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

The Dynamics of Indigenous Identity: The Mapuche and the State

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According to Florencia Mallon, anthropologists and sociologists have previously presented two competing and incomplete visions of the contemporary Mapuche. Anthropologists have emphasized Mapuche cultural retention, while sociologists stress the process of rural proletarianization and, implicitly, the loss of a specific Mapuche identity (87). By contrast, Mallon's historical analysis of the Mapuche community of Nicolás Ailío (the community was named after its first leader) demonstrates that cultural retention and peasant consciousness are not in fact mutually exclusive. She shows that through the twentieth century community members adopted both Mapuche and class identity as complementary social

and political strategies. In fact, she documents how the community stressed one strategy over the other depending on changing social and political conditions. That is, Mapuche identity in this community has a history and needs to be understood historically. In addition, Mallon argues persuasively that a proper understanding of this community needs to focus on the dynamic relationship between the Mapuche and the Chilean state.

In her analysis of this dynamic, Mallon aims to shed light on both the Mapuche and the state. As she puts it,

a more nuanced and realistic history of the conflicts and creativity of the Mapuche as a people actually yields a more humanly believable story, not only of survival against overwhelming odds, but also of creative if unequal intervention in the politics and process of the Chilean nation as a whole. Neither Mapuche history nor Chilean national history can be completely understood in isolation from the other.(21)

Understandably, the narrative of the book emphasizes the effects of the Chilean state on the Mapuche. In particular, Mallon provides countless examples of abuse and injustice suffered by the community. But the book also shows that, despite this history of injustice, the Mapuche of Nicolás Ailío never gave up on their pursuit of vindication. On the flip side, the story of Nicolás Ailío reveals the contradictory goals at the heart of the Chilean state. This was a state with contradictory goals. This was a state that promised to protect Mapuche communities, but felt compelled to privilege non-Mapuche property owners. While the state thrashed about trying to reconcile these conflicting imperatives, the Mapuche themselves had to respond flexibly and creatively in order to survive.

Mapuche communities were legally established in southern Chile according to a state settlement plan that had been put in place after the final military conquest of the Mapuche in the 1880s. According to the plan, each community was allotted land and with it

an implicit promise of state protection. However, the plan implied a far-reaching transformation of Mapuche culture. To begin with, the plan ignored traditional Mapuche kinship structures and imposed a Chilean model. In addition, the settlement plan limited the extension of each communal grant, and thereby forced the Mapuche to abandon livestock production and turn towards agriculture. Finally, many communities received land grants that overlapped the holdings of private land speculators. As a result, many Mapuche communities found their holdings were insufficient even for agriculture. To make their communities viable many communities turned to the court system and state bureaucracies in the desperate hope that their land-holdings might be expanded. Thus, by the early twentieth century, the history of these communities was frequently one of poverty and litigation.

The community of Nicolás Ailío was particularly aggrieved in its land claims, but found little satisfaction in the courts. Not only was the community unable to recapture its disputed lands, but the land dispute itself became a mechanism of cultural transformation because it pushed the Mapuche to think about land and land ownership according to the Chilean legalistic mode. The shortfall in agricultural production also forced community members to seek alternative sources of income outside the community and thereby forced the Mapuche to adapt to the workings of the labor market. Nevertheless, the land dispute did have some positive effects for the community of Nicolás Ailío. The dispute served to reinforce the concept of community. Indeed, Mallon argues that throughout these early years, the legal struggle formed “the most important and constant thread in the community’s history” (48). So the community’s legal strategies had the curious effect of both acculturating the members to some Chilean norms while also strengthening an important sense of cultural difference.

Ironically, this sense of difference was most threatened during the land reform era of the 1960s and early 1970s. During those years, leftists held out the prospect of new lands for the Mapuche. However the promise of land reform threatened Mapuche identity because leftists did not offer land to the Mapuche as “Mapuche.” Instead, land was promised to “peasants,” which raised a crucial dilemma. The Mapuche had to decide whether to join forces with such a political movement and reach across ethnic lines, or whether to continue their land struggles strictly as Mapuche. Mallon describes considerable ambivalence on this issue as many Mapuche were understandably skeptical about the possibility of cross-ethnic alliances. In fact, the community of Nicolás Ailío apparently divided on the issue, with some members keeping their distance while others enthusiastically participated in land seizures in their region. As a result of one of these seizures during the government of Salvador Allende, some members of Nicolás Ailío temporarily left the community to take over a nearby dairy farm along with several non-Mapuche peasants. While reading this account, one can well imagine that an enduring land reform might very well have produced a gradual dissolution of Mapuche identity and community.

