

The political vitality of Mapuche stones: Heteronomy and political decision-making

Journal of Material Culture

2017, Vol. 22(3) 334–347

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DOI: 10.1177/1359183517702683

journals.sagepub.com/home/mcu



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Abstract

In the ethnographic literature on Mapuche culture from the late 19th century to the present, there are many references to the existence of stones charged with symbolic, magical, religious and even political powers. These range from large rocks that are the object of collective worship to small stones that are put to (more-or-less) personal use. This article focuses on the political role of these stones. In many cases, they are depicted as subjects that form alliances with their owners and create the conditions for victories in politics and war thanks to their oracular powers and the force and prestige they confer. This article also includes an analysis of how these stones are inscribed in a certain logic of Mapuche decision-making, in which that activity is often moved to a heteronomous space (dreams, omens, divine voices and other signs) in which these stones seem to participate as subjects. This suggests that Mapuche society has a specific relationship with political decision-making and the problem of sovereignty, one that stands in opposition to both Carl Schmitt's authoritarian decisionism and the rationalism of liberal democracy.

Keywords

decision-making, living stones, Mapuche, sovereignty, fetish

... an inanimate thing or a beast or a child cannot do anything by chance [*tyché*], because it is incapable of choice; nor can good fortune or ill fortune be ascribed to them, except metaphorically, as Protarchus, for example, said that the stones of which altars are made are fortunate because they are held in honour, while their fellows are trodden under foot. (Aristotle, *Physics*, 1985[384–382 BC], Book II, Ch. 6: 337)

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Mapuche people are the largest indigenous group in present Chile (c. 1,000,000). During the colonial period and the beginning of the republican period (16th to 19th century) they succeeded in establishing large territorial control from the central southern part of present Chile to the Atlantic coast in current Argentina. In this huge territory they developed a prosperous economy based on livestock and succeeded in maintaining their territorial independence until the end of the 19th century when they were definitively conquered by the Chilean and Argentinian republics. This article focuses on the political role of some Mapuche stones (from large rocks to small stones) described in the ethnographic literature as being charged with symbolic, magical, religious and even political powers. In this frame, the Aristotelian epigraph at the start of this text may be useful.

For Aristotle, only those capable of decision-making, choice and intentional action (agency) can be said to be fortunate. In this way, such individuals are differentiated from inanimate objects, animals and children. The latter may only arrive at exceptional results through the spontaneous or mechanical effect of natural causes (*automaton*). The notion that stones may have agency implies the existence of a universe in which natural, spontaneous and impersonal causality is permanently suspected of hiding a subjective intentionality. Thus, the spontaneous and natural character of accidents (that is, their pre- or extra-social nature) is annulled through the subjective decision of a social actor. From an animist perspective (*sensu* Descola, 2005), such an actor may take the form of a human being or an animal, plant, or thing. Figures such as the *machi* (Mapuche shamans) are responsible for identifying them as the authors of misfortunes, illnesses and sudden deaths. Thus, in a world steeped in decision, luck (*tyché*) is understood as an illusion that arises from a lack of awareness of underlying causes. These are not the natural and objective causes of scientific rationalism (those produced by *physis*), but rather causes that are always artificial and subjective (produced by *techné*). But what is the nature of these causes? This question asks us to confront a longstanding philosophical discussion around decision-making, subjectivity and sovereignty. Descartes posits the question of the modern subject as an effect of a sovereign decision (the suspension of all certainty) (Thayer, 2006: 223), which leads us to another question: Is it possible to speak of true decision-making when this is the result of a determination that precedes it? The idea of a subjective decision thus liberated of all determination implies in political terms a communion with the indeterminate and always exceptional space of a sovereign decision in the sense of Carl Schmitt (2005). In other words, it is a decision that is independent of all previous norms or decisions. Thus, if for the 'magic thought' luck disappears in the identification of the subjective cause or through the realization of an evil decision that explains the chance accident, it returns through the inaccessibility of causes that determine the decision to the extent that it is understood as an unfathomably sovereign decision. In this way, luck (*tyché*) does not stop functioning as an ubiquitous and permanent variable that actors will attempt to control.

