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A REAPPRAISAL OF MAPUCHE TEXTILE PRODUCTION AND SHEEP RAISING  
DURING THE NINETEENTH CENTURY\*\*

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ABSTRACT

This paper is about Mapuche sheep raising and woollens production during the first three quarters of the nineteenth century, as well as about the perception customers had of Mapuche wool manufactures. Based on the British consular reports and travellers' diaries written after Chile gained independence, this article provides new and stronger evidence to support the case that Mapuche textile production was of high-quality and very important for their entire economy; that the Mapuche woollens trade was comparable to European industries before the 1850s; and that the Mapuche wool industry was certainly more developed than the one existing in Chile, the main market for Mapuche exports. This article also shows that this superiority over the Chilean woollens industry included the production of the main raw material used to produce woollens, namely raw wool.

**Key words:** Mapuche, textile, Chile, nineteenth century

RESUMEN

Este artículo trata sobre la crianza de ovejas y la producción de lana de los mapuche durante gran parte del siglo XIX, y sobre la percepción que los compradores tenían de los productos lanares. Basado en reportes consulares británicos y diarios de viajeros, escritos después de la Independencia de Chile, el artículo entrega nueva y consistente información que sostiene que la producción textil mapuche era de alta calidad y muy importante para toda la economía; que el comercio mapuche de lanas era comparable al europeo antes del año 1850; y que la industria lanar mapuche era, por cierto, más desarrollada que la existente en Chile, principal mercado de las exportaciones mapuche. También muestra que esta superioridad sobre la industria lanar chilena incluía la producción de materias primas para la producción textil, principalmente, lana sin procesar.

**Palabras clave:** Mapuche, textiles, Chile, siglo XIX

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## INTRODUCTION

As Sagredo has remarked, the history of the textile industry in Chile has not received much attention, to such an extent that there is not a single piece treating the topic according to the exigencies of modern scholarship<sup>1</sup>. This statement applies in particular to the first three quarters of the nineteenth century, and is also valid for Mapuche textile activity while the Mapuche remained independent from Chile, that is, between Chilean sovereignty (1810s) and Araucanía's annexation by the Chilean state in the 1880s. Bearing in mind this gap in the economic historiography of both the Mapuche and the Chileans, the main objectives of this paper are: to provide new and stronger evidence to support the case that Mapuche textile production –which consisted completely of products manufactured with wool manufactures– was very important for their entire economy, not only for Mapuche exports but also for the aggregated value of their production; that Mapuche woollens production was comparable to European industries before 1850 and that it was certainly more developed than the one existing in Chile; and that this superiority over the Chilean woollens industry also included the production of the raw material used to produce woollens (namely, raw wool).

Why is this important? First, there is little historiography on the economy of the Mapuche for this period, despite valuable previous contributions on Mapuche history by expert scholars such as León, Pinto, Bengoa and Boccara, amongst many others. Moreover, there is also some confusion regarding key aspects of the Mapuche economy. For example, as Boccara recently noted, the answer to an important but very simple question such as “what did the Mapuche do with all the cattle they brought from the other side of the Andes?”, remains contentious<sup>2</sup>. Secondly, thanks to previous contributions by other scholars, we know that the Mapuche produced ponchos and blankets (amongst other woollens) and exported them to Chile and other markets, but surprisingly, several mainstream scholars dealing with the Mapuche economy have told us that the textile industry was not that important or, at most, that it was far less important than other economic activities. When trying to place the importance of textiles within the entire Mapuche economy, scholars have been, at best, somewhat timorous, perhaps due to the irreparable lack of quantitative estimates on Mapuche textile production<sup>3</sup>. Consequently, there is a bias in the thin economic historiography of the Mapuche in favour of cattle, horses and sheep farming; raiding (*malocas*); and agriculture, to the detriment of textiles.

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<sup>1</sup> Rafael Sagredo, “Fuentes e historiografía de la manufactura e industria textil. Chile, siglo XIX”, *América Latina en la historia económica* 4, 1995, 29.

<sup>2</sup> Guillaume Boccara, *Los vencedores. Historia del pueblo mapuche en la época colonial*, Santiago, Ocho Libros, 2007, 355-356.

<sup>3</sup> For example, Mapuche and Pampa textiles did not pay the *alcabala* when entering consumer centres within colonial societies. For an explanation of the difficulty of constructing a series of quantities produced by indigenous communities, see for example, Juan C. Garavaglia and Claudia Wentzel, “Un nuevo aporte a la historia textil colonial: los ponchos frente al mercado porteño (1750-1850)”, *Anuario IEHS* 3, 1989, 217.

Take for instance the popular and frequently reprinted history of the Mapuche written by Bengoa, and his important conclusion regarding the Mapuche economy, which says that the main economic activity performed by the Mapuche was cattle, horses and sheep farming, while textile production is only mentioned in passing<sup>4</sup>. Bengoa and Valenzuela even stated that cattle was the main Mapuche export, and that other products such as textiles were far less important<sup>5</sup>. Likewise, other important authors such as Cerda have reached similar conclusions<sup>6</sup>. And although it is true that some historians have acknowledged that textile activity was important for the Mapuche (or they suspected it was important), these more positive accounts are usually given in passing, without further elaboration.

For example, Jorge Pinto concluded that during the eighteenth century Mapuche “textile activity achieved an enormous development within the indigenous society”<sup>7</sup>, but Pinto did not push his conclusions further, neither did he state that textiles were a core activity for the Mapuche economy, nor did he examine in depth the production of woollens. Likewise, León conjectured that by the end of the eighteenth century the Mapuche territory was “plagued” with woollen looms, but according to this author it is difficult to assess the real impact textile exports had for the Mapuche economy given the patchy evidence available to us<sup>8</sup>. In the same vein, other authors such as Villalobos, Casanova and Weber have acknowledged that Mapuche textile exports were important<sup>9</sup>, but they did not examine, for example, the great qualities Mapuche textiles had. Even Boccara, who concluded that during the eighteenth century Mapuche textile production (of ponchos in particular) and their exports became important, does not attempt to tell us how important textiles were for the Mapuche economy, arguing that exports in particular seem to have been considerable, but are very difficult to quantify. Indeed, after reading Boccara’s book, the reader is left with the sensation that the Mapuche economy was fundamentally organized around cattle raising and raiding (*malocas*)<sup>10</sup>. Unfortunately, Boccara’s fine monograph ends at the early nineteenth century. Furthermore, and perhaps more

<sup>4</sup> José Bengoa, *Historia del pueblo mapuche*, Santiago, Ediciones Sur, 1985, 19-20, 44.

<sup>5</sup> José Bengoa and Eduardo Valenzuela, *Economía mapuche*, Santiago, PAS, 1984, 32, 117.

<sup>6</sup> Mapuche textile production is seen as a semi-specialised activity: Patricia Cerda, *Fronteras del sur*, Temuco, Ediciones UFRO, 1996, 97.

<sup>7</sup> Jorge Pinto, *De la inclusión a la exclusión. La formación del Estado, la nación y el pueblo mapuche*, Santiago, Dirección de Bibliotecas, Archivos y Museos, 2000, 20-21. See also Jorge Pinto, “La Independencia de Chile y la génesis de la república”, H. A. Silva (ed.), *Historia económica del Cono Sur de América. Argentina, Bolivia, Brasil, Chile, Paraguay y Uruguay. La era de las revoluciones y la Independencia*, México, Instituto Panamericano de Geografía e Historia, 2010, 383-385; Sergio Villalobos, “Guerra y paz en la Araucanía”, Sergio Villalobos and Jorge Pinto (eds.), *Araucanía: Temas de historia fronteriza*, Temuco, Ediciones Universidad de la Frontera, 1985, 17.

<sup>8</sup> Leonardo León, “Comercio, trabajo y contacto inter-étnico en las fronteras de Chile, Cuyo y Buenos Aires, 1750-1800”, *Runa* 19, 1989-1990, 187. In the same vein, see Cerda, *op. cit.*, 98.

<sup>9</sup> Villalobos, *op. cit.*, 17; Holdenis Casanova, “La alianza hispano-pehuenche y sus repercusiones en el macro-espacio fronterizo sur andino (1750-1800)”, Jorge Pinto (ed.), *Araucanía y pampas*, Temuco, Ediciones UFRO, 1996, 81-83; David J. Weber, *Bárbaros: Spaniards and their Savages in the Age of Enlightenment*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2005, 62-68.

<sup>10</sup> Boccara, *op. cit.*, 312, 315, 321.

importantly, scholars have paid little attention to the many properties that made Mapuche textiles such a desired object of consumption, as well as to the high quality of Mapuche textiles, even if compared to European produce.

