

REVIEW

PEDRO CAYUQUEO

HISTORIA SECRETA MAPUCHE

Santiago de Chile: Catalonia, 2017. 372 pp.

Historia Secreta Mapuche thrives in offering its audiences a compelling, unconventional retelling of the story of the Mapuche, one of the many native communities of Latin America. At the end of the prologue to the book, Pedro Cayuqueo tells his readers that if he succeeds in catching our curiosity, surprising us, and making us feel uncomfortable, we will then be closer to that “vieja utopía libertaria mapuche. Aquella de construir un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos” ‘old libertarian mapuche utopia. The one of building a world where many other worlds fit’ (my trans.; 158). A book whose main objective is to unsettle audiences by stripping widely accepted historical “truths” so as to reimagine a more interconnected, healed future, definitely

catches the reader’s attention.

The first point which turns this historical chronicle of the Mapuche into an appealing account and sets it apart from others of similar nature lies in the fact that it is written not by a historian, an anthropologist, an ethnographer or an archeologist, but by a journalist. Besides his profession, the Chilean Pedro Cayuqueo is a Mapuche descendant very well known for his role as an activist for the Mapuche cause. Following this path, Cayuqueo has participated in different newspapers and magazines in Chile, Argentina, Spain and England. He is the author of books including *Just for Being Indians* and *The Voice of the Lonkos*. Currently, he is the Director of the *Mapuche Times* and hosts the TV programme

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons © Ayelen Rosario Tissera

Review - Cayuqueo “Historia secreta Mapuche”

2018 | América Crítica. Vol. 2, n° 1, giugno 2018: 87-89

DOI: 10.13125/americacritica/3297



Kulmapu aired on CNN Chile.

It is interesting to highlight the current historical moment in which this book is being presented. The two countries placed at the southern end of the Latin American cone are undergoing a socio-political process in which fanatical positions prime over the more conciliatory, mutually understanding ones. In other words, there is an attitude towards dismissing indigenous threads, particularly Mapuche ones, as part of the Argentinian and Chilean national identity. Under this context, a book such as *Historia Secreta* which does not consider the Mapuche people as strictly Chilean nor Argentinian is in itself an outstanding resisting position against the extreme nationalist, separatist wave which soaks these neighbor countries and perpetuates Eurocentric divisions.

The simple yet engaging writing that Cayuqueo uses in this book makes it accessible in such a way that the intended audience is not circumscribed just to those immersed in the debates of the topics at hand. Therefore, with this book, the author is aiming not just to an audience formed by the people in the fields of indigenous, ethnic, and cultural studies but he pretends to appeal to all those book lovers and history aficionados living in Chilean and Argentinian soil, in the rest of the Latin American brother countries, and around the globe.

Under a decolonizing point of view, Cayuqueo presents to these audiences a historical account of the Mapuche community freshly separated from the "official history" maintained on both sides of the Andes since the nineteenth century. The author succeeds in telling a story which, despite the fact of being plagued with injustices, should no longer be connected to grief, resentment and hatred. On the contrary, Cayuqueo urges the readers to stop seeing the Mapuche as victims, recognize their agency, and start thinking about them as a community which has its heroes, its deeds, and misfortunes as any other community in the world. Apart from this, the author shows how the Mapuche are today still very much alive and very active in the struggles each country poses against them. This image of native peoples currently engaging with their realities is clearly challenging the western tale of indigenous peoples as having existed only in an ancient past.

The book opens with a description of Wallmapu, the Mapuche country that defies the current geographical division of Argentina and Chile. With a relaxed, ironic but still denunciatory tone, the book revises and questions established historical myths such as "La Conquista del Desierto" 'The Conquest of the Desert', "Civilización y Barbarie" 'Civilization and Barbarism', and "Los Arau-

canos". Conversing with Chilean and Argentinian scholarship, the narrative of the book resignifies the role of notable historical figures such as Lautaro (who inspired the formation of the Lautaro Lodge), Calfulcurá the Napoleon of the Pampas, the Argentinian hero José de San Martín and his Chilean equivalent Bernardo O'Higgins, and the genocidal Julio Argentino Roca who is still seen as a national hero in the Argentinian history. Pedro Cayuqueo closes the book with an insight that sees the twentieth century as a period of "reorganización, la lucha política y el de la memoria contra la asimilación y el olvido" 'reorganization, political struggle and memory against the assimilation and oblivion' all necessary processes if Chile and Argentina wish to enter the twenty-first century with an attitude towards healing, survival (to borrow Gerald Vizenor's term), engagement to our own history, and bonding to brother native communities at a planetary level.

As a journalist, Cayuqueo expands the

treatment of the history of the Mapuche peoples by overthrowing the very idea of "objectiveness" often found in accounts of native communities informed by prejudiced anthropological mechanisms. He himself declares that he is not a historian but just a "faithful history reader", therefore, his account differs from what a reader would expect in a history book. Consequently, Cayuqueo engages at a personal level with this history, because it is the history of his people, it is the history of our people. The book interrogates and challenges the "official histories" taught for so long in Argentinian and Chilean educational systems because of its powerful impact on the configuration of national identities from the foundations of young minds. In connection to this it is also that Cayuqueo manages to use the essence of the language from our contemporary, hyperconnected, media-tized world to channel his message directly to the younger generations since they are the ones who will rethink the stories of our continent.

Ayelen Rosario Tissera

State University of New York, Binghamton

ayutissera@hotmail.com