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# Rethinking Indigenous Resistance to Globalization

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**Abstract:** Since the first Europeans arrived in the Americas, indigenous peoples have sought to maintain their ways of life and culture despite the many attempts to transform or destroy them. For some, indigenous resistance is seen as the principal obstacle to progress, while others see indigenous culture as the innovative answer to the problems generated by globalization.

Drawing principally on the experiences of indigenous peoples in Latin America, we analyze their responses to the arrival of Europeans, the creation of the Nation-State, capitalist production, ‘development’ programs and environmental destruction. We argue that dominant ideas of development and progress have created and maintained structures of marginalization and cultural transformation, negatively impacting indigenous peoples. We conclude with a proposal of how indigenous ideas allow us to rethink our understanding of human life on the planet.

**Keywords:** Indigenous peoples, development, Colonialism.

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## 1. Rethinking indigenous resistance to globalization

In the increasingly interconnected global public space, images of indigenous peoples defending their lands from mega-development projects, including hydroelectric dams and interstate highways, are common but new. Indeed, since the arrival of the first Europeans to the Americas, indigenous peoples have sought to maintain their ways of life and culture despite the many attempts to transform or annihilate them. Throughout the planet, indigenous peoples have resisted and many continue to resist natural resource extraction, the imposition of capitalist production, religious conversion, and even well-meaning ‘development’ programs. Historically, indigenous resistance has been understood as the principal obstacle to the achievement of progress, although indigenous culture is increasingly perceived as the innovative answer to the problems generated by globalization and especially environmental destruction. Drawing on critical, perspectives of colonial and settler experiences in Latin America, our central argument is that most contemporary ideas on indigenous peoples and development are based on erroneous theoretical conceptualizations that perpetuate social, economic and political inequity as well as differences in material wealth between indigenous and non-indigenous populations.

Indeed, even the definition of ‘indigenous people’ is still politically debated. The term tends to be defined in opposition to the nation-state, capitalist development, and Western culture

and religions. It has been used by indigenous movements to resist economic development, but has also been used to marginalize their communities and to maintain unequal gender relations. Although an initial definition is necessary to begin the discussion, we propose that any definition of indigenous peoples needs to be understood as a fluid, dynamic concept that is defined by past and present intercultural relations. Thus, for the purposes of the present paper, indigenous peoples were colonized by a recognized nation-state (generally of European descent) and presently recognize that they belong to a culturally distinct nation. They possess separate political authority structures, although they do not have their own State even when some may participate in international activities.

At present, most indigenous peoples in Latin America have limited access to and control over natural resources, they experience territorial marginalization and social discrimination, and there are limited opportunities in indigenous communities. We argue that their current situation can be traced to historical processes, and especially to the concrete relations generated since the encounter/dis-encounter with the international system of states via the Conquest, colonization, and their annexation. Indeed, the violent process of incorporation defined the frontiers of 'indigenous land', generally reducing their autonomy of decision and action as well as placing their culture, economy, and political authority in an inferior position to the newly constructed 'national' state and the international state system.

This cultural interaction also introduced new criteria of differentiation into both indigenous and non-indigenous communities. For example, Hall and Fenelon (2008) observe that colonization in North America resulted in the division between more or less assimilated indigenous persons, between full-blooded and mixed-blood persons; it also transformed gender roles. These historical processes also resulted in the invisibilization and the (self) negation of indigenous culture within most 'national' societies even when there is increasing recognition of the right to be different (see for example, Merino and Quillaqueo 2004). Still, even when there is a common pattern, each process was shaped by historical interactions, and especially the political and diplomatic strategies developed in response to Conquest and colonization (Zavala 2008). The present paper analyzes indigenous resistance to the historical construction of material and intersubjective structures that continue to define the position of indigenous peoples in the global development process. Drawing on the experiences and perspectives of the Mapuche, the principal indigenous people in Chile, our analysis focuses especially on the creation and consolidation of the Nation-State and 20<sup>th</sup> century development programs.

