The *Weda Kurruf* or el "viento malo": suicide among Pewuenche students in Chile

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ABSTRACT: This paper analyses the impact of the historical trauma, globalisation, and hegemonic social forces on the deterioration of Pewuenches' well-being in southern Chile. This situation is particularly conspicuous in younger groups, who have experienced a decline in their mental health evinced by the rise of cases of suicide in the last decade. This article will explain the extent to which historical violence, governmental intervention, and imposed educational policies embedded in global agendas are determinant conditions for this problem.

KEYWORDS: Suicide. Students. Globalisation. Indigenous cultures. Mental health.

O Weda Kurruf ou "el viento malo": suicídio entre estudantes Pewuenches em Chile

RESUMO: Este artigo analisa o impacto que o trauma histórico e as novas forças sociais dominantes, como a globalização, tiveram na deterioração do bem-estar de Pewuenches no sul do Chile. Essa situação é particularmente evidente em grupos mais jovens, que viram um declínio em sua saúde mental na última década, com aumento de casos de suicídio entre adolescentes. Este artigo demonstrará até que ponto a violência histórica, a intervenção governamental e as políticas educacionais impostas inseridas nas agendas globais são condições determinantes para esse problema.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Suicídio. Estudantes. Globalização. Culturas indígenas. Saúde mental.

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1 Introduction

The effects of globalisation on Indigenous communities have been primarily addressed by disciplines such as economics, politics, and sociology (DESIERTO, 2021; ARCE, 2010; MACDONALD; MULDOON, 2006; PARADIES, 2016). However, little has been said about the related psychological distress and, in general, about the significant impact of a process of such magnitude on Indigenous' mental health. The present article delves into the emerging phenomenon of suicide among young Pewuenche students in Alto Biobío, Chile. The locals have named this unusual situation *weda kurruf*, which can be translated as "fierce winds" carrying misfortune. Such a presage and fear of the future gains new meanings in the context of globalisation.

Deaths by suicide and other mental sufferings used to be rare and exceptional situations for the Pewuenche. Nowadays, however, they are threatening problems that have become part of this community's daily life. The literature about mental health and Indigenous populations indicates that there are at least four elements that should be taken into account to understand the phenomenon we are dealing with here: long and usually deep-rooted historical traumas (SMALLWOOD et al., 2021), the systematic oppression exerted over Indigenous societies and culture (BURNETTE; FIGLEY, 2017), the power abuse from hegemonic groups (HARDING et al., 2015; BREIDLID, 2013), and the structural violence prompted by policies and norms emanating from the dominant societies in which these Indigenous communities live (KOWALCZYK, 2013). In the case of the Pewuenche, these effective forms of violence have been experienced in different ways throughout their history. They can, in effect, be traced as far back as to the first years of the Spanish conquest (1540-1598) (CROW, 2013). Today, all these forms of violence continue, although mediated by the globalised economic system (CANCINO, 2014).

This paper argues that, in addition to the abovementioned factors, the systematic imposition of educational programs embedded in global agendas is a contributing factor to the declining mental health of young Pewuenche. This, together with the historical injustices endured by this community over the centuries and a traumatic heritage of violence and oppression, could have led to the high suicide rates among young students in recent times.

2 Being pewuenche: historical trauma, oppression, and power abuse

From a historical perspective, and not so different from the majority of Indigenous groups in Latin America, the Pewuenche community in Alto Biobío has undergone a long record of encroachment and oppression that stretches back to the Spanish domination when two-thirds of their population was decimated (ALYWIN, 2002) and an important portion of their lands or *Wallmapu*[1] was usurped and looted. Even though the Spanish conquest formally ended in 1598, the persecution, exploitation, and injustice did not cease. As centuries passed, other groups of power tried to take control over them, restarting a circle of abuse and violence (TISSERA; CAYUQUEO, 2018; HALE; REINAO, 2018).