In contrast to the Chilean historiography on the Mapuche, in the case of the Pampas (also of Mapuche background after the so-called “Araucanization of the Pampas”), Argentine authors such as Mandrini and Palermo have given more positive views about the relative importance of textile production for the Pampas’ economy. Mandrini in particular has clearly and loudly sustained that the importance textiles had for the Pampas economy has not been fully valued by historians (or anthropologists), but that undoubtedly textile production was one of the main economic activities conducted by the Pampas during the nineteenth century<sup>11</sup>. Mandrini adds that because of the lack of studies on the Pampas before the 1980s, there were many prejudices about this nation and, in particular, many misrepresentations of their economy, including their textile activity<sup>12</sup>. Mandrini concludes that a complex society as the Pampas could not have rested solely on the basic economic activities attributed to them by most scholars<sup>13</sup>.

If, as I will argue below, the Mapuche textile activity was indeed more important and developed than hitherto portrayed, how can we account for this misrepresentation and relative neglect? The clearest explanation would be the lack of reliable primary sources, a problem previously faced by other historians. Most of the cultures in Latin America before the arrival of the Europeans were preliterate and therefore did not leave written accounts of themselves<sup>14</sup>. Therefore, for centuries our views about the Mapuche economy have been shaped by what the Spanish and Creoles told us about the natives (in particular by the military and members of the clergy), showing in their accounts many prejudices and racial stereotypes they carried with them, which after all were also intended to justify the long desired conquest of Mapuche lands<sup>15</sup>. Indeed, there are very few accounts about the Mapuche economy in the extant archival evidence available to us<sup>16</sup>, and of those available most portray the Mapuche as lazy savages. In turn, and unfortunately but unavoidably, these accounts were the main source of information used by most

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<sup>11</sup> Raúl Mandrini, “¿Solo de caza y robo vivían los indios? La organización económica de los cacicatos pampeanos del siglo XIX”, *Siglo XIX. Revista de historia* 5, 1994, 20. For Miguel Angel Palermo’s views, see “La innovación agropecuaria entre los indígenas pampeano-patagónicos. Génesis y procesos”, *Anuario del Instituto de Estudios Históricos y Sociales* 3, 1988; “La compleja integración hispano-indígena del sur argentino y chileno durante el periodo colonial”, *América indígena* 51, 1991, 153-192; “El revés de la trama. Apuntes sobre el papel económico de la mujer en las sociedades indígenas tradicionales del sur argentino”, *Memoria americana* 3, 1994.

<sup>12</sup> Raúl Mandrini, *Los araucanos de la pampa en el siglo XIX*, Buenos Aires, CEAL, 1984, 8.

<sup>13</sup> Raúl Mandrini, “La agricultura indígena en la región pampeana y sus adyacencias (siglos XVIII-XIX)”, *Anuario del Instituto de Estudios Históricos y Sociales* 1, 1986, 12.

<sup>14</sup> Bengoa, *op. cit.*, 11, 212.

<sup>15</sup> Arauco Chihuailaf, “Acerca de la leyenda de los guerreros araucanos”, *Sociedad y discurso* 1, 2002, 4; Raúl Mandrini, “Indios y fronteras en el área pampeana (siglos XVI-XIX): Balance y perspectivas”, *Anuario del Instituto de Estudios Históricos y Sociales* 7, 1992, 62; Holdenis Casanova, “El rol del jefe en la sociedad mapuche prehispánica”, Villalobos and Pinto (ed.), *op. cit.*, 31.

<sup>16</sup> Boccara, *op. cit.*, 336.

scholars dealing with the Mapuche economy, although these historians have surely been aware of the bias inherent to these sources. Before 1810, accounts from non-Spanish officials, who could potentially provide a more objective account of the Mapuche economy, are few and far between. In fact, when Humboldt was granted permission in 1799 to visit the interior of South America, he proudly said that “never had a more extensive permission been granted to any traveller; never had a foreigner been honoured with more confidence on the part of the Spanish government”<sup>17</sup>.

Luckily for us, after Chile gained independence from Spain, many travellers who would not have been allowed by the Spanish colonial authorities to enter Chilean territory before independence, could now visit Chile and the River Plate, and from there many entered into Mapuche and Pampas territory and reported on what they saw about their economy, including the production of textiles. In addition, many foreigners also settled in Chile either permanently or for long periods of time (e.g. British consuls in Concepción and merchants everywhere), reporting also on their contacts with the Mapuche. In the words of Trifilo, after the independence from Spain, the Spanish “monopolistic barriers were fully eliminated, and foreigners were permitted to travel freely in the newly emancipated South American countries”<sup>18</sup>. I am not arguing here that all of the new foreigners’ accounts of the Mapuche economy produced after Chilean independence are necessarily more objective than those provided by Spanish officials before 1810, but they are undoubtedly a rich source of information that needs to be considered further. And indeed, so important are all these accounts that they are considered to be one of the main sources of information about the nineteenth century Mapuche<sup>19</sup>.

To give readers an idea of the scale and potential of this “new” source of information, I have consulted over 80 travellers’ diaries<sup>20</sup>, most of which were written by British people. This is not surprising, because as Hayward stated in her introduction to Graham’s diary, during the second stage of British imperial expansion in the nineteenth century, travel narratives became increasingly popular in Britain as they introduced “potential colonialists to new lands” and consolidated “a national identity by comparing British to ‘other’ characteristics”<sup>21</sup>. Indeed, the diaries of

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Anonymous, *Humboldt’s Travels and Discoveries in South America*, London, 1854, 4.

<sup>18</sup> Samuel Trifilo, “Early Nineteenth-Century British Travellers in Chile”, *Journal of Inter-American Studies* 11, 1961, 391.

<sup>19</sup> Bengoa and Valenzuela, *op. cit.*, 14; Horacio Zapater, *Los aborígenes chilenos a través de cronistas y viajeros*, Santiago, Editorial Andrés Bello, 1978, 10; Trifilo, “Early Nineteenth-Century”, *op. cit.*, 391; Samuel Trifilo, *La Argentina vista por viajeros ingleses, 1810-1860*, Buenos Aires, Ediciones Gure, 1959, 9.

<sup>20</sup> A detailed list of most of these diaries is available in Bernard Naylor, *Accounts of Nineteenth Century South America. An Annotated Checklist of Works by British and United States Observers*, London, Institute of Latin America Studies, 1969.

<sup>21</sup> Jennifer Hayward, “Introduction”, Maria Graham, *Journal of a Residence in Chile During the Year 1822 and a Voyage from Chile to Brazil in 1823*, London, 2003, viii.

British travellers in Chile, the River Plate and other quarters of South America became so popular that they were even commented upon in the contemporary press<sup>22</sup>.

Because of this, these accounts are the principal primary source used in this paper, in order to make a stronger case for the importance of textiles for the Mapuche economy, as well as for their positive qualities and their standing if compared to European wool manufactures. Some of these travellers' and long-term residents' accounts were known to historians of the Mapuche, others were not, but even those consulted by other scholars have not been generally used to depict Mapuche textile production and sheep raising (e.g. British consular reports sent from Chile to London). Finally, other explanations for the lack of attention or importance given to the Mapuche textile activity would be, on the one hand, the high concentration on frontier relations by those scholars working on Mapuche history<sup>23</sup>, thus paying relatively little attention to what was happening at the interior of the Mapuche territory, where the textile activity took place. On the other hand, Mapuche textiles were produced by women, while history remained a largely male profession, and men paid relatively little attention to women's role in history. This fact certainly applies to Mapuche history; we know a lot about famous *caciques*, male warriors and other topics involving men, but less is known about women.

After this introduction, this paper has another three sections. The second section deals with the main raw material used by the Mapuche textile industry, namely raw wool, to support the view that the Mapuche were better sheep raisers than the Chileans, and had, therefore, an important advantage over their neighbours' textile producers. The third section is about the Mapuche textile activity and the perception customers had about Mapuche woollens, and it aims to highlight the positive qualities of Mapuche textiles, which made them such a desired commodity within and beyond Araucanía. Finally, section four sheds new light on the importance of textiles for the Mapuche economy.

#### THE PRINCIPAL RAW MATERIAL USED BY MAPUCHE TEXTILE PRODUCERS

Spanish conquerors brought with them to the Americas new species such as sheep (of the merino variety in particular), whose numbers rapidly expanded in colonial and even in independent Mapuche territory, which remained unconquered by the Spanish invaders<sup>24</sup>. This incursion of sheep into independent native dominions was quick and surprisingly successful, although nature certainly helped this development.

