Becoming *Neuquino* in Mapuzugun: Teaching Mapuche Language and Culture in the Province of Neuquén, Argentina

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This article explores the sense of belonging promoted by the current program of Educación Intercultural Bilingüe (EIB) of the province of Neuquén for Mapuche children, examining the design and implementation of this program. The analysis reveals how this program reinforces a hegemonic definition of Mapuche identity, which relegates Mapuche culture to times past and to a rural setting. At the same time, the program subordinates the Mapuche identity to the provincial realm, and merges it with the Argentine and Catholic identities in supposed "harmony." [Mapuche childhood, sense of belonging, bilingual intercultural education, Indigenous policy]

> When the school day was finished, the kids lined up by grade near the flagpole where the flag of Argentina waved above, and beneath it, the Neuquén flag. Given that the principal was absent, one of the teachers chose the children who would lower the flags that day. A girl from seventh grade said, "No," and one of her classmates complained, "You can't say no to the flag, Miss!" So the teacher asked the girl why she refused, and she responded, "To let someone else have a chance, because I get picked often." The teacher accepted her answer and repeated it louder for all to hear, in a tone showing her approval of the girl's response. The two flags were lowered in silence, untied from the pole, folded, and taken to the office by two other children. The rest of the children stayed in line. Later, one by one, the teachers said good-bye to all the students: "Good-bye, kids!" Then, "in unison" and with the traditional singsong used at schools—separating each syllable and stressing it—the pupils responded, "See-you-to-mor-row, Miss!" The last one to say good-bye was the Mapuche language and culture teacher: "Ka pewkajael picikece." With the same style and the same lack of energy, the students responded: "Ka-pew-ka-jael kv-mel-tu-fe!" [field notes, Huiliches County, February 2004][1]

The current Mapuche Language and Culture Teaching Program in the province of Neuquén (MLCTP) is presented as the antithesis of the historically hegemonic education of Argentina, a model that has treated Indigenous pupils from the point of view of a monocultural, European-oriented model. However, an ethnographic analysis of the implementation of the MLCTP reveals that the initiative is not so much about its stated aim to "preserve Indigenous culture." In fact, the program shows renewed efforts to make Mapuche children loyal citizens of Neuquén and Argentina—and good Catholics as well.

Here, I argue that this is done by restricting the MLCTP to certain rural Mapuche communities (those officially recognized by the provincial state) by subordinating Mapuzugun (the Mapuche language) to Spanish, by treating Mapuche cultural elements as obsolete, and by reducing them to "school logic," as I show later.

By basing the arguments on a conceptualization of childhood as a field for disputing hegemony (Williams 1997), and of boys and girls as social subjects and competent

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interlocutors, this article then explores the senses of belonging (Brow 1990) promoted by this educational program and the perspectives of the children in this regard.

In addition to official documentation and news sources, I also include original ethnographic materials researched between 2001 and 2005 in central and southern Neuquén as part of a broader investigation on the construction of multiple subjectivities between Mapuche children living in the countryside and urban settings.[2] By staying there and residing with the Mapuche, I was able to share the varied spheres of daily interaction with the social actors, such as their homes, the school, the cafeteria, the health center, and the headquarters of the organization. I was also able to be present in the spaces that were not so frequent, like those in which the community rituals are done—*la enramada*, literally, the branching—and the Mapuche special educational activities, such as the "camps" (Szulc 2007).

After briefly describing the current situation of the Mapuche population and presenting an overview of the regional educational system, the analysis presents central aspects of the MLCTP. These aspects set up a particular, hegemonic sense of belonging in which being an Argentine, a Neuquén citizen, and a Catholic all come into play, together with a depoliticized, subordinate definition of the Mapuche. The analysis of the MLCTP will then lead us to discuss a wide range of meanings and articulations that are contested in several ways during the construction of this subjective position (Hall 1986; Mouffe 1988).

Contemporary Mapuche Communities in the Countryside and in the City

Currently, the Mapuche people mainly reside in the Argentinian provinces of La Pampa, Buenos Aires, Neuquén, Río Negro, Chubut, and Santa Cruz; and in the Chilean regions of Arauco, Bio-Bio, Malleco, Cautin, Valdivia, Osorno, and Chiloe. Although there are no precise official data available in Argentina, the estimated Mapuche population is between 90,000 and 300,000 people, with a significant percentage living in rural groupings that are not articulated as communities (Briones and Carrasco 1996), and more than 70 percent reside in urban centers. The Patagonia region is home to nearly 70 percent of the 113,680 Mapuche people, as estimated by the National Statistics and Census Institute (ECPI 2004–05). Neuquén is one of the three provinces—along with Chubut and Jujuy—with the highest proportion of Indigenous homes, 8.6 percent of all homes, according to the 2001 National Census.

The principal work of rural dwellers involves tending to smaller livestock—either independently or as rural hands on private estates—and making handicrafts. In some communities, the government of Neuquén has implemented housing plans, foresting projects, state commercialization of the handicrafts production and, most recently, the MLCTP. These policies have been implemented in addition to food distribution (welfare), health care, and production subsidies. Historically, the government of Neuquén has responded to the demands of the Mapuche regarding social welfare, forging relations based on cronyism and strategies for cooptation while neglecting the real issues facing the Mapuche people (Falaschi with Sánchez and Szulc 2005).

