



## What Pehuenche blood does

### Hemic feasting, intersubjective participation, and witchcraft in Southern Chile

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Among the Pehuenche, blood is extracted from humans and animals and shared and eaten among people, offered as food to land spirits and deities, as well as devoured by evil spirits and witches. Through an ethnographic analysis of eating and feeding practices involving a variety of blood eaters, this article argues that blood (Ch. *mollvün*), as it functions in rural Pehuenche people's practices in Southern Chile, indexes the capacity to create relationships and is itself the result of relationships. By focusing on what *mollvün* does as well as on the practices through which it is collectively made and maliciously unmade by witches, I show how *mollvün* challenges, interferes with, and reconfigures current anthropological conceptualizations of blood as substance.

Keywords: blood, substance, inter-stance, eating, feeding, Pehuenche, capacity

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I will never forget the first time I met Marta, a Pehuenche woman in her forties who was my neighbor when I lived in the town of Ralko in Southern Chile. In the very first week of my fieldwork, Marta introduced herself while I was walking around town. She told me we were neighbors and invited me to her house to see the woollen socks she was working on. She told me I should buy them since winter nights were extremely cold in the mountains. One thing that really struck me that day was the way she referred to her husband. She told me that she was married to a man who had the same type of blood as me. She also mentioned that he was a non-Pehuenche person who had heard about my arrival and wanted to meet me too. We spoke about many things that day, and she also mentioned that recently, a young man had died on the road that ran along the Queuko River. Most people



considered this death to be due to a tragic encounter between the man and an evil spirit. “His blood was eaten,” she said, “his body was without blood when he was found.”<sup>1</sup> Yet, she warned me not be worried about that since I had “good defenses.” It took me some time to understand that I was immune to such attacks because of my particular blood type: according to many people in Southern Chile, evil spirits do not like to eat *winka* blood, namely blood that is not Pehuenche. Before my arrival in Alto Bío Bío, I could not have foreseen how important eating blood is, not only for Pehuenche spirits, but also for Pehuenche people.

Based on extensive fieldwork carried out among Pehuenche people living in Alto Bío Bío, this article seeks to account for Pehuenche practices in which blood, or *mollvün* in the Pehuenche language, is not simply a good substance to think with (Lévi-Strauss [1962] 1969) but also an exquisite matter to nourish and devour.<sup>2</sup> In order to offer an ethnographic theory that emerges from the data (rather than the other way around), in this article I will use the Pehuenche concept *mollvün* rather than the English term “blood.” My argument in this article resonates with recent anthropological vocabularies dealing with kinship experiences and the transpersonal unities of bodies (see Stasch 2009; Sahlins 2013). I suggest that among the Pehuenche, eating and feeding practices concerning *mollvün* might be regarded as particular practices of “intersubjective participation” (Sahlins 2013). More particularly, and through the ethnographic description of eating and feeding practices concerning *mollvün*, I seek to reveal how in Pehuenche understandings, *mollvün* can be regarded as the very capacity needed to activate such a participation or shared existence (cf. Lévy-Bruhl 1949). By focusing on what *mollvün* does as well as on the practices through which it is made and unmade, I show how *mollvün* challenges and interferes with current anthropological conceptualizations of blood as substance.

### Pehuenche *mollvün* beyond unsubtle connections

A widespread approach to blood in anthropology is to use the term “substance” as a suitable term to convey indigenous understandings of blood, on the grounds that substance is a good concept to think with because of its semantic flexibility and its multiple meanings (see Carsten 2001). Whereas the semantic flexibility of the term “substance” has allowed the destabilization of traditional analytical dichotomies within kinship analytics between the “biological” and the “social,” the ambiguities of the concept have also made it difficult to deploy in a rigorous and clear comparative approach within different ethnographic scenarios (ibid.). To cut a long story

1. Marta’s original sentences were uttered in Spanish, but the word for blood was uttered in Chedungun, the Pehuenche language. The original code-switching sentences were: “Sp. *le comieron el Ch. mollvün*,” and “Sp. *Encontraron su cuerpo sin Ch. mollvün*.”
2. This discussion is based on eighteen months of fieldwork carried out in the district of Alto Bío Bío, where more than 80 percent of the population are Pehuenche. Nowadays, the Pehuenche are considered Mapuche people residing in the mountains, even if originally the Pehuenche people did not belong to the Mapuche ethnic group (see Bengoa 2000).

short, blood has been anthropologically considered as a bodily substance plus its particular extensive symbolic repertoire (Wade 2002; Carsten 2004, 2011) or symbolic potential (Copeman 2009a, 2009b; Carsten 2011; Hugh-Jones 2011).<sup>3</sup> More importantly, the semantic flexibility of the term “substance” has made it possible to gloss over the separating distinction of material and symbolic properties of blood. In fact, various authors have argued that the term “substance” allows the material and metaphorical properties of blood to merge. Whereas Carsten (2011) and Mayblin (2013) have suggested that blood can function as both metaphor and metonym, Weston (2013) has recently offered us the concept of the “meta-materiality” of blood to refer to how the symbolic attributes of blood are not separable from the material ones, making explicit that what blood invokes goes beyond both metaphor and the material.<sup>4</sup>

Inspired by these scholars’ contributions with regard to the problematic distinction between material and symbolic properties of blood, in this article I would like to show how even the idea that material and symbolic properties of blood “merge” does not accurately resonate with what Pehuenche *mollvün* is, because for the Pehuenche these categories are not separated in the first place. Following from this—and rather than focusing on how substance has been used in the analysis of kinship, or on what substance does to kinship (Carsten 2001)—in this article I explore how Pehuenche *mollvün* challenges hackneyed notions of substance.<sup>5</sup>

