

Land Decolonisation in South America: The Right to Belong to the Land

The case of the Araucanía

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Introduction

Marked by the Bío Bío to the north and Toltén Rivers to the south, the Pacific Ocean to the west and the Andes to the east, Araucanía in southern Chile is a region historically and still today known as ‘the frontier’. However, the region was never a real frontier; rather it was a space excluded from the control of the Chilean nation state until 1883. Prior to that, the Chilean territory had therefore not been continuous; in between lay an autonomous territory occupied by Mapuche people. Despite its historical conquest, the central-southern region of Chile is still riven by confrontations over land control, with the involvement of old and new actors. In this scenario, the expansion of land grabbing has opened a space to consider how land resistance movements have the decolonial potential for a revolutionary transformation of the territory.

Different from the colonisation of most of the world, the modern history of land manipulation in the Araucanía begins with the military campaign organised by the state of Chile in a process ironically named the ‘Pacificación’ (pacification), or the ‘Ocupación’ (occupation) of the Araucanía (1861-1883). The territorial autonomy of Mapuche people of the Araucanía that survived the Spanish colonial conquest

reached an end with military annexation by the Chilean state. For Mapuche people the postcolonial incorporation to the state brought territorial, epistemic and historiographical violence and domination (Legg, 2007, p.265) all at once, while being incorporated, though their dispossession, to the national project.

The *reducciones* ('reductions', or reservations) became the most effective mechanism to dominate Mapuche groups. As Klubock (2014) analyses, colonisation officials understood that the best way to control Mapuche resistance was through the imposition of borders (p.31). The racial politics against the native population as people without rights was extended to the occupation of their lands. The Mapuche were given a space within the national territory by a process structured on the matrix of colonial power, which set up a social and spatial stratification placing Mapuche men, and especially women, at the bottom. This process of 'internal colonialism' was based on 'specific mechanisms of segregation-exclusion' and founded on the horizon of a deep and latent structural colonial violence (Cusicanqui, 2010, p.13).

The land given as a result of the *reducciones* of the Mapuche people gained a new status. Land resistance did not come 'naturally' to Mapuche communities but the defense of their reservations against new pressures from state, private and corporate interests came to define a constant, structural relation with the nation-state project and a place of cultural resistance. Under the current expansion of extractivism through forestry industry is that land resistance is reinvigorated. In this paper it will be explored the ways in which the extractivist industry operates creating a new colonial landscape and the debates among land resistance and the potential for land decolonisation.

This paper is part of a thesis project examining the meaning of land under the conflictive expansion of global financial capital in the form of an extractive forestry industry and the implications for the new production of space by rural and urban subaltern Mapuche people in Chile through political practices, political imaginaries and the representation of spaces (Brenner and Elden, 2009, p.359).

Forestry and land grabbing in Chile

The current phenomenon of land grabbing is a type of land appropriation that moves beyond the classic framework of legal and spatial boundaries in the nation-state's political organisation. A new form of enclosure is taking place, in which land is wanted but people are mostly irrelevant or, in the worst scenario, an obstacle. The actors suffering this process are peasants, landless, indigenous and so on. But those creating the business of land acquisition are more difficult to discern. These represent an entanglement of transnational companies, states through their financial extensions (pools, leasing, foreign direct investment), NGOs and international cooperation organisations.

The technocratic phase: Biopolitical¹ enclosure

Entering the global market via neoliberal restructuring of the economy and a political oppressive military regime created the conditions for a new phase of spatial transformation. The resisting population that did not migrate when their

¹ Foucault's notion of modern governance focuses on the subject more than the territory as the main target of governance, while maintaining previous regimes of sovereignty and discipline. Biopolitics refers to a form of power that, through an ensemble of institutions, procedures and forms of thought, enhances and administers people's lives or disallow (it to the point of dead) in the realm of explicit calculations, making knowledge-power a factor of the transformation of human life.

rural areas became exclusive zones for timber production started to live under a new regime of biopolitical enclosure.