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<sup>22</sup> See for instance comments on the famous Maria Graham's, Campbell Scarlett's and General Miller's books in: *The Times*, "The Pacific. From our own correspondent. Valparaiso. November 27", 19 February 1847; *The Times*, "South America and the Pacific", 6 February 1838; *The Times*, "South America", 3 September 1828.

<sup>23</sup> Mandrini, "Indios y fronteras...", *op. cit.*, 59; Leonardo León, *Maloqueros y conchavadores en Araucanía y las Pampas, 1700-1800*, Temuco, Ediciones UFRO, 1991, 15.

<sup>24</sup> Diego Barros-Arana, *Historia general de Chile*, Santiago, 1884-1893, vol. IV, 263; Tomás Guevara, "Historia de la civilización de Araucanía", *Anales de la Universidad de Chile* 108, 1901, 757.

Indeed, as a British visitor who entered deep into Mapuche lands in the early 1850s observed, “there is no country better adapted to the raising of sheep than that possessed by the Araucanians”<sup>25</sup>.

Supporting this judgement, as early as during the 1640s and as southward in southern South America as in Valdivia and Chiloé, it was reported by a director of the Dutch West Indian Company that sheep were very abundant in the area<sup>26</sup>. In the same vein, in 1670, while being commissioned to establish English trading links with South America in the Pacific<sup>27</sup>, the British naval officer John Narbrough was told at Valdivia that “Indian territory [...] [was] mighty good land, and the country very fruitful [...] and much cattle that the Indians have, as horses and cows, and goats and sheep [...] [were] taken from the Spaniards, since they came into this country”<sup>28</sup>. Some decades later, John Byron (the grandfather of the poet Lord Byron, and by then a navy midshipman), was surprised to meet some Mapuche who approached him bringing some sheep after the wreckage of the *Wager* in independent native dominions. Showing how little known the Mapuche territory in Europe was at that time, Byron wondered “from whence they could procure these animals in a part of the world so distant from any Spanish settlement cut off from all communication with the Spaniards by an inaccessible coast [...] is difficult to conceive”<sup>29</sup>.

Despite Byron’s unawareness, what is clear is that by the mid-seventeenth century, the Mapuche had made sheep wool the principal and essential component of their textile production, and indeed sheep became the most important livestock kept by the Mapuche and the Pampas<sup>30</sup>. Many Mapuche became skilled shepherds, successfully specializing in sheep raising<sup>31</sup>. Though less fine than the wool obtained from camelidae (the source of this raw material for the Mapuche before the arrival of the Spaniards)<sup>32</sup>, it was cheaper and more abundant than in pre-colonial times. According to Palermo, the European sheep gave more wool per weight of animal than the Araucanian camelidae, while the sheep were also more resistant to local weather and diseases<sup>33</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> Edmond Reuel Smith, *The Araucanians; or Notes of a Tour among the Indian Tribes of Southern Chili*, London, Harper & Brothers, 1855, 230.

<sup>26</sup> Henry Brewer and Elias Herckeman, “A Voyage to the Kingdom of Chili in America Performed in the Years 1642 and 1643”, in *A Collection of Voyages and Travels*, London, 1744, 389-390.

<sup>27</sup> See J. D. Davies, “Narbrough, Sir John (bap. 1640, d. 1688)”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004.

<sup>28</sup> John Narborough, “A Journal Kept by Captain John Narborough, &c.”, *An Account of Several Late Voyages & Discoveries to the South and North*, London, S. Smith & B. Waldford, 1694, 92.

<sup>29</sup> John Byron, *The Narrative of the Honourable John Byron*, London, Baker & Leigh, 1768, 34.

<sup>30</sup> Mandrini, “¿Solo de caza...”, *op. cit.*, 4; Raúl Mandrini, “Desarrollo de una sociedad indígena pastoril en el área interserrana bonaerense”, *Anuario del Instituto de Estudios Históricos y Sociales* 3, 1987, 76.

<sup>31</sup> Palermo, *op. cit.*, 165.

<sup>32</sup> As already observed, “weaving with llama wool was well developed at the time of the [Spanish] contact. Sheep wool was latter substituted”. John Cooper, “The Araucanians”, *Handbook of South American Indians*, Washington D.C, Smithsonian Institution, 1946, 713. See also Ricardo Latcham, “Ethnology of the Araucanos”, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 39, 1909, 337.

<sup>33</sup> Palermo, *op. cit.*, 160.

In turn, and crucial for our purpose here, in spite of being newcomers to the art of flock raising, the Mapuche kept themselves distinct from colonial and early post-colonial societies, producing a better raw wool than that produced in Chile and Argentina, despite León's surprising claim that the Mapuche textile industry was supplied with raw wool by the Chileans<sup>34</sup>. Indeed, thanks to Gay's important findings, historians should be more aware of the fact that, by the end of the eighteenth century, Chilean agriculture could not generate any surplus of raw wool and that national sheep raising could only produce part of the wool needed to cloth Chilean peasants<sup>35</sup>. The situation in the Mapuche territories was just the reverse. Even Chile's conqueror (Pedro de Valdivia), in a letter to Charles V, the Spanish King, wrote that the Mapuche of Cautín had plenty of sheep with very long wool<sup>36</sup>. In the same vein, two Dutchmen noticed as early as the early 1640s that the sheep they saw south of the Biobío river (i.e. the natural boundary between Chile and Mapuche dominions) were "both in bigness and otherwise like our European sheep"<sup>37</sup>. Why was this the case?

In 1806, Luis De La Cruz, then Concepcion's mayor, explained the superiority of the Mapuche raw wool in relation to the Chilean, in terms of the better waters and superior grass available to the Mapuche in independent native dominions, and also on account of the comparatively greater extension of land existing in Araucanía to raise them<sup>38</sup>. But was only nature to blame? A more important explanation is to be found elsewhere. Spanish-Creole flock quickly interbred, while the Mapuche flock remained a pure race for many centuries (as was the custom in continental Europe). Indeed, Spanish and Creole sheep were allowed to "ran wild and deteriorated for over two hundred years", giving a low quality wool, rather thick, crumbly and limp<sup>39</sup>. Supporting this judgement, soon after Chilean independence, it was observed by Theoderick Bland, then special commissioner of the United States to South America, that most Chilean sheep were not merino, but of an ordinary race, and very

<sup>34</sup> León, *Maloqueros...*, *op. cit.*, 89 and 115; León, "Comercio, trabajo...", *op. cit.*, 189.

<sup>35</sup> Claudio Gay, *Historia física y política de Chile, según documentos adquiridos en esta república durante doce años de residencia en ella: Agricultura*, Paris, 1862-1865, vol. I, 23.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Gualterio Looser, *Esbozo de los estudios sobre los indios de Chile*, Santiago, Imprenta Universitaria, 1955, 114.

<sup>37</sup> Brewer and Herckeman, *op. cit.*, 391.

<sup>38</sup> Luis de la Cruz, "Descripción de la naturaleza de los terrenos que se comprenden en los Andes, poseídos por los pehuenches, y de los demás espacios hasta el río Chadileubu", Pedro De Angelis, *Colección de obras y documentos relativos a la historia antigua y moderna de las provincias del Río de la Plata*, Buenos Aires, 1836, 26.

<sup>39</sup> J. H. Clapham, *Woollen and Worsted Industries*, London, Methuen & Co., 1907, 78; Guevara, *op. cit.*, 756; Francisco Encina, *Historia de Chile desde la prehistoria hasta 1891*, Santiago, 1945-1952, vol. XIII, 539; Alfredo Taullard, *Tejidos y ponchos indígenas de Sudamérica*, Buenos Aires, Guillermo Kraft Limitada, 1949, 67; Peter Schmidtmeier, *Viaje a Chile a través de los Andes*, Buenos Aires, Editorial Claridad, 1947, 101; Alcides D'Orbigny, *Viaje a la América meridional*, Buenos Aires, Editorial Futuro, 1945, vol. II, 509. Flocks of sheep in the River Plate provinces in the 1810s "were of extremely poor quality", Hilda Sabato, *Agrarian capitalism and the world market: Buenos Aires in the pastoral age, 1840-1890*, Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1990, 23.



badly raised<sup>40</sup>. As a consequence, by the mid-eighteenth century the sheep kept by the Mapuche were bigger and possessed longer and better fleece than those of the Spanish or Creoles resident in Chile<sup>41</sup>.