This article seeks to explore the role that certain stones have played in the configuration of this relationship between subjectivity and political decision-making, but in a political space – the Mapuche space – defined by a relationship which, if not antagonistic, is at the very least outside the modern figure of the State.¹ In this way, I seek to present a political logic that in a certain sense falls away from two modern modes of linking decision and sovereignty: Carl Schmitt's authoritarian decisionism, on the one hand, and

liberal rationalism, on the other. We will see that while, in one case, the sovereign and its sovereignty is based on the heterogeneous point of an exceptional decision, in the other, sovereignty is based on the supposition of a human nature or rationality (which is more or less universal) as a condition for the decisions that found social contracts or 'communicative actions'. The Mapuche stones analysed herein imply a form of political decision that is based on an exceptional dimension but also involves a heteronomous space that suspends the possibility of constituting a sovereign order, at least according to these two modern concepts of sovereignty.

In order to begin our discussion, let us say that these stones meet that function of guarantees of luck that underpin the indetermination of decisions. As we will see, they can also have good or bad luck. An example of this double condition was described few years ago by Chilean anthropologist Rolf Foerster. He analysed the case of members of a Mapuche community in the Cayucupil Valley (near a town called Cañete) who are in danger of losing their land to *wingka* (white, non-Mapuche) landholders. They decided to ask a *machi* to pray at the Holy Stone of Lumaco, a rock worshipped by the Mapuche, especially on 20 January.² After they visited the site, a stone beneath the tyre of the bus in which they were travelling prevented the group from starting the journey back. A passenger said, 'Oh, the stone wants to go with us.' The community members decided to bring the stone back to the village. Upon returning home, they dedicated a prayer to it, and the stone (certainly through the *machi*) then told them that it was a son sent by the Holy Stone of Lumaco and 'that they would not be bothered'. Time passed. One day, the *machi* felt ill. One of the community members explained:

We made her drunk [the *machi*] ... so that we could find out what was going on, and she said that [the stone] was feeling [offended] because people used to get drunk above it, step on it, make fun of it, and disrespect it.

The group then decided to put the stone back in its original place, after which 'We wept because we were once again without protection. We had taken it with us so that it could protect us' (Foerster, 2006).

Like the unlucky stones that Protarchus mentioned, this stone had been trodden upon rather than being properly venerated. As a result, the stone that was supposed to bring good luck to the community became unlucky. According to Aristotelian reasoning, it was the same stone that had decided to travel to the Cayucupil Valley when it prevented the bus from leaving.³ But was it really the stone that had made this decision? Recall that, upon its arrival to the community, the Holy Stone of Lumaco explained through the *machi* that it was a 'son' that she had left with them. Thus, the notion of the decision as a singular and sovereign point becomes less apparent after what seems to be a dynamic of transfers and displacements. However, in order to understand this notion of a stone that makes decisions, we must first understand how the luck that the stone brings with it is manifested.

For that, we should focus on a particularly important type of stone called *tokikura*. These stones are polished axes of an archaeological origin, with a hole in their base and a bevelled edge. They are between 8 and 13 cms long, and between 6 and 10 cms wide. The finest are made on marbled stones. They are normally found on the surface, which

hinders their chronological setting based on stratigraphic analysis. As Zulema Seguel (1966: 211) has noted, ‘their thorough elaboration, the delicacy of their polishing, their elegant forms, means that we consider them as non-utilitarian objects’, that is, objects improper for practical activities like cutting wood or ploughing. It is interesting that although these stones are linked to the global figure of the ‘lightning stone’,⁴ that is, they are thought to be produced by lightning bolts (after they fall and are buried under the earth), their name refers to the *toki* political figure or warrior chief with whom various Mapuche factions were allied during great insurrections against the Hispano-Criollos.

