

Does the Mapuche people constitute a nation? the processes of transformations of the Mapuche people

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The Mapuche people are an indigenous group in Southern Chile (and Argentina) who are the direct descendants of an original ethnic community. Throughout history, they have experienced major changes in their composition and culture, from being an independent community during the period before the Spanish conquest, to being a community which enjoyed a high degree of autonomy during the colonial period, to being absorbed in important numbers by the Chilean state after the independence in 1810. In this paper, I will explore the several phases undergone by the Mapuche people, a task in which I will include historical and sociopolitical considerations as well as the results of the 1992 and 2002 censuses and the use of the internet in the Mapuche's attempt to re-define their existence as an indigenous group. In order to accomplish this, I will consider the following set of questions: Who were the Mapuche people? Who are they now? What main factors explain both their disintegration on the one hand, and their persistence on the other? Is this group experiencing an ethnic or even an ethnonational movement? How have the censuses influenced their existence in Chilean society? What role has the internet played in reviving the "Mapuche question"? Are they a nation, as some internet actors claim? If they are not a nation, will they ever become one? Why or why not? What are some possible solutions to their present problems? For the sake of chronology and in order to establish the "Mapuche question" as an ongoing process, an incursion into their early history becomes a necessity.

An historical overview of the Mapuche

Mapuche means "people of the land." The Incas referred to them as "araucanos" (Araucanians), a name that Spaniards also

used. Their territory consisted of four main regions and hence four Mapuche groups were formed: the Picunche in the north; the Mapuche in the center; the Huilliche in the south; and the Cuncos in the coast.¹ After a long and continuous war with the Inca, who failed to conquer them, they established borders with the Inca Empire south of the Maule River. The exact borders were the Petorca River and the Ligua River in the north, down to the Isla Grande of Chiloe of what is present day Chile. When the Spaniards arrived, the Mapuche, whose estimated population was approximately 925,000 people, had a distinctive cultural identity, a religion, a language called *Mapudungun* (which still exists today), a social organization, and a lifestyle of their own. The vast area which they inhabited allowed for the existence of cultural diversity without centralized power, but they were able to develop a great sense of unity. The basic structural unit was the extended family, known as "lof," whose authority rested on a "Lonko," or chief.

Pedro de Valdivia, Captain General of the "conquest" of Chile, founded Santiago in 1541. Thereafter, Spaniards invaded Mapuche lands and began to enslave the Mapuche people; they raped women, pillaged their communities, and inflicted horrendous torture and mutilation on those who resisted them. Chief Caupolicán, for example, was impaled; chief Galvarino was mutilated of both hands. But the Mapuche would not be subdued. They kept on fighting

1. For historical information, I rely mainly on Alejandro Saavedra, *Los Mapuche en la sociedad chilena actual* (Santiago: LOM Ediciones, 2002); on R. Marhiquewun, "The Mapuche Nation," Internet document: mapuche.nation.org, and on Rolf Foerster, "Movimiento étnico o movimiento etnonacional Mapuche?"

losing some battles and winning others. In 1541, Valdivia and his troops were totally defeated by the Mapuche. Valdivia was taken prisoner and executed according to law by a blow to the head. After one hundred years of fighting, the stalemate continued. The so-called "Araucanian war" was far from coming to an end. In 1641, the Spanish and the Mapuche signed the Treaty of Quillín, in which Spain recognized the independent nature of the Mapuche people. But throughout the colonial period, the Spanish incursions continued in Mapuche territory to pillage communities. After the Treaty of Quillín, the Spanish proceeded to pacify the Mapuche people because the "Araucanian war" had become a burden. This pacification extended beyond the colonial period; and the Mapuche people never became a part of the Spanish colonial power.

The destruction and absorption of the Picunche

One group of the Mapuche people however, was defeated and partially destroyed by the Spanish: the Picunche population. The Picunche survivors were integrated into the colonial society by way of acculturation and mestizaje. Saavedra rightly observed that the surviving Picunche population became "one of the formative bases of Chilean society: the Chilean people" (51). According to Saavedra, these Picunche people will form the largest demographic base of the "people, the nation, and the emerging Chilean nationality." This way, the Picunche population "disappear[ed] from collective memory and [became] the people of a new emerging society. This is the same people who fought, at the end of the nineteenth century, the Mapuche in the south during the pacification of Araucanía" (51). This Picunche component was to be enlarged by numerous Mapuche, Huilliche, and Cunco slaves captured to the south of the Bio-Bio River. The persistence of the Mapuche today

is due to the fact that they were not defeated by the Spanish. They resisted, and they obliged the Spanish to negotiate and to have commercial relations with them.

The colonial period and the Chilean state

Benedict Anderson points out that ethnic communities are never stable, but they change through time. A significant transformation experienced by the Mapuche people occurred during the colonial period, when the Spanish controlled the territory north of the Bio-Bio River. Some factors that made this transformation possible were the struggle of the Mapuche for maintaining their independence, the commercial interactions, and all of the varieties of contact between the Spanish and the Mapuche, integrated with a process of "appropriation and innovation" as Saavedra defines it. A fundamental element of this transformation is the process called "Araucanization of the Pampas," which occurred from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. In this process, which involved the use of force to obtain cattle and alliances and associations with the pre-Hispanic Pampean population across the Andes (Argentina), an important mestizaje developed between the two populations. In this way, the *Mapudungun* language experiences an expansion and the Mapuche culture is redefined by being receptive to contributions from the Pampean peoples.²

As the raids to the pampas become more elaborate, bands of horse warriors appear. These bands had a chief and extensive tribal connections, which, with time, gave way to a structure of social stratification. Little by little, these chieftanships made the existence of larger socio-political units possible, but not as a

2.Saavedra rightly observes that this redefinition of culture involved armed disputes for cattle between the two populations and that the rewards of looting became an important part of the game. Leather, cattle, horses, and hostages were exchangeable for other goods.

unified society or a "nation." Saavedra, with his usual insightfulness, rightly asserts that the Mapuche people, as well as other original peoples, "are transformed because they are integrated into a larger history which objectively determines and transforms them" (56). By 1810, when the colonial period comes to an end, the Mapuche culture has experienced important changes by adapting to new realities or circumstances and by adopting ways which serve them for the purpose of maintaining control over their culture.

