



# ALTERNAUTAS

(Re)Searching Development: The Abya Yala Chapter

Vol.11 – Issue 1 [July 2024]

## Decolonising Solidarity?

### 50 years of the Transnational Mapuche Advocacy Network

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Accepted: 24 July 2024 / Published online: 31 July 2024

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How to cite:

Garbe, S. (2024), Decolonising Solidarity? 50 years of the Transnational Mapuche Advocacy Network, *Alternautas*, 11(1), 182-208. DOI: 10.31273/an.v11i1.1491.

University of Warwick Press  
<http://www.alternautas.net>



ISSN - 2057-4924

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# Decolonising Solidarity? 50 Years of the Transnational Mapuche Advocacy Network

**Abstract.** While the 50th anniversary of the coup d'état against the government of Salvador Allende in Chile invites us to reflect on past and current experiences of solidarity between Latin America and Europe, the present contribution seeks to foreground the rather overlooked international solidarity efforts of and with the indigenous Mapuche. As a result of their forced exile to Europe after 1973, Mapuche activists began to organise themselves as a diasporic community in Europe and to form a transnational advocacy network in support of their people. This contribution aims to showcase how international solidarity of and with the Mapuche in Europe evolved over time, how they relate to non-indigenous, Chilean solidarity networks, and which underlying Mapuche notions of solidarity they reactivate in order to weave their transnational advocacy network. Therefore, this article seeks to make a contribution to critical understandings of solidarity and the hierarchies and differences involved in transnational solidarity action.

**Keywords:** decoloniality, Chile, Mapuche, solidarity, indigeneity.

**Resumen.** Mientras que el 50<sup>a</sup> aniversario del golpe de estado en contra del gobierno de Salvador Allende en Chile nos invita a reflexionar en experiencias de solidaridad pasadas y presentes entre América Latina y Europa, esta contribución busca poner el foco en los esfuerzos de solidaridad generalmente ignorados de y con el pueblo Mapuche. Como resultado de su exilio forzado hacia Europa luego de 1973, activistas Mapuches comenzaron a organizarse como una comunidad de diáspora en Europa y a formar una red transnacional para apoyar a su gente. Esta contribución tiene el objetivo de demostrar como la solidaridad internacional

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Mapuche en Europa evolucionó con el tiempo, cómo se relacionó con redes de solidaridad Chilenas no indígenas, y cuáles eran las nociones de solidaridad Mapuche que fueron reactivadas para tejer su red de apoyo transnacional. De esa manera, este artículo busca hacer una contribución a los estudios críticos de solidaridad y las jerarquías y diferencias presnetes en la acción solidaria transnacional.

**Palabras clave:** decolonialidad, Chile, Mapuche, solidaridad, indigeneidad.

## Introduction

It seems to be an historical coincidence that, on the day of the military coup in Chile, led by Augusto Pinochet on September 11, 1973, the portrait of an indigenous woman headlined the cover of the weekly newspaper, *Chile Hoy*. Margarita Paillán, a Mapuche woman, mother of seven children, and someone who at the time was called a ‘peasant leader’, had travelled to the country’s capital, Santiago de Chile, to denounce the persecution and torture of peasants and Mapuche people at the hands of the Chilean military in the Chilean South, the ancestral heartland of the indigenous Mapuche (Zerán, 2023). So, what does this coincidence tell us about the military coup in Chile, the persecution, murder, and forced exile of hundreds of thousands of Chileans, as well as the outstanding global solidarity movement with Chile after 1973? First, the story of Margarita Paillán seems to challenge the dominant timeline of the military dictatorship, dating from 1973 until 1989, as the repression against peasants and indigenous people in Chile was already spreading throughout the country before the military coup. Second, the prominence of a Mapuche woman on the cover of that newspaper highlights the fact that indigenous people were not only protagonists of the revolutionary developments in Chile until 1973, but also racialised targets of repression following the coup. Both the different timeline of state violence experienced in Wallmapu and the protagonism of indigenous organising urges us to reconsider our understanding of 1973: it requires us to interrogate why there is only a marginal place for indigenous actors and victims at the 50th commemoration of the coup and the global solidarity movement with Chile that followed.

The present contribution takes this absence as a point of departure to tell the story of the indigenous Mapuche solidarity movement that originated after 1973 in parallel, but also separately to, the Chilean diaspora and its solidarity network. By considering Mapuche actors as the ‘forgotten victims’ of the

dictatorship as well as the ‘forgotten protagonists’ of international exile and solidarity, this contribution discusses the conflicted relationship between (non-indigenous) Chileans and (indigenous) Mapuche within transnationalised expressions of solidarity, in which colonial relations between both groups are reproduced and challenged. Finally, within that context, Mapuche actors contribute notions and practices of solidarity from an indigenous background, enriching and challenging hegemonic and Western ideas of solidarity.

The following article seeks to analyse the transnational advocacy and solidarity network of the Mapuche people as part of their decolonial struggle for autonomy, territory, and plurinationality in contemporary Chile. The Mapuche are the largest indigenous group in Chile and, according to the latest census, about 10% of the population identify themselves as Mapuche (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas, 2017) – although recent studies show that Chileans increasingly identify themselves as indigenous (Centro de Estudios Interculturales e Indígenas, 2020: 9). Particularly since the formal return to democracy in Chile in 1990, the Mapuche struggle for the decolonisation of their territories, for political autonomy and ecological justice, and against state repression and persecution has become increasingly prominent both nationally and internationally. They employ a vast set of political strategies with different degrees of organisation to fight for their recognition as an Indigenous nation, for political autonomy and self-determination, or for the return of their ancient territory in the Chilean South, the Wallmapu (Pairican, 2014).<sup>2</sup> Among these strategies is the transnationalisation of their struggle by making their demands and the human and Indigenous rights violations by the Chilean state internationally visible and weaving relations of solidarity beyond Wallmapu (Garbe, 2022; Habersang and Ydígoras, 2015). This includes transnational networking, diaspora organising and the employment of a variety of protest strategies. This contribution therefore engages with a relatively small field of critical Mapuche studies beyond Chilean academia (Bauer, 2021; Haughney, 2006; Kaltmeier, 2004; Richards, 2013), of which only a few have focused on the trans- and international outreach of Mapuche mobilisation (Garbe, 2022; Habersang and Ydígoras 2015; Salas Astrain and Le Bonniec, 2015 ).