In addition, Spanish and Creoles also allowed an unfortunate blending of sheep with goats, which further worsened the quality of raw wool available to Creole and later on Chilean textile producers. According to Robert Cunningham, a British consul then resident in southern Chile, as late as 1838, as Chilean “farmers do not understand [...] [sheep] management, the animal is very degenerate, the wool coarse in pile, bad in colour, and very dirty. The sheep and goats are allowed to herd together, in consequence of which a cross breed takes place, which also tends greatly to deteriorate the wool”<sup>42</sup>. In Argentina’s Córdoba a similar situation was also reported. Indeed, a British captain and businessman visiting the area in the mid-1820s was surprised to see “several hundred sheep intermingled with goats. Their issue was a strange one, and it was almost impossible to distinguish the species of the produce, half goat and half sheep as many of them were”, and therefore he asked the owner if “supposing the flock consisted of a pure breed of sheep and goats, whether they would not be worth double the money, and the fleece twice as much”<sup>43</sup>.

From the late 1830s (but in particular from the 1840s) improvements started to be noticed in Chilean sheep raising. A landmark year was 1837, when, according to Correa, Chile started to import from New South Wales merino sheep of the best quality<sup>44</sup>. But the improvements were only slowly and gradually noticed. In 1838, Cunningham still reported that “the experiment of shipping wool from this province to England & North America was tried repeatedly during the last three years, but was never repeated by the same parties. I am informed by persons who have had extensive dealings in the wool of this province, that it is neither increasing in quantity nor improving in quality”<sup>45</sup>. The same consular officer further added three years later that “wool will undoubtedly in time become an article of much importance here, as the climate and soil are admirably adapted for sheep; but until stimulated by foreign enterprise, the inhabitants are too ignorant and indolent to turn these advantages to account”<sup>46</sup>.

<sup>40</sup> Theoderick Bland, *Descripción económica y política de Chile en el año 1818*, Santiago, Establecimientos Gráficos de Balcells & Co., 1926, 17.

<sup>41</sup> Oficina de Estadística, “Informe sobre el territorio de Arauco y la población indígena, 1868-1869”, Iván Inostroza (ed.), *Etnografía mapuche del siglo XIX*, Santiago, DIBAM, 1998, 106; Palermo, *op. cit.*, 162; Mandrini, “Desarrollo de una sociedad...”, *op. cit.*, 77.

<sup>42</sup> National Archives (UK), London, Foreign Office, Embassy and Consulates, Chile, General Correspondence (henceforth FO), FO 132/15, Robert Cunningham to John Walpole (Santiago). Talcahuano, 6 September 1838.

<sup>43</sup> Joseph Andrews, *Journey from Buenos Ayres Through the Provinces of Cordova, Tucuman, and Salta, to Potosi*, London, John Murray, 1827, 114-115.

<sup>44</sup> Luis Correa, *Agricultura chilena*, Santiago, Imprenta Nascimento, 1938, vol. II, 195-196. Corroborating this, see Eugenio Pereira, “Las primeras relaciones comerciales entre Chile y Australia”, *Boletín de la Academia Chilena de la Historia* 53, 1955, 34. See also Encina, *op. cit.*, vol. XIII, 539.

<sup>45</sup> FO 132/15, Robert Cunningham to John Walpole (Santiago). Talcahuano, 6 September 1838.

<sup>46</sup> FO 132/20, Commercial report for 1840. In Robert Cunningham to John Walpole (Santiago). Talcahuano, 7 January 1841.

From the mid-1840s the same consul, who incidentally was in charge of sending key information to Britain about the agricultural produce of Chile, reported in much better terms: “the farmers are now paying some attention to the breeding of sheep, and the wool is fast improving”<sup>47</sup>, further adding the same year that “from the introduction of merino sheep from New South Wales the wool is improving fast here, and promises to be an article of first rate importance in a few years. The merino sheep are said to thrive much better here than in New South Wales on account of the mildness of the climate and greater abundance of pasture”<sup>48</sup>. So, after New South Wales sheep proved their worth, the strategy adopted by Chilean sheep farmers was that of “killing off all their black sheep, and carefully preserving those with white fleeces: they are also crossing the common sheep with the merino breed”<sup>49</sup>.

The Chilean success story now being told by Cunningham from the mid-1840s is coincident with the report sent from Santiago de Chile to London by another consul a few years later: “the wool of this country has of late been much improved by the introduction of merino sheep from New South Wales, and although as yet the flocks of pure merino are limited, a cross from this breed with the Chilean sheep has answered well”<sup>50</sup>. However, despite the improvements introduced by Chilean sheep raisers, the Chilean sheep remained inferior to the Mapuche sheep for the totality of the period covered by this paper. As late as 1855 Cunningham reported that from Chile “a trade of a very considerable importance is being established with the Indians in barter of European goods for cattle and wool”<sup>51</sup>. Indeed, even during the 1860s, Claudio Gay concluded that the Mapuche sheep gave around 20 percent more wool per animal than the Chilean ones<sup>52</sup>.

In any case, in particular before the 1840s, the sheep raised within Mapuche dominions were so abundant and of such high quality that they were even exported in sizeable quantities from Araucanía to central and north Chile during the late colonial period and early independence<sup>53</sup>. Likewise, raw wool also left Araucanía for Chile in large quantities<sup>54</sup>. A visitor to independent Mapuche dominions in the

<sup>47</sup> FO 132/23, Robert Cunningham to John Walpole (Santiago). Talcahuano, 1 April 1844.

<sup>48</sup> FO 132/23, Commercial report for 1843. In Robert Cunningham to John Walpole (Santiago). Talcahuano, 20 January 1844.

<sup>49</sup> FO 132/25, Commercial report for 1845. In Robert Cunningham to John Walpole (Santiago). Talcahuano, 26 January 1846.

<sup>50</sup> FO 16/79, Observations respecting the Agricultural Interests of the Republic of Chile as connected with the present state of Commerce. By Consul General Sullivan. Santiago, 29 November 1852. Increased production of better Chilean wool is also explained by an increased demand from continental Europe for this raw material as the wool industries of France, Germany and Belgium started to consume unprecedented quantities of wool from the 1840s. Hilda Sabato, ‘Wool Trade and Commercial Networks in Buenos Aires, 1840s-1880s’, *Journal of Latin American Studies* 15, 1983, 50.

<sup>51</sup> FO 16/94, Report of trade for the year ending 31 December 1854. By Robert Cunningham. Talcahuano, 12 February 1855.

<sup>52</sup> Claudio Gay, ‘Viaje a la Araucanía en 1863’, in *Etnografía Mapuche*, 61.

<sup>53</sup> Miguel Angel Palermo, ‘Reflexiones acerca del llamado ‘Complejo Ecuéstre’ en la Argentina’, *Runa* 16, 1986, 165-166; Boccara, *op. cit.*, 337.

<sup>54</sup> Iván Inostroza, *La economía indígena Araucana y la frontera del Biobío, 1550-1880*, MA Dissertation, Universidad de Santiago de Chile, 1990, 191.

mid-nineteenth century reported that “the [Mapuche wool] fleeces also are fine, and if properly washed would command a high price. Heretofore the wool produced has been consumed by the Indians themselves, but [...] it has [also] become an article of trade with the Chilenos. As nearly every family has its flock, the quantity of wool which might be exported is considerable”<sup>55</sup>. According to Gay’s estimates, as late as 1863 there were more than 1.000 Chilean merchants inside Mapuche territory trading with the natives, in particular buying Mapuche wool<sup>56</sup>.

All in all, and rather paradoxically, while it is unthinkable that Mapuche textile production could have developed as it did without the introduction of the Spanish sheep<sup>57</sup>, it was also the case that Mapuche flock raising remained far better than that of their Chilean neighbours until Chile’s invasion of Araucanía, when the Mapuche were subjugated by the Chilean state. But more importantly, rather than being exported to Chile, most of the Mapuche wool remained within Araucanía to produce fine woollens, which is the subject of the next section. In economic parlance, the Mapuche successfully integrated vertically the production of raw materials with their textile production.

#### MAPUCHE TEXTILE ENTERPRISE

In the previous section it was established that the Mapuche did better than the Chileans regarding sheep raising, so that the Mapuche had the clear advantage of producing better woollens than the Chileans (and the Creoles before independence). In addition, and perhaps more importantly, the Mapuche women<sup>58</sup> also had better textile techniques than the Chileans for producing wool manufactures<sup>59</sup>. This is not surprising given the lack of industrial development in Chile. By the 1780s, Juan Ignacio Molina (a renowned Jesuit priest and scientist) had rightly concluded, in reference to Chile, that “the industry is so trifling that it does not deserve the name”<sup>60</sup>. Or in the words of a British naval officer writing during the 1830s, while comparing the Chilean textile industry to that of the Mapuche: “even their

<sup>55</sup> Smith, *op. cit.*, 230.

