

Guillaume Boccara

The brighter side of the indigenous renaissance (Part 3)

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The brighter side of the indigenous renaissance (Part 3)

1 CNRS/EHESS, Paris

3/ The attributes of the new mapuche national power: news, flag and direct action

2 A landmark in the history of Pan-Mapuche Activism is the founding in 2003 of the first independent Communication agency online. Devoted to covering events involving indigenous peoples and localities throughout the *Wallmapu* and beyond, the new electronic media called *Kolectivo Lientur*¹ was, after a few months, complemented by the creation of a newspapers called *Azkintuwe* (i.e. The Viewpoint)². Already available on the World Wide Web, this monthly publication started to be distributed on both sides of the Andes in the major cities of Southern Chile and the Argentinean Pampas and North-Patagonia. According to its current director Pedro Cayuqueo, the creation of this magazine responded to a triple necessity. First of all, the need to counterbalance the everyday desinformation produced by the dominant Chilean and Argentinean media regarding the Mapuche social movement and the relationships between Indigenous Peoples and the state. Second of all, the necessity to inform Mapuche people throughout the *Wallmapu* about what was happening throughout their territory. Third, the conviction that a space for internal debate was essential to bringing about independent and creative ways of exchanging ideas and to discuss political proposals emanating from a wide range of indigenous organizations of the *Wallmapu*. What the group of students in Journalism at the Frontier University of Temuco had in mind when they created this electronic medium was to produce information outside the major dominant centers of knowledge production. Avoiding to reproduce papers already written or published by other media, they started this innovative experience on the Internet essentially because of the lack of other kind of resources and their incapacity to work in the radio or printed media. They actually did not really like using the Web, for, as Cayuqueo put it to me, «the public that has access to this medium is not our people but rather basically international organizations, academic and professional sectors». Nevertheless, launching their work on the Internet happened to be the right choice, even though it was what we could call the «choice of necessity». In a few months *Kolectivo Lientur* became the principal means of independent information on Mapuche affairs. After less than a year of experience, they decided that «it was time to move to a printed medium» recounts Cayuqueo. In October 12th 2003, the first issue of *Azkintuwe* was published with a print run of 2,000 copies.

3 This being said, let us take a closer look at the ways information is organized and at the impact this new medium has had on the knowledge production regarding Mapuche people and affairs.

4 First of all, let us note that *Azkintuwe* presents itself as a national Mapuche media. It embraces the entirety of the Mapuche territory and, in accordance to Cayuqueo's terms «opens a space for national pluralism». During an interview I conducted in the city of Temuco in 2004, Cayuqueo told me that his magazine allowed «to unite or reconnect the Mapuche people who live within the Chilean State with those who inhabit the Argentinean territory»³. He also emphasized the fact that «half of the newspapers information [was] about the *puelmapu*» and that this has had «a very important social and political impact». This approach to Mapuche historical and social protagonism implies not only a critic of dominant ways of talking indigenous peoples and cultures but also a rethinking of the geographical units within which the data are to be collected.