My intention in what follows is not to offer an extensive review of the remarkable body of literature on blood and kinship. Rather, and considering recent understandings of kinship as forms of mutual belonging that extend beyond common substance (Sahlins 2013), I wish simply to suggest that a precondition for engaging in the quest of describing Pehuenche *mollvün* ethnographically is to make room for the direct interference of indigenous concepts with anthropological conceptualizations of such *common substance*. My intention in doing so is not to dismiss the fruitfulness of the term “substance” within anthropological debates on kinship, but to suggest that Pehuenche understandings of *mollvün* as the matter responsible for constructing relatedness (see Wagner 1977) destabilize the separation, and even the distinction, between material and symbolic properties of blood. In fact, Carsten herself has cautioned that the connection “between what we might think of as the literal qualities of bodily substances and their metaphorical associations” is rather

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3. This distinction resonates with some of the foundational insights of symbolic anthropology (Turner 1967; Douglas [1970] 2002) and has played a strong role in shaping the premises on which academic contributions concerning blood are made. For general reviews, see Carsten (2011, 2013).
  4. Weston writes: “Meta-materiality goes beyond metaphor to enlist the material, beyond the material to figure substance through metaphor, analogy, and whatever other historically situated heuristic devices people find available” (2013: 37).
  5. Building on the seminal work of Seeger, da Matta, and Viveiros de Castro (1979), Amerindian scholars have generally rejected such a substance–symbol divide, refusing the idea of the body as “a material substrate on which meaning can be encoded” (Conklin 1996: 373). For contributions of Amazonian hematology to understandings of blood as a bodily substance with particular relational qualities, see Conklin (2001); McCallum (2001); Belaúnde (2006).

“unsubtle” and “becomes immediately more complex if we explore the relational dimensions of how they are apprehended” (2011: 24). Carsten makes apparent the epistemological risks anthropologists might face when dividing blood into what I suggest are now three conceptual containers: the literal qualities of bodily “substances,” blood’s metaphorical associations, and its relational dimensions.

Rather than distinguishing my ethnography among the Pehuenche from an anthropological analytic of blood that considers how material and symbolic properties *merge* in the case of blood, in this article I aim to demonstrate how *mollvün* does not assume the discrete existence of a symbolic world apart from a material one in the first place. In fact, the distinctions between the literal, metaphorical, and relational dimensions of *mollvün* are not simply unsubtle among the Pehuenche, but rather are nonexistent.<sup>6</sup> I should add here that my argument is not a critique of the entirety of symbolic anthropology and its efforts to address indigenous conceptual repertoires, but rather to suggest that the conceptual separation between material and symbolic properties of blood, and more particularly its interpretation of blood as symbol, should not be imputed to Pehuenche understandings of *mollvün*. In a nutshell, thinking about Pehuenche *mollvün* in terms of the literal, metaphorical, and relational dimensions of blood involves the risk of committing “epistemocide” (Scholte 1984)—or, in Lévi-Strauss’ terms (1955), a destruction of the object of our attachment and its replacement with another that might be homonymous but pragmatically behaves quite differently. The argument I wish to put forward in this article is constituted by the simple ethnographic description of Pehuenche eating and feeding *mollvün* practices as paradigmatic events of the local construction of Pehuenche consubstantiality (Pitt-Rivers 1973) that not only extend beyond the notions of common substance (Sahlins 2013), but also go beyond the separation between (and so the “merging” of) material and symbolic properties of blood.

### Eating *mollvün*: *Niachi*

Among all the things about which I was ignorant concerning life in Alto Bío Bío, the fact that I had not eaten the blood of freshly killed animals, or *niachi*, was one of the things I was most often teased about. In what follows, I would like to suggest that eating animals’ blood implies eating the result of generative relationships, and in turn generates the capacity for those relationships to be recomposed.<sup>7</sup> Among the Pehuenche, eating blood makes one’s blood stronger, therefore enriching a person’s capacity for establishing productive relationships.

My neighbor Marta was particularly surprised that I had never tried *niachi*, and it was not long before she invited me to the primary school graduation party of one

6. The absence of this connection reminds us that the substance/symbol divide results in an isomorphic and renewed version of what Whitehead (1920) has called the “bifurcation of nature,” namely “the strange and fully modernist divide between primary and secondary qualities” (Latour 2004: 2).

7. For a more general reflection on the implicit and simultaneous temporalities that are merged in blood, see Carsten (2013).

of her daughters. This celebration was very important, she told me, and her husband Ronaldo was going to kill a goat or a sheep and share the meat and blood with their friends. When the day of the graduation arrived, Marta's youngest daughter hurried over to my house to tell me that they were about to kill the animal, and she invited me to join them. Once in their house, I noticed that Ronaldo was putting off killing the sheep since Marta was still preparing the bowl into which the animal's blood would be poured. In the bowl, Marta mixed some coriander, a pinch of salt, and, most importantly, a very spicy chili pepper (Ch. *trapi*) which, I discovered some months later, helps keep evil spirits away. Once Marta was ready, Ronaldo finally slaughtered the sheep using his knife, twisting it in the animal's neck for a quick death. While the sheep was bleeding, Marta placed the bowl close to the animal's neck in order to collect the warm, red liquid. Once the blood was in the bowl and the animal was dead, Marta added some lemon and oil, stirring the concoction a bit. She then poured a spoonful of it out the window, looked at me, and said: "We always feed the *püllü* spirit, the land spirit. By doing so, the *püllü* will always help us by bringing food for the family. You will always have food if you feed the *püllü*." By pouring this spoonful out of the window, Marta was feeding the *püllü*, and thereby creating a relationship between her family and the spirit. We then waited a while for the blood to coagulate before cutting the *niachi* into little squares and finally eating it. "This is always the prize after having worked hard," Marta said. "It gives you strength, good luck, so you can keep on working." Each of us using our own spoon, we shared the *niachi* from one bowl.<sup>8</sup>

