SHORT PAPER 2: *COURAGE TASTES OF BLOOD*

Mary Zell Galen

HIST 110-50: Honors Modern Western Civilizations

April 19, 2016

Florencia E. Mallon’s *Courage Tastes of Blood* documents the history of a Chilean Mapuche community throughout the course of the twentieth century, as the United States’ response to the Cold War increased the community’s struggle to possess land. Persevering through poverty, difficulties to maintain a cultural identity, and struggles surrounding complex land claims, the Mapuche people now own more land as the twentieth-first century begins due to legislation and protests.

Originally beginning with the Spanish conquest of Latin America, the Mapuche’s predominate struggle throughout the twentieth century remained maintaining access to land. As the Hispanic Chilean system of land ownership was rooted on paper deeds and in the court system, the Mapuche community struggled to claim ownership. The Mapuche people faced extreme discrimination and racism after the Spanish occupation. In order to achieve their own political and economic success, the Hispanic Chilean government failed to recognize the genuineness of the Mapuche land claims. These land claim battles took place in Spanish, not the Mapuche’s native language, placing the Mapuche at a greater disadvantage. Beyond land claims, the Hispanic Chilean public education system used systemic racial segregation against Mapuche students, as doña Felicia’s oldest son Hugo faced for not knowing his shoe size. The government strived to keep the Mapuche people in poverty; preventing access to the Mapuche’s land was used as a main tool.

A physical space is critical for any cultural survival. Without land, the Mapuche’s culture would merge into Hispanic Chilean culture and cease to exist after several generations; thus, the Mapuche people would lose their sense of identity and the community would cease to exist. Furthermore, the Mapuche’s lost land forced them onto poorer quality land; this new land decreased their quality of life and livelihood. As the Mapuche’s land was taken and discrimination increased, entire generations faced hardships and disadvantages.

To remain owners of their land, the Mapuche worked with and against the Hispanic Chilean legal system. The Mapuche initially worked to settle their ownership disputes through the in courts. In 1925, the first Mapuche congressman created the first Indigenous Lands Division Law. However, this law hurt the Mapuche people because the system of land grants required possession of the entire piece of land before the division process began. However, working within the Chilean courts and senate led to continued economic and social discrimination for the Mapuche people. By December 20th, 1970, the Mapuche were inspired by President Salvador Allende and began to take action outside of the law through occupation of their former land. However, after the rise of the military junta government beginning on September 11, 1973, hope was lost again for the Mapuche people and land instability increased.

The Cold War conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union directly affected the Mapuche people due to Chile’s governmental actions throughout the second half of the twentieth century. The United States government, following the containment policy initiated by President Harry S. Truman, worked to stop the spread of communism by attempting to insure the existence of as many non-communist countries as possible. Both the United States and the Soviet Union worked to expand their influence globally and limit the spread of the other’s ideological policies, displayed through “hot” conflicts such as the Korea and Vietnam War. Increasing the United States’ concerns for Latin America falling under the iron curtain like regions including Eastern Europe, sections of Africa, and Central and East Asia, Cuba became backed by the Soviet Union and fell to communism only a couple decades before socialism’s rise in Chile. To avoid losing a second Latin American economic partner and ally, the United States acted with extreme caution to preserve its political influence and business interests Chile.

The United States government continued using the containment policy in Latin America when supporting conditions allowing for the 1973 Chilean coup d’état and the overthrow of the Popular Unity regime. As the Mapuche allied themselves with President Salvador Allende’s leftist government in attempts to limit a capitalistic exploitation of their culture, the Mapuche were seen as an enemy when General Augusto Pinchot took power. Thought Pinchot was a military junta causing displacement and death for many Chileans, his neo-liberal policies gave the United States a sense of security over a threat of communism or socialism overtaking Chile. With the exception of the Carter administration, the United States government continued to back Pinochet to prevent leftist governments taking control in Chile at the expense of human rights. This United States backing of military junta government continued to hurt the Mapuche people, as the brutal Pinchot regime led to more privatization and less access to land.

Though Mallon’s research on the background of the Mapuche people strays from conventional standards in the history discipline, the unique “process of re-membering” allows for an interpretations of a minority’s perspective in history.[[1]](#footnote-1) The book also contradicts norms by valuing oral history on an equal level of written history; without Mallon’s use of oral history, the Mapuche’s twentieth century history could potential be lost. However, the validity of Mallon’s research is decreased by her refusal to release her complete interviews and other oral history research surrounding the Nicolás Ailío community. By publishing her conclusions without providing the public access to primary sources used decreased the credibility in Mallon’s work.

A writing method and historical analysis tool employed in *Courage Tastes of Blood*, Mallon used radical history as a tool for citizen activism, to display political opinions, and to provide sympathy for the Mapuche people. Without the diverse accounts Mallon gathered from across the Mapuche community, valuable information about an indigenous people and narratives of “human beings support[ing] each other through solidarity” would not have been accessible for the world outside of Chile.[[2]](#footnote-2) However, Mallon acknowledged the flaws in the oral narratives by unapologetically admitting to writing a partial history and use of radical history methods to build sympathy for the Mapuche people. Conflicting narratives and selectively, less-true shared information occurred in Mallon’s writing. Mallon placed primary focus on “not so much by identifying which [narratives] are “truer” than others, but by exploring how these different narratives allow the members of the communities and other actors in the communities’ drama to make sense of their past and present actions.”[[3]](#footnote-3) Despite its flaws and intentional message, a narrative history of the Mapuche history is less powerful and accurate without oral history interviews.

Caused by the Mapuche’s constant struggle for land during the twentieth century, the community faced a frequent battle to avoid poverty and retain their culture and lifestyle. The United States’ response to both the Cold War and Chilean political tensions led to an increase of land instability for the Mapuche people. Florencia E. Mallon’s unconventional approach to historical writing “rais[es] some of the most fundamental questions confronting the politically engaged historian.”[[4]](#footnote-4) Without Mallon’s research and an understanding of the Mapuche’s struggle for land, historians lack a valuable account of the effects Cold War’s effects on Latin American indigenous people.

Work Cited

Mallon, Florencia E. *Courage Tastes of Blood: The Mapuche Community of Nicolás Ailío and the Chilean State, 1906-2001*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005.

1. Florencia E. Mallon, *Courage Tastes of Blood: The Mapuche Community of Nicolás Ailío and the Chilean State, 1906-2001* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 232. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid., 231. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid., xii-xiv. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid., xiv. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)