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Chile's Indigenous Mapuche at... "War"

By Peter Keller

"Viva La Guerra Nación Mapuche!"

—Spray-painted on a bus stop shelter in Nueva Imperial, Chile

NOVEMBER 2000

TEMUCO, Chile—Something is out of place. Spray-painted graffiti on bus stops and buildings support a continuing war by the Mapuche Nation. Meanwhile, the drowsy community of Nueva Imperial (pop. 12,000) continues its daily zombie procession — buying bread, going to work, having lunch at home, evening walks around the plaza and watching TV soap operas. With such a tranquil setting, maybe the war passed through town without stopping. Maybe only a few people care. Perhaps it went underground. Moreover, what's the war for?

I am a *Winka*, and more than likely you are too. Anyone not Mapuche is considered a *Winka*. However, one doesn't have to be Mapuche to understand the fight for recouping ancestral lands, maintaining cultural traditions and the desire for autonomy. After well over a year in Chile observing the Mapuche struggle, and having touched upon indigenous themes in several newsletters, I decided to dedicate the month of November to examining the issue more closely. What follows is an account of insights on the state of Mapuche land conflicts, culture and self-governance issues.

"Indigenous Communities at the Brink of War."

— *El Diario Austral*. November 9, 2001. Front-page headline

"Brothers unite to recoup land and the right to bread."

— More graffiti in Nueva Imperial

The Mapuche people are one of eight distinct indigenous communities in Chile.¹ However, they make up 93 percent of Chile's indigenous population. According to the last census in 1992, nearly one million Mapuches resided in Chile — a country of 11 million at that time.² Mapuche ancestral territory includes land from the Biobio River south to the Island of Chiloe.

The word Mapuche means "people of the land" in Mapudungun, the Mapuche language. The Pehuenche, Hilliche, Puelche and Lafquenche indigenous groups are all included under the broad term *Pueblo* Mapuche.

'Pacification of the Araucanía' (as Spanish colonizers referred to Mapuches)

¹ The other indigenous communities include Aimara, Rapa Nui, Atacameñas, Quechuas, Collas, Kawashkar and Yámana. *La Ley Indígena*, No. 19,253, Article 1, 1993.

² Currently, the population of Chile is around 15 million. In 1992, nearly 80% of the Mapuche population lived in cities, with 40% of that total based in Santiago. Another census will be conducted in 2002.

was a slow process that spanned two and half centuries until 1850. Up to that point, Mapuche communities occupied a vast territory, living within sedentary fishing and agriculture family-clans along the coast and nomadic pastoral families toward the Andes. As the Conquistadors made attempts to pacify them, Mapuches quickly learned new war techniques to defend their land. Mapuches are considered the inventors of mounted infantry with two riders per horse — one at the reins and the other fighting. They held their ground even as a new Chilean Republic developed its constitution in 1822, stating all lands south to Cape Horn were part of Chile. Beginning in 1850, the Chilean government invited foreigners to help settle the land south of the Biobio River. Germans were first to arrive, followed by the Swiss, French and British. Over the next 40 years the colonists were successful in occupying Mapuche territory and developing farms and ranches. By the 1900s, colonization was in full swing by Chileans and foreigners, incorporating Mapuche territory into the country's political economy.³

Demands by Mapuches to recover ancestral lands were largely ignored until the 1960s, when several agrarian-reform laws were enacted. Interestingly enough, the reforms were put in place for *campesinos* (the rural economic lower class) at the national and regional level that were permanent workers on *fundos* (farms) that dotted the countryside. Nonetheless, indigenous farm workers saw this as a chance to recover lands usurped over the last century. Agrarian reforms resulted in the expropriation of 710,816 hectares within 584 properties.⁴ However, not all were returned to Mapuche communities; cooperatives received some of the lands. The Chilean agency in charge of the reform process, *Corporación de Reforma Agraria* (CORA), main-

tained legal control of the recovered land. These lands were not legally constituted as indigenous property, which proved to be a costly move for the Mapuche community when a military coup led by General Augusto Pinochet began on September 11, 1973.