My research methodology follows activist and committed research approaches (Fals-Borda and Rahman, 1991; Juris and Khasnabish, 2013), which enable an ethnographic approach to transnational spheres of Mapuche advocacy. Between 2014 and 2017, I participated in a total of nine Mapuche solidarity events in Europe and conducted 17 guided interviews with Mapuche and non-Mapuche actors. On two trips to Chile, I critically discussed the transnational solidarity

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<sup>2</sup> Although the ancient territory of the Mapuche encompasses the Southern parts of today’s Chile and Argentina, this contribution foremost engages with the Chilean context.

activism with a total of 33 interlocutors and engaged myself as a human rights observer on the ground. With this approach, I conducted research both ‘in’ and ‘on’ solidarity: I actively engaged in transnational Mapuche advocacy as a non-Indigenous supporter, while at the same time seeking to ethnographically grasp the diverse forms, encounters, understandings and practices of transnational Mapuche activism. This methodological approach demanded constant reflection, as well as questioning my own role as a non-indigenous supporter of the movement, opening new, yet conflicted spaces of analysis and reflection (Garbe, 2023).

### **Decolonizing Solidarity Studies**

In this contribution I propose analysing the transnational activism and advocacy of/with the Mapuche through the conceptual lens of (international) solidarity by engaging with a growing and exciting field of (critical) solidarity studies (Busen and Wallaschek, 2022; Stiehler et al., 2023; Susemichel and Kastner, 2021).

General definitions of solidarity are based on the assumption that solidarity always involves a certain degree of cohesion between group members, with specific normative goals (Bayertz, 1998a: 11–12). Thus, solidarity mediates between the community and the individual; it is a form of community formation and entails positive moral obligations (Scholz, 2008: 18–19).<sup>3</sup> The political notion of solidarity that this article engages refers to international or intranational alliances within political, socio-cultural or ecological struggles (Süß and Torp 2021; Behr 2022), in which the involved actors come together in the pursuit of a specific goal, usually against a political antagonist (Bayertz, 1998; Scholz, 2008). Such an understanding of solidarity usually describes the experiences of international or domestic alliances among and between collectives that share a particular political ideology or class position. Yet, there is a certain tendency within solidarity studies to assume a commonality of the involved actors and leave the involved differences unacknowledged (Susemichel and Kastner, 2021; Zablotsky, 2023). In contrast, I argue that it would be more productive to focus

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<sup>3</sup> A widely accepted conceptual refinement of the different dimensions of solidarity further differentiates solidarity as a) a moral and universal idea, b) civic obligations, state responsibility and care within the modern nation-state, c) a term that describes social and communal bonds, and finally d) political solidarity in the struggle for social justice (Bayertz, 1998a; Scholz, 2008).

on what happens to political solidarities when the actors and groups involved do not share the same background, vulnerability, privilege or access to resources.

There are at least three thematic and theoretical fields in which the limitations and possibilities of solidarity across and beyond difference is debated: critical historiography, particularly that with an interest in anticolonial resistance and alliances, Black and Third World feminism, and, finally, post- and decolonial theory. To begin with, there are exciting historical investigations on expressions of solidarity and political alliances in the recent decades and centuries between groups and actors beyond difference. What these cases show is that actors and groups unite across racialised, colonial or ethnic differences, or differences based on citizenship or class in order to fight colonial forms of exploitation and domination (Featherstone, 2012; Gandhi, 2006; Gopal, 2019; Linebaugh and Rediker, 2013). In particular, expressions of solidarity with revolutionary movements across Latin America in the 20th century demonstrate how actors from the Global South have shaped creative understandings and practices of solidarity, fostering relations of South-South solidarity across differences (Stites Mor, 2022; 2013; Stites Mor and del Carmen Suescun Pozas, 2018). Focusing on the differences within solidarity relations helps us to recognise the agency of those groups who are the actual political protagonists in a common struggle, but who have often been silenced or forgotten – for example, students from the so-called ‘Third World’ during worldwide student protests of the 1960s (Hendrickson, 2022; Seibert, 2008; Slobodian, 2012). These examples not only bring such silenced and forgotten actors into the archive of historical experiences of solidarity, but also enrich the debate by including different forms of organisation and practices of solidarity, political analyses from a different perspective or other focal points of the struggles. The case of the Mapuche conveys how Mapuche actors themselves are the protagonists of the transnationalisation of their struggle who shaped international solidarity networks through their ideas and concepts.

One of the most challenging and productive contributions to the debate on solidarity, its universal conceptualisation, and its limitations and possibilities both across and beyond difference comes from critical feminist theory. Black feminists and feminists from the Global South in particular, such as bell hooks, Angela Davis, Audre Lorde and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, have questioned the universality of womanhood and gender-specific experiences in different contexts (hooks, 1986; Davis, 1983; Lorde, 2019; Mohanty, 1988). In this tradition, supposedly universal experiences are deconstructed as particular positionalities and interests. From this feminist critique follows the claim that, instead of perpetuating the “myth of equality” (Zablotsky, 2023: 112) within solidarity studies, recognising both “the historical and experiential specificities and differences [...] as well as the historical and experiential connections [...] from

different national, racial, and cultural communities” (Mohanty, 2003: 242). Only by recognising this difference would it be possible to consider solidarity not as an already given universal, but as a shared site of political struggle on which competing or complementing meanings of universality, as well as equal access to resources and the creation of shared commons, can be negotiated (Butler, 2000; Hark et al., 2015; Zablotzky, 2023).

