

People of the Land and Poverty:

Mapuche Inequality After Decades of Economic Reforms in Chile

In September 2010, Chile celebrated its 200th anniversary of independence from Spain. Despite the celebrations, Chile remains a nation with internal racial and economic struggles. Although the situation has changed since independence, the indigenous population continues to struggle for equal rights and representation in a country with continuing nationalistic fervor.

According to the United Nations (UN), despite centuries of forced assimilation, there are more than 370 million people in the world today who identify as belonging to an indigenous group. Despite the varying groups, languages, beliefs and cultures, common to many of their histories is a pattern of rural, agrarian populations being dominated forcefully, politically, and economically by a colonizing population (Claudio and Jeanne 2008). And as a consequence, one characteristic that is almost universally shared amongst indigenous people is poverty.

In the last few decades scholars, governments, and NGOs have increased their interest in the plight of indigenous people around the globe (ILO 1957; ILO 1989; Patrinos 1994; Dixon and Scheurell 1995). The increased interest is evident with the adoption of the 2007 Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (Cabo 1986; UN 1988; ILO 1989; UN 2007). While the word *poverty* never appears in that declaration, it clearly recognizes past injustices and emphasizes the right to freedom from discrimination in the pursuit of economic well-being.

While certainly not all indigenous people are poor, the fact remains that for people who identify or are identified as belonging to an indigenous group, the likelihood of living in poverty remains high (Patrinos 1994; Plant 1998; de Alcantara 2008). This increased interest in indigenous issues has sparked the attention of poverty researchers who recognize that indigenous

poverty is prevalent yet not sufficiently understood (Gonzalez 1994; Psacharopoulos and Patrinos 1994; Eversole, McNeish et al. 2005). Further research is needed to increase our understanding of indigenous poverty as well as understanding the circumstances and lived experiences of indigenous people today especially if meaningful and effective ameliorative strategies are to be developed.

This paper provides an in-depth analysis of poverty, inequality and the socio-demographic characteristics of the Mapuche people of Chile. The Mapuche are by far the largest of that nation's indigenous groups, occupy a large swath of rural central Chile, and are economically destitute. This research comes from a larger research project where a mixed-method research design was implemented, including spatial modeling of nationally representative household survey data and a complementary ethnographic fieldwork component.

Literature Review

The first people in Chile were the ancestors of the indigenous people of today. The largest group of indigenous people in Chile (at over 80%) is the Mapuche of the Central Valley (MIDEPLAN 2007). At seven percent, the proportion of the Chilean population that is indigenous is low relative to other Latin American countries. However, at 1.1 million people it is quite sizable in absolute terms (IADB 2006). According to the Ministry of Planning and Cooperation in Chile, the indigenous population is growing at a rate comparable to the overall population (MIDEPLAN 2007), so it will remain an important minority group into the future.

In the past few decades Chile has experienced profound political and economic transitions going from the leftward leaning leadership of Salvador Allende during the 1970's, to years of brutal dictatorship in the 1980's under Augusto Pinochet, to a series of democratically

elected presidencies basically following pro-growth, market oriented economic policies (ECLAC1988; WorldBank 2002; Rector 2003). These policies have ostensibly met with some success. Just in the past decade, Chile has been able to significantly decrease the rate of poverty at the national level (Mario 2008). However, this poverty reduction has not been evenly distributed. Rural areas, over represented by indigenous people, have experienced less poverty reduction (WorldBank 2002).

The history of the indigenous population in Chile has been one of repression, discrimination and subjugation (Melissa, David et al. 2008). When Europeans came into Chile they attempted to keep the indigenous populations isolated in part because they believed them to be inferior. Segregation but also forced assimilation became the twin tools of the dominating European-origin population (Rector 2003; Mallon 2005). The indigenous people were forced to assimilate or faced isolation, and they were subjected to social oppression through legislation, social policies and other official and quasi-official means (Jeffery 2007). These laws created formal mechanisms such as slavery and a reservation system that legally legitimized discrimination against indigenous people. One example was the forcing of indigenous communities onto reservations that were smaller than traditional ancestral lands (Ray 2007). An inevitable result was a drastic change in their livelihood strategies and dire poverty amongst indigenous people. Over time, and with an increased discourse on human rights, official policies of repression were viewed as morally unacceptable, and they slowly changed (Jeffery 2007). However despite abolishment of these formal controls, informal means of oppression such as racism and discrimination still exist.

