

From Rojava to the Mapuche Struggle

The Kurdish Revolutionary Seed Spreads in Latin America

Pilar Villanueva

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For several years, the Kurds have been at the forefront of a revolution in Western Kurdistan (Rojava). Their alternative system to capitalism has resonated all over the globe. Their society is organized according to Democratic Confederalism, an ethical form of political organization that brings together ideas from libertarian municipalism, social ecology, and feminism.

In Latin America, one of the places where Rojava thought has taken root is Wallmapu, the ancestral territory of the Mapuche people, the largest indigenous group in Chile and Argentina. The Mapuche have struggled for centuries against repression, displacement, and dispossession of their territory and lands.

Originally, some Chileans along with others from the Mapuche diaspora, inspired by the Kurdish struggle – and especially the Kurdish women’s freedom movement – came together to form a solidarity committee called the Comité de Solidaridad con Kurdistán, Región Chilena y Wallmapu (Committee of Solidarity with Kurdistan, Chilean and Wallmapu Region).

This committee is a communicational platform that disseminates information about the Kurdish struggle and works to bring their model of organization to the Chilean and Mapuche territory. Meanwhile, in Argentina, a country which also denies the Mapuche people their right to self-determination, leftists and feminists have travelled to Kurdistan, and written books about their experiences with the alternative political system being built in the region.

Rojava is the Kurdish area located in Northern Syria where people are developing what may be one of the most important revolutions in history. In the middle of a military repression maintained by the Turkish and Syrian government and the Islamic State, Kurdish women and men are fighting together for their freedom and that of their people.

The indigenous people from the mountains in the northern Middle East – the Kurds – are currently participating in an armed struggle to protect part of their remaining territory, which includes three regions: Kobane, Jazira and Afrin. This last region was recently occupied by the military forces of the Turkish state⁽¹⁾ and the Kurds are trying to recover it.

In the midst of this resistance, the Kurds are creating a new political, social, and economic system called Democratic Confederalism, which is based on the freedom of women and the construction of a direct democracy.

⁽¹⁾ towardfreedom.org

This is a project for the radical democratization of society, and proposes, as their leader Abdullah Ocalan puts it in his book *Democratic Confederalism*, “political self-administration, in which all groups of the society and all cultural identities express themselves in local meetings, general conventions, and councils. Such a democracy opens political space for all social strata and allows diverse political groups to express themselves.”

Just as Kurdistan has been denied its existence and has been forced into the territorial boundaries of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria – so too is the ancestral territory of the Mapuche people colonized by the states of Chile and Argentina. Today, only 5% of this territory is officially recognized as Mapuche territory in Chile. Most of Wallmapu is under the control of wealthy families, the state or corporations that extract the region’s natural resources.

This contemporary disregard for the right to Mapuche self-determination is nothing new. Since the Spanish colonization, the Mapuche people have experienced forced migration and territorial dislocation through countless oppressive and unjust acts perpetuated by the Chilean state. Much like the Kurds of Turkey, the Mapuche have witnessed the dispossession of their land under the violence of the national police and military. Like Kurdish children, Mapuche children have been shot and killed by police.

The Mapuche people also likely felt common cause when in 2015, Sur, Cizre and other Kurdish regions in Turkey’s southeast were under military curfew. Araucanía, the region with the largest number of Mapuche, is also the one that has the strongest presence of military forces.

This indigenous group is currently fighting for their rights and their lands, but none of the governments have recognized their autonomy. In 1973, under the regime of Augusto Pinochet which lasted from 1973 to 1990, those Mapuche who were against the regime were tortured, exiled, or forcibly disappeared. Mapuche land is now undergoing a re-militarization under the right-wing Piñera presidency.

The Mapuche and Kurdish struggles, although taking place in two completely different continents and cultures, are more related than many may think. Both groups are indigenous people demanding the right to self-determination and fighting to protect their ancestral lands and control their own resources in the face of state violence. They are also, as a result, on the receiving end of the so-called, U.S.-launched, “war on terror.”

For the Turkish state and other countries which support Turkey’s oppressive President Erdogan, the Kurdish movement is a terrorist movement because it opposes the state with an armed struggle, even though their armed struggle was declared in response to relentless state violence against the Kurdish people (decades ago, they weren’t even allowed to speak their own language).

