

Interview with SAIIC:

Margarita Marta Calfio Montalva



Photo: Laura Soriano

Margarita works with the LIWEN Center for Mapuche Studies and Documentation and is a member of the Mapuche Institutions and Organizations of the IX Region Organizing Committee. She was also president of the Urban Mapuche Indigenous Youth and Student Union, and founder and board member of the urban Mapuche association, "Kinen Mapu."

Margarita came to visit SAIIC in mid-March to participate in a number of local events. She gave a presentation at SAIIC's "Recognizing and Honoring Contributions and Perspectives of Indigenous Women" event on March 13th. While visiting our office, Margarita spoke with SAIIC about her work with urban Mapuche youth in Chile.

We know that you work with the Mapuche youth in Temuco, Chile. How are urban Mapuche youth keeping their identity?

Actually, I was working with youths when I resided in Santiago, between '92 and '95. I worked with a youth organization called the Urban Mapuche Indigenous Youth and Student Union. One of my wishes now is to start a project with urban Mapuche youths in the city of Temuco, because revitalizing identity in these spaces is urgent.

We know very well that cities are not the appropriate environment for the reproduction and socialization of the cultural elements of an Indigenous People. These places, rather than facilitating the formation of a unique identity and positive self-image for the younger Indigenous generation, tend to degrade you as a human being and encourage negative and alienating values.

According to the 1992 population census, there are one million two hundred Mapuche people. Of this, over than four hundred thousand Mapuches live in Metropolitan regions, and only about 15% live in rural zones.

The urban Mapuche population is made up of migrants from the rural communities and their children born and raised in the cities. They are youths with Mapuche last names, but they are usually lacking cultural references that would enable them to connect with their Indigenous identity in a positive way.

I personally lived this reality and it was a slow, complex process, because when I began to reconnect with my Mapuche heritage, my parents were unhappy. They didn't understand or didn't want to comprehend my need to reconnect with my roots...It was a difficult battle against the social currents, and against your own fears...

How much influence has urban culture had on Indigenous youths?

The city influences you with values that alienate you from your identity as a Mapuche, but when you resolve your own identity issues and begin to accept yourself and feel proud of your origins, it gets easier. There are always people that will help you, especially the grandmothers and grandfathers, who will hand you all their knowledge without questioning.

A very relative point is that when you assume your identity, being urban, you have mastered the elements of the other world, of the dominant society. This is really an advantage, because you possess the tools that you can utilize to benefit your people. This is what we are trying to do with many Mapuche young people, make them conscious of our heritage, conscious of our need to become professionals.

What is "Kinen Mapu", the Urban Mapuche Association doing to support the Mapuche youth and to strengthen their culture?

This organization is new and has not yet completely defined its course of action, which is something that we have to do soon.

I've been working for some time with the LIWEN Center for Mapuche Studies and Documentation. The objective of this institution is to generate knowledge from our own perspective and to disseminate it to all sectors, especially the Mapuche. For example, we work on topics relating to the Mapuche people, to the situation of other Indigenous nations' in their own countries, and on the issue of Bilingual Intercultural Education.

What is the difference between the programs for Mapuche children and those for the youths?

With the children you have to work in a playful context, where you keep the youngster entertained while they're learning, and of course you must involve the family in some way. This is difficult, because many times the parents don't agree that their child should learn about Mapuche culture because they view this as negative but this is not their fault. We don't know what negative experiences they have had that have made them opposed to it.

Working with young people or adolescents is a little more complex. They are going through a difficult stage, building their identity. They have many fears, and to come to terms with being an Indigenous person in a racist country is not an easy thing. You have to gain their confidence slowly. They must see that you as a woman can be a role model, that being Mapuche is not bad or ugly, not at all.

We know that you did some research on the oral history of the families of urban Mapuche youths. What were the most important points that came out of this research?

This study came about due to the interest that a group of us young Mapuche students had in retrieving our history, that history which was denied us for our having been born in a different context than our parents and grandparents. It was an arduous task, because from the beginning our families didn't

understand our interest in understanding things of such little relevance to them. The people in the countryside usually don't value their legends, their family histories. They don't comprehend the richness of their own knowledge. We got them to change their attitude: they started to talk, to spill out a whole marvelous, unknown world for us. We really learned an enormous amount. It was magical to listen to it all, and the most important thing is that we were able to get our relatives, our aunts and uncles, cousins, etc., involved.

We'd like to ask why you, as a young Mapuche woman, are involved in this type of work?

I work with conviction, because I really feel that it's necessary to struggle for our rights as Mapuche people. The conditions of poverty and oppression in which we live today must change. Mapuche children should grow up in a healthy atmosphere, in peace and harmony with the environment.

When I took consciousness of my identity, of my history, of my culture, it was really like a liberation. I strongly feel the need to support my people in every way that I can. It's a life choice.

What would you like to see in the future for Mapuche youth? And what would you like to do to make it happen?

The future of the youth and children is a worry that we have as a people. In many communities, the young people must migrate to the urban centers to find any work they can. Their dreams of studying are dashed at a very young age and that's not fair.

I'd like to do many things, but we need to design strategies at the community level. Individual initiatives should be within a larger context to make the desired impacts and changes. We're working for this.

We know that you've been working on a project on Indigenous Women and Gender in Washington, DC. Could you tell us what the focus of your research has been?

In September, 1997, I was selected by the Development Fund for Indigenous Peoples to develop a work apprenticeship in the Indigenous Peoples' Union of the Interamerican Development Bank, located in Washington, DC. I'm specifically working on editing a report about the topic of gender relations in Indigenous communities and development. It is a reflective work, whose main objective is to understand Indigenous women's thoughts and perceptions about development. Essentially, the idea is to propose certain strategies that can be incorporated into the Bank's policies in relation to Indigenous women. ✎

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contribution to society, not only the Indigenous one of Ecuador, but in whichever place throughout the world.

