MAPUCHE: DREAM INTERPRETATION AND ETHNIC CONSCIOUSNESS

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After a series of violent earthquakes, tidal waves, and floods in southern Chile, María, a novice Mapuche shaman, reported the following dream to members of her community:

I felt the water coming out of the lake; the earth was moving. A spirit was telling me to throw branches of maqui to the water so the waves would recede and the earth stop trembling. An older couple came to me, a woman and a man. They asked me why the people had not celebrated a ngillatun for a long period of time. Where were the people? I saw a lot of people screaming. The old couple told me to have a ngillatun, and that all the people from the community had to assist. Animals had to be sacrificed. The old man had asked Ngenechen to kill everyone who was not obeying god, those who had forgotten to be Mapuche, those who had not held a ngillatun with their hearts. Those with heart, the machis, would have the strength and power. Those would survive the earthquake. He asked the people to meditate, and to have a ngillatun after the earthquake. I cried and cried in my dream.

María reported the dream to her community, and a series of ngillatun—the Mapuche rituals to the ancestors—were performed by members of her community, following the indications of the dream. The message of the dream was obeyed by the community for several reasons: María’s status as a peumafe, or good dreamer, based on her shamanic training; the presence in María’s dream of the most important gods in the Mapuche pantheon, the old couple and Ngenechen; and the gravity of the situation. For María the dream was of great importance because it announced the arrival of her shamanic spirit, the last step in her shamanic training, and provided the reason for the cataclysm—that it was sent to punish the Mapuche for disregarding their traditions. The Mapuche had neglected to celebrate the ngillatun, and the few rituals that were held were not performed from the heart, that is, they were lacking in ardor and dedication. María received the shamanic spirit from her deceased shaman mother soon after the dream, and she was officially ordained a shaman in a public ceremony.

The Mapuche believe that cataclysms are sent to them by the gods and their ancestors as a punishment for violating the rules of the ad mapu, or natural laws. It is the duty of the shamans and other peumafe to interpret crises and provide moral guidance to the Mapuche through their dreams. These dream narratives play a major role in the construction of Mapuche ethnic consciousness; they help define ideal traditional Mapuche behavior in relationship
to the Chilean culture and provide guidance to the communities during critical times. By defining the ideal Mapuche behavior in relationship to the dominant Chilean culture, the Mapuche separate themselves from the dominant ethnic group. Also, shamanic dream narratives are an expression of the increasing political authority of women shamans throughout the twentieth century.

The data presented here were collected during twenty months of participant observation—from October 1984 to March 1987—in four Mapuche Indian reservation communities in the south of Chile. The selection of these communities followed the present indigenous classification of the different subgroups and their geographical environment (the coastal people, or the Lafquenque; the Mapuche, or people of the land; the highland people, or the Pehuenche; and the Huilliche, or the southern people) and was intended to cover dream interpretation among the Mapuche Indians. The four reservations are located on the coast, in the coastal valley, in the eastern highlands, and in the South. On the coast I lived on the reservation of Malalcahuello; in the valley, the reservation of Lumaco; in the highlands, the reservation of Melipeuco; and in the South, the Island of Huapi. I also visited reservations bordering these four home bases. During the twenty months of fieldwork, I alternated mainly among these four communities.

I collected dream narratives from peumafes, and recorded the settings and contexts in which the dream narratives occurred. Because shamans are considered the most important dreamers, most of the information about peumafe dream narratives came from ten shamans located in three of the areas I studied. In addition, I gathered information from other peumafe, the reservation chiefs, and ritual leaders. Since dreams play an important role in the preparation, organization, and performance of rituals, I participated in and gathered information from numerous rituals during the period of fieldwork. The interviews were conducted in Spanish as well as in Mapudungun, the native language. The material about the general Mapuche theory also comes from a larger study I conducted on Mapuche dream interpretation.

Good rapport was the most important ingredient of the data collection process, because without being trusted and regarded as a lamgnen, or sister, I could never have done this research. A factor that initially helped me to establish rapport with the Mapuche was my physical appearance. As a woman of Asian and Hispanic origin, I have a strong physical resemblance to the Mapuche. I was regarded, in their words, as a “Mapuche from the North who had
forgotten the Mapuche way.” Their trust and friendship helped me
to become part of their daily sharing and interpreting of dreams as
just another member of their families.

This study was influenced by dream research conducted during
the past ten years.\(^1\) I subscribed to the notion that societies have
their own psychological theories that influence their daily behav-
ior.\(^2\) Of particular importance for this research is the distinction
between the dream phenomena and the dream reports.\(^3\) Dreams
themselves are private, whereas dream reports are public. Dreams
are viewed as multimodal experiences that are transformed into
narrative form by the dreamer in the process of recalling the expe-
rience. The process of recalling the dream is the first editing. By the
time the dream is told to others it has been edited many times and
adjusted to cultural norms. Through the editing process the dream
acquires cultural shape and meaning. Dream narratives cease to be
individual and private; they become shared public experiences.

