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Dispossession of Indigenous Knowledge in the Chilean Education System: Mapuche Experiences in Chile

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ABSTRACT

The article reports on the dispossession of indigenous knowledge in the public education system in Mapuche territory in La Araucanía, a southern region in Chile. The methodology is qualitative, 18 people were interviewed including Mapuche wise men and women, fathers, and mothers who experienced schooling processes in their younger years. The information analysis technique is content analysis, to identify explicit and latent meanings related to the schools they attended and the Chilean education system. Mapuche wise people and parents were consulted on the pedagogical practices of dispossession of ancestral knowledge that have been institutionalized. Main results show that schools have transmitted a Western Eurocentric-based knowledge which results in the dispossession of their own episteme and in their transformation into ordinary Chilean citizens who are unaware of their language and culture as a central axis of their sociocultural identity. Main conclusions account for the historical processes of schooling in an indigenous context, highlighting the consequences that this monocultural education has brought to families, communities, and new generations of indigenous. This poses the challenge of transforming the school curriculum, to transmit their truth, to advance in justice, reparation, and to ensure the non-repetition of the epistemicide of indigenous knowledge in the school.

KEYWORDS

Dispossession; indigenous knowledge; school education; epistemicide

Introduction

In the Americas, the relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples has been marked by colonialism, power relations and asymmetry toward indigenous communities, considering them inhuman races that should be eliminated (El-Hani, 2022). This conceptualization of races is associated with the logic of classification, categorization and labeling of subjects, according to their cultural characteristics and phenotypic traits that allowed – from an ideology of superiority – to attribute to indigenous people a lower hierarchy and social value (Villarroel et al., 2023). Systematically, dominant groups began to implement practices of cultural genocide and assimilation of indigenous people to hegemonic interests, norms, and social values (Molina, 2022) concentrating all forms of control of subjectivity, culture, and especially the production of knowledge under European supremacy (Quijano, 2019). Likewise, cultural genocide based on systemic racism has permeated over the decades various institutions of the Chilean state, including educational institutions. The school education system has historically sought to eliminate “the indigenous” from children and young people attending schools in ancestral territory. This has been materialized through a curriculum based on Western Eurocentric knowledge which promotes one culture, that of the dominant social groups as ideals to be followed for the formation of new generations.

Worldwide, a hegemonic schooling process for children and young people, characterized both by the dispossession of the territory and by the dispossession of their own educational knowledge was implemented in different colonized indigenous territories. This involved the establishing of teaching and learning methods – arranged on specific schedules and locations – to regulate the forms of relationships, and to perpetuate an asymmetry of power between the teacher, their students, and families. The overall purpose was to provide schooling and literacy to individuals deemed as subaltern (Serrano et al., 2012). The foregoing allowed what Salazar and Pinto (2018) call “governance exercise,” understood as the systemic need to keep civil society disciplined according to hegemonic moral patterns. In this way, through practices of dispossession of indigenous knowledge in school education, the construction and establishment of knowledge is hegemonic, constituting a political and ideological process endorsed by the State to control the other, in this case the indigenous nation. These forms of control include dispossession of their political, cultural, social, and territorial resources through the installation of a school system that imposes ideas, opinions, ways of being and acting in the world. This worldwide monoculturalism exercised in the classroom in the form of pedagogical practices carried out by teachers is allegedly superior (Shizha, 2005, 2010, 2013). This is how, through social representations and pedagogical practices, the reproduction of a social structure that classifies subjects according to their cultural origin is promoted (Llancavil & González, 2017). This is how the indigenous person occupies a place of subordination and submission, for which reason they lose any form of right. Thus, schools oversee maintaining the status quo, making sure that the indigenous continue to be socially devalued. This practice should not be abandoned, as otherwise indigenous culture is prone to becoming a critical subject that might be a threat to the hegemonic order established in the school system (Villaruel et al., 2023). Practices of dispossession on indigenous children and youth force them to share and mentalize a linear knowledge that is contrary to the holistic knowledge that they have built in their families and communities (Campeau, 2021). In this way, through school education and its curriculum, the will of dominant groups is transmitted into indigenous children and youth’s minds, defining the status, relations of privilege, power, and control of hegemonic racial groups. Consequently, a cultural genocide against indigenous peoples is explicitly implemented to free them from the state of misery that – from the dominant group’s perspective – is assumed indigenous subjects find themselves in (Pávez et al., 2020). Thus, state policies and its different institutions carry on aggressive and relentless practices toward indigenous peoples by stripping them of their cosmogony and worldview.