Interestingly enough, it was not the Spanish who conquered and committed ethnocide against the Mapuche, but the new Chilean state. After obtaining independence from Spain in 1818, Chile begins a process called the "Pacification of the Araucania," which are military invasions and occupations whose objectives are to take the territory from the Mapuche, and subjugate and incorporate them to the new sovereign state. Many Mapuche people die, their territory as well as their culture and society are considerably reduced, and finally they are forced to become (indigenous) Chilean citizens. Many of them received official land titles on reservations. Others were placed on reservations without land titles. All of this was accomplished in the 1880s. As Saavedra puts it, the Mapuche stop being a culture "because they stop being autonomous societies, because the possibility of making their own decisions and exercising cultural control regarding fundamental cultural aspects disappear" (61). In order to survive, they have to submit and adapt to the ways of the dominant culture. In this process, they are the subject of economic, social, and ideological acculturation.

In the past fifteen years, the Mapuche question has been the subject of unprecedented interest.³ With the defeat of

the military in the plebiscite of 1989, Chilean society started its transition to democracy. The Mapuche population started the process of regrouping and, again, of redefining themselves. Two main options were available to them. The first was to negotiate with the new transitional democratic elected government, and the second was to continue their consuetudinary resistance to authority due to the lack of agreement on important issues, such as the recognition of the Mapuche as an autonomous ethnic group, the recovery of ancestral lands, and benefits and rights for the Mapuche people. As in the times of the "Reche" in the beginning of the colonial period, the Mapuche failed to organize themselves and when they did, several groups with conflicting interests emerged. In this sense, many Mapuche chose to work with the government while others decided to remain independent. Those who chose to act independently lacked the ability to join forces and separated into several organizations each with its own agenda. These two problems still affect the Mapuche people. On the one hand, there are those who were coopted by the government and are working from the inside to advance the rights of their indigenous group; and on the other, there are those who favor a radical program and are seeking to be recognized as an ethnic nation, the Mapuche nation.

The Mapuche, the census and the internet

In order to determine with some rigor and legitimacy the question of who the Mapuche are today, I am utilizing two seemingly useful instruments, the census and the internet. Benedict Anderson convincingly argues that the census is one of the three institutions responsible for "the imaginings of the colonial state," which are

3. During the sixteen-year dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet (1973-1989), the Mapuche were both repressed and dismembered. In this regard, Saavedra points out that Mapuche organizations were destroyed;

mobilizations were suppressed; many were persecuted and tortured; they lost their recovered lands; they lost the trust in themselves, pp.192.

the true origins of “official nationalism” in the European colonies of Asia and Africa.⁴ It is the census which makes the imaginings of identities possible by categorizing people. The census’ contribution, thus, is not related to the construction of racial or ethnic classifications, but to its quantification. This categorization of peoples plays a key role in the organization of social institutions, in the past as well as in the present. I will first discuss the census and then the internet.

of Easter Island. As I will show later, several other cultures or populations were left out.

The results of the census were thus:

The census

Since the return to democracy in 1989, the Chilean state has had two censuses, the first in 1992 and the second in 2002.⁵ The census, it must be made clear, should be understood as an approximation and not as an accurate account of the Mapuche population. It all depends on the type of questions asked and on the subjectivity of the respondents. In the 1992 census, the question regarding cultural identification was:

If you are a Chilean, do you consider yourself as belonging to any of the following cultures?

1. Mapuche;
2. Aymara;
3. Rapanui;
4. None of the above.

It is important to note that the answer includes only three alternative cultures, the Mapuche of southern Chile who are the descendants of the “reche”; the Aymara of northern Chile who are the descendants of the Inca Empire; and the Rapanui who are the descendants of the original inhabitants

4.The other two institutions are the map and the museum. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991 [1986], pp.

5.The results of these censuses can be seen on the internet at www.INE.cl, which is an official site sponsored by the Chilean government. INE stands for Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas.

Figure 1

1992 Census	Number	%
Mapuche Population	927,000	8.76%
Non-Mapuche Population	9,660,367	91.24%
Total	10,587,427	100,00%

In these results only the Mapuche and non-Mapuche populations who were fourteen years old and older were considered. If the population in the range of 0-13 years old had been considered, the percentage of Mapuche population would have increased.

The answer to the question does not determine how many indigenous people there are in Chile, but rather it is a demonstration of how many people ascribe themselves to a given culture. In this case, as sociologist Marcos Valdes clearly points out, the act of ascribing themselves to a specific culture makes it possible to attribute them to an indigenous condition, which does not determine the number of indigenous people in the country.⁶ This asymmetry is seen by Valdes as problematic since someone who ascribes himself to an indigenous group, either as a Mapuche, Aymara or Rapanui, does not necessarily mean that he is one. The opposite is also true. Someone who belongs to a specific ethnic group may not ascribe himself as one. He then concludes that the

quantification of the Mapuche population is still a challenge and that efforts should be made in order to solve that problem, a point with which I both agree and disagree at the same time and to which I will return later.

In the 2002 census the question regarding ethnic groups was formulated thus:

Do you belong to any of the following original or indigenous peoples?