Finally, post- and decolonial critiques have begun to complicate notions of solidarity across difference because of their situatedness within colonial and racist structures – rather than outside of them (Mohanty, 2003). They contributed, among other things, to understanding how notions of entire regions or societies in the Global South are influenced by colonial representations (Said, 2003), or how even well-intentioned advocacy reproduces paternalism and silences subaltern voices (Alcoff, 1992; Spivak, 1988). Therefore, solidarity can even reproduce these structures of colonial and racist inequalities as long as it is “non-performative”, that is, if it does not change the conditions under which solidarity relations occur, nor redistribute material resources (Ahmed, 2004). In the context of this post- and decolonial critique, few empirical studies have taken up the challenge of empirically examining specific expressions of (international or intranational) solidarity and transnational alliances with a focus on the racialised and gendered differences between the groups and actors involved (Conway, Dufour and Masson, 2021; Land, 2015; Mahrouse, 2014). And despite the recent resurgence of theoretical and political interest in solidarity, there is little ongoing research that emphasises the epistemic and critical potential of practices of solidarity and mutual aid by subaltern or affected actors, groups, and grassroots organisations.

This last argument points towards the possibility of decolonising solidarity studies. By engaging with practices and ideas of solidarity that are developed by subaltern, racialised or discriminated groups, particularly those that are nurtured by non-Western, or indigenous traditions of thought, it becomes possible to counter the underlying Eurocentrism within solidarity studies.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> This would be the case, when, for example, experiences, practices, and ideas of solidarity are limited to the Christian, white, and male experience within the modernisation state in the Global North. There is a certain tendency in solidarity studies, particularly within social and moral philosophy, to foreground such a Western and European genealogy of solidarity (see for example Brunkhorst, 2002; Grosse Kracht, 2021; Bayertz, 1998b). Ironically, what these perspectives do not seem to consider is that European philosophy since the Enlightenment “was produced in a regime of global synchronicity” (Conrad, 2012: 1014–15) and heavily influenced by Islamic, Chinese, or

Instead, a decolonising perspective on solidarity would take those differences and inequalities, which are the result of racial social stratification within colonial modernity (Mills 1997; Quijano 2014), as a point of departure, engaging with ideas, perspectives and practices of solidarity that have been historically marginalised and delegitimised within a “coloniality of knowledge” (Lander, 2005). To decolonise solidarity studies therefore requires seeking out an “transcultural translation” (Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2010: 17–36) between eurocentric and non-Western conceptualisations and practices of solidarity, without ignoring their asymmetrical relation or appropriating subaltern knowledges to hegemonic spaces. Bringing these reflections back to my ethnography on Mapuche solidarity networks, the practices and ideas of solidarity deployed by the Mapuche within their advocacy network are a valuable contribution to this dialogue.

### **The Transnational Mapuche Advocacy Network in the Making**

This section explains how Mapuche organisations and communities in Wallmapu and via diasporic groups have managed to transnationalise their struggle and situate it beyond the constraints of their domestic conflict with the Chilean state. What is noteworthy about these experiences is that international solidarity with the Mapuche has been and still is mostly among the Mapuche themselves, especially due to their diasporic experience in Europe<sup>5</sup> since 1973 in parallel but also separately to the (non-indigenous) Chilean diaspora and its solidarity network. This means that the international solidarity of and with the Mapuche is the result of the socio-cultural dynamics of their society, particularly its transnationalisation since the 1970s. The following section will mostly focus on diasporic solidarity efforts in Europe, although Mapuche organisations in Wallmapu have also had a crucial role in internationalising their struggle and building alliances beyond Chile.<sup>6</sup>

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Native American traditions of thought (Dussel, 2000; Graeber and Wengrow, 2024).

What this would mean for the concept and idea of solidarity, is yet to be investigated.

<sup>5</sup> It needs to be mentioned that the Mapuche exile is not limited to this region and, for example, today there are Mapuche advocacy groups in Canada and Australia.

<sup>6</sup> Despite the Pinochet dictatorship, many new Mapuche organisations were founded in the 1980s, especially in urban areas. They organised political and socio-cultural resistance against the dictatorship, often abandoning their previous affiliations within the (mostly left-wing) party spectrum and began to forge alliances with other actors and organisations at an international level. In 1975, for example, a Mapuche representative, Melillan Painemal, was elected Vice President of the *Consejo Mundial de Pueblos Indígenas*

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The repression and persecution under Pinochet’s military dictatorship forced many Mapuche to leave Chile. A significant Mapuche diaspora emerged, defined as “the population forced to leave Wallmapu, their national territory, for political and economic reasons” (Marimán et al., 2006: 261).<sup>7</sup> While a total estimate of 260,000 people with different socioeconomic, cultural and ethnic background left Chile and migrated to approximately 60 different countries (Rebolledo, 2010: 165), data on Mapuche exile remains scarce. There are at least 50 known biographies of Mapuche who emigrated to Western European countries between 1973 and 1978, to take up residence in Great Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Sweden, Switzerland and the Netherlands (Chihuailaf, 2002). Other studies speak of “hundreds of Mapuche” who were imprisoned during the dictatorship and then went into exile, but do not provide exact figures (Rebolledo, 2010: 181). Most of the exiled Mapuche were political leaders or active in peasant or student organisations as well as workers’ and teachers’ unions (Chihuailaf, 2002: 169). In that regard, it is also important to note that a still unknown number of Mapuche children were forcibly removed from their families in the 1970s and 80s and put out for (illegal) foreign adoptions, who also became part of the diasporic community.<sup>8</sup>

The diasporic experience of the Mapuche in Europe changed their own perception of the socio-cultural situation of the Mapuche in Chile. Godofredo Cotrena, for instance, was an active member of the left-wing revolutionary land movement and Mapuche organisations before and during the dictatorship. During his exile in Belgium in the 1980s, he realised that the Mapuche and non-Mapuche exiles from Chile were treated in the same way as ‘regular’ migrants, without taking into account the intersectional discrimination faced by the Mapuche (as exiles, leftists and indigenous people) (Rebolledo, 2010: 181–85). In exile, he

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(CMPI) based in Canada. Mapuche organisations from Chile also participated in the founding of the *Consejo Indio Sudamericano* (CISA) in Cuzco, Peru, and contributed to the development of common positions on anti-capitalist and ethnonational demands in 1980 (Marimán et al., 2006: 236).