The objective of this article is to give an account of the practices of dispossession institutionalized in the Chilean school system to eliminate “the Indian” from indigenous children and youth, according to the voices of Mapuche wise people, fathers and mothers from La Araucanía, Chile.

This article has been written in La Araucanía, Chile, the ancestral territory of the Mapuche people. The authors, who are not indigenous, position themselves from a critical intercultural educational perspective in the constant pursuit of developing knowledge in teaching and research within indigenous contexts. They aim to contribute to the decolonization of the hegemonic society in Chile, which perpetuates systematic practices of racism against historically marginalized groups. The researchers work as educators in higher education, specifically in the field of social sciences. They are also researchers in the field of initial teacher training, operating within a context marked by social crisis and the richness of cultural diversity. Within this challenging environment, the authors have explored innovative pedagogical approaches that enable the integration of an intercultural educational focus into teacher training programs and the processes of teaching and learning in schools. Their primary goal is to promote a pluralistic epistemological vision that gradually contributes to the decolonization of education. To achieve this, they emphasize the importance of recognizing the practices of systematic violence perpetuated through traditional educational models. This recognition is seen to avoid repeating history and to acknowledge that the school system was one of the primary agents responsible for disposing of indigenous knowledge in Mapuche children and youth who experienced the process of schooling within the Chilean colonial school system. They advocate for the legitimate integration of indigenous ancestral knowledge into the school curriculum, incorporating it into the content, skills, and attitudes relevant to students’ holistic education.

Practices of dispossession of indigenous peoples

There is a concept in German for dispossession, *Landnahme*, whose original meaning is “land appropriation”, and has been commonly used in the context of settlement or conquest of new territories (Dörre, 2016). Under this conceptualization, it is worth noting that a *Landnahme* process produces a winner vs loser relationship of tension between two confronting social groups. This tension eventually end up with “losers” being excluded or expelled from the social relations of the dominant group in a process of consolidation (Dörre, 2016).

In the context of analysis to the capitalist system, *Landnahme* is a concept used to address the expansive character of capitalism in different countries, and specifically in indigenous territories. This has resulted in an invasive dispossession of indigenous ways of life, affecting their relationship with their natural and territorial environment. Indigenous communities have been undisputedly labeled as the losers of the *Landnahme* of the Americas. The logic of dispossession from the policies established by states has been legitimized as “civilizing and legal acts” for the subordination of peoples, supposedly underdeveloped and primitive. In the case of the Americas, these communities are referring to indigenous peoples (Dörre, 2016). Historically, dispossession is associated with the appropriation of their lands, as a right of dominant societies whose purpose is the advance of westernized civilization and the colonization of “uncivilized” minds, from the logic of those who assume themselves to be superior.

