuses on the exploration of the interrelationship of the imagined national community made by collective myths. From the perspective of the colonial matrix of power theory the analysis focuses on “being Mapuche”—that is, belonging to Indigenous People in Chile. I will highlight the dynamic inter-relationship of three myths: the myth of the foundation, the myth of the blood sacrifice, and the myth of ideological relationship.

Introduction

The history of Indigenous Peoples’ resistance to colonialism is closely linked to the military occupation of territories, the subjugation of its natives, and the imposition of a colonial power matrix of power. This power is embodied in three spheres:

- Control of the economy
- Control of the authority
- Control of knowledge and subjectivity

By appropriating lands, natural resources, forms of government and military control, as well as the forms of coloniality and being, one is in control of knowledge
production itself (Mignolo, 2009). Relating these three spheres within the colonial matrix of power occurs between the material domination, economy, authority, institutions, and the epistemic domination. From this interrelationship emerges the importance of the knowledge that is in the control of subjectivity and, consequently, in the control of the economy and authority. As such, the colonial matrix of power defines and generates insiders – humanity, civilization, development – as well as outsiders – barbarians, Indians, and primitive and inferior beings.

Thus, generating and creating an outside through defining the inside, there exists a perpetual dynamic and asymmetrical condition; this is coexistence in conflict, with decolonial thoughts and decolonization emerging at the exterior within the border. From these circumstances the outsiders, previously limited in participation and decision-making, begin to demand their epistemic rights. It is in this context that the history of resistance of Indigenous Peoples casts a dimension to the political and social reality in Latin America.

**Nation-State and National Identity as Symbolic Engineering**

The modern nation is defined on the principle of territoriality, that is to say, on geographical representation. From this perspective the State is a national territory, which is the mental representation of a geographical, social and sociological space in the collective conscience of a nation. The relationship between territory and nation suggests the idea of a State, and consequently the emergence of the nationalist paradigm.

The concept of State as the personification of nation and territory, without distinction, is recognized as existing both on local and global levels. For this purpose, it emphasizes the interrelationships between the societal, geographical and historical environments. State is located in a nation's moral centre, defining the profile of a sense of belonging and identity. Nation defines the extent of what is considered as the country of origin. A nation without a country, a State, is consequently not recognized as a nation.

Imbued here is a symbolic engineering mechanism that excludes dual identity from an imagined national community. The double national identity, particularly in the Americas, considers a dynamic interrelationship of three myths:

- The myth of the foundation, “We arrived first or as early as you…”
- The myth of blood sacrifice, “We fought and gave our lives for our chosen homeland”,
• The myth of the ideological relationship, “the ideas we brought with us are American ideas” (Overland, 2000).

Furthermore, engineering and symbolic imagery as an idea of the double identity integrates two spheres of knowledge: the cultural and the political. This relationship is embodied in the mix of official history with myths and collective inventions. As a result, this relationship forms a dynamic imaginary structure where the “past” emerges as a symbolic expression of a collective destiny. In turn, this notion of the “past” serves as a continental and national emancipation project with future projections, and not as a pre-designed project in an archaic past.

The Mapuche Nation’s Territorial Autonomy: Historical Survey

In contrast to what happened to other Indigenous Peoples in North and South America, the Spanish Empire was never able to subjugate the Mapuche. On January 9, 1641, following decades of bloody fighting between Spain and the Mapuche, hostilities ceased with the signing of the Treaty of Quilín. This treaty recognized the River Bio-Bio as the southern border of the General Captaincy of Chile. It also stated that the Araucanía started at the Bio-Bio. In 1811, one hundred and seventy years later and under less advantageous conditions for the Mapuche, representatives of the new Republic of Chile ratified the principles of the treaty. By then, the Mapuche had preserved their territorial autonomy for two hundred and forty-two years.

The colonial war against the Mapuche is one of the longest in history. Military aggression covers more than three centuries, beginning with the Spanish invasion on Mapuche territory by Pedro de Valdivia in 1541, lasting through the Conquest in the Desert (1833-81) in Argentina, and then the Pacification of the Araucanía (1862-83) in Chile. Historically, the cause for struggle between the Mapuche and the Spanish Empire, and its successor republics, has been land. The Mapuche sought to defend their territory, while the Spanish, Chile and Argentina aimed at expanding their territory by conquest.