## **2. Colonialism and the creation of the national state**

As with many indigenous peoples in Latin America, the Mapuche actively resisted Spanish occupation. Indeed, even when the Europeans were able to establish forts and outposts, the Mapuche maintained control of their lands south of the Biobio River and successfully expelled the Spanish at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. The Mapuche were the first and only indigenous peoples to have their sovereignty legally recognized by the Spanish Empire.

However, in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the European settlers who formed part of the newly independent Chilean government ignored the treaties, considered Mapuche territory to be 'empty' and justified its colonization. This logic followed the Doctrine of (Christian) Discovery, based on several papal bulls that allowed Spain and Portugal to claim to territories whose inhabitants were not subjects of a European Christian monarch (see Frichner 2010).

Thus, as in most colonial and especially settler states, the Chilean government justified their war against the Mapuche based on their ‘savage’, uncivilized nature (Neculman 1994). The doctrine of *Terra nullius*, still used in international law, defined lands inhabited by non-Christians as ‘vacant lands’, and therefore Christians had a right to its possession because non-Christians lack the morality that makes them human beings. As can be seen, this Christian doctrine justified the colonization of non-Christians by Christian powers and legitimized the violent dispossession and expelling of indigenous peoples from their lands. Like Christianity, Liberal political thought also legitimized the colonial project’s use of force with ‘uncivilized’ peoples due to their inferiority. Indeed, and reflected as well in the historical construction of the state, authors like Hobbes argued that the State created unity among its inhabitants by differentiating and protecting members from non-members, essentially ‘encouraging’ people to become citizens through the threat of violence. Thus, it is through (the threat of) violence that a Liberal state gained control of its territory and citizens begin to share values. In turn, from the liberal perspective, the law is ideally defined to reflect those values, thus allowing all its citizens to live within a peaceful environment where certain individual differences are tolerated and respected even when discouraged in public spaces. The ‘civility’ of this state contrasts with the state of nature (located outside the State), where there is insecurity and frequent injustice.

According to Liberal social contract theory, a rational, civilized person will voluntarily choose to become a citizen of a State in order to have both liberty and security. Following this same logic, individuals (and in our case indigenous persons) who chose to remain outside the State and not adopt the values of the corresponding national culture are considered to be uncivilized (or pre-modern). Liberals do not necessarily perceive this as a rational, free choice to protect their culture, but rather a non-choice because they unable/incapable of perceiving that living in a State is in their best interest.

Echoing Liberal theory, most colonial States in practice combined both violent and persuasive methods to encourage adoption of national values and incorporation into the national state. At the same time as shown by Turner (2006), these shared values of the nation-state provide the normative background for any Liberal discussion about justice.

As can be seen, in both thought and practice, indigenous societies were not conceptualized as self-governing societal cultures, but rather they were generally considered to be violent or noble savages (Shaw 2008). In turn, the Western colonial project and the subsequent conquest and assimilation of non-Western peoples consolidated this worldview in the collective memory, legal system, philosophy, and history at the national and international levels (Pitts 2011), where the idea of a single nation that shares basic cultural values remains an important obstacle to equity between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples and persons. The arrival of colonizers and settlers to indigenous lands drastically transformed their lives. Indigenous peoples were no longer able to move freely around their lands. In most cases, indigenous peoples lost their lands, and their communities and families were violently intervened and destroyed. In Latin America, although the official histories tend to emphasize assimilation and minimize the discussion of the indigenous resistance to the violence present in colonialism and state construction, both indigenous and non-indigenous scholars have increasingly contributed to a more balanced understanding of this period. In the following section, we trace a general historical pattern shared by most indigenous peoples in Latin America although there are historical differences depending on the strategies chosen.

### 3. Resistance, assimilation, and marginalization

Once indigenous people understood that the European settler sought to colonize and take control over their lands, they adopted diverse strategies to maintain their culture and way of life. Still, and despite the different historical processes, all the strategies have eventually resulted in certain integration of indigenous peoples, transforming both indigenous and the dominant national society. The social and historical construction of indigenous inferiority in modern, Western thought continues to structure intercultural relations in today's Latin American societies. The present section describes the different strategies used by indigenous peoples to resist and maintain their ways of life.