One example of discrimination is in access to human capital attainment (Ray 2007). Indigenous people in urban areas are given less opportunities for education, adequate

employment, housing and health care (Sahn and Younger 2006). Their survival depends on their ability to compete in the urban world and the lack of human capital renders that survival difficult. Indigenous Chileans in rural areas, who are more likely to rely on the land for survival, are faced with decreased access to land, and receive less of the infrastructure benefits of urban areas. The Mapuche are forced to compete in a larger Chilean society, but negative stereotypes and discrimination constrain their ability to participate and compete in mainstream society (Patricia 2007; Ray 2007). Just as has been chronicled in the United States, these disadvantages become barriers to attaining standards of living comparable to the non-indigenous population (Snipp 1989).

A complicating factor in current studies of indigenous people and poverty inheres in the reliance on self-identification as indigenous which raises problems of selectivity. Some indigenous people have ceased to identify with indigenous groups, moved away from indigenous areas and assimilated into mainstream Chilean society (Ray 2007). Others still maintain an indigenous identity but have left indigenous lands and migrated to the cities to eke out a living in an urban setting, either in the mainstream or at the margin. Many however have maintained their indigenous identity and continue to seek ways to maintain their lifestyles on their ancestral lands (Raúl 2008; Wessendorf 2008). As such, poverty among indigenous people in rural areas may be influenced not only by the legacy and practice of formal and informal means of oppression, but also by the selection of people who self-identify as indigenous and choose to remain in rural areas. In other words, much as William J. Wilson describes the inner city with its concentration of the black underclass, rural reservations might be described as rural concentrations of the Mapuche underclass (Wilson 1987).

The identity of the Mapuche is inextricably bound to the land. Indeed, the name Mapuche means "people of the land" (Ray 2007). As in many countries, indigenous people in Chile are far more likely to reside in rural areas than are their non-indigenous counterparts (Ader 2008). This interaction of identity with land also complicates the study of poverty among the indigenous people because location and the space available to a community can greatly affect the risk of poverty among indigenous and non-indigenous people alike (RSS 1993). Empirical evidence has shown that areas that are dependent on natural resources for economic well-being are disproportionately poor (Slack and Jensen 2004; Stedman, Parkins, and Beckley 2004). As well, in rural areas the population is less likely to have adequate housing, health and sanitation. They receive less education and have less access to high paying jobs. They are more dependent on natural resources for livelihood and employment (Psacharopoulos and Patrinos 1994). This is consistent with other empirical studies of poverty in Latin America (McNeish 2005; Eversole 2005; Damman 2005; Kelley 1988).

Despite being disadvantaged by their rural location, rural people often contribute to their own economic well-being through various informal survival strategies such as gardening, hunting, fishing and bartering (RSS 1993; Gomez and Franco 2007). Poverty measures that do not take into consideration differing costs of living, levels of infrastructure, community characteristics, or the varying survival strategies of rural populations can over or under state the level of poverty (Snipp 1992; RSS 1993).

To summarize, like indigenous people the world over, the Mapuche population of Chile has endured centuries of subjugation and discrimination that has left a lasting legacy manifest most noticeably in high rates of poverty and a spatial clustering in rural central Chile.

The purpose of this research is to explore and analyze poverty and inequality amongst the Mapuche. Are poverty rates indeed higher among the Mapuche and, if so, why? To what extent are disadvantages in human capital (education) and other individual and family-level demographic variables at play? To what extent do ecological variables such as rurality of residence, local industrial structure, quality and availability of social and public services, and other characteristics of place account for the greater poverty risks among the Mapuche?