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**WHO ARE THE MAPUCHE?**

The Mapuche Indians of southern Chile are one of the largest
contemporary indigenous populations in South America. Their
number was estimated at five hundred thousand in a 1988
census.\(^4\) Although the Mapuche live on reservations and in close
proximity to Chilean society, they continue to maintain their eth-
nic identity. Mapudungun (mapu means land and dungu means
language), the Mapuche language, is a key aspect of their culture
that both establishes and reinforces ethnic identity. The knowl-
edge of the language is considered one of the most important cri-
tera for being Mapuche.\(^5\) Cestmir Loukotka identifies the
Mapuche language as a stock belonging to the southern division
of the Andean tribes.\(^6\) He finds five dialects among the Mapuche
of Chile, of which four are still spoken. In spite of this dialectical
difference, researchers have found the Mapuche language to re-
present a linguistic unity.\(^7\) Mapuche from different dialectical
regions are able to communicate among themselves. Although
today most Mapuche are bilingual, conversations among them
are primarily held in Mapudungun; Spanish is rarely spoken
among Mapuche and is reserved for conversations with huinca
(non-Mapuche). Children first learn Mapudungun before being
taught Spanish in government schools on the reservations.\(^8\)

Mapuche reservations are located in three distinct environ-
mental zones: along the Pacific Ocean, west of the coastal range, and in the Andean foothills. Vast portions of Mapuche territory were once covered by deciduous forests, but due to lumbering, fuel use, and clearing for agricultural purposes, large areas are now deforested. Many of the reservations are situated in a central valley between the coastal range and the Andean foothills. Ximena Bunster presents some limited statistics from a range of physical habitats: Inland areas range from 53 inches to 75 inches of rainfall annually, with an average temperature of 53 degrees Fahrenheit. Coastal areas range from 99 inches to 113 inches of rainfall with slightly cooler temperatures. Furthermore, the farther south a location is the greater the rainfall and the cooler the temperature.

The Mapuche land is known for its high frequency of seismic and volcanic activity, as well as for tidal waves. Chile is one of the countries with the highest seismic activity in the world. It is estimated that more than fifteen thousand seismic movements have occurred in Chile since 1543. Many of those earthquakes have registered higher than 8 on the Richter scale, with the highest, in 1960, registering a magnitude of 8.5. These environmental conditions have strongly influenced Mapuche cosmology and worldview. Mapuche myths abound with volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, and tidal waves. Many Mapuche rituals are conducted in response to such cataclysms, which are often interpreted as punishment by the gods and the ancestral spirits for deviating from the traditional path.

Mapuche houses, or ruka, are built in small clusters of three or four, known as lofche, but single dwellings are also common. The rukas are generally oval or rectangular, fifteen feet wide, thirty feet long, and eight to ten feet high. These houses are often oriented in an east-west direction, with a single doorway facing east. There are no windows, only openings that serve as smokeholes at opposite ends of the roof. Located near the center is a fireplace, which provides the only artificial source of light and heat. Cooking is done over an open fire.

The social life on each reservation is essentially that of a small community. In her study of seven reservations, Ximena Bunster makes it clear that reservations are actually comunidades, small kinship-based holdings given to the Mapuche by the government.

Mapuche society is organized around the principle of patrilineal descent, that is, people trace their primary kinship connections to the ancestors and living relatives of their fathers. Groups based on patrilineal lineages are formed by those individuals who are able to trace their descent through the males from a common
ancestor. All men have membership in large, localized corporate lineages. Deceased members are considered to be the ancestral spirits of the lineage. A relatively recent important social change affecting the Mapuche is the establishment of lineage leaders as chiefs of the entire community or reservation.\textsuperscript{18} The *lonko*, or chief, has authority in the organization of political, economic, religious, and marital affairs. The *lonko* has the assistance of a council of elders who are the heads of lineage branches. These elders share the responsibility of organizing and conducting the rituals.

The Mapuche practice patrilocality, that is, after marriage a Mapuche woman moves to her husband’s reservation. The tendency is for a married man to continue living on the reservation of his birth, although usually not in his father’s household.\textsuperscript{19} Men are encouraged to marry a matrilateral cross-cousin—a man’s mother’s brother’s daughter.

The Mapuche religion is shamanistic. Their religious practitioners, the *machi*, are shamans, who can heal and who serve as mediators between the divine and the ordinary world. Through trances shamans are able to communicate with their spiritual helpers and obtain aid in healing people and conducting rituals in the community.\textsuperscript{20} For the past century Mapuche shamanism has been considered primarily a female profession. If men wish to enter this profession they must take on female attributes. They have to change their names to female ones, dress like women, and marry men. The husband of the shaman is called *dungumachife*, and he plays the role of decoding the sacred language spoken by the shaman when the shaman goes into a trance. He translates the language of the shaman only when the shaman is conducting healing rituals. For other types of rituals the shaman speaks without the help of the dungumachife. People enter the shaman profession after having a series of dreams and visions, usually after suffering a long and dangerous illness. Novices can be any age, but usually are in their teens and are trained by an older shaman. The training lasts about four years, during which time the novice lives with the senior shaman. During this time the novice learns to diagnosis illness, heal with different herbs, play drums, ventriloquize, sing ceremonial songs, and induce trances. At the end of this period the shamans display their knowledge to other shamans and the community in a ceremony called *machiwullun*. The shamanic ceremonial paraphernalia consist of a drum, or *kul-trun*, and a carved pole, or *rewu*. Periodically shamans assist each other in ceremonies and get together to restrengthen their shamanic powers.
For treatment of illness and disease most Mapuche consult both shamans and western doctors. The machi are extremely popular among the Mapuche and also among the Chileans, who consult them for all kinds of problems.

The Mapuche division of labor is based on sex and age. Men head the households, and with the help of their older sons take care of the agricultural tasks and the selling of produce in the local markets. Men also supplement their incomes by working for wages. Traditionally agriculture was women’s work but nowadays men are the principal farmers of crops of European origin to be sold in the local markets. Women perform the domestic tasks, but they also work in the gardens and sometimes sell fruits and vegetables. The children help their parents by taking care of the animals and performing domestic chores.