One strategy is to resist and defend their territory, which eventually resulted in the physical destruction of indigenous communities and their ways of life. Due to the military superiority of the colonizers (often interpreted as well as moral superiority), indigenous peoples eventually accepted their military defeat and most agreed to integrate into the Nation-State. Even the Mapuche who had defeated the Spanish, eventually lost to the Chilean armies and many chiefs then sent their children to Chilean schools (Bengoa 1985).

At the same time, national governments legalized economic appropriation of indigenous territory. In the case of Chile, the government granted land titles for the most fertile land to the Chilean 'heroes' of the battles with Mapuche as well as to Italian and German settlers. In contrast, the Mapuche were forced to live on smaller tracts of land (*reducciones*) assigned as community land titles, resulting in the loss of indigenous political autonomy as well as territorial continuity (Calbucura 2008). Indeed, between 1884 and 1929, indigenous land was reduced from 10,000,000 to around 500,000 hectares, which were assigned in 3,078 community land titles (Bengoa 1985). The Chilean government defined the communities according to their understanding of indigenous society and land use, and thus only considered the small agricultural plots that surrounded the Mapuches' homes in the winter, ignoring other relevant territorial components that formed part of their production systems, such as water and forests.

Further, the Chilean State assigned legal representation to the *Lonko*, the political and spiritual community leader, who was authorized to sell part of the community's land. These 'legal' land purchases resulted in further loss of indigenous territories, and are the principal causes of present-day land disputes. Subsequently, the Chilean government dictated legal instruments that allowed subdivision, favoring the development of a market-oriented private property and further loss of indigenous lands. Additionally, many Chilean landowners forcefully expelled the indigenous populations from their lands (Calbucura 2008).

To the extent possible, and when settlers were not occupying the territories, the Mapuche continued to use their ancestral lands 'illegally', while others moved their communities to unsettled territories in order to maintain their way of life out of the State's reach. However, even when indigenous peoples resettled on land where they could maintain their way of life, both state and non-state organizations continued to actively incorporate them into the 'Modern' world, the 'Nation', and civilization, using diverse strategies to achieve their ends. The State and private companies tended to use (the threat of) violence to encourage integration into the national society and economy. In the well-known cases of Australia and Canada, children were forcibly separated from their families and their territories to attend state or church schools. In this complementary strategy of persuasion, both churches and schools played an important role convincing people to adopt Christian and/or Western

cultural values due to their ‘moral superiority’, convincing many that indigenous culture was ‘savage’, unproductive, and ‘uncivilized’. When they attended school, indigenous children who spoke their first language or followed traditional practices were often beaten.

Once integration into the national state had begun, monetary incentives were used to encourage greater assimilation through better pay and better treatment. Indeed, Yashar (2005) argues that official figures of indigenous population tend to be low since many persons of indigenous descent do not consider themselves to be indigenous because it is synonymous with being poor, and thus they no longer consider themselves to be Mapuche once they have achieved a certain socio-economic status. As a result, both indigenous and non-indigenous peoples tend to associate indigenous culture with poverty, and this association is often reinforced by official poverty indicators that maintain a cultural bias.

In short, since the construction of the nation-state on their lands, indigenous persons have had seen their life choices limited rather than increased. One choice is (and should be) to remain in one’s community and maintain traditional cultural practices, but this choice often involves important threats to their physical security and the marginalization from the benefits of economic development. According to Saavedra (2002, p. 235) in the case of Chile, this self-identification as Mapuche is principally because one is a child, grandchild, or descendent of a Mapuche and secondly because they feel they are ‘different’ from non-Mapuche.

Still, this choice has always been difficult due to the obligatory nature of Western education, which tends to promote integration into the dominant society. In the case of Chile, the educational system continues to actively promote the idea of a single history, a single nation, a single discourse, a single language. When indigenous cultures are taught as ‘primitive’ elements of the past, indigenous students tend to experience the educational process as a cultural shock, often resulting in traumas and conflicted identities (Merino and Tileaga 2010).