Together these questions generally ask, what are the relationships between inequality, poverty, and place amongst the Mapuche people in Chile? Researching the social and economic situation of indigenous people not only sheds light on their particular situation, but also broadens the literature on issues such as: how rural residence affects economic vulnerability, how ethnic identity can influence poverty, and how survival strategies and perceptions may influence measures of poverty and development policies.

Methodology

In order to answer the research questions, I have used a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods: often called mixed methodology (Creswell and Garrett 2008). In a situation where questions are not answered by quantitative data alone, mixed methods become a reasonable choice of methodology. Although not without its critics (Sale, Lohfeld et al. 2002; Giddings and Grant 2007) mixed methodology, when designed properly, provides a broader range of insights, allows a greater confirmation of findings, and enhances the validity of results (Maxwell 1998; Collins, Onwuegbuzie et al. 2007; Gelo, Braakmann et al. 2008; O'Cathain, Murphy et al. 2008). When dealing with complex social issues such as spatial distribution of

poverty, inequality, and ethnicity, mixed methods facilitates a deeper level of inquiry and analysis.

For this analysis secondary data come from a household survey developed by the Ministry of Planning and Cooperation in Chile called the *National Socio-economic Characterization Survey* or CASEN. This survey is a government funded household survey of about 73,000 households (in 2006) throughout Chile. This survey gathers data about household demographic characteristics as well as employment, income, education and health issues. It is a stratified cluster sample that is nationally representative.

Because of its large sample size, representativeness, depth of information, and the fact that the data are geocoded, the CASEN lends itself to quantitative research that includes advanced spatial modeling techniques (Goodchild, Haining et al. 1992). This survey provides the data necessary to assess the relative impact of many of the mechanisms that perpetuate poverty and inequality. Using the CASEN data I analyze household level demographic characteristics that correlate with indigenous poverty such as human capital attainment, family composition, immigration status, employment, identity and residence. Descriptive as well as multivariate analysis is used to assess the relative impact of sociodemographic characteristics on the likelihood of being poor.

Conclusion

Empirical studies of poverty among indigenous peoples are too few in number given the severity of the problem. Some studies place the emphasis on human capital differences while ignoring other structural factors that can affect risks of poverty. The empirical studies that are available tend to compare the indigenous population to the non-indigenous population which

does not allow analysis that separates identity from other factors and suggests a homogenous indigenous population with similar risks of poverty.

In the case of Chile a bundle of variables that reflect human capital (education) or its immediate results (employment status), as well as a spatial clustering in rural areas, suggest significant disadvantages for the Mapuche. The multivariate results were completely in line with the descriptive findings. They suggest that employment and education are two significant factors affecting poverty rates, and that the Mapuche disadvantage in these respects partly explained their higher prevalence of poverty. The Mapuche are also penalized economically by their clustering in rural Chile, where rates of poverty are higher. In the end, controlling for these variables helps explain the Mapuche inequality and disadvantage. There is something about being Mapuche that increases the likelihood of being poor. We now know that lower education, employment disadvantages and rural residence are at play. What is left for further exploration is *why* these human capital and other disadvantages obtain.

The policy implications from this analysis would suggest a greater focus on Mapuche poverty instead of a broader attack on indigenous poverty. It also may be geographically relevant because living in the south increases the probability of being poor. It appears that human capital attainment is one policy area on which to focus. Since we know that the Mapuche have less education on average, educational programs may be one way to decrease the poverty rates for the Mapuche people, although this could be a factor for all southern rural residents. Employment also seems to be a factor with people employed in the extractive industries having a greater chance of being poor. This calls attention to the fact that attempts to increase human capital among the Mapuche people will be of limited utility if the strength and quality of labor demand

is not addressed as well. As rural areas worldwide are universally and perennially disadvantaged, a concerted effort at rural development in Chile would disproportionately benefit the Mapuche.