The Pewuenche are an ancient society settled in Alto Biobío, in the south-central part of Chile near the Andes and Argentina's border. Members of the larger group of Mapuche, the Pewuenche constitutes one of the eight ethnic groups legally recognised by the Chilean State in the Indigenous Law 19.253 enacted in 1993 (GUNDERMANN KRÖLL, 2018) and one of the largest Indigenous groups in the country. The creation of this law was an attempt of the democratic governments to acknowledge and include minority ethnic groups as part of the "new nation" instituted after Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship (1973 to 1990). During this period, one of the darkest in modern Chilean history, Indigenous groups were systematically persecuted, killed, and forgotten (MORALES URRA, 1999). A recent investigation on the disappearing and killing of Mapuche people during Pinochet's dictatorship, established the number of cases in one hundred and seventy one cases during the regime (HOERLL, 2016).[2]

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1 Mapuche Nation.
2 According to the anthropologist Ana Mariella Bacigalupo (2018), during her research about the killings of Mapuche from nineteenth century onwards, she found that during Pinochet's dictatorship, many people of the community were shot and left on the surrounding in a place called Quepe. One of the locals she interviewed, declared that "Then there are also the spirits of those who were killed by the military [during Pinochet's dictatorship] who shot people, even machi [shamans], on this bridge at night and threw them into the river or were eate by dogs [...]" (BACIGALUPO, 2018, p. 229).

The colonisation period was one of the first examples of the violence inflicted upon the Pewuenche. Like many other Indigenous groups worldwide, the Pewuenche were savagely oppressed by Spanish conquerors (HALE; REINAO, 2018). Resistance to colonial occupation and long battles for their territory only brought more dreadful upshots. Some examples are the Arauco War (1550 - 1656) against the Spanish conqueror Pedro de Valdivia, and Battle of Las Cangrejeras 1624, among others (BENGOA, 1996). Their lands were usurped, the Catholic religion was imposed on them, and their population was decimated. Riveros (1998) argues in this respect:

> Un aspecto central en esta historia de dominación ha sido la evangelización de los pueblos indígenas. Los misioneros, que en su mayoría pertenecían a congregaciones jesuitas y franciscanas, buscaban convertir a los indios y salvar sus almas, no importándoles si para ello debían recurrir a la fuerza e incluso a la aniquilación. Las dificultades y resistencias para captar al otro como un "otro" no sólo se dieron en el plano teórico sino que se tradujeron en un verdadero genocidio, puesto que cuando no se acepta al "otro" se termina por eliminarlo (RIVEROS, 1998, p. 01).

During the nineteenth century, the Chilean Government continued to view native communities as an obstacle to progress. Drawing upon the argument of economic development, authorities arbitrarily determined that the lands were not effectively occupied or *terra nullius* (the land of no one) and that, therefore, they must be "rescued from the savages" (BENGOA, 2017, p. 40). As a result, the Pewuenche's ancient territory was militarily occupied and reduced (WALDMAN, 2012).[3] The Government's goal was to unify the country at the expense of suppressing these communities. According to

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3 According to Bengoa "La sociedad santiaguina y el Estado consideraron que esos territorios del sur estaban desocupados. Tierra de nadie, se dijo: Terra Nullius. Los gobiernos lo tenían como tema pendiente del "desarrollo nacional". A mitad del siglo se mandó a realizar un "censo de población" y se estimó que sólo vivían treinta mil personas en toda la Araucanía, lo cual sin duda era una cifra pequeña para el gran territorio comprendido desde el río Bío Bío hasta Valdivia." (BENGOA, 2017, p. 40)

Redondo Cardenoso (2016), Pewuenche's lands were used to grow wheat for exportation and were cheaply offered to European colonists who settled in the region. Particularly noteworthy is the case of Germans who, in complicity with the Chilean Government and through the national scheme of German Colonisation (*Agencias de Colonización*), established their colony in lands that belonged to Indigenous people on the borders of Lake Llanquihue (HOERLL, 2016).[4] The systematic reduction of the Pewuenche's habitat furthered by the Chilean Government would be the starting point of the clashes between the State and this group in recent decades (AKHTAR, 2013). This longstanding conflict has become the basis of the structural violence experienced by the Pewuenche people, undermining this community's mental health significantly (SIMON; GONZÁLEZ PARRA; JARA, 2017).