<sup>56</sup> Gay, *op. cit.*, 64.

<sup>57</sup> Latcham, *op. cit.*, 337; Mandrini, “¿Solo de caza...?”, *op. cit.*, 7.

<sup>58</sup> It was the Mapuche women who were in charge of producing textiles in the Mapuche economy. Indeed, textile production was their main economic activity (together with agriculture). M. César Famin, *Chili, Paraguay, Uruguay, Buenos-Ayres*, Paris, Firmin Didot Frères, 1840, 18; Charles Darwin, *Voyages of the Adventure and Beagle. Journal and Remarks, 1832-1836*, London, Henry Colburn, 1839, 366; Robert Fitz-Roy, *Voyages of the Adventure and Beagle. Proceedings of the Second Expedition, 1831-1836*, London, Henry Colburn, 1839, 310; Cooper, *op. cit.*, 715; Pedro Mege, *Arte textil mapuche*, Santiago, Museo Chileno de Arte Precolombino, 1990, 9; Bengoa, *op. cit.*, 26; Pinto, *De la inclusión...*, *op. cit.*, 35. According to Boccara, the “value” of the Mapuche woman depended entirely on her ability to produce ponchos. Guillaume Boccara, “Etnogenesis mapuche: resistencia y reestructuración entre los indígenas del centro-sur de Chile (siglos XVI-XVIII)”, *Hispanic American Historical Review* 79, 1999, 441.

<sup>59</sup> Guevara, *op. cit.*, 471.

<sup>60</sup> Juan Ignacio Molina, *The Geographical, Natural and Civil History of Chili*, New York, AMS Press 1973, 280.

weaving apparatus [that of the Chileans] is not superior to that of the aborigines [Mapuche]<sup>61</sup>. A few years earlier another British visitor (John Miers) had also concluded that “the uncivilized Indians to the southward are even more dexterous in these arts [of weaving and dying] than the more cultivated Chilenos<sup>62</sup>. The lack of prejudice expressed by foreign visitors is also evident as late as during the early-1850s, when the American astronomer James M. Gilliss elegantly wrote that:

“[...] all we have learned with certainty is that Araucanía is a country in no respect inferior to the province of Concepcion [southern Chile]; that its people [...] live in far greater comfort than the laborers of the haciendas of central Chile; that [...] their wives manufacture ponchos and coarse woollen cloth to a greater extent than the wants of their families demand [...] and in the fineness of thread, evenness of weaving, durability and brilliancy of colors, and elegance of patterns, they far excel their more civilized [Chilean] neighbors<sup>63</sup>.

And these are not isolated examples of western travellers thinking that the Mapuche textile industry was superior to that of the Chileans. In the same vein, while visiting Chile in the early 1820s, another British traveller remarked that “the manufactures of the country are on a very limited scale, and may be said to exist more among the Araucanos than the descendants of the old Spaniards<sup>64</sup>. As late as the mid-nineteenth century, even the Chilean government was not ashamed of admitting that the Chileans did not produce any manufacture of any significance but that the Mapuche did. In response to a request made by the British government to most countries of the world to send their manufactures to the Great Exhibition of London 1851 (Crystal Palace), the Chilean Government issued a call in a local newspaper (*La Tribuna*), in which it was reported that the government of Chile has named a commission composed by natives and foreigners for the sending of manufactures to the United Kingdom but that

“Great Britain ought not to expect from us either prodigious of art or wonders of industry [...] Nevertheless, we are not destitute of some articles interesting to Europeans, and which we do not perhaps sufficiently appreciate ourselves on account of our being familiarised with them. Those articles are not to be met with in public establishments, but in the hut of the savage [Mapuche], in remote provinces [...] Blankets, coverlets, and carpets of all sizes might be collected that would be worthy of exhibition in any quarter

<sup>61</sup> Allen Gardiner, *A Visit to the Indians on the Frontiers of Chile*, Surrey, Seeley & Burnside, 1840, 156.

<sup>62</sup> John Miers, *Travels in Chile and La Plata*, London, Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1826, vol. II, 230.

<sup>63</sup> James Melville Gilliss, *The U. S. Naval Astronomical Expedition to the Southern Hemisphere during the years 1849-50-51-52. Chile: its Geography, Climate, Earthquakes, Government, Social Condition, Mineral and Agricultural Resources, Commerce, etc., etc.*, Philadelphia, J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1856, vol. I, 63.

<sup>64</sup> Alexander Caldcleugh, *Travels in South America, during the Years, 1819-20-21*, London, John Murray, 1825, vol. I, 355. In the same vein, an earlier visitor observed that in Chile “the inhabitants make ponchos [...] principally manufactured by the Indians”, R. H. Bonnycastle, *Spanish America*, London, Longman, 1818, vol. II, 262.

of the globe on account of their tissue, the brightness and durability of their tints, and the novelty of their patterns”<sup>65</sup>.

In addition, when compared to European wool manufactures, many contemporaries also regarded the Mapuche production as high quality: “in fineness and closeness of texture, in brilliancy and durability of colours, in variety and elegance of patterns, some may vie with many of our best European works of art”<sup>66</sup>. Charles Darwin himself commented that the “workmanship is so good, that an English merchant in Buenos Ayres declared that the ones which I had [Mapuche], were of English manufacture. He was not convinced to the contrary, until he observed that the tassels were tied up with split sinew”<sup>67</sup>. Or in the words of a British merchant resident in the Southern Cone in the late 1830s, who, by the way, was a real textile expert since his main trade was to import textiles from Britain:

“Our very Pampa Indians<sup>68</sup>, all isolated as they are, and with their scanty means of improvement, produce articles of manufacture, that for design, finish, and quality, leave one and all of these common articles of importation [i.e. European] at an infinite distance. The skill and perseverance displayed in many of their productions ought to cancel the charge of *barbarism*, we so unfeelingly, so unjustly, and so impolitically prefer against them”<sup>69</sup>.

Finally, in the early 1820s Alexander Caldcleugh was partly right when predicting that it “is not unlikely, that, in a few years, an English manufacture will supersede the use of the poncho [locally produced]; although up to this time, we have not been able to fabricate any thing equal to it”<sup>70</sup>. In agreement with Caldcleugh, and after touring Mapuche dominions during the 1850s, Edmond Smith (a US astronomer) was also of the idea that “the most celebrated looms of Europe have not been able to equal fabrics produced by the aid of the most primitive machinery” available in Araucanía<sup>71</sup>. And this was no exaggeration. Indeed, in the mid-1840s, a British merchant in Buenos Aires sent to Britain samples of Pampas ponchos to be imitated in northern England, stressing that “the object being that they should be an exact

<sup>65</sup> FO 16/68, copy of *La Tribuna*, Santiago de Chile, 14 May 1850.

<sup>66</sup> Miers, *op. cit.*, vol. II, 231, further adding that “I have seen some of their woollen ponchos, which, for fineness of thread, evenness of weaving, durability and brilliancy of colours, and elegance of pattern, are superior to any thing of the kind I ever beheld”: Miers, *op. cit.*, vol. II, 459.

<sup>67</sup> Charles Darwin, *Charles Darwin's Diary of the Voyage of H.M.S. Beagle*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1933, 181.

<sup>68</sup> It is worth noting that the Pampas borrowed their textiles techniques from the Mapuche from the west side of the Andes: Luis Parentini, *Introducción a la etnohistoria mapuche*, Santiago, DIBAM, 1996, 113; Palermo, *op. cit.*, 83.

<sup>69</sup> *The British Packet*, “Reflections on the present state of Buenos Ayres”. Buenos Aires, 16 February 1839. This was a British merchants’ newspaper.

<sup>70</sup> Caldcleugh, *op. cit.*, 161.

<sup>71</sup> Smith, *op. cit.*, 55.

imitation of the ponchos made by the Indians<sup>72</sup>, since if thus perceived by local customers these ponchos would command higher prices.

That is, not only did foreigners regard Araucanian textiles highly, but more importantly, very often, local customers preferred them to the imported woollens. Indeed, ten years earlier, another British merchant sent this eloquent letter to one of his British suppliers:

“ [...] we hereby send you [...] a native made woollen fancy rug as a pattern for you to execute [...] the quality of wool, weight, pattern, spinning, weaving, breadth, tassels, brilliancy and fastness of colours of the pattern must be imitated to perfection [...] so that in short, the copies may not be distinguishable from the original [Mapuche], on the most rigid comparison [...] & generally you must forego introducing any perfection of spinning or weaving as any thing else which might indicate the goods being of English or foreign manufacture – for the object is to make the copy so like the original as they must be sold as native made rugs, so therefore the precise thickness of the weft & warp, its inequality & laxity of spinning & the exact medium tension of the weaving must all be copied & even the rusticity of the tassels<sup>73</sup>.”