The Mapuche family is a self-contained unit of production and consumption. Families have rukas, parcels of land, for their own use, and animals and materials for their needs. However, for major agricultural tasks—such as the harvest, which requires many workers—the Mapuche engage in mingaco, or communal work. This type of work is done with the help of relatives and friends. Lately its importance has diminished with the introduction of mechanized harvesters. The main crops planted by the Mapuche are wheat, potatoes, barley, oats, linseed, and rye. Wheat is the most important cash crop because the farmer can obtain credit based on a future harvest, and wheat can easily be sold at retail or wholesale prices. Credit is often used to purchase essential material possessions. In addition to planting crops, the Mapuche raise goats, sheep, and chickens for home consumption. Fishing and hunting supplement the household diet. Wage labor is a recent phenomenon; Mapuche men often work three or four days a week for Chilean landowners.

**HISTORY OF CONTACT:**

**THE MAPUCHE AND THE HUINCA**

The Mapuche are renowned for maintaining their ethnic identity despite centuries of invasion and colonization, and despite recent attempts at integrating them into the Chilean society. The Mapuche successfully defended their territory against all invaders—Incan,
Spanish, and Chilean—beginning with the pre-Hispanic Incan expansion into what is now southern Chile and ending with the beginning of the reservation system in 1884. Today the Mapuche territory covers the provinces of Arauco, Bio-Bio, Malleco, Cautin, Valdivia, Osorno, and Llanquihue in the south of Chile. Most of the population is centered in the provinces of Cautin and Valdivia, between 39 and 40 degrees south latitude.26

The Mapuche, also known in the ethnographic literature as Araucanian, had their first contact with the Spaniards in 1540, when Pedro de Valdivia invaded Chile and founded Santiago. Valdivia began colonizing Chile via the encomienda system. Through this system Valdivia granted large areas of land and native labor to his officers as payment for their services. Louis Faron reports that one of Valdivia’s captains received a grant of thirty thousand Indians, who were used to pan gold.27 The Mapuche resistance had its formal beginnings in the first great uprisings of 1554. For the following three hundred years the Mapuche were at war with the Spanish and Chilean nationals. The traditional Mapuche social organization of small kinship-based groups allowed for effective guerrilla warfare against invaders.

For four centuries the Mapuche endured not only a war with the Spanish and Chilean soldiers but also an intense campaign of Christianization by Jesuit, Franciscan, and Capuchin missionaries. The shamans actively fought the campaigns of the missionaries.28 Until the end of the nineteenth century the shamans played an important role in the failure of the evangelization of the Mapuche.

The Chilean army, emerging victorious from Chile’s war with Peru and Bolivia, finally defeated the Mapuche in 1884, and the Mapuche were placed on reservations. The settlement on reservations and the incorporation of the Mapuche as Chilean citizens caused major changes in the economic, social, and political life of the Mapuche.

An important economic and social change was the switch from a primarily mercantile cattle-raising economy to an agricultural one. The Chilean government promoted agriculture among the Mapuche. This change altered the gender labor division that had existed prior to the reservation system. Mapuche men, who previously were in charge of warfare and cattle raising, took over the agricultural work that had previously been done by women; the men became full-time agriculturists.

The Mapuche also experienced changes at the political and judicial level. The lonko, or lineage heads, lost their judicial power over crimes committed on their reservations since the Mapuche
were placed under the judicial system of the Chilean government. In addition, the lonko became the representatives of their communities to the Chilean authorities. This role has diminished throughout the twentieth century, however. Except for those times when the Mapuche have organized themselves against the land-tenure laws passed in this century, their representation in government has been minimal.

The religious organization of the Mapuche changed when the Mapuche were placed on reservations. Before the end of the war there were priests, diviners, dream interpreters, and healers. The only full-time religious practitioners who survived the many changes in Mapuche society on the reservations were the machi (the healers). The machi, however, also experienced changes. Before the reservation system the shamanic healing arts were performed by both men and women, but with the settlement on reservations shamanism emerged as a primarily female profession. As chiefs lost their political power in the twentieth century, shamans obtained more political power, and the management and performance of rituals became political activities. The shamans ruled by the ad mapu—the ancestral laws—and made attendance at all rituals obligatory. Participation in rituals makes an individual a Mapuche; if a Mapuche stops participating in rituals, then that Mapuche ceases to be a Mapuche.

**MAPUCHE DREAM THEORY**

Traditionally the Mapuche have been deeply preoccupied with the future and the unknown. To address these concerns they developed a number of divinatory systems, involving both physical and psychological phenomena. For instance, ethnographic and missionary reports have mentioned that the Mapuche examine hand and foot tremors and the flight of birds to predict the future. In fact, little is known about Mapuche divinatory systems, and many of these systems have fallen into disuse. Dream interpretation is the only one that continues to be of importance. Dreams are daily narrated and interpreted.29

According to the Mapuche, the action of dreaming involves movement, because the soul leaves the body, or *trawa*, of the sleeping person and wanders about. For the Mapuche—as for many other native societies—this journey outside of the body is the experience of dreaming.30 The Mapuche name for the soul engaged in
the activity of dreaming, thinking, or imagining is *pülli*, which is also used to describe the last stage of the soul’s transformation after death.\(^{31}\) Being able to travel long distances allows the *pülli* to reach the cosmic plains of *wenu mapu*—the land of the ancestors and the deities—after death, where it becomes integrated into the pantheon of the Mapuche ancestors. In life, *pülli* is responsible for the activities of dreaming, thinking, and imagining because these activities may take the soul on long journeys to the supernatural world.

