Aillaquillen: The Island of Nine Moons

Cosmovision and Animism in Performance

By Peter Petkovsek, MFA

ABSTRACT

This essay examines the narrative of the co-created community theatre show *Aillaquillen: The Island of Nine Moons*, presented at the Liquen Cultural Centre in the town of Villarrica, Chile, in 2022. The show was the result of a practice research project, in which I partnered with local Mapuche activist Alejandra Aillapan Huiriqueo to explore how the intrinsic values of the Mapuche worldview or cosmovision and (new) animism could be translated into intercultural theatrical practice and the performance of an environmental narrative. The intercultural process of co-creation transformed my own approach to my surroundings and culminated in a performance that told a story out of local cultural and environmental necessity.

Keywords: Intercultural theatre, Indigenous theatre, Mapuche theatre, environmental theatre, eco-theatre, Indigenous rights, environmental justice, cultural exchange, Mallolafken Lake, Chilean Indigenous environmentalism, Indigenous knowledge

Staging a Mapuche Legend

The Mapuche are the largest of all Indigenous nations living in what is now Chile[1]. They are perhaps most noted by the connection to their land as the link is expressed in their name itself: *Mapu* means land or earth, *Che* means people. *Mapuche* are the people of the land, and the language they speak, *Mapudungun*, the language of the land or earth – "a language symbolically associated with nature: it is not only human language, but also the language of the 'earth, wind, natural sounds, and voices.'" (Carcamo-Huechante & Paillan, 2012, as cited in Echeverría, 2018, p. 287). Similarly, the land for the Mapuche isn't solely a designated territory or an arable resource, but "a set of dimensions, energies and types of lives" (Ranjan et al., 2023, p. 4), in which their culture and traditions are deeply rooted. While historically successfully repelling first the Inca and then the Spanish invaders, the Mapuche lost most of their land and sovereignty in the 19th century, when the freshly independent Chilean state decided to 'pacify' the region of Araucania, first with a mix of political means, settlement, and land redistribution in the early 1850s, then with a military occupation (Echeverría, 2018). To this day, tensions between

[1] Numbering around 1.7 million, while another 200,000 live in Argentina

the Mapuche communities and the Chilean state center around stewardship and protection of their ancestral land, or *Wallmapu*, which is being changed, threatened, or destroyed by industry, agrarian use, private development, and tourism. This type of destruction is "not just territorial but encompasses the destruction of an entire society in which human beings, territory, and more-than-human entities have been closely linked since ancient times" (Echeverría, 2018, p. 283).

Alejandra lives in Villarrica, a small town on the shore of an eponymous lake (called Mallolafken, or lake of white clay, in Mapudundgun) lying at the feet of a majestic, also eponymous volcano (called Rukapillan by the Mapuche, or house of spirits). A nutrition engineer by profession, she considers herself a *Dhomo Weichafe Mapu del Mallolafken*, which translates as the (Woman) Guardian of the Land of the Mallolafken Lake. While wary of 'well-meaning' Western academics, she agreed to meet with me upon finding out I was also a theatre director. Through the work we did together, she generously shared the Mapuche culture and cosmovision with me, for which I am humbly grateful.

Constantly aware of my position as a Western, white, European male affiliated with a university of a historically colonizing nation, I strived to avoid replications, conscious or not, of colonial, Eurocentric, or patriarchal-like power dynamics. Instead, I endeavored to undertake the approach to the work "in the way Westerners should have approached all other beings: in asking to be received, in accepting to know less, rather than more" (Weber, 2020, p. 22). This encompassed a process of becoming 'culturally worthy': "intellectually, emotionally, physically, and spiritually ready to fully absorb cultural knowledge" (Archibald, 2008, p. 376), as well as learning about and practicing a set of Indigenous-inspired values: permission, respect, ritual, reciprocity, interconnectedness, and gratitude[2], while adding my own background of Western theatre-making to the process.