1. Alacalufe (Kawashkar)
2. Atacameño
3. Aimara
4. Colla
5. Mapuche
6. Quechua
7. Rapa-nui
8. Yamana (Yagan)
9. None of the above⁷

The salient feature of this question is that there are no points of comparison with the question on the 1992 census. In the 2002 census, the question is directed to the idea of belonging to a particular original group of people. In the 1992 census, the

6. Marcos Valdés, "Reflexiones metodológicas en torno a los censos de 1992 -2002 y la cuestión Mapuche." Internet Document: www.mapuche.cl. pp. 3. At the same time, Valdés makes clear that his article is based on some papers and documents found on the same web page.

7. Valdés reports that this question was the result of a research project in which expert methodologists as well as indigenous leaders participated. The goal was to improve the question formulated in the 1992 census, Internet Document, pp. 7.

question is related to the concept of cultural self ascribing. Likewise, as can be seen in the statistics, the 1992 census did not consider people who were fourteen years old or younger; the 2002 census considered all ages. This fact contributes to making comparisons between the two censuses difficult, if not impossible. For the sake of clarity, in 1993 the Chilean state promulgated the "Indigenous Law No. 19, 253" ("Ley Indígena No. 19.253"), which includes the following:

Article 1. The State recognizes that the indigenous people [persons] of Chile are the descendants of the human groupings that exist in the national territory since pre-Columbian times, that preserve their own ethnic and cultural manifestations and the land is for them the main foundation for their existence and culture.

The State recognizes as main indigenous ethnic groups: the Mapuche, the Aimara, the Rapa Nui or Pascuense; the Atacameno, the Quechua and the Colla communities in the north of the country; the Kawashkar or Alacalufe and the Yamana or Yagan communities of the austral canals. The State values their existence because they are an essential part of the Chilean Nation's roots, as well as its integrity and development, according to their customs and values.⁸

As can be seen, the State does not recognize the existence of original indigenous peoples. What the State does recognize is the existence of eight indigenous ethnic groups, which means that the category of peoples, or pueblos, is not a part of the law. This fact may have juridical implications since it may affect the validity of the question. Anyhow, the results of the

2002 census are as follows:

8. "Ley Indígena No. 19.253,"
www.libraryofcongress.cl.

Figure 2

2002 CENSUS	No.	%
Mapuche Population	604,349	3,84%
Non-Mapuche Population	15,116,435	96,16%
Total	15,720,784	100,00%

These results show how many persons belong to the Mapuche group but it does not show the quantification of the Mapuche people. Regarding this point, Valdes rightly asserts that "it is not possible to affirm that the Mapuche population that resides within the borders of the Chilean national state is the one observed in the 2002 census" (9). I believe it is possible that a person may consider himself/herself as a Mapuche without belonging to a Mapuche community in the strictest sense. Just because this person does not live within a Mapuche community his answer may have been influenced and he may not have been counted as a Mapuche individual. The evident diminishment of the Mapuche population shown in the 2002 census when compared to the 1992 census is questionable since such an extraordinary decrease, from 8.76% to a mere 3.8% in only a ten-year span is difficult to accept, more so if in the 1992 census the population of fourteen year olds and younger were not considered.

At this point, a working definition of ethnic group or ethnic community becomes necessary. Raymond Taras and Rajat Ganguly define ethnic group or ethnic community as "either a large or small group of people, in either backward or advanced societies, who are united by a common inherited culture (including language, music, food, dress, and customs and practices), racial similarity, common religion, and belief

in common history and ancestry and who exhibit a strong psychological sentiment of belonging to the group"⁹. Moreover, they complement this definition by noting that these ethnic groups can be of two types, homeland societies, whose people are longtime occupants of a specific territory, and immigrant diasporas, those persons living outside their own territory (9). Essentially, Taras and Ganguly agree with Anthony Smith's definition of an ethnic group, which is based on the following six components: a collective name, a common myth of descent, a shared history, a distinctive shared culture, an association with a specific territory, and a sense of solidarity.¹⁰ It should be noted that this definition has a correlation with the definition offered by the Chilean state. A comparison would reveal the following:

Taras, Ganguly, and Smith's Definition

1. The group could be a homeland society.
2. It is united by a common inherited and distinctive culture.
3. It has a collective name.
4. It possesses a shared history.
5. It is associated with a specific territory.

9. Raymond C. Taras and Rajat Ganguly, *Understanding Ethnic Conflict. The International Dimension* (New York: Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers, 1998), pp. 9.

10. Anthony Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1988 [1986], pp. 22-31.

6. It possesses a sense of solidarity.

Chilean Ley Indígena's Definition

1. They existed in the national territory since pre-Columbian times.

2. They are descendants of ancient human groups who preserve ethnic and cultural manifestations.

3. The law contemplates the Mapuche as a part of the definition.

4. They are the descendants of groups that existed in pre-Columbian times; in this sense, they have a shared history.

5. They are a part of human groups that inhabited the Chilean national territory.

All of these components, as well as other components of the definition, such as racial similarity, a strong psychological sentiment of belonging to the group, and the sense of solidarity, are only applicable to the Mapuche people who were born and live in Mapuche communities. The component of a common religion is somehow diffuse and difficult to measure since many Mapuche individuals are either Catholic or Evangelical.