### **Wasting *niachi***

A few months after the graduation party, I again experienced of the importance of *niachi* when I was invited to accompany the health workers from the main health clinic in Alto Bío Bío on one of their trips. For the past ten years, workers at the Ralko healthcare clinic have been undertaking preventative health campaigns in the highest parts of the Andes. In January 2010 I accompanied the public health team on their journey to Cochico, one of the *veranadas* or summer locations in the high pastures. In this place, the Pehuenche communities of Trapa Trapa and Butalebun spend their summers. After several hours on horseback we arrived at the first makeshift construction of planks of wood (Sp. *puesto*). Our host Edwin was a man in his forties, who allowed us to set up camp by his family's *puesto*. He arrived at the camp after us, accompanied by a friend of his. Both of them had spent the whole day taking care of their animals (Sp. *campeando*). After some friendly greetings and conversation, the chief of the health team spoke to Edwin about buying a goat to eat that night. Edwin said he would be happy to sell us a goat, adding, "Well, yes, that's my job, to feed them, not like yours that is just pencilwork . . ."<sup>9</sup> Yes, you are just a pencil. Not me, I take care of animals the whole day." Edwin then left,

8. The Chedungun term *misako* is used to refer to situations in which several people eat out of one bowl. For a description of how animal blood was consumed over 150 years ago, see Cox (1863). This author points out that every time an animal was sacrificed, its blood was eaten warm straight from the eater's hands.

9. The target of this remark was health workers. The original Spanish sentence uttered by Edwin was "puro lapiz!"

and as it was becoming dark, he returned with a white goat. “How do you want it? Alive or dead?” Edwin asked. “Dead,” said the chief of the healthcare team. Edwin killed the goat using his knife, twisting it in the animal’s neck in the same manner as Ronaldo had done with the sheep. While the goat was bleeding from its neck, Edwin fretted about the animal’s blood being wasted. “No one wants to eat *niachi*?” No one responded. “We wasted the *niachi*,” he said, frustrated, as he proceeded to *carnear* (En. to butcher) the animal.

As Edwin’s comments to the chief of the health team demonstrate, the practices related to the caring and feeding of shared animals and the subsequent collection of animal blood are much more significant than “pencil” work, since pencils, like health workers, do not socially interact with animals: health workers are useless and herders are useful caretakers. To say that health workers are “just pencils” is another way of saying that those people are very distant from the significant practices taking place in *veranadas*. Indeed, the health workers did not even show any interest in the valuable *niachi* pouring out in front of them.

I heard the sentence “We wasted the *niachi*” on countless occasions. It was always uttered by Pehuenche people engaged in affinal economic transactions undertaken between themselves and foreigners, the latter being either tourists or public health workers who did not want to eat the animal blood.<sup>10</sup> For the Pehuenche, wasting *niachi* is forbidden. Furthermore, and in contrast to the witches’ eating practices of blood that I will describe below, *niachi* is never eaten individually and has to be shared and distributed properly. It entails an eating practice that is more than individual. In this sense, *niachi* might be conceived of as a precious food that composes transpersonal interactions, and intersubjective participation, between real people, or *che*: eating *mollvün* entails and affords the composition of “a moral position of being ‘unitary, solidary, amicable with someone’” (Stasch 2009: 133).<sup>11</sup> After that primary school graduation party given by Marta’s family, during which I ate *niachi* for the first time, Marta began calling me *lamngen*, which is a kinship term used reciprocally between women and men who consider each other real or classificatory siblings (see Isla 2005). To some extent, my own relation with Marta was recomposed through eating practices concerning *mollvün*, and resonates with Salihns’ approach to kinship as a “manifold of intersubjective participations, founded on mutualities of being” (2011: 12). But where does the *mollvün* come from that plays such a central role in enacting intersubjective participations?

### **Cultivating mollvün**

The Alto Bío Bío landscape is shaped by a system of altitudinal zones that allow for the development of distinct stockbreeding and agricultural practices that, most importantly for this discussion, are bound up in particular ways with *mollvün*—in

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10. Historically, cattle trading emerged from relations with others who were spatially, ethnically, and socially distant (see Jones 2000; Course 2013). Although this practice has spread among some rural non-Mapuche people throughout Southern Chile, the historical roots of *niachi* consumption are Mapuche *tout court* (Vignati 1960).

11. For a classic ethnography on Zande Blood Brotherhood and on how blood can guarantee amicable terms between groups or individuals, see Evans Pritchard (1933).



this case the collective cultivation of animal blood.<sup>12</sup> The Alto Bío Bío's zones comprise two different types of regions, known as the *invernadas* and the *veranadas*. The *invernadas* are the winter stations in the low valleys. The *veranadas*, summer stations in the high pastures, are particularly important regions because, as a Pehuenche herbalist, Flora, once explained to me, "our food is in the *veranadas*; there is food for everyone there, animals and people." Because food and consumption are not simply instrumental practices, but involve *mollvün* as the very capacity to establish relationships, Flora's assessment also speaks to the centrality of *mollvün* in the herding activities that take place in the *veranadas*. Residence in winter and summer stations is dictated by seasonal weather changes and is dependent upon the presence or absence of snow. The rearing of cattle (*kullin* in Chedungun) takes place through seasonal migration practices, and the main activity of herders in the *veranadas* is usually referred to as *campear* (En. to go to graze), a Spanish word that is used when herders, riding on their horses, spend their days looking for the cattle that have moved around while grazing.<sup>13</sup> During the day, animals can eat and move freely through the mountainous fields, but when night approaches, herders have to help the cattle get back to the enclosures situated near each family's *puesto*. Occasionally, when the area where animals are grazing is not the best in terms of the available vegetation, herders bring all of the animals together before relocating the cattle to a more suitable place. The most important outcome of the time spent in the *veranadas*, as Rene once told me, is the fattening up of animals (Sp. *engordar los animales*). While this outcome may appear to be simply material—in the sense of producing sustenance—Rene told me that the fattening of animals means that "everyone is happy, animals and people." "Fattening" refers not only to increased meat or weight, but also to the fact that, as Flora and several other herders told me many times, "the more animals eat, the stronger their blood becomes." Thus, stock-breeding practices and human–animal interactions are crucial for the cultivation of the precious animal blood. Herders' practices serve to cultivate *mollvün*, which in turn grants a capacity for producing further relations between people.