Much like other Indigenous groups in the Americas, the Mapuche suffered a drastic reduction in numbers in later centuries. According to Hernández (1985: 14), the Mapuche population in Chile prior to the Spanish invasion reached approximately one million people. After three decades the Mapuche had been reduced to 600,000 in number. Two hundred years later, the genocide reached its peak through a war of extermination launched by the governments of both Ar-
gentina and Chile. By the late 19th century, no more than 150,000 Mapuche were estimated to have lived in Chile following the wars.¹⁰

Before the Republics of Chile and Argentina exercised sovereignty over Mapuche territory, the “indigenous question” was a political-military problem. In January 1883, the Chilean Army occupied the Araucanía with Chile taking possession of approximately 9 million hectares of land. The Government of Chile, by decree, declared this territory property of the Republic. In the course of 35 years, 1884-1919, approximately 80,000 Mapuche were confined to some three thousand reservations; a territory consisting of approximately 500,000 hectares in a mountainous zone devoid of Government assistance. The reservations became enclaves for an agrarian subsistence economy.¹¹

The Myths

The Myth of Foundation

In the Americas the foundation myth has shaped the identity of its countries through a synthesis of the past, developed from a unique and exclusive fusion. It is based on the premise that has generated a version of a highly-complicated issue in the historiography of the Americas: the myth that “we arrived first.” In empirical terms, this is referred to as frontier expansion, displacement, location as well as transition and alteration of socio-cultural boundaries.

The theory of frontier expansion in the Americas entails two models of appropriation of territory: the Hispanic and Anglo-Saxon. According to Turner (1893) in the Anglo-Saxon case the “frontier expansion” is characterized by the appropriation of the “free lands” (terra nullius).

The official version of Chilean history stresses the idea of an expanding Chilean frontier, similar to the North American model, “the great and continuous advance.” In this frame of reasoning the historian Villalobos (1982) has contributed a further interpretation of the notion of “displacement of the Spanish socio-cultural frontier.” Villalobos recognizes the existence of Indigenous population. The Mapuche, as groups of nomad conglomerates, would according to this description have the particularity of being social groups in a perpetual level of decay and anomie. According to Villalobos there are, other than this, no antecedents confirming the existence of a socio-cultural jurisdiction, much less a form of sovereignty exercised over territory by the Mapuche Indians. The Mapuche territory is considered “terra nullius” and is – as was argued in North America – open to the advancement of settlers.
The existence of a military frontier, and the subsequent resistance from the Mapuche Nation due to displacement of the socio-cultural boundary, enables us to interpret history from a decolonizing perspective. Particularly the issue of “parliaments”, held between the Spanish and Mapuche during more than two centuries, exemplifies the validity and existence of a military frontier and socio-cultural interaction.

The evidence of this relationship is embodied in the treaties signed between the Spanish Crown and the Mapuche Nation. The sequence of treaties between the Mapuche Nation and the Spanish Crown is long and starts with the Parliament of Killin, on January 6th 1641, and finishes with the General Parliament of Negrete, March 3-5 1803. In total, 36 international treaties were enacted with the Mapuche (Gavilán, 2002). And, until 1803, the Spanish Crown recognized the inviolability of Mapuche territory and self-determination as well as commitments to mutual defense against foreign aggression.

In similar terms, the new Republic of Chile signed, in 1825, the Treaty of Tapihue with Mapuche political representatives. The text of the Treaty of Tapihue emphasizes that the new Chilean Republic will not violate their mutual frontier. This treaty establishes that the Bio-Bio River is the frontier between Chile and Ragko-Mapu, or the Mapuche Nation. An additional antecedent that is worth mentioning is the Chilean Constitution of 1833, which stipulates that the territorial jurisdiction of the Republic of Chile runs from the provinces of Coquimbo to Concepcion – north of Bio-Bio River.

In sum, international treaties signed between the Spanish Crown, the Republic of Chile and the Mapuche population in Indigenous reservations are evidence of a border-coexistence between three sovereign nations.

The Myth of Blood Sacrifice
Culturally and politically, the myth of the blood sacrifice completes the integration of the national imagery, exalting the importance of sacrifice, or immolation, for the sake of the Motherland. This is materialized as a conduit of inclusion in the imaginary collective of those who were not endowed with the Latin biological-cultural heritage.

The homeland engages in wars; to immolate for the sake of the homeland is to express loyalty towards the imagined national community. In Latin America, this loyalty was certified by participation in the independence-, civil-, and interstate wars that shaped and reshaped boundaries of homelands. The gallery of American heroes includes not only individual deeds, but highlights the commitment of entire ethnic groups to causes.
In Chile it is difficult to find representatives of Indigenous Peoples as central characters in the war acts of the imagined homeland; rather, records indicate the opposite. Regarding the Mapuche Nation, these persons are mentioned chiefly as opponents against the founding of the Republic of Chile.