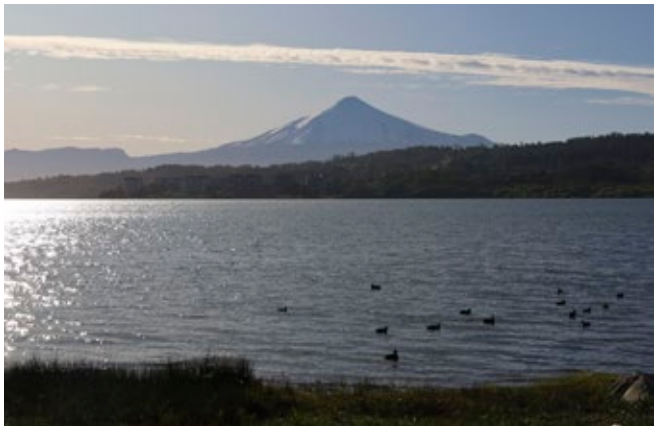
The performance dramatized a local Mapuche *epew* or story with a lesson chosen by Alejandra. The story is an etiological legend, which explains the creation of the only island on the Mallolafken Lake. The narrative includes a young Mapuche couple who, in the excited expectation of the birth of their first child, disregard the practice of asking permission and showing respect and reciprocity in relation to the environment. While crossing the Mallolafken Lake, they are punished for this in the form of the strong wind *puelche* that hinders their progress. They realize their error and ask forgiveness of the elements who come to their aid, combining fire from the volcano, water from the lake, the wind blowing fiercely, and the earth underneath to create a small island on which the young couple can land and give birth safely. The Mapuche name for the island, *Aillaquillen*, translates to 'Nine Moons' in memory of this legendary event. The *epew* contests a currently better-known but colonially-colored[3] version of the legend, in which a Mapuche 'princess' falls in

[2] Archibald outlines a similar set of seven principles comprising Indigenous storywork: respect, responsibility, reverence, reciprocity, wholism, interrelatedness, and synergy (2008, p. 376)

[3] Alejandra referred to it as 'the Disney version'.

love with a white Spanish colonizer. It also holds a clear message about the relationship with the land and the environment, and it was a narrative Alejandra felt needed to be told to the Mapuche community just as much as to the *winkas* or non-Mapuche audiences.

Figure 1
The Rukapillan volcano rising over the Mallolafken Lake



Note. Photograph taken by the author.

The performance, therefore, became part of the Mapuche struggle: "Many Mapuche political mobilizations associate the struggle for reclaiming territory with the preservation of elements of Mapuche worldview. This is because they understand how the maintenance of their social order depends on the ritual activities that take place in a specific territory and the memories that are rooted in the landscape" (Echeverría, 2018, p. 299). The Aillaquillen *epew* is a memory of the landscape, of the Mallolafken Lake with the island and the Rukapillan volcano, affirming once again that from the Mapuche perspective, "the Che [people] and Mapu [earth] do not exist separately, that is why the only way to recreate our own institutionality, our values and customs, our culture and our language, is to the extent that we recover the territory" (Marimán, 2002, p. 93). The Mapuche are understandably wary of the *winka* and tend to keep their rituals and traditions to themselves, but Alejandra is an activist for dialogue and interculturality. The performance of *Aillaquillen: Island of Nine Moons* was seen by an auditorium of mixed Mapuche and *winka* audience, not to mention other spectators outside of the cultural center: the lake, island, and volcano themselves. It was a communal practice of cosmovision and new animism through an overlap of Indigenous methodology and Western theatre, and it told the story of the territory that needed to be told: for the Mapuche, an affirmation of their culture and connection to the land currently suffering from contamination, industry, tourism, and the effects of climate change, and for the *winka*, a reminder of the values needed when positioning oneself within the environment and relating to it.

Western Structure, Indigenous Content

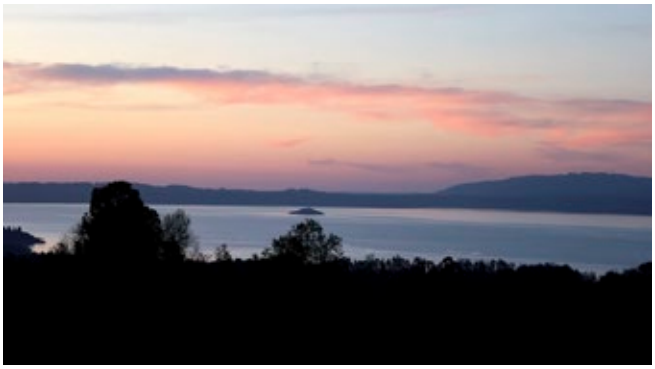
From the start, our collaboration with Alejandra was to be co-creative, each of us bringing our own culture, background, and training to the process. My response to the *epew* that Alejandra presented was an Aristotelian dramatic model for the performance, which we then filled with creative interpretations of the chapters of the story, additional content devised by the rest of the company (a group of local artists and creatives gathered for this project), and Mapuche performative and ritualistic elements overseen by Alejandra.