Under Pinochet, agrarian reform became contra-reform and CORA-held lands were privatized. Led by National Forestry Corporation (Conaf) Director Julio Ponce Leruo, Pinochet's son-in-law, lands were auctioned to the highest bidder. Much of the lands that corresponded to Mapuche control in the Provinces of Arauco, Malleco and Cautín (political subdivisions within Regions) were auctioned in favor of forestry companies such as *Mininco*, *Forestal Arauco* and *Crecex* — the same companies that are at the center of current-day Mapuche land conflicts. In 1974, Decree number 701 was enacted, a forestry law that promoted the expansion of plantations by subsidizing 75 percent of costs



³ "Estudio sobre Tierras Indígenas de La Araucanía: Antecedentes Histórico Legislativos (1850-1920)." José Aylwin. 1995. Instituto de Estudios Indígenas, Universidad de la Frontera.

⁴ "Comunidades Mapuche y Empresas Forestales: Tierras, Bosques y Conflictos." Raúl Molina Otárola. In Pueblo Mapuche: Desarrollo y Autogestión. 2000.

for each hectare planted in trees. Much of these auctioned Mapuche lands were well-suited for fast-growing eucalyptus and Monterey pine. Forestry companies quickly used state subsidies to plant newly acquired lands with these non-native trees, creating in effect a monoculture crop destined for use as pulp and lumber in national and international markets.

In 1979, Mapuches suffered another setback in the form of Decree 2568, which divided Mapuche community lands into small, individual plots. The Decree, supported by the Catholic Church and the Temuco Bishop, created an environment where these small parcels were more susceptible to being sold (to raise capital), often to non-Mapuche buyers. The result, intended or unintended, changed the social composition of Mapuche communities that had land from landowners to tenants, from rural existences to urban dwellers and from providers to receivers. By the end of military rule in 1989, Mapuche groups re-ignited the fight to take back usurped lands, thus beginning a new stage of the Mapuche "war."

One particular group, *El Consejo de Todas Las Tierras* has been leading in the fight to regain Mapuche lands. "We've been successful in getting back nearly 6,000 hectares from forestry companies," *Consejo* activist José Naín told me during a visit to his Temuco office. Surprisingly, when I asked him how much land still needed to be recouped; he had no answer, and no idea of the number of hectares remaining.

Currently, Mapuche communities near Lumaco are organizing protests to take over the 566-hectare *Fundo El Rincón* owned by Mininco Forestry Company. As the timber-harvest season approaches, more Mapuches are gathering to block the *Fundo* entrance. "The community is not going to allow anyone to pass as long as no agreement exists with *Forestal Mininco*," says community leader Juan Maril, "If that doesn't occur, they are not going to take one log from our territory." Mapuches are seeking to use part of the disputed land for their own benefit. Tension continues to mount as other Mapuche activists in the region are joining almost 500 area families.⁵

Forestal Mininco would like to avoid a repeat of what happened in 1997 in this Province when Mapuche radicals burned two logging trucks. After that incident, 12 Mapuches were held responsible and the government activated the Interior Security Law, listing three Mapuche groups as a danger to national security. In addition to *El Consejo de Todas Las Tierras*, *La Identidad Territorial Lafkenche* and *La Coordinadora Arauco-Malleco* were also cited. Since that incident, newspapers and government officials have referred to the overall land issue as the "Mapuche Conflict." Attacks have continued on *Forestal Mininco* and earlier this year 25 hooded activists attacked a caravan of 11 logging trucks escorted by *carabineros* (Chilean police force).⁶ No

damage or injuries were reported.

One remedy has been for the government to purchase private lands and transfer them to Mapuche communities. The current indigenous law, passed in 1993, created a Land and Water Fund to purchase these lands in conflict. Thousands of hectares have been bought from forestry companies, but the price per hectare continues to rise — doubling between 1994 and 1997 — lessening the purchasing power of the Fund. It seems that some sellers are making a profit from public funds by raising prices when selling their property.⁷

Most lands recovered have not come from forestry companies, but from the National Property Office. Over 55,000 hectares have been transferred from the government to Mapuche communities. However, some state lands within ancestral Mapuche territory have been designated national parks or national reserves, such as the Chiloé National Park. While I am an obvious supporter of national parks, I realize they are not always the best answer in certain situations and should not be applied at all in others.