The action of dreaming is performed by the soul of the sleeping person, who receives the information about the soul’s nighttime journey at dawn. Thus the narrative of a dream represents the waking verbalization of the story told to the dreamer by the travelling soul. A twenty-four hour period is divided into four parts: *antu* (day); *pun* (night); *liwen*, or *epewun* (dawn); and *ella trafja* (dusk). Dawn is the time period considered most important by the Mapuche; it endows them with health and vigor.\(^{32}\) Not surprisingly, dawn is the time when most of the important rituals are performed. Shamans pray at dawn in order to communicate with Wuñelfe, the goddess of the morning star.\(^ {33}\) Dawn is considered a pure and sacred time, when night and day are separated; the morning light protects the Mapuche from the evil spirits of darkness. Soul and body are united at this hour, and the soul narrates to the body the events experienced on its oneiric journey.

Dreaming is considered a potentially dangerous journey. The journey can be dangerous for the soul because the soul can be exposed to evil spirits. The soul can journey to the *anka mapu*—the land inhabited by the *wekufe*, or evil spirit—where an encounter between the *pülli* and evil forces might cause death, sickness, or loss of the soul. If, on the other hand, the soul encounters good spirits, then the dream is beneficial to the soul.

For most people the journey of the soul is passive because their souls lack volition and as such are subject to the actions of other spirits. The dream experience of shamans is different, however, in that their souls do have volition while journeying at night, and can therefore control their dream activities with the aid of spirit helpers. Because shamans must contact the supernatural in order to receive orders or advice, their souls are constantly exposed to danger and are considered to be stronger than those of ordinary people. It is believed that because of this constant exposure to the *wekufe*, shamans’ souls are often taken over by evil spirits, and the shamans themselves become agents of evil. For this reason shamans are usually feared, because one never knows when they
may become witches. Chiefs and ritual leaders are also seen as having strong souls, although to a lesser degree than shamans.

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**Dream Classification, Dreamers, and Dream Interpreters**

The Mapuche place dreams into two major categories: *wesa peuma*, bad dreams, and *küme peuma*, good dreams. This classification is based on the qualitative aspect of the prophecies announced in dreams; *wesa peuma* have negative outcomes and *küme peuma* have positive outcomes.

In Mapuche society everyone is considered capable of dreaming. Traditionally, however, there have been different categories of dreamers: (1) *peumafe*, the official dreamers of the community; (2) *pelon*, certain types of diviners; (3) *machi*, shamans; (4) *lonco*, chiefs; (5) *niempin*, ritual leaders; and (6) ordinary dreamers.

The *peumafe* (*peuma* means *dream* and *fe* means *skills*) are individuals capable of receiving important dream messages for the community from the supernatural world. In the days before the reservation system this role was taken by individuals whose exclusive function was to have dreams and to report them to the community. Thus they were the official dreamers, whose dreams contained supernatural messages about the future of the society. Sometimes this role was shared with other political and spiritual leaders of the group such as shamans, chiefs, or ritual leaders.34 Among contemporary Mapuche, however, no single person performs this function exclusively. Instead this role has been assumed and shared by the shamans and, to a lesser degree, by chiefs, elders, ritual leaders, and shamanic interpreters, or *thungumachifes*.

The *pelon*, or *peun*, were diviners, whose service as dreamers was considered to be of great importance to the society.35 They were able to discover thieves, criminals, witches, and lost objects. To locate lost objects through dreams, the chief means of divining, the *pelon* slept with an object that had been in physical contact with the items lost.36 They also intervened magically in traditional horse racing and were able to predict the outcome of races and games from dreams they had the night before the scheduled event.37 Among contemporary Mapuche the shamans have taken on the role of the diviners.

The machi, or shamans, have traditionally been considered
important dreamers. They use dreams to heal, to divine the future, and to receive supernatural information. Shamanic dreaming is qualitatively different from ordinary dreaming in that it is often effected by the use of hallucinogens. The term peuma is used for all types of shamanic journeys of the soul, including shamanic trances, which occur while the shaman appears to be awake, and nighttime dreams.

Other dreamers are the lonco, or chiefs, who make use of their dreams in various ways. All of their dreams preceding a political meeting are narrated for the purpose of finding a solution to the problems to be discussed at the meeting. Major decisions made by chiefs are almost always arrived at only after a thorough examination and interpretation of their dreams. In the past chiefs conducted rituals subsequent to experiencing bad dreams, because such dreams were taken as bad omens for the entire community. They also conducted rituals when other members of the community were plagued by bad dreams.

The niempin are the ritual leaders whose dreams are used to determine the date of a ngillatun. In the past the niempin used to communicate to the chiefs divine messages they received in dreams during the ngillatun.

Before the reservation system there were peumatupe, or official dream interpreters, whose profession consisted exclusively of interpreting dreams. There were other individuals called peunmatufe, who interpreted dreams for the purpose of searching for lost objects or animals. Nowadays the functions of dream interpretation are divided between shamans and wise elders. Difficult dreams are taken to a shaman or to someone known for his or her wise interpretations, but most dreams are interpreted by the individual dreamers and their family members.

The Context of Dream Narration

Dreams are narrated by both men and women. Stylized forms of dream narrative, however, tend to be in the male domain because oratory is considered a male art. Most of the good dreams narrated in public are those of the official dreamers of the society. The dreams of successful shamans and chiefs who are believed to have direct access to the supernatural are an important component of shamanic and political discourse and are therefore announced publicly. Dreams narrated by these official dreamers predict cata-
Shamans do not usually communicate their dreams with private meaning to others for fear it may enrage their auxiliary spirits, who are extremely jealous and consider their relationship with the shamans secret and exclusive. Shamans do, however, share with the community all dreams containing divine messages for the group and all dreams with therapeutic functions.

