# An excursion to the Mapuche people's resistance within the Argentinean punk scene

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### Abstract

By the end of the Argentinean dictatorship in 1983, the local punk scene enters in a new phase characterized by a discursive paradigm shift. The scene slowly adopts an intersectional form of radical criticism of the power relations based on categories such as class, gender, sexuality or ethnicity. From this perspective, a growing interest in the resistance of indigenous groups, such as the Mapuche communities, start to emerge in fanzines, lyrics and at musical events in the Buenos Aires scene, to later become appropriated by the punk scenes across the Patagonian urban areas in the nineties. The influence and adoption of the punk political discourse among the "mapurbes" and "mapunkies" activists implies new meanings of resistance. This article offers an overview of how these discourses are promoted and expressed throughout the post-dictatorship Argentinean scene. Then, it focuses the use and adaptation of punk as a syncretic tool of resistance and identity valorization by the Mapuche resistance and activism.

### Keywords

Argentinean punk, counterculture, Mapuche resistance, Patagonia.

### Introduction

Punk, as a countercultural movement, arose in the mid-seventies in the United Kingdom and the United States, causing shock within Western societies with its esthetic, performative, musical and discursive panoply that challenged the preexistent socio-cultural norms. Trying to define or categorize this cultural phenomenon is proving difficult and can turn into a

real roadmap to madness (O'Hara, 1999). However, some main roads can be easily drawn, especially when it refers to politics such as the promotion of freedom, resistance, anti-authoritarianism, and anti-establishment, anti-hegemony, non-conformist attitudes.

As Simon Frith (1977) claims, musical cultures provide a better analytical map of social life than readings habits or other cultural consumptions. It appears as a social product that has social effects, and is particularly relevant in the construction of social subjects, based on the way they interpret discourses. This facilitates the reading, understanding and interpretation of partly hidden transgressive forms of resistance.

Throughout these last decades, the punk culture slowly grew globally and was adapted into national and local scenes, as it is the case of Argentina. At first sight incompatible with the social context, the clandestine debut of the Argentinean punk is to be dated back at the beginning of 1978 in Buenos Aires, during the civic-military dictatorship (Flores, 2011). This early wave of Argentinean punk was characterized by a primal scream of rage and anti-oppressive discourses, a sense of emergency defined by the fierce repression the country was facing. After the reemergence of democracy in 1983, the paradigm shifts to an intersectional radicalism. The questioning of power relations, allows looking at the expression of subaltern and marginalized social groups on the one hand, and on the other at the scene positioning as another spokesperson of the struggles that those same groups carry out.

Considering the latest and through the analysis of specific sources, this article examines how the Mapuche struggle and resistance is made visible within the Argentinean punk scene, and how the punk ideology finds an echo within the Mapuche youth to express a new form of resistance and identity.



Fig. 1 Current Mapuche territory and ancestral territory claims.

Source: Rainer Lesniewski.

## The Mapuche resistance as part of the Argentine national scene discourses

Following the return of democracy in 1983, the Argentinean punk scene comes out of secrecy and enters a new phase. Despite a more favorable political context for the free expression of radical ideologies, the scene experiences abuse towards their members and activities (Makaji, 2014). However, at the same time a considerable number of bands emerge from the underground, the first fanzines are edited, records are released, and the scene progressively become politicized following anarchist principles and the global punk scene's ideology. A paradigm shift becomes evident within the scene which implies a withdrawal of punk's first wave characteristics, in order to adopt a radical political dimension that suggests the possibility of an alternative future (Cosso, 2015). Through this ambition of building new alternatives for living, materialized in the creation of discursive spaces, the scene's idiosyncrasies introduce an intersectional approach to its ideology. <sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, the scene expands to a greater extent both socially and geographically. With the success of bands reaching mainstream audiences, such as *2 minutos* or *Attaque 77*, the scene is no longer restricted to the uppermiddle/higher social classes youth and reaches out to all sectors of the population (Flores, 2011). Mainly localized in Buenos Aires during its early stage, the scene spreads nationwide with the gradual integration of local scenes from the major Argentinean cities, and later, medium-sized urban areas.

