

Problematizing History:

Indigenous perspectives on Welsh settlement in Patagonia

(GEMAS, AHRC-UKRI)

Puel Willi Mapu Mew: Taiñ Zungun

Mónica Melipan

Iván Paillalaf

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PUEL WILLI MAPU MEW: TAIÑ ZUNGUN
nütramkawün

Evento poético musical



*Mónica Melipan, Viviana Ayilef,
Gerónimo Gil e Iván Paillalaf*

Jueves 2 de noviembre/ 19 horas/ Centro
cultural por la Memoria Tw





This is a rough script for the event, with the songs and poems excluded. Note also that the stories may also be different in the recording, as they were spoken rather than written.

[Translator's note: What was delivered in Mapundungun, and not Spanish, is noted in italics. The concepts conveyed by some individual words in Mapundungun are given in square brackets; in the poems, these are noted in footnotes.]

Monika: *Pentukun* [formal introduction]

Hello and good afternoon. I'm Mónica Melipan, and my inherited land is over in Río Corinto. My great-great-grandfather on my father's side was the leader of the community, and his name was Zenon Antieco. He was my great grandmother's father. My great grandmother on my father's side was called Amelia Antieco, my great grandfather was Antonio Melipan, and my grandfather's name was Adolfo Melipan. These are my ancestors, the ones who guide me through the world and who are here at this event today, and so we speak today together in one voice, one mind.

I am not yet as wise as my ancestors, but I always walk the Mapuche path, when conducting Mapuche ceremonies, when meeting my people, and when going out to visit the people in our communities.

And that is how I live, learning from the ancestors of each territory. Sometimes I'm sad, but what is there to be done? That is why I always strive to learn more about our beliefs, our way of thinking, our wisdom.

We are not alone, that is what our ancestors say, that is the advice I have been given over the years, and that is why we keep on going. Those are my thoughts.

Iván: *Pentukun* [formal introduction]

Gerónimo: opening song

Pentukun [formal introduction]

Performing a Mapundungun version of the song 'Del mismo río' [From the same river] (Daniel Morales translation).

Introduction to the history narrative

Iván

The Mapuche and Tehuelche people, our people, are indigenous people who pre-exist the states of Argentina and Chile. That is proven not only in place names, in cave paintings, in the various ancient objects that our *kuifakecheyem* [ancestors] left behind before leaving for another world, but also in the records of travellers, traders, clergy and soldiers of European or Creole origin who came to these lands and met with our people in different contexts on both sides of the mountain range. They talk about how our people controlled the territories in which they lived, and continue to live, following the *Az Mapu* [rules of nature] that our *Kimche Papay* [wise elder woman] and our *Kimche Chachay* [wise elder man] still pass down to us. During the 19th century, our *lonko* [community leaders] maintained different forms of dialogue with the Argentine State, which was just coming into being, making agreements that are still studied to this day. That was the situation when the Welsh settlers came to what today we call Chubut.

Much has been said about the agreement between the State and the Welsh people, but we wish to emphasise that those narratives ignore the deal that the Mitre government had to strike with *pu lonko yem* [now deceased leaders] of those territories in order to be granted permission to allow settlement on the coast and in the lower valley. That was the famous *Tratado Chehuelcho* [Tehuelcho Treaty] signed by the *lonko yem* Francisco, Chiquichano, Antonio, Chagallo and others in 1865.

That very year, the Welsh contingent arrived and established the Settlement, with the cooperation of the *lof* [indigenous communities] of the area, who took advantage of the settlement as a point of exchange and trade. This was a location where the settlers would buy our people's products such as *quillangos* [animal skins], knitted goods or *choyke* [ostrich] feathers and sell them on for a large profit, which is what allowed them to survive

and prosper.

However, in 1879 the Argentine State broke these agreements and, fuelled by the racist ideals attached to what is today known as 'extraction', so began the genocide against our People led by Julio Argentino Roca, including violent encroachment on the Pampa and Patagonia territories. Almost 42 million hectares were placed in the hands of some 1,800 landowners by 1903. All of them had economic or family ties to the political powers of the time. It got to a point where 67 people owned 6 million hectares, and it should be noted that their surnames continue to be among Argentina's elite to this day.

As for our people, those who were not murdered, those who did not disappear in the hands of the Argentine army, they were captured and put in chains, forced to walk long death marches, imprisoned in concentration camps like Corralón Villegas, Valcheta or on Martín García Island, distributed among those same wealthy families to become servants, put on display in museums, and forced to live under miserable conditions that led to the death of many families.