The Mapuche narrate dreams at informal and formal gatherings, as part of one of the five different types of narrations: (1) the weupin, or ritualized speeches, which are exchanged between men at the beginning and at the end of household visits. Hosts frequently narrate good dreams that predicted the arrival of the visitors; (2) the qulkatun, or improvised song narrative, in which the singer/narrator often includes the dreams preceding happy or sad events to illustrate the inevitability of the occurrence; (3) the nut’amkan, or historical narrative, in which the narrator recounts heroic deeds of Mapuche warriors or unforgettable events in the life of the narrator, and incorporates the important dreams of the Mapuche warriors or of the narrator; (4) the epeu, or folk tale; and (5) the daily conversations among family members.41

Shamanism and Dreams:
The Shamanic Journey

Shamanism in Mapuche society—as in other shamanic societies—is characterized by the practitioner’s ability to enter a trance, or ecstasy (peuma in Mapudungun) to communicate with the supernatural world.42 The shaman’s soul leaves the body and enters the realm of the supernatural, where the soul communicates with ancestors and gods. In the native theory the soul’s ability to journey to the supernatural is considered of vital importance for the practice of shamanism. Individuals in Mapuche society who dream vividly, have visions, enter into trances, and have survived prolonged illness are believed to have been singled out to be trained as shamans. All of these shamanic traits entail a journey of the soul outside the body. The journeys experienced in dreams, visions, trances, and illness differ in length and in the degree of transformation experienced. Death, of course, is the longest journey and involves the greatest transformation.

Death is viewed as the permanent separation of the individ-
ual’s soul from the body. This separation involves a journey that, if successful, could lead the soul to the wenu mapu, or nome-lafken—the place of final rest. In the journey to the wenu mapu the soul goes through a series of transformations. The first transformation occurs as soon as the individual dies and the am, or soul, of the living becomes an alwe, or wandering spirit. In this state, which lasts no more than four days, the alwe is in close physical proximity to the body, and is vulnerable to the actions of the evil spirits who try to capture it. If these evil spirits are successful in their pursuit, the alwe is transformed into a malevolent spirit who will act under the agency of the evil spirits and cause sickness and death. If the alwe manages to escape the actions of the evil spirits, it will be able to travel farther, for about one to four years, until it arrives at its final destination. In order to accomplish this long and difficult journey, the alwe needs to be transformed into pülli, which has the power to travel long distances. In the wenu mapu the pülli will be safe from the evil spirits and will become an ancestor spirit. As an ancestor spirit it will be able to direct the moral life of the Mapuche by giving advice to the living through dreams. Over the course of four years, then, the soul can be transformed into either an agent of evil or an ancestor spirit. Death is not only the end of the body but also the creation of either good or negative spirits that form an integral part of the life of the Mapuche. The good spirits guide the moral life of the Mapuche and the evil spirits cause sickness, misfortune, and death.

A dream is a kind of “lesser death” in the sense that it involves the temporary separation of the body from the soul and has the potential to transform the latter. This transformation can occur when evil spirits damage the soul or when good spirits give special powers or gifts to it. Shamans are the only individuals who have the power to direct their dreams; in great part this is due to their having survived a serious illness—a near-death experience in which their soul has been transformed. Having a near-death experience empowers the soul, and demonstrates that the soul is strong enough to travel a long distance without being damaged. This strength of the soul enables shamans to be the link between the living and the dead through their dreams. In their communication with the ancestors shamans can exercise the moral system, in which good and bad behavior are defined according to what is traditional, so the moral system of their ancestors is constantly being redefined through the dreams of the shamans.
SHAMANIC DREAMS
DURING CRITICAL TIMES

The Mapuche shamans play an important role as interpreters of critical situations. Through their dreams Mapuche shamans explain natural catastrophes and political events. The shaman’s central role in the management of important rituals becomes crucial during times of community stress, during periods of natural disasters and political repression, for example. Dreams play a significant role in Mapuche rituals because they provide the divine rules according to which the leaders keep the tribal law functioning. A dream legitimizes the political power of the dreamer in front of the community because it establishes a direct connection between the dreamer and the ancestors. In ritual ceremonies a dream plays the important role of legitimizing the voice of the dreamer and presenting the traditional and ideal behavior. This role becomes more important during critical times because the rituals are performed spontaneously, and they call for an explanation of the crisis and guidance through it. Crises requiring ritual ceremonies include natural catastrophes such as earthquakes, tidal waves, floods, and volcanic eruptions and social crises involving any form of social or political repression. A ceremony is usually performed to put an end to a catastrophe and to find an explanation for it. Shamans usually order ritual ceremonies after having a dream in which their ancestors explain the reasons for a calamity.

Dreams and Earthquakes

The Mapuche inhabit a seismically active part of Chile that is beset by intense earthquakes and devastating tidal waves. The Mapuche attribute these phenomena to Pillan, the god of thunder, and believe that when they occur a ngillatun ritual must be performed to appease the forces of nature. Human sacrifice is specifically called for to counteract the floods caused by tidal waves. Such beliefs are deeply rooted in Mapuche oral tradition, which abounds in narratives of cataclysms and associated ngillatun rituals. Preserved in this traditional lore are the accounts of how cataclysms announced themselves in dreams or visions, and how ngillatun rituals with human sacrifice were conducted. In the earliest available version of the Mapuche origin myth, collected by...
Rosales in the mid-seventeenth century, the survivors of the great flood sacrificed one of their children, cutting the child into four parts and throwing the pieces into the water. This made the waters recede. In a myth collected by Eulogio Robles Rodriguez the Mapuche celebrated their first ngillatun following a big flood caused by tidal waves. An orphan child was sacrificed on this occasion, and his blood was used for ceremonial purposes. In yet another version of the origin myth, collected by Humberto de Augusta at the beginning of the twentieth century, the cataclysm was announced to a shaman in a vision. She saw a little man emerging from the water and ascending to the sky. Later a jaguar descended to tell the shaman that a tidal wave would come, in which all non-Indians would die.