To further elaborate how *mollvün* is bound up with the capacity to establish relationships, I will address the *nguillatun* ritual. Considering that animals' blood is important in this ritual, I should make explicit from the outset that, even though there is a sort of a predominant anthropocentrism in Pehuenche conceptions of *mollvün*, and even though some people say that animal blood has more force than that of humans, Pehuenche people are not really concerned with defining similarities or differences between the constitution of human blood as compared to animal

12. Historical records (Molina 1795; de la Cruz [1863] 1953; Canals Frau 1953) have considered Pehuenche people as hunter-gatherers, horticulture and agriculture being practices predominantly associated with the Mapuche of the Central Valley. According to these historical records, the Pehuenche diet was mostly animal-based. Practices associated with European cattle, as well as the incorporation of pastoral technologies, were gradually introduced throughout colonial history (see Valenzuela 1981).

13. In Despret's terminology, *campear*, or taking care of animals, might be regarded as "a practice that constructs animal and human" (2004: 122): it is an anthropo-zoo-genetic practice.

blood.<sup>14</sup> Like people, animals are the result of the assemblage of different components, and *mollvün* is the capacity that keeps these components related. Every time someone who is awake sees the invisible form of another person or animal, they refer to this as an *am*: an invisible double that manifests itself as a fleeting visible appearance, able to be seen but not touched. The relation between the person or animal and the *am* is not stable, however, as I came to understand through stories related to me by my host Pedro. He told me that when he was a child, he and some other children once saw a little calf near the river while they were looking for their cow, which was eating grass somewhere in the area. After having found their cow, they came back to the place where the little calf had been. They could not find it, and there were no visible traces of the animal at all. On another occasion, in that same place, they heard the loud roaring of a bull. When they looked for the bull, ready to catch it with a rope, there was no sign of it anywhere. Pedro told me that these animals that appear and disappear are called “enchanted animals” (Sp. *animales encantados*), also referred to as an animal’s *am* (Ch. *am kullin*). The children had seen the visible form of the animal or person, but it had disappeared in its form as *am*.

I will show how feeding or eating *mollvün* serves to compose not just persons or animals, but also relationships, since relations themselves are composed and decomposed through *mollvün*. These binding capacities of *mollvün* became apparent to me when I participated in the prayer performed at the *nguillatun* ceremony, which takes place over three days. On the first day, shelters are constructed in a U-shape, so the activities of each family are easily visible from the shelters of all the other families. This infrastructure offers perhaps the only occasion in Pehuenche life in which Pehuenche people are visible as constituting a collective entity. *Chavid*, a drink-food made of *pewen* pinenuts, is collectively prepared on the second day of the three-day ritual.<sup>15</sup> In a big pot hanging over their shelter’s open fire, each family boils several kilos of pinenuts collected from the most elevated areas of the nearby mountains. (In the days preceding the ritual, it is very common to hear people wondering whether or not they are prepared [Sp. *estar preparado*] to proceed with the forthcoming ritual with enough pinenuts.) Once the water has boiled, the pinenuts are taken out of the pot and carefully peeled. Afterward, they are put back into the same pot until the water begins to boil again. Then, the pinenuts are taken out of the pot once more and ground with a manual grinding machine in order to remove any water remaining from the boiling process. Each family puts their ground pinenuts in a container made of wood (Ch. *dalka*) or pottery (Ch. *menkul*), where they are left to ferment until the next day.

The prayer, which occurs on the third day, is at the core of the ritual, because it is a moment of extended commensality in which this food is offered collectively

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14. I have no ethnographic evidence about gendered aspects of blood among the Pehuenche. For an analysis about gendered aspects of blood elsewhere in South America, see Sanabria (2009).

15. The production and mode of exchange of *chavid* resonate with the domestic production of cider (Sp. *chicha*) described by Course (2013). Both items are produced outside of market relations with white people, and their production mostly indexes relations of consanguinity.



to Ngenechen, the Mapuche supreme being.<sup>16</sup> The *chavid* prepared by each family is blended with the *chavid* of the others. The ritual involves mixing the *mollvün* of a sacrificed animal with the collected *chavid*. The mixture of *chavid* with *mollvün* might be regarded as the paradigmatic matter of relatedness, where *mollvün* is a crucial element in the establishment of the fertile relation between the Pehuenche as a unitary group and their supreme being. More particularly, the mixing of the *mollvün* with the *chavid* entails the powerful mingling of foods that are not only the result of relationships, but are also endowed with the capacity for producing and reinforcing intersubjective participation. As many people told me, after the ritual people are closer to each other. This does not refer simply to an emotional sense of companionship, but rather to consubstantiality, as the Pehuenche refer to themselves as being a unitary composition. Notably, this Pehuenche emphasis on consubstantiality as the basis of relatedness is linguistically embedded: to be “accompanied” or to be “together” can be expressed in Chedungun as “to be one” (Ch. *kiñewün*), which also means “to be many.” This expression is often used within the *nguillatun* ritual (Ch. *Kiñewüinküleygün nguillatun mew*). In this sense, I suggest, *mollvün* is a particular kind of food that creates relationships not only between people but also between people and Ngenechen through a series of linked relations that, once again, are themselves constituted by relations and constitute still other relations in turn. Animals are fed by people, and as they grow, the animals’ *mollvün* is cultivated through those interactions. Animals’ eating practices strengthen the animals’ *mollvün*, which in turn, when offered as food, actualizes the relation between the Pehuenche and their supreme being Ngenechen. The relations established between people and animals (in herding), and between animals and the food they eat in that process, collectively generate and strengthen the further relation between people and their god.

Following from this, I suggest that *mollvün* is not simply the end product of interactions between people and animals, but it is also the capacity needed for, in the case of *nguillatun*, the relationship between the Pehuenche and Ngenechen to take place. Let’s remember that the practice of giving “thanks to the supreme deity Ngenechen for past providence and to request continued providence for the future” (Course 2012: 3) is performed through feeding practices concerning *mollvün* and *chavid*. These thanks are offered materially through the mixing of the two fluids, each of which issues from the collective experiences of intersubjective work: the cultivation of animal *mollvün*, the collection of pinenuts, and the collective preparation of *chavid*. Yet, as I have already mentioned, it is not only Ngenechen who feeds on *mollvün*; Pehuenche people also derive great value from eating animal blood. In fact, during the ritual, on the same day in which the main prayer takes place, each family sacrifices an animal (a sheep or a goat) in their small shelter to be eaten and shared with the other families.<sup>17</sup> Before eating and sharing the animal’s

16. For an extensive ontological and historical analysis of Ngenechen in Mapuche ontologies, see Alonqueo (1979), Foerster (1993), and Bacigalupo (1997).