<sup>7</sup> It is worth noting that due to the colonial experience in Chile, the Mapuche diaspora can be defined as all Mapuche who live outside their historical territory, meaning in other parts of Chile and abroad. In this article, I use the term Mapuche diaspora in the narrower sense of the word, to refer to those who define themselves as Mapuche and live permanently in “external” (Rebolledo, 2010) or “second exile” (Chihuailaf, 2002: 169), i.e., outside the nation states of Chile and Argentina.

<sup>8</sup> A recent study counted 488 children whose family and ethnic origins remain unclear (López, 2018). However, due to the socio-economic backgrounds of the mothers, it can be assumed that a considerable number of these illegally adopted children were also abducted from Mapuche mothers.

became aware of the normalised racism towards the Mapuche in Chile. He also recounted understanding that political parties (of the left) in Chile did not really understand the particularity of the indigenous or ethnic experience in their country.<sup>9</sup> Ultimately, in the diaspora, the experience of discrimination was transformed into pride of being Mapuche and created a sense of community among the Mapuche in exile. In this way, the Mapuche diaspora made an ideological shift towards a neo- or pan-indigenist ideology, similar to what was happening among Mapuche organisations in Wallmapu around the same time. The reason for this shift was the shared experience as an indigenous diasporic group, which contributed to a critical awareness of the colonial constitution of Chilean society.

An organisational milestone for the first generation Mapuche diaspora in Europe was a meeting of around twenty-five Mapuche exiles in London from 25 to 28 February 1978, during which participants positioned themselves as an autonomous political actor of the Chilean diaspora (Chihuailaf, 2002: 170; Rebolledo, 2010: 182). They hereby created a space to gather and exchange experiences of the repressive reality under the dictatorship and the discriminatory and racist structure of Chilean society. Ultimately, the meeting was the founding moment of the *Comité Exterior Mapuche* (Exterior Mapuche Committee, CEM), the precursor of today's organisational forms among the Mapuche diaspora. They published information in Western European newspapers and magazines, but also in publications of the (non-indigenous) Chilean diaspora, as well as in radio and television programmes. They also established their own means of communication and began to disseminate information in several self-published bulletins (Chihuailaf, 2002: 170-74).

The diasporic experience of the first generation of Mapuche in Europe represents an important precedent for the transnationalisation of their struggle. They developed a sense of community and belonging among themselves, while at the same time developing increasingly critical ideas about their situation as a colonised and discriminated collective in Chile. On this basis, they organised independently from political parties, Chilean exiles and European organisations, and began to form a solid organisational structure in the diaspora instead. What is more, they succeeded in transculturalising the European solidarity scene by importing their political ideas and forms of organisation, particularly their cultural politics of autonomy,<sup>10</sup> from Wallmapu to Europe (Rebolledo, 2010: 183; Garbe,

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<sup>9</sup> “I realised that the left-wing parties, the Unidad Popular and, of course, all the other parties as well, did not understand the indigenous problem ” (Godofredo Cotrena in Rebolledo, 2010: 184).

<sup>10</sup> The cultural politics of autonomy are rooted in the historical experiences of the Mapuche society and their struggle to maintain their autonomy during the Spanish invasion and later

2022: 101–42) When the CEM ceased its work in the mid-1980s, the Mapuche diaspora partially disintegrated, but until the early 1990s it increasingly organised itself on a national level in the respective countries to which its members had migrated (Chihuilaf, 2002: 176).

During my ethnographic research in Europe between 2015 and 2018, I visited and joined several solidarity events that were organised by members of the first and second generation of the Mapuche diaspora with the support of European NGOs. Members of the Mapuche diaspora in Europe form the organisational core of current socio-political and cultural solidarity efforts in Europe. It is remarkable how the Mapuche diaspora in Europe organises solidarity events independently and on their own terms, even if they are supported by other non-Mapuche organisations, groups, and activists. For example, they receive logistical or financial support from NGOs and individual non-indigenous activists are invited to participate. This means that the Mapuche (the diaspora or delegations from Wallmapu) are the protagonists of these events. They decide whom to invite, who would deliver talks and what the schedule should look like. Other solidarity actors, such as myself, are invited to these events and may be asked to take on certain support tasks, such as translating press releases, doing the grocery shopping or helping out in the kitchen.

The organisational forms and political strategies of today's second-generation Mapuche diaspora are a direct result of the experiences of the first generation that came to Europe from 1973 (Rebolledo, 2010: 185).<sup>11</sup> The political strategies of the first generation of the diaspora, such as the cultural politics of autonomy policies, were passed on directly to the second generation, sometimes

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the Chilean state as well as their general socio-political organisation, in which territorial units and communities seek to maintain their autonomy from each other. Today, most of the relevant and visible Mapuche organisations and communities share the struggle for autonomy, and, more recently, for self-determination and plurinationality, as a shared horizon for social change. Ultimately, autonomy is a central political and philosophical concept debated within contemporary critical Mapuche thought (Llaitul and Arrate 2012; Marimán, 2012; Tricot, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> Second generation Mapuche in Europe are mostly the children of those refugees/migrants who came to Europe in the 1970s. They were born in Europe and therefore claim a hybrid identity that is nurtured by their indigenous heritage, their place of birth, and a rejection of being subsumed as Chileans. Today's solidarity events organised by the Mapuche diaspora reflect this hybridity through their multilingualism (Spanish, Mapuzugun, and the respective mother tongues of the second generation, such as Dutch, French or German). Besides one ethno-biography about the Railaf Zuñiga family, who left Chile during the dictatorship in the 1970s and settled in the Netherlands (Casagrande, 2015), there is no research available on the second Mapuche generation.

within the same family structures. On several occasions, the Mapuche diaspora, which today coordinates solidarity with Wallmapu, explained to me how their parents trained them politically and taught them how to organise solidarity actions with Wallmapu in Europe. They emphasised that one of the most important lessons was how solidarity in Europe can be organised autonomously and independently of non-Mapuche organisations and people.