The survivors who were able to return to the territory had to fight hard to obtain small pieces of barren land. For decades, they suffered discrimination, marginalisation, and colonisation by an Argentine state that sought to erase our identity and culture.

Mónica: opening testimony

The 'Huisca-Antieco' Mapuche Tehuelche community is about 60 miles away from the city of Esquel and about 50 miles from the town of Trevelin. In order to reach the territory there is only one road for cars, which is accessed via Route 34, 'The Rifleros Trail'. Starting near the town of Tecka, there are about 40 miles of tarmac and 20 miles of gravel before you reach what is today Estancia Súnica. About 10 miles further in, you reach Lot 118. That used to be a cart track that our ancestors in these communities would use to move around. There are two lots in the community territory, namely Lot 118, which was used in winter, and Lot 113 which is used today in summer.

The earliest settlements date back to 1880, when the family of Miguel Aburto and Marcelina Nahuel became the first family to live in the upper reaches of Río Corinto, Colonia '16 de octubre'. By around 1900, other indigenous families had settled here too. But then the arrival of Fontana and his Welsh Rifleros laid the ground for the Argentine army to bring about two evictions of community peoples who had been in the territory a long time before. Fontana and his Rifleros are known as the 'discoverers' of the 16 de octubre valley, in an event that

has left its mark on the history of the community and on the history of all the descendants of the indigenous people of that territory.

Iván

It is important to emphasize how they silenced us and tried to erase us from the territory's history, this being the point where we see the arrival of the Rifleros as being linked to the evictions that happened afterwards.

This notion of 'discovering the 16 de octubre valley' erases us, as it entrenches the idea that no one knew of the existence of or lived in these lands before the arrival of Fontana. It was easy then to violently expel those who were not part of the social stratum or culture that Fontana and his Rifleros represented.

The same is true of the idea of 'desert' used in Roca's campaign and seen in Fontana's diary, in his actions and in his vision when discussing the territory upon which they were advancing. On this, it is worth checking an article by Oscar Medina which analyses the material. It is important to highlight the fact that the Rifleros were only able to carry out their expedition in the wake of the State's genocidal campaigns, with support from that State and enabling that process to continue.

When the new Settlement came, so too did the State, schools, hospitals, police and churches. Those were the organisations responsible for violently banning our people from speaking our mother tongues, for forcing them to use Spanish as the only official language, banning them from practicing their spirituality and forcing them to become Christians, banning them from using our traditional medicines, and banning them from identifying as Mapuche Tehuelche.

Gerónimo: second song

Performing 'Amuayñ Gejipun' [We go the ceremony] by José Uircaleo and Jeremías Chauque

Viviana: first poem

Pentukun [formal introduction]

KIÑE [ONE]

Oh that I were a great pioneer,
and have my bank holidays placed in everyone's diaries

and be honoured eternally
through events or statues or buildings, anything;
oh that there were, as you entered a territory, a majestic *pangui*¹
made out of the best clay, to which we would have made petitions,
and asked its statue to protect us,
like the *ngen*² used to do,
like it continues to do.

The *pangui* showed the way to our people during the exile age.
He would come to us in our dreams and show the path
of survival
to our *kuifi*.³

And the *ñanco*⁴ too.

I sometimes imagine what the Puelmapu villages would be like if, as you entered,
there was a statue of the *ñanco* showing its white chest,
but there is only some dragon
or some dinosaur.

We are in history's waiting room.

We have no monuments.

One indian gazing from his enormous stature towards the sea in Puerto Madryn
in the body of some alien race.

The intention was there, we might assume,
but why is it that every time our turn comes,
they blunder?

Like with the statue of the natives on their knees in Trelew,
when they attempted to honour us,

in 2015,

the 11th of October,

or the bank holiday on the 3rd

of November,

the assumed, unworthy,

"loyalty day"?

Mónica: The first eviction

In 1956 Joaquín Felipe Guerrero, a Portuguese national, asked for the eviction and

¹ puma

² guardian entity

³ ancestors

⁴ hawk

relocation of the indigenous families of Lot 113 onto an indigenous reservation. The State leased him four lots in the upper reaches of Río Corinto, namely Lots 123, 124, 118 and 113, and, with the complicity of the Lahusen forestry company, who were harvesting timber in Lot 113, they suggested that the indigenous people should be moved by force to the Nahuelpan reservation. This was happening during a period of violent and unjust evictions of indigenous families, people who did not have rights as a result of the so-called 'desert campaigns', racism, and other socio-historical factors.