Within this new counterculture configuration and discursive context, the scene starts to make the struggle of Mapuche communities visible, among other social issues. In the second edition of the *Resistencia* fanzine<sup>2</sup>, edited in Buenos Aires in 1985, a regular political note entitled

Arctic&Antarctic, 14/82

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Coined by the American feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, the concept of intersectionality serves as a guideline to encompass the complexity of discriminations. Crenshaw's theorization rejects the compartmentalization and hierarchization of the major axes of interhuman social differentiation that are mainly categories of class, race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, age, and disability. The intersectional approach not only recognizes the multiplicity of the oppressive systems out of these social categories but also postulates their interaction in the reproduction of social inequalities. See Crenshaw, Kimberlé (1991): "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color", Stanford Law Review, 43 (6), pp. 1241-1299.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> The fanzine *Resistencia* was edited and published in Buenos Aires between 1984 and 2001. Among other fanzines, its role in the scene was decisive in disseminating information and raise political awareness.

"Resuciten Indios" lays the foundation of a social awareness based on an analogy highlighting that both, punks and indigenous are rebellious and fighting the system (Fig. 2).

Later, this same analogy is strongly being reaffirmed in a longer article published in 1988. Here, the columnist named *El Profe* (The Professor) revises sharply the *Civilización y Barbarie* myth<sup>4</sup>, its political rhetoric and its historical meanings. In addition,he puts into perspective the historical oppression suffered by indigenous communities with other marginalized groups to stress the mechanism by which the oppressive systems are interconnected:" [...] creo que lo que les pasó a los indios, a los negros y a los gauchos, que todo lo que pasóy siguepasandotiene mucho que ver con las 'historias' que sufrimos los punx, los gays, los heavies, los marginados de estesistema de mierda [...] No importa si sos ecologista, punk, gay, drogadicto o lo que sea. La cosa es si te bancas o no que haya un poder que te reglamente la existencia."<sup>5</sup> (Resistencia, 1988) (Fig. 3)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> "Resuciten Indios" (Resurrect Indians) was first written as a review of a band with the same name.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> The concept of Civilización y Barbarie (Civilization and Barbarism) stems from Facundo: Civilización y Barbarie the journalistic serial story written and published in 1845 by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento. Considered one of the foundational works of Argentinean literature, it offers an essay on the country's development, modernization, and culture. Although this polemic dichotomy helped implementing a new era for the country it also partly justified the Conquista del Desierto (Conquest of the Desert), a civilizing military campaign to establish dominance over Patagonia and Mapuche's ancestral territory in the 1870s. Also see Fig. 1.

<sup>5</sup> "[...] I think that what happened to the natives, negros and gauchos, everything that happened

<sup>5 &</sup>quot;[...] I think that what happened to the natives, negros and gauchos, everything that happened and still happens has to do with the "stories" we, punx, gays, heavies, marginalized by this shitty system, suffer [...] It doesn't matter if you are ecologist, punk, gay, drug addict or whatever. The thing is whether you tolerate or not that the power regulates your existence"

Fig. 2. First"Resuciten Indios" column (Resistencia, 1985).



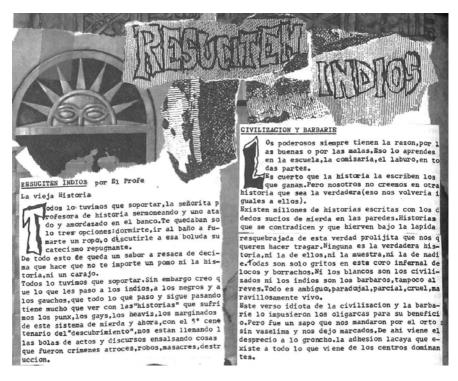


Fig. 3 "Resuciten Indios" column (Resistencia, 1988).