Indeed, the only Kurds supported by the Turkish state are those who renounce their own identity: those who oppose the freedom movement and support Erdogan. In Turkey, even social media posts critical of Turkey’s invasion of Kurdish-held territory in Syria can get someone accused of being a terrorist. Those who support Erdogan, however, are not seen as terrorists.

This situation is similar to what is happening to the Mapuche people in the South. Since colonization, the Mapuche have been split into at least three groups: those who are willing to leave their heritage behind if it means avoiding the continuous discrimination and racism towards them, those who are apathetic, and those who keep speaking their language (the Mapuche were also banned from speaking their language) and/or participate actively in political and social organizations to recover their lands and autonomy.

It is this last group, much like their Kurdish counterparts, which has gained the attention of the state. The existence of people who speak up for Mapuche identity has provoked the militarization

of the territories where not only more Mapuche people live, but where they are more politicized. To criminalize them, the state has come up with a specific law: The Antiterrorist Law, which was first created during Pinochet's dictatorship to arrest, torture or accuse activists who were against his regime. Since the dictatorship ended, this law has been used to put politicized Mapuche in prison or even sentence them to death.

Not so long ago there was the case of Machi Francisca Linconao, a healer, authority figure, and elder in the Mapuche community who was accused by the state after the wealthy Lucksinger-Mackay couple died in a fire. This couple lived in the middle of a region that concentrate the highest population of Mapuche people. They and their family own many corporations and are well known for being one of the richest families in Chile.

Machi Linconao was put in prison after two officials planted fake evidence in her house to frame her for this murder. Linconao, many believe, was probably being punished for what she was most known for: defending Mapuche land. After a hunger strike and political solidarity from across the country, she was set free and the state finally recognized that the "evidence" used to indict her was fake.

Chilean activists and some people from the Mapuche diaspora created the Committee of Solidarity with Kurdistan, Chilean and Wallmapu Region to collectively challenge such criminalization of the people's movements in Kurdistan and Chile, and to disseminate information about the Kurdish political project.

Lua Montiel, a member of this committee told *Toward Freedom* that they are working "to disseminate the Kurdish political project and the women's freedom movement which is at the base of it." Some of the activities the group organizes are courses of self-training for the members of the committee, and public workshops about Democratic Confederalism.

Women create meetings to talk about Jineoloji, which is "the creation of a women's paradigm." Jineoloji was a concept that came from the freedom struggle of the Kurdish women and seeks to give, according to Montiel, "women and society access to science and knowledge" and to strengthen the connections between those two.

The concept of Jineoloji is especially interesting for the women in Chile, Argentina, and other countries in Latin America, since, Montiel explains, "it helps us to overcome the western and colonial feminism, and to know a new experience of women's struggles, even more considering the war context that they are facing."

Similarly, in Argentina there are several people who support the Kurdish freedom movement and work cooperatively with other committees to spread the movement's ideas and bring them to Latin America. For instance, this committee held the book launch *Mujeres de Kurdistán, La Revolución de las Hijas del Sol* (Women from Kurdistan, the Revolution of the Sun's Daughters) written by the Argentinian authors Rom Vaquero Díaz and Leandro Albani.⁽²⁾

People in Latin America not only want to learn from the Kurdish experience but also bring this way of organization to Chile and the Mapuche people through workshops, editorials, and new organizing strategies.

As Nahuel Valenzuela, a member of the Chilean-Mapuche committee put it to *Toward Freedom*, this group "was thought as a broad leftist space that sought to add individualities as well as collectives from a wide range, especially those from anarchist areas and revolutionary and socialist tendencies. "

⁽²⁾ articulo.mercadolibre.com.ar

The Kurdish seed has already spread through Latin America and it is taking root among activists who are eager to collaborate. Like the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, the Kurdish struggle has inspired the formation of new groups, committees, organizations, and people who share similar experiences, and all appear to join what is just one fight: the struggle for our true freedom.

Pilar Villanueva is a feminist activist and the editor-in-chief in Zanganos Magazine.

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