One day on a hike with Esteban Domihual, a Mapuche youth from the Mapuche village of Icalma near the Argentine border in Chile's Ninth Region, I was reminded of this principle. After a 20-minute drive and an hour hike to the summit of the Andes, only about 1,500 meters above sea level in these parts, we reached the area where he collects pine nuts from *Araucaria* trees, also known as *pehuen*. From our vantage point we looked down at alpine lakes on the Argentine side of the border and could see distant prairies. "In the summertime I stay up here for weeks collecting pine nuts," Esteban said. "I love the freedom of living off the land. Our community doesn't want this turned into a park, because that would restrict use of our land." He doesn't have to worry about that; no proposal exists to turn this mountainous area above Icalma into a national park. Nevertheless, his point was heard, at least by my ears.

"New Mapuche Nation"

- Graffiti in Temuco

"The 18th of September is a *Winka* party not Mapuche"

- Painted on a wall in Nueva Imperial

The 18th of September is Chile's Independence Day, or as Chileans say, "*Día de La Patria*." (Motherland day). This is the day that defines Chileans as a nation. The national flag is flown everywhere, attached to car-radio antennas, displayed in storefronts and illuminated at night by thousands of light bulbs. By law, on the 18th of September, all residences must have a flag visible from the street or the

⁵ "Mapuches de Lumaco en pie de guerra." *El Diario Austral*, November 9, 2001, p. A8.

⁶ "La Violencia en el Tiempo." *El Mercurio*, February 4, 2001, p. D18.]

⁷ "Materializaciones y Conflictos." José Aylwin O. Instituto de Estudios Indígenas, Universidad de La Frontera, 2002, p. 69.



A rural Mapuche family outside their home in Chile's Ninth Region. The clothes are typical of Mapuche elders. Photo courtesy of Conadi.

owner will be subject to a fine.⁸ The sense of nationalism is so strong that Chilean journalist José Mariman critically wrote, "Chilean statesmen are so trapped in a centralist vision of the state (united, one nation, one culture, one language) that they show little capacity to understand the real dimension of the Mapuche issue."⁹ Maintaining identity for a minority population is difficult enough, and in Chile it is even harder, since the Constitution doesn't acknowledge indigenous cultures.

Given this overbearing presence of Chilean nationalism, I was particularly interested in assessing Mapuche language, ceremonies, dances and music as an indicator of the strength of the preservation and continuance of Mapuche culture. I traveled to the Andes near Lonquimay, where I heard an elementary school was making progress in teaching Mapudungun to the school children of Quinquen. This is a relatively new community of nearly 35 families. In 1992 Mapuches began arriving here in the belief that the government would begin transferring state lands to the community. Finally, in 1997, the community of Quinquen received 13,300 hectares to be divided between families and used as common property. The Quinquen School, a barn-shaped structure with a curved roof that nearly reaches the ground, was built in 1993 with German funding and constructed by community members and the Chilean environ-

mental group Codeff. Patricio, the school's only teacher, lives 300 kilometers away in Carahue. During the week he stays in Quinquen to teach his 15 students, who range in age from eight to 16 years old. His knowledge of Mapudungun is limited, however, and elders from the community come to the school to teach students on a weekly basis. "It used to be that Mapuche children learned Mapudungun first and then were taught Spanish in school," said Patricio. "Now, it's the other way around. Only a few kids learn Mapudungun at home from their parents or grandparents."

Before I met the students, two *carabineros* stopped by to inquire about my mission. Interviewing the interviewer had become an all-too-familiar process during my Mapuche month. I encountered a high level of suspicion and mistrust at the start of most conversations, whether with government officials, community

leaders or the police. "What are you doing here?" asked the tall, skinny officer. He continued, "You need to write me a note stating why you are here, who you work for and what your objectives are in this project." I followed his instructions, but wondered why the *carabineros* hadn't been this attentive to my presence the week before, when my digital camera was stolen in Temuco.¹⁰ Finally I was able to talk with the students. We drew pictures of animals and explained their characteristics in Spanish and Mapudungun. Most knew animal names like horse, cat and dog in Mapudungun, but not many knew descriptive words for these animals. Patricio said it is difficult to develop specialized programs because the Ministry of Education controls curriculum and altering that is a bureaucratic maze. However, he proudly added that the students learned Chile's national anthem in Mapudungun.

Here's a good example of the Ministry of Education bureaucracy at work:

"Do you have statistics on how many or what percentage of elementary schools in Mapuche communities teach Mapudungun?" I asked the statistics department in the Ministry of Education's Temuco office.