Introduction: Acknowledgment of the Land

The performance started with the showing of a short video made from material gathered in the initial phase of exploring the region, learning—on my part—about Mapuche cosmovision, and creating an initial relationship with the land itself. In the video, Alejandra, as the narrator, introduced the Mallolafken island and the importance of the four elements, all gathered within the lake and the Rukapillan volcano. "The Villarrica volcano is a mystic center of the Mapuche world. /…/ The breathing of the earth is felt in the fumaroles, in the hot springs and the lakes. Inside, there is a house where the spirits of the *pillan*, or intermediary spirit between human beings and the *Ngenchen* [four celestial beings in Mapuche mythology] live; also the spirits of the dead pass through this volcano on their journey to their final destination" (Skewes & Guerra, 2016, p. 70). It is also of special importance for the glaciers on its slopes, from which Mapuche tradition believes all life originated. In lower altitudes, the mountain is also the home of *araucaria* trees, whose seeds or *piñones* have nourished local communities for centuries.

The initial video immediately introduced the values of permission and interconnectedness: "We Mapuche understand that the Aillaquillen island is here to remind us of the importance of being integrated into nature. Each time that a human enters its spaces, she needs to ask for permission and recognize the presence of the *ngen*, its protectors, for herself to be a protector as well," says Alejandra, the narrator. The concepts and attitudes of permission, respect, ritual, reciprocity, interrelatedness, and gratitude create a scaffolding of values that enables a worldview of balance within the environment, consisting of humans, nature, and spirits. This type of active interaction with the ecosystem gives a possibility to "intentionality, the ability to use an intentional vocabulary. Above all, it is permission to depict nature in the active voice, the domain of agency" (Plumwood, 2014, p. 451).

Figure 1
Aillaquillen Island



Note. Photograph taken by the author.

I experienced my own widening of self through this process; despite wandering around frequently in the various environments of my native Slovenia and appreciating their beauty and value, I'd rarely thought to interact directly with them, ask permission to enter, or reflect on the agency of the environment itself. Indeed, what I was experiencing is what Tim Ingold calls *astonishment*: "Astonishment is the other side of the coin to the very openness of the world that I have shown to be fundamental to the animic way of being. It is the sense of wonder that comes from riding the crest of the world's continued

birth" (2011, p. 74). The connection to a world constantly in flux, constantly becoming, needs to be experienced, not just analysed or studied. Andreas Weber emphasizes a similar point: "It is important to stress that engaging in indigenous practices is not purely theoretic endeavor and is not possible by a theoretical approach alone. Indigenous practices have to be enacted and embodied. The spirits of rivers and mountains, which are entangled with our own lives, have to be invoked and asked for their participation" (2020, p. 32). The practice research was, therefore, the exploration of an embodiment of cosmovision and a way of relating to and within the world that focused on "embodied aliveness [instead of] abstract theory" (Ingold, 2011, p. 27).

Embodied aliveness is one of the crucial concepts of the Indigenous worldview or cosmovision, which is usually referred to as animism by the Western world. Contesting the 19th century Tylorian definition of animism, in which, linked to social Darwinism, animistic societies "were placed toward the bottom of the evolutionary ladder, whereas monotheistic religions, especially Christianity, with its clearly defined dualistic metaphysics, were placed at the pinnacle" (Howell, 2014, p. 104), (new) animism approaches criticize dualisms of human-nature and mind-body, and attempt a different understanding, looking for a "synthesis of current environment theory (insisting that the environment does not necessarily consist dichotomously of a physical world and humans) and current personhood theory (asserting that personhood does not necessarily consist dualistically of body and spirit)" (Bird-David, 1999, p. S68). New animism, influenced by Bruno Latour's actor-network theory, Philippe Descola's definitions of possible ontologies based on the interplay of interiority and physicality, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's notion of perspectivism, and Harvey Graham's definitions of the world as a community of living persons, among other concepts, now understands Indigenous worldviews as "incorporating all forms of being within the ontological category person. /…/ For them, ontology, epistemology and axiology form an undifferentiated relational field" (Morrison, 2014, p. 48). Such a relational approach generates a particular worldview, which Alejandra and I explored through performed narrative.