The policy of division and fragmentation of the lands remained in force in the following centuries, increasing the disruption, loss of autonomy and control, non-protection status, and violence against the Mapuche. In 1927, the Government dictated a market-oriented strategy to replace communal ownership plots with private property titles. In 1960, the state intervened in the region taking control over Indigenous lands (WALDMAN, 2012; REDONDO CARDENOSO, 2016). These policies were reinforced during Pinochet's dictatorship and would continue with the different governments after the return of democracy (KLUBOCK, 2011).[5] Persecution and oppression against the Mapuche were perpetuated by creating the anti-terrorist law in 1984 (No.18,314) (LOPES; SANTOS; DOS, 2018). The principal purpose of this law was to target and silence dissension among citizens opposing the regime. As a result, the structural violence inflicted against the Pewuenche community escalated.

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4 On the German colonisation of Chile see Blancpain (1994); DCB (1950); Heberlein (2008) and Sanhueza Cerda (2006).
5 During the repression of the Pinochet's regime, the Government privatised territories in the South of Chile that belonged to Mapuche farm cooperatives and granted these lands to state-run companies to develop forest industry. Regime supporters purchased these companies at low-cost prices taking advantage of the new neoliberal anti-regulatory agenda. The consequences on the communitie's economy based on hunting and fishing-oriented livelihood were dreadful (KLUBOCK, 2011).

This law has been invoked repeatedly by the Chilean Government in democratic times to repel the claims of this community to recover their territory. Such are the cases of Víctor Ancalaf Llaupe, Jorge Huiaquín Antinao or Juan Luis Llanca. The first was detained held on terrorist charges for setting fire to four trucks belonging to an electrical company (Endesa) during a protest against constructing a dam in their territory. In the case of Huiaquín, he was charged with robbery with force, damage to property, arson, among others, because of his participation in the occupation of a disputed neighbouring state. He was held in prison for several months between 2002 to 2003. However, the criminal charges were dropped due to lack of evidence and replaced with a minor "public disorder" fault. During the same years, Juan Luis Llanca was also imprisoned for setting crops on fire at a private state (El Ulmo) that was ancestral land in the past. Under this anti-terrorism law, any criminal charge, even minor offences, acquire the status of serious faults (BALASCO; BAUER, 2020).

In the 1990s, Chilean society adopted a neoliberal economic system. In that period, many foreign investors acquired most of the land in the region. A group of one hundred and fifty Pewuenche families were removed from their original location and relocated to small pieces of land (Ayin Mapu - El Barco). In the following years, these investors destroyed the zone's ecosystem by constructing two massive hydroelectric dams (OPASO, 2010). According to Azuero *et al.* (2017), the primary psychological consequence of these usurpations was a "subordinated integration" of the Indigenous communities within the dominant culture. Nonetheless, different Pewuenche communities decided to fight back and defend their right over the lands (RODRIGUEZ; CARRUTHERS, 2008). The response from the Government at the time (First period of president Sebastián Piñera, 2010 - 2014) was to increase the military presence and persecute dissidents. In the following years, military teams were trained in the Colombian jungle by order of the Government of Sebastián Piñera (2018 - 2022) to suppress the Mapuche's uprising in the region. The operation was named "Comando Jungla" (Jungle Commando) (DÍAZ;

CASAS, 2018). The history of abuses and death endured by the Mapuche can be summarised as below:

> Since its creation in the nineteenth century, the Chilean state has often excluded Mapuche from citizenship. By 1973, they were subject to Pinochet's military rule without any rights at all. Pinochet's 1984 Anti-Terrorism Law denied Mapuche due process and tripled the punitive sentences against them. Its use did not cease with the end of Pinochet's dictatorship. Since 1990, at least fourteen unarmed Mapuche activists have been killed by the military police. The government has ignored Mapuche complaints about systemic violence and harassment by military police in Mapuche communities (Vidal 2011; The Guardian 2013). In short, the Mapuche have been killed by the military and the police ever since the nineteenth century, not because of their political ideologies but because they are Mapuche (BACIGALUPO, 2018, p. 233).