Furthermore, it is interesting to note here how the question of the divine and non-human origin of these stones could constitute an object of ethnic assertion. This already was the case in the 19th century according to testimony compiled by Bertha Koessler in which one of the accusations made by the Mapuche community at the time against Argentine explorer Francisco Pascasio Moreno was that he said that the *tokikura* were of archaeological origin. In the story, this statement takes the form of a sort of blasphemy against their divine origin:

And *liñkangué* [round eyes, the nickname given to Francisco Moreno] made fun when he found out that this lightning bolt [*tokikura*] is sacred and he wanted to say that it is a stone axe of the ancients. That was a lie: they come from the sky; they are born under the voice of God, which is *tralka* [thunder], they fall with the *liñke* [lightning]. (Koessler, 1962: 223–224)

It is interesting to see how on a current Mapuche website of clear culturalist trend this accusation is taken up again, but this time scientific arguments are used in favour of the original interpretation of these stones.

[René] Guénon was very familiar with some issues, but in other specific cases he did not know what any French person living in the countryside knows as well as any aborigine: the lightning stones are NOT pre-historic axes, but a product of nature. When lightning strikes and enters the ground, the extremely high temperatures melt mineral materials in its path, dragging them to considerable depth. When those materials cool, they generally take on two forms: that of an axe or that of a cone (Ankanaw, 2012).

But this natural explanation moves to a supernatural one without any transition, manifesting a conceptual continuity between nature and divinity: ‘The lightning stone, *tokikura* (in the Mapuche language), is a divine creation and not a human invention’ (Ankanaw, 2012).⁵ In some way, this shows us how in this type of present culturalist statement, the political power of the extraordinary phenomenon is overshadowed by this identification of the supernatural and the divine with the regularity of natural laws.

In another testimony compiled by Bertha Koessler in Argentinian Patagonia during the first half of the 20th century, a Mapuche informant, Amuiaiu-Pangü, stated the following about the stones:

My grandparents always used to view the *tokikura* as very holy stones worthy of worship. They were always given plenty of blood ... these stones take in as much blood as they can consume; they absorb it very well. They need high levels of strength to carry out their work. The owner of a *tokikura* always buries his stone on his land near his house so that he can look at it whenever

he wishes. This magical stone is a great help. Because it provides warning, it is called a *peutufe* (oracle: that which warns, advises); it is called a *peutuun* when it ascertains a person's fate, especially when there is a rumour of an impending raid. (Koessler, 1962: 95)

We thus see that the stone ensures luck, a kind of luck that is specifically associated with contexts of war (which is related to the warrior genealogy of the *tokikura* itself). In addition, before ensuring luck, this stone 'ascertains' one's fate.⁶ This is communicated by the stone through its movements: '[if] the *tokikura* moves to the surface of the earth without anyone having touched it, we will be victorious ... If the magic stone does not move, this is a bad sign that means that we will be defeated.' As proof of the above, Amuia-Pangü refers to the colonized condition of his people:

The fact that the *tokikura* have remained below the earth proves that this is correct: when the whites entered the Mapuche lands, and when the *wingka* [whites] took power over the *mapu* [land], the stones remained under ground and never again moved to the surface of the earth. Will they ever move again? (Koessler, 1962: 96)

The same report includes testimony from another Mapuche, Uenchu Küdel, who confirms this function of the *tokikura* as a political decision-making tool for war or peace, but from a less supernatural and more sociological perspective. He states that once the war ended, '[the *tokikura*] were buried before the tribes, a ceremony that demonstrated that "we have peace." They were unearthed to signal the imminence of war' (Koessler, 1962: 96, note 2). He then describes the particular mechanisms of political decision-making that these stones were associated with: these decisions were made in assemblies, for which 'we always had two chiefs: one voted for war and the other against war.' The former, who carried the *tokikura*, 'argued in favour of the Mapuche' and was called *mapuülmen* (chief of the land), and the other was called *uinkaülmen* (chief of the whites) and sought to 'argue in favour of the whites' (p. 96).

Zavala has highlighted the historic depth of this dualistic structure of Mapuche chiefdom, which was already visible in the 16th century in the form of the *Ngen Toki* (owner of the *toki*) and *NgenVoye* (owner of the cinnamon), which represented chiefs for war and peace. This duality would reappear during the colonial era (17th to 18th centuries) through the *Toki Ulmen* (who promotes and directs insurrections against colonial authority) and the *Cacique Gobernador* (Governor Chief) (the legitimate Mapuche representative before the Spanish administration) (Zavala, 2000: 216–224). However, it is likely that, in the context of these deliberations, the owner of the *Toki* or *mapuülmen* used signals from the *tokikura* as argument. Thus he placed the *tokikura* in a position symmetrical to that of the crown or State in the *uinkaülmen* or Governor Chief's argument. That is, in both cases, the position of a heteronomous as an exterior referent to the decision.

