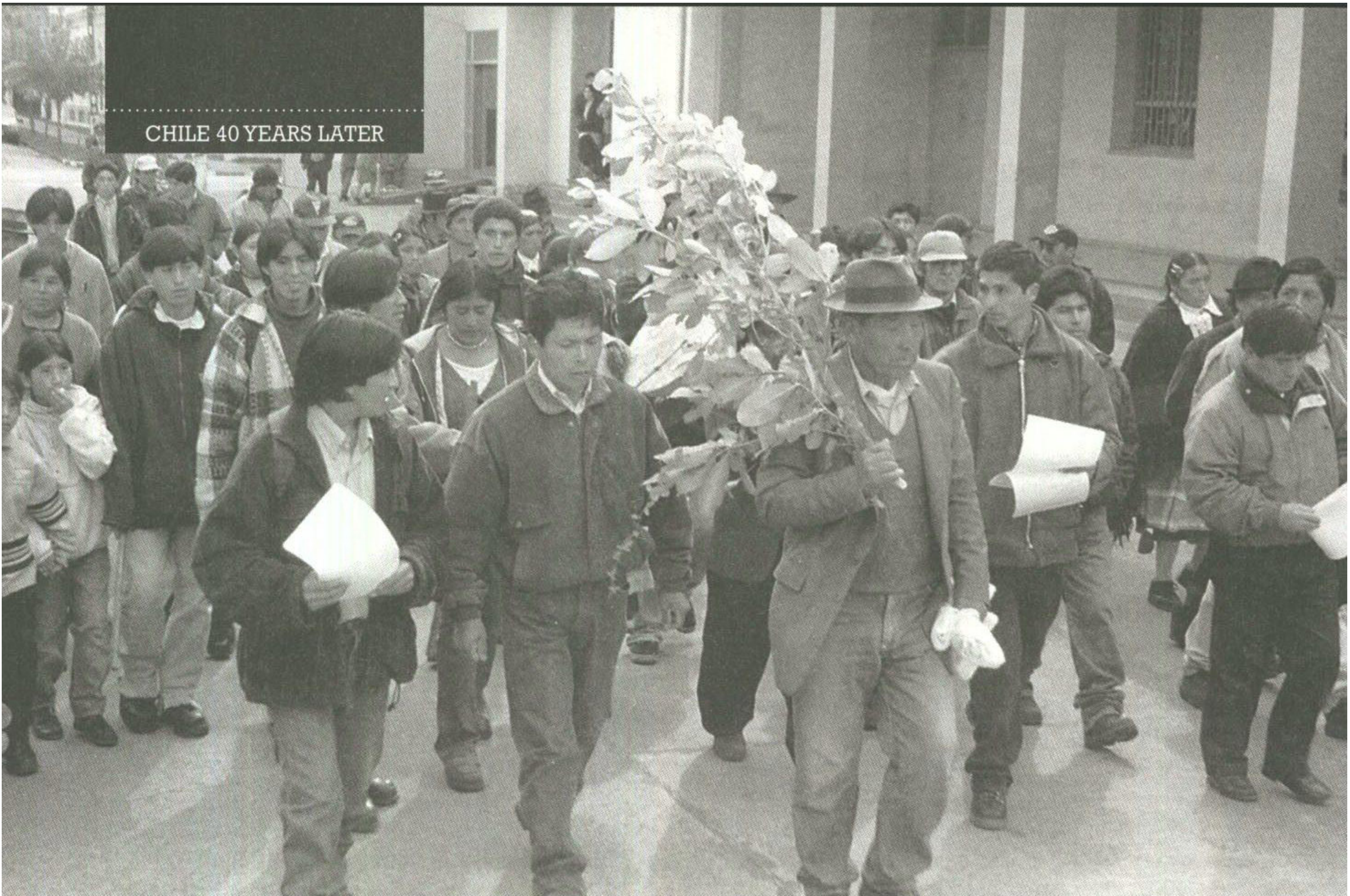


CHILE 40 YEARS LATER



A Mapuche march in support of a community-recovery activist charged with terrorism under a Pinochet-era law.