"No, we don't have that information. You have to speak

⁸ During my first Día de La Patria in Chile a Carabinero knocked on the door of my shared rental early that morning. I answered and he asked for the house owner. The landlord/owner lives outside of town. He then asked to see my identification and told me I had to put a flag in the front window. "What would happen if I didn't?" I asked him. He responded with a giggle and made a motion with his hand across his neck, like my head would be cut off. After telling him I was a writer, he said in a serious tone that the fine was around US\$40.

⁹ "La Verdad de La Explotación," José A. Mariman. *Rocinante* magazine, September 2001, p. 7.

¹⁰ Without a camera, the few pictures I have for this newsletter are from Web sites; for the rest of the images my words will have to suffice.

with our program coordinator. His office is on the 8th floor of the regional government building.”

I found the office and asked my question again, this time to Intercultural Education Program Coordinator Mario Cayun.

“I am compiling that information now. It should be ready next week,” replied Cayun. [In *Chilean Code*, he was essentially telling me, ‘If you are lucky, I will start that next week.’] “But I can’t give you this information,” he continued. “You have to get authorization from my boss, Sergio Alavcón. First, you need to talk with him and then send a letter with your request.” This is when I realized he was speaking in code and was using the stall tactic.

I called the office four times in the next week and continued to get the run-around.

“No, Sergio is not in the office. Try tomorrow.” Then tomorrow came. “No, Sergio is at a meeting today and Mario will be back next Monday.” Such a simple question, I thought, but then again nothing is simple when governments and Mapuches mix. From this experience, I can only imagine the hurdles for expanding school curriculum to include formal Mapudungun language classes.

To be fair, I should note that some work is being done on the theme of intercultural education. For example, an international workshop was organized and put on in Santiago by Conadi (equivalent to the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs) for teaching indigenous languages in schools. However, just a week before the workshop in my interviews with educators in Curarrehue, Quinquen and Nueva Imperial, no one knew of the event.

One of the most important ceremonies in Mapuche culture is the *Nguillatun*. This takes place at sacred sites in the spring. This most religious of ceremonies has a basic purpose of renewal, to give thanks and ask for a good harvest in the year to come. I was invited to a *Nguillatun* in Pedregoso, near the headwaters of the Biobio River. It was there that I met Esteban Domihual, the same person I hiked with a week later in Icalma. He explained to me the form and significance of the ceremony. Temporary shelters, made with tree branches and covered with sticks, form a large circle with an opening facing east. These structures are called *ramadas*; families from local communities use them as their homes during the ceremony. One by one throughout the day, each of 14 gathered *Lonkos* (community chiefs) would lead their dancers and drummers to the center of the circle. The steady rhythm of women drumming on *Kultrúns* (a wooden-based, leather-topped drum) set the pace as barefooted men with feathers in their hair began a two-beat shuffle from one foot to the other, around a *pehuen* tree place in the middle of the circle. In this part of the ceremony, the musi-

cians and dancers pay tribute to the tree and ask for a good crop of pine nuts — a main staple in their traditional diet.

Esteban and I stood outside the large circle as other community members rode horses in a double-line procession around the *ramada*. “Each year fewer people participate in the *Nguillatun*,” Esteban remarked. “The circle used to be filled with *ramadas* along the edge. Now only half the circle is filled. Mapuche youth are not interested in these cultural traditions. I am afraid that as the elders pass away, so will the traditions,” said Esteban reluctantly. He predicted that in 15 to 20 years it’s possible that *Nguillatun* will not be celebrated here at all.

The Pedregoso area is only one of hundreds of Mapuche communities in Chile. I found some communities that have not performed a *Nguillatun* in 40 years, while others consistently have one each year. Near Carahue, one of the communities that has not celebrated a *Nguillatun* in decades, José Paillao tried to satisfy my interest in his culture. During breakfast at his home, a simple square, wooden structure without indoor plumbing, he showed me musical instruments and told me about dances that he remembered.¹¹ José played a *Trompe*, which is a mouth harp used to court women. Another instrument he played, a *Pifilka*, is a simple wooden flute used for dances. One of the dances he recalled was *Caballo Purrum* (young horse), a competition between two men interested in the same woman. As I departed, José said, “Mapuche culture will be lost if we don’t begin to teach and practice our traditions. Generally schools are relied upon to teach, because many families have forgotten the past.” However, few schools are taking on the new responsibility in earnest.