Exposition: Western Science and Traditional Indigenous Knowledge

The first scene of the show was, in fact, an audio recording of the two protagonists discussing, as their contemporary selves, facts about the Mallolafken Lake and the Aillaquillen Island. The lake, with its two adjacent towns (Villarrica and Pucon, the 'adrenaline capital of Chile'), is a hugely popular tourist site and subject to overdevelopment, industrial misuse, and contamination. The latter comes from an oversaturation of nutrients from pisciculture, wastewater treatment plants in parallel with untreated sewage, urban and agricultural use ("Contaminación masiva de la Cuenca del Lago Villarrica," 2022), as well as tourist and thermal spa activities (Simon & Ceballos Saez, 2023, p. 630). The population in the basin of the lake has grown significantly in just a few years, and the land is increasingly divided and privatized, ignoring Mapuche claims or historical

rights. Consequently, the lake is subject to eutrophication processes, leading to frequent algae blooms and a decreasing quality of water. It is generally considered a health risk to bathe in it, although this is consistently ignored by visitors, and there are periods of time when swimming is forbidden due to high levels of contaminants. In 2017, the Chilean Ministry of Environment declared the lake a 'saturated zone' (a euphemism for contamination), a first step towards a Decontamination Plan that has been in the works since then, often criticized (Simon & Ceballos Saez, 2023) and not yet implemented (Parra, 2024, "Estamos viendo morir el lago Villarrica"). Somewhat dryly and economically driven, Rodriguez-Lopez et al. concluded their 8-year study of the levels of Chlorophyll-a in the lake using satellite images and monitoring data by observing that "the increasing occurrence of algal blooms poses a threat to the organisms and the scenery of the lake, and decreases income generated from tourism in the southern part of the country" (2023, p. 16). This says little of the value that the lake has for the Mapuche community and culture. Considered a living being in Mapuche cosmovision, Mallolafken is an integral part of the land, while water itself, as the originator of life, is perhaps the most important of all four elements. The chemical analysis of the lake's water, although highly important, also says little about Traditional Indigenous Knowledge woven into place and land, often expressed through narrative: "The story and the storyteller both serve to connect the past with the future, one generation with the other, the land with the people and the people with the story." (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012, p. 146). The answers to seemingly geological, geographical or demographic questions are therefore presented in the form of narrative, which itself is knowledge, not to be dismissed as fiction: "Reductive assumptions of traditional ecological knowledge can be read as a recasting of colonial ideas of 'primitive superstition, savage nobility, or ancestral wisdom' that re-inscribe colonial domination by seeing Indigenous knowledge as 'an object for science rather than as a kind of knowledge that could inform science'" (Cruikshank, 2004, p. 21). The exposition of the show attempted to contest this type of view by juxtaposing Western-style facts with Indigenous myth, as knowledge of equal value, searching for a balance between the two, just as Western new animists are searching to reconnect with principles that exist in Indigenous cosmovisions, the Mapuche are not negating Western science. Both aspects are important in a holistic approach: "This sense of deep relatedness to the world transforms consciousness into a means for holistic perception through which we are able to apprehend the intrinsic qualities of things as well as their inherent wholeness" (Harding, 2014, p. 375). Both the geological/ geographical facts about the Mallolafken Lake and the Aillaquillen Island, as well as the story of its creation and the connection to the land and its people, are important and able to co-exist.

LIFKOYAM[4]
We need to go, my love.
The lake is vast and the waters deep.
The baby will not wait for us to sleep.

[4] The dialogue between Lifkoyam and Nautüll from this scene was my own proposal, edited and approved by Alejandra.

Dawn will be upon us soon.
The sun will come and bless our voyage.
It's time to go.

NAUTŰLL
Should we not wait for the sun?
Should we not wait for his blessing?

Will the waters not close their waves to us,
If we tread them without warning?
Without asking permission?

LIFKOYAM
There is no time, my love
The sun will wait
The waters will understand
The journey is long
We will need all our strength
All the time of night and day
To bring our child
Safely to the other side
It's time to go
The deep black of the horizon is thinning
Time to go

The elements, however, did not understand. Trouble followed in the form of the *puelche* wind (performed by a white-clad dancer), stopping their progress and generating the crisis of the story, as the baby chose that very moment to start making its way into the world. The threat of losing their future was a consequence of not acknowledging their place within the relational network of beings and land—a poignant message for the audience.