PHOTO BY ARCHIVE PERIÓDICO AZKINTUWE

The Mapuche Movement, the Popular Unity, and the Contemporary Left

PATRICIA RICHARDS

THE MAPUCHE MOVEMENT IS HEIR TO A LONG history of diverse, multifaceted resistance advancing ancestral claims against a colonialist, racist state and society. Movement claims, however, are contextualized by particular historical periods, and for

*Patricia Richards is an associate professor of sociology and women's studies at the University of Georgia. She is the author most recently of *Race and the Chilean Miracle: Neoliberalism, Democracy, and Indigenous Rights* (University of Pittsburgh, 2013), from which this essay draws. She thanks Rosamel Millaman for his incisive comments and observations.*

many Mapuche the Unidad Popular (UP) represented a real possibility to advance the long-standing demands of their people. Nevertheless, in some respects, Mapuche claims stood in tension with the class-driven focus of the Unidad Popular. Today, the ancestral, anticolonial character of Mapuche demands continues to inform the movement and its relations with the political left.

After the Mapuche's 1883 defeat at the hands of the Chilean state in the war denominated the "Pacification of the Araucanía," they were placed on *reducciones* (reservations), which made up only 6% of their original territory. By 1930, one-third of these reduced land claims had been usurped through trickery and other means.

Throughout the century, the Mapuche faced severe discrimination and suffered disproportionate levels of poverty. Allende's commitment to social justice thus held great appeal for many, and Mapuche gains were substantial during his presidency. The Mapuche benefited from agrarian reform under Jorge Alessandri (1958-64) and Eduardo Frei (1964-70), but especially under Allende's government. In all, 163 properties, totaling over 152,000 hectares, were expropriated in their favor between 1962 and 1973.¹ In contrast to non-indigenous campesinos, many Mapuche envisioned agrarian reform as a way not only to acquire land but to reclaim that which had been stolen from them. And indeed, while some of the properties expropriated in their favor were ancestral lands, others included were usurped portions of the reducciones as well as ancestral territory.

Despite their somewhat different goals, Mapuche and left-wing Chileans worked side by side in organizations like the Movimiento Campesino Revolucionario (MCR, the peasant arm of the MIR [Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria]). The unified character of this movement was reflected in its name. Mapuche MCR member Rafael Railaf explains that "campesino" was chosen instead of "Mapuche" to inspire poor Chileans to join the organization. "We thought that if we struggled [alone] we would be weak, because we were very few, we weren't millions like the *winka* [Chileans]."² In fact, as Florencia Mallon has noted in *Courage Tastes of Blood: The Mapuche Community of Nicolás Ailío and the Chilean State, 1906-2001* (Duke, 2005), this class-based focus was partly orchestrated from above, by those with power in the MIR.

Certainly, poor Mapuche and Chileans did share some class-based commonalities. Mapuche who joined the revolutionary left explain their affinity with those groups in terms of their positions on poverty and social justice. Anthropologist Rosamel Millaman, who was a member of the Communist Youth and later played an important role in the anti-dictatorship organization Ad-Mapu, explained what drew him to communist politics: "There was a lot of poverty in our own family. We were hungry, we didn't have anything to put in the pot. [...] So it was the social condition, the misery that we were living, that drew me to that."³ Rosendo Huenuman, later a Communist member of Congress, worked with a leftist politician in the 1960s to reclaim some of his community's usurped land: "For me, the injustice against our people was clear and I wasn't going to keep my mouth shut."⁴ In rejecting exploitation and inequality, these Mapuche leaders contributed to laying bare the economic and cultural violence that had for so long

governed social interchange in the Chilean south.

Nevertheless, Mapuche alliances with leftist and campesino groups were not the only organizational strategy of the era. Consistent with a long history of cultural and political mobilization, many Mapuche continued organizing as *Mapuche* during this period. For instance, national Mapuche congresses held in 1969 and 1970 laid the groundwork for a new indigenous law. That law, passed in 1972, was a second major achievement for the Mapuche under Allende. It represented the first time indigenous people were legally recognized as existing independently of their lands, created the Institute of Indigenous Development, and included a promise to restore Mapuche lands that had been usurped since the *Pacificación*. All of this became inoperable, though, with the military coup the following year. Despite this law, however, the Allende administration has been criticized for forcing collective production practices on the Mapuche and failing to recognize their rights to participation and self-determination. Moreover, already in the 1960s and 70s, there were currents pointing to the limits of the relationship with the left and even explicitly anti-communist rhetoric in some Mapuche communities.⁵

After the coup, much of the land that had been returned to the Mapuche was restored to local farming elites or deeded to corporations to plant with pine and eucalyptus, laying the bases for a lucrative timber industry in the region. In fact, the industry had been fostered by the state since the 1940s, and between 1965 and 1973 the government planted pine on expropriated lands. It was often Mapuche who worked on these plantations, but they were never given legal title to the land. All told, by the end of the counter-reform, Mapuche families retained only about 16% of the land recovered between 1962 and 1973.⁶ In addition to being expelled from their land, communities suffered abuses from the regime and its supporters. One member of a community that lost land during the counter-reform recalled Mapuche *comuneros* suspected of being pro-Allende who were tied up at gunpoint by elite landowners or shot at if they walked across their property. A conservative estimate holds that 41 Mapuche were executed by the regime and another 80 disappeared.⁷ This repeat dispossession of Mapuche communities under Pinochet is the immediate antecedent of present-day conflicts among the communities, local farmers, timber companies, and the state.