- 5 Closely connected to this first feature is the fact that *Azkintuwe* is slowly turning into a Latin American media. Mapuche affairs in the *Wallmapu* are linked to indigenous peoples' struggles at large. The magazine includes an international section and data are gathered first-hand by journalists who had traveled to Ecuador, Bolivia, or Mexico. The situation of indigenous peoples and minorities throughout the world is also addressed as in the case of the Vascos and Irish peoples' struggles. Eventually, Mapuche leaders' trips abroad (to the United Nations, the European Union, etc.) are thoroughly accounted for. Unlike previous Mapuche media, *Azkintuwe* is really meant to become the first global Mapuche media. As Cayuqueo put it: «we hope to express our opinion as Mapuche about issues that are not necessarily related with indigenous themes».
- 6 Now then, this emphasis on both the global and the transnational contexts does not imply that local problems are passed over. One can even argue that within the new transnational scene of Mapuche struggle, a renovated importance and meaning is granted to the local. Indeed, local issues become the symbol of a broader national fight. Local conflicts that oppose indigenous communities to multinational corporations, national states or local landowners are incorporated into the Mapuche national fate at large. Local places are being reconnected to the global Mapuche political space, thus weaving a new web of signification. Far from being conceived of as isolated localities, indigenous communities are knotted together. Any problem that affects a Mapuche community on whatever sides of the Andes is now a Mapuche national issue. In brief, local struggles are enacted as national ones. It is collectively that the Mapuche people are to solve their problems and *Azkintuwe* is here to give a thorough representation of the whole Mapuche political landscape as well as of the Mapuche political landscape as a whole.
- 7 At this point, I think that it is necessary to reassess the fact that this magazine's contribution to the process of Mapuche reterritorialization and renationalization started as a virtual transnational experience. As noted above, *Azkintuwe* was effectively first available online before being physically present in stores. And even though the scarcity of resources constituted a major constraint, the fact that the first Mapuche national medium took shape as a deterritorialized experience needs a closer examination. In fact, the lack of financial or other kind of communication resources tells us something about the condition of the Mapuche society. Subjected to decades of internal colonialism, the Mapuche people have been suffering from economic exploitation, social domination and political repression. In the wake of their military defeat at the end of the nineteenth century, the Mapuche people's territorial and sociopolitical organization were dismantled and their lands greatly reduced. The repression they suffered during the last neoliberal dictatorship (1973-1990) at the hands of the Chilean army, police and landowners amplified the cultural loss and social dislocation of indigenous communities. In brief, the political violence and socioeconomic domination not only has had profound psycho-sociological consequences but also triggered a dynamic of social and cultural transformation or better say dislocation. Therefore, the creation of this electronic news medium can be seen as a one of the few means of social reshuffling Mapuche people had left in a context characterized by a process of deterritorialization in which politics, identities, and communities have become detached from local places. Interestingly enough, Internet appears to be a good place to start weaving the novel Mapuche social fabric when internal sociopolitical and economical webs have been swept away by decades of asymmetrical relationships. The fact that the Mapuche nation is being partly recreated as virtual polity and identity by means of the World Wide Web is not accidental. It is rooted in deep and enduring material and historical causes. Indigenous subjectivities and polity have therefore to be both materially recovered **and** virtually produced. That represents another novel feature of Mapuche politics.
- 8 Once again, we can see through this example that several contradictory dynamics are at work in the re-building and re-imagining of indigenous peoples' nationality, polity and cultural

nationalism: 1) a double movement of deterritorialization/reterritorialization; 2) the centrality of localities in transnational politics; 3) the critical role virtual plays in the weaving of the social fabric; 4) the construction of transnationalism through cyberspace.



Cover of *Azkintuwe*



Azkintuwe online (The Mapuche Nation's *Wallmapu*: from Concepción to Esquel)

- 9 Alongside this epistemological critic of the dominant symbolic order have appeared broadening ranges of political manifestations, which challenge the existing paradigms of monocultural nation-state. From the early 1990s onwards, there has been an intensification of trans-Andean relations that link distant localities. Mapuche organizations from Chile and Argentina have been multiplying their common international activities. Not only have they re-imagined and redrawn their territory as we have previously seen. They have also physically engaged in permanent trans-Andean politics. By organizing Pan-Mapuche meetings, creating common symbols, intensifying the circulation of the elite, and mobilizing and struggling over issues that used to be confined to national frameworks, the Mapuche activism has been slowly producing a unified version of their material and imagined territory. Related to this, the invention of the Mapuche national flag can be seen as another critical step toward the construction of this new imagined community throughout the *Wallmapu*. As Argentine anthropologist Claudia Briones aptly noted, the selection of «a single flag expressing the identity and symbolic unity of all the Mapuche people» was not an easy task⁴. It took several meetings between 1990 and 1991 for the indigenous leaders to come up with this new emblematic symbol of what they started to call the «Mapuche Nation». Stakes were actually high, for the Mapuche people had to show unity by the crucial date of October 1992. Sociohistorical and political differences had to be downgraded and, conversely, similarities