By 1992, a new column is written in the same vein by a Spanish columnist. In this occasion, the critics aim to the five hundredth anniversary of the Discovery of Americas and the celebrations planned by the Spanish and some Latin American governments. The columnist informs the reader about the tragic consequences of the Discovery for indigenous people throughout the continent and invites the punk communities and activists to join or organize countercelebrations (Fig. 4). It is worth mentioning, in other *Resistencia* editions, calls for donations or festivals along with organizations in solidarity with Mapuche communities. The importance of the fanzine *Resistencia* and its "Resuciten Indios" regular columns appear to be crucial in awakening consciousness within the punk scene towards the oppression suffered by, not only Mapuche, but indigenous people in general.



Fig. 4"Resuciten Indios" column (Resistencia, 1992).

Having focused this specific period of the Argentinean punk history, between the end of the dictatorship and the mid-nineties, allow us to observe the beginning of a critical consciousness toward the Mapuche struggle and resistance through discourses that still remain strong nowadays within the scene. Lately, this topic became one of the scene's main concerns, along with the fight for legal abortion, after the abusive evacuations of Mapuche activists occupying lands and the death of Santiago Maldonado. Moreover, despite the fact that most of these early discourses emerged from Buenos Aires, they were crucial in the influence they had for the shape of the future Mapuche punk scene and the creation of an ideological basis nationwide. Lately, the influence of the struggle took a new dimension, no longer restricted to discourses, by the integration of traditional indigenous music into the punk sounds. The most vivid example is the band Arboles en Llamas from Córdoba who invited the folk singer Rubén Patagonia to participate on their last album.

### Mapunkies, syncretism and resistance

At the beginning of the 1990', within this post-dictatorship punk context in Argentina, the dynamics of influence from the Mapuche activism to the punk scene take a new turnwith the emergence of Mapuche punk in the main Patagonian urban areas. Around 1992 and the counter-celebrations for the five hundredth anniversary of the Discovery of Americas, the activism starts to consolidate and gain public recognition. This moment of social unrest turns to be a fertile ground for the adoption of the punk culture by the Mapuche youth.

As mentioned above, this adoption is enhanced through transregional influences from the capital area, creating a circulation of a radical dialectic between both regions, each scene mutually reinforcing the shared feeling of resistance towards the institutional and hegemonic oppression. Nonetheless, taking into consideration the geographical location of the Mapuche territory, split between Chile and Argentina, it should be recalled the influence of the Chilean scenein this process. Interestingly, the Basque punk scene played also a key role in the ideological construction of the Mapuche punk one,

Arctic&Antarctic, 14/87

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Santiago Maldonado was a tattoo artist and activist who was found dead nearby the Chubut river days after the Argentine Gendarmerie dispersed a protest led by Mapuche activists against the Benetton group's activities in the Chubut province. Two main hypothesis surrounds the circumstances of his death: the autopsy results pointed to a death by drowning whereas human right organizations and the family say it is a case of forced disappearance. Maldonado's death unleashed a political storm and revived dark memories of the dictatorship's disappearance practices.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup>Árboles en Llamas (2015): San Expedito. Argentina: Inerme Discos.

sharing both the denial of their nations and culture by their respective state's institutions (Kropff, 2011).

Progressively during the nineties in Patagonian cities (Fig. 1) like Bariloche, Neuquén or General Roca (called Fiske Menuco in Mapudungun<sup>8</sup>) a cultural hybridization process takes place and gives birth to a syncretic culture and identity materialized by the neologisms *Mapunky* and *Mapurbe*. Coined by the Chilean poet David Añiñirby contracting the terms punk and urban with Mapuche, these portmanteau words reflect an updated set of reality and identityno longer tied to traditional, rural and folkloric stereotypes. The *Mapunky* syncretism is not only visible from an ideological perspective but it embraces fully the punk performative panoply with its music and esthetic. For instance, the use of traditional music instruments during shows and protests is becoming increasingly common, as well as typical do-it-yourself punk outfit (Fig. 5 and Fig. 6).



Fig. 5: Mapunkies during a protest, one of them carries a Ñolkiñ (Mapuche instrument).