This military operation has left dramatic and deadly consequences for the Pewuenche. In 2018, Camilo Catrillanca, a young Mapuche farmer and grandson of a *lonko* (leader), was shot in the head by a military unit while heading home (EL ASESINATO..., 2019). Catrillanca's is not an isolated case whatsoever. Many Pewuenche leaders have been politically incarcerated or killed. Some examples are the *machi* (spiritual guide) Celestino Córdoba, who held a long-time hunger strike in prison after being accused of the murder of an elderly couple of the zone, without proof of his involvement in the crime (CHILEAN..., 2020). Two more examples are the community leader Alberto Curamil, who was arrested while halting the construction of two hydroelectric projects in 2014 (MILLER, 2021), and Macarena Valdés, who died in 2016 while campaigning against RP Global, an Austrian energy company that was looking for building hydroelectric plants in the region (www. dw.com).

Thus, the Pewuenche people have been forced to defend their territory against different forces of power throughout their history. The land is a fundamental part of their existence, culture and complex worldview. However, the intervention of the Spanish

conquerors first, followed by governmental policies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the current global agenda have persistently isolated this community, ripping them off from their ancient territory, sovereignty, and agency. Poverty, injustice, and land usurpation have ensued from the systematic abuse of power against these communities. One unnoticed aftermath of this, however, is the enormous emotional and psychological distress affecting these people, as we shall see in the following sections.

3 Economic global agendas: a continuum of colonisation

The general treatment of Indigenous communities in the face of the ongoing globalisation process has not improved compared to previous historical developments, at least not considerably. What is more, pre-existing social injustices have tended to increase in the last two centuries, especially among minorities and vulnerable groups in which Indigenous populations are generally included. For instance, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2003) has stated that economic globalisation has exacerbated inequalities in societies, especially in minority groups. This is particularly conspicuous in labour markets, where global economies have divided skilled and unskilled workers. Under this logic, it is worth mentioning that most of the Pewuenche workforce is under the category of unskilled labourers (MEZA, 2009).

In general, the division of the workforce has increased wage differentials and reinforced the unequal distribution of capital. The consequences have been various. For example, there has been a substantial increment in the gap between rich and poor, a reinforcement of the social class systems, and an intensification of inequalities in vulnerable groups in different parts of the world. Along with this situation, the current confrontation of worldviews between globalised Western nations and native populations is particularly problematic and more detrimental for the last group. According to Bhavsar & Bhugra (2008), the present process of cultural integration has also fractured the world into two opposite philosophies: identity and social collectivism on the one hand and individualism on the other. In this fashion, while collectivist

societies work together based on the idea that every person is part of a whole and is motivated by the norms and duties imposed by the collective entity and ideas shared by Indigenous beliefs across the world, individualistic societies, largely in the West, are more inclined to promote and emphasise individual choices and needs over those of the group (BAUMAN, 2001). Arguably, the confrontation of such opposite perspectives has led to a deterioration of Indigenous' mental health.

In the case of the Pewuenche, the acculturation process has been historically managed by the *Huincas* (whites, invaders). It has fostered a sentiment of tension and confusion, particularly in young Pewuenche, who see their cultural identity threatened. In a way, many of them experience an internal struggle elicited by the dilemma of either defending their communities and cultural heritage or embracing foreign influences. This identity conflict has led in turn to a psychosocial "unbalance", evinced by a loss of oneself, depression, anxiety and increasing suicidal behaviour in young people. This phenomenon is called by the locals *weda kurruf*.