We can now return to the issue of luck. At the end of his testimony, Amuia-Pangü concludes: 'According to our ancestors, a *tokikura* is a gift from heaven; it determines the luck of the person who owns it' (Koessler, 1962: 96). In other words, the stone materializes the luck of its owner, or the condition of his or her luck to the extent that it determines the owner's power of decision while guaranteeing the success of the results. The stone thus literally embodies the decision of the individual, but materialized outside the individual. Roger Sansi-Roca (2005: 144) says something similar in regard to the *otã*

(those ‘saint’ stones of Candomblé religion), to the extent that they function as ‘external organs’ outside the initiates’ body, or as part of their ‘distributed person’ to use Alfred Gell’s (1998) term. Strictly speaking, ascribing a decision-making space to the exterior of an individual is no less heteronomic than ascribing it to the interior as in both cases the supposed indivisibility of the individual cedes before the agent-other that makes its decisions (see note 11). In this sense, Gell spoke of the homunculus that the psychological theories on representation must suppose within the individual to the extent that all mental representation supposes the duality of an image and a receptor of the image. As such, he proposed that a way of animating the stones was to produce this interiority (produce the homunculus) by locking the stone in a space that contains it (transforming it into the contained homunculus) or by making holes in it that would suggest a homunculus inside it (transforming it into the continent of the homunculus) (pp. 130–132).

We find the same decision-making function in another stone, the famous stone of Kallfukura, the most influential Mapuche chief of the 19th century in what is now Argentina. The stone is identified as being a *chewürpe* spirit, or a stone that some describe as exhibiting anthropomorphic features and an ability to transform into a flying ball of fire.

Kallfukura passed the stone down to his son, the also notable *cacique* Namuncura, who confronted the conquest of his territory by the Argentinian army at the end of the 19th century. Argentina’s General Rojas is said to have demanded the stone, which Namuncura agreed to, trusting in the power of the stone to liberate itself. After being locked in a metal chest, the stone passed through its walls and flew back to Namuncura. He explained that this was only possible because ‘the stone is not a stone; what I left [with the general] is a *chewürpe*; this is not a stone, though it takes the form of a stone.’ He added, ‘This is how we are respected’ (Canio and Pozo, 2013: 289). It is interesting to note that, after recovering the stone, Namuncura organized a mass prayer in its honour, during which the stone, like *tokikura*, was fed with the blood of a sacrifice. Namuncura then concluded, ‘Now I have returned to being a person’ (p. 275). The stone thus functioned as a supplement that restored Namuncura to his condition as a person. However, here we should describe the notion of a person as a matter of degree rather than one of nature and thus explain how a stone can also be a person. Rather than employing a radical ontological dichotomy between things and people (and I follow here what Jean Bazin, 2008: 509, calls a fetishist ontology), stones, people and other entities (including the gods) are distributed along a continuum that ranges from lesser to higher degrees of individuation. This scale is related to historicity and thus to singularity (in which the divine marks the highest state of singularity). This variable capital of individuality (which we here consider equivalent to personhood capital) makes them stand out over other people or other things. In fact, when Kallfukura passed the stone down to Namuncura, he did so explicitly ‘so that he would remain an important man’ (Koessler, 1962: 281). According to this *cacique*’s political perspective, personhood is correlated with energy that Social Science has defined as charisma and that, in this case, is explained by Namuncura’s ability to base his decisions on the heteronomous space incarnated by the stone. Namuncura states:

‘The damned Indian thinks he knows,’ that is what the powerful *wingka* say about me. ‘But he does not know anything; he does not know how to read,’ that is what the powerful *wingka* say

about me. I do not know this on my own; I do not know what I should say. It is my stone that makes me this way; it is she who directs me in all matters. (Koessler 1962: 298)