But of course the land reform did not endure. The brutal repression of the dictatorship (1973-1990) interrupted any gentle process of Mapuche acculturation. This is not to say that the dictatorship sought to promote Mapuche identity. Far from it. In 1978, the dictatorship actually tried to undermine Mapuche identity by eliminating indigenous communal titles to land. In the case of Nicolás Ailío, the end of communal titles brought on a tremendous subsistence crisis as many community members were forced to migrate at least temporarily. But these setbacks seem to have encouraged the revival of Mapuche identity. In response to adverse conditions, different communities came together to strategize. In the case of Nicolás Ailío, NGOs facilitated the process, sometimes

unintentionally. These local developments in turn had an effect on national politics. Because separate communities became more comfortable working together, supra-regional Mapuche organizations grew in strength. Some Mapuche leaders even came together in the late 1980s to form a new radical organization, the *Consejo de Todas las Tierras*. (180-1)

The return of democracy in 1990 brought a new round of change for the Mapuche. In 1992, the new Chilean state created another program to buy lands for Mapuche communities and individuals. The community of Nicolás Ailío applied for one of the grants and eventually received one. The results, according to Mallon, were somewhat traumatic. First, the community divided between those who chose to remain on the old grant and those who wanted to make a new life. And then the new community of Nicolás Ailío II found the new environment to be more challenging than expected. But the turn of the century found both the new and old communities gradually improving and slowly overcoming the crisis of the previous ten years. Thus Mallon is able to conclude her narrative on an optimistic note and one cannot help but agree with Mallon's positive assessment. After all, through a century of give-and-take with the Chilean state the residents of Nicolás Ailío had learned to expect the unexpected and adapt to shifting conditions. The obvious question for the future is how Nicolás Ailío I and II will be shaped by the distance between them. Will the communities remain culturally and socially linked? Or will the future see these communities drift apart and develop along different historical trajectories?

As for the history of Nicolás Ailío, Mallon has done an admirable job of reconstructing its past and setting it within a wider context. Although oral histories form the backbone of the study, it is amazing how much documentary evidence she was able to recover on this single community. These documentary sources are central to the analysis because they provide the state's perspective on the

community. In everything from court files to news articles and agricultural studies, Mallon finds records of state attitudes towards the Mapuche of Nicolás Ailío and she links these records to other sources that then help illuminate the state's relations to Mapuche communities more generally. This, then, is not just a narrow micro-history of a small community. The book tells the story of a common history shared across a broader region. In particular, by setting oral and documentary sources in dialogue with one another, Mallon is able to show that the state's actions in this one locale were not isolated or arbitrary acts. Instead, they corresponded to wider patterns of state action and Mapuche reaction that grew out of the contradictory goals of the Chilean state.

Indeed, in every period that she covers, Mallon seems to have discovered documents in which state agents explicitly voice their ambivalence about Mapuche communities and Mapuche land ownership. State agents consistently recognized that the Mapuche had suffered abuse and injustice, but they could never bring themselves to make the redress of past injustice a priority. Throughout the twentieth century, these state agents prioritized economic efficiency and development ahead of justice. And they considered the Mapuche as inefficient by definition. The result is that state actors and agents would often give voice to a rhetoric of justice and protection, but ultimately would never live up to that rhetoric.

It would be tempting to conclude, then, that this rhetoric was ultimately empty and useless. But one of Mallon's major points is that this rhetoric had a real effect, even if it was rarely honored. At the very least, she argues, the community was able to use state rhetoric as a foundation for their communal strategies of vindication. In so doing, the Mapuche of Nicolás Ailío both kept the rhetoric alive and preserved their sense of community. This sense of community was itself a real achievement in a society that was increasingly anti-

communal in its guiding ideologies. So, while the state rhetoric of paternalism may not have inspired much state action, it did provide a foundation for the Mapuche reaction to the state.

Overall, these are interesting and important observations about the Mapuche/state dynamic in the twentieth century. With these observations, Mallon's book makes a subtle and nuanced contribution to the historiography of modern Latin America. While the book is perhaps too subtle and nuanced for undergraduates and general readers, an academic audience will appreciate the insights one can get on indigenous peoples and the nation state from the history of one small community. Those sections that draw mostly from the oral histories—the opening section on the dictatorship period is especially strong—provide the most engaging and compelling reading for a less specialized audience.