Asking permission is the quintessential Mapuche ritual: "Mapuche believe that human beings must ask permission to enter the domain protected by the spirit masters" (Echeverría, 2018, p. 289). The latter, in this case, are the *ngen*, spirit protectors of nature, who, along with the major beneficial spirits (found in the land above or *wenü mapu*), the *weküfe* or bad spirits (found in the land below, *minche mapu*), and the shamanism and witchcraft practiced by the *machi* ('good shamans') or *kalku* ('bad shamans'), form the major axes of Mapuche spirituality and practice (Grebe, 1993). The purpose of the *ngen* is to preserve life, well-being, and continuity of various natural phenomena. This generates "principles of a native ethnoecology, contributing to the balance of the environment, avoiding both the excessive exploitation and predation of natural resources as well as their contamination" (Grebe, 1993, p. 48). Each *ngen* protects and gives life or animating force to a certain element or part of the natural world, such as water, the native forest, stones, the wind, fire, the earth, wild animals, medicinal plants, etc. The *ngen* can be connected to powerful elemental forces such as water and fire, or protectors of 'smaller

Figure 3
The puelche dancing around the couple in their boat

Note. Photograph taken by the author.

units' such as trees, birds, and streams. What is important is the manner of interacting with them: a Mapuche person "first needs to ask permission to enter [their] dominion. To use any natural element protected by the *ngen*, she needs to justify why she requires it and how much of it she means to take to cover her immediate need. Once the announced quantity is obtained, she needs to express her gratitude to the *ngen*; /…/ It is necessary to give [the ngen] a small offering to comply with the traditional principle of reciprocity. This offering usually consists of some breadcrumbs or grains of wheat and/or corn, or a small coin" (Grebe, 1993, p. 51). Every Mapuche who acknowledges her roots and culture follows this code of ethics and behavior in most situations.

In new animistic terms, based on the idea expanded by Nurit Bird David, the young couple forgets, for a moment, to act as 'dividuals': "When I individuate a human being I am conscious of her 'in herself' (as a single separate entity); when I dividuate her I am conscious of how she relates with me. This is not to say that I am conscious of the relationship with her 'in itself', as a thing. Rather, I am conscious of the *relatedness with* my interlocutor *as I engage with her*, attentive to what she does in relation to what I do, to how she talks and listens to me as I talk and listen to her, to what happens simultaneously and mutually to me, to her, to us" (1999, p. S72, author's emphasis). The consequence of dividuating is an ethical approach to relating to the world and environment: "Within the interpersonal epistemology of indigenous ethics, morality plays out positively in kinship, interpersonal and communal ways that bridge the dividual and others, and negatively in individualistic, antisocial ways that isolate the individual from the group" (Morrison, 2014, p. 49).

While wandering around the area in our preparations for the show, Alejandra was practicing her code of ethics and dividuating, situating us in a relation with the volcano and the land it represented by asking permission to enter its space, presenting small offerings in return, and expressing gratitude at the end of a safe passage. The simple gestures, expressed by means of direct address, created an interpersonal relationship or connection between us and the mountain. After a couple of such hikes, I came to think of Rukapillan as a friend or kin—almost more so than other mountains I had visited more frequently prior; my experience of visiting a particular place or land has now irrevocably changed. Importantly, these were not instances of Western romantic or idealistic misrepresentations of Indigenous cultures as those of 'noble savages' living simple but pure lives in harmony with nature. Rather, at that moment, I was able to access a knowledge system that stresses "the intentional, relational and interpersonal character of reality as both locally grounded and socially emergent," stressing "who is dividually, and therefore collectively, acting, rather than what causes" and emphasizing "interdependence, influence, mutuality, responsibility, and respect (or not)" (Morrison, 2014, p. 49). This was what the young couple in the show momentarily ignored, provoking a reaction from the beings

around them that placed them and their about-to-be-born child in danger. They needed to remember and correct their mistake:

LIFKOYAM
What do we do, my love?
I am rowing as fast as I can
And we are barely moving
We will not make it to shore before the baby is born
She will not be well if she is born here in the wampo
My heart is bleeding at the thought
I am sorry my love
I am sorry for not asking permission
I am sorry for hurrying too much
What can we do?

NAUTŰLL
We need to pray now
We need to beg forgiveness
We need to ask permission
Dear Mallolafken,
Forgive us for entering without permission
Please hear us now
We come with open hearts
We come with love and respect
All we want is for our baby to be safe
So that we can raise her
And teach her how to respect the land
How to respect the elements
We ask forgiveness, Mallolafken
And we ask permission to cross safely!