But why exactly was the Mapuche woollen production so respected and so much in demand? There were many properties that made Mapuche woollens better than those produced in Chile and elsewhere. For example, Mapuche and Pampas textiles were waterproof, to the surprise of many Western travellers, and this was in part due to the better raw wool used by the Mapuche and Pampas<sup>74</sup>. For instance, the British naval officer Robert Fitz-Roy was astonished to see that “the clothing of the Araucanians, made by themselves, is very strong yarn cloth. Indian ponchoes will keep out rain longer than any others<sup>75</sup>”. In the same vein, Alexander Caldcleugh, leaving behind all prejudices against the Mapuche, stated that “no English manufacture has been made so impervious to the rain<sup>76</sup>”, which is coincident with Vidal’s description of local ponchos in the 1810s: “those made by the humble Indians of the Pampas (plains) are of wool, so close and strong as to resist a very heavy rain<sup>77</sup>”. In the 1850s an American naval officer also observed that the “English manufacturers send great numbers of ponchos to Chili; but they never can be mistaken for the native article [...] on exposure to the rain are easily drenched, while those made in the [Mapuche] country, on being slightly moistened, become

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<sup>72</sup> Guildhall Library, London, UK, George Frederick Dickson papers, MS 28969. Frederick Hughes to W. H. Garrett (London). Buenos Aires, 26 March 1845.

<sup>73</sup> John Rylands Library, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK, Hodgson, Robinson & Co. papers, GHR 5/1/5. Hodgson & Robinson to Faulkner (Manchester). Buenos Aires, 28 January 1834.

<sup>74</sup> Taullard, *op. cit.*, 89; Enrique Kermes, “Tejidos Pampas”, *Revista Jardín Zoológico de Buenos Aires* 1, 1893, 1799.

<sup>75</sup> Fitz-Roy, *op. cit.*, 464.

<sup>76</sup> Caldcleugh, *op. cit.*, 355.

<sup>77</sup> Emeric Essex Vidal, *Picturesque Illustrations of Buenos Ayres and Monte Video*, London, R. Ackermann, 1820, 55.

compact and stiff, shedding rain like a roof, and keeping the wearer perfectly dry<sup>78</sup>. Not surprisingly, Mapuche and Pampa textiles commanded the highest prices in the region<sup>79</sup>.

Mapuche textiles were also considered by Europeans to be made of very durable yarn, which made them last longer than most<sup>80</sup>. Furthermore, not only was the yarn long lasting, but so were the dyes used to give the garments the desired colours. According to Armaignac, once Mapuche cloths were finished, colours were unalterable forever<sup>81</sup>. Likewise, for a Briton visiting the area in the 1840s, native ponchos had a “durability in the colours which no European dye can match”<sup>82</sup>. And indeed, when in 1817 San Martín exchanged presents with a group of Pehuenche, “some of the ponchos accepted by the general were by no means contemptible as specimens of native manufacture, particularly in the liveliness of the pattern, and the permanence of the colours”<sup>83</sup>.

Regarding colours, not only the quality of the dyes was highly regarded: the brilliancy and variety of textile colours was also seen as a positive and desirable feature of Mapuche production<sup>84</sup>. For example, for Gardiner, who entered Araucanía to learn more about the Mapuche, “there is such an endless variety in the colours, and in the method of arrangement, that there are few countries, not even excepting Asia itself, which can furnish finer groups, or more striking individual studies for an amateur in picturesque costume”<sup>85</sup>. Prior to that, in a manuscript entitled “History of Chile”, found by a British visitor to the Convent of San Francisco in Santiago de Chile during the 1810s, Mapuche textile was claimed to have “something in it very agreeable to the eye, on account of the various and beautiful colours, with which is dyed the wool: nothing indeed, can surpass it”<sup>86</sup>. Finally, it is worth mentioning that dyes were produced locally by the Mapuche for most colours, and obtained from Central America or Asia (via Chile) for a few other colours, blue in particular<sup>87</sup>.

<sup>78</sup> Smith, *op. cit.*, 55. See also Amedee F. Frezier, *Relación del viaje por el Mar del Sur a las costas de Chile y el Peru durante los años de 1712, 1713 y 1714*, Santiago, Imprenta Mejia, 1902, 38-39; Rómulo Muñiz, *Los indios pampas*, Buenos Aires, Editorial Buenos Aires, 1931, 46.

<sup>79</sup> Juan C. Garavaglia, “Los textiles de la tierra en el contexto colonial rioplatense: una revolución industrial fallida”, *Anuario IEHS* 1, 1986, 57; Garavaglia and Wentzel, *op. cit.*, 217.

<sup>80</sup> Gardiner, *op. cit.*, 178; Ignacio Domeyko, *Araucanía y sus habitantes: recuerdos de un viaje en las provincias meridionales de Chile en los meses de enero y febrero de 1845*, Buenos Aires, Editorial Francisco de Aguirre, 1971, 76; H. Armaignac, *Viaje por las pampas argentinas, cacerías en el Quequen Grande y otras andanzas, 1869-1874*, Buenos Aires, Editorial Universitaria, 1974, 116.

<sup>81</sup> Armaignac, *op. cit.*, 116; Domeyko, *op. cit.*, 76.

<sup>82</sup> Frederick Walpole, *Four Years in the Pacific in Her Majesty's Ship Collingwood*, London, Richard Bentley, 1850, vol. I, 347. See also Miers, *op. cit.*, vol. II, 230-231.

<sup>83</sup> John Miller, *Memoirs of General Miller*, London, Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown and Green 1829, vol. I, 98.

<sup>84</sup> Miers, *op. cit.*, vol. I, 31-32.

<sup>85</sup> Gardiner, *op. cit.*, 38.

<sup>86</sup> John C. Davie, *Letters from Buenos Ayres and Chili*, London, R. Ackermann, 1819, 163.

<sup>87</sup> Armaignac, *op. cit.*, 116; Schmidtmeier, *op. cit.*, 60; Taillard, *op. cit.*, 69. See also Pinto, *De la inclusión*, *op. cit.*, 32; León, *Maloqueros...*, *op. cit.*, 115; M. D. Millán de Palavecino, “Área de expansión del tejido araucano”, *Primer Congreso del Área Araucana Argentina*, 1963, 433; Palermo, *op. cit.*, 169.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF TEXTILES WITHIN THE MAPUCHE ECONOMY

All in all, the testimonies provided in the previous sections strongly suggest that Mapuche textiles were high quality products, which possessed several key attributes which ensured that they were greatly in demand: being waterproof, having attractive designs, possessing striking and long-lasting colours, and being made of long lasting yarns. Or as Miers succinctly summarised while visiting the Southern Cone in the 1820s: “some of the better sort of ponchos are woven in fancy running patterns, not unlike the style of the ancient Greek and Etruscan borders. Sometimes the yarn is so fine, that the poncho is nearly as supple and soft as silk. These are made by the Indians in Chile. The labour bestowed on these is almost beyond belief”<sup>88</sup>.

Not surprisingly then, the Mapuche and Pampas became important suppliers of wool manufactures to the Spanish and Creole economies of both Chile and the River Plate (before and after independence from Spain)<sup>89</sup>, although this has not always been recognized by historians. For example, the eminent Arnold Bauer, writing about textile consumption in Chile during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries concluded that many of the textiles consumed by the Chilean population were imported from Perú (including re-exports of articles introduced from Spain, which in turn included re-exports of articles introduced from other European countries), from Ecuador, and directly from France and Britain by way of contraband trade. The other important source of supply mentioned by Bauer is Chilean household production<sup>90</sup>. Curiously enough, Mapuche supply is not even mentioned, and this is perhaps a good example of why Eric Wolf refers to the Mapuche (as to many other native people of the Americas and elsewhere) as “people without history”.

But luckily we know that the Mapuche and Pampas did export a significant amount of textiles to Chile and Argentina during the colonial period and thereafter (ponchos in particular), as well as cattle, as already acknowledged by other historians. Indeed, in their famous trip to South America during the 1730s-1740s, Jorge Juan and Antonio de Ulloa reported that in Concepción the inhabitants clothed themselves with either coarse woollens produced at home, or with Mapuche textiles, being barely able to afford European wool manufactures<sup>91</sup>. So important were exports of Mapuche ponchos to Chile that, according to Vicuña Mackenna and other contemporary visitors in the area, during the first half of the eighteenth century Mapuche textiles were even re-exported from Chile to other countries, such as Perú

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<sup>88</sup> Miers, *op. cit.*, vol. I, 32.