4 The *weda kurruf*: structural violence and suicide among young indigenous

From 2000 onwards, the suicide rate among the young Indigenous population in Alto Biobío has increased dramatically, particularly in secondary Pewuenche students. However, little has been said about this escalation, disregarding the eventual connections between this phenomenon and more severe and long-term problems related to the historical conflict between Indigenous communities and the Chilean State. The Pewuenche looked at nature and their language (*Mapudungun* or, more specifically, *Chesungun*) to find a metaphorical explanation and a name for this dreadful and new problem affecting them: *weda kurruf* or *el viento malo*.

Weda kurruf is a term used by the Pewuenche and other Mapuche communities to refer to an omen. Tellingly, in the last twenty years, this concept has been employed to describe a series of suicides among young members of the group. Despite

their history of suffering and injustices, suicides were exceedingly rare among the Pewuenche. Nevertheless, in 2010, a press article showed for the first time the high number of suicides committed by adolescents of this community between 2004 and 2007. All of them attended secondary public schools in Alto Biobío (GUAJARDO SOTO, 2017).

Different studies have revealed a similar situation and a dramatic increase in cases in other Indigenous populations in Latin America (CEPAL, 2011; TUESTA CERÓN, 2012; AZUERO *et al.*, 2017). Mental struggles are not infrequent in Indigenous people. A wealth of literature on mental health and Indigenous groups has demonstrated that experiencing social exclusion and marginalisation have a considerable impact on their mental balance (MCNAMARA *et al.*, 2018; DOYLE; HUNGERFORD; CLEARY, 2017; HARDING *et al.*, 2015; KIRMAYER; BRASS; TAIT, 2000).

Globally, suicide cases among young Indigenous populations have become a concern (HUNTER; HARVEY, 2002). Moreover, during the last three decades, the rates of suicidal behaviour have increased perilously in young populations (KIRMAYER; BRASS; TAIT, 2000), surpassing by large the general global population. Numbers are even worse in young Indigenous.[6] Epidemiological studies have shown that 30% of Indigenous students have experienced suicide attempts at some point during their academic years (BEE-GATES *et al.*, 1996). Other investigations have found that mortality by intentional self-harm is the primary cause of death among these populations.

In America, and particularly in Chile, suicide rates in the Indigenous population are higher in the range between ten and twenty-four years old, primarily concentrated on men. Suicide has been determined as one of the third leading causes of death among Indigenous adolescents, both men and females (NU, 2011; TUESTA CERRÓN, 2012). Another study conducted by The Chilean

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6 According to the World Health Organisation, suicide among adolescents is the second leading cause of death globally, accounting for more than 800,000 deaths annually. However, other adolescent populations are more affected by suicide, such as the case of Indigenous populations.

Department of Health (2017) and the national census in 2017 showed a dramatic increase of 150% in suicides in different ethnic groups in Chile. In the case of young Pewuenche, the rise of cases between 2006 to 2010 was 82%. Poverty, isolation, loss of identity were the predominant causes, according to these findings (PÉREZ-SALES, 2010).

In trying to explain this phenomenon, researchers such as Silviken & Kvernmob (2006) have connected Indigenous adolescent suicide with two phenomena. One of them is the process of forced cultural assimilation in a globalised system and the subsequent loss of identity. The second is the historical trauma inherited because of colonisation processes. According to these authors, these two events are tolling young Indigenous' well-being. In the same vein:

> The rise in the suicide rates of the Pehuenche has occurred in places that have been intervened by the state or by international capital, as part of a national project of neoliberal modernisation that attempts to incorporate them into the agricultural and cattle raising market (AZUERO *et al.*, 2017, p. 240).

Fragmentation and acculturation of the Indigenous population are other factors to consider in the increasing numbers of death by suicide in young people. According to Harder *et al.* (2014), Indigenous groups have suffered the oppression of dominant groups who have imposed their standard of living and worldview. The outcomes of this acculturation process are poverty, discrimination, racism and mental struggles. Berry (2008) situates the core of this forced assimilation in Western societies' educational system. He argues that schools are ideological devices used by hegemonic powers to produce these fragmentations through forcing Indigenous young people to attend public or residential schools and learn the Western culture. In this matter, educational institutions are engendering a "dislocation" of their own culture and hindering the formation of identity and self-esteem, two vital aspects of well-being during adolescence, when self-construction occurs.