In the case of Latin America, specifically in Chile, the dispossession of the territories owned by indigenous peoples was carried out through practices of fraud and usurpation of their territory which worsened because of their unfamiliarity with the hegemonic languages. Institutionalized practices of racism were also assumed as their lands were sold, leased, or exchanged for a minimum value (Campeau, 2021). This dispossession in the colonial period allowed colonizers to make use and appropriation of the land and its natural environment as if they were deserted. Similarly, other practices of appropriation and usufruct of the indigenous world also materialized. One of them was the dispossession of the natural environment, through the commodification of nature, the destruction of native flora and fauna, through the afforestation of monocultures, agroindustry, hydroelectric dams, among other water megaprojects that determine the activities of control, government, management, care and social distribution of natural resources, which were systematically subordinated to the determination imposed by the capitalist socioeconomic and political processes (Castro, 2023). Thus, the natural environment that fulfills a function of dense and deep interrelation of the tangible and intangible of indigenous cosmovision are elements that have been progressively subordinated by the capitalist colonial logic. This, expressed in a principle of competition and productivity of the natural environment influenced the epistemic practices of indigenous cosmogony and worldview associated with their natural environment, the human and the divine (Escobar, 2016). This is why this Western Eurocentric view of dispossession of the natural environment exhaust natural resources, generating an irreversible global damage to the tangible and intangible sides of nature, which is of vital importance according to indigenous lore (Dörre, 2016). Another practice of dispossession installed toward indigenous epistemic frameworks refers to the spiritual aspect, a process in which indigenous spiritualities are subjugated and silenced, through the imposition of a God, forms, norms, and values that do not conform to this interrelation of the human and the divine, from the indigenous perspective (Cayuqueo, 2016). Practices of spiritual dispossession toward the indigenous have been expressed through ways of ignoring and disregarding indigenous cosmology, spirituality, and ontology, attributing them adjectives such as wild, retrograde, and unscientific (Sabzalian, 2019). Spiritual dispossession has implied the suppression, subordination and denial of orality and the transmission of the indigenous’ own knowledge while erasing their conversations and it has limited their experiences with the divine as they have been forced to assimilate the hegemonic culture that has been imposed by the westernized society. In this regard, it should be noted that nature itself under indigenous worldviews is a political subject that affects the social and political life of humans. Nature being a subject of the first order to consider (Rojas-Bahamonde et al., 2020). In this sense, spiritual dispossession also has

Table 1. Types of dispossession expressions toward indigenous peoples.

Expressions of dispossession	Descripción
Judicial	It is expressed in the denial of other forms of organization, such as those that indigenous peoples have and that allow them to establish their social and cultural norms of relationships, of being and acting in accordance with their own frame of reference. This dispossession denies indigenous peoples the right to self-determination.
Territorial	It is associated with the practice of appropriation and usurpation of ancestrally indigenous territory, under the civilizing and productivity logic that is expected from these spaces. This type of dispossession is materialized by the State and companies to exploit the resources for their economic benefit.
Epistemic	It is expressed in the violation and denial of the existence of other forms of knowledge to understand and exist in the world. It implies the invisibilization of indigenous epistemic system or even the usurpation and appropriation of its own frames of reference by the hegemonic culture or by those who have political and economic power in society.
Spiritual	This refers to the imposition of values, beliefs and cultural practices alien to the indigenous worldview and cosmogony to the detriment of their own spiritual and religious beliefs and practices. It is materialized in institutionalized spaces such as the church and the school.
Natural	This refers to the appropriation of natural resources such as water, land, forests, native flora and fauna without the consent of the indigenous communities that depend on them for their survival.

Source: Own elaboration.

political implications. In [Table 1](#), we give an account of other forms of dispossession that have been institutionalized in indigenous contexts based on the ideals of the nation-state, which deny the existence of epistemological pluralism in society.

According to [Table 1](#), we can argue that dispossession in its different practices has become a strategy of cultural devastation and depredation of the lore and wisdom of indigenous peoples ([Maldonado, 2020](#)). Types of dispossessions that we have yet only just begun to question from a critical perspective.

The dispossession of the indigenous in the educational system

The practices of dispossession of the indigenous in educational system are based on the transmission and imposition of a single way of knowing and understanding the world from the Western Eurocentric civilization that has materialized in the school curriculum ([Arias-Ortega et al., 2023](#)). The school curriculum is understood as that document accepted by the State that accounts for school organization and the implementation of learning objectives, programs and study plans that constitute the guidelines to be followed in pedagogical practices ([Briand & Chapoulie, 1993](#)). In this sense, the school curriculum is the representation of a world of laws and texts for the regulation of schools in the school system. According to [Quintriqueo et al. \(2022\)](#), the school curriculum is a site for the logic of knowledge construction expressed in the study programs which impose teaching and learning methods, as well as defining the educational means and resources and procedures to develop the learning situation. Thus, this school curriculum has served as a strategy to introduce and legitimize social differentiation, promote cultural discrimination, and root institutionalized racism practices in formal schooling processes ([Londoño et al., 2019](#)).