Analysing enclosure as a spatial technology allows to critically trace the use of land in the context of modern political projects. Land has been framed as property, patrimony or resources; and it has been expressed through different forms – legal, economic, technocratic. However, it can also be interpreted in different cultural and ontological terms outside Western epistemology. The current regime of biopolitical enclosure creates a new form of conceptualising land that undermines people's role as 'inhabitants' in an ensemble with modern state territory – creating a new contradiction in space.

Enclosure is not limited to nature as in the sense of the Agricultural Revolution in England and the enclosure of the common land that took place from the 16th to the 19th centuries in Europe. Enclosure in a postcolonial state applies to the peoples living on the land who have been *reduced* in terms of space and in terms of their ability to reproduce their world view. The sites of interaction with the non-human environment, such as forest, mountains and rivers – to mention some sacred and non-sacred places of the Mapuche everyday life – were colonised as unoccupied land and put into state hands, for exploitation or sale.

In the context of present day Araucanía, the expansion of forestry activity is producing spatial enclaves of rural communities that are isolated and 'fenced off' by tree plantations. This spatial stagnation forces people to either sell their land (if they have any), migrate or resist. For Mapuche communities forestry expansion also affects their coexistence with nature. The expansion of the model further

affects people's cultural reproduction and knowledge: materials for traditional medicine disappear, and sacred spaces are inaccessible, among other practices with the land that are no longer possible. With the increase of migration, families break apart, with the elderly remaining alone in the countryside. The body is also affected. Health and alimentation is put in danger by water contamination and land desertification. The commodification of nature can be seen as a transformation in nature itself; but also a new technology with which to displace and discipline populations. This type of enclosure creates a new territorial dynamic guided by corporate interest and marked by extraction.

María Laura Silveira (2006) argues in *Global Corporate Territories* that such spaces are exclusive for extraction. Land is exploited in a way that eliminates other topography, eliminating any possibility of coexistence with other forms of social relations. It is a form of landed activity that promotes no type of solidarity, neither organic nor mechanic (Durkheim, 1984). Local populations are even treated as potential threats to plantations. Herding animals or collecting wood are some of the recognised practices associated with access and usage of common goods in rural spaces. These practices along with many others are now restricted, producing a different understanding of the enclosure and control of the land owned by these industrial extractive companies. The exclusivity of corporate spaces is achieved by enclosure as a permanent violent mechanism supported by military repression and political criminalisation of resistance.

Another characteristic of the corporate space is its continued expansion. Although the land enclosed for the purpose of this activity is formally demarcated by barbed wire, the extension of its residual activity branches out like a river network and

expands like an oil stain. This is a form of enclosure transcending formal border markers. It is a form of living enclosure defined by the effects of the type of production occurring on that land. From mining to forestry and soy plantations the biodiversity that makes the land into a source of life begins to die, drying out and becoming toxic and poisoned. Land and nature have become a living organism of death and expulsion. The spatial distribution of these agro-industrial territories has an enclave effect on the populations remaining in those spaces. In such cases there is an inversion: living surrounded by nature becomes living *enclosed* by nature.

Since extractivist industries utilise an economy of scale, they depend on the expansion of production, its intensity and the reduction of costs. This means constantly acquiring more land, increasing the yield and reducing labour to a minimum. A direct impact is felt by poor rural communities, exacerbating their isolation in social and spatial enclaves among the plantations.

The forestry industry did not create a large and stable labour market;² instead, people became redundant as labour and in space. The 'natural' movement of the market and its newly enclosed land also required control. The military junta, following the Chicago monetarist experiment, were in charge of repressing any nascent union activity, or any expression of resistance. Practices of enclosure and control aligned to the interests of corporations were prioritised over other social spatial forms that formerly characterised rural life and labour.