<sup>89</sup> Caldclough, *op. cit.*, vol. I, 336 and 355; D’Orbigny, *op. cit.*, vol. III, 836 and 901; Molina, *op. cit.*, 94-95. See also Boccara, *op. cit.*, 439-440; Palermo, *op. cit.*, 158, 168 and 184; Pinto, *De la inclusión*, *op. cit.*, 29; León, “Comercio, trabajo...”, *op. cit.*, 187.

<sup>90</sup> Arnold Bauer, “Industry and the Missing Bourgeoisie: Consumption and Development in Chile, 1850-1950”, *Hispanic American Historical Review* 70, 1990, 232.

<sup>91</sup> Jorge Juan and Antonio de Ulloa, *Relación histórica del viaje a la América meridional*, Madrid, 1748, vol. III, 319.



and Paraguay<sup>92</sup>. Indeed, the main Mapuche export to Chile was ponchos<sup>93</sup>. Writing in the late 1830s, Gardiner confirmed that “the principal trade [of the Chileans] with the Indians is in ponchos and cattle”<sup>94</sup>.

So important was this trade, and it employed so many Mapuche hands, that in the 1770s Ambrosio O’Higgins (then a high officer of the Chilean army, and future governor of Chile and Viceroy of Perú) wanted to ban Mapuche poncho exports to colonial Chile (and even to abolish wearing them) in order to put pressure on the Mapuche economy, given the importance poncho production had for the Mapuche national income. With these measures, O’Higgins also intended to make those Mapuche working in the textile industry unemployed, expecting that cheap Mapuche labour would flow from Araucanía to Chile and create new jobs. Additionally, Mapuche ponchos were so much in demand in Chile that the Spanish and creoles acquiring them usually gave in exchange strategic commodities such as arms and horses, which the colonial authorities wanted to avoid<sup>95</sup>.

Around the same time, and linked to Mapuche textiles too, the Church had also proposed an alternative plan to Chilean authorities to try subjugating the Mapuche. This consisted of establishing new towns and more people on the Chilean side of the frontier with the Mapuche. These new towns would be entrusted with the essential task of developing the indigenous production of textiles (and even to generate a surplus of production) to avoid dependence upon Mapuche textile supply. If possible, the Church also wanted to ban the commercial exchanges between the Chileans and the Mapuche. This plan, according to the clergy, would also help to diminish polygamy among the Mapuche (regarded by Catholics as sinful), since polygamy was mainly explained by the Church on account of textile production: each Mapuche woman had to produce a certain amount of ponchos or blankets per year for her husband<sup>96</sup>.

Thus, so far I have established that Mapuche textiles were high quality products and that they were exported extensively. But how important was this trade? This is perhaps the million dollar question that eminent scholars of Mapuche history such as Boccara, Pinto and León have been unable to answer. León himself has admitted

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<sup>92</sup> Benjamín Vicuña-Mackenna, *Historia de Valparaíso*, Valparaíso, Imprenta Albion de Cox i Taylor, 1869, 332-333; Samuel Hull Wilcocke, *History of the Viceroyalty of Buenos Ayres*, London, H. D. Symonds, 1807, 536; Otto Von Kotzebue, *A Voyage of Discovery into the South Sea and Beering’s Strait in the Years 1815-1818*, London, Longman, Hurst & Co., 1821, vol. III, 20. See also Sergio Villalobos, “Guerra y paz en la Araucanía”, Villalobos and Pinto, *op. cit.*, 17; Pinto, *De la inclusión*, *op. cit.*, 29; Cerda, *op. cit.*, 92 and 98.

<sup>93</sup> Boccara, *op. cit.*, 444.

<sup>94</sup> Gardiner, *op. cit.* 182; Juan and Ulloa, *op. cit.*, vol. III, 353-354. Molina, *op. cit.*, 94-95. See also León, *Maloqueros...*, *op. cit.*, 89, 103-104; Pinto, *De la inclusión*, *op. cit.*, 28, 33; Taullard, *op. cit.*, 65; Marcello Carmagnani, *Los mecanismos de la vida económica en una sociedad colonial: Chile, 1680-1830*, Santiago, DIBAM, 1999, 222-226; Boccara, *op. cit.*, 331-332, 338.

<sup>95</sup> Antonio Sors, “Historia del Reyno de Chile, situado en la América meridional”, *Revista chilena de historia y geografía* 38-45, 1921-1924, vol. V, 284; Jorge Pinto, “Frontera, misiones y misioneros en Chile, 1600-1900”, Jorge Pinto, *et al.* (eds.). *Misioneros en la Araucanía, 1600-1900*, Temuco, UFRO, 1988), 32-33; Pinto, *De la inclusión*, *op. cit.*, 26 and 41.

<sup>96</sup> Sors, *op. cit.*, vol. XLI-XLV, 268-269 and 284-285.

that, given the fragmentary evidence, it is not possible to assess the real impact that poncho exports had on the Mapuche economy<sup>97</sup>. This question will not be fully answered here, but the evidence provided above (and below) further supports the idea that it was very important indeed.

Yet, and unfortunately, very little is known about the real magnitude of Mapuche exports in quantitative terms, since they never entered legal records kept by either Spanish or later on Chilean custom authorities. In addition, most figures available relate only to ponchos, although this is not a great issue, because the poncho was the main textile manufacture produced by the Mapuche and in turn, from the beginning of the seventeenth century, most of the male inhabitants in southern South American colonial societies left behind part of their European garments and adopted the Mapuche poncho<sup>98</sup>, which became a better substitute for the Spanish cape<sup>99</sup>. Thus, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the poncho constituted the most important part of the clothes of most men not only in the Araucanian frontier but also in the rest of Chile and Argentina<sup>100</sup>. As observed by a French visitor: the poncho “*c’est le vetement de tous les Chiliens, riches et pauvres*”<sup>101</sup>.

It has been said that in the mid-eighteenth century Concepción imported 30.000 ponchos annually from the Mapuche<sup>102</sup>. It has also been estimated that the Mapuche sent to the Chilean region of Maule as many as 40.000 ponchos per year in the early nineteenth century and that, on the frontier, as many as 60.000 Mapuche ponchos were sold annually<sup>103</sup>. Writing in the late 1780s, Gómez de Vidaurre also estimated that the Mapuche exported about 70.000 ponchos per annum to Chile<sup>104</sup>. Considering that producing a poncho required on average 2.5 yards of cloth, this would mean that the Mapuche could easily export to Chile more than 175.000 - 250.000 yards of wool cloth per year during the early nineteenth century (and perhaps more). This amount compares with British exports of wool manufactures to Chile during the late

<sup>97</sup> León, “Comercio, trabajo...”, *op. cit.*, 187.

<sup>98</sup> Already in the 1710s, Amedee Francois Frezier had observed this transformation. *Relación del viaje por el Mar del Sur a las costas de Chile y el Perú durante los años de 1712, 1713 y 1714*, Santiago, Imprenta Mejía, 1902, 39. Additionally, the German doctor Edward Poeppig observed in the 1820s that not only did the white population adopt the Araucanian poncho, but also other natives. *Un testigo en la alborada de Chile, 1826-29*, Santiago, Zig-Zag, 1960, 399. See also Parker King, *Voyages of the Adventure and Beagle. Proceedings of the First Expedition, 1826-1830*, London, Henry Colburn, 1839, 277; Alexander Gillespie, *Buenos Aires y el interior; observaciones reunidas durante una larga residencia*, Buenos Aires, La Cultura Argentina, 1921, 170.

<sup>99</sup> M. D. Millan de Palavecino, *El poncho. Estudio etno-geográfico*, Buenos Aires, Museo de Motivos Populares Argentinos, 1954, 7.

<sup>100</sup> Manuel Llorca-Jaña, “Knowing the Shape of Demand: Britain’s Exports of Ponchos to the Southern Cone, c.1810s-1870s”, *Business History* 51, 2009.

<sup>101</sup> M. H. Bosch Spencer, *Commerce de la Cote Occidentale de l’Amérique du Sud*, Brussels, Imprimerie et Lithographie de D. Raes, 1848, 286. In the same vein, see also Molina, *op. cit.*, 52.

<sup>102</sup> Inostroza, *op. cit.*, 134.

<sup>103</sup> Palermo, *op. cit.*, 168. See also Taillard, *op. cit.*, 65.

<sup>104</sup> Felipe Gómez de Vidaurre, *Historia geográfica, natural y civil del reino de Chile*, Santiago, Imprenta Ercilla, 1889, 343-344.