Here we see a structure of decision-making in the Mapuche political order that is directly related to extreme dispersion of power. In a space of political horizontality (what political anthropology would call a 'segmented society' without a State or even against the State), making use of a heteronomous space allows for the enunciation of decisions. Though they involve various actors, the decisions do not appear to have been initiated by these actors. Rather, decisions seem to be initiated by a process of alterity that transcends them. Hence, the stones are one among many other types of oracular decision-making (based on the songs of birds, the results of certain games, the directions in which sacrificed animals fall, dreams) that can be read as argumentative resources used to justify certain decisions. Thus, whether a decision is imposed or not imposed will not depend so much (at least nominally) on the charismatic weight of the individual who supports the decision, but on the heteronomous object (for example, the Holy Stone of Lumaco, the *tokikura* or the *chewürpe*) with which he or she has established an alliance and that, in this way, supports his or her decisions.

On the one hand, in the case of accidents that have taken place in the past in an apparently fortuitous way (from an Aristotelian perspective), there is a need to identify a subjective decision; that is, an individual (human or non-human) must take responsibility for an event to account for misfortune within an economy of gift and vengeance.⁷ But in inscribing itself within the circular and impersonal dynamic of this type of symbolic economy (see Mauss, 1923) (or rather an ontological one in the case of revenge),⁸ that is, to the extent to which these decisions are understood as successive realizations of certain extemporal structures, it is difficult to consider them to be real or fully sovereign decisions. They are instead effects of a structure (of revenge or the gift).⁹

Thus, in the case of those non-accidental and subjectified facts, if they depended on fully sovereign decisions, their causes would be attributable exclusively to the subject himself or herself (or would even produce it), elevating the decision to the rank of miracle, that is, to an exceptional rank that, according to Aristotle, defines the effects of luck (*tyché*). This would have the political effect (celebrated through the authoritarianism of Carl Schmitt) of transforming the subject himself into an incarnation of sovereignty and into a potential supporting figure of a State (see Schmitt, 2005).¹⁰ According to this approach, the high importance of individual autonomy, which many anthropologists identify as a characteristic of the Mapuche social ethos and which would be an obstacle to the creation of transversal and centralized forms of political representation (Melville, 1976), should be understood as a systematic displacement of sovereign decisions to the exterior of the individual rather than an equal distribution of individual 'sovereignities'. This exteriority is materialized through elements like stones which mark the true sources of decisions. And returning to the gift, this is consistent with the anti-exchange thesis of Jean Bazin (that I am following in this work), in which instead of updating a structure or circuit of exchange, the gift constitutes a circulation of singular things charged with vitality and that can determine the action and affects of the human subjects through which they pass (Bazin, 2008: 568).

This accounts for the apparent contradiction between the subjectivizing determinism through which past events are described retrospectively and the de-subjectivized indeterminism through which events are projected into the future.

However, in the testimony that we cite regarding Kallfukura's stone and the heteronomous power that it exerted over him and his descendants, another important fact appears. Namuncura claims that the stone had said to his father:

'I appear before you today. I allow myself to be seen by you because I am not a stone.' Thus, my stone spoke to me, 'because they ordered me to do so when the old God said, 'you should see him!' ... They said this to me, and this is who I am governed by. (Canio and Pozo, 2013: 304)

Thus, as in the case of the stone of Cayucupil that had been sent by his mother, the Holy Stone of Lumaco, the displacement of decisions does not stop with the stone of Kallfukura. Rather, it refers to its proper state of heteronomy (in this case, God), which is relatively coherent with the fact that the stone is, in its own way, a person.

Hence, at the end of the chain, God appears as the prime driver of the decision. However, we must ask which God is being referenced, as it appears to be one that is not the universal God of Christian monotheism. At present, the Mapuche concept of a supreme God is manifested through Ngünechen (the owner or dominator of men). However, this term is of relatively recent origin (no earlier than the 19th century)¹¹ and, for reasons that I do not have room to describe here, this God presents an ethnic character that is exclusively Mapuche (or, more precisely, 'of' the Mapuche, as there are testimonies that describe him as 'a white gentleman, elegantly dressed, as one sees in cities') (Eulogio Robles, cited in Casamiquela, 2007: 168).¹² In this sense, Namuncura himself explains that, in the presence of political and military defeat, his stone 'no longer has value'. It cannot foretell or assure military victories. He then explains that this can be attributed to the fact that 'the Ngünechen of the *wingka* has defeated us. We were wrong before [our] Ngünechen, and this is why they are confusing the Ngünechen that governs us' (Canio and Pozo, 2013: 297).