Another risk factor affecting young Indigenous groups is the abuse of psychoactive substances to alleviate their mental suffering. According to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO, 2016), alcoholism is part of the three main mental struggles of the Indigenous groups in Chile, along with depression and suicide. In this regard, alcoholism and drug addictions are part of the problems that heavily affect the Pewuenche (HAW *et al.*, 2005), especially the adolescents (ALARCÓN; MUÑOZ; GRANDJEAN, 2018). In effect, since 2006, there has been a rapid increment in the use of psychotropics among the young population. The abuse of these substances has long been associated with suicide, as the existing literature roundly proves (ORELLANA; DE SOUZA, 2019; DE LEO; MILNER; SVETICIC, 2012; SILVIKEN; KVERNMO, 2006).

5 Other risk factors: education, constraint, and despair

Years of usurpation and state violence have led the Pewuenche to a gradual process of "cultural death" (RAMÍREZ et al., 2018). The structural violence undergone by the Pewuenche is especially conspicuous in social spheres such as education. After the return of democracy in Chile, educational policies have overtly ignored first nations" cultural heritage, basing the educational system and the curriculum taught in the schools on global trends and Western ways of life. Subjected to neoliberal economic agendas, the existing national educational policy has systematically ignored this Indigenous community's needs. As a consequence, there is a limited ethnic presence in the national education curriculum, which is reflected in scarce references to these groups in textbooks. Allusions to Pewuenches and other original communities in compulsory school textbooks are generally permeated by a naïve tone that tends to infantilise them, to identify them as "other"; this is with all likelihood a legacy from European colonists (WEBB; RADCLIFFE, 2016). In general, Indigenous people's social and cultural practices, including languages, have been downgraded, prioritising foreign influences. This also occurs in schools

with a substantial presence of Indigenous students (DE LA MAZA; BOLOMEY, 2019).

Chile's unequal educational system also perpetuates social disparities in these groups. Education provided to most Indigenous adolescents focuses on training them to follow a route for vocational studies and perform semi-skilled jobs, which in Chile have lower wages and fewer life prospects and opportunities. Thus, Indigenous students have less access to further education in the restrictive Chilean education system, being prepared principally for low-skilled labour. According to the National Socioeconomic Characterization Survey (CASEN),[7] in 2006, just a 16,5 % of young indigenous were able to access to university.

These situations have led the Pewuenche adolescents to a detachment from their community, worsening this group's mental health. In the case of Pewuenche communities, decades of acculturation policies and historical trauma are well-documented factors that could have contributed to their mental health deterioration, having a repercussion in the suicide rate. The extent to which different dominant social forces have negatively affected this group becomes apparent in a recent study based on interviews with Pewuenche adolescents. The findings were clear, suicide in the regions was a way to avoid demanding situations (stressors) such as parent separations, poor school performance, school attrition, alcohol consumption, domestic violence, a strong sense of frustration, and cultural isolation (SIMON; GONZÁLEZ PARRA; JARA, 2017).

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7 *Encuesta de Caracterización Socioeconómica Nacional*

A revealing fact is that most of these adolescents attended public schools built by the Government using funding provided by the private investors that own hydroelectric dams in the region. It is likely for that reason that the educational curriculum taught in the schools in Biobío in that particular period was remarkably less focused on Pewuenche's culture and language, to such an extent that students began to perceive those educational policies as blatant attempts to westernise them. They called this process *"awinkamiento"*, a term derived from the Pewuenche *winka* o *huinca*, a vocable initially used to refer to the Spanish conquerors and today applied to Chileans and, in general, to anyone who does not belong to their communities.