The following case is a dramatic example of the power of the shamanic use of dreams. This case illustrates how shamans use traditional knowledge to provide an interpretation of their reality and their relationship to the Chileans. In the process of interpreting a series of violent earthquakes in 1960 the shamans established rules of ideal behavior for the Mapuche. Another important aspect of this case is the fact that shamanic decision overruled the Chilean judicial system.

In 1960 a series of earthquakes shook Mapuche land with great force. The first earthquake happened on May 21, 1960, registering 7.5 on the Richter scale. It was centered in the northern section of Mapuche country, in the vicinity of Concepción. This powerful earthquake was followed by a second, stronger one of 8.5 magnitude, centered in the southern section of the Mapuche territory, near Puerto Montt. For more than three months the region continued shaking with several aftershocks of 7.5 and 8 magnitudes. Seven more volcanoes erupted in the Mapuche territory, and three other earthquakes appeared elsewhere in the area. The most powerful of the earthquakes hit the area of Araucania, where most of the Mapuche population is concentrated. Tidal waves swept away several towns. Thousands of people were killed, houses were destroyed, and entire towns were wiped out. The coming of these terrifying earthquakes was heralded by a red nova in the Chilean sky. It remained visible to the naked eye for one week prior to the onset of the earthquakes.

The shaman in the coastal region had a dream that predicted the earthquakes. One week before the earthquakes started she dreamed the following:

A bull was roaring. It went to the Maule river, and a skinny horse came down to the river, too. They started to fight in the ocean.
The shaman understood that the dream was predicting a horrible event that was going to affect everybody because of the image of the two supernatural combatants. She did not report the dream to the chiefs because she was unsure of what the event would be. Only after the first earthquake occurred did she realize exactly what the dream had meant.

The Mapuche conducted a series of ngillatun rituals to placate the supernatural powers, and the most notorious of these was held on the coastal reservation where the shaman whose dream had predicted the earthquakes lived. After a month of continuous earthquakes and tidal waves the people were in a state of complete panic. They had already conducted a number of rituals but the earth continued to tremble. Finally, the shaman had another dream. In it she was told that in order to placate Huen-Chao, the Father of the Universe, it was necessary to perform a human sacrifice. A boy whose mother was working in the region as a maid was chosen, and on June 5, 1960, he was killed during the ngillatun and his body was thrown into the ocean, according to tradition.50

The shaman who ordered the sacrifice of the child explained her dream to me in a series of interviews conducted from 1985 to 1987. She said that in her dream she learned that the 1960 earthquakes were an expression of nature’s anger at the oppressive attitudes and actions of the Chilean government toward shamans and traditional rituals. Nature’s anger had been aroused by the Chileans’ repression of traditional Mapuche culture. The huinca were being punished, and if the Mapuche wanted to save themselves they had to conduct a ngillatun in the traditional way. They had to behave according to the traditional way, not like the Chileans. The celebration of a ritual like the ones described in their myths was the best way to demonstrate to the gods the Mapuche desire to adhere to the ad mapu, or traditional laws. The shaman’s explanation demonstrated her fight against cultural oppression. After the shaman had informed the community in her role of official dreamer, the ngillatun ritual was performed in strict adherence to the dream and with the participation of the shaman’s community and other guest communities.

Shamanic dreams predicting earthquakes are usually narrated after the earthquakes have occurred. However, dreams that explain the reasons for the cataclysm are usually narrated as soon as the shaman has the dream. In announcing and explaining such events shamans exercise their political and religious power. Acting as the werken, or messengers, of the supernatural, they validate the
ad mapu and their own power. They acquire much personal prestige by serving as good dreamers.

I interviewed shamans from different regions, and most of them had narrated dreams of upcoming earthquakes. In fact, there is considerable rivalry among shamans regarding their roles before and after catastrophes. In the case of the earthquakes in 1960 there were many older shamans who believed that they had been the only ones to receive early dream announcements of the impending doom and accused other shamans of being false messengers.

People other than shamans also claim to have dreams predicting disasters. In their dreams Mapuche ideal behavior is constructed, too. Often their dreams not only contain requests for a ngillatun before earthquakes, but also may instruct the dreamer how to survive the cataclysm. On one reservation Matilde, an older woman, told me about such a dream prior to an earthquake. She was given to understand that the earth was Mother; she was very angry because the Mapuche were not behaving according to tradition. They were becoming like the Chileans. The dreamer was told that she had to pray during the earthquake because only people who prayed, without panicking or crying, would be saved. The Mapuche of the region were about to be punished because of their disrespect for Mother Earth. Earth had to show them who was in charge. Matilde said that she owed her life to the dream. All through the trembling of the earthquake she followed the dream’s advice and calmly prayed.

Dreams and Political Unrest

Under the socialist government of Salvador Allende, from 1970 to 1973, the Mapuche became actively involved in the tomas de terreno (land seizures) with the purpose of gaining back their lost land. During this period the Mapuche were able to recover approximately seventy thousand hectares of land. This land was returned to the Chileans in 1973. Their participation in these activities later led to political persecution by the Pinochet government that overthrew the Allende government in 1973.