Similar to the 1970s and 80s (Kaltmeier, 2004: 365), the Mapuche diaspora today serves as a contact point for Mapuche representatives and delegates who travel to Europe to provide information about the situation of the Mapuche in Wallmapu at conferences, international organisations, smaller workshops or individual solidarity events. Jaime Huenchullán, a *werken*<sup>12</sup> of the autonomous community of Temuco, recognises the important role of the Mapuche diaspora in the transnationalisation of their struggle. He stated that, during his visits to Europe, he particularly appreciates the enthusiasm and logistical support of his “Mapuche brothers and sisters” (Radio Mapuche, 2015). The Mapuche diaspora is in close contact with Mapuche organisations and communities from Wallmapu, and thus supports the organisation and coordination of their visits to Europe. Activists from the Mapuche diaspora invite the delegations from Wallmapu to their homes, translate their speeches and organise most of the logistics. Of strategic importance are the solidarity groups of the Mapuche diaspora that live in cities where the headquarters of international or supranational organisations are located, such as Geneva or Brussels. The presence and support of the Mapuche diaspora provides representatives of Wallmapu with a space that is independent of non-Mapuche organisations and actors. The Mapuche diaspora thus guarantees that the delegations can maintain their cultural politics of autonomy, even when abroad.

One major difference to the first generation is that contemporary solidarity efforts of the second generation are characterised by a strong female presence, and many Mapuche women are protagonists of solidarity efforts. Therefore, the diagnosis that “women played a substantial role in the development of a reconstruction process of Mapuche society” (Leiva Salamanca, 2015:kl 168) also applies to the Mapuche diaspora in Europe.<sup>13</sup> This is because Mapuche women in Europe today not only play a prominent role in public solidarity events, but also recreate cultural practices such as preparing food (*zeuma iyael*) or talking together while drinking mate tea (*matetun*). In this way, Mapuche women in

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<sup>12</sup> A Mapuche communities’ spokesperson.

<sup>13</sup> Similarly, the multifaceted ways by which Mapuche women recreate cultural practices in the home in Santiago and how these enable the articulation of place identity in culturally modified post-migration urban spaces” (Becerra et. al., 2017: 14), for example in Santiago de Chile, might also be observed for the diasporic context in Europe.

particular are responsible for the “meanings, images, memories, wisdom, customs, and practices that constitute the basic inputs to recreate cultural practices.” In doing so, they “help maintain social configurations and ways of inhabiting public and private spaces that emphasise community solidarity, indigenous knowledges, and reciprocity” (Ibid., 14-15).

The prominent role of Mapuche women in public solidarity events organised by the diaspora intervenes in Europe’s political arena, a historically male-dominated space, by denouncing human rights violations or demanding indigenous and especially indigenous women’s rights (Richards, 2005). At the same time, their visibility rejects eurocentric and colonial ideas about indigenous cultures and societies as male-dominated and patriarchal, whose women must be rescued by white men (Spivak, 1988). Thus, the struggle of Mapuche women can be seen as part of a dynamic in which, in recent years, black and indigenous women from Latin America in particular have become internationally prominent figures in ecological struggles, their communities and the struggle for alternatives to neoliberal and patriarchal capitalism in the region.<sup>14</sup> The success of their resistance was reflected in the fact that they soon became the target of state repression or death squads (Hiner and González, 2023; Richards, 2005: 208–9). In the context of Wallmapu, the spiritual leader *machi* Francisca Linconao and community activist Macarena Valdés became symbols of indigenous, feminist and ecological resistance in the Global South.

### **Decolonising Solidarity?**

The making of transnational advocacy of and with the Mapuche, especially through the efforts of a Mapuche diaspora living in Europe, shows that there is a continuity of relations of solidarity between Chile and Europe that is different to and hidden from more prominent solidarity efforts with ‘the Chilean people’. Therefore, Mapuche solidarity activism has inscribed a difference and heterogeneity into the entanglements of solidarity between the two geographies, Chile and Europe, as well as introducing indigenous, Mapuche elements into the involved practices of solidarity. The effort of claiming their difference within solidarity action and the indigenisation of practices of solidarity are important

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<sup>14</sup> Prominent cases include the murder of Honduran activist Berta Cáceres in 2016 and the assassination of Rio de Janeiro city councilor and queer feminist activist Marielle Franco in 2018.

elements of how Mapuche advocacy decolonises relations of solidarity in the present context. This final section of the paper develops this argument further.

From the beginning of this piece, the story of Margarita Paillán has shown that a wave of repression had already reached Wallmapu and its indigenous population even before September 11, 1973. For the Mapuche, repression also continued after the dictatorship ended and Chile returned to formal democracy in 1989. The indigenous population living in Chile, especially the Mapuche, continued to suffer from and mobilise against state repression and persecution (Pairican, 2014). This means that, while the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, including the suspension of basic democratic and civil rights, was a historical exception for most sectors of Chilean society, it is rather another chapter in the asymmetrical, colonial history between the Chilean state and the Mapuche people. The different timeline of the Mapuche concerning the repressive reality in Wallmapu reproduces a crucial element of colonial imaginations and knowledges, in which indigenous realities have been relegated to an historical past and their coevalness denied (Fabian, 1983; Quijano, 2014). A critical, decolonising account of solidarity would need to address this “allochronism” (Fabian, 1983: 32) within international solidarity efforts, meaning that the repression of the Mapuche did not cease with the end of the dictatorship.