The independence war that was fought by the Chileans against the Spanish was, in its absolute majority, performed by Criollos – Spaniards born in the colonies of the empire – and mestizos – descendants of the Spanish and Indians. The Indigenous population, especially the Mapuche, predominantly fought on the side of the Spanish military forces.

From the point of view of the myth of blood sacrifice for the homeland, there have been seven occasions on which Chile could have established a gallery of heroes and martyrs for the national imaginary. Chile has participated in three interstate wars,\(^ {19} \) three civil wars,\(^ {20} \) and one war of territorial annexation and ethnic cleansing.\(^ {21} \) Of these seven armed conflicts, only in two has the Mapuche Nation actively participated as an adversary.

The first case involves the active participation of the Mapuche on the side of the Spanish Empire troops. On April 5\(^ {\text{th}} \), 1818 the Chilean forces imposed a military defeat on the Spanish forces.\(^ {22} \) The Spanish reorganized its military forces, retreating to the Mapuche territory south of the Bio-Bio River, and, with help received from the Mapuche, it was possible to proceed with military operations against the Chilean forces. The war raged extensively from 1819 to 1824, at which point the Spanish troops were defeated. During this time the Mapuche contingent that was at the disposal of Spain exceeded 6,000 warriors.\(^ {23} \) A year later, the peace Treaty of Tapihue was agreed to by the Mapuche Lonko, “political chief”, Francisco Mariluan, together with the Chilean government.\(^ {24} \)

Notwithstanding, on July 2\(^ {\text{nd}} \) 1852, two decades after the peace agreement with the Mapuche Nation recognizing their autonomy and territory, the Chilean state enacted the law that the Mapuche territories have to be annexed to the Chilean State.\(^ {25} \) It is known as Chile’s most unusual law, as it is an extraterritorial legislation to be applied to territories that lie outside of the territorial jurisdiction of Chile.\(^ {26} \) The aggression, under the name “Pacification of Araucanía”, culminated with the occupation of the Mapuche territory and subsequent campaigns of ethnic cleansing.

Against this historical background it is possible to claim that territory, nation and nation-territory are interchangeable notions. Mapuche territorial self-autonomy, and the later annexation to the Chilean State, demonstrate that the nation-territory is susceptible to adopt different qualities depending on the institutional jurisdiction.
The problem with the Chilean official story is how it places Mapuche Indians in
the imagined national community, because there is no information demonstrating
their blood sacrifice for the Chilean homeland. It is no coincidence that the offi-
cial story highlights the Mapuche persons who militarily resisted the attempts
of the Spanish conquest; a story that integrates them into the national imagina-
tion as the precursors of the struggle for the independence of Chile from Spanish
colonial rule.²⁷

The Myth of the Ideological Association

The third myth in the agenda of inclusions and exclusions articulates the cultural
and political notion of “Latin America.” It emphasizes how Spanish conquest
and colonization resulted in the integration of the continent into the Western,
Christian world.

Latin American identity and nationalism is related to the idea of the modernist
project; it confers to both notions a past and collective destiny that emancipates it
for future projections rather than seeing its ancient, Indigenous past.

From this perspective, the Latin American identity and nationalism interrela-
tes the myth of ideological association with the idea of modern thought and the
notion of progress towards a rational culture. In this regard, the idea of modernity
emerges from the concept of the accepting of a universal, single and identical
rationality to all civilizations and throughout time (Villoro, 1998).

The Latin American identity refers to a widespread continental and generali-
zed conscience of struggle for the Independence from the Spanish Empire. The
Latin American identity is the consciousness of belonging to a wider imagined
community with a common language, religion and cultural background. In this
context, there stands out the foundation of republican institutions and the demo-
cratic ideals of independence from the colonial political system.

As a part of the myth of ideological association emerges the issue of conti-
nental or national identity, which is motivated by the Western idea that connects
two concepts: State and nation. The myth of the ideological association strongly
intends that State and nation are congruent; the idea of the Nation-State is charac-
teristic of modern thinking (Maldonado, 2008).