17. These practices are known in the vernacular as *konchotun*, which in Augusta’s ([1916] 1991) definition refer to the activities of those who sacrifice animals for each other.

meat, each family eats the animal's blood or *niachi*, which helps, as I was told many times, to strengthen the *mollvün* of the eater.

### Küme mollvün, weya mollvün

In Alto Bío Bío, *mollvün* also constitutes morality, or moral behavior—it is a moral substance.<sup>18</sup> *Mollvün* refers to the morality of people's actions in the sense that people's actions themselves are grounded and depend on the type of *mollvün* they have—or exhibit. In fact, Pehuenche theories of action are premised on particular capacities or incapacities attributed to *mollvün*. People act, see, and take care of others (or not) in particular ways depending on what their *mollvün* is like. When people speak about these moral aspects related to the quality of *mollvün*, they are not only speaking metaphorically, or making a transference in the semantic space; they are rather using *mollvün* as itself constitutive of moral actions. In this respect, *mollvün* is something like a “literal metaphor” (Cochetti 1995), namely a kind of metaphor that not only stands for itself, but actually embodies itself (see West 2007).<sup>19</sup>

A Pehuenche person can be defined by others as having either weak-bad blood (Ch. *weya mollvün*) or good-strong blood (Ch. *küme mollvün*). Just as blood constitutes morality, so too moral action can generate (good) blood. For example, having good-strong blood is strongly related to practices of generative commensality (eating like and with someone). In fact, the strengthening of good blood must be achieved through daily, as well as more ritualized, practices of commensality.<sup>20</sup> And at the same time, again, one cannot only reinforce *küme mollvün* through practices of commensality, but practices of commensality are afforded by *küme mollvün*. It is very important for people in Alto Bío Bío to always be well fed and to share food with others, exchanges that generally take place in the *kütralwe*. *Kütralwe* literally means the place of the fire, usually translated into Spanish as *fogón* (fire) or *cocina* (kitchen). This is the place where daily activities such as cooking and sharing food and telling stories take place. Once, while having breakfast with the herbalist Flora in her *kütralwe*, her small nephew Juan complained that he did not want to eat. Flora responded by referencing her brother, who had been “grabbed by the devil,” and committed suicide (Ch. *kidu lamwvun*, literally “killed himself alone”). She said: “If you don't want an evil spirit to come get you and kill you like your uncle, it is better that you eat. ... You need to have strong blood (Ch. *küme mollvün*) if you

18. For a reflection on how substances that make persons are themselves moral substances, see Santos Graneros (2011). For a thorough analysis of the moral aspects of blood elsewhere, see Copeman (2009a) and his analysis on blood transfusions as “an operation with moral as well as physical consequences for recipients as well as for donors” (95–96).

19. I am grateful to Roberto Beneduce and Simona Taliani for bringing this to my attention.

20. For an analysis of commensality as producing kinship, see Gow (1991); Rival (1998); Lagrou (2000); McCallum (2001); Vilaça (2002); Viegas (2003); and Carsten (2004). For a general description of the relationship between eating good food and having good blood among the Mapuche, see Gonzalez Galvez (2012).

want to go to the mountains.”<sup>21</sup> The point I would like to emphasize here again is that in Alto Bío Bío, *mollvün* indexes the capacity, or incapacity, to establish protective relationships of mutual belonging. Moreover, the generative aspects of *mollvün* are themselves the result of such relationships.<sup>22</sup> In this respect, good blood is both the source and outcome of a person’s productive relationships with others.

Conversely, as my host Pedro once told me: “Those who have bad thoughts or evil thoughts and want to fight and kill someone, that is evil, that’s bad blood (Ch. *weya mollvün*), that is arrogant blood.” Having *weya mollvün* refers to someone’s inability, or failure, to establish generative interactions and mutual belonging (Sahlins 2013). The capacity to establish such relations, furthermore, is itself a form of morality. For example, one of my hosts’ elderly sisters was often referred to as having *weya mollvün* because she had failed—refused—to raise her daughter Nadia. But the most powerful expression of this negative moral position is the existence of witches. In the words of my host Pedro: “What witches want is to destroy people, because they do not have the heart that allows them to look at other people as equals. (Sp. *No tienen el corazón para mirar a otras personas de igual a igual.*) They have *weya mollvün*.” As Pedro had said, witches are not able to look at other people as equals and are always characterized by feelings of envy, a negative moral intentionality that threatens the nondestructive composition generated among people of good blood, the relationships between those who are able to see each other as equals. The one time I met Marianela, a supposed witch from Pitril, she confessed to me that she was extremely upset with the people who were organizing the *nguillatun* ritual, because they had not invited her to participate with the rest of the community. For this reason, she had conducted her own ceremony with her family, but without friends.<sup>23</sup> When I told my host family about this encounter, admittedly feeling a general sensation of unease, they advised me not to talk to Marianela again, because she had bad blood (Ch. *weya mollvün*) and bad thinking (Ch. *weya rakiduam*). Hence, it was necessary to keep away from her and her evil intentions. To sum up: those who do look down on people are considered to have bad blood, or *weya mollvün*. This is the case for witches, who are not only defined by their bad blood, but are also infamous for their nocturnal blood-eating practices.

### **Nguken, or sucking mollvün out**

In Alto Bío Bío, stories about people whose *mollvün* has been sucked out are very common. In fact, uncanny blood-eating practices are generally associated not only with supernatural evil spirits such as the one mentioned by Marta at the beginning of this article, but also, and mostly, with witches’ nocturnal attacks.<sup>24</sup> These

21. For an exploration of blood conceived of as the transformation of previously consumed food, see Mayblin (2013).

22. In this respect, *mollvün* might evoke the Maori transpersonal notion of *mana*, inasmuch as *mollvün* entails the capacity to activate fellowship of human being (see Prytz Johansen [1954] 2002).