highlighted. Therefore, the gathering of people around a single signifier and the objectivation of the national feeling into a unique flag are also to be understood as a performative act. The creation of a Mapuche flag that could be blandished and float throughout the *Wallmapu* aimed at expressing «unity amidst diversity». It sought to go beyond the Chilean and Argentinean national frameworks. Eventually, the brand new Mapuche national flag was supposed to substitute the use of the Chilean and Argentinean ones that were located at the very core of the Indigenous peoples' system of representations (See Picture of Rehue below). For it is well known that Mapuche peoples from both sides of the Andes put either a Chilean or Argentinean flag at the center of the ceremonial field during community rituals. The will to spread the use of a Mapuche flag hints at expressing a symbolic insurrection against the nation-state centric ordering. Nevertheless, it can be said that more than reflecting a preexisting and unequivocal unity it aims at overcoming a nationalist symbolic order and to penetrate into a new one. Once again, along with Briones, I would say that this illustrates the process of «culturalization of politics». For beyond and despite all their differences, Mapuche people from the *Gulumapu* and *Puelmapu* started to be represented as sharing a common fate. Conversely, despite all they have in common, poor non-Mapuche peasants and urban workers on the one hand, and indigenous peasants and urban workers, on the other, began to be conceived of as two distinct groups walking separated paths and waging different wars. Therefore, like other symbolic devices used by Mapuche organizations since the early 1990s, the Mapuche flag tends to stress internal colonialism over class exploitation and to overstate cultural determinations over socioeconomic ones⁵. Again, this fight over the emblematic symbol of Mapuche national unity that aims at overcoming present international boundaries⁶ shows the contradictory dynamics triggered by the process of neoliberal globalization. For, on the one hand, the promotion of cultural diversity and the ethnicization of politics seem «to disguise the real workings of capitalist accumulation» and to split the subaltern groups' «culture of work»⁷. On the other hand, however, it allows silenced groups to elaborate autonomous regime of representation⁸ and spread new ways of doing politics and thinking about the nationhood and fatherland.



(Picture of Rehue or Mapuche Altar during a religious ceremony in Santiago de Chile, 1993)

10 In order to increase this feeling of being part of the same social, cultural and political space, indigenous organizations have been multiplying meetings and reunions gathering persons coming from both sides of the Andes. Those meetings have both a political goal and serve the purpose to show Mapuche people publicly. The mere act of regularly gathering Mapuche people from Chile and Argentina accomplishes the purpose of the meeting: showing that there is actually a political and social unity. According to this, political meetings can be seen as legitimizing and performative acts. Another relevant example of this transnational indigenous politics is when in 2004 Mapuche people from Argentina tied themselves to the Chilean embassy in Buenos Aires in protest against the detention of Mapuche political prisoners in Chile. Tying their social fate to their brethren's, they publicly expressed that the injustice that was being committed against their western *peñi* and *lamuen* represented an offence made against the entire Mapuche Nation. Through direct actions and the creation of contexts, Mapuche activists were clearly attempting to manifest a sense of national unity. In this case, indigenous direct actions and discourses did not simply reflect cultural and political realities but rather helped to create them⁹. By generating a frame within which Mapuche national unity could be expressed and publicly displayed, Mapuche activists were contributing to the forging of this unity. As Briones argues, «the mise-en-scène of indigenous claims within the public sphere» appears to be of critical importance in the construction of Mapucheness.



Mapuche Flag



(Protest in the Streets of Buenos Aires, October 2004)