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Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Variation in Poverty Measures

	Mapuche	Aymara/ Quechua	Other Groups	Ratio Mapuche to Aymara	Ratio Mapuche to Other
Poverty Measures (measured in percentages)					
Official Poverty Line	15.2	11.2***	9.1***	1.36	1.67
Relative Poverty Line (Employment)	38.2	31.8***	17.7***	1.20	2.16
Relative Poverty Line (Employment by HH size)	32.4	19.5***	13.5***	1.66	2.40
Relative Poverty Line (Total Income by HH size)	28.1	17.6***	12.9***	1.60	2.18

*** Mapuche to other Indigenous category difference significant at p<.001 using a Chi-square test

Table 2: Descriptives Statistics for Socio-demographic Variables by Race/Ethnicity

Variables	Total	Non-Indigenous	Total Indigenous	Mapuche	Aymara Quechua	Other Indigenous
Demographic Characteristics						
% Female Headed	29.7	29.7	29.5	28.9	34.2	32.5
% Married	54.6	54.9	51.0***	52.1	42.5	38.9 **
% Cohabiting	14.0	14.3	17.0***	16.5	22.2 *	21.2
% Single	10.3	10.2	13.0***	12.6	12.6	11.5
% Other Relationship	20.6	20.7	19.6	18.8	22.7	28.4 **
† Age	51.2	51.3	49.1***	49.2	48.9	48.3
† Household Size	3.7	3.7	3.8***	3.8	3.9	3.8
Employment Status and Type						
% Unemployed	2.6	2.6	3.3**	3.4	0.5 **	7.7
% Inactive	26.3	26.4	24.1**	25.0	19.8	15.3 **
% Employed Extractive	10.3	9.7	20.1***	21.0	18.4	6.7 ***
% Employed Mining	1.6	1.7	1.1**	0.4	1.6	11.5 ***
% Other Employment	59.2	59.7	51.5***	50.2	59.7 **	58.7 *
Education						
† Years of Schooling	9.5	9.6	7.8***	7.6	9.0 ***	10.2 ***
Residence						
% Rural	13.1	12.0	31.3***	33.6	19.8 ***	12.0 ***
% Santiago	30.6	31.3	20.1***	22.0	7.8 ***	10.5 ***
% Other Urban	56.3	56.8	48.6***	44.5	72.2 ***	77.4 ***
Region						
% North	11.1	11.0	13.3***	2.8	84.0 ***	70.2 ***
% Central	62.2	64.0	32.9***	35.8	13.4 ***	17.7 ***
% South	26.7	25.0	53.8***	61.4	2.7 ***	12.0 ***
N	72146	67910	4238	3656	374	208
† Indicates Mean Value						
Comparisons between groups significant at: *= p<.05, **=p<.01, ***=p<.001						

Table 3: Logistic Regression Results for Likelihood of Living in Poverty (odds ratios)

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Full Model
Demographic							
Mapuche	1.81***	1.77***	1.64***	1.47***	1.44***	1.46***	0.99
Aymara/Quechua	0.99	0.91	1.01	0.92	0.81	1.16	1.00
Other Indigenous	0.68	0.62*	0.65*	0.74	0.60*	0.74	0.65
Female		1.35***					1.11**
Age		0.99***					0.95***
Cohabiting		1.46***					1.23***
Single		1.33***					1.22***
Other Type		1.26***					1.16***
HH size		0.99					0.98**
Employment							
Unemployed			8.52***				8.28***
Inactive			2.57***				3.15***
Employ							
Extractive			2.99***				1.47***
Education							
Years Educ				0.89***			0.86***
Residence							
Rural					4.19***		2.24***
Other Urban					1.92***		1.52***
Regional Controls							
North						0.99	0.81***
South						1.83***	1.30***
N	73658	73658	73658	73658	73658	73658	73658
R² (Nagelkerke)	0.005	0.023	0.085	0.075	0.054	0.023	0.209
-2LL	68372	67557	64755	64991	66188	67549	58510
Significance test reported as: * p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001							