Abstract
This text analyzes the concept of civilization as used in the Chilean public debate between 1855 and 1883. Special emphasis is placed on the use of the concept to legitimize the territorial expansion of the Chilean State, both towards the south of the Bio-Bio river as well as towards the north of the Atacama desert. The condition of "barbarians" of its inhabitants - mainly the mapuches - is stressed, applied also to Bolivia and Peru. "Civilization" became a functional concept for the Chilean elite allowing its members to assume a sense of historical mission, and also justify the use of violence associated to the incorporation of the above mentioned territories to the definition of Chile's national sovereignty.

Keywords
Civilization, Mapuche, Territorial expansion.