Further, there are social-economic structures that encourage assimilation in order to achieve physical ‘security’ and a better quality of life even with the introduction of multicultural policies. In most Latin American countries, social behaviors, perceptions and attitudes devalue indigeneity and tend to discourage self-identification as indigenous. In Chile, Irazaval and Morande (2007) found that most present-day Mapuche (especially in urban areas) often do not speak their native language Mapudugun and present a certain opening towards the dominant culture. In short, the incentives to adapt lifestyles that favor greater integration into national society, including moving out of their communities and marrying non-indigenous persons, continue to be present in Chile and most settler states. Still, the choice to assimilate into Chilean society results in their marginalization from their original cultural community, impacting in the autonomous cultural reproduction of indigenous communities. At the same time, and despite their decision to assimilate, the dominant society still tends actively discriminate against persons of indigenous descent.

A third choice, which is little studied in the social sciences (an important exception is Garcia 2004), is to move and live in both worlds. The people who have maintained presence in both worlds have played and continue to play an important role in defending indigenous rights with respect to the national state and the international state system (Turner 2006). They serve as virtual ‘translators’ who help the dominant society better understand indigenous demands and vice-versa, although they have often had the responsibility to implement government decisions with respect to indigenous policies. Many have used their knowledge of, and education in Western society to defend indigenous rights within Western and international

legal systems, but at the same time others are characterized as ‘brokers’ who use these abilities to obtain benefits for themselves and their constituencies by maintaining their inferior client position (see for example, Durston 2005).

As can be seen, each choice involves different individual costs. Indeed, the success of indigenous persons in the dominant society continues to depend on accepting the Western rules of the game, and they are easily excluded or marginalized when they do not. For example, Domingo Namuncura, lost his job as Director of the Chilean Indigenous Development Corporation (CONADI) because he voted against the transfer of property rights from indigenous persons to an electrical company (Namuncura 1999). The existence of these visible and invisible discriminatory structures continues to impede the promise of equality and integration, contributing to the generalized distrust of promises of ‘progress’ by governments and other non-indigenous actors.

In short, the expansion of the nation state in indigenous lands initiated a double process of assimilation and discrimination that weakened indigenous ties to their land and language. In response, indigenous peoples throughout the globe elaborated diverse resistance strategies to maintain, revitalize, and renew cultural practices, maintaining continuity with past practices while incorporating new knowledge and cultural elements. As a result of these often contradictory historical processes, indigenous peoples are considered to ‘belong’ to the colonizing State (and its dominant culture), which continues to assign them to an inferior position. Present-day struggles by indigenous peoples consciously challenge the historical construction of this inequality based on 18<sup>th</sup> Century racist constructions of ‘civilization’ and ‘modernity’ that continue to promote assimilation and structure debates over the ‘development’ of indigenous peoples.

#### **4. Development in indigenous territories**

With the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the decolonization processes after World War II, indigenous peoples were increasingly considered to be formal citizens although their indigenous identity was still considered to be pre-modern. As discussed in the previous section, and despite their differences, the State, private companies, religious, academic and/or development organizations increasingly intervene in indigenous territories as part of a ‘civilizing’ mission that seeks to modernize or develop. According to Hall and Fenelon (2007), from a world systems perspective, the unequal pattern of external intervention in indigenous territory is defined by the need for and availability of natural resources. It is safe to assume that because of this ‘civilizing’ mission, the State tends to promote intervention rather than protect indigenous peoples’ cultural practices, and has even justified the use of violence to facilitate national development processes.

Even when Latin American States often idealized ancestral cultures, national policies promoted assimilation and development projects were intentionally designed to promote the adoption of Western ways of life. Consequently, in the 1960s and 1970s, indigenous peoples often accepted that they were peasants in order to obtain government recognition of their territories.

However, in the 1970s and 1980s in Chile and most of Latin America, the implementation of neo-liberal economic policies transformed the relationship between indigenous peoples and the State, establishing the relation as an individual person rather than the member of a group



(Yashar 2005). Indigenous persons were no longer considered to be ‘peasants’ and had become individual economic agents. From this perspective, the Chilean government in 1979 facilitated the legal division of communal lands into individual land titles, creating a formal equality with non-indigenous property but further dividing the community at the same time (Bengoa 1999). Additionally, the Chilean government also legally created individual water property titles, which are sold separately from land rights.

As for most indigenous peoples, the principal and orienting demand of the Mapuche is the right to control their lands and environment due to their vital importance for their cultural and physical survival. The introduction of neo-liberal policies, and especially fiscal austerity measures and increased needs for natural resources located on indigenous lands, is associated with an increased implementation of State and private development projects in or near indigenous communities. In response to external intervention facilitated by neo-liberal policies, indigenous communities have actively and passively resisted, especially when faced with forced displacement (Brysk 2000, Hall and Fenelon 2004, World Dam Commission 2000).

As a result, most indigenous peoples actively questioned the national/global model of economic development that structures and limits social policies and indigenous development. Indigenous resistance to economic development tends to share certain elements, such as emphasis on local community, identity politics, land claims, and rights to a variety of traditional practices, where one of the most important is communal land ownership (Hall and Fenelon 2004, p. 156). Their forms of resistance are associated with cultural elements that distinguish them from the modern nation-state and capitalist ways of life, especially the instrumentalization of land and nature. Their resistance is often expressed symbolically through cultural and artistic production, especially through poetry and literature.

During this same period, the transnational indigenous movement achieved important international recognition of the distinctiveness of indigenous peoples. Indeed, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples specifically associates the loss of land to the loss of cultural rights. At the local and international level, indigenous peoples also worked together with human rights and environmental protection movements as a means of resistance. According to Brysk (2000), many non-governmental organizations that promote development came to see indigenous peoples as clients.

This collaboration contributed to the growing global recognition, value and protection of indigenous practices. This, in-turn, led to the creation of international standards and national legislation that require development programs to mitigate the costs and contribute to an improved quality of life for the affected families and communities. Further, in order to achieve governability and respond to international pressure, governments have introduced new governance structures, incorporating indigenous actors into the design and implementation of public policies. At the same time, the lack of coordination between different public organizations and their limited understanding of indigenous culture have complicated decision-making, especially with respect to development models and projects in indigenous territory.

These greater efforts to harmonize economic development with indigenous peoples generally involve financial compensation, community participation, and mitigation programs. However, these programs tend to principally address environmental and material aspects since cultural impacts cannot be effectively quantified using econometric methods, like

contingent valuation, especially because most indigenous peoples do not consider culture to be a commodity that can be bought and sold (Thorsby 2003). Furthermore, participative methods, which are often assumed to sufficiently address the issue, actually result in ineffective mitigation programs (Tilt *et al.* 2008) because they assume that the people affected have complete information with respect to the expected social and cultural impacts, even when no method exists to measure these scientifically.

Consequently, most development projects do not result in improvements for indigenous communities. In the worse cases, they have disarticulated and destroyed sustainable forms of traditional life, limiting alternative forms of cultural and economic development. Further, even many well-meaning development programs are unclear about the relationship between the proposed development and indigenous identity because dominant theoretical conceptualizations continue to maintain indigeneity as a static, separate culture frozen in pre-colonial history, ignoring the intercultural nature of colonial societies.

## **5. Identities, interculturality and multicultural policies**

Since historical processes have defined both individual identities and social categories, it is safe to assume that increasing intercultural contact continues to shape both indigenous and non-indigenous identities, and that most live in at least two cultures, two worlds (Simon and González 2013). Similarly, Warren and Jackson (2002) argue against a static notion of indigeneity because indigenous peoples in Latin America are transnational, urban, proletarian, border-crossing, bi/trilingual, and professional. However, we often group diverse indigenous peoples under the term 'indigenous', homogenizing the inter- and intra-group differences, through their opposition to 'national' and/or Western society, denying the differences existing within the indigenous societies as well as the fluidity of their representations.

In some Latin American countries, such as Bolivia and Ecuador, indigenous movements have been able to frame their resistance in terms of a pluriethnic national defense with respect to foreign intervention. However, the majority of Chilean society does not recognize its plural nature and societal acceptance of cultural differences remains limited, although multicultural policies and international agreements have achieved certain advances.

At the same time, indigenous movements in North America argue that multicultural policies and even the recognition of past state 'errors' (horrors) will continue to be ineffective as long as the state maintains its national, colonial, dichotomous nature (Turner 2006). Similarly, many Mapuche organizations consider the Chilean State as an external oppressor that does not (and indeed cannot) represent them in its present form, especially considering the flagrant violations of the rights of indigenous peoples, where the State is either the violator or does not effectively protect these rights. One of the constant criticisms heard in Mapuche communities is that the State is only concerned with protecting private sector development rather than ensuring the rights of all citizens even without considering collective rights.

The emerging international consensus on collective rights for indigenous peoples recognizes that it is necessary to ensure the continuing existence, development and wellbeing of indigenous peoples as distinct collectivities. From this perspective, public policies and state measures should reflect the aspirations of the peoples concerned in order to protect, maintain and develop their cultures and identities, customs, traditions and institutions. Still, the

implementation of collective human rights should not adversely affect the implementation of individual rights. Indeed, the United Nations favors the incorporation of cultural practices, traditions and values of indigenous peoples when they are in line with human rights principles (Barelli 2010).

To a certain extent, international law now recognizes that Indigenous persons participate in at least two cultures. In the 'national' political context, they should not be subject to any form of discrimination, should receive equal treatment, and should be able to participate fully in public life even when they do not fully share all national values. At the same time, they also have a right to maintain their distinctive identities, cultures, languages and ways of life, where collective land rights are directly associated with their right to self-determination and to development, which is understood as their right to decide the kind of development that takes place on their lands and territories in accordance with their own priorities and cultures.

This double citizenship (within the national polity and indigenous territory) is reflected in indigenous demands for both differential rights as well as equal citizenship rights within the national polity. For example, even when Mapuche organizations criticize government programs that only promote income generation, they still demand equal rights in education. These demands for inclusive and effective citizenship can only exist within a multicultural rather than a national state because it must respect their dignity and cannot result in the loss of cultural identity. In general, States have only offered apologies for past action and greater resources rather than structural changes in their relationship with indigenous peoples.

## **6. Indigenous peoples and the planet**

The principal objective of this paper has been to trace how 18<sup>th</sup> Century ideas continue to structure our understanding of development, maintaining indigenous peoples outside of development and separate from the national State. Even the attempt to define 'indigenous peoples' can often marginalize rather than empower. Despite some advance in addressing the inequity present, our knowledge on development, poverty, and the environment remain grounded in and limited by Western understandings of the world. Indigenous resistance suggests several paths to overcome some of the contradictions present.

At the same time that these theoretical conceptualizations have maintained indigenous peoples outside, historical relations have actively integrated indigenous persons into the 'national' society. In the case of Chile, intensive processes of assimilation have resulted in important transformations and most Mapuche have had to recover their identity as part of political process that is strongly connected to territorial control and recuperation as expressed by one Mapuche movement:

'Once we have recovered these ancestral spaces, we will be better able to express our spirituality. Once we recover our ancestral land that belongs to us and we control the territory, the people will find that life will have more meaning. We will respect each other more, we will have a better quality of life and more respect for nature because our ancestors knew that humans are not the center of the world but rather just one more' (Coordinador Arauko-Malleco 2001).

In short, indigenous approaches to development require that we rethink globalization by considering the importance of culture and land for individual well-being. At present, for the

Mapuche, this means maintaining autonomous territories and spaces outside the logic of Western development.

As can be seen, even when we want to avoid essentializing Mapuche identity, it is important to understand this relation to land as an important differentiating element. Indeed, many people who define themselves as Mapuche, understand that a human being is defined by their relation to an identifiable place of origin, by their peoples, by their lineage, by their place's being (*ngen*). They feel sorry for people who have no roots and are disconnected from their land.

At the same time, indigenous approaches also encourage us to understand where we have come from and how past historical relations structure present-day identity. In contrast to many ahistorical conceptualizations of indigenous peoples as outside of Western society, new conceptualizations should recognize that they were forcibly incorporated to become part of a 'national' society. Consequently, all members of colonial societies are intercultural, and international law recognizes that indigenous peoples are citizens of both the 'national' society as well as their own culture. We believe that future political debates of indigenous rights will be about the conceptualization of intercultural identities and the definitions of double citizenship rights. Within this rapidly changing globalized world, it is especially urgent to create spaces for personal and cultural development of Indigenous youth who have emerged as new voices of globalized indigenous identity, living in both worlds.

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