From my experience, the only Mapuche students taking a strong interest in their culture are at universities in Temuco and Santiago. I attended a seminar organized by students at the Catholic University of Temuco titled “Mapuche Conflict: A Valid Reality.” Only 70 people attended the day-long seminar held at the university auditorium. Community- and student-leaders gave speeches to a mostly receptive crowd. Common statements included, “The media focus only on the violence; they don’t look behind the violence at other issues.” “It’s unfair that one must have money to study, and many who want to study, don’t have the money.” “The problem is political and tactical. We have to unite to win.”

Afterward, I accompanied Victor and Vladimir, two student-community leaders, to a hunger strike held by other students in protest over the closing of a centrally located Mapuche student-housing complex. The hunger strikers had taken over part of the Catholic Cathedral in downtown Temuco in hopes of gaining support from the Bishop. The Ministry of Planning ordered the state-owned student-housing complex closed, and a new one was being built

¹¹ Among rural Mapuches, the standard of living is at a bare minimum or even less. The percentage of people living below the level of poverty in Chile is 23% nationally. However, the percentage in the Eighth and Ninth Regions among Mapuches is 55% and 41%, respectively. Mideplan-Conadi, 1998.

outside of town. Bishop Manuel Camilo Vial largely ignored pleas by student strikers for assistance in the matter and said, "Leave my house free, because in my house I have the right to decide things. I want the house of God to be respected, and in this sense, when they leave I will then meet them."¹² Eventually the students left and their cause was dropped without support from the Church or Government. In the end, the reason for the hunger strike eluded me, except that students were not consulted in the closing and translocation of their home — business as usual for Chilean bureaucrats.

In the courtyard outside the room occupied by hunger strikers, I asked Victor and Vladimir for their impressions of the fight to recover Mapuche lands. They wanted to know why a *Winka* would be interested in these issues, so I showed them some of my past newsletters. I also happened to have a newsletter from Wendy Call, an ICWA Fellow in Mexico. Wendy's newsletter was about the Zapatistas in Chiapas and their fight against the current Puebla-Panama Plan. They took a particular interest in this newsletter and stopped at the picture of *subcomandante* Marcos with a black hood over his face and a pipe in his mouth. They began to giggle like schoolboys looking at a *Playboy* magazine. They made a few off-the-cuff remarks, like "I could go with them if I wore a hood." They wanted to charge me for any interviews, at a peso-per-word rate. If not that, they wanted contacts to raise money. Their playful attitude had me wondering if they were serious about their struggle, or if it was just a form of entertainment. Either way, I would think twice about donating.

Financial support for Mapuche causes is diverse and, oddly enough, strong among religious organizations. Projects funded by governmental and non-governmental entities from Canada, Germany, England, France and the United States were common. Equally common were programs and projects led and sponsored by Protestant, Evangelical, Baha'i and Catholic religious groups. Personally, I worry about the influence of organized religions on Mapuche culture. However, I am a few hundred years late. Missionaries for several centuries have made an impact on daily Mapuche life.

For instance, a wooden cross is placed at the center of



Mapuche women keep the beat with Kultrúns (drums) at a Nguillatun ceremony. Courtesy of Conadi.

the circle in the *Nguillatun* ceremony. Although many Mapuche homes I visited were barren of wall hangings, one picture was consistently hung - Pope John Paul II. World Vision, an international Christian organization, has an office in Nueva Imperial for Mapuche-community sustainable development. As its first core value World Vision states, "We acknowledge one God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We seek to follow Jesus."

Mapuche spirituality is traditionally polytheistic, but in today's Mapuche society, dominated by Christian faiths, few Mapuches now are troubled by monotheism. All these organizations do good work by teaching self-sustaining and revenue-generating practices, such as building greenhouses, growing crops, raising livestock and making textiles.¹³ However, I encountered few programs that maintain or revive cultural identity through Mapuche ceremonies, language, dances and music.

If Mapuches want to preserve their culture, one means might be to use the same media that are diluting it, but in such a way to enrich it. Currently, only one medium exists for Mapuches, and that is Radio Baha'i, which produces several programs in Mapudungun.¹⁴ Until just a year ago, another source was the monthly journal "*Voz Mapuche: Aukín*." *El Consejo de Todas Las Tierras* produced the publication with funding from WWF International — until financial support was pulled due to cutbacks at WWF. Many possibilities exist to use radio, television and print media advantageously; one just needs creativ-

¹² "Obispo responde a huelguistas," *El Diario Austral*, November 9, 2001, p. A6.