LIFKOYAM
Water, the source of all life,
Sun, the giver of all strength,
Earth, the mother of all,
Wind, the mover of all
Please hear our repentance
We ask to be forgiven
In our hurry and haste,
We did not spare a thought to things bigger that ourselves
We now ask permission
To be accepted into this place
To be able to cross the waters
So that our baby can enter the world safely
So that we can continue to show reverence
To the land around us
To the Rukapillan
To the Mallolafken
To the Puelche
Please help us now
In our hour of need

In addition to expressing the values of permission, respect, interconnectedness, and ritual (reciprocity and gratitude manifested later on in the show), the scene was an illustration of how the 'wild' is constructed in Indigenous practice as compared to Western imagination. Weber compares the two: the latter sees the wild as without rules, egoistic, threatening with death, opposed to man, emotionally detached, opaque to human understanding, and better off without man (Weber, 2020, p. 69). Although the threat is present in the *epew*, it is only a consequence of imbalance, and the restoration of the relationship that happens through the young couple's prayers shows how the wild (or nature, the environment) is constructed in an Indigenous view: it is based on rules, devoted to mutuality, is life-giving, includes man, is nourishing, is like kin, and requires gratitude (Weber, 2020, p. 69). Once these rules are respected and followed, balance is the result.

Climax: The Elements Dance

Once the couple begged for forgiveness and asked for help, the elements came to their aid. In the performance, this scene was created by four dancers, who took on the roles of the elements and created, through individual and collective dance, the island as a safe haven for the protagonists.

As the initial video of the performance explained, the four elements are highly important in Mapuche cosmovision. Water (*ko*), in its many forms, is the giver of life; wind (*kürüf*) and fire (*kütral*) add dynamics and provide breath and the spark of creativity, while earth (*mapu*) supports it all. In another interlacement of Indigenous and Western approaches, the dancers embodied the elements using choreographies reminiscent of Michael Chekhov's approach to elementally-inspired performance, with flying (air), flowing (water), radiating (fire), and molding (earth) movements. Chekhov's approach to acting resonates with a (new) animist worldview, especially regarding his notion of 'creative individuality': "Igniting 'life,' a dynamic creative state and artistic freedom in sympathy and harmony with the world as a whole, would all become part of Chekhov's central tenets encapsulated in the principle of creative individuality" (Rushe, 2019, p. 8). The idea of the whole or entirety is important; working with it, "in conjunction with a feeling of form develops complete kinaesthetic awareness" (Rushe, 2019, p. 91). The Indigenous values of interconnectedness, respect, and reciprocity are mirrored in Chekhov's practice, which imagined, to a certain degree, a world constantly in flux.

"Indigenous worldviews /…/ are neither conceptual, nor only ethical, but always performative. They enact the world by being a part of it. In Indigenous thinking, you are a worldview, you represent cosmos, so you behave as such. You are kin to all beings, and all beings are persons" (Weber, 2020, p. 20). Being part of the world, stepping into the being of an element, demands a type of crossing of ontological boundaries, explored in the West by invoking neuroscience and mirror neurons as a neurological basis for empathy or through versions of the Deleuzian concept of becoming. Signe Howell, writing about her experiences with the Chewong people, claims understanding Indigenous cosmologies will make more clear "what it means to be human in a world within which the idea of a neutral nature is foreign" and hints at something bigger: "The mere fact that many of us have no problem in empathizing with the animic and anthropomorphic modes may, by itself, indicate some form of psychic unity of mankind" (2014, p. 110-111). Performance is a productive way of exploring this unity, as was shown by the elements dancing to unite and create new relations with the human couple.

Resolution: Connecting Through Song

As soon as the couple gratefully took refuge on the newly created Aillaquillen island, the baby (in the legend, she grows to be an important and famous Mapuche *machi* or healer and interlocutor with spirits) was safely born. Accompanying the birth was a song representing another fusion of Western and Mapuche elements. Originally composed by the Spanish singer and actress Tànit Navarro, the lyrics narrated the perspective of an

unborn child asking her mother for a lullaby that will resonate with her forever. The performers in our show substituted the Mapudungun word for mother, *ñuke*, instead of the Spanish *mama* and added traditional Mapuche instruments to their rendition. The result was a haunting song that evoked not only the life of the unborn child but painted that image against the context of the Mapuche history and struggle without expressing it through specific language.

