

The worldwide need of change: the environmental issue in the Mapuche cosmovision as a source of inspiration.

Michelangelo Temporin

*(...) Las culturas indias
al conquistador se lo advirtieron:
La madre tierra no tiene dueño
y el agua no tiene precio
y está dispuesta
Para el imponente Lobo
y para la bella libélula
Para el presente humano
y para la fugaz flor. (...)*

Emiliano Robles Becerril, in “*El agua y el libre mercado*”, 2010.

Nowadays, the environmental issue is presented as the greatest problem to address on a global level. Indeed, since the nineteenth century, the industrialization process has aimed to increase the worldwide production and consumption. This process has damaged the Earth natural cycles significantly and has led to all the events that can be placed under the label of ‘climate change’. In this regard, it seems important to underline the role of nature in the Mapuche cosmovision as it provides a concrete example of how, starting from an “epistemology of the South”, it is possible for the Western and global society to learn, and, consequently, change people’s behaviour towards environmental issues. According to the *Comunidad Williche Kiyemtuaín*, the Mapuche people consider water, land, mountains, volcanoes and the natural elements in general, as not only life-giving, but also as life themselves, owning an essence or spirit¹. In the Mapuche cosmovision,

¹ P. Rumian Lemuy, *Desde la Cosmovisión Mapuche: El Agua del Mapu está en grave peligro*, in “Fütawillimapu-archivo, espacio mapunche williche en internet”, 22 de marzo de 2012.

indeed, the *Ngen-ko* (water's spirits) is *Newen* (energy) and does not exist alone, but is in symbiosis with other natural components, constituting the *Itrofillmongen* (biodiversity)².

The Mapuche cosmos can be distinguished in a vertical dimension (metaphysics) and a horizontal one (nature). In their traditional belief system, the number four is seen as the element of equilibrium: four are the sacred divinities; four are the skies; four are the corners of the earth; four are the elements (water, earth, air and fire)³. Therefore, from a Mapuche perspective, the natural environment is not only regarded as a vital value for human consumption and animals and plants survival or as a resource generator of other productive and energy services (as it is in the dominant Western neo-liberal vision). Instead, in the Mapuche world, nature in general, and water in particular, are *mollfün* (blood), the *Ñuke Mapu* (Earth) vital sap, from which all living beings descend⁴. In the ancestral Mapuche traditions, the natural elements were sacred. For instance, when Mapuche people wanted to cross a stream or a river, they had to make an *efku* (request) to ask permission to the *Ngen-ko*, water spirit protector.

Today we pollute our own planet, throwing garbage into the estuaries, into streams and watercourses. Nowadays there is not the same respect and reverence that in the past characterized the Mapuche's behaviour and their way of thinking. We cannot look into crystal-clear water anymore, in which once it was possible to see the *Ngen-ko*'s image reflected, hence we are no more able to grasp its energy and life. Instead, we look into the water and see darkness, dirtiness, stagnant, pollution filled with various wastes that we throw into the water every day. Many years ago, the Mapuche walker took out his *srosronka* with toasted flour and with water from the stream, and, in such a way, the person was "revitalized" to continue his walk. Today, this is not possible anymore because the vast majority of watercourses are contaminated. The *machi* or *lawetujo* (Mapuche healers and religious authorities) sought only special spots, sacred and sheltered, like the *külako* or *püilyisruka* (Mapuche sacred natural places), in the most hidden and clean places, to make their remedies to mitigate the *kutran* (pain). These places hardly exist anymore and although it is possible to find *külako*, its waters have been contaminated and, without *nwen* (energy), its trees and land have been dried up. In the Mapuche communities, people say that "the water has hidden,

<http://archivo.futawillimapu.org/2012/03/22/desde-la-cosmovision-mapuche-el-agua-de-la-mapu-esta-en-grave-peligro-por-ponciano-rumian/>

² *Ibidem*

³ Francisco Antonio Encina, *Historia de Chile*, in P. Rumian Lemuy, *op. cit.*

⁴ P. Rumian Lemuy, *op. cit.*

and also the spirits have fled” because of the grazing, the agricultural production and the livestock, all the streams have been channelled and deviated, “violating” and “raping” the natural water course⁵.

In an interview I conducted with Hilda Llanquino Trabol, a former Mapuche university professor of *Trabajo Social* at the Universidad de la Frontera, she explained that “in our current time, the principal problem toward the environment is people’s lack of empathy and sensitivity”. This approach, in her opinion, directly stems from a neo-liberal and neo-capitalistic behavioural model which has been progressively perpetuated and spread by the West. As a consequence, people do not look at the moon, sun, sea and mountains as something sacred, to which we are in an intimate reciprocal contact, but rather they seek to find the best way to exploit them, in order to derive maximum profit. In this way, Hilda sustains that “we lost the contact with nature, with territory, and, hence, we lost the contact with ourselves”⁶. I think that only by “re-structuring” the consumers preferences and tastes as well as establishing a new consumption ethic through a “cultural revolution”, it will be possible for humankind to move towards a sustainable concept of progress and development, wherein natural elements, animals and people could coexist peacefully. This is the main challenge of our time.

⁵ *Ibidem*

⁶ Trabol Llanquino, Hilda. Personal interview. 17/7/2019, Temuco.