23. For the importance of friends in the construction of true people, see Course (2011).

24. I hereby focus only on nocturnal witch attacks (Ch. *nguken*) which imply blood eating. In Alto Bío Bío, other witchcraft attacks are carried out through poisoned food (Ch. *ilel*).

Pehuenche manifestations of witchcraft are known as *nguken*.<sup>25</sup> The invisible nocturnal predators at work in these situations are not eating a material substance: what is eaten in *nguken* situations is the very capacity for relationships to be composed, including those properties deemed to constitute or compose a person. As the following discussion will suggest, *nguken* experiences may be considered paradigmatic situations through which to think about Pehuenche understandings of relatedness precisely because they imply a disruption, or weakening, of such forms of relatedness.<sup>26</sup>

As night approaches, Pehuenche people usually gather around the *kütralwe* before going to sleep. Privacy is of the essence; for the Pehuenche it is critical to close their curtains properly. I remember how uncomfortable one particular woman became when I sat near a window facing the road during a visit to her home, unwittingly preventing her from closing the curtains. After a while, she anxiously asked me to close the curtains myself because it was very dangerous not to do so. Someone, an evil spiritual visitor, could be watching us, planning a visit, she argued. The threat of an unwelcome visit by an evil spirit is always related to the (absent) presence of a *kalku*, a polysemic term which might refer to (a) a person who has the capacity to perform witchcraft; (b) a harmful device or instrument used by witches; (c) an evil spirit owned by a witch.<sup>27</sup> This polysemic use of the word *kalku* can be also understood by considering the profound intertwinement between witches and particular evil spirits involved in *nguken*. In fact, it is not always possible to clearly separate the evil spirits executing nocturnal attacks from the witches themselves. Evil spirits are usually named through ambiguous terms, categories that are nothing more than names used to designate an unknowable source of evil. Even when an evil spirit manifests itself, this manifestation is never fixed or definitive and can instead be repeatedly transformed. Samuel, an evangelical Pehuenche, once explained that evil spirits “can turn themselves into cats, dogs, chickens, roosters, people, male goats ... thousands of things.”<sup>28</sup> At the same time, in many cases these transformations are considered to be the witch herself who has turned into an

25. There is no ethnographic evidence to consider *nguken* situations among the Pehuenche as events arising from *within* the discourse of modernity in postcolonial contexts, as some scholars working in Africa have argued (see Comaroff and Comaroff 1990, 1999; Geschiere 1997; White 2000). These reflections have attempted to demonstrate how discourses on witchcraft are intertwined with modern transformations, global capitalism, democracy, statecraft, and so on (see also Ashforth 2005).

26. For ethnographies that account for different failures of relatedness, see Stasch (2009); da Col (2012b). For a consideration of witchcraft as the dark side of kinship, or negative kinship, see Sahlin (2013). For an analysis of witchcraft as a practice deeply structured by intimacy and the powers it affords, see Geschiere (2013).

27. For historical accounts of *kalku* in Mapuche literature, see Guevara (1908) and Latcham (1924). For other South American ethnographies concerning dark shamanism and the moral ambiguity of shamans/witches, see Whitehead and Wright (2004). For an analysis of this ambiguity among the Mapuche people, see also Bacigalupo (2001, 2007).

28. I should make explicit here that Pehuenche people do not differentiate Pehuenche blood from Christian blood (see Foerster 1993).

evil spirit. The evil bird *chonchon*, for instance, infamous for its capacity to eat the blood of sleeping people, is known by Pehuenche people as the flying *kalku*'s head.<sup>29</sup> Following from this, the nocturnal eater of blood is bound up with the uncanny personal composition of a witch: the *chonchon* is a witch in another form.

*Nguken* is a concept that Pehuenche people regard as impossible to translate into Spanish. Most simply, it refers to nocturnal events during which sleeping people are the targets of predatory attacks and their blood is slowly sucked out. In the vernacular, people refer to the nocturnal attackers as "visitors" (Sp. *visitas*, Ch. *witran*), that is, eaters who temporarily inhabit the domestic space. The defining feature of these nocturnal attacks is the predatory performance in which sleepers' *mollvün* is enacted as food by the eater.<sup>30</sup> When the victims are not literally killed by this bloody feast, they become sick. After unbearable *nguken*-nights, my host Pedro spent most of the following day in silence, being apart, without wanting to work, and fearing that he would finally be killed. His capacity for speech was reduced, as were his personal strength and his ability to take care of other humans and animals. Persons whose blood has been partially sucked out during nocturnal attacks undergo an apparent decrease in their capacity to establish relationships with others.

While it is possible to describe the events in the terms I have used so far, *nguken* situations can only be fully understood by considering Pehuenche notions of personhood. As I have shown elsewhere (Bonelli 2012a, 2012b), a Pehuenche person can be thought of as a personal composition made up of a corporeal support, an invisible double that inhabits the corporeal support and is known as *am*, and a protector spirit called *püllü*. To simplify somewhat, a person is considered to be the result of the assemblage of these different components. When considering *nguken*, it is necessary to keep in mind that during sleep, the components of the personal composition are highly dislocated. While sleeping, the corporeal support is situated far away from its *am*, its invisible double. However, sleeping, although it is a moment of personal dislocation, is not one of disintegration. Put differently, even though sleeping entails a particular detachment of the components of a person, the sleeper is still a person. Even though the personal composition undergoes a dislocation, these components are still tied together through the binding capacities of *mollvün*, as I will demonstrate. The binding capacity of *mollvün* is invisible. However, this invisibility cannot be described in terms of the allegedly symbolic property of blood that merges with the material aspects of Pehuenche *mollvün*. Instead, it refers to a capacity to compose persons that *nguken* in turn has the capacity to disrupt.