Saavedra, using a similar approach, considers that "the present Mapuche population in Chile would be formed by all those persons who were born on reservations and in other Mapuche communities, with or without land titles, and by their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, whether they remain in or have emigrated from these communities" (23). Saavedra considers several generations in his definition of a Mapuche person. Whether this conception is accurate or not is debatable. In my personal experience, I have met several Mapuche individuals who were born in a reservation, lived there until young adulthood, spoke *Mapudungun* and Spanish, were familiar with community practices, but once they left the reservation, they rejected their roots and did not want to be identified as Mapuche individuals. Moreover, they refused to speak *Mapudungun* and did not seem to care for their ancestry. These people were totally acculturated and considered themselves as Chilean nationals. But I realize that the

opposite is also true. Many Mapuche individuals who left their community may still identify themselves as belonging to the Mapuche people. Saavedra's interest and concern is not to describe an ethnic community because the number in terms of population is meager; his interest and concern is to include, theoretically speaking, the few members who make up the ethnic community and their descendants to the fourth generation. That is why he speaks of an "ethnically differentiated population" to refer to them. These people "consider themselves, and are, descendants of an ethnic group and of a clearly identified culture: the Mapuche ethnic group and culture" (25). Furthermore, Saavedra explains his position by stating that "the present Mapuche population is formed by several relatively differentiated segments that include the more traditional circles which still persist in some rural locations, as well as persons who are uprooted and scattered in cities and rural sites far from their ancestral territories" (25). All in all, this is what constitutes an indigenous people (*pueblo indígena*).

All of the above considerations are present in the question posed by the 2002 census: "Do you belong to any of the following original or indigenous peoples?" If someone declares to belong to an original or indigenous people, it does not mean that the same person really belongs to that community since this is a subjective appreciation and decision. At this point, we return to Benedict Anderson's concept of an "imagined community." If in the 2002 census 3.87% of the individuals declared themselves as belonging to the Mapuche community in general but not necessarily living in a Mapuche community in the traditional sense, it is because this is the choice of their imaginings; this is the way they see themselves and this is the way the state should see them. This is not to say, though, that they form a homogenous and closed community, a fact that can be better appreciated by turning to some Mapuche

individuals, groups, and organizations who claim that the Mapuche community is not only a distinct ethnic group but also a nation.

The Mapuche, Rolf Foerster and ethnonationalism

Several attempts have been made to categorize the Mapuche as a nation. Rolf Foerster contends that the demands of the Mapuche must be classified as ethnic demands, but that there are processes at work that depart from being ethnic and point to ethnonational demands.¹¹ In order to prove his position, Foerster considers five "phases of problematization." The first is that the Mapuche are seeking to be recognized as pueblos by the Chilean state, a position supported by two Mapuche organizations. The problem is that if the state recognizes them as a pueblo, this automatically gives them the right to self-determination according to international law. But the Mapuche are not trying to create a nation-state, but rather they are seeking autonomy or local self-government.

The second phase is that the Mapuche are not demanding land anymore; they are demanding a territory, which is "the fundamental base of [their] existence; it is the space where they share life, work, where the culture of the people generates" (53). They consider this as a sacred space which is marked by violence; it is the place where their ancestors died defending it. They are just defending the space that saw them grow up; a place that has generated the base of their culture. It is in this sense that the Mapuche see their territory as a motherland.

The third phase deals with demands for political autonomy, which is in part represented by the existence of the Council of All Lands (Consejo de Todas las Tierras).

11. Rolf Foerster, "Movimiento étnico o movimiento etnonacional mapuche?" *Revista de Crítica Cultural*, Santiago de Chile, 1999, p. 52.

This Council has been responsible for a different system of representation for all Mapuche concerns in which the "lonkos" and "machis" (chiefs and sorcerers) occupy an important place. The Council has also promoted several national and international initiatives regarding the recognition of colonial treaties signed by the Mapuche people and the Spanish Crown. Similarly, in 1998, the so-called Mapuche Congress concluded, among other things, that besides promoting the unity of the Mapuche people over any political, ideological, and religious predilection, it should favor a relationship with the Chilean state so that an agreement can be reached regarding their autonomy, which translates to them having the power to make all decisions about their own destiny.

The emergence of a Mapuche nationalist intellectual elite forms the fourth phase. More than at any time before, young Mapuche individuals are experiencing an important process in which they are reaching a high degree of professionalization. They form the political and intellectual Mapuche elite. Poets, writers, sociologists, historians, are re-founding the past and re-actualizing history by an act of anagnorisis associated with the value of their tradition and culture. They maintain that the Mapuche people must perceive themselves as belonging to the same unit if they want to be recognized as a nation.

Drawing on Miroslav Hroch's three phases of nationalism, Foerster composes the fifth phase, in which he sees a movement from ethnic to national sentiments. In the first stage, the national sentiment is cultivated mainly in the cultural, literary, and folkloric realms without any political implication. In the second stage, a group of precursors and militants of the national idea is detected and they will direct their attention to political campaigns in favor of this position. In the third stage, the national idea obtains the support of the masses.

Up to this point, even if incomplete and lacking in depth, Foerster's argument seems to be going in the right direction. But due to the fact that he does not provide any explanation for his assertion that "a part of the intellectuality and of the political Mapuche elite would fulfill the first and the second phases" (57), his argument collapses. Then, in assessing the third phase, he simply concludes that he does not know with certainty while acknowledging that it is a possible scenario.

The internet and Rolf Foerster

Anthropologists such as Foerster are not alone in their desire to see the emergence of a Mapuche nation. He joins some sectors of the Mapuche intelligentsia in advancing, even if only through his own writings, the idea of an ongoing process from a Mapuche ethnic group to a Mapuche nation. The expression of this idea has found its best advocate in the internet. In fact, several organizations and individuals are actively involved in this process. Some important web sites dedicated to the Mapuche question are, among many others, www.mapuche.cl; www.mapuche-nation.org.; and www.ical.cl (Instituto de Ciencias Alejandro Lipschutz).