Figure 4
Birth of the baby

Note. Photograph taken by the author.

Epilogue: How It Started

Once the baby was born, Alejandra herself took to the stage, dressed in traditional Mapuche clothes, and introduced her father, Lorenzo Aillapan, a respected member of the community and an *hombre pajaro*, 'man who can speak to birds,' who helped end the show with a *kimche's* (wise man's) reflection. Before bows, the whole company, as well as the Mapuche members of the audience present in the auditorium, performed the *afafan* or ritual cry, which cry affirmed the *newen* or vital energy of the endeavor and announced Mapuche and our presence to the *ngen* and the *Ngenchen*. These elements not only confirmed the Mapuche content of the story

Figure 5
The afafan at the end of the show

Note. Photograph taken by the author.

but elevated the show from just a portrayal of an interesting tale to a practice of cosmovision, affirmation of Mapuche traditions, resistance against the hegemonic culture, and a part of the larger Mapuche struggle.

The show concluded as it started: with a video. The final act was a short documentary-style video showing the audience a crucial part of the process of preparation for the performance. The whole group of performers and creators made a trip to the Aillaquillen island itself to put the values of cosmovision into practice: ask permission of the lake and the island to enter their territory and create a show about them, show respect through this action, acknowledge our interrelatedness, express gratitude, and offer, through a ritual Alejandra guided, a reciprocal gift—*araucaria* saplings, to return the tree to the island from which it had already disappeared in the past decades.

The *araucaria* has an important cultural and symbolic significance for the Mapuche. The seeds, similar to large pine nuts, are collected each year in February and used in various ways for food, including being ground into flour. The

trees grow slowly and can reach ages of more than a thousand years, while seed production only starts after several decades of growth at the earliest. The life of the *araucaria* forests has been intimately intertwined with Mapuche communities for centuries: "the biophysical space /…/ is a product of the history of human societies and reflects the uses, values, learning and the particular cosmovisions of the societies that have used it" (Sedrez dos Reis et al., 2014, p. 3). Araucarias represent resilience to the Mapuche, as they have withstood these threats for decades and centuries. However, they are now threatened by exploitation, the timber industry, and the effects of climate change. As temperatures rise, fewer and fewer young saplings survive, and the species is currently being affected by a dieback called 'Araucaria leaf damage' (Varas-Myrik et al., 2022).

In the ritual planting, Alejandra thanked (the *ngen* of) the elements and noted the symbolic nature of the gesture; since araucaria trees grow so slowly, most likely none of the team present will be alive to see the fruit of the saplings, which means we were planting them for future generations. Bringing back the araucarias that used to be there but were cut down is highly important as a gesture not only of conservation but also of resistance. It is a show of connection to the land, as well as a practice of reciprocity: "That is why, for the Mapuche being, the territory is so relevant, since it does not only involve a material space where people live or plant but also considers sacred space that must be respected by the *gijañmawün* [action of giving and receiving]" (Ranjan et al., 2021, p. 5).

Figure 6
Planting the araucarias

Note. Photograph taken by the author.

Conclusion

The co-creation of the show *Aillaquillen – Island of Nine Moons* explored the expression of cosmovision and (new) animism on stage through a story of resilience and environmental importance, using an intercultural mix of approaches and concepts. Mapuche elements worked in dialogue with Western theatrical approaches, and bonds were created of narrative, connection, and friendship. Ultimately, in the words of Linda Hogan, "With many methods, we are all reaching for the same thing, not power, not riches, but recognition of our place in the whole of creation. We know that a healthy-minded human, a healthy community, yearns toward the love and care for earth and all of earth's creations" (2014, p. 22). The performances and practices of permission, respect, ritual, interrelatedness, reciprocity, and gratitude represent expressions of what could be called the sacred: "What matters is the sacred that is present in everything, everyone. This contributes the most toward humanity and creation. This requires an act of attention, an acknowledgment that all are sentient beings and of the smallness of our own being in this world of the living, ongoing life force" (Hogan, 2014, p. 22).

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Peter Petkovsek, Ph.D.

Peter Petkovsek is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Leeds. His practice research focuses on intercultural storytelling and co-creation as a contributor to value-based climate change mitigation. Peter also holds an MFA in Theatre Directing from Columbia University in New York and divides his directing work between professional stages around the world and environmental applied theatre productions wherever there are stories that need to be told.