In this sense, the purpose of dispossession in the educational system is to subjugate indigenous people by imposing hegemonic language, as well as disregarding indigenous episteme and lore, in order to forge a homeland, a single and indivisible citizenship in accordance with the sociocultural values of the dominant society. In this way, the practices of dispossession are carried out in school institutions through the curriculum and by teachers, who receive initial teacher training of a monocultural and racist nature ([Barboza & Ferreira da Silva, 2022](#)). This type of training transmits, consciously or unconsciously, the need to do away with the indigenous ethos, knowing and doing, in order to overcome “the Indian” in them and thus allow them an upward social mobility, which necessarily considers the transformation of their spirit into a socially accepted subject. In this way, the

approach promoted by school education is based on colonial roots that justify colonization. Schooling becomes a strategic tool of the State to deprive indigenous peoples of their own episteme. We have observed this in the indigenous territories that have been colonized, where the aim of the educational system, according to teachers, is the transformation of the indigenous person, to get rid of poverty, dirt, and backwardness to become a person who might achieve a better life condition as long as they abandon their own (Arias-Ortega & Quintriqueo, 2021). This implies dispossessing themselves of their language, culture, history, and territory, this is, of their indigenous ancestry. In this way, school dispossession has been carried out through teachers who have become agents who promote the logic of development, according to the ideals and educational views of a hegemonic State.

In this context, school educational practices seek the extermination of the diverse social and linguistic aspects of indigenous peoples, through a permanent campaign in which classrooms become a correctional space. According to Maldonado (2011), it is assumed that teachers are the representatives of the State who act against communities and their culture, through processes of dispossession and invasion. In this way, power and asymmetry are installed in communities and expand in their territories, exercising power toward them and their traditional authorities. This is how the educational system transmits and promotes practices that discriminate and repress any expression of diversity toward indigenous children and young people in schools. This dispossession inside and outside the school implies the domestication and deterritorialization of the indigenous, to submit them to the Western Eurocentric logic, promoting educational discontinuity at community and family level. In this way, the bonds of attachment of indigenous children and youth with their land, their identity, and their territory are consciously affected in order to colonize and dispossess the mind, being and knowledge of indigenous children.

In this perspective, the practices of dispossession carried out in school and in the educational system in general tend to break and destroy three types of epistemic practices that are important for indigenous type of knowledge. The first is related to the discontinuity of oral transmission practices from parents to their children as a frame of reference (Kovats, 2020). The school interferes with the ways of life of indigenous peoples by installing a gap of asymmetry between the ancestral knowledge held by parents and the knowledge transmitted in the classroom to their children, as a unique and valid form of knowledge to thrive in a global society (Burgess et al., 2022). The second, is related to the discontinuity in the relationship and interrelationship of indigenous children and youth with their natural and spiritual environment, transmitted as a value of vital importance in indigenous family education (Campeau, 2021). The educational system strips and denaturalizes indigenous family life by imposing the so-called scientific method as the only valid method to construct knowledge, excluding, denying, and marginalizing the indigenous knowledge developed in through centuries (Villarroel et al., 2023). The above, generates a distancing of children and young people from their natural way of life maintained in their own cosmovision by non-schooled subjects. Finally, the third is related to the stripping of the spirituality of children and young people in school education, in which the tangible, the intangible, and their relationships with other native peoples are questioned and ridiculed in schools, assuming that they are beliefs and rituals that are far from being civilized (Grosfoguel, 2022). In this context, the school and the educational system in general continue to domesticate children and young people, distancing them from their communities following a logic that perpetuates capitalism through the dispossession of their own knowledge of being and doing, in order to perpetuate colonialism in indigenous territories.

Methodology

The study considers a qualitative methodology that seeks a clear and deep understanding of the meanings attributed by indigenous wise men and women, fathers and mothers to the practices of dispossession of their own knowledge they went through during their schooling years. Thus, the voices of the participants are to problematize the consequences of the dispossession of their language and culture. The site in which the sample was gathered is located in La Araucanía, Chile, which historically

has been characterized by a high density of Mapuche population, which according to the data of the socioeconomic characterization of the Chilean national survey of 2020, this indigenous population reaches up to a total of 2.185.732 people, equivalent to 12,8% of the total population at national level. The participants were 12 Mapuche wise men and six wise women, ranging in age from 40 to 70 years old. All participants are *Mapunzugun* speakers (Mapuche vernacular language). In addition, five mothers and one father were part of the sampled population. Their ages range from 38 to 42 years old, and they have experienced schooling processes in Chilean monocultural schools. The Mapuche wise men are recognized by the community for being the ones who know and maintain the ways of their society, culture, and language, and keep the family history of their people, as guardians of their Mapuche background. The inclusion criteria were related and restricted to their willingness to participate in the study.