The fallout from the coup also highlighted the difficulties of working with the *winka*. Mapuche who had participated in political parties, unions, and other groups often felt they had been used. When their

priorities, views, and organizational strategies did not correspond to the class-based or *campesinista* focus of these notably hierarchical organizations, they were marginalized or derided. There was little room to propose political initiatives based on the principle that they were a people. Rosamel Millaman observed in a personal interview that racism was simply not considered relevant within the Chilean left in the 1960s and 70s: "The left always posited that by solving the social problems of the people [...] racism would disappear. And it seems that this isn't the case. This definitively is not the case." Thus the dictatorship found many Mapuche not only suffering severe repression but also questioning their alliances on the left and organizing autonomously in organizations like Ad-Mapu and the Comité Exterior Mapuche.

Conflicts over land, natural resources, development, and indigenous rights have been ongoing in the Chilean south since shortly after the return to democracy and are part and parcel of the long history of colonial dispossession, as well as being linked more immediately to the privileged status of neoliberal development over indigenous rights. Today in ancestral Mapuche territory, timber companies (whose subsidization has continued in the democratic context) own three times more land than the Mapuche. Pine and eucalyptus plantations surround Mapuche communities, reducing biodiversity, leaching the soil of water and nutrients, polluting soil and water sources with pesticides, and making subsistence agriculture unsustainable. This situation has contributed to high levels of outmigration and socioeconomic isolation and suffering among those who remain.

The timber plantations have been a major target of peaceful Mapuche protests, as well as land occupations, intentionally set fires, and equipment sabotage. Mapuche have also been accused of arson on estates that now belong to European-descended *colono* farmers (the descendants of Europeans recruited to populate the zone after the *Pacificación*) and other Chilean landowners. Conflicts have also occurred over the construction of hydroelectric dams, a highway that runs through Mapuche communities, garbage dumps located within them, waste from pulp plants that poisons nearby waters, the list goes on. The state has responded to the more extreme forms of conflict by applying an antiterrorist law—originally drawn up during the dictatorship to persecute leftists—against the Mapuche. At least three Mapuche have been

shot dead by police in the context of these conflicts.

A look at how different social actors understand the conflicts is telling. Despite growing promotion of multiculturalism over the years the Concertación held the presidency, many politicians on the left continued to frame Mapuche concerns in terms of social class, perhaps admitting a need for increased access to land, education, healthcare, and so forth, but conceptualizing all of these as socioeconomic problems exacerbated by the dictatorship, thereby denying the longer history of colonial dispossession. Meanwhile, in personal interviews, *colono* farmers and local elites involved in the conflicts consistently cited the UP era as "when all the problems started," identifying "extremists" from the MIR and other groups as "the same terrorists of today." They contrasted the "permissiveness" of the UP with the "tranquility" in

Mapuche demands for collective and cultural rights are not fathomable within a political system that, despite some recognition of diversity, seeks to assimilate the Mapuche into a Chilean whole.

which they lived under Pinochet.

The Mapuche I interviewed, in contrast, see their claims as rooted not in the dictatorship, but in the longer history of dispossession and colonialism. For instance, when I met Rodrigo Curipan, he was filing a complaint against police for interrogating children from his community at school (without their parents' permission or presence) with regard to their relatives' participation in efforts to recover territory. The struggle of this community has been ongoing since the *Pacificación*. The community successfully recovered some land during agrarian reform, but lost it again during the dictatorship—it was later sold by its *winka* owner to a timber company. Today, the community is surrounded by three timber plantations and several farmers, all in possession of what was historically their land. The contemporary conflicts facing this community are part of a historical process of dispossession, even as they have been exacerbated by the neoliberal policies started by the dictatorship and perpetuated by democratic governments.

The demands of the contemporary Mapuche movement are diverse, some rooted in concerns about



Police drag a woman during a raid of the FFEE (Police Special Forces), in the community of Juan Currin, Temuco, Araucanía Region.