¹³ In Icalma, I found an interesting environmental-management project led by the Indigenous Institute, an organization tied to the Catholic Church. It developed manuals for local Mapuches to use for filing water-pollution complaints and securing land titles, among other issues. Icalma is a popular summer camping destination and some locals think septic systems are leaking into Lake Icalma. The environmental-control project was financed by the Fund of the Americas program (an initiative to relieve debt owed to the United States). Unfortunately, even after three requests, the Institute would not share the manual with me due to "institutional policy."

¹⁴ Baha'i faith is based on the mission of Baha'u'llah, born in Iran, who in 1863 declared himself as the fulfilled promise of all religions and messenger of God for that era.

ity in both programming and financing.

During a trip to New Zealand years ago, I watched one TV channel that was dedicated exclusively to the Maori, the indigenous people of New Zealand. Although, I didn't understand the Maori language, I would watch the Maori news program each night, fascinated by the rhythm of the spoken words. Other examples exist for promoting multiple cultures and languages. One comes from a less-developed country, Kazakhstan. There, office signs identifying government agencies are posted in both Russian and Kazakh. Indeed, many countries have bilingual signs and some Chilean offices in the Ninth Region even provide directional signing and public information in Mapudungun and Spanish. One simple, high-profile way to create awareness of multiple cultures is to install road signs describing geographical features in appropriate languages. For example, at a river crossing such as *Rio Grande* (Big River) in Mapuche territory the same sign should include, *Futaleufú*.

“The Mapuche *Intifada*: Indigenous Uprising Worsens.”

- *El Mercurio*, February 4, 2001, p. D17.

“Freedom to the Mapuche Political Prisoners”

- Graffiti on wall in Temuco

Shortly after the return of democracy in Chile after 17 years of military dictatorship, a special commission for indigenous people was formed by the new government. With representation from indigenous groups and government officials it developed a proposal for a new comprehensive indigenous law. The proposal was sent to the National Congress in 1991 and was debated for the next two years until a compromise text was passed in October 1993.

Indigenous Law (No. 19,253) includes sections on land issues, education, culture, judicial systems, indigenous rights and creation of a National Corporation of Indigenous Development (Conadi). Three funds were initiated under this law, one for land and water recuperation and two others for indigenous-development and culture/education projects. The law also provides for the creation of indigenous-development areas, of which five have so far been designated. Finally, the law authorized the creation of a national advisory council to provide policy guidance. Council members include the Conadi National Director and officials of various governmental agencies, each designated by the President. Representatives of ethnic groups are elected by their communities, but they comprise less than half the mem-

bership and are subject to Presidential approval.

“How can we compete in this current political system?” asked José Naín, referring to Mapuche representation in Congress. “If you are elected as a candidate of a major party you are captive to the wishes of party bosses. If you are elected as an independent, you have no power to influence legislation.” Currently, only one member of Congress is Mapuche — Francisco Huenchumilla of the Christian Democratic party. At the municipal level, four mayors are Mapuche — none of whom were elected as an independent candidate. These four communities are Curarrehue, Tirúa, Puerto Saavedra and Los Alamos. Congressional elections are scheduled for December 16th throughout Chile. Teoberto Nancupil Baeza is the only Mapuche running as an independent candidate. He identifies closely with the Mapuche cause, but even in a district with a majority of Mapuches his chances of winning are slim due to the current party system.

Mapuches are beginning to develop proposals to adapt the current political system, or completely change it. One example is that of New Zealand and Australia, where the indigenous population can directly elect a certain percentage of senators and representatives for seats in the national congress. With this type of system, based on percentage of overall population, Mapuches could elect nearly 10 percent of candidates sent to Congress. *El Consejo de Todas Las Tierras* has proposed the creation of an autonomous Mapuche parliament. This body would serve as an institutional bridge between the State and the Mapuche Nation. Under the proposal, the Parliament would be located in Temuco and would control land issues, economic activities, culture, education, religion, health and housing, among others. Neither proposal has made any headway, which is not surprising given the current adversarial relationship between Mapuches and the National Congress.¹⁵

In an effort to gain more control and autonomy over Mapuche ancestral territory, Mapuche-Pehuenche communities have developed a written agreement with the National Forestry Corporation (Conaf) for using Villarrica National Reserve. The five-year agreement allows Mapuches from nine communities to collect medicinal plants, conduct religious activities, use pastures for livestock and co-manage forestry projects in the 60,000-hectare National Reserve. Financial resources from a French environmental fund will be used to fulfill certain aspects of the agreement. Conaf is currently developing another agreement with Mapuche communities near Pucón regarding adjacent Villarrica National Park. However, they anticipate this one will be more complicated due to the high profile of tour operators in the park.