Actors of the transnational advocacy network of and with the Mapuche strategically pursue this approach. They embed the criminalisation, persecution, and violence against the Mapuche in Wallmapu within a more general and comprehensive critique of the military dictatorship in Chile from 1973 to 1989. The structural violation of human rights during the dictatorship has been widely recognised nationally and internationally and has been historically addressed by the Chilean state, for example through the National Commission for Truth and Reconciliation. From the perspective of the Mapuche and their solidarity actors, however, this “dictatorship has never ended”.<sup>15</sup> Alex Mora is Mapuche and has lived with his family in Cologne, Germany, for many years, where he is active in regional solidarity action with Wallmapu. An important motivation for his solidarity activism was the fate of his brother, who was tortured and killed during the dictatorship. He also experienced police violence himself when the Chilean police raided his house and beat his brother in front of his eyes. Alex Mora’s personal history shows how an already recognised framework of injustice in relation to the dictatorship serves to legitimise his own solidarity activism with the Mapuche. He also experienced first-hand how discrimination and repression unfold on a daily basis in Mapuche communities such as Temuicui, and how this is similar to the repression under the dictatorship.

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<sup>15</sup> Alex Mora, personal interview with the author, 28/11/2015.

Therefore, this framing becomes a powerful tool for transnational alliances to hold the current Chilean state accountable in light of past human rights violations. This strategy aims to counter Chile's self-portrayal as a defender and guarantor of human rights that has come to terms with its dark past. Jaime Huenchullán, *werken* of the autonomous community of Temucoicui, explains that international solidarity has a subversive potential because “they [the Chilean political elite] don't want their image to be stained”.<sup>16</sup> This particular strategy is an example of “frame amplification” (Snow et al., 2008: 257–58) in which an interpretative frame of a particular situation (e.g. the dictatorship and its crimes) is actualised (e.g. that the dictatorship never ended) and its memory strengthened (e.g. that similar offences are still being committed). On the one hand, more people within Chilean or international civil society can be reached. On the other hand, the positive post-dictatorial image of the Chilean state can be called into question, allowing activists to demand compliance with human rights, particularly the rights of the indigenous population .

Such a frame amplification has also been mobilised amongst the Mapuche participants during the popular rebellion in Chile in 2019, the so-called *estallido social*. While multiple and diverse social sectors of these protests framed their resistance as part of the struggle against thirty years of neoliberal democracy, Mapuche demonstrators positioned their own against 300 years of coloniality. At the same time, the fierce government repression of the *estallido* reminded many Chileans and international observers of the darkest years of the Chilean dictatorship. The images of the military police patrolling the streets of Santiago de Chile during curfew hours caused international and domestic outrage. But while these weeks brought back traumatising memories for a whole generation of Chileans, repression and human rights violations had never really ceased in Wallmapu. In other words, “everything we have seen since October [2019] in the centre of the cities (militarization, repression, assassinations, etc.) has had the Araucanía region as its laboratory, from 1997 to the present” (Zapata, 2021: 146). The success of such a frame amplification during the *estallido* can be exemplified by the fact that the *wenufoye*, the Mapuche national flag and a “symbol of ideological decolonisation” (Pairican, 2019), as well as the face of Camilo Catrillanca, a young Mapuche who was killed by the police in 2018, were prominently displayed during the manifestations.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Personal interview with the author, 20/03/2016.

<sup>17</sup> For a further discussion on how the ‘Mapuche issue’ gained visibility during the *estallido* see Gordon-Zolov and Eric Zolov (2022).

The “colonial difference” (Mignolo, 2000) of the Mapuche within the international solidarity efforts with Chile and Wallmapu is a terrain of constant negotiation and contestation. For example, despite the Mapuche diaspora’s crucial role in current solidarity efforts in Europe, there is a struggle to recognise their efforts as Mapuche. For example, in a public interview with Andrea Cotrena, a Mapuche woman living in Belgium, during a solidarity event in The Hague, the interviewer refers to her as part of the “Chilean delegation” (TeleSur, 2015). Andrea Cotrena rejected this categorisation and introduced herself as a Mapuche woman living in Belgium. This is significant, as she explicitly refused to be subsumed under Chilean ethno-nationality. With her contribution, Andrea Cotrena also challenged essentialising ideas that the Mapuche identity is fixed to a specific territory. Instead, she insisted on the continuity of the Mapuche struggle within the diaspora, linking her endeavours to those of her father, a renowned Mapuche leader: “The struggle continues”, she stated (TeleSur, 2015). At the same time, she positioned herself as a member of a collective by speaking in the first-person plural. In doing so, she established a translocal connection between the Mapuche in Wallmapu and in the diaspora, but also a continuity between her parents and her own generation.

There is thus a struggle on the symbolic level within international solidarity efforts, in which Mapuche activists criticise those attitudes and discourses of non-indigenous people who want to subsume the Mapuche under a (Chilean or Argentinian) nationality. Such practices are an expression of the nationalist paternalism of non-Mapuche Chileans or Europeans, which is now being reproduced in solidarity work. This critique was articulated during my ethnographic research by several Mapuche solidarity actors living in Europe. In one extensive conversation, Llanquiray Painemal, a Mapuche woman and political activist living in Berlin explained this problematic constellation.<sup>18</sup> Particularly on a discursive level, she pointed out that white Chileans often talk about indigenous people in a possessive way, and “say, for example, ‘oh, our Mapuche’”. Her critique also applies to the fact that, on several occasions, non-Mapuche Chileans have shown up at solidarity events in Europe with a Chilean national flag without realising that “the Chilean flag has a colonial history”. In contrast, the Mapuche flag, according to Llanquiray Painemal, has the “meaning of an anti-racist, anti-colonial struggle”.