Before proceeding further with this discussion, we must acknowledge the fact that information technology through the internet is closely related to the process of globalization in the sense that opening economic markets makes a greater economic integration possible, and it is also related to the postmodernist era in the sense that the internet allows for the coexistence of different (or opposing) world-views without preference for one or the other. The positive and/or the negative sides for the Mapuche people remain to be seen.

Oscar del Alamo considers four main fields of opportunities that the internet offers to the indigenous populations in general, all of them being implemented at different geographical locations: education,

health, human rights, and economic activity.¹² Although these are important issues which need to be studied, my concern here centers more on political aspects. In order to legitimize their claim as a Mapuche nation, the Mapuche political elite and their non-Mapuche supporters in many parts of the globe are in the process of revising and rewriting not only Mapuche but also official Chilean history. The key historical marker for them is the year 1641, in which the Treaty of Quillín between the Spanish and the Mapuche people was signed. According to R. Marhiquewun, by signing this treaty Spain recognized the Mapuche people as an independent nation, a fact that remains inalterable to this date.¹³ In this treaty, the issue of borders was also resolved and those borders should be respected today because the Mapuche people were not conquered by any other power.

Reinaldo Mariqueo and Jorge Calbucura contend that the Mapuche people, as a distinct nation, have been able to survive through years of oppression and absorption:

Despite the assimilationist efforts of the dominant Chilean society, the Mapuche people have managed to preserve their traditional language (*Mapudungun*), their religion and the socio-political structure which regulates life in the indigenous reserves where they have been forced to live since the beginning of the twentieth century. Their identity as an autonomous nation together with their awareness of being part of a distinct cultural and historic heritage and spirituality has created a socio-political movement which

12. Oscar del Alamo, "Esperanza tecnológica: internet para los pueblos indígenas de América." Internet Document in América Indígena website, pp. 16-29.

13. R. Marhiquewun, "The Mapuche Nation," Internet Document, Mapuche-nation.org., pp. 3.

draws on communal aspirations¹⁴.

Ben Morton asserts that the Treaty of Quillín of 1641 recognized Mapuche nationhood and independence and that the last "parlamento" (parliaments) between Spain and the Mapuche nation was signed in 1803 and then again in 1816, exactly on the eve of Chile's final independence in 1818.¹⁵ The Parliament of Negrete (1803) established three important requirements, 1) any aggressive conflict should be preceded by a declaration of war (if this did not happen, the other party would commit an act of "piracy and banditry"); 2) all non-indigenous peoples born in Mapuche territory were deemed Spanish, and only Spanish and Mapuche could live south of the Bio-Bio River; and 3) an extradition agreement was to exist between both countries. All twenty-eight "parlamentos" or treaties signed with Spain, Morton argues, connect with the contemporary Republic of Chile through the Parlamento General de Tapihue (1825), signed by the Mapuche and the Chilean state during the government of Ramón Freire (1823-1826). The treaty ended a fourteen-year guerrilla war between the two peoples, one that had raged throughout the period of Chile's struggle for independence from Spain. The Parlamento de Tapihue again recognised the Mapuche Nation, clarifying the frontier of the Republic of Chile and Ragko Mapu [Mapuche territory] along the Bio-Bio River. It prohibited any Chilean from living south of the border and stated that any breach of this agreement by either party would be deemed to be a breach of international law (4).

14. Reynaldo Mariqueo and Jorge Calbucura, "Introduction," Internet Document, Mapuchemation.org., pp. 1.

15. Ben Morton, "Building a Case for Mapuche Self-determination," CELANEN. A Journal of Indigenous Governance, Vol. 1, No. 1, February 2004, pp. 4.

Accordingly, these treaties were ratified by important Mapuche organizations, including the Council of All Lands in 1998, since they provide the foundation for a future model of self-determination throughout Ragko Mapu (Mapuche territory).

This struggle for the recognition as a nation on the part of the Mapuche people reaches different levels. For example, at an international conference sponsored by the UNPO (Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization), Reynaldo Mariqueo, in representation of the Mapuche Inter-Regional Council, an umbrella organization which comprises a network of groups and organizations based in various regions of Chile, complains that "the Mapuche people are not recognized by the Chilean constitution, making us technically a non-existent nation."¹⁶ José Marimán, reacting against an article by historian Sergio Villalobos published in the Chilean newspaper *El Mercurio* (05-14-00), successfully argues that Villalobos thesis that "the ancient indigenous people of Araucanía [the Mapuche people] were the protagonists of their own subjugation" is essentially wrong and a-historical.¹⁷

In spite of all of these (and other) attempts to define and legitimize the Mapuche people as a nation, the problem persists since in some cases the arguments are weak, for example, Foerster's, and in other cases the arguments are valid and legitimate but the historical processes have changed the situation. The five phases

16. Reynaldo Mariqueo, at the Conference on Non-violence and Conflict: Conditions for Effective Peaceful Change, Tallin, Estonia, 15-19 July 1997. Similarly, Mariqueo and Luis Llanquilef addressed the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva, 16 March-24 April 1998, regarding the fundamental rights of the Mapuche people.

17. José A. Marimán, "El nacionalismo asimilacionista chileno y su percepción de la nación mapuche y sus luchas" ("The Chilean Assimilationist Nationalism and its Perception of the Mapuche Nation and its Struggles"), Denver, June 2000. Internet Document, mapuche.cl., pp. 1-12.

described by Foerster are problematic. In the first place, if the Mapuche are seeking recognition as a pueblo, this does not mean that they are making an ethnonational demand or that they will constitute a Mapuche nation. It means that they are seeking to increase their share of power by obtaining some important rights such as more internal autonomy, more rights to land tenure, more rights to natural resources in the territory in which they live, and more rights in general such as a better education, health, and others. All of the rights they wish to obtain have been in the agenda of the Mapuche people for many years and they are not a part of a new set of demands. Seeking more autonomy or more local self-government is not to be associated with ethnonationalism in this case.