The idea of nation emerges from two traditions of thought. On the one hand is
the French tradition inherited from the French Revolution, which sees the nation
as a political entity made up of law and equal citizens. The French Nation from
the Napoleonic era is a political community formed after the State. The other
definition corresponds to the German romantic tradition that sees the nation as
the existence of a cultural community, a common language and a common ethnic origin. The German tradition points to the existence of the nation a priori to the foundation of a State.

The idea of modernity emerges from accepting the concept of a single, universal, rationality. According to this interrelation, the Nation-State represents a rational construction, rooted in a supposed ethnic homogeneity as well as a linguistic and cultural uniformity.

In Latin America, the State emerges from importing the European political model, with the idea of “nation” as coming from the concept of the “ethnic melting pot” which presupposes the existence of a nation of equal citizens and without ethnic-cultural distinctions, within the State. As Maldonado (2008) points out, it is necessary to consider that a State is not the same as a nation; by definition, the State is an entity of political character. To consider both concepts as equivalents implies a contradiction by failing to consider the nation as a substantially cultural entity. According to Villoro (1998) to assume that the State and nation are a natural unit implies ignoring that the State and nation respond to different processes of building.

*Nation* was not always linked to the *State*. Before the modern era, nation did not involve any concepts of political sovereignty. Many nations could coexist under the same empire or kingdom without any other political bonds between them than the subjection to a common sovereign. Such is the case of the Mapuche Nation and its relationship with the Spanish Empire, as we have previously explained.

Establishing the distinction of nation in a political and cultural sense, Maldonado (2008) distinguishes between historical, or traditional, nations to those that are modern, or created. Following this distinction, Indigenous Peoples tend to be regarded as historical nations, and the ideological myth of the ideological association claims to assume the notion of modern nation. From the point of view of decolonizing theory, and in particular from the perspective of knowledge and subjectivity, it is important to consider this distinction.

Subsequently, representative organizations of Indigenous Peoples in the Latin American political, academic and cultural context commonly receive harsh reactions when they use the concept “indigenous nation” to describe their ancestry. Referring to the postulate of coloniality of knowledge and being, it is necessary to point out that this refers to the cultural, historical, connotation of the term “nation” and not to its modern meaning. The representative organizations of Indigenous Peoples assign political meaning to “nation” to express and affirm identity – it is a means for obtaining political recognition for their existence within the Nation-State.
Summary and Conclusion

This article has dealt with the historical confrontation between Native Peoples and the Republican States of Latin America. The focus has been on three concepts, from the perspective of the theory of the colonial matrix of power: Latin American identity, nationalism and Nation-State. “Being indigenous Mapuche in Chile” stood out as relevant in exploring the imagined national community made by the official history and collective myths.

The official version of the history of Chile, in spite of recognizing the existence of the Indigenous population (Mapuche) in the mentioned territories, stressed the idea of the expansion of the Chilean frontier in the image of the North American way – the “great and continuous advance.” This indicates that there existed an idea of a “terra nullius” successively opened to the advancing of settlers. The antecedent of the official history that supports this postulate emphasizes anomie as endemic in Mapuche society.

The second version, referring to the theory of decoloniality, emphasizes the existence of a military frontier, and the resistance of the Mapuche Nation to the displacement of the Hispanic socio-cultural frontier. This highlights the leading role of Indigenous People within the limits of socio-cultural interaction. In particular, this version highlights the role of the institutions of Indigenous Peoples as evidence of the adaptation process to which the political structures of Indigenous Peoples were submitted, as an after-effect of the conditions imposed on them. Not only the situation of the Mapuche territorial autonomy at the border of the Spanish Empire, but also the occupation and annexation of the Mapuche territory to the Chilean State make it evident that the territory is susceptible to adopting different qualities. In this way, the situation underlying the analysis of the concept Nation-State and national identity is a symbolically engineered product.

From a decolonizing perspective, the invention of the nation in the Chilean case is also a process of dehistorization for the Mapuche Nation. This is done through official national history and collective myths, as a means for defining the profile of belonging national identity.

From the perspective of the theory of decolonization, the Mapuche and Chilean history begins with the imposition of the colonial power matrix. The colonization of the Mapuche Nation and the role of colonizer of the Chilean Nation materializes during the military occupation of the Mapuche territory. Resulting from this is the subjugation of the Mapuche Nation in the three spheres of colonial matrix of power, the first two of which are the following:
• the control of the economy through the internment of the Mapuche population in Indian reservations;

• the control of authority through the abolition of formal power for the traditional Mapuche authorities and military control in the areas of Indian reservations.