Back at Icalma, I had asked two members of the community association about the level of cooperation with

¹⁵ Highest on the list of legislative priorities for Mapuches is the ratification of Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization. Former-President Aylwin's Administration sent Congress this Convention for ratification ten years ago with no result. Current President Lagos has re-sent the Convention receiving the same results.

nearby Conguillio National Park. Both replied, "There is none" and gave me facial expressions as if they had just smelled something foul. Curiously, one of them asked, "Why would you ask that? What would we do with the national park?" I replied with examples of U.S. national parks that occupy ancestral indigenous lands. "You could have an exhibit of traditional culture at the visitor center or present interpretive talks about past and current Mapuche culture," I said. "This could be a way of reaching the general population because thousands of people go to the park each year." They still weren't interested; the perceived bureaucracy was too much of an effort.

"Freedom and Self Determination to the Mapuche People"

- Spray-painted on wall in Temuco

Each Mapuche community is a little different. Although I visited only a dozen or so communities out of hundreds, rarely did I come away with a sense of hope. I was encouraged by the overall vibes at one such community, though - Maquehue. Only 15 kilometers south of Temuco, Maquehue's pastoral setting has provided well for its residents. Country gravel roads connect rural homes, schools and one hospital. The 30-bed hospital is a model for the region and has attracted visitors from around the world; even former-First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton paid a visit here while in Chile. Just three years ago the Indigenous Association for Makewe Health took over management of this hospital, which had been founded in 1907 by the Anglican Church.¹⁶ What makes the hospital special is that it combines western medicine with Mapuche medicine. Besides doctors and nurses on duty, eleven *Machi* (shaman or healers) tend patients by providing diagnosis and remedies for "Mapuche" illnesses. Many Mapuche communities have lost touch with the role of *Machi*, who tend to both spiritual and physical health. Luckily, in Maquehue, *Machi* continue the tradition.

In spite of a few bright rays of hope; I was disappointed by a lack of unity within *Pueblo Mapuche*. In Temuco, I asked Victor, one of the student leaders, why the Mapuche community as a whole didn't unite to accomplish common goals. "It's an error to think that Mapuches were ever fighting as one. Throughout our history we've been decentralized, and [found ourselves] sometimes on opposing sides. For instance, some Mapuches helped the Spanish Conquistadors. One advantage of this system is that without a common leader it was more difficult for governments to sign a treaty because no one represented the common will of the Mapuche people."

The lack of overall coordination and communication of Mapuches on Mapuche issues has been frustrating for me to observe. Even though I understand that Mapuche society did not choose to be incorporated into a nation ad-

vocating representative democracy and capitalism, I see that Mapuches are tied more into this system each day. Their only way to gain political power and make positive changes is by playing according to the conquerors' rules. Even so, the Mapuche political voice continues to be fragmented by the malaise of disorganization. This became clear at the Temuco University seminar entitled "Mapuche Conflict."

I went to the seminar with Karina Rojas, a friend of mine from Argentina. Karina is a mixture of ethnicities, including French, African and Huarpe — the later the indigenous people of west-central Argentina. Few indigenous First Nations remain in Argentina; the government was highly successful during the "Indian Wars" of the 1800s. Karina came to this part of Chile to learn about the state of Mapuche culture, and hopefully to gain inspiration to take back to her community. Disappointed by the lack of unity, she leaned over to me and said, "Do you know what the phrase, '*Divide y Triunfarás*' means, because it's happening here." Literally, it means 'divide and triumph.' In the balance, identifying the source of division is a historical exercise. Looking for triumphant winners, one doesn't have to go very far to find forestry companies, government, church and perhaps globalization. Sadly, this isn't one of those win-win situations. A losing side is evident — and the Mapuche, along with cultural diversity, are on it. □

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¹⁶ Spelling of words has taken on an interesting side battle. "Makewe" is a Mapudungun word, but government publications spell it "Maquehue." The same goes for "Temuko" and "Temuco," plus hundreds of other words.