After the bloody 1973 coup d’etat Pinochet took over the government for seventeen years. Pinochet wanted to purge the country of political leaders thought to be subversive. Mapuche leaders were identified as subversive and persecuted. Many were arrested or killed. The fortunate ones with international connections obtained political asylum in Europe and Mexico.
By the mid-1980s the Mapuche were frustrated with the results of Law 2568, passed in 1983, which required just one vote per community for land to be divided. This law threatened to end the Mapuche reservation life. It gave independent titles for land; thus individual owners could sell the land whereas communal owners could not. The Mapuche feared that all the land would be sold because of the inability of the Mapuche to pay the land taxes for individual owners. Without their land they would be forced to go to the cities.

The Mapuche leadership split, with one section forming alliances with the non-Mapuche political left and the other becoming part of the Centros Culturales, organized by the Catholic Church, which emphasized cultural independence and tried to maintain their ethnicity by supporting and advocating participation in the traditional rituals. The alliance to the Centros Culturales grew because of the fear of association with the outlaw left. Many younger men started to work for the Catholic Church as evangelizers. The young leaders of the Mapuche, most of whom were employed by the Catholic Church, were involved in this campaign to preserve their tradition. When they went to different reservations to evangelize, these young men used their visits to present a form of resistance to cultural and political oppression. The maintenance of traditional Mapuche values and beliefs was encouraged. These young leaders believed that if they maintained unity and recovered pride in their culture they would be able to resist the efforts of the Chilean government to divide land for private ownership. Shamans in particular were asked to maintain their sacred knowledge and keep it secret from strangers.

Several rituals were conducted from 1985 to 1987 because of the great political tension in the country. The Mapuche were frustrated with their situation, the new law threatened further land division, and they lacked the political guidance of their chiefs because of political persecution. Also, major natural catastrophes occurred during this time. Severe storms caused major floods. A series of earthquakes of 7.5 magnitude and the eruption of two volcanoes occurred. The flooding caused severe damage to the agriculture in the region. In addition, the comet Halley could be seen in the early mornings by the naked eye in southern Chile for all of 1985. The shamans of many reservations called for ngillatun to enhance cultural unity. The need to perform these ceremonies was legitimized by the shamans’ dreams. These dreams were narrated at the meetings by the chiefs of the communities involved in the celebrations. In the dreams the shamans were told the reasons why
the Mapuche were suffering and being persecuted. There were two main explanations: One explanation placed the blame on the Mapuche for violating the traditional laws of the ad mapu and behaving like huinca, and the other blamed the huinca as the direct cause of Mapuche suffering.

According to the first explanation the Mapuche were violating the traditions of their ancestors by becoming like the huinca—dressing like them and speaking like them. As one machi said, the ancestors were angry because the young people were speaking more Spanish than Mapudungun; drinking wine instead of mudai, the traditional fermented drink; and carrying radios to the ngillatun. Also, young women were cutting their hair and wearing pants and makeup. The only way to end the political crisis and the natural disasters was to behave in a traditional manner.

The other explanation blamed the huinca directly for the Mapuche problems—earthquakes and floods were seen as huinca persecution. Shamans recommended unity to defy the huinca persecution, and this unity was to be found in the unity of the Mapuche culture—a culture that was traditional and that respected ancestral laws. Because the epicenter of a series of earthquakes in 1984 was not in the Mapuche area but in the center part of the country, the shamans said the earthquakes were a result of the rage of their ancestors at the behavior of the huinca. The Mapuche would be saved from the next catastrophes by behaving in a traditional manner. Rituals had to be conducted according to tradition, despite the many governmental prohibitions against such gatherings because of the states of emergency that were common during the seventeen years of Pinochet’s government.

**The Dreams of the Rockkeeper**

The following case occurred during the most repressive phase of Pinochet’s government (at the beginning of his government in 1973 and during the final years, 1985 to 1987) in an area historically known for the rebellious attitudes of the Mapuche toward the Chileans.

A man I will call Manuel was the chief of one community and ritual leader of four communities. Fifty-eight years old in 1986, Manuel had two wives and twelve children. His community was known not only for its rebellious stand toward huinca, but also as one of the most traditional areas, where people still wore tradi-
tional clothing, tended to speak only Mapudungun, practiced polygyny, and regularly practiced traditional rituals. Poverty was also characteristic of this area. The soil was almost completely eroded, and over the past hundred years the best Mapuche land had been taken over by German immigrants. Consequently, the Mapuche of this area had been forced to work for wages as farm workers for their wealthy neighbors and gather rose hips in the nearby hills to sell to pharmaceutical companies.

In Manuel’s community there was a sacred rock that had been traditionally venerated by the Mapuche. The Mapuche believe that rocks harbor spirits that can endow their worshippers with power. This particular rock was believed to have rolled down from a hill and landed in a spring one hundred years ago. Every year people from remote communities came to pay homage to the rock and ask for favors. Shamans came to the rock to obtain power. The rock’s reputation as a healing and problem-solving stone had also reached non-Mapuche Chileans.

In 1973, soon after Pinochet’s military coup, Manuel was arrested for expressing antigovernment ideas and for his alleged affiliation with a leftist political party. He was tortured for several days and left for dead on a road. He survived his injuries, and soon after had a series of dreams about the sacred rock. He recounted the first of these dreams as follows:

I dreamed that the rock mentioned my name, and called me. It said, “Manuel, come here!” Then it spoke in Mapudungun; it did not speak in Spanish when it said, “I want you to be the person who will clean me.” “Hey,” I said to my family, “I had this big dream,” and I asked them to come with me. “Let’s go,” I told them, and I brought a bucket. And we went to clean the rock. I threw water at the rock, everywhere, and it became very shiny; it looked beautiful.

Manuel emphasized the fact that the rock identified him and spoke to him in Mapudungun—not Spanish, the dominant language. Manuel continued for several years to wash the rock periodically.