Conclusion: Local Politics, Transnationalism and Globalization

- 11 What is new about the Mapuche mobilization from the early 1990s onwards is that it has both become transnational and used the production of local knowledge as a critical weapon against the arbitrariness of the global symbolic order. Like other transnational social movements,

it goes beyond traditional interstate and multinational interactions and takes effect through the emergence of new political subjects that are different from the citizens of the home states¹⁰. Like Pan-Mayanist's, Pan-Mapuche activists' struggle for the recognition of their collective rights contributes to stabilizing and standardizing core elements of Mapucheness at a transnational level¹¹. By repeatedly asserting the existence of *Wallmapu* as ancestral political and cognitive pattern of territorial organizing, Mapuche intellectuals not only emphasize the fact that they are natives and that their presence can be traced back to thousand of years. They above all seek to highlight the fact that they were here before this particular form of political organizing called nation-state. In consequences, theirs is both a cultural and a political precedence. By re-validating *Wallmapu* in both its multiple socioterritorial sections and spiritual dimensions, indigenous activists attempt to break free from existing models of internal colonialism. They are thus sending a powerful message that reads as follow: «we were here both before Creole nations (culture) and Latin American states (polity)». In many cases, they do so downgrading the extent to which history has shaped their political and cultural landscapes. Therefore, the process of nation-state denaturalizing occurs in parallel with the one of indigenous naturalizing.

12 Another aspect that is worth mentioning in conclusion is that the re-emergence of indigenous territorial conceptualizations happens to be central to the reconstruction of Mapuche identity and polity. Those renovated modes of territorial ordering result in the reactivation of collective memory. New forms of organizing transnational mobilization contribute to the emergence of Mapuche networks that connect local leaders, activists and intellectuals. Creating an identity of objective interests and subjective perception of the political and cultural issues at stake, indigenous transnationalism works as integrative mechanism¹². However, as I mentioned earlier, this process of Mapuche reterritorialization happens to be intimately connected with, if not triggered by, a dynamic of deterritorialization. At a time when more than 70% of the Mapuche population either live out of the *Mapu* or no longer make a living from the *Mapu*, identity and culture are becoming increasingly deterritorialized. Scattered throughout Chilean and Argentinean cities and rural areas, Mapuche people are forming a virtual transnational community in which the notion of *Wallmapu* plays a critical role. Needless to say, by talking about virtual community I do not wish to suggest that it does not actually exist or that it is a fake social grouping. I am merely attempting to account for the kind of Mapuche identity and culture that is being built, imagined and that is slowly emerging by means of the production and circulation of knowledge (maps, paintings, news, symbols) and political performances. Indeed, as recent anthropological theory on globalization has shown, the intensity of transnational cultural flows «requires a reconsideration of presumably bounded culture areas»¹³, both from a material and ideological point of view. The circulation of information, persons and symbols within transnational spaces has intensified and the identity and cultural formation processes have been transformed. They now respond to a double movement of deterritorialization / reterritorialization and denationalization / renationalization. Even though transnationalized and globalized Mapuche identity and culture are developing throughout new social spaces, they have definitely grown from indigenous grounds. Therefore, I propose to call them *neo-traditional* insofar as they are both rooted in indigenous historical homeland and representational systems and being shaped by contemporary national and global politics.

13 Eventually, I wish to emphasize that the emergence of Pan-Mapuche activism is directly linked to the process of neoliberal globalization. As anthropologist Michael Kearney rightly argues, cultural-political dimensions of transnationalism represent a response to globalization¹⁴. Because of the adoption in the late 1980s of an export-led development model, indigenous lands have become global capitalism's new frontiers. Greater pressures are exerted on indigenous peoples' territories. Lands that used to lie outside previous political concerns and

development models are now being fully incorporated within neoliberal states' action plan. No matter how isolated a piece of land is, it will not be forgotten by the transnational neoliberal state. No place and no one will be spared. Every single plot will be rationally exploited and, in accordance with the latest multilateral agencies' culturalist perspective, every single culture (*i.e.* ethnic group) will find its market niche.