PHOTO BY ARCHIVE PERIÓDICO AZKINTUWE

poverty and inequality, and others in territorial recovery and recognition of their rights as a people—including autonomy and self determination. Mapuche actors increasingly speak of a need to develop a vision that addresses not only the Mapuche but also the Chilean nation as a whole, in order to generate wider support for Mapuche claims and, ultimately, transform Chilean democracy. For example, a young Mapuche historian, Sergio Caniuqueo, speculated in a personal interview that as a result of the extreme contradictions generated by neoliberalism, Chileans and Mapuche alike were developing an awareness of their own subordination. He thought the discontent some Chileans felt upon seeing their own demands repressed might open them to establishing working relationships with the Mapuche despite the legacy of systemic racism. In this context, the regional autonomy advocated by some Mapuche actors could benefit Chileans as well.

However, past experience suggests that in order to facilitate alliances that do not perpetuate inequality, Chileans would have to acknowledge the dispossession and discrimination that has occurred, recognize the legitimacy of indigenous rights, and be explicitly committed to an anti-racist practice. Indeed, Mapuche demands

for collective and cultural rights are not fathomable within a political system that, despite some recognition of diversity, seeks to assimilate the Mapuche into a Chilean whole, and sees other demands as a threat to the unitary Chilean nation and its development priorities. Mapuche claims butt up not just against neoliberal objectives, but against the logics of ongoing colonialism and institutionalized racism.

The fact that the social world is built around Chilean ways of knowing and marginalizes Mapuche epistemologies, continues to render Mapuche claims unintelligible for many who do not have firsthand knowledge of the conflicts. This can be as true of those on the left as those on the right, as indicated by the refusal of a pro-Concertación acquaintance in Santiago to believe that police violence takes place in Mapuche communities—“Nah, Patricia, the police and the people get drunk together in those little communities!”—or of the leftist woman I met at a party in Temuco who claimed ignorance of police raids in Mapuche communities, asking with eyebrows raised, “This is happening NOW?” Such obliviousness of ongoing systemic racism is evidence of the extent to which Mapuche are excluded from imaginings of the collective Chilean self. Even when Chilean respondents

seem troubled by the injustices facing Mapuche communities, they are often able to brush off their concerns based on a notion of the needs of Chileans as a whole. How to have Mapuche claims heard, understood, and legitimized—not just by the state but in civil society—is a formidable struggle unresolved to this day.

Certainly there have been some mass expressions in the Mapuche's favor, such as a 10,000-strong march in Santiago in 2010 supporting Mapuche hunger strikers and other recent demonstrations. But if the

contemporary left is to embrace Mapuche concerns as its own, and to do so in a way that is not merely symbolic or paternalistic, it will have to come to terms with the anti-colonial roots of those concerns and the plurinational character of Chile itself. Chilean citizens raising their voices not only to express dissatisfaction with the political economic system but in outrage against ongoing colonialism and systemic racism could contribute to the eventual substantive recognition of Mapuche claims and, by extension, the redefinition of Chilean democracy. **[E]**

1. Martín Correa, Raúl Molina, and Nancy Yáñez, *La reforma agraria y las tierras Mapuches: Chile 1962–1975* (Santiago: LOM, 2005).

2. Andrés Carvajal, José Peralta, and Carlos Ribera, eds., *A desalambrar: Historias de mapuches y chilenos en la lucha por la tierra*, (Santiago, Editorial Ayun, 2006), 61.

3. Rosamel Millaman (anthropologist member of Com-

munist Youth) in discussion with the author, 2006.

4. Pedro Cayuqueo, "Rosendo Huenuman: El último parlamentario Mapuche," *Azkintuwe*, July 28, 2008, www.azkintuwe.org/jul28_01.htm.

5. Sergio Caniuqueo, "Siglo XX en Gulumapu: De la fragmentación del Wallmapu a la unidad nacional Mapuche. 1880 a 1978," in *Escucha, winka . . . ! Cuatro ensayos de historia nacional*

Mapuche y un epílogo sobre el futuro, ed. Pablo Marimán, et al. (Santiago: LOM, 2006), 104, 107.

6. Correa, Molina and Yáñez, *La reforma agraria y las tierras Mapuches*.

7. Pedro Cayuqueo, "Nómina de detenidos desaparecidos y ejecutados políticos del Pueblo Mapuche," *Azkintuwe*, Sept. 9, 2011, http://www.azkintuwe.org/20110911_006.htm.



Chile's Special Forces squad on the Temukuykuy Reservation, Malleco Province, Araucanía Region.

PHOTO BY ARCHIVE PERIÓDICO AZKINTUWE