Nationalist and paternalistic appropriation is also expressed through experiences in which “they [the Chileans] want to speak for you, but don't want you to speak” or claim to be the “representatives of the Mapuche in Europe.” These acts are, by no means, limited to the symbolic realm, but can have very

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<sup>18</sup> Personal interview with the author, 16/06/2017. The following quotes are retrieved from this interview.



concrete material consequences. For example, non-Mapuche actors and organisations receive donations or funding for supporting ‘the Mapuche cause’ but manage those funds without necessarily being accountable towards their indigenous partners. Mapuche communities and organisations in Wallmapu seem to be aware of this danger, and therefore demand transparency and accountability not only from NGOs but also from members of the Mapuche diaspora. Andrea Cotrena<sup>19</sup> revealed that “people there [in Wallmapu] think that we [the Mapuche diaspora] are making extra money [...], taking advantage of the Mapuche name and things like that”.

Maybe the most important intervention in the struggle over representation by the transnational solidarity efforts of the Mapuche is that they seek to challenge and transform the racialised stereotype of the Mapuche as domestic terrorists. Since the late 1990s, right-wing media, such as the Chilean newspaper *El Mercurio*, have openly and directly associated the political mobilisation and resistance of Mapuche communities and organisations with criminal, terrorist, violent and aggressive acts (Kaufmann, 2010). These discourses are widely accepted in Chilean society and, as a result, the causes of the conflict in Wallmapu are attributed solely to the Mapuche. In particular, the term “Mapuche conflict” was introduced in this context, thus unilaterally attributing responsibility for the conflict in Wallmapu to the Mapuche. One expression of this discourse is the association and equation of the Mapuche mobilisation with armed insurgent organisations such as the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) in Colombia, the Euskadi ta Askatasuna (ETA) in Spain or even internationally-operating terrorist organisations such as Al-Qaeda (Cayuqueo, 2012: 74–76; 110–12; Kizugünewtun Independencia, 2017). These discourses not only criminalise the political expressions of Mapuche society, but also contribute to legitimatising their repression and persecution based on the Anti-Terror Law 18.314, a legacy of the dictatorship. Therefore, a central goal of the Mapuche is to challenge this negative stereotype in Chile and beyond.

Hence, decolonising solidarity is not only about claiming an indigenous difference within the political practice of international solidarity efforts, but also about introducing indigenous (Mapuche) elements into the different symbols, practices and understandings of solidarity. To begin with, the international solidarity efforts of the Mapuche are not limited to advocacy work within supranational organisations or collaborating with human and indigenous rights NGOs. The common solidarity endeavours of the Mapuche diaspora are inextricably linked to the feeling of being part of and belonging to the Mapuche

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<sup>19</sup> Personal interview with the author 06/06/2017.

community. This contributes to rebuilding the social fabric and cultural traditions of the Mapuche abroad. Not only do many of the solidarity events organised by the Mapuche diaspora have a political dimension, but they also serve to celebrate the survival of Mapuche culture, to revive, remember or restore it as part of a broader decolonial struggle (Smith, 2008: 142–63). For example, activists from the Mapuche diaspora wear their traditional clothing and jewellery, use Mapuche instruments like the *trutruka* and *kultrun*, and openly display the wenufoye, the Mapuche flag, at solidarity events. Solidarity events are also organised according to certain Mapuche rituals and begin, for example, with the short welcoming prayer, *jejipun*. The celebration and display of Mapuche cultural symbols is an essential element of community-building within the Mapuche diaspora. These efforts not only shift cultural symbols into the European context, but also reaffirm the social fabric of the Mapuche diaspora, reactivating cultural traditions in a transnational sphere, and transculturalising typical Western iconography of international solidarity.

Moreover, a widely practised Latin American protest tactic of indigenous origins has been transferred to the European context: the so-called *funar* (from the verb *funar*, which in Chilean Spanish is a synonym for ‘protesting against someone’), which originates in post-dictatorial Chile. At that time, human rights organisations and relatives of the dictatorship’s victims began to denounce suspected or known human rights violators, perpetrators or complicit politicians in public, who have not been prosecuted and were able to move on with their lives after the dictatorship ended. To *funar* someone would mean to show up at their homes and workplaces and set up small manifestations on a regular basis in order to disrupt their daily lives, by standing in their way, whistling and shouting at them, chanting slogans of the human rights movement, and holding up the portraits of the victims. A *funar*’s aim is also to inform bystanders, neighbours, and co-workers about the committed crimes and hereby making the denounced people’s post-dictatorial lives increasingly difficult. In that way, for example, the denounced person no longer appears at their workplace, or moves out of their homes. This type of manifestation therefore manages to publicly name those responsible for human rights violations, insists on their judicial prosecution, and remembers the dictatorship’s victims. Interestingly, the word *funar* originates from Mapuzugun, and can be translated as ‘to make something go bad’. This protest tactic was used by the Mapuche and Chilean diaspora in Europe to protest at Chilean embassies and consulates. The tactic became particularly significant when activists accused former Chilean President Michelle Bachelet of her government’s human and indigenous rights violations. This was particularly prevalent during her frequent trips to Europe in her last term in office (2014 to 2018), when demonstrations were organised against her on several occasions, for example in Stockholm, Geneva, Cologne and Leuven.

International solidarity requires constant negotiations and meetings, not only with political antagonists but also among allies. Being in dialogue has been introduced to me as a central cultural technique by Jaime Huenchullán, *werken* of the autonomous municipality of Temucoicui, by emphasising that the Mapuche have always been a “very open people for dialogue.”<sup>20</sup> For him, the willingness to engage in dialogue with non-Mapuche is a historical constant of his society. Consequently, the historically and cosmologically rooted ideas of dialogue can be understood as a central cultural technique of the Mapuche for the current framework of international solidarity. First, the importance of conversational practices within Mapuche culture is visible on a small scale through the practice of *matetun*, collective mate-tea drinking, which is “gregarious, relaxed, affectionate, and empathic gatherings that involve discursive practices” (Becerra et al., 2018: 13–14).