Whereas the temporary state of separation occurring between the *am* and the corporeal support is at the core of Pehuenche sleeping and dreaming (see Bonelli 2012a, 2012b), and of *nguken*, a permanent state of nonrelating between these

29. For ethnographic descriptions of *chonchon*, see Waag (1982), Citarella (2000), and Bacigalupo (2007).

30. As has been suggested by da Col with regard to witchcraft situations and their malicious relations, these nocturnal visitations are mostly characterized by "perverted commensality" in which "the witch devours the vital force of neighbors and kin" (2012b: 13). For further analysis on perverted commensality, see also da Col (2012a); Humphrey (2012).



components is the central aspect of Pehuenche understandings of death. In extreme cases, *nguken* can itself actually cause the victim's death, understood as the final irrevocable decomposition of the person: the total consumption of persons' *mollvün* destroys the link between their visible corporeal support and their invisible *am*. Thus, in addition to deteriorating a person's capacity to establish further productive relationships, witches' eating practices simultaneously undermine the relations between the different components of a person, sometimes to the point of death. In what follows, I will show how nocturnal attacks imply an experience of personal decomposition strongly related to the extraction of *mollvün* that can be understood as the alteration of mutualities of belonging.

The nocturnal visitor waits for a person to sleep before initiating a visitation. In the words of my host Pedro, this ensures the person's greatest vulnerability: "Witches tell their evil spirits that they have to go and kill that particular person, to weaken him, to beat him at night when he is in bed. So the evil spirit waits to take advantage." Evil spirits "take advantage" of the situation during which the personal composition no longer holds; this defines the state of sleep. In particular, the separation of the *püllü*, or caretaker spirit, in the state of sleep, offers the eater a unique opportunity: "That thing waits until I am in a deep sleep, then it frightens my *püllü* spirit, and the truth is, there is nothing one can do against him. That is the problem. If I could, I would grab him. I'd grab him and beat him with a stick."<sup>31</sup> In other words, the decomposition of the relations composing a person generates a situation in which a person is not capable of (re)acting. Yet, there is one more task the evil spirit must carry out before it can eat the blood of a sleeping victim. Once a person is decomposed, so to speak, the evil spirit has to penetrate the sleeper's corporeal support: "The evil spirit arrives at the body, and I don't know how it enters. I don't understand how it enters if my body is all closed. If the head is all closed, how does it enter?"<sup>32</sup>

The stages of a nocturnal visitation are thus the following: first, the person needs to be asleep. Once the *am* has left the personal composition, the nocturnal visitor then takes advantage of the situation and tries to frighten away the *püllü* spirit. After the visitor has successfully further "decomposed" this part of the personal composition, the third stage of nocturnal visitations takes place: the evil spirit enters the sleeper's corporeal support. It is only then that the sleeper's *mollvün* is finally reached and eaten.

During my time in Alto Bío Bío, I hoped (in vain) to come across visual evidence of these predatory attacks. What was striking for me was that nocturnal visitors left no sign whatsoever of their bloody feast. In its visible and tangible properties, the corporeal support remained untouched. This fact was not a paradox for the Pehuenche, however, precisely because blood (what they call *sangre* in Spanish and

31. In other areas on the continent, predation against other humans through sorcery has been conceived of as hunting (Chaumeil 1983) or as invisible warfare (Albert 1985).

32. The use of the word *cuerpo*, "body," as a space evil spirits can get inside of, coincides with the definition of *kalül* given by Augusta ([1916] 1881). *Kalül* is the body, or the stomach. Augusta also notes that *kalülelkukalen* is a shamanistic expression used to indicate that a spirit is "in" the body of the victim. Whereas *kalül* is a visible space, the *am* is an invisible capacity.



*mollvün* in Chedungun), which is sucked out by the evil spirit, is not a material bodily substance traveling within bounded bodies. The absence of any visible trail of consumption can be explained not in terms of the nocturnal visitors' eating of *mollvün* as a symbolic act, but rather as something radically different. The separation between the material and the symbolic properties of *mollvün* was nonexistent in these eating practices. Instead, the absence of visual signs indexes a blood-object that "exists" here but in the form of a substance that is *neither* material *nor* symbolic, *nor* some form of "merged" relation between the two.

### ***Mollvün* as inter-stance**

All of the ethnographic situations highlighted above shed light on the various ways Pehuenche people and relations are composed (and decomposed) through *mollvün*. More particularly, these materials show how *mollvün* can be understood as a substance of relatedness with the capacity to assemble different kind of relationships within Pehuenche life. *Nguken* situations and witches' eating practices illustrate (negatively) how a personal composition coheres through the binding capacities of *mollvün*. *Mollvün* links visible and invisible components of a person; it is therefore (to put it simply) at once a visible fluid and an invisible capacity in between the spiritual soul and the corporeal support. Moreover, *mollvün* both determines how people act, see, and take care (or not) of others, depending on what their blood is like; and also grants a capacity for producing further relations between people, between people and *püllü* spirits, and between people and Ngenechen. Last but not least, eating animals' blood or *niachi* helps to strengthen the *mollvün* of the eater, therefore enriching a person's capacity to establish further productive relationships.

Bearing in mind that among Pehuenche people, witches are always thought of as being responsible for *nguken* events, Amazonian research concerning eating people might appear as a suitable parallel literature to think with. In a remarkable article taking into account the more productive relational schema of Amazonian contexts which are strongly characterized by predation, Fausto (2007) makes a distinction between two modes of human consumption: cannibalism and anthropophagy. The former refers to eating practices in which the other is eaten in his or her personal condition as a person, whereas the latter takes place on those occasions where eating involves "desubjectifying the prey" (504).<sup>33</sup> The procedures through which anthropophagy practices are performed entail a series of shamanic and culinary operations that avoid cannibalism: the game animal (which is considered human) needs to be produced as food and "be reduced to the condition of an inert object" (503).<sup>34</sup> Taking into account these conceptualizations, one might be tempted to think of *nguken* as situations configuring a particular kind of opportunistic anthropophagy, in the sense that a person is already apparently "desubjectified" in the

33. This process has been described, for instance, by Vilaça (2000) in her analysis of Wari funerary events.

34. In my ethnography, however, goats were never considered to be human, even though both animal and human blood are capable of doing similar things to the eater and to his or her relations.

state of sleep such that the evil spirit only needs to wait for the opportunity of sleep to attack. However, sleepers are not fully desubjectified prey since their *mollvün* sustains the relationship between component parts. *Nguken* situations cannot be thought of as cannibalistic either, however, since sleepers are also not fully composed as persons. This Amerindian theoretical framework becomes a helpful tool with which to think about *nguken* insofar as eating *mollvün* involves eating an entity situated somewhere on the subject–object continuum.

