

Non-fiction

This is a non-fiction text. It provides information about a mapuche community in Alerce village. You will also read an interview to the members of this community.

ANCESTRAL PAILLAHUEQUE LOF

On a cold winter evening, we got to the ruka where the local mapuche community called *Ancestral Paillahueque Lof* usually gather for different activities. *Lof* is the word to refer to a mapuche family living in the same place. This mapuche-williche family living in Alerce village had kindly invited us in order to tell us how they live, where they come from, what they do and what being a mapuche means.

We all sat round the fire, which was burning in the middle of the ruka. We could feel the warmth of the flames and the warmth of the people who kindly shared some dried apple chips, known as *orejones*, and *mate*. As soon as the logko arrived, we started talking about their daily life. The word *Logko*, means “head” and it is also used to refer to the leader of a mapuche community. They were not wearing their traditional clothes this time though, but they always do when they celebrate some rituals or carry out special public activities.



Mapuche ceremonies

In the course of a year, the community may have different traditional rituals such as the gillatun, the we txipanthü, or a machitun. A gillatun is a rogative which they perform whenever they feel there is a necessity in the

25 community. For example, when they want a good harvest, good weather
conditions or they wish for the spiritual well-being of all its members. Their
last gillatun was performed after the last eruption of Calbuco volcano on
22nd April, 2015. They asked for the welfare of all the people in the area. A
gillatun may also be celebrated whenever the *logko* of the community calls
30 for it. this means he has has a deam in which the spirits have told him
when to do so.



Nguillatuwe in Alerce, after the ritual.

Another ceremony is the one called *We Txipanthü* which is the mapuche
New Year's Day and it is celebrated on 24th June. This is the only
celebration that has a fixed date in the community.

35 The mapuche people also practise some healing rituals, which are
performed by a machi, who is a person that has a connection with the
spirits and with nature. The Paillahueque lof community does not have a
member who has this role, so they have to call a machi from another
place. He comes to the ruka and performs two kinds of rituals: a machitun
40 and a lepuntun. The former is done when he wants to heal a person from
an illness, and the latter is carried out in order to heal people spiritually.

The machi has a health programme which could be a complement to the
traditional medicine given by doctors. In fact, this lof suggested the
National Health Service to implement this programme as alternative
45 medicine to heal people, but there is some resistance to this view on the
part of doctors.

The language

One of the members of this community teaches their language in a public school in the area and she states the difference between the terms *Mapuzugun* and *Chezugun*. She says that the first one is the language of the land (mapu=land and zugun= language) used by the machi to talk to all living beings in nature. And *Chezugun* is the language used by the people to communicate among them (che=people and zugun=language). She says that they wish they could all speak Mapuzugun – that is, speak with mother land. She adds that there is a decree of the Ministry of Education to teach the subject “Mapuche Language and Culture”, but for this, 20 per cent of the students in a school must have a mapuche origin.

In spite of this, the new generations are revitalising the language in the Llanquihue province, but it has not been an easy task, since most of the native speakers were exterminated through time. This community has made several proposals to the City Council of Puerto Montt in order to preserve and teach their language, but there has not been a concrete answer in this regard. They say that communities in our country today are discussing the writing system to be used and told us that there are 33 different systems that major mapuche families have created to represent their sounds, but the Ministry of Education have adopted the Azümcheffe, proposed by CONADI, in their textbooks. The teacher in this lof uses the Unified Writing System because she says it is more similar to the Spanish writing system and, therefore, it is easier for children to learn it.

Their history

We asked them a little bit about their history, and this is what they said:

70 Are you all just one family or do you belong to different families?

We are all direct descendants from a cacique who lived in Frutillar, Juan Paillahueque, and who was killed in 1916. There are other mapuche people around, but they are not relatives and they are not interested in keeping their traditions. In this lof, we are all relatives and we make alliances with other families. This means that if a member of this family marries a person from another mapuche lof, he or she becomes part of this

community, too. We get to know each other because of the names. Surnames have a meaning. They represent the things or the animals of the place where a family lives.

80 **And what does your surname mean?**

Well, *hueque* is the mapuche name for a kind of guanaco that existed in the area. And *pailla* means tamed, quiet or wise. So literally *paillahueque* means ‘tamed guanaco’. And this describes our family because we consider ourselves quiet, wise and we love home life.

85 **How long has this lof been here in Alerce?**

We have been here for more than twenty years now, working actively as a mapuche community, but in 2010 we were obliged to become a legal organisation. In that way, we can plan projects and apply for different resources, even though these are scarce. We also seek for recognition of
90 our rights as indigenous people who are native to this land.

What type of recognition do you expect from the authorities?

We hope they can accept that we have rights to the land that our great-grandfather had when he was killed. Through time, the Chilean governments have taken our lands. The mapuche people became tenant of their own
95 land; in the end, they were expelled.

The Chilean government gave the German settlers a piece of land, building materials and animals, and we expect to have, at least, the same from the state. If we could return to our great-grandfather’s land, we could recover our energy (*nuewenh*). That is a never-ending fight we will have. Through
100 violence, they forced us to acquire the language we speak now. The different governments have passed different laws to benefit the mapuche, but nothing has actually been done. We seek to revitalise our whole culture.

What are you doing for that?

105 We have opened our space to the local community. We sometimes invite students to our ruka and we teach them how to make tortillas or clay

pots. They often think that *rukas* exist only in the ninth region and they do not know that there is one near their homes. They also think that our traditional clothes are costumes, maybe because their parents have taught them about that. We sometimes invite other native speakers to teach them our language, tell them stories and children feel happy about this because they usually see all these as elements of a distant culture, and they realise they can learn them near their school. Teachers at their school have also proposed to build a *ruka* in their yard, but that is not possible because it is part of our cultural heritage which does not belong to them.



Do you play your traditional games?

Yes, we play two kinds of games: *palin* and *linao*. *Palin* is similar to hockey and it is played barefoot with a curved stick called *wiño*. We have 20 *wiños* to play in teams. These sticks are also used in some traditional ceremonies. And *linao* is a mixture of rugby, handball and basketball. The ball is made of wet kelp and it is the same size as the handball.