That was when Amelia Antieco and Antonio Melipan were evicted along with their seven children, including Adolfo Melipan who was 11 years old at the time, as well as their foster children, Crecencio Melipan and Aurelio Melipan, who were 8 and 10 years old at the time and who are still with us today. They were all chased out by National Gendarmerie officers and transferred to what is now the Ceferino area of Esquel. These were my great grandparents on my father's side and my grandfather on my father's side, *ñi tuwün ñi kupalme* [my territorial origin and my family lineage]. At the time, they only evicted people who lived in Lot 113, including this family, who were the first indigenous family to live in that lot, since the others (Rosas and Contreras) did not consider themselves, nor were considered, indigenous and they only worked there extracting wood for the Lahusen company.

This indigenous family had a community and cultural relationship with other indigenous families of the time and with the other neighbouring communities, such as Mallín Grande, Lago Rosario and Nahuelpan. However, given that none of them had resources, legal protection, or rights as indigenous populations, they were unable to return to the territory until a later process, when their descendants managed to do so with the consent of the other populations of the community.

Gerónimo: third song

Performing 'Mis ancianos' [My ancestors] by Che Joven

Viviana: second poem

***EPU* [TWO]**

We were given a bank holiday to 'honour' us,
but that holiday is an insult,

it hurts us, like every past injury

hurts us,

like every 3rd of November,

like being back on that very day when our families were thrown off their lands

or when other peoples were hunted to be displayed

like animals,

like God's mistake.

In Germany every corner commemorates death's nightmare:

a 'Never Again' policy that means

that one cannot walk three steps without seeing a sign commemorating the horror.

In Argentina there is no such thing as a Videla banknote either,

we had never needed to debate this

until recently

after four decades of democracy.

Nor are there any statues

nor streets with the names of those who perpetrated that genocide.

But, in the Puel area,

while walking here and there

you know that you are wandering an area where there was death

and the only thing you see is that the streets have naturalised names like Julio Roca.

The road signs note the distance to Buenos Aires.

In Chubut, we see blue signs

in Spanish and Welsh

noting the feat 'of the Rifleros'.

When I see those signs, I wonder,

what would happen if they also signposted our own places of memory?

The indigenous concentration camps:

valcheta/chichinales,

corral charmata/fortín villegas,

the port of san antonio,

or carmen de patagones,
choele choel,
corrales de retiro,
martín garcía,
or the la Plata museum?

Mónica: The second eviction

In 1996, the new owners of the Forestal Andina forestry company obtained a licence to work in those forests in order to extract wood from the lenga trees.

This is the context for the eviction suffered by Aurora Huisca and Manuel Antieco and their families, including their granddaughters, Manuela Antieco and Dominga González, who were only about 10 years old around then. At that time they had the support of the Mapuche-Tehuelche '11 de Octubre' Group and the lawyer Dr. Gustavo Macayo as well as the citizens of Esquel who showed solidarity with their cause and campaigned together, as this was a period of reclaiming the Mapuche Tehuelche identity and the rights of indigenous peoples in general. The then recent amendment to the Argentine National Constitution (1994) had been favourable, and new rights and institutions were introduced through it, among them the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Around the same period (1992) was when Argentina made an amendment to Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization, which is a legal tool that has protected Indigenous Rights ever since.

After several developments, people managed to secure the intervention of the Instituto Nacional de Asuntos Indígenas [National Institute of Indigenous Affairs], which at the time was accountable to the Secretaría de Desarrollo Social de la Nación [Ministry of Social Development], who eventually paid 100 thousand pesos to the company to return the community territory to the indigenous families. Therefore, the State was able to buy the land from the company and return it to the native families and secured a community property deed for them as well as legal status.

This is a milestone in the history of our people. Great longkos like Foyel and Inacayal held a big Mapuche gathering in 1880 near the current community territory, in what is known today as 'The Rifleros Trail' within 'Estancia La Esmeralda', and that was in the middle of the war, when the so-called campaign to the desert was being executed. That is not far from School No. 18, where the 1902 referendum was held to decide whether those territories would be part of Chile or Argentina, and that was chaired by the Brit Thomas

Holdich, the Chilean Hans Steffen and the Argentinian, Francisco P. Moreno, who was notorious for the abuses, atrocities and violence he inflicted on our people over at the La Plata museum.