1810s and early 1820s<sup>105</sup>. That is, during these two decades, the Mapuche could have exported to Chile roughly the same quantity of woollens, as the principal industrial nation of the time did, so by no means a negligible amount.

In this respect it is also worth noting that the natives' costs of production for woollens remained for a long time at similar levels or lower than in Britain, according to the patchy evidence available to us from British merchants' correspondence. Indeed, it was not surprising that there were complaints made from the merchant houses in southern South America to the British producers requesting cheaper products:

“ [...] you cannot produce the originality required in the fancy rugs & that they inch still cost about 20/each, which is a much higher cost than what we consider you could produce them for. We think you had best suspend operations [...] [at least] you can produce them for less money [...] which we hope you may be able to do [...] one thing we can assure you, the one [the pattern] we sent you is all made by the hand or rude implements of the Pampa Indians”<sup>106</sup>.

The reader may wonder about the impact of the British industrial revolution on the costs of production of the wool industries, at a time when Britain was the main textile supplier of Latin America. But the technological advances in the British wool industries (woollen and worsted branches) were slower than in cottons and other star industries, to such an extent that, for woollens, the term industrial revolution was never applicable as the “shift from a purely domestic manufacture to complete factory production took almost 100 years”<sup>107</sup>. Indeed, in the early nineteenth century, there were few technological differences between the British wool industry and the craft production of the Mapuche. None had mechanised their main productive processes: during the 1810s-1820s woollen weaving in Britain “remained essentially medieval”<sup>108</sup>.

In addition, worsted spinning was only gradually and painfully improved, and yarns were produced in factories from the late 1820s<sup>109</sup>. Only during the 1830s and 1840s was there a definitive decline in hand-weaving within the British worsted industry, while the complete transition to a factory system occurred in the late

<sup>105</sup> Between 1817 and 1824 Britain exported, in annual averages, 389 000 yards of woollens and worsteds to Chile, and never more than 3m yards before 1850. The National Archives, London, UK, Ledgers of Exports Under Countries (CUST/8, all volumes for 1817-1850).

<sup>106</sup> GHR 5/1/5, Hodgson & Robinson to G. Faulkner (Manchester). Buenos Aires, 22 December 1834.

<sup>107</sup> R. G. Wilson, *Gentleman Merchants*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1971, 90.

<sup>108</sup> W. B. Crump, *The Leeds Woollen Industry, 1780-1820*, Leeds, Thoresby Society, 1931, 52.

<sup>109</sup> D. T. Jenkins, “The Western Wool Textile Industry in the Nineteenth Century”, D. T. Jenkins (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Western Textiles*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, 762; David S. Landes, *The Unbound Prometheus. Technological Change and Industrial Development in Western Europe from 1750 to the Present*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, 88; Ralph Davis, *The Industrial Revolution and British Overseas Trade*, Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1979, 21-22; Pat Hudson, *The Genesis of Industrial Capital*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986, 43.

1850s<sup>110</sup>. This branch of the industry was further fostered when combing, which precedes spinning, had been perfected during the 1840s and successfully mechanised during the 1850s and 1860s<sup>111</sup>. The transformation of the woollen branch of the British industry was slower than in worsteds, despite the fact that scribbling had been successfully mechanised in the woollen branch by the 1790s<sup>112</sup>. Yet, the water frame for spinning woollens was not in much use by the 1840s, and only the 1850s could be considered as the turning point in the mechanisation of spinning<sup>113</sup>. The mechanisation of weaving was even more gradual. The use of the power loom was widespread only from the 1850s, but hand-weaving only started to decline from the 1870s, a process that was not completed until the beginning of the twentieth century<sup>114</sup>. This means that the Mapuche were able to compete effectively against British exports to Chile for several decades after independence, while British wool manufactures' costs and, therefore, export prices still remained high.

Equally important, when assessing the significance of the Mapuche textile production we must also consider the Mapuche's own consumption of their wool manufactures. The Mapuche may have imported European cottons from colonial and post-colonial Chile, but preferred woollens produced internally by the Mapuche women. Considering that during the mid and late eighteenth century the Mapuche population is estimated at about some 250.000 - 300.000 people (not far from Chile's total population)<sup>115</sup>, then a sizeable internal market was supplied by the Mapuche women. This is significant because the historiography of the Mapuche is highly concentrated in frontier relations (see above) and, therefore, historians tend to focus on Mapuche exports, thus neglecting the production destined for internal consumption.

Finally, not only did the Mapuche remain competitive for many decades, even after independence, but we also know that in terms of relative prices Mapuche textiles commanded very high rates indeed within the Southern Cone. For example, Luis de la Cruz reported that in 1806 a Mapuche poncho or a manta could be exchanged for up to 16 mares<sup>116</sup>. In the same vein, in the early 1840s a British visitor also reported that for a poncho the Pampas could obtain fifteen to 20 mares<sup>117</sup>. Likewise, in 1847 Maas observed, near Toltén, that the relative prices obtained by

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<sup>110</sup> Hudson, *op. cit.*, 44; E. M. Sigsworth, *Black Dyke Mills: a History*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1958, 38.

<sup>111</sup> By 1870, for machine-combing "the major technological inventions had been made", Jenkins, *op. cit.*, 762-764; S. D. Chapman, "The Pioneers of Worsted Spinning by Power", *Business History* 7, 1965, 115.

<sup>112</sup> Landes, *op. cit.*, 169-170.

<sup>113</sup> Jenkins, *op. cit.*, 762-763; Davis, *op. cit.*, 21-22; Chapman, *op. cit.*, 97; Hudson, *op. cit.*, 43; Landes, *op. cit.*, 87.

<sup>114</sup> Jenkins, *op. cit.*, 763; Hudson, *op. cit.*, 37 and 44.

<sup>115</sup> Bengoa, *op. cit.*, 34; Cerda, *op. cit.*, 68. Lower estimates are given by Pinto, *op. cit.*, 22, in what remains a contentious and unexplored topic. Cooper, *op. cit.*, 694.

<sup>116</sup> Cruz, *op. cit.*, 184.

<sup>117</sup> W. MacCann, *Two Thousand Miles' Ride Through the Argentine provinces*, London, Smith, Elder & Co., 1853, vol. I, 76-77.

Mapuche ponchos with the Pehuenche were a horse and three cows per poncho<sup>118</sup>. Earlier on, Lord Cochrane's secretary reported: "I had several opportunities at Arauco of seeing the Indians employed in weaving *ponchos*, some of which, I learnt, were worth from a hundred to a hundred and fifty dollars"<sup>119</sup>. Lastly, Palavecino also mentioned that a poncho could be exchanged for 70 kilograms of *mate* and 20 kilograms of tobacco<sup>120</sup>. If, as the figures above suggest, the Mapuche were exporting to the Chileans some 100.000 ponchos per annum, then these exports would be equivalent to more than 1.500.000 mares, or 7.000 tons of *mate* or 2.000 tons of tobacco, by any estimate sizeable quantities of alternative products.

### CONCLUSIONS

I have shown in this paper that nineteenth-century Mapuche textiles and raw wool were regarded by foreigners and local customers as high-quality products. This was on account of textiles being waterproof, having attractive designs, possessing long lasting and beautiful colours, and being made of durable yarn employing first-class raw wool and tints. Thus, Mapuche woollens (and raw wool) were superior to those produced in Chile and stood high even if compared to European wools and wool manufactures. They were heavily consumed by the Mapuche themselves but also exported to Chile, the River Plate provinces and other markets. The Mapuche superiority over their neighbours is crucial to the development of exports, because most of the Mapuche textile surplus ended up in the neighbouring markets. The evidence provided in this essay makes an important contribution to Mapuche history, people about whom we know little for the 1800s-1860s, in particular about their textile production and how it was perceived by the final customers, despite previous valuable contributions produced by other pioneer scholars of the Mapuche such as León, Pinto, Boccara and Bengoa.

In addition, animals farming, raiding and agriculture may have been important for the nineteenth century Mapuche but I have also provided new and strong evidence so as to further support the case that textile production was a key Mapuche economic activity and that Mapuche textiles commanded high prices in relation to the other important commodities produced or traded by these natives. Finally, we must also bear in mind that in contrast to raiding, textile production provided the Mapuche with a regular and certain income. Therefore, it makes sense to concentrate more on textile production, an area somewhat mistreated by a number of historians of the Mapuche.

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<sup>118</sup> Inostroza, *op. cit.*, 120.

<sup>119</sup> William B. Stevenson, *A Historical and Descriptive Narrative of Twenty Years' Residence in South America*, London, Hurts, Robinson, and Co., 1825, vol. I, 30-31.

<sup>120</sup> Millan de Palavecino, *op. cit.*, 5.