However, the Pehuenche materials presented in this article index a rather different type of eating relation that goes beyond the clear distinction between eater-as-subject and bodily substances as parts of subjects that should be objectified in order to be eaten. Marilyn Strathern's (2012) recent reexamination of her material on Hagen eating and feeding may be helpful in thinking about this eating relating in a different way. She writes that "[w]hat agents eat of others are the outcomes of those others' actions, the things they have *grown* and *nurtured*" (11, emphasis added), much as the *mollvün* eaten among the Pehuenche is (variously) the outcome of their labors with animals as well as their moral labors (or lack thereof). Just as "work is an index of strength" (9) for the Hagen, "good blood" is an index of moral rectitude and relational capacity for the Pehuenche. However, in Strathern's account, substance analogizes and is substitutable (Strathern 1988; see also Carsten 2001), such that items of consumption consist of "substitutes" (Strathern 1988) for others' previous acts. This idea resonates with Pehuenche materials but does not fully account for what *mollvün* -eating practices make (or do not make) Pehuenche agents do. Even if *mollvün* has to do with people's actions (and the very capacity for those actions to take place), it would be fairer to say that it works as the capacity that affords such intersubjective work, and not as its substitute. Furthermore, *mollvün* is not only the material effect of such intersubjective work; it is also the capacity that affords interactions, and commensality, between human and nonhuman agents such as *püllü* spirits and Ngenechen.<sup>35</sup> *Mollvün*, in Pehuenche terms, is not, once again, a substance in which material and symbolic properties merge, but rather a nonparadoxical visible-invisible connecting capacity between the personal composition, between people and *püllü* spirits, between people and Ngenechen, and even between true people, or *che*, and witches.<sup>36</sup>

Taking these Pehuenche propositions seriously necessarily implies the betrayal of one's own language (see Viveiros de Castro 2003). In the current context, this betrayal implicates the distinction (merged or otherwise) used widely among anthropologists between material and symbolic properties of blood. I have sought to show through the above ethnographic analysis that there is no foundational material substance with symbolic potential in the case of Pehuenche *mollvün*, however much the language we use to analyze it might suggest otherwise. In

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35. In this sense, Pehuenche blood should not be conceptualized through Strathernian lenses of "meaningful difference" within some larger system of categories (see Graeber 2001).

36. To put it in negative terms, just as nocturnal visitors are not "feasting on people" (Fausto 2007), *niachi* eaters are not "acquiring a perspective" (Vilaça 2009). To be more precise, and considering reflections on Amazonian hematology, *niachi* consumers are not acquiring "an operator of perspectives" (Belaúnde 2006: 145).

considering eating and feeding practices among the Pehuenche, my aim has been to utilize the language that belongs to anthropological reflections on blood in order to generate a divergence internal to it (see Strathern 1998; da Col and Graeber 2011).<sup>37</sup> By considering the relational capacities of *mollvün*, I have attempted to preserve the ethnographic uniqueness of the concept of *mollvün* by showing how this notion embeds a connecting matter in between personal components, in between people, and in between people and *püllü* spirits, as well as in between people and Ngenechen. As such, *mollvün* invites us to rethink the concept of “substance.” Despite its sematic flexibility, the term *substantia* refers to being, essence, or material, and derives from the word *substans*, the present participle of *substare*, meaning “to stand or to be under.” This article attempts to show that *mollvün* is not a sub-stance (or an under-stance) in which material and symbolic properties merge, but rather a capacity to construct relationships: Pehuenche *mollvün* is more an *inter-stance* than a sub-stance. I have attempted to show how Pehuenche *mollvün*, as a connecting capacity, interferes with previous anthropological analyses of blood: whereas ethnographically *mollvün* connects different entities of Pehuenche life in intersubjective participation, analytically it creates a disruptive link between ethnographic facts and wider anthropological reflections on substance, as a conceptual container for the merging of material and symbolic properties of blood. Thus, as an inter-stance, Pehuenche *mollvün* not only extends beyond the notions of common substance, but also goes beyond the separation between material and symbolic properties of blood. In showing how different eating and feeding *mollvün* practices constitute a particular Pehuenche compositional existence both within persons and between them and their worlds of people, animals, and spirits, this article has offered an ethnographic inter-stance in which there is a merging of negative and positive aspects of this compositional form of shared existence.

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37. For philosophical reflections on the relation of the eating subject and its language of description, see Mol (2008).

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### Ce que le sang pehuenche fait: festin sanguin, participation intersubjective et sorcellerie dans le sud du Chili

Résumé : Parmi les Pehuenche, le sang est extrait des humains et des animaux, partagé et mangé entre humains, offert comme nourriture aux esprits et divinités de la terre, ainsi que dévoré par les esprits malveillants et les sorcières. Grâce à une analyse ethnographique des pratiques alimentaires et de nourrissage impliquant une variété de mangeurs de sang, cet article soutient que le sang (Ch. *mollvün*), tel qu'il fonctionne dans les pratiques des Pehuenche ruraux du sud du Chili, indexe la capacité de créer des relations et est lui-même le résultat de relations. En se concentrant sur ce que le *mollvün* produit ainsi que sur les pratiques par lesquelles le *mollvün* est collectivement fait et défait malicieusement par les sorcières, je montre comment le *mollvün* défie, interfère avec, et reconfigure les conceptualisations anthropologiques habituelles du sang en tant que substance.

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