These past events allow us to establish the relationship between these two spheres of the colonial matrix of power with the third: the control of knowledge and subjectivity. In this particular context, this control emerges as a precursor in the exploration of the notion of \textit{coloniality} in the field of the geo-politics of knowledge. From a decolonizing perspective, “Knowledge and being Mapuche” is part of the process of the symbolic engineering invention, where the invention of the social space and its equivalent — territory, nation and State jurisdiction — are central and decisive.

\section*{References}


Notes
1 A version of this paper was presented at the international symposium on Independence and Dependence in Latin America, 200 years later. Latin America Institute, Stockholm University.
2 According to Mignolo (2009) the colonial matrix of power is structured in two phases of unequal weigh modernity and coloniality.
3 In order to discuss this issue see William and Smith, (1989) ; Dietz (1989) and Anderson (1983)
4 Ibid.
5 Parliament of Concepción (1811).
6 The “Conquest of the Desert” military campaign began on 22nd March 1833, the Argentine army occupied Patagonia. On 28th July 1881, the President of Chile, Aníbal Pinto, signed the treaty whereby Chile renounced its historical rights over Patagonia and which established the Andes as the border between Chile and Argentina. Patagonia became the property of the Argentine Republic. The 5th May 1885, Namuncura, successor to Juan Calbucura, formally surrendered to the Argentinean General Winter.

7 In 1862 the Chilean army begins its advance south of the Bio-Bio. On 1st January 1883, Toki Epulef is defeated. The Chilean army occupies the Araucanía.

8 The majority of researchers consider a combination of disease, wars, and natural catastrophes as factors for the decrease in population (see Bengoa 1985).

9 This number is corroborated by Hidalgo (1973), who based his estimates on a detailed study of the chronicles pertaining to the first stage of the Spanish conquest. According to some researchers, the estimate of a population of one million is considered “optimistic” (see Sots 1981).

10 According to Guevara (1913) around 117,000.

11 About the matter see Calbucura (2008)

12 It recognizes the existence of Mapuche sovereignty over the territory that runs from the River Bio Bio to the River Tolten.

13 The Spaniards’ concern was to prevent the establishment of bases of operations for pirates.

14 From the original text: “Recalling the outrageous thefts which were performed from both sides in the past, it is established that, the Chilean who trespasses in order to steal the land and were apprehended, will be punished by the cacique under whose power it had beenfallen, as it will also be, in accordance to the laws of the country, the native who were caught in thefts on this side of the River Bio Bio which is the dividing line between the new allied brothers.”

15 From mapudungun (mapuche language) “ragko”, which means “clay land” and was transformed into the term “Arauco” by the Spaniards. With this term they named the Mapuche territory south of the River Bio Bio.

16 The signing of the Treaty is preceded by the enactment of the Law of October 27th 1823, which recognizes the Treaties and Parliaments as a rule of international right valid between Chile and the Araucanian Territories. Later on, in January 19th, 1825, the President of the Chilean Republic, Ramon Freire, signed the Treaty of Tapihue.

17 23 years after of the declaration of the independence of Chile.

18 The maps of the American continent of that time bear witness to the demarcation.

19 War of the Independence of Chile (against Spain – Mapuche nation), 1813-1826 ; War against the Peruvian-Bolivian Confederation (1836-1839) ; War of the Pacific (1879-1884).

20 Civil War 1829-1830 ; Civil War 1851 ; Civil War 1891.

21 Occupation of the Araucanía (1861-1863) or “Pacification of the Araucania” against the Mapuche nation.

22 Maipú Battle.

23 This is the number led by the Mapuche military chief Mañil. It is also to be considered the participation of other military leaders, such as those from the locations of Arauco, Tubul, Boroa, Imperial and Lebu.

24 Represented by the President of the Chilean Republic Ramon Freire.

25 This law is followed by one of December 4th, 1866, which decrees the foundation of the province of Arauco in the heart of the Mapuche territory.

26 Art. 1: A new Province is created under the name of Province of Arauco, which will demarcate its limits from the Indigenous Territories located South of Bio Bio ; Art. 3: To all the effects of this new law they fall under the will of supreme government to annex everything as much as the President of the Republic requires.

27 About this issue see Calbucura (2005).

28 About the discussion of the concept see Chacon (2005).

29 Quoted by Maldonado (2008).


31 About the discussion of the concept see Maldonado (2008).
RE: MINDINGS
Co-Constituting Indigenous / Academic / Artistic Knowledges