The second phase that Foerster mentions is that of the demand for territory. The Mapuche people have always declared their intention to recover the land that was taken away from them by force. They do want their land back and the right to exploit it as they see fit, but in no case do they consider these lands or territories as a motherland, as Foerster argues. Moreover, "the usurped lands continue to be the center of Mapuche mobilizations. It is from this center that they make territorial demands" (Saavedra, 228). Clearly, these are not ethnonational demands.

The demand for political autonomy cannot be seen as an ethnonational demand due to the simple fact that political autonomy cannot be equated with forming a separate nation. Eduardo Curin and Marcos Valdes, in an excellent study of the Mapuche question argue that "[t]he secession in the Mapuche case is not viable nor it is a desirable pretension inasmuch as the Mapuche culture preceded in its genesis to the national Chilean state. On the other hand, the historical Mapuche territoriality involves two national states, Chile and Argentina, reason for which it is not possible to speak of secessionist pretensions

regarding the process of autonomy."¹⁸ Therefore, the demand for autonomy is not to be associated with independence or with the formation of another national state within an already existing national state. Furthermore, Foerster mentions that the Indigenous Law of 1993 gave birth to the National Corporation for Indigenous Development (Corporación Nacional de Desarrollo Indígena - CONADI), which is a state entity. Great many Mapuche individuals make CONADI "their law and institution" as Foerster acknowledges. But he does not give proof for his argument that some Mapuche organizations stopped working with CONADI because they realized that it was not advancing or defending Mapuche interests.

The notion that some Mapuche poets and intellectuals write about their ancestors, their origins, their history, their symbolic universe, and about any topic related to the Mapuche people cannot be considered as a nationalist stand. They may well be experiencing a type of anagnorisis regarding their own ancestry, but this does not make their discourse a tool for seeking a new national state. It is a case of individual self-discovery.

Finally, Foerster's concept of the three stages that an ethnonational movement must experience in order to form a nation may be theoretically sound, but as Saavedra points out, this scheme does not consider "socioeconomic or cultural aspects that do or do not allow the concrete historical formation of a nation as well as the reciprocal relationships between this process and the formation and development of nationalisms" (229). General laws and principles are not fixed and may not be replicable in all cases.

The concept of a Mapuche nation is supported more by wishful thinking than by

18. Eduardo Curin and Marcos Valdés, "To the Intellectuals; or How it Becomes Necessary to Re-think the Mapuche Question," Internet Document, Mapuche.cl., pp. 6.

hard evidence. Mapuche as well as non-Mapuche intellectuals are attempting to give shape to a movement than can unite Mapuche people in a common enterprise by appealing to a nationalist stand. One of the problems associated with the concept of nation is its ambiguity and, to a certain extent, its arbitrariness. This is the case of José Marimán, who proposes his own use of the term,

...I have decided to use the concept of nation to designate the Mapuche ethnic group. The repeated use of the concept produces a reinforcement of the same in the Mapuche psyche, and contributes to reach, some day, the goal of becoming a politically closed society...the concepts used in the social sciences are only conventions...[and] we can –and must–allow ourselves to manage our own conceptualization (Foerster, 57).

He continues by arguing that the Mapuche people are not obliged to use the same language used by the nation-state. On the contrary, they should have their own language and impose it on the ideological struggle for their project of ethnic liberation. Apparently, Marimán is using the concept of Mapuche nation as a way to raise consciousness in the Mapuche people about their own circumstances, but not because in reality there exists a Mapuche nation.

The internet II

Several Mapuche organizations and individuals are using the internet to advance their interests. The internet can be useful for them in the sense that they are represented on several web pages, where they can inform and educate the general public about their problems and goals. Through the internet, they can be the subject of countless manifestations of solidarity and support; they can offer invaluable information to students, researchers, and other types of audiences; they can transfer

their experience to other indigenous groups who are in a similar situation; they can offer their own points of view on different subjects, from the ideological to the practical; and they can preserve their linguistic and cultural diversity. In this sense, the internet is to be seen as a truly democratic and interactive universe. But the internet also poses some great challenges to the Mapuche population. One of the main challenges is the access to it. The majority of the Mapuche population has been impoverished and does not have the economic resources to pay for this type of technology, which means that only a limited and privileged number of Mapuche individuals can enjoy what the internet may offer. In general, the level of education among the Mapuche is low, which makes it more difficult for these half-educated people to use this tool. A great deal of information is found only in the English language, a language they do not know, which limits their access to certain types of information.

As can be seen, there are positive and negative aspects in using the internet as a way to claim the status of nation by the Mapuche people. In my view, the negative aspects supersede the positive ones. The main point is perhaps the confusion created by several types of discourses regarding the idea of a Mapuche nation. While many individuals claim the status of nation for the Mapuche people, they are not clear about what they want for this community. This confusion is expressed in positions such as the one taken by Marimán, who consciously uses the concept as a way of motivating the Mapuche people to re-think their ethnicity in order to perhaps re-invent a community. For Marimán, in this case, the “idea” is more important than the “reality.” Another important aspect to consider is that the use of the internet may contribute to the creation of a certain type of distancing and isolation when the virtual world of the internet receives more attention than the

real world itself.¹⁹ But the problem persists. Can the Mapuche people be considered as a nation? In my view they cannot be considered as a nation simply because they are not one. They could have formed a nation, but they missed their opportunity at a very specific and decisive historical period, a matter to which I now turn.