The data collection techniques used were semi-structured interviews in which participants were inquired about: 1) their schooling experiences; 2) incorporation of their own educational knowledge in the teaching-learning process; 3) the challenges and limitations of developing their indigenous identity in the Chilean educational system. Ethical safeguards involved were informed consent and respect for the principles, norms, and socio-cultural protocols of Mapuche family education associated with *mañumntu* and *pentukuwün*. The former concept (*mañuntu*) implied a process of reciprocity between individuals who interacted in conversation, that involved giving away food, objects, or other gifts to wise people, fathers, and mothers of the family as a token of appreciation for the knowledge they were about to share. This action gave way to understanding in depth the experiences of schooling and its relationship with the dispossession of ancestral knowledge, perpetuated in the educational system (Quintriqueo et al., 2022). The later concept (*pentukuwün*) implied the “researchers” introducing themselves to the indigenous communities and vice versa to account for their territorial and parental origin and their social heritage as an initial protocol for the sharing and exchanging among participants in conversation (Quintriqueo et al., 2022).

The information was analyzed through topical analysis, which is defined as a method for the treatment of information that allows identifying, organizing, analyzing in detail, and reporting patterns of discourse based on a careful reading and re-reading of the information provided by the study participants (Mieres et al., 2012). This process implied the need to preserve and respect the subjectivity of the participants and the recognition of the spatiotemporal context in which the phenomenon was studied. Topical analysis was applied verbatim to identify recurrent topics regarding the practices of dispossession that have been institutionalized in the educational system. The analysis considered the transcription, reading, and rereading of the material and annotation of general ideas, to identify structures and meanings about the object of study. Subsequently, initial codes were generated to categorize the information into groups of the same meaning that could be considered significant in relation to the subject of study. In this process, the abstract content nuclei (topics) related to each category were identified. Likewise, the quotations that represent each topic were identified, so that the abstractions and concepts that the researchers attributed to a given fact or content could be signaled to an extract from the text. Finally, a conceptual arrangement of the topics was made, which allowed a detailed description of the underlying contents.

Results

Results showed how pedagogical practices – in the educational system and in specific schools which involved an indigenous context – had been consciously or unconsciously implemented as a strategy to deprive indigenous children and youth of their own cultural knowledge. According to the testimony of the participants, it was possible to identify two main elements that meant strategies of dispossession that were institutionalized in the school. They were as follows: 1) decontextualization of school education, which implied the transmission of hegemonic school contents as unique and valid to understand and explain the world, detaching indigenous and local knowledge; and 2) discontinuity of indigenous family education, which implied distancing childhood from epistemic practices, as a result of the long period that children and young people spent in the educational system, which broke the relationships between child and parents with their communities.

Decontextualization as a practice of dispossession

In relation to the decontextualization of school education as a practice of dispossession of indigenous knowledge, the testimony of indigenous wise people, fathers, and mothers allowed to identify that during their schooling years some hegemonic discourse was imposed as a tool to erase indigenous background knowledge. For example, a Mapuche wise person points out that this form of dispossession was expressed in the form of learning the national dance, thus forgetting and denying their traditional dances such as *purriün*, practiced in socio-religious ceremonies to connect with the divine and the earthly, as a form of gratitude. A testimony stated that: “they taught us to dance *cueca*, I was never able to learn it and they would yell at me that no matter how hard I tried, I could never learn it” (Aliwen). Reportedly, this obligation to learn was also reinforced by physical punishment toward children and young people. Likewise, another testimony added that the decontextualization also affected indigenous religious beliefs (*feyentun*), that were denied or stereotyped or systematically associated to witchcraft. In this regard, a wise man remarked that “(…) in November they took us to pray in the Month of Mary. As a child, I did not understand why pray to a statue, something very odd to the practices of my community, related to beings of nature” (Linkoyam). Dispossession of indigenous spirituality in school education materialized in the teaching of another religious belief as the only and valid one. This generated questioning in children and young people, who did not understand why they could not practice their own spirituality that they had experienced with their families and communities for ages. From the testimony of the participants, it was recognized that, in general, their background knowledge was never taken into consideration. A fixed model of education was assumed for all regardless their own culture. In this regard, a mother pointed out that:

I think that we were always being Chileanized [not recognizing our differences], we never worked on cultural awareness. She [the teacher] never realized that I was bilingual nor that I spoke *Mapunzugun* [Mapuche vernacular language], that I had another cultural background vital to my experience. (Rayen)

According to this testimony, it was possible to identify how dispossession of “being indigenous” was expressed in this logic of homogenization and Chileanization on Mapuche children and youth in the educational system in order to construe a single and indivisible citizenship, according to the moral and social values of the dominant groups. This undoubtedly resulted in a significant impact on the loss of cultural identity and a sense of shame for being indigenous. An example of this was recalled by a mother who said:

Many times, I did activities that I think marked me, for example, drawing a picture about my vacation. I had no idea of the concept of vacation was in the first place. Sometimes they punished me for not drawing the picture (...) sometimes they beat me or punished me for not drawing the picture. (Kajfurayen)

The same mother, deepening in the curricular decontextualization she went through at school also added:

They made me draw and paint Santa. I was about nine years old, so I painted a random drawing as I did not know who Santa was. I painted it green and yellow. The teacher told me it should have been painted red. I was clueless as there was no TV set at home, and we never celebrated Christmas. I was impossible to understand why I was being punished. (Kajfurayen)

Through the monocultural teaching, Mapuche students were prone to question their own cultural heritage as these children and young people received physical and psychological punishment in school education. In this regard, the testimony of a parent added that: “at school they never considered me, I could not understand why never, in elementary school, in middle school, in the entire schooling process they denied my cultural scheme and broke my own self [they denied what was ours, our culture].” (Nahuel)

According to the testimonies of the participants, we can infer that these forms of dispossession undoubtedly generated traumas in Mapuche children and youth that they carry to this day, as adults, as parents and grandparents. In hindsight, they were aware and able to demonstrate how this cultural

refusal had affected their children and grandchildren. Likewise, they verified how these relations of racism and discrimination toward them had also generated interethnic conflict and an inverse racism to Chilean-Western citizens reflected in the following testimony: “they never told us that we were Mapuche, that we had another language, that the Mapuche had our *gijatun*. They never reinforced it. That is where all our hatred for the Catholic, Western world comes from.” (Awkan). Correspondingly, indigenous wise people and parents expressed their expectation that schools should have taken care of the social and cultural diversities which without a doubt would have contributed to their social development and to the establishment of intercultural relations. They expected a more dignified treatment, which might have had the benefit of letting them appreciate the Western Eurocentric rational logic without abandoning their own. This is expressed in the following testimony:

They never addressed our issues. They never had a humane or dignified treatment. I remember a situation in which teachers thought a classmate was dumb [with cognitive deficiency] or deaf [he never answered when called to]. The reality was that he only spoke Mapunzugun, the only language that was spoken home. (Newen)

In sum, the analysis of the participants’ testimonies confirmed that the practices of dispossession of indigenous knowledge were institutionalized in the educational system and had left traces and traumas in the indigenous population. This have affected their social, cultural, linguistic, spiritual, and emotional development. These traces are based on an educational relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous people characterized by power asymmetry and contempt toward the Mapuche, in which the State has played a systematic role. This takes the form of religion impositions, norms, values, knowledge, even dressing codes and dietary guidelines from the hegemonic culture that have nothing to do with indigenous traditions. This is how this type of practice generated a state of unrest that persists in the indigenous society because of a violent imposition that has endured in their territory.