This state of opposition between the Mapuche and *wingka* Gods echoes the ancient colonial opposition between the *ngentoki* and *ngenfoye* with their later iterations as warrior chiefs and governing *caciques* or *mapu ñlmens* and *wingka ñlmens*. Zavala and others find in this opposition a symbolic determination of political order through a dual cosmological structure. I argue that one can read this in an inverse direction, that is, as a political determination of symbolic representations. When I refer to the term 'political', I apply the definition put forth by Carl Schmitt (2007: 26) based on the friend/enemy distinction. In this context, the most intensely supernatural function is fulfilled through those heteronomous instances that allow for the discussion of political decisions. This is due to the fact that nothing is as supernatural – in the sense of a miraculous or monstrously exceptional prodigy – as an absolutely sovereign decision, that is, a decision that does not answer to a cause outside itself. Thus, if at the end of the series of transfers, one finds a godlike figure, as in the case of the stone of Namuncura, this will be God as a maximum exception, as the pole of maximum singularity (let us remember the God of the fetishist ontology according to Bazin) or as a pole of distribution of the singularities and from which the decisions come. This pole of exceptionality is poised in opposition

to the pole of natural regularity and Humanist reason, which constitutes the modern and liberal substrate upon which individual decisions are to be sustained.

The fact that it is the stones that form this pole of radical singularity may be related to the ontological conditions that stones are given through their own materiality. As Marc Augé (1998: 31) states, for living consciousness, the truly supernatural is inert matter: 'The unthinkable, and in a certain way, power, correspond to brute inertia and pure materiality ... the supernatural corresponds to the inert.' This explains why the stones are endowed with an ontological alterity that predisposes them to form charismatic foci of singularity through a series of events that mark their history and agency. Thus, the more muted and impenetrable the stones are, the more clearly they reflect the infinite vitality of that unthinkable God through being pure accident, pure contingency and pure singularity.

The Mapuche God was called Pillañ, a term used several centuries before Ngenechen.¹³ This deity appears to be related more to attributes than to substance. As Ewald Böning (1995: 175) explained 40 years ago, Pillañ represents 'the vigorous, the extraordinary, the powerful, the disturbing phenomenon'. Volcanic eruptions, storms, earthquakes and tidal waves were viewed as manifestations of Pillañ. In order to understand the link between these different conceptions of divinity and the role of the Mapuche stones in the decision-making process, it may be useful to explore the analogy between the Pillañ/Ngenechen opposition and the theological opposition between theologians' God and philosophers' God, according to Pascal, or the Egyptian God (of logos) and the Jewish God (of the command) in Freud's Moses. It is interesting to see how in his reflections on these two concepts of the divine, Slavoj Žižek (1999: 24–27) highlights the dual and sexualized character of the first God (visible in the quadripartite constitution of Ngenechen – old man, old woman, young man, young woman) versus the desexualized character of the second, which is presented as the capricious God of the commandment and of pure arbitrariness. Without wishing to exaggerate this speculative analogy, I think it can be useful to read the opposition between the aforementioned culturalist identification of divinity with natural regularity (represented by Ngenechen) and its more political feature as manifestation of the extraordinary (Pillañ).

Justifying this characterization of Pillañ exceeds the objectives of this work and would require a separate article. However, we can note some clues around its relationship to the problem of the heteronomic condition of the decision. Many authors have discussed this understanding of Pillañ as an attribute (identifiable with the exceptional and the extraordinary) and not as an individualized spirit (Imbelloni, 1953: 323). A good example is that of Tadashi Yanai, who argues that, in function of his own ethnographic experience, one cannot say that the Pillañ is an attribute of the volcano as an extraordinary phenomenon (which is Böning's thesis) since the volcano is said to be inhabited by *pillañes*. But beyond this, the interesting thing is that, based on these same observations, he posits a continuity between the old Pillañ and the contemporary notion of the *püllü*, a sort of ancestral spirit that would function as an agent that speaks through the mouth of its possessor in rites or dreams in his or her place.

