

"The Mapuche Challenge in Chilean Modern Society"

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I applied to do this project so I could do research, mainly from interviews, on the Mapuche culture and their situation in today's Chilean society. I traveled all over and interviewed many people who were Mapuche, involved in the cause for Mapuche rights and those that don not care for their rights.

When I arrived in Santiago, I met with Don Claudio Escobar. Claudio is a known organizer and expert on Mapuche culture and history and the issues facing the community in Chile today, both in Santiago and in the rural areas. Claudio is very connected with the Mapuche community and intellectuals and social scientists that work for the cause as well as the leaders of the appropriate community. Claudio himself is like many of the Chilean people, including myself, *mestizo*, of mixed blood and didn't grow up with the Mapuche culture except what has been integrated into the dominant Chilean or *huinca* culture.

I spent the first week in Santiago where, in present day, well over half on the Mapuche people live. It is estimated that over 500,000 of the total 900,000 Mapuche population lives in the capital. This represents approximately 7% of the population in the Chilean territory.

I spent the first three days of my time with Paulina Acevedo, a journalist with the Mapuche Observatorio, one of the largest umbrella organizations working with the rights and protection of the Mapuche culture. The organization has main offices in Temuco, the regional capital of the 9th region and the region of the traditional lands and reservations of the Mapuche. Temuco is located 12 hours south of the capital city of Santiago.

In Temuco the organization deals with protecting the needs and rights of Mapuches in the urban area as well as the villages that surround Temuco. The organization does research and identifies with the Mapuche leaders' causes and issues that need to be followed, especially in the courts as well as national legislation that affects the Mapuche people. They provide legal aide to Mapuches who have had their rights infringed upon and provide social services for the community. They also network around the country as well as link to international organizations dealing with the rights of original peoples and original peoples' organizations. Paulina presented me to various people within their organization, which allowed me an idea of the issues they are working on and the breadth of their organization. Interestingly enough, the organization was organized at the behest of Jose Alywin Oyarzun, the son of former Chilean president Patricio Alywin. Alywin has completely dedicated his career to the development of this organization and the Mapuche cause.

The next day I spent with Claudio Escobar visiting other contacts and organizations dealing with specific issues. Claudio has been very involved in the cause to stop the construction of the coastal highway in the 9th region that has taken many traditional Mapuche lands, especially sacred territories and cemeteries. He has also been involved in the cause to stop the damming of the Bio Bio River just north of Temuco and the area of Concepcion. This project destroys traditional territories as well as a very special eco system. Claudio's third priority is ecological causes. He says the traditional ways of the Mapuche and their relation with all creation is the basis for a just ecological policy today. Also, the ecological causes the Mapuche organizations follow closely today are the issues in Chile that cause destruction of the environment and affect the traditional

Mapuche lands. Claudio has been involved in protests on a national level and an organization of marches. He is very involved in supporting the maintenance of Mapuche culture in the city of Santiago and public celebration of their traditions.

I then met with Carlos Ruiz, a known historian who specializes in the history of the Mapuche people and a proponent of including more history of the Mapuches and the conquest in the regular Chilean educational curriculum. Mr. Ruiz was able to put me in touch with other academics and give me references on historical issues in relation to the Mapuche people and what is now Chile.

The Mapuche poet, Graciela Huinao, was able to put me in touch with more of the cultural events that are going on in Santiago: literature, music, dance and poetry. She is a respected, perhaps the most, cultural person in Santiago on Mapuche culture.

After my time in Santiago, I traveled to Temuco, the regional capital of the 9th region and the cultural capital of the Mapuche culture or some would say "nation." In Temuco I had the privilege to meet and spend a great deal of time with Jose Alywin, the founder of the Observatorio Indigena. In Temuco they provide a great deal of legal aide to Mapuches who have been arrested for the burning of forests planted on traditional Mapuche lands or the destruction of their machinery or other properties. They were able to arrange a visit and interview in the prison with two Mapuche *Lonkos*. The word *Lonko* in Mapundungun, the traditional language of the Mapuches, means chief. However, the *Lonko* are the head of a clan, more than a tribe. These two *Lonkos*, Don Pascual Pichun and Don Aniceto Norin, were accused of burning the home of the owner of lands that a group of the Mapuches are asking be returned to them. The *Lonkos* won the first trial but the owner, Fernando Figueroa, appealed the case and won the second round. The

Lonkos were given 5 years and one day of prison. The owner then took them to a third trial for another act of violence he says they committed but there wasn't sufficient evidence. As I was leaving Chile the fourth trial was beginning. Figueroa again appealed.

I also interviewed a young man, Cristian Calhueque, who was unjustly accused and convicted of participating in destruction of property. He was released from prison but had to go to the area police station each day to sign in for six weeks. Because of the distance to the station and the lack of transportation he wasn't able to hold a job and caused an impossible situation for him and his family.

During my time in Temuco, I was also able to interview other community leaders of the Mapuches, as well as citizens with opposing views. In the interview with the Mapuches I was able to gain a better understanding of the divisions within the Mapuche community in regard to what actions should be taken to obtain lands or even whether the cause is worth it. There is a great deal of tension within the community.

After Temuco I traveled to Lincanray, close to the mountains and visited the only radio station that deals with Mapuche issues. The area is strongly Mapuche and many of the farms still have *rucas*, traditional kitchens and living areas with thatched roofs. However, because of the beauty of the land and the gorgeous lakes, more and more investors are trying to develop the area.

I then returned to Santiago for more interviews and to put into context what I had learned in the south. But, before leaving Chile, I returned to another area of the south, again close to Temuco but towards the coast. I stayed with a Maryknoll lay mission couple that live and work in the small town of Chol Chol. This small community is poor land and not in a developing area. It is very simple. I was able to visit the local Catholic priest who is

Mapuche and visit and even stay with a Mapuche family, the Nahuelhual family and stayed with them one night in a farm near Chol Chol. This family lived in the traditional *ruca* with an extended house. The grandparents only spoke Mapundungu. The granddaughter, Johana, is attempting to start an eco-tourism business where clients would stay in the traditional *ruca* and eat traditional foods. Johana, however, recognizes that most of the clients will probably be foreigners, and she sees a lack of interest on the part of *huincas*, (Chileans) in Mapuche culture.

I also interviewed Chileans. I want to develop my findings in the area of racism in the Chilean society towards the Mapuche people and their culture. There are so many sayings in the language and attitudes that speak to what the general populace sees as Mapuche "traits" and ways of being. The issue of racism towards the culture and people is an issue in Chile. There is also a tremendous lack of knowledge and understanding of *mestizaje* in Chile. There are 900,000 full-blooded Mapuches but millions of Chileans carry Mapuche blood in their veins. This lack of recognition and understanding is also a result of the racist attitudes that have developed.

This is a summary of what I did in Chile during the month I was there. I will be writing my senior essay on this subject thanks to all the great material I was able to gather while I was there.