² The corporate formatting of the industry meant the freedom to hire subsidiary companies for labour, and the obstruction of the creation of unions

As a result the notion of bounded territory has been undermined by the creation of enclaves of extraction fragmenting the territory. For the corporations land signifies 'a platform to obtain profit; for them, the territory is just a resource in their equation and not the condition of their existence' (Silveira, 2006, p.23). The result is a dynamic of territorial violence and social dislocation.

The violent impact of this contradiction between extractive land use and local practices mostly affected the 'reduced' Mapuche communities. The region heavily linked to the historical memory of the Mapuche territory³. consists of vast areas of native forest and, at the same time, the biggest concentration of forestry plantations in Chile (Aylwin, Yanéz, Sanchez, 2013) with a total of 1,403,918 hectares.⁴ Since the development of the forestry industry, where the most intensive tree plantation expansion took place, migration and unemployment augmented accordingly. Although the discourse of national development is strongly backed up by the success of the forestry industry in the country's export market, it has had no positive effect on local communities. The closer to the plantation, the more serious the poverty of the population and of the land, and the higher the increase in migration⁵.

Against the expectations of Mapuche organisations, the transition to democracy further developed the regime of biopolitical enclosure. Promises given by the

³ Biobío, La Araucanía, Los Ríos and Los Lagos

⁴ The areas with the highest concentration of forestry plantations are Biobío (919,793 hectares) and La Araucanía (484,125 hectares) (INFOR, 2014).

⁵ The region of Araucanía by 2009 had a poverty rate of 27% by 2009 compared with the national average of 15.1%. Communities in central-southern Chile have suffered a decrease in population: Ercilla (-11.2%), Lumaco (-15.2%) Los Sauces (-5.7), Traiguén (-12.1) and Purén (-8%) while the national average increased by 10.2%. Provinces going through a transition to the forestry model also show a rapid decrease in population: Puerto Saavedra (-18.8) and Cunco (14.9) (González et. al, 2014, p.12) This data was found in the WRM report (González et al, 2014). It could not be double-checked since the government has withheld access to any information from the 2012 census. Subsequent reports by different state agencies have also been withdrawn.

*Concertación*⁶ government regarding land restitutions, along with other claims, were neither honoured nor placed on the political agenda. Democracy did not only fail to return land expropriated during the military regime but continued with the commodification of nature by expanding dam constructions and plantations and guaranteeing the maintenance of the neoliberal economic model. Since the return to democracy, rural conflict has returned to the public scene, however this time with a marked Mapuche signature. As a conclusion, not only has the rural exodus increased but also the repressive practices against local protestors have continued as part of democratic process.

The conflict hit peak with the case of Lumaco in Araucanía. In 1997, the arson of three trucks belonging to the company Forestal Bosques Arauco led to the invocation of special security law to deal with the situation⁷. Under the Ley de Seguridad Interior del Estado (Law of State Security; LSE), 12 Mapuche people were incarcerated and prosecuted in under 15 days. Corporations and landowners felt under threat from an increase in violent incidents in the south of the region, and put pressure on the government of President Ricardo Lagos (2000-06). Lagos applied an anti-terrorist law left over from the Pinochet regime, bringing it back into effect.⁸ The Lumaco conflict marked a return to direct confrontation. The case reached national and global attention owing to its scale and how criminalisation was used to deal with the conflict. It also meant a qualitative transformation in the relationship between the Chilean nation-state and

⁶ An alliance formed by the center left during the transition to democracy from the Pinochet dictatorship.

⁷ Rather than conventional laws related to arson

⁸ Several changes have been applied to the anti-terrorism law of General Pinochet's military government. In 1991, the Aylwin government modified it to fit the standards of Human Rights legislation. In 2002, it was adjusted to the new code of criminal procedures (HRW, 2004, p.24). For more details see the full HRW report.

the Mapuche people (Pairicán, 2013, p.36).

Land decolonisation and production of space

Today, though indigenous people are accepted as citizens, their political rights as indigenous people are denied (Cerdeña García, 2012). Yet the events of Lumaco shifted the indigenous individual from a marginal, second-class societal place to target and threat at the same time. Now, his daily activities are seen as potentially associated with loyalties distinct from the nation-state; loyalties that could threaten the citizens, the nation, and the colonality of power (Quijano, 2010). Along with a portrayal of rural people as archaic and naturally violent, land and territorial autonomist claims are depoliticised. Instead of accepting land claims as a political issue, governments reframe the conflicts as a global security issue. This narrative of criminalisation has been developed in the post-9/11 context of global terrorism. The permanent global threat installed since the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers in New York City has permeated to the Latin American context in an enmity formation process putting the loyalty of indigenous or other local communities in doubt. This figure can be also explored using Georg Simmel's approach:

The stranger is by nature no "owner of soil"—soil not only in the physical, but also in the figurative sense of a life-substance which is fixed, if not in a point in space, at least in an ideal point of the social environment. (Simmel, 1950, p.3)

Simmel uses the historical example of the medieval Jews not permitted to possess land because of their 'ambiguous loyalty'. In the Western world today, it is the Muslims or Arabs who are incorporated into the framework of the urban spaces but as a subordinated community refused a sense of property in the

spaces of representation.

In the positivist paradigm of the 19th and 20th centuries, migration laws enacted by the new nation-states promoted the population of South American countries by European foreigners as the ideal citizen of the postcolonial era. These 'strangers' displaced the local, who in turn became the stranger in the new representation of space. In this way the jurisdiction of property is established in order to exclude ownership from the original communities. The native effectively becomes a non-owner of soil, integrated through exclusion as a peasant without land. The figure of the other has a social function for the collective, in reasserting the hegemonic group. In the context of the colonial, the indigenous is primarily the subject upon which the post-colonial nation is shaped.

Following the de-colonial approach, the 'modern subject' is moulded in the mirror of the colonial subject based on a racial, hierarchical and epistemologically exclusive form of knowledge. In this construction, indigenous populations have been labelled in different ways depending on the time of the production of a nation-state narrative. The most pervasive label of 'otherness' in currency today is that of terrorism, which remains loosely defined in both academia and international relations. The flexible application of this label allows actions responsive not to national threat but to strategic global interest. In the new context military practices have been brought to bear on local populations. Warfare has been transformed by this process (Dillon and Reid, 2009)—locating the enemy within the state. Throughout Latin America the post-dictatorship era has seen the project of multiculturalism redefine native populations through a process of 'folklorisation' – itself yet another mechanism for colonialism. This is what Silvia

Rivera Cusicanqui calls 'a conditional inclusion' that defines the boundaries of second-class citizenship through a caricaturesque portrayal of subaltern identities' (Cusicanqui, 2012, p.100). In neoliberal, multicultural (Richards, 2010) Chile those who fall outside these parameters have been framed either as *mestizos* with no real indigenous identity, or terrorists with an irrational and violent mentality.

It might have been expected that social fragmentation, urban relocation and an ethnically subordinated integration would lead to second and third-generation Mapuche identity being subsumed into the larger 'liberal universe' of social Chilean society – or at least that this hybrid urban subject would no longer connect with isolated rural indigenous communities. However the 2012 census⁹ revealed that 1.5 million people claimed to be of Mapuche '*etnia*'¹⁰ (ethnicity), showing an increase of almost a million people over the 604,349 self-professed Mapuche in the 2002 census. Interestingly this trend has coincided with a steady increase of the urban Mapuche population; with 66% now living in the city and just 33% in rural areas.

Indeed, land decolonisation then does not need necessarily to be rooted in the land. For Cusicanqui the rural exclusivity of indigeneity leads to a new stereotypical 'theatrical display of alterity' (Cusicanqui, 2012, p.99). For her, the recuperation of 'original lands' moves away from a real discussion over hegemonic power. However it is necessary to contrast the Bolivian political reality

⁹ This information has been retrieved from Mapuexpress.com. The official results of the 2012 census have been withheld from the public owing to a dispute about methodologies. The census is now under international revision.

¹⁰ Chilean authorities refer to Mapuche as an ethnicity rather than a nation or people.

spoken of by Cusicanqui with the Chilean one. The lands claimed in Bolivia are not commodified land – they remain marginal lands still unattached to the global market. However the lands claimed by the community of Lumaco and others in Araucanía lie in the centre of corporate space production, making it very unlikely that the Chilean state will ever give away these lands as a concession to their neoliberal multicultural project.

What is it to be Mapuche today? Do you need to own land? Do you have to speak the language? Do you have to know the traditional practices? And how does that fit with the modern identity of the urban Mapuche, or *mapurbe*¹¹? Is this cultural hybrid capable of embodying the decolonial approach?

The case of land conflict in Araucanía fits easily into the classic Mapuche national history of territorial identity. But Héctor Nahuelpan (2013) contests the idea of a monolithic history elaborated purely through the lens of the rural communities – often seen as the center of tradition and locus of Mapuche conservation culture. He argues that this narrative is frozen in the past up to the point of the Chilean invasion and subsequent reductions; but it does not question that a claim for territory is itself a result of the encounter with colonial thinking. Furthermore, this narrative ignores how tradition has been re-invented in colonial power relations (Nahuelpan, 2013, p.24).

But what is the problem with this ‘strategic essentialism’ (Caniuqueo, 2014) for rural communities, if the goal is to decolonise land – to produce an autonomous territory? For Cusicanqui (2012) the narrative reinforces a monolithic

¹¹ Title of poem and book by David Aníñir (2009). A neologism combining ‘urban’ and ‘Mapuche’.

understanding of the 'native', delegitimising any other movement or political action unable to show certain credentials, like living in the countryside, and keeping ancestral practices, among others. For Cusicanqui the claim and recuperation of land can threaten the larger *mestizo* political project. So land (de)colonisation – from the perspectives of Cusicanqui and Mapuche radical historians such as Nahuelpan and Caniuqueo and activist poet and labourer Anífir – can be found in other, non-rural, spaces.

Nahuelpan's 'grey zones' help us to think of cognitive spaces that can break the binary distinction between urban/rural, modern/traditional, coloniser/colonised. The grey zone is where the 'motley society' can be enacted (Zavaleta Mercado, 2009) in which the internally colonised subject (Fanon, 1973) can admit him/herself as a Mapuche, though he or she might lack the liberal markers of identity: language, land, location, traditional practices, and so on.

Cusicanqui's critique of academic discourses of decolonial thought coming from the West (Mignolo, Quijano, Walsh, etc.) reflects on the modern dimensions of indigeneity (Cusicanqui, 2012, p.96) as one of entanglement with modern practices in places – markets, shantytowns, cities, mining centers, among others. There is no possible discourse of decolonisation and no theory without its practice (p.100). In the same way, when Lefebvre explains the science of space (1991), he also brings the dialectic triad: knowledge of space, discourse of space and practice of space. Critically analysing Chomsky's work on Cartesian linguistics (1966), Lefebvre pointed out that Chomsky 'completely ignores the yawning gap that separates this linguistic mental space from that social space wherein language becomes practice' (Lefebvre, 1991, p.5). In the same vein criticisms of

the semiotician Mignolo by post-colonial scholars like Cusicanqui have emphasised the place of decolonisation practices.

Searching for the spatial element of the decolonial project then, it is necessary to criticise the primordially philosophers have given to epistemological thinking, assuming it is “structurally” linked to the spatial sphere’ (Lefebvre, 1991, p.4). Cusicanqui also expresses frustration with the Western decolonial project headed by ‘Mignolo and co.’, calling it a neutralisation of ‘practices of decolonization by enthroning within the academy a limited and illusory discussion regarding modernity and decolonization’ (Cusicanqui, 2012, p.104). The radical element of the decolonial is dissipated when limited to academia – knowledge and discourse – and excluded from social space. Mignolo’s ‘border epistemology’ (Mignolo, 2010, 2012) looks for experiences of subaltern communities on the margins of modernity. However, this enforces the idea that modernity can have an ‘outside’. Seeking the margins of modernity can become a return to a Cartesian/Western logos, returning to a binary opposition between the modern/colonial, the urban/rural, the margins of modernity/the center of modernity. This is, however, difficult to find in space, as Lefebvre contests:

Epistemological thought, in concert with the linguists’ theoretical efforts, has reached a curious conclusion. It has eliminated the “collective subject,” the people as creator of a particular language, as carrier of specific etymological sequence (Lefebvre, 1991, p.4).

In Lefebvre’s dialectic of space he reminds us we are looking for the ‘concrete subject’. This paper looks to separate ourselves from the mental-space, where as Lefebvre would say ‘space is fetishised and the mental realm comes to envelop

the social and physical ones' (Lefebvre, 1991, p.5). We are looking for those collectives that create their own language that is 'inserted into the contemporary world' (Cusicanqui, 1991, p.95).

The current land or territorial claims from certain groups corresponds to a new phase of conflict in which rights are articulated in various forms: autonomist territorial discourses, political party formation, intellectual communities. These new groups are led by a new Mapuche generation who did not grow up in the countryside, were educated or worked in the city suburbs, or had their formative years during the dictatorship. These Mapurbe, or urban Mapuche are represented in student unions, political movements, studying groups, academic collectives and in the counter-cultural group of 'Mapunkies' or Mapuche punks, among others. These are all different identity groups that found a community through different subaltern modern cultural resources in combination with their Mapuche identity. This generation, in opposition to a previous 'shameful' one that searched for assimilation and survival, is – against neoliberal multiculturalism – producing its own motley space.

Translating this to social space, 200 years of imposed enclosure made losing land so prevalent that it became part of the oral history more than a material reality. Discourse over land became a valuable discursive resource for radical alterity. Against state predictions, in which land enclosure gives rise to subjects such as peasants, rural poor, natives or workers, in the last twenty years the discourse around land connected with identity has been invigorated. However, for Cusicanqui the identity around land and territory is unique to men, maintaining a

patriarchal form of ownership and possession as identity (Cusicanqui, 2012, p.106). Following this interpretation, it is necessary to abandon land and territory as the totem for identity. It is the invasion of the spaces designed by the 'cultural invader' that can give rise to a decolonial revolution. As Cusicanqui describes

The modernity that emerges from these motley relations and complex and mixed languages is what builds the Indian hegemony to be realized in spaces that were created by the cultural invader: the market, the state, the union. (Cusicanqui, 2012 p.107)

But these diverse urban-rural Mapuche movements each feed into the other. The binary distinctions of rural/urban, spiritual/material, national/global start to become more diffuse when local conflicts invoke global terrorism and global ecology threats; or when corporate space expansion transfigures the rural landscape as a space exclusive for extraction and not for people. It is in the contradictions of capitalism on fixed land that seemingly distant groups producing space or claiming land meet each other in solidarity. Paraphrasing Lefebvre the *right to belong to the land* in this context has different meanings depending on the political project: autonomy; municipal control; educational reform; hegemonic control; rural traditional practices, access to the timber market, and ecological transformation, among others.

This solidarity agreement expresses that land is being thought about and experienced in multiple ways. Not exclusively in its ancestral way, as a cosmology, but as a living space, a resource, a global claim against corporations and state homogenisation; an identity connector in opposition to the global and national hegemonic project. The various Mapuche streams, though heterogeneous, all support rural land claims. The struggle for land resonates on

multiple scales: from the glocal scale against the terrorist discourse; at a global and national level against a state-corporate alliance in the global economy; at a transnational level as well, where ecologist discourses are unified with identity and political projects contesting the destabilising forms of the neoliberal extractivist market in the Global South.

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