Discontinuity of indigenous family education

The account of the participants in the study sustains that the discontinuity of indigenous family education has materialized in the school as a historical practice that has had an impact on Mapuche cosmogony and cosmovision. Thus, in school education, the discontinuity of indigenous knowledge has been a strategic action that emerges from the school to separate parents from their children and thus cut off generational transmission. From the narratives of the wise people and indigenous parents, it is recognized that their grandparents, parents and even themselves have denied and deprived their children of their own knowledge and wisdom in order to avoid racism and discrimination.

In this same line, they recognized that the generational loss of knowledge (language and aspects of spirituality) prevented them from transmitting this knowledge to their children. In general, parents recognized that they did know their own culture. In this regard, a participant mentioned that: “My mother says that my father [denied her to teach us our own language], because he thought it would be difficult for us to learn [what they thought in school]” (Millaray). However, in the testimony of the wise people and parents reported they were able to “twist” fate’s hand and managed to make children at least listen and understand mother tongue, and participated and observed sociocultural and socio-religious practices. In the end, children and youth have managed to understand the relationship with the divine, the relationship with the tangible and intangible natural environment, and have been able to recognize that this “dispossession” has been imposed in the educational system. Nevertheless, this strategy of resistance and resilience to insist on learning their own epistemic frameworks has been fortuitous and unplanned. Adults have continued to speak their language and practice their traditions. They have allowed children to learn these through observation. In this regard, a testimony stated that: “I understand it [*Mapunzugun*] when I hear it, but I can’t speak it (. . .) my parents kept talking about it (. . .), one listens and learns” (Millaray). In this regard, another testimony added that:

They didn’t impose that we spoke *Mapunzugun*. I can understand everything because I grew up with my grandmother and I would listen to her. My mom and dad did not speak to us [in *Mapunzugun*] only in Spanish. (Tahiel)

According to the testimony, it is possible to verify that families and the community itself have promoted dispossession, to the extent that it has been normalized for new generations. The reason for this situation is related to the fear of rejection, but at the same time it poses the threat of depriving new generations of their own knowledge. A participant remarked that:

At the family and community level we, young people, could understand, but not speak, the language. We eventually managed to learn it as adults. (Lautaro)

According to this testimony, it is possible to infer that participants recognize and understand that this same denial of self-learning and generational transmission has left traces of forgetfulness and hindered linguistic revitalization. This difficulty for speaking generates a loss of linguistic vitality. In this regard, a testimony stated that: “I understand everything [mapunzugun], and I have always understood it, but speaking was difficult for me and for my generation, those to come seem worse” (Nahuel). Another participant added that “despite the fact that the school did not teach the language, it was not lost because thanks to our grandparents who spoke to us in *Mapuzungun* when we were little. That’s why we did not lose our language” (Küyen).

According to this testimony, it is possible to infer that the discontinuity of family education has been made visible mainly in the loss of linguistic vitality, which comes hand in hand with the use and mastery of learning the dominant language going on in the classroom. The long hours mastering the hegemonic language in the classroom fostered the transit of the indigenous individual into a “Chileanized” subject. Likewise, this discontinuity of indigenous education within the family was justified as a strategy for adaptation in the classroom and for preventing their children from the trauma of “being” indigenous. This discontinuity in their narratives is expressed in the following testimony:

My mother also suffered a lot and that was why she was reluctant to speak to me or my brother in *Mapunzugun*. To save us from the pain she went through. Sadly, she did not know how to speak Spanish at all, only *Mapunzugun*. She only studied up to third grade. (Aliwen)

In this sense, the participants recognized that the discontinuity began with the normalization of not speaking their own language, using different clothing, or not giving their children Mapuche names for fear of being bullied. This is the reason why cultural transmission was consciously avoided and why communication with their grandparents was interrupted. However, they recognize that now, as adults, have been able to recover their own ancestry and traditions thus reversing this discontinuity.