When one says, for example, that the *püllü* (or *witrаниеeteu*) of a person is who really speaks or dreams, should we say that that *püllü* is the person, or that the person has that *püllü*? In the latter

case, as we say when a person has its spirit as a force (*nepen*) that is transformed into a mystical weapon, which subject should that verb have? Who is the one that transforms the spirit into the mystical weapon? There are actually reasons to believe that the true subject of all significant action for the Mapuche cannot be anything but the ancestral spirit (Yanai, 1997: 151–172).

Beyond this ethno-theological debate on the real identity of Pillañ (as a personified force or as a name for the extraordinary phenomenon), I think that this author confirms, in his own way, the connection between Pillañ and the heteronomic space with which I have identified a Mapuche decision-making structure. Pillañ forms thunder and thunderbolts, and Pillañ sends the *pillañtoki*, the axes of Pillañ, the stones of lightning. The latter, upon falling and being buried under ground, become *tokikura*, the stone axes that predict the occurrence of war or peace.¹⁴ And stretching a bit more this theological speculation, we can understand them as gifts from a god who, in distributing himself, distributes decisions and other wonders.

This reminds us of those inalienable and sacred objects given by the gods to the Baruya ancestors, which, according to Godelier, instead of signs and symbols are ‘things that possess spirit, thus power’ (Godelier, 1996: 170). Like the Mapuche stones under discussion, they are a sort of materialized power, or the material anchorage of its legitimacy and authority. In Gell’s (1998) terms, we may say that when it comes to the political decisions, the stones function as active agents and the Mapuche chiefs as passive ones. They may also be understood as the index of this god or transcendent source of decisions, representing it not in a symbolic way, but as material manifestations of its distributed personhood (p. 96 ff.). Following Gell’s example of this kind of representation, the stones represent this political source of heteronomic decisions in the same way that embassies and ambassadors represent their nations within another country (even if they don’t ‘look like’ their nations) (p. 98)

Thus the aim of this article was to show how the spiritual interpretation of object’s agency can be read in political terms, and how this material dimension of power seems inseparable from the problem of how decisions are produced, or at least, how they are justified.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the organizers of the *Culture of Stones Congress*, held at University College Dublin between 18 and 20 September 2014, where I had the chance to discuss some of the ideas developed in this article. I also thank Rodrigo Mera for the conversations and information that motivated and made this work possible. I also thank Elizabeth Collingwood and Kate Goldman for their kind assistance with the English translation.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This article is part of a research funded by project Fondecyt no. 1140921.

Notes

1. This responds, on the one hand, to the historical and anthropological characterization of Mapuche society as a society without a State or a segmented society (Bechis, 2008) defined