The historical events linked to the 'Rifleros' have constructed a narrative wherein the Rifleros and Colonel Fontana come to these lands on a journey of 'discovery'. From our point of view, this is the event that founded the current situation wherein the Huisca Antieco community is now surrounded by *estancias*, which are lands that the Argentine State gave to Welsh and other immigrants as part of their European settlement policy.

Viviana: third poem

***KULA* [THREE]**

Oh that I were a great pioneer

not having to explain all these things in a text.

I think it must be the *pangui*,

watching from afar, like a ruling force.

The Mapuche monuments are in our surnames

and in our memory too.

They flow through our blood.

Our surnames are formed with the puma, as in Melipan,⁵

or they have the *newen*⁶ of joy, as in Ayilef,⁷

or the serenity and calm of *lamgen*⁸ Paillalaf.⁹

Our surnames carry the experience of the land,

the *mapundungun*¹⁰ of the land,

the *zungun*¹¹ of the land.

Oh that we had

⁵ four pumas

⁶ strength

⁷ running laughter

⁸ sister or brother

⁹ quiet lake

¹⁰ language (the mapundungun language)

¹¹ word

some heroic name in the province's history books,
some cultural event, a museum, memorable horse, bank holiday, bilingual schools,
so many things.

But despite Foyel

and mighty Kalfukura and the countless *longko*¹² and their modest majesty,
there is no place for them in the province's official history,
save for this shameful bank holiday
and the vandalised tombstone of *longko* Inacayal.

But we were here before

and here we will stay

even though we don't have a statue of the *pangui*,¹³

nor of the *ñanco*,¹⁴

nor of the *choique*,¹⁵

nor of mighty Kalfukura's strength.

But they are in us.

We carry them in our bodies.

They are returning.

Iván:

Despite the genocide and the impunity, our people's resistance never ceased. There was resistance in every home where a grandfather told old stories, where he spoke and taught the words of his language, in every family history of uprooting, in every *ngillatun* [ritual], in every legitimate claim for basic rights, and every time the *lawen* [medicinal plant] was requested to treat an illness. Those were the different ways in which our ancestors continued the struggle. And even today those struggles continue, always heading forward with those memories, lending us *newen* [strength] each time.

Today there are various regulations that recognize our rights over the territories, and we also have a say in the issues that affect us. The national and provincial constitutions and

¹² community leader

¹³ puma

¹⁴ hawk

¹⁵ rhea (type of ostrich)

international supralegal regulations, such as the ILO Convention 169 or the United Nation's Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), are some examples.

However, although the country's institutions are bound to respect these principles, in reality, the racist way of thinking that makes our people and our words invisible continues in different areas. That is why it is so important to get the words out so that our voices and our reality do not stay in the shadows of oblivion.

That is why the current work that so many Mapuche Tehuelche and non-Mapuche Tehuelche people are doing is so important in diversifying, enriching and perhaps changing an official narrative that has caused so much damage. Out of respect for all those who came before us, we must not regurgitate that narrative without critique when there is so much evidence to show that the original intention was to dispossess, eliminate and hegemonize our people.

Today is one further contribution to this effort, as we discuss our history in our own words and in our own way. And we invite you to contribute further to this work, by going through your own family memories, by putting an end to the propagation of racist narratives, by researching and by supporting people's legitimate claims for their rights.

Viviana: fourth poem

MELI [FOUR]

This bank holiday is an insult.

It feels like another attempt to humiliate us,
and the list is already long...

Generations of Chubut children are bound to say that

November the 3rd is commemorated as the day the Mapuche and Tehuelche swore
'loyalty' or 'allegiance'

to the Argentine flag

as though such a thing as 'Argentina' existed in this ancient territory
at that time.

They looked to adventure books when they invented this date.

Another injury to memory in the name of 'making amends'.

They knew exactly what they were doing.

They are not innocent.

One cannot talk about respectful relations when a State chooses a date arbitrarily without consultation, without considering the disrespect.

This performance requests that the State displays some interculturalism for once and remove this holiday from the calendar and ask those who have real legitimacy

to decide

among our people –

the authorities, the individuals, the *pu ngen* –

to choose another date for this 'honour',

one where dignity is not injured

for the sake of all those children who died in State prisons,

forced to leave their rivers

and their games on their land, or rather, all games

in all lands,

and the most sensitive aspects of childhood,

forced to watch their mothers die

and see other children stillborn in their mothers' arms.

This holiday is not true.

It is an injury.

Gerónimo: closing song

Performing 'Del mismo río' in Spanish

Mónica: Farewell

Iván: *Úl* [formal farewell song]