 $<sup>^8</sup>$  From  $\it mapu$  'land' and  $\it dungun$  'speak', Mapudungun is the Mapuche's language.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> From the poem written both in Spanish and Mapudungun "María Juana la mapunky de la Pintana". See Añiñir Guilitraro, David (2009): *Mapurbe: venganza a raíz*: Santiago de Chile: Péhuen. <sup>10</sup> Due to the lack of opportunities in rural areas in the nineties, young Mapuche people settle in the city suburbs, generating debate on the possible dissolution of the Mapuche identity. See: Ramos, Ana and Walter Delrio (2005): "Trayectorias de oposición. Los mapuches y tehuelches frente a la hegemonía en Chubut", *Cartografías argentinas: Políticas indigenistas y formaciones provinciales de alteridad*, Buenos Aires: Antropofagia, pp. 79-118.



Fig. 6 Mapunkies wearing denim jackets with embroidered back patches on which "Resistencia Mapuche" and traditional symbols can be seen.

Source: Página12.

Early in the 2000', the *Mapunkies* and *Mapurbes*, also called Warriaches in Mapudungun language, manage to create discursive spaces of rupture to facilitate the reinvention of tradition as a mean of cultural resistance and survival. In this context, they, along with local artists and activists, launch the Mapuche Campaign of Self-Affirmation Wefkvletuyiñ ("We are Reemerging") in 2001.<sup>11</sup> Through media and art, this campaign promoted a public debate and awareness on Mapuche's identity and social condition. Its main goal was to bring to light the different realities faced by Mapuche communities, such as the eviction of Mapuche from their ancestral land, the sale of natural resources to foreign corporations, the abusive incarceration of activists accused of terrorism, the denial of their culture and language, the institutional racism, the marginalization and poverty. The campaign not only

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> More information about this campaign is available in English here: http://archive.hemisp hericinstitute.org/cuaderno/wefkvletuyin/campana\_eng.html.

addressed these urgent concerns but also to challenged commonly accepted perceptions of the Mapuche as simply a part of national folklore and rurality—a representation in which *Mapunkies* or *Mapurbes*, were never a part of.

The use of some punk ideology features as part of this campaign reveals a convergence, mentioned earlier, in the way that both are fighting the system and its institutions. Regarding the relevance of this connection and the need to update Mapuche's identity based on a new reality, Facundo Huala, <sup>12</sup>explains:

"[...] el punk cuando nació, nació desde un sector de la sociedad con una postura frente al sistema. Y por ahí que muchos de nosotros nos hayamos criado en la ciudad, que hayamos vivido en la ciudad y nos hayamos relacionado con esas cuestiones es lo que nos lleva a hacer esta conexión.[...] Obviamente somos rebeldes, somos rebeldes a un sistema, somos rebeldes a una forma de vida a la que fueron obligados a esta rnuestros padres.[...] Nosotros no vamos a estar felices y contentos, y nos sentimos reflejados en la actitud del punk. [...] Nos criamos en el barrio, el barrio sigue estando enTerritorio Mapuche, entonces desde ahí tratamos de volver a nuestra raíz desde el cemento. Por ahí suena como una idea medio poética, pero es así, desde el cemento volvemos a nuestra raíz. (...) Hay organizaciones que plantean que la única lucha válida es en el campo y que en algún momento de la historia los mapurbe van a tener que dejar la ciudad."<sup>13</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Also known as Fakundo Wala, Huala was a *Mapunky* poet before becoming the *lonko* of the Lof Cushamen (political leader of the Cushamen community). He is currently serving a 9 years sentence in Chile after being convicted on terrorism charges.

<sup>13 &</sup>quot;[...] when punk was born, it did from one sector of the society – with a stance against the system. The fact that many of us grew up in cities, lived in cities and related to these concerns is what led us to make this connection. [...] Of course we are rebels, rebels against a system, a lifestyle that our parents were forced to adhere to. [...] We are not going to be happy and content with that, and we see ourselves reflected in the punk attitude. [...] We grew up in the suburbs, the suburbs still remain within the Mapuche territory, so from there we are trying to go back to our roots from the cement. It might sound like a poetical idea, but it is what is, from cement we go back to our roots. [...] Some organizations suggest that the only worthy struggle is from the countryside and at some point in history the mapurbes will have to leave the city." Translated from "Tratamos de volver a nuestra raíz desde el cemento" in *Indy media Argentina*, (2004, April 3). See: https://archivo.argentina.indymedia.org/news/2004/04/187 161.php

