*Courage Tastes of Blood*: The Effects of Chilean Government on The Mapuche Community Throughout the 20th Century

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The Cold War was arguably the most influential factor driving world affairs during the second half of the twentieth century. The Latin American country of Chile was of no exception to this time of great tension in relation to foreign affairs. As the Chilean government shifted and evolved in response to the surrounding world, so did the way of life for its citizens. Unfortunately, those who were considered of lower class or socioeconomic importance often fell victim to sources of more considerable power. In her historical work, *Courage Tastes of Blood*, author and radical historian Florencia Mallon displays the importance of collaboration with other communities, involvement of women and the shift of religion in Mapuche culture due to the imperative need to adapt in response to the continued friction with Chilean government during the latter half of the twentieth century. The class structure of these Chilean people becomes apparent as Mallon cites examples of the mistreatment and underrepresentation of the Mapuche people by the Chilean government.

The Mapuche are an indigenous group of people who rely heavily on land for cultural practice and basic survival needs. Mallon states, “Before their military defeat, the Mapuche people were structured politically in a decentralized way, through a combination of lineage-based marriage alliances and a fairly complex and flexible relationship among territory, kinship and identity (7). With access to land, the Mapuche were able to expand their communities as much as they pleased. However, “Local landowners, merchants and foreign and national colonists all vied for the best lands, economic connections and local political posts” (Mallon 41). The relationship between the traditional Mapuche people living in the Ailio community and a greedy entrepreneur is an example of this toxic form of relationship. Mallon states, “Duhalde was a French Basque immigrant… indigenous lands purchases by Duhalde were only the tip of an iceberg of legal and financial manipulation on which he bases his fortune… Duhalde’s end [his violent murder] marked the end of what he had represented: the voraciousness of the early landowners, who laid waste to everything that stood in their path, cutting down forests, moving fences, burning rukas, consuming people’s lives and lands” (49-57). In response to the removal and separation of the Mapuche people from their original lands, communities became smaller and more isolated. In order to adapt to this change of cultural system, “… the exchange of women through marriage between neighboring land-grant communities helped strengthen cultural, socioeconomic and kinship ties” (Mallon 7). An economic consequence of the loss of land was the inability to farm an adequate amount of crops due to lack or space or poor quality soil. Mallon concurs “… the Mapuche were forced to become peasants and small agricultural producers despite the fact they were most accustomed to a less intensive use of resources that combined agriculture with livestock raising” (76). This resulted in a cycle of poverty for the Mapuche people. In order to support the family, many children were forced to drop out of school early. This resulted in the lack of opportunity for many generations to come and the continuous cycle of poverty.

Although traditional Mapuche culture follows a patriarchal model, which often results in the role of women to be unnoticed or unappreciated, Mapuche women were an integral part in the motivation of the community to adapt and persist through difficult times. Mallon writes, “The place of a mother at the center of subsequence and spirituality is also a strong theme in the story of the Ailio Pilquinao family” (71). Because the loss of land resulted in great poverty, the men whom lost their jobs and were unable to support their families suffered great public humiliation. The Mapuche women were not responsible for providing for their families financially, therefore they were able to continue with their daily chores such as “garden plots and daily domestic tasks” (Mallon 71). This allowed the women in Mapuche communities to maintain a sense of dignity and therefore create a sense of stability and hope for their families. Mallon proves this theory stating, “… the traditional strength and power of Mapuche women, especially within their families and communities, was a motivating element..”(123). This quotation gives evidence that without the perseverance of women, the Mapuche culture may have perished under the challenges and oppression it faced.

In 1964, Christian Democrat Eduardo Frei was elected president. He sought to implement the Agrarian Reform, which appealed to the Mapuche as it guaranteed more property rights and therefore the opportunity for more prosperity. This shift in political structure can be argued as the reason for which many Mapuche converted to Christianity. Mallon writes, “To the intensification of religious feeling, whether Mapuche spirituality or the stronger presence of the Protestant and Evangelical religions was added a bevy of additional sociopolitical changes that began to affect many Mapuche communities during the 1960’s”(79). Regardless of what faith one practiced, religion helped the Mapuche people persevere through difficult times. Mallon cites many individual experiences with religion. She writes, “… Antinao told me that her mother had been taken to jail… “she never allowed the guards to shut up… she would talk to them about God”… Dona Maria was also convinced that God helped don Heriberto survive” (Mallon 163). A higher power gave the Mapuche people a source of hope and strength that they could not find anywhere else.

As the Cold War affected the structure of government of Chile, the Mapuche people were directly impacted. For over a century the Mapuche endured many forms of progression and setbacks in the form of land possession or removal. Ultimately, the Chilean government used inhumane and unethical tactics to manipulate the Mapuche community. Mallon writes, “Still, despite the inequality of circumstances, the Mapuche tenaciously resisted the abuses perpetrated among them, and they did not always lose” (41). Mallon stresses to her readers that the collaboration with surrounding communities, involvement of women and the shift of religion in Mapuche culture, allowed those individuals to avoid complete assimilation, maintain a sense of heritage and culture, and preserve a presence that exists in our world today.

Mallon’s historical piece, *Courage Tastes of Blood*, emphasizes a form of literature known as radical history. This form of writing allows us to view history through the factual yet biased and opinioned views of a professional historian. Works of radical history allow one to receive the thoughts and insight of the author while giving one the ability to compare one’s own opinions against that of the historian and/or author. Victoria Mallon uses historical archives and first-hand accounts of Mapuche and non-Mapuche individuals in the form of interviews. Her thorough and committed research show her passion for the Mapuche and makes for a captivating piece of historical work. I enjoyed this piece of historical literature as Mallon was able to effectively convey the way in which her interviewees perceived their experiences and struggles as they persevered against the Chilean government. Radical history gives the reader the opportunity to not only witness first-hand accounts of individuals, but to understand their motives and beliefs regarding the experience as the author documents the way in which they portray their story and the emotions that they appeal to.

Works Cited

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