In addition, the concept and function of a dialogue is described by the Mapuzugun term *rapiñelwe*, which can be translated as ‘space of the middle’. *Rapiñelwe* is “a cultural expression whose function is to mediate between the parts concerned”, for example “between people where a certain type of alienation has created a certain imbalance” (COTAM, 2003: 1166). The institution of *rapiñelwe* initiates a dialogue between the parties concerned in order to restore the balance. This willingness to engage in dialogue can also be found, for example, in the socio-political institution of *trawvn*, a space and moment of self-organised encounters with dialogues, open decision-making and transparent agreements (Nahuelpan, 2016: 114). In the institution of the *koyang*, which has since been translated as *parlamentos*, bilateral negotiations between the Mapuche and the Spanish colonial powers between the 17th and 19th centuries, the dialogue between the involved parties was highly relevant to diplomatically resolving conflicts (Contreras Painemal, 2010: 52–55). What is important about such notions of dialogue is that they require a previous negotiation about the terms of the conversation. Representatives of the Chilean government have repeatedly failed to provide spaces in which a dialogue between Chilean and Mapuche representatives can take place on a neutral and horizontal basis.

Finally, Mapuche actors introduce understandings and conceptualisations of solidarity that are different to Western ideas of solidarity and reactivate an indigenous cosmology. During my ethnographic fieldwork, several Mapuche interlocutors were reluctant to frame the struggle in support of their people, be it in Wallmapu or in Europe, as solidarity, and were critical of the eurocentric

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<sup>20</sup> Personal interview with the author, 20/03/2016.

underpinnings of that concept. The internationally renowned Mapuche poet Rayen Kvyeh expressed this critique the following way:

The Western concept of solidarity is when you give something to someone. We do not give something to someone, we share. You share the pain, you share the land, you share the food, you share love, beliefs, the struggle of belonging of being Mapuche – that is solidarity. It is not that you give the other [something]. Mapuche solidarity does not have a price, it does not have a currency. It does not translate into currency. It does translate in facts, in care, in love, in work, in being there. That is solidarity.<sup>21</sup>

She hereby associates the Western concept of solidarity with paternalistic and hierarchical relationships. Instead, according to her interpretation of Mapuche cosmology, solidarity is part of belonging to a group and takes place within the communal life, as a member of this community. This understanding of solidarity therefore cannot be detached from the social context in which they take place and is linked to a specific collective. This conceptualisation of solidarity is not exclusive but demands the establishment of sustainable, intimate and reciprocal social relations *before* engaging in a common political struggle. Such an understanding of solidarity can be expressed with the Mapuche principles of *keyuwvn*, working together, and *mingako*, collective work in the community. With these principles in mind, it becomes clearer why the Mapuche diaspora in Europe puts such a strong emphasis on community building within their common solidarity efforts and ‘weave’ non-indigenous supporters into their social fabric.

## Conclusion

In the context of the 50th anniversary of the military coup in September 2023 in Chile, this article aimed to foreground the rather overlooked and hidden solidarity efforts of and with the indigenous Mapuche, and to discuss how it evolved over time. In doing so, it sought to reinscribe indigenous agency, protest strategies, and visions of solidarity into the memory and legacy of international solidarity between Latin America and other parts of the world. The international advocacy efforts of the Mapuche hereby weave relations of solidarity beyond the colonial constraints of the Chilean nation-state and decolonise dominant understandings of solidarity. This includes, on the one hand, claiming an indigenous difference within the very political praxis of international solidarity, particularly within the (post)colonial relation between Mapuche and non-indigenous Chileans. On the other hand, it means introducing indigenous, in this case Mapuche, elements into different symbols, practices and understandings of

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<sup>21</sup> Personal interview with the author, 01/03/2016.

solidarity, which urges us to think of solidarity beyond eurocentric categories, and on the basis of different cosmological and epistemological perspectives.

Indigenous biographies, such as the story of peasant leader Margarita Paillán or Mapuche solidarity activist Alex Mora, show there is a different timeline of repression and persecution for Mapuche people in Chile. While the suspension of basic democratic and civil rights during the dictatorship was a historical exception for most sectors of Chilean society, it is rather another chapter in the asymmetrical, colonial history between the Chilean state and the Mapuche. Also, the repression during the *estallido social* in 2019 was for many Mapuche yet another episode of colonial violence, the only difference now being that it was brought to the countries' capital. To scrutinise the colonial difference within relations of solidarity between Latin America and other parts of the world is not only insightful for the case of the Mapuche, but would also help to articulate a critique of the colonial relations between progressive governments and indigenous minorities in other parts of the continent. Historically, this might concern the problematic relationship between the Sandinista government in the 1980s and Nicaragua's indigenous Miskito minority in the Caribbean coast, or contemporary conflicts between state-led extractivism and indigenous mobilisation against it. At the same time, highlighting the indigenous, Mapuche influence within the history and legacy of solidarity with Chile shows how different mediums, practices and strategies are mobilised within solidarity action. In the present case, this includes indigenous symbols and practices such as traditional Mapuche clothes and rituals, protest tactics such as the *funa*, political strategies of dialoguing, and finally alternative understandings of solidarity through Mapuche notions of *keyuwvn* and *mingako*. Such cultural resources have not only contributed to understandings of solidarity with Chile, but also make it more diverse and transcultural. Finally, the evolution of transnational advocacy of and with the Mapuche, especially through the efforts of a Mapuche diaspora living in Europe, shows that there is a continuity of relations of solidarity between Chile and Europe that is different to and hidden from more prominent solidarity efforts with 'the Chilean people'. This helps to explain the fact that the 50th commemoration of the coup d'état and the celebration of 50 years of solidarity with Chile in different countries in 2023 sadly was lacking an indigenous, Mapuche perspective. Bringing the history and the different timeline of the Mapuche and their solidarity efforts into the discussion therefore might contribute to creating a shared transcultural memory, in which both the atrocities of the dictatorship and of continued colonial violence in Wallmapu are recognised.

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