Unfinished business

Guillaume Boccara studies what he terms the "enigmatic Mapuche resistance" and some transformations which affected this group during the colonial period.²⁰ He maintains that the terms Mapuche and Araucano are not the correct terms since the word Mapuche appears in documents only during the second half of the nineteenth century; the word Araucano appears in early documents but it refers to a much smaller community. The word used to categorize what we now call the Mapuche people was "Reche," which means "authentic or genuine man." By the time the Spanish arrived, the "Reche" constituted dispersed groups without sociopolitical organization characterized by the absence of obedience to a political figure that could represent authority. The Spaniards complained that this lack of organization and structure was the main obstacle for conquering these groups. According to them, there was a triple absence: the absence of a political figure, the inexistence of a spatial configuration, and the lack of a general coordination among the distinctive social units. In this sense, Boccara argues, the two salient characteristics of the "Reche" were dispersion and war. In times of peace, they were free to do and behave as they pleased;

19. Oscar del Alamo discusses some possible negative aspects of the use of the internet, pp. 12-3.

20. Guillaume Boccara, "Etnogénesis Mapuche: resistencia y reestructuración entre los indígenas del centro-sur de Chile (siglos XVI-XVIII)," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 79:3, 1999, pp. 425-61.

in times of war they joined forces under the authority of a single chief.

In essence, the sociopolitical structure of the "Reche" was thus: the main social unit was the "ruca" (house) or the familial space; the next level was the "caserío", or group of "rucas"; a superior level of integration was the "quinelob," which was composed of several "caseríos." The members of the "quinelob" collaborated with economic activities and joined forces against exterior aggression. The next level was the "lebo," which was a group of "quinelob." The "lebo" is the most important social unit since it was at this level that issues of war and peace, domestic and foreign policy, religious ceremonies, juridical and political decisions, and other issues were resolved. Also, the "lebo" represented the first level of identity and of group unit since, as Boccara explains, a "Reche" (individual) "did not sacrifice, did not decapitate and did not eat a member of his own "lebo" (431). In case of war conflicts, several "lebo" could join forces in a superior group called "ayllarehue," which was only a temporary association. At a still more superior level, there was the "futumapu," which means "large land" and it was composed by a group of "ayllarehue." These "futumapu" were not of a permanent nature and occurred only in times of war.

War played an important role among the "Reche" since it was responsible for the structure of relationships between the different social units of the "ayllarehue." For example, the concept of prestige was an important motivation for all individuals; war trophies such as heads, captured men and women, horses, and cloth allowed them to negotiate with opposing units. But more importantly, war played a fundamental role in identity formation, in building the self and the other. There was a tendency to assimilate the enemy's qualities in the practice and representation of war, so that in every combat, warriors made great efforts to capture an object which symbolized the other. Those captives who were not suited

for ritual sacrifices were subject to a process of "Recheization"; they were not allowed to speak Spanish and were dressed as "Reche." They also adopted some cultural elements from the Spanish, such as the horse, wheat, iron, and cloth. All of this shows that the identity of the "Reche" was built, paradoxically, through a movement of openness towards the other. Later in the process, the economy was based on three activities, raising cattle, the "maloca," and commerce. By the end of the seventeenth century and up until the end of the colonial period, this economic model became a standard practice and generated an economic surplus as well as space for macro-regional economic integration.

These changes in the economic structure affected and transformed the indigenous economic mentality since they were willing to work more in order to satisfy their new needs. Nevertheless, these changes did not damage the military power of the Mapuche people. It just occurred the opposite because the economic changes increased their capacity for resisting Spanish domination. In addition to economic transformations there were also important sociopolitical modifications. The power of the leaders, or chiefs was not related to war anymore but to the economy. The Spanish called them the chiefs-governors and politically they were the head of the "futumapu." Similarly, each "ayllarehue" and "rehue" had its own chief. One important aspect in these power relationships is that the Mapuche chief had the obligation to give (drinks, cows) in order to legitimize his position and power; if not, he was despised because he was poor. The chief of the "futumapu" had the greatest power in this structure. All other issues were subordinate to the "futumapu," which shows the degree of organization as well as the degree of delegation of power. In the 1760s the term Mapuche appeared for the first time. It is in this period that a unified sentiment of identity emerged. Since then, the indigenous peoples of central-south Chile began to use

the name Mapuche in order to describe themselves. Boccara is right when he asserts that the "Reche-Mapuche" represent a particularly interesting example of ethnogenesis since the "Reche" power to resist not only allowed them to survive but was also the nucleus of a "profound process of transculturation which gave way to the composition of a new social formation and to the emergence of new identities" (458).

I believe it is precisely in this period that the Mapuche people had the best chance to become a nation. They did conform to a more or less solid and large ethnic group, they were relatively rich, they adopted new customs which worked to their advantage, they had pride in their ancestry, and they had the ability and the capability of becoming a nation. Going back to Taras and Ganguly, and Smith's definition of an ethnic group, the Mapuche fulfilled all six characteristics: 1) they were united by a common inherited and distinctive culture; 2) they had a collective name; 3) they possessed a shared history; 4) they were associated with a specific territory; and 5) they possessed a sense of solidarity. Why did they not become a nation? Why did they miss this opportunity? It was not because of time limits. From the time they identified themselves as Mapuche people in the 1760s until the final conquest in the 1880s, more than one hundred years passed. Several possibilities are at hand for assessing their inability to become a nation. One possibility is that perhaps they thought that the advantageous situation they were enjoying would not drastically change with time. The "malocas" were simply a thing of the past since they had fairly good relations with the "huincas," or criollos/Chileans. That could explain the fact that they did not react in any violent way when they were considered not as Mapuche citizens but as Chilean citizens right after the independence from Spain. The new Chilean state did not seriously recognize a separate sovereign entity such as an autonomous Mapuche territory. In this sense, the treaties signed

by the Chilean state with them were just a means to stop Mapuche attacks and violent manifestations. It must be remembered that the Chilean state fostered a military campaign to "pacify" the Araucania or Mapuche territory, which ended in the 1880s.

