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*Courage Tastes of Blood*

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Modern Western Civilization

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The lives of the Mapuche community, specifically the community of Nicolás Ailío, are the main focus of *Courage Tastes of Blood* by Florencia E. Mallon. The book has a primary focus on the community and the Chilean State during the 20th century. Mallon incorporates the background of the Mapuche culture to explain how the communities were changing. The land of the indigenous people was a major issue and primary focus of Mallon. Poverty in the Mapuche community was another topic on which Mallon divulged. The motives of the Cold War and the changes of government had a vast influence on the life of the Mapuche, as accounts from Mallon prove. The sources of much of Mallon’s information are oral stories that have been passed down and Mallon displays the material in a radical way. Specifically, Mallon sides with the Mapuche people instead of explaining the information from an unbiased viewpoint.

 The largest conflict of the Mapuche people involved land reform. The treatment of land by the indigenous people varied considerably from the treatment of land by the government. The Mapuche people recognized how land was divided by person, but there was no legal proof of land ownership. The government did not perceive land ownership in this way and did not acknowledge that the indigenous people owned the land. As a solution to the land discrepancies, “The Ley de Redicación de Indígenas (Law of indigenous settlement) was promulgated in 1866…In theory, the mapping of indigenous territory being brought under Chilean state control would begin with the legal settlement of the native population on their ancestral lands, and only afterward would government officials have the right to define how much land was left for other uses” (Mallon 36). However, Mallon argues that the government did not follow this law. Instead, the government took the land they desired and would distribute the remaining land to the indigenous people. There were instances where leaders were forced to move locations due to land. Mallon claims, “If a native leader refused to move his lineage to another location, government officials tried to reduce the size of the land grant” (Mallon 37). The government claimed to distribute the land to the indigenous people first, but in reality the Chilean state had claimed certain lands as state property. As seen in Mallon’s argument, the government and the Mapuche community viewed land in polar opposite understandings, resulting in enormous tension between the groups.

 The Mapuche people faced many challenges other than land reform, one of which was a constant state of poverty. The Mapuche people lived and worked in a primarily agrarian society. Their work was focused on sustaining life by farming essential survival needs rather than making a profit. Mallon argues that the Mapuche, specifically the community of Nicolás Ailío, faced poverty as a result of oppression on indigenous culture. Mallon claims, “Continuing to divide the peasantry according to race only benefited the dominant classes, because it divided the dominated among themselves and created a racial justification, based on stereotypes about Mapuche inferiority and “lack of civilization” for the entire system of domination” (Mallon 82). Mallon sides with the Mapuche people and claims that there was no differentiation between different labor types and oppression based on race. The oppression is one of the reasons that the Mapuche communities suffered and were forced to live in poverty.

 Even though the Mapuche faced many challenges there are accounts of successes when the Mapuche faced their challenges. The land reform that occurred under Allende gave more land to those who already owned land. This resulted in the community of Nicolás Ailío being at a disadvantage. In addition, the land reform represented a continuation of the poverty-stricken lives for the Mapuche people, rather than assistance to a community in need. The community did not have adequate land necessary to farm the proper amount of food to feed the community. Additionally, the lack of land possession meant there was little power in the community. After several fights in an attempt to earn back their land, there were land expropriations that were given to the indigenous people. This land allowed the Mapuche people to thrive in their communities.

The government and the indigenous Mapuche people faced many conflicts, but a specific example of a conflict occurred over land. Mallon states, “According to law, Ubeda had the right, as a retired soldier, to a 150- hectare plot of fiscal land” (Mallon 41). The government claims that an indigenous person, Lorenzo Paillao, destroyed all of Ubeda’s possessions on the land. The Mapuche community argues that Ubeda came and destroyed Paillao’s land with an army and that Paillao acted in an attempt to retrieve his land. Mallon sides with the Mapuche community and claims, “Paillao and his family had been pressured to move from the land on which they had customarily been settled” (Mallon 44). Each side has a different perspective on how and who initiated the violence, but both sides reach the same conclusion. When analyzing historical stories, it is important to remember that each side has bias. It is also essential to receive evidence from both viewpoints in order to arrive at an informed decision on what truly happened.

 The changing government of Chile had an effect on the treatment and actions of the Mapuche community. Salvador Allende Gossens won the election in 1970 as part of the Unidad Popular (UP) party. Allende wanted to raise the standard of living of the working class. According to Mallon, “A few days after Salvador Allende won the presidential election, a committee was formed in the community of Ailío to study the land problem people had been enduring for more than sixty years” (Mallon 107). One issue regarding the study was that the people on the committee were not from the area and did not understand how land was divided in the Mapuche community. The people did not agree with the way that Allende was handling the situations in Chile. Augusto Pinochet was the leader of a military junta who planned to take power. The military stopped their protection of the presidential palace in Chile. Allende would not leave the palace and committed suicide. The military junta led by Pinochet then came into power. The military junta handled the land disputes differently from Allende. There are accounts of people not leaving what they believed to be their land and the military coups torturing people into doing what Pinochet wanted. Mallon includes an account of a man being electrocuted (Mallon 138). The Cold War was an ideological conflict and a struggle for power. Pinochet believed that communist socialism meant power. He used militaristic tactics in his rule, which caused the people to vote Pinochet out of office. Mallon incorporates drastically different stories of life in the Mapuche community during the rule of Allende and Pinochet.

Mallon approaches the history of the Mapuche, Nicolás Ailío’s community, and the Chilean state in a unique, radical way. Typically, history is written in an unbiased way from the 3rd person point of view. This is especially true because most people who write about history were not around during the actual events. Mallon, on the other hand, handles writing about historical events in a vastly different way. Mallon openly sides with the Mapuche people and makes no attempt to hide her bias and puts blame on the Chilean government for the effects on the Mapuche and Nicolás Ailío’s community. Mallon’s sources were primarily oral stories that have been passed down through generations and altered depending on the narrator of the story. Each narrator has a different variation, depending on their role and personal situation during the historical event. The information was not told in English, so information could be lost or altered in the translation of the account of the event. Mallon did not incorporate textual history, so not all of the evidence may be historically accurate. I believe that radical history is a way of presenting historical information, but it is not the most accurate way to depict historical accounts.

 The Mapuche people suffered and faced challenges just like the other groups of indigenous people in Chile during the same time period. The community of Nicolás Ailío continued to survive, despite the attempts of the Chilean government to get the community to assimilate to the rest of the country. The community persevered through poverty and land reform to survive through several government reforms. It is important to remember the different forms and types of bias when analyzing and drawing conclusions from Courage Tastes of Blood and other historical documents of history. In conclusion, Mallon documents a detailed account of the challenges and successes of the Mapuche community of Nicolás Ailío throughout their history.

# 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.