

Fragmented Struggle: Contentious Politics & the Mapuche in Chile

Since the independence of Chile, indigenous people have faced marginalization and various forms of repression. For example, Chile is one of the few Latin American countries that does not recognize indigenous people in its constitution. Since Chile's independence, factions of the Mapuche (Chile's largest indigenous groups) have mobilized for better rights and recognition from the Chilean government. However, unlike other Latin American countries, the Mapuche have failed to form a unified mobilization, and they have also failed to form a unified ethnic political party (Yashar 2005 and Van Cott 2005). Currently, Mapuche organizations are divided across their goals and strategies for engagement with the state. Some Mapuche organizations mobilize to gain constitutional recognition from the state and advocate for plurinationality, others mobilize for autonomy, and others mobilize for complete separation from the Chilean government. The fragmentation across institutions was evident, but it was unclear whether this fragmentation also existed at the individual level.

Thus, this summer, I conducted pre-dissertation fieldwork in Temuco and Santiago, Chile, to understand the heterogeneity among the Mapuche and the historical precedent for these divisions. I conducted seven semi-structured interviews with Mapuche and non-Mapuche individuals during my fieldwork. They had either worked as community leaders, bureaucrats, or as members of organizations that worked on issues related to the Mapuche. I also had informal conversations with other individuals, such as faculty members and people that worked in non-state institutions dealing with indigenous issues. Through my interviews and conversations, I found that the heterogeneity across Mapuche organizations is also present at the individual and community level. For example, when asked about their national identity, many Mapuche responded that they were Mapuche living under Chilean occupation. In contrast, others responded that they were both Chilean and Mapuche, and others noted that some Mapuche do not identify as Mapuche and instead only identify as Chilean. Similarly, when asked about their preferences for the new constitution, Mapuche individuals demonstrated a variety of preferences, emphasizing the significant variation across Mapuche communities. My fieldwork findings lead me to my dissertation research questions: What are the preferences of the Mapuche for being part of the Chilean states? And under what conditions are Mapuche activists more likely to utilize (or support) violence to achieve their overarching goals?

Works Cited

- Van Cott, Donna Lee. *From Movements to Parties in Latin America : the Evolution of Ethnic Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. Print.
- Yashar, D.J., 2005. *Contesting citizenship in Latin America: The rise of indigenous movements and the postliberal challenge*. Cambridge University Press.