In this same perspective, from the participants’ accounts it was possible to identify that in the indigenous family education there were educational methods for the formation of a person from their own epistemic views. For example, learning through doing and observing the activities that their parents carried out without fear of being punishment was lost in the educational system. They only learned through repetition and memorization in the classroom. There was a testimony that pointed out that:

[in indigenous family education] we always worked with my mom and dad in farming naturally. I never saw it as an obligation. (Rayen)

In the same perspective, another participant added: “my father teaches me to do that [work on the land], my mother teaches me to do Mapuche things, to cook typical food by watching her, that’s how you learn” (Kajfurayen). In this regard, a Mapuche wise woman added that this form of indigenous family education always took place within the family, in a respectful relationship in which children were required to pay attention and were predisposed to learn. In addition, there was respect for elders as an educational principle. In this regard, the wise woman indicated that:

I saw when I was little that in many houses, the grandfather was the person who was in the *ruka* [house] giving advice in a song family members got so many things from. Grandparents were always fond of the grandchildren (...) they would laugh while chatting next to the fire, they would be the center of attention and children would have no right to give their opinion whatsoever. They just had to stay still there, out of respect for the whole family. That is what I would like to teach modern children, to respectfully listen to the elder. (Nulpi)

The testimony allows inferring that indigenous family education means teaching children and youth to keep a respectful silence and attentive listening. In this regard, it was noted that: “children and youth had to remain respectfully silent when adults were speaking, they were not even allowed to blink” (Nahuelpan). Finally, another practice installed by the school had to do with the long periods of children at school, which affected their chance of taking care of the animals or getting involved in other family activities. One testimony indicates that:

Some kids [indigenous children and youth] arrived late to class, not even because they had gotten up late, but because they had to do many things in the morning [help with family chores], they [the children and youth] were sent to see the animals far away from school or they had fix big breakfasts that meant cooking big meals. In the end, teachers never asked why they were late, they would just punish them. (Galvarino)

In sum, we can see that the schooling system has systematically stripped Mapuche people of their own ancestral knowledge and skills by maintaining institutionalized practices endorsed by the State. These practices persist implicitly and explicitly in school education, so indigenous students continue to be colonized.

Discussion and conclusion

Results allow to argue that dispossession suffered by indigenous children and youth in the Chilean educational system has constituted a generational trauma and has left deep traces in wise people and parents and in indigenous communities in general. Dispossession has affected social, cultural, spiritual, emotional, and territorial aspects (Antümilla-Pangikül, 2020). In the context of school education, and according to the voices of our participants, dispossession materialized in visible and invisible ways that affected vernacular language, their appearance and even their dietary behavior. Their spirituality has also been diminished and stereotyped in schools. At cognitive level, dispossession has materialized through the imposition of a Western-Eurocentric-ish curriculum.

The historically silenced voices of indigenous wise people and parents allow to establish that Chilean educational system has been characterized by erasing indigenous social and cultural background. This is consistent with Quidel (2015) and Pávez et al. (2020) who argue that in Mapuche territories the school system is characterized by homogenization. Indigenous children and youth are expected to assume Western Eurocentric codes and behaviors. This process of Chileanization involves physical and emotional punishment to discipline Mapuche bodies, minds, and spirits. Historically, schools have become vehicles of cultural uprooting, devaluation of indigenous worldview and cosmogony and a tool for homogenization that has fractured the integrity and spiritual balance of Mapuche people.

To reverse dispossession, it is of vital importance to start by recognizing that indigenous lore constitutes an epistemic framework that schooling should bring indigenous culture into the classroom (Acharibasam & McVittie, 2021; Casaro & Aguilera, 2015). From this point of view, indigenous knowledge allows students to see life in a different way, as part of a spiral and non-linear formation of new generations of students. Indeed, teachers’ mastery of Mapuche culture would enhance methodological, didactic, and pedagogical dimensions. Likewise, cultural traumas would be left behind and replaced by respectful cultural recognition. Dispossession has no place in the educational system.

If we are to advance in the decolonization of the educational system, it is urgent to recognize and assume that practices of systemic dispossession constitute a form of violation of human rights. They need to be addressed from an intercultural perspective to account for social, cultural, spiritual, linguistic, and territorial diversity. In this sense, rethinking institutionalized practices would foster decolonization and would pose a counter-hegemonic stance to practices of dispossession. It would promote the development of intercultural critical thinking and social justice. This poses the challenge of making visible what has been historically invisible to give recognition to indigenous ancestral culture.

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