14 In a recent article promoting the idea of «Development with Identity», Inter-American Development Bank anthropologist Anne Deruyttere explains with enthusiasm that IDB's new strategic framework aims at «enhancing the potential of indigenous peoples' comparative advantages based on their natural, cultural and social capital to improve the well-being of their communities» as well as at «taking advantage of market niches that respond to increased demand for products and services such as eco- or ethnotourism, environmental services, arts, handicrafts, forest products, organic produce, ethnopharmacology, and other products and services based on ancestral knowledge (...)»¹⁵. As we can see, economy, as «the neoliberal age's “cultural dominant”»¹⁶, embraces cultural diversity, and the invisible hand of the market, along with the helping hand of neoliberal State¹⁷, turns race and ethnicity into comparative advantages. Therefore, the spreading of a planetary economic culture that both celebrates cultural difference and subsumes everything (natural resources, produced assets, human resources) under the abstract category of capital¹⁸ has constrained indigenous peoples to organize transnationally. Neoliberal globalization has triggered a profound reordering and redefinition of geohistorical units through the signing of Free Trade Agreements, the intensification of migratory flows, and the process of capital relocation¹⁹. At the same time, as Fernando Coronil rightly argues, it has also tended to racialized and ethnicized social conflicts. Transnational indigenism seems to represent a powerful response to this contradictory dynamic of inclusion/marginalization. And it is through the material as well as symbolic taking over of spaces and places that this Alter-Native vision of the *mapu* and the *che* is expanding. For, as Subcomandante Marcos contended, neoliberal globalization represents «a new war of conquest of territories»²⁰.

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Notas

1 This Communication agency was called Colectivo Lientur after the name of a seventeenth-century Mapuche chief. According to Pedro Cayuqueo: «Lientur was the Mapuche *Toqui* (war chief) who convinced the Spaniards to sign the peaces of Quillin in 1641, ending nearly a century of bloody war. He assumed command after the death of Pelantaro, another great Mapuche chief at the end of the sixteenth century. Lientur knew how to act like a leader, achieving the signing of several peace treaties in which the independence of the Mapuche nation was recognized and guaranteed by the colonial power». Pedro Cayuqueo also explains that: «Lientur works as a symbol insofar as he allows us to show that we, Mapuche, are not violent like the official press claims. Lientur is the very expression of a leader who defended his territory and was chosen by his people and nation to carry on political negotiations with the invaders at the appropriate moment. The official history has always tended to remember leaders like Lautaro or Galvarino and to present them as bellicose chiefs. That is part of the dominant ideology that seeks to present us as an expansionist and violent nation» (Interview to Sergio Cayuqueo conducted by Guillaume Boccara, Temuco, January 29 2004, available online at http://drclas.fas.harvard.edu/publications/revista/chile/interviews_mapuce_e.html).

2 *Azkintuwe* is not the only Mapuche medium online to put forward the critique of creole ethnocentrism and lay out political proposals regarding the future of the Mapuche nation. But it was one of the earliest to bring all aspects of Pan-Mapuche activism together in a single

critique of global capitalism and monocultural nation-state. It undoubtedly offers the synthesis of Mapuche thinkers' critiques.

3I interviewed Mr. Pedro Cayuqueo on January 29th of 2004. A few days before, he had been arrested on the streets of Temuco while he was selling the third issue of his new magazine. 200 copies were confiscated and Cayuqueo spent two days in jail.

4 Briones, *op. cit.*, chap. 6: 29.

5 Briones, *op. cit.*, chap. 6: 45.

6 Briones, *op. cit.*, chap. 1: 2

7 Briones, *op. cit.*, chap. 6: 46.

8 Escobar, 2002.

9 Briones, *op. cit.*, chap. 1: 24.

10 See Brysk, *op. cit.*: 189.

11 Warren, 1998: 32.

12 Let us note that the emergence of the Mapuche *Wallmapu* in the indigenous consciousness does not only imply the rediscovering and reinventing of indigenous territory. It also leads to the redefinition of Chilean and Argentinean nationhood and imaginary geographies. But this is another story.

13 Quoted by Kearney, *op. cit.*: 557.

14 Kearney 1995.

15 2004: 27.

16 Coronil, *op. cit.*: 66.

17 Coronil, *op. cit.*: 75.

18 See Coronil, *op. cit.*: 76-77.

19 Building on sociologist William Robinson's analysis of transnational conflicts in Central America (2003), I would suggest that those new indigenous forms of configuring political space both erode national boundaries and represent a response to the new economic and social space of capitalist development.

20 Quoted by Coronil, *op. cit.*: 71. See Marcos 1997.

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