Similar studies on language use and its impact on suicide among young Indigenous populations have been conducted in other countries with a high presence of native groups. The case of Canada and the investigation conducted by Hallett, Chandler & Lalonde (2007) in one hundred and fifty autochthonous communities in British Columbia demonstrated that the knowledge and active use of the native language was a protective factor against suicide. Moreover, in those groups whose original language was preserved, the rates of suicides dropped to zero. According to this study, the consequence of suppressing the native language has a direct incidence in mental health in Indigenous communities. In a similar vein, Chandler *et al.,* (2003) found that poor encouragement to use native language is a primary factor in early school leaving in these students.

Some students consider that the neglect of their language signifies a cultural loss that directly impacts the community's well-being. As Battiste (1998) argued, the loss of Indigenous language spells the end of another way of looking at the world, explaining the unknown and making sense of life. Therefore, the progressive death of such a crucial cultural identity means a threat to the survival of the entire human group.

The case of the student Humberto Pereira Manquepi, a young Pewuenche, might shed some new light on this argument (DUARTE, 2007). In 2006, he attended the intercultural colloquium *Epu Rume Kimun-Trawun*, where he denounced the flaws of the existing educational system:

> We (Pewuenche) believe that a bilingual in-
> tercultural education must be developed be-
> cause Chilean education has no identity. They
> prepare us to be *gringos* or Chinese. They do
> not understand interculturality. They think it
> is a conflict, but it is not. It is a relationship be-
> tween two or more cultures. We demand our
> language, clothing, and cultural realities to
> be respected. The education of our people re-
> quires recognition of who we are. We demand
> that the Government recognises us as people,
> constitutionally, not as an ethnic minority, but
> as an Indigenous nation (GUAJARDO, 2017,
> p.148).

The following year, Humberto Pereira Manquepi took his life while working as a casual worker in one of the industrial farms of the central region. He was seventeen years old.

One of the teachers interviewed on that study asserted that embracing the national culture is a real challenge to his students. According to him, a personal conflict emerges while trying to understand Western paradigms imposed by the Chilean educational system through a neoliberal economic agenda. In addition, these students expressed to feel the national's contempt and an increasing feeling of discrimination manifested by the minor presence of their traditions in the national curriculum and the subjects they have to learn. A crucial aspect identified in relation to the cultural loss experienced by these students is the replacement of their mother language, *Mapudungun* or *Chedungun*, favouring foreign languages such as Spanish, English or Chinese. According to Azuero et al. (2017), there is an "imminent risk of the extinction of these languages" due to external influences and lack of presence in the national curriculum. The consequence of all these actions is the progressive decline of Indigenous people's "collective self-esteem". Lastly, the educational policies have systematically neglected Pewuenche's suffering and traumatic past. In this regard, Chandler & Lalonde (1998) pointed out that the lack of interest in cultural continuity, which allows developing a sense of self within the culture in which a person is born, is strongly associated with self-destruction and suicidal behaviour.

6 Conclusions

This paper has analysed the possible factors involved in suicide cases among young Pewuenche students in Alto Biobío, southern Chile. As expounded through this paper, suicide among this group involves multiple components. As Durkheim (2006) stated at the end of the nineteenth century, the extreme complexity of suicide lies in its motivations being deeply rooted in every aspect of social life. Nonetheless, when a suicide occurs in ethnic groups, the problem becomes even more convoluted.

The results of this study have shown that in addition to historical traumas, globalisation has perpetuated historical violence, social exclusion, and discrimination against groups such as the Pewuenche. The analysis revealed that even though education is a driver of social mobility, in the case of the Pewuenche culture, it has operated as a contributing factor to adolescent's mental health deterioration, mainly because national educational policies and practices have systematically ignored their history, culture, and needs. Arguably, there seems to be a direct correlation between an educational system that acknowledges people's culture and needs and suicide rates. In the case discussed in this paper, the lack of recognition and superficial cultural valuation might have negatively influenced young Pewuenche's mental health, ultimately playing a part in the gust of "viento malo" o "*weda kurruf*" experienced in Biobio.

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