What have been the challenges that you have had to face as an Indigenous woman doctor?

I don't like being labeled as an Indigenous woman doctor; well, I feel like any other woman of any other culture and nation. But in fact I've had to face certain challenges, like knowing that the people of my community viewed me as the savior from the health problems affecting the community. The leaders of my provincial community trusted so in my abilities. One demonstration of this was their inviting me to work in the SAMAY Project, financed by the European Union. I'm talking about a pro-life project that would permit us, in a significant manner, to build our society, that would allow us to control our own destiny. Being a representative of the Confederation of the Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador, CONAIE, is another challenge.

To respond positively to all these challenges, I always try to learn more to better understand the culture of Globalization, to learn how to maneuver myself within the dynamics of the modern age, in distinct levels and spheres of human actions. For me, it is important to take into account the advice and the points of view of the great Indigenous leaders, and of the great ideologies, both old and new. ✎

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dimensions into environmental impact assessment processes of research institutes, multilateral institutions, governments, etc.

6. Develop standards and guidelines for the protection, maintenance and development of indigenous knowledge, which: a) facilitate the development of sui generis systems of protection for Indigenous knowledge according to indigenous customary laws, values and world view b) recognize the concept of the collective rights of Indigenous Peoples and incorporate this in all national and international legislation c) take into account and incorporate existing Indigenous Peoples' political and legal systems and Indigenous Peoples' customary use of resources d) recognize traditional agricultural systems of Indigenous Peoples e) involve Indigenous Peoples in the development of research guidelines and standards

7. Develop standards and guidelines for the prevention of biopiracy, the monitoring of bioprospecting and access to genetic resources: a) affect a moratorium on all bioprospecting and/or collection of biological materials in the territories of Indigenous Peoples and protected areas and patenting based on these collections until acceptable sui generis systems are established b) affect a moratorium on the registering of knowledge c) recognize the rights of Indigenous Peoples' to access and repatriate genetic materials held in all ex-situ collections, such as gene banks, herbariums and botanical gardens.

8. Ensure the sharing of the benefits derived from the use of indigenous knowledge includes other rights, obligations and responsibilities such as land rights and the maintenance of Indigenous cultures to facilitate the transmission of knowledge, innovations, practices and values to future generations.

9. Ensure that relevant provisions of international mechanisms and agreements of direct relevance to the implementation of article 8j. and related articles, such as the Trade Related Intellectual Property agreement of the World Trade Organization, the European Union directive on the patenting of life forms, the Human Genome Diversity

Project, the Human Genome Declaration of the UNESCO, the FAO Commission on Plant Genetic Resources and national and regional intellectual property rights legislation under development, incorporate the rights and concerns of Indigenous Peoples as expressed in the ILO Convention 169, the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Kari Oca Declaration, the Mataatua Declaration, the Santa Cruz Declaration, the Leticia Declaration and Plan of Action, the Treaty for a Life Forms Patent Free Pacific and previous statements of Indigenous Forums convened at previous CBD/COP and intersessional meetings.

10. Provide material and non-material support mechanisms and incentives to Indigenous Peoples for capacity building initiatives towards: a) the development of sui generis systems based on indigenous customary laws for the protection and promotion of Indigenous knowledge, innovations and practices b) institutional strengthening and negotiating capacity c) locally controlled policy, research and development strategies and activities for the maintenance and development of Indigenous knowledge

11. Require the revitalization and maintenance of Indigenous languages as part of the implementation of article 8j. and related articles and support the development of educational systems based on indigenous values and world view, including the establishment of an Indigenous university.

12. Require that research and development activities in the realm of Indigenous Peoples' knowledge, practices and innovation systems are given the same financial and policy support as "formal scientific" research and development activities.

13. Provide material and non-material incentives for maintaining and enhancing biodiversity, including land rights and the recognition of achievements by Indigenous Peoples in protecting biodiversity. ♣

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ments and reforms to the Mexican state, rather it would be admitting that what is needed is a radical transformation to the corrupt structures of power in Mexico that have been dominated by the more than 70 year old PRI dictatorship. It would mean allowing for not only the Zapatistas, but all of Mexican civil society to have the right to transform the government into something that would govern by obeying the needs and consensus of the Mexican people, rather than continue to be mediator of elite global business interests and an instrument of repression.

Unfortunately Mexico acts with the reassurances of its trade partners, the United States and Canada. The only thing standing in the way of Mexico's unacceptable policy towards Indigenous peoples is civil society both in Mexico and globally. Civil society through both its political will and actions can put an end to this genocidal war. The Indigenous people are clear that the solution will come from nowhere else, nor can they do it alone. "Neither peace nor justice will come from the government. They will come from civil society, from its initiatives, from its mobilizations. To her, to you, we speak today." ♣

Crystal Echobawk is a member of the Pawnee Nation, who works for the National Commission for Democracy in Mexico. She attended the University of Sussex in Brighton, England where she completed both a Bachelors in History and a Masters in Social and Political Thought, and wrote her thesis on the Zapatistas. In September 1996, she was asked to join the North American Indian Delegation to the United Nation's Working Group on the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Geneva. In December of that year, she traveled to La Realidad, Chiapas, Mexico and produced a comprehensive briefing report regarding the situation in Chiapas. Since she has been working with NCDM, Crystal has traveled nationwide to raise consciousness and mobilize people around the Zapatista struggle, especially focusing on organizing North American Indian communities to support the struggles of Indigenous peoples in Mexico.