As part of the Self-Affirmation campaign, a fanzine called Mapurbe'zine, <sup>14</sup> was also published between 2001 and 2006, drawing on the do-it-yourself ethos of punk culture (Fig. 7). Written in both Spanish and Mapudungun the fanzine shares political analysis, as well as historical rereadings and cultural issues. Worth noting as a symbol of this *Mapunky* identity, is the use of the letter "k" instead of "c"<sup>15</sup> when writing in Spanish, which also refers to the traditional use of this letter in the punk written slang (Fig. 8). With this creative and renovated means of expression that stem from the punk practices, *Mapunkies* can finally perform discursive codes specific to their language, allowing at the same time outsiders to identify with them and come up with reconsiderations on the Mapuche identity.

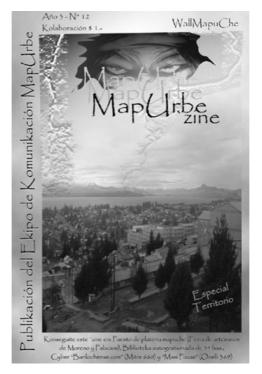


Fig. 7 Front page from MapUrbe fanzine, n/d.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup>A selection of articles is available online, see:

https://hemi.nyu.edu/cuaderno/wefkvletuyin/fanzine\_eng.htm.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> The letter doesn't exist in the Unified Mapuche Alphabet (Alfabeto Mapuche Unificado).

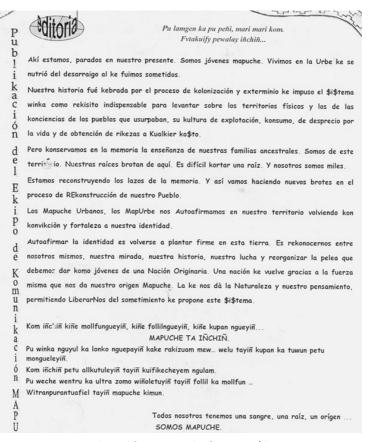


Fig. 8 Editorial from MapUrbe fanzine, n/d.

However, as mentioned previously, the campaign's attempts to question and debate on these subjects are challenged by some Mapuche activists and older generations deeply rooted in ancestral tradition and rurality (Kroppf, 2011). These insist on only one particular way of being Mapuche and resist, they do not see the ancestral struggle of their communities merging with urban and Western conceptions of resistance.

Although these debates on finding the best ways to tackle the issues they face torn apart the Mapuche movement for years, the resilience and commitment manifested by young urban Mapuche led them to progressively be accepted and active within the Mapuche's rural, ceremonial and political spaces.

### Conclusions

From the analysis above, the gradual circulation of the punk ideology, discourses and practices in Argentina can be seen beneficial for both the national and the Mapuche scene. The dynamism of the dialectic between the Mapuche resistance and the Argentinean punk in the nineties proves to be decisive for both movements by mutually feeding each other in order to shape themselves ideologically.

Nevertheless, the nature and results of this dialectic are different. On the one hand, the Argentinean scene by making visible, addressing and including the struggle of Mapuche people into its set of discourses, helps its followers to understand the mechanism of hegemonic oppression. That way, these discourses raise awareness among young people about other marginalized groups fights and ideologies, such as feminism, within an intersectional framework. On the other hand, the adoption of punk by the Mapuche urban youth originates syncretic identities (Mapurbe and Mapunky) and allows them to inject updated forms of resistance into the preexisting one. This process not only reshapes the Mapuche identity but can be defined as crucial for its valorization and survival, as well as for the dynamism of their resistance in Argentina. The Mapuche people being transnational, the same phenomenon can be observed within the Chilean scene, with the influence and support of famous national punk bands, such as Fiskales Ad-Hok. This process of updated resistance through the adoption, adaptation and expression of countercultures is not only being seen with punk but also hip-hop music.

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