As a result of the marked rise in private property when "wire fences were introduced in the 1930s, the lack of available land led to the overexploitation of soil and caused the death of livestock, and an excess number of family members available to work" (Briones and Carrasco 1996:154). Therefore, the migration of young Mapuche people from the rural communities to the cities is a constant and profound historical

phenomenon on both sides of the Andes mountain range (Aravena 2002; Hernández 2003; Radovich and Balazote 1992). Even today, this migration grows, also owing to the people's disappointment with the quality of the education in rural elementary schools and the absence of high schools in rural areas.

In the urban centers, some Mapuche residents take informal jobs or temporary work and/or receive subsidies; in general, they end up living in marginal neighborhoods. There, the Mapuche people have renewed community-based actions since the mid-1980s, forming organizations that process complaints by Mapuche residents and offer them daily support in an environment that is often hostile. In 1990, some of these urban organizations—as well as some rural ones—began seeking independence from provincial government bodies and from political-party relations. At the same time, they sought support from grassroots groups, unions, progressive professional associations, and human rights organizations and started defining themselves in a way that goes beyond national borders—referring to the Mapuche population of both Chile and Argentina as a single people, a single nation, the Pueblo Nación Mapuche. Claudia Briones (1999) has defined these groups as "organizations with Mapuche philosophy and leadership," also on account of their restricting membership to Mapuche people and basing their actions on Indigenous practices and concepts.

In spite of their demographic importance and the growing visibility of their demands, the Mapuche urban populations and the communities not recognized by the Neuquén government (although they are recognized by the national state) have not been taken into account in the Bilingual and Intercultural Education Policy (EIB) that we are analyzing here, just as occurs with other welfare benefits and governmental policies for the recognition of Indigenous peoples.

Historically, the actions of the Catholic church and the educational system have led to a marked reduction of Mapuzugun, the Mapuche language. In fact, for a significant number of Mapuche children, youth, and middle-aged adults, Spanish is the mother tongue. However, as noted by Lucía Golluscio, "In the past few years several Mapuche political organizations have reassumed the value that the language traditionally held . . . and have incorporated into their political strategy linguistic revitalization activities and a marked use of Mapudungun in intra- and interethnic gatherings" (Golluscio 2002:154–155).

In this regard, these organizations have increasingly developed educational activities for their own children in Mapuzugun (Piciñan et al. 2004), activities that go against the hegemonic sense of belonging promoted by the MLCTP (Szulc 2007).

On the Educational System and Bilingual Intercultural Education in Neuquén

In Neuquén, policies aimed at assimilation have predominated since the stage in which this region was incorporated to Argentina as a national territory in 1884 (Teobaldo 2000, Sánchez 2004). Since the implementation of the public school system at the end of the 19th century, the educational mandate across the country has been to transmit the national identity to children (Puiggrós 1990). In the territory of Neuquén, the central government also sought to "integrate the Indigenous population, albeit regrouped and/or dispersed" after the military campaigns at the end of the 19th century known as the "Conquest of the Desert" (Díaz 2001:40). However, in practice, this period was characterized by feeble organization in the field of education (Teobaldo 2000) and by weak state institutions in general. During the first half of the

20th century, for the vast majority of the Mapuche population—whether they had access to Salesian or state boarding schools or attended public schools in the populated centers—their time in school was brief, lasting from a few months to two years at the elementary school level.

Education became a key part of state policy when Neuquén became a province in 1958, as the local government—led since 1962 by the Popular Movement of Neuquén (MPN)—focused on improving infrastructure and strengthening the educational and health systems. Public schools—with buildings of notable quality, in relative terms—and the model for primary health care both substantially contributed to the process of communalization, in the sense of construction of a shared sense of belonging (Brow 1990), based on being *Neuquino*. The hegemonic sense of belonging in the province has been wrought with confrontations with the national state and the symbolic incorporation of the Mapuche as "one of the emblematic local figures" (Mombello 2005:174). This follows a model of pluralism that is based on tolerant subordination, a model that recognizes heterogeneity to a certain degree but seeks "homogenization as desirable and inevitable in the long term" (Briones 2004:123).

The policy to regularize the Mapuche communities implemented by the new province of Neuquén, which recognized lands as "reserves" in 1964,[3] included a space that was reserved for schools and other public buildings in each community. The purpose of these schools was to give the children a common education (Sánchez 2004), and the Mapuche beneficiaries were required to send their sons and daughters (Briones 1999). As a result, school continues to play a central role today, "sometimes, as the only government enclave" from which "an entire network opens up to allow other institutions to enter: health, welfare, government programs" (Díaz 2001:50), and Catholic missions as well.

The EIB has been implemented at some of these schools, based on the recognized rights of Indigenous people and on an educational model that is theoretically open to ethnic and linguistic diversity—a model that has already gained consensus at the national and international levels (López 2006).[4]

The current MLCTP was implemented at elementary schools located in rural communities in mid-2000, although the political resolutions and measures related to MLCTP date back to 1995. Unlike other Argentine provinces where the EIB was implemented as a comprehensive law on Indigenous people, in Neuquén, it was instated through resolutions by the Provincial Education Counsel and through decrees by the executive branch of Neuquén (Hecht and Szulc 2006), that is, as legislation with a lower legal status and limited effects.[5] As stated in the inaugural resolution of MLCTP, the program is found on "the need of Indigenous communities to preserve their language and culture," and the state's and educational institutions' responsibility for "ensuring the preservation of Indigenous culture," privileging language as a "vehicle of cultural expression."

Officially, the MLCTP consists in "optionally" incorporating "the teaching of Mapuche language and culture in the elementary schools located in Indigenous communities" with an hourly assignment of ten hours per week for each teacher. Six of these hours are distributed among the different classes at each school, and the remaining four hours should be used for the task of "cultural recovery" in conjunction with the community. In 1995, a new post