At the time of Manuel’s torture and subsequent dreams the municipality of the town near the reservation had custody of the rock. Although the rock was located on an Indian reservation, the non-Mapuche office of the municipality claimed the site in accordance with a law that granted rights over a strip of twenty-five meters along both sides of the road. The fact that the rock was located one hundred meters from the road did not seem to matter. The municipality began charging money for access to the road, and all visitors had to pay. It was a difficult and painful situation...
for the Mapuche; they had to pay for something that belonged to them. When the municipality installed picnic tables, non-Mapuche began to come on weekends to picnic and barbecue. The Mapuche had to watch non-Mapuche having parties and getting drunk at the sacred rock. Several years later, after a particularly rowdy party organized by the municipality, Manuel had a dream in which the spirit of the rock told him, “From this moment on, you will be in charge. You are a Mapuche, and only a Mapuche can do this.” After having this dream, Manuel interpreted his surviving the beatings and his subsequent dreams as indicative of a special mission assigned to him by his ancestors. Manuel communicated this latest message to his family and prayed in front of the rock.

Soon afterward Manuel had a third dream, in which the rock told him that things were going to change—that the abuse of the Mapuche would stop but he had to be very alert. All of these dreams encouraged Manuel to call for a meeting, even though social gatherings were not allowed under military rule. Only a few people came to his meeting. He told them about surviving the torture and about his dreams. He explained to the people that by surviving torture at the hands of the huinca he had shown the true qualities of a warrior. He had been transformed, and his soul was a strong one. His calling was similar to shamanic calling, but different in that his encounter with death came at the hand of a huinca. The dreams indicated that he had to become a warrior, fight for his people, and embark on a new mission. He encouraged people to go to the rock and pray without paying the municipality’s fee. On four separate occasions groups of people prayed at the rock without paying the fee, and they were not detained or beaten by the police. During the fourth visit people said they heard the sound of money falling near the rock during their prayer session. Manuel and the other worshippers interpreted this as a signal from God that they would win their fight with the municipality.

Soon after this fourth visit to the rock, Manuel had a fourth dream, in which the rock told him the following:

You heard the signal. You have shown faith in God. We will not allow them to abuse you. You will pray on your way to the rock. Tomorrow it will rain. You will protect yourself from the rain behind a bush and see how the road will move and shift from side to side. No vehicles will be able to pass over the road.

Manuel narrated the dream to the community, and it was agreed
that the fight might be difficult but God would be on their side. It rained severely during the day, and a jeep from the municipality tried to get to the rock. But because the road was very slippery the jeep got stuck in the mud. These events seemed to verify the prediction of Manuel’s dream. He assembled the community, and they decided to go to the municipality to claim the rights to their rock. The following day Manuel and some other members of his community went to talk to the mayor. They presented their case, and they prevailed. To this day Manuel is considered the official caretaker of the rock both by the non-Mapuche municipality and by the Mapuche community.

In the capacity of official caretaker—a position previously unheard of among the Mapuche—Manuel keeps the rock clean and burns the candles that people leave for the rock. He also receives some money from worshippers who want him to continue taking care of the sanctuary. He continues to have dreams, in which the rock gives him specific instructions on how to pray, how to organize rituals, and how to dispatch his task as the rockkeeper. The rock also advises him in matters related to his political and religious offices. Manuel says that the rock guided him in the process of becoming a Mapuche. According to Manuel, a proper Mapuche speaks the Mapuche language, is a warrior, and respects the Mapuche tradition. Through the dreams the rock reminded him that his “Mapucheness” made him different from the Chileans and allowed him to fight and to lead his people.

**CONCLUSION**

Throughout the twentieth century the peumafe, especially the shamans, have used dreams to communicate with their ancestors and to help the Mapuche understand themselves at critical moments. Dream narratives contribute to the development of a distinct ethnic identity, and create a cultural resistance to oppression and domination. This “self definition” is a rejection of the dominant society’s negative definitions of the Mapuche.

The dream discourses of shamans and community chiefs attempt to prevent ideological domination by others. These dream discourses help revive ethnic and cultural memory during critical periods. They remind the Mapuche who they are and who they were. The voices of the dreamers also perpetuate the notion of tradition. However, as the case of the Mapuche rockkeeper shows,
tradition is often recreated in the process of change. The definition of the Mapuche traditional way of life is often shaped by the context of time. As the Mapuche move forward, maintaining relations with the huinca, they may have to adapt their ethnicity accordingly.

NOTES

8. Ibid., p. 786.


17. Ibid., p. 356.


19. Ibid.


25. Faron, *The Mapuche Indians of Chile*.

26. Ibid., p. 10.

27. Ibid.


32. Olivera, “Chem peuma eimi trafja el horizonte onirico de los Mapuche de la agrupacion ancatruz.”


37. Ibid.


42. Eliade, *Shamanism*.

43. Cunill, *Vision of Chile*.


45. Ibid., p. 9.


47. Lenz, *Tradiciones e ideas de los Araucanos acerca de los terremotos*.


52. An explanation for the origin of this veneration can be found in the Mapuche myth of *tren tren* and *kai kai* (Tomas Guevara, *Tren Tren and Kai Kai*, 1911). Following a flood the Mapuche ancestors were saved from the evil snake kai kai by the mountain tren tren. However, not everybody escaped the waters: Some Mapuche became fish and others turned into rocks. Rocks outcropping in
the mountains are believed to be the petrified bodies of ancestors who were unable to save themselves from the flood. These rocks are called huitralcura (Guevara, *Tren Tren and Kai Kai*, pp. 88–89).


### Suggested Readings