- as noted later in this article – by internal tendencies of inhibition of centralized forms of power. On the other hand, it responds to the relationship of exteriority with regard to the Chilean national government due to the colonial condition that defines Mapuche society's relationship to that government. And we think this is not contradictory with the fact that Mapuche leaders have strategically 'occupied' positions in the Chilean State during the 20th century (Vergara et al., 2005: 73).
2. On the Piedra Santa de Lumaco, see Casamiquela (1971), Foerster (1985: 43–67, 171) and Schindler (2006: 11–67).
 3. Referring to the *otã* stones of Candoblé religion, Sansi-Roca (2005: 143) also identifies in the apparent 'luck' of finding the stone a decision on the part of that same stone: 'If stones are not bought or made, but found, it is because they want to be', which takes us back to the 18th-century theories on fetishism in which Europeans believed that black people worshipped 'the first thing they find in their way'. In this sense, Sansi-Roca notes that while 'there is certainly an element of chance', it is a 'driven chance' or 'hazard objectif', following the surrealist concept. In the paragraphs that follow, we will see how this 'driven chance' can reach the same stone and relativize its apparent decision-making capacity.
 4. The literature on lighting stones on the global level is enormous. For a review of the global nature of this figure and particularly the comparison of African and Mesoamerican data, see Ortiz (1947). For the Spanish context (which can offer background on Mapuche practices) see Hildburgh (1941). For the Mapuche context, see Cañas Pinochet (1902), Joseph (1930), Imbelloni (1953) and Balmori (1963).
 5. This statement of divine origin (in that it is both natural and supernatural) of the *tokikura* resonates with the old reflection on other objects charged with vitality: the Christian relics known as *acheiropoieta*, that is, images whose guarantee of divinity resides in the fact that they were not produced 'by human hands' (such as the celebrated Shroud of Turin or the Veil of Veronica) (Kitzinger, 1954: 83–150; Latour, 2009: 144).
 6. This oracular nature of the stones is also revealed by Casamiquela when he speaks of the great sacred stones like Lumaco or Retricura. In addition, these are objects of propitiatory rites and shelter or materialize the presence of spiritual beings (Casamiquela, 1971: 498). Rolf Foerster (1985: 171) takes up these same characteristics when he speaks of the great stone of Abuelito Huenteao in Pucatrihue.
 7. By responsible, I mean it in an economic sense rather than a moral one. In fact, there is another type of magical stone (green or transparent beads) called *llanca* that are currently used by the *machi* in their shamanic practices. They were initially used as a means to pay for the debt incurred when one causes another person's death:

And these deaths are always paid for in *llancas*, which are green and black stones varied with veins of different colours and that they esteem more than diamonds and emeralds, which they ignore. Each string of these stones is a payment, and each death is composed of ten payments. And if the killer does not have them, the relatives forcibly give them to him in order to get out of that commitment. It is a matter of the entire family, and if one cannot make the entire payment, relatives will help; today it is me, tomorrow it is you. (De Rosales 1988[1664]: 133–134)

8. Here I am thinking of Viveiros de Castro's thesis on the Tupi Nambá revenge wars, in which the 'motor of time' of that society was recognized. That motor was activated by the rite of execution of the prisoner to be devoured in which the victim and victimizer engage in a dialogue. Over the course of that dialogue, their positions become confused, producing what the author calls a 'transcendental synthesis of time in *Tupí* society' (Viveiros de Castro, 2002: 238).

9. This is valid even outside the Maussian or Lévi-Straussian (1950) model of the gift. For example, in the reading that Derrida offers of Mauss's celebrated text, the true gift would imply its unknowing by the subject, precisely to escape the circularity that annuls it (Derrida, 1992: 6–33). In this case, the gift would continue to decide without the subject's knowledge.
10. For its part, liberal democracy has solved this problem by supposing a basis of common rationality for humanity upon which the diversity of particular decisions can be supported. However, this has not prevented an intense debate on the existence or not of free will under individual decisions, within the frame of a liberal ontology of human being (cf. Kane, 2002). And if we take, for example, the neuroscientific arguments against free will (as well as their philosophical counter-arguments), we can observe how they share with those Mapuche stones, a question on the relation of person and things (stones or brains) when they need to explain the origin of decisions.
11. On the late origin of Ngünechen and its Christian influence, see Bacigalupo (1997: 199) and Foerster (1993: 71).
12. On this same line but with implications that we do not have room to unpack here, Juan Rosa Painemil – a Mapuche leader from the Arauco Province – told us in an interview that Ngennechen appeared to him in dreams in the form of Augusto Pinochet dressed in his white uniform (Foerster and Menard, 2009: 54).
13. For a review of colonial references to Pillañ (and prior to those of Ngünechen), see De Augusta (1910: 226) and especially Böning (1995).
14. On the relationship between Pillañ and the *tokikura*, see the classic text by Rodolfo Lenz (1895–1897) on the myth of Latrapay (or Tatrpay) in which two young people put to the test by an evil old man ask Pillañ to send them stone axes, that is, Pillañ axes, or *pillañtoki*, with which they manage to cut hard trees in a single swing (pp. 695–704). See also Imbelloni (1953) and his postulate on the transoceanic diffusion of these stone axes.

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