The Mapuche people, even when highly organized by the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, were not able to form one large ethnic group. Instead, they opted for maintaining a partially independent group structure. The "futumapu" represented several smaller units but it did not represent or have the power of a central government. In this sense, power between the different units involved a type of negotiation and was not simply vertical. Ethnically, then, the Mapuche people formed a large group composed of several smaller ethnic groups. This structural division was not favorable to the necessary cohesiveness required for political unity. At one point in history the Mapuche people were on the road to becoming one strong ethnic community, but somehow they lacked organization. A nation is defined as "a politicized ethnic group" which transcends the notion of a cultural group. The Mapuche people did not become a politicized group; they were not able to transcend being a cultural or ethnic group. Because of it, they missed the opportunity to become a nation.

The "Pacification of the Araucania" by the Chilean state must be seen as both a territorial and a political conquest. By the 1880s, the Mapuche population was dispersed and alienated. This defeat left the Mapuche with their "traditional" and most valuable weapon: the ability to resist. They did resist and their descendants continue to resist, but the conditions have changed. They have been the subject of another process which has been in place for more than a century: the process of assimilation.

The last decades

Teresa Durán Pérez points out that by the mid 1980s, the Mapuche society was described by scholars and Mapuche people alike as having at least one of the following characteristics: 1) culturally, this society has a world-view that partially guides the oldest generations of these communities; 2) Mapuche society has lost or is losing its identity, values, and history; 3) socio-politically, it does not possess a principal central organization which could lead and define the behavior of their members; 4) economically, they are being progressively impoverished due to the lack of land, to the bad quality of the land that they do have, and to the deficient technology used to produce staples.²¹ Durán notes that in the first two decades of the twentieth century, the Mapuche experienced a partial or total rejection of their identity. In this case they emigrated from their communities to the cities and initiated a voluntary process of mestizaje or miscegenation. On the one hand, this is really a voluntary process of Chileanization of the Mapuche population; on the other hand, this is a process of assimilation and in its extreme form can be considered as a process of ethnocide. In the 1970s and the 1980s, the Mapuche people experienced a process of re-elaboration of their identity, which in essence means that many youngsters and adults have opted for acting in the national society and in their own society giving expression to a new Mapuche identity more in accord with the historical moment they are living.

Some other important facts will take us further in our comprehension of the Mapuche question. According to Saavedra, during the last thirty years the Mapuche people have experienced a significant change: there has been a gradual proletarianization of their members, they have emigrated to the cities, and they are

21. Teresa Durán Pérez, "Identidad Mapuche. Un problema de vida y concepto," *América Indígena*. Vol. XLVI, No. 4, Octubre-Diciembre 1986.

suffering from poverty. More than sixty percent of the population lives in urban zones. The majority of the Mapuche population is formed by emigrants.

Saavedra also informs us that presently the majority of the Mapuche population lives in the same places that poor Chileans live; that their clothes, food, homes and daily life are no different from those of their neighbors; and only in rural communities some traditional ways of daily Mapuche life persist (175-207).

In reference to the 2002 census, it must be remembered that the Mapuche made up 3.84% of the total population. Considering that more than sixty percent of the Mapuche people live in the cities just like any poor common Chilean, probably with a high degree of acculturation, we are left with approximately 1.5% of Mapuche people who live in rural areas. Just as in the cities there has been a process of proletarianization, in rural areas there has been a process of "campesinización" or "peasantization" which also makes some degree of assimilation probable from the Mapuche community members. If we subtract these members from the 1.5% because we consider them as acculturated and not really as belonging to the Mapuche community, we are left with still a lower percentage. This would mean that out of a little more than 15 million inhabitants, approximately 150,000 individuals would belong to an authentic Mapuche community. But we are not dealing with an ethnic group or with a nation; we are dealing with the *descendants* of an ethnic group. That's why the act of categorizing, in this case, cannot be seen as directed towards the notion of recognizing (or not) an ethnic community since an act of recognition would mean a complete lack of understanding of historical processes. Ideally, the categorization or the counting of the descendants of original Mapuche groups serves the purpose of identifying their needs in order to seek ways to ameliorate their situation. Regarding the concept of loyalty, it seems that most Mapuche people have

opted for a "dual" commitment or identification, one as a Chilean national and the other as a descendant of Mapuche ancestry.

Concluding remarks

The Mapuche people are no longer an ethnic group; rather, they are an indigenous community who are the direct descendants of an original ethnic group which flourished, in an amalgamated form, in the late eighteenth century. Throughout its existence, this ethnic group has undergone several transformations in an ongoing dialectical process. At their peak, the Mapuche ethnic community had the resources and the ability to become a compact group, but their lack of organization and of political vision played against them. They missed the opportunity to become not only a united single community but also, and more importantly, a nation. From the 1880s on, in spite of their resistance to adopt the Chilean culture, they nevertheless have gradually assimilated and have become Chilean nationals, more so in the second half of the twentieth century and in the beginning of the twenty-first century. Many scholars, academicians, sociologists, anthropologists, and political scientists believe that total acculturation of the Mapuche people is a question of time. It is coming, like it or not. Since they cannot go back in history, nor can they start a process of re-ethnification, they are left with two choices: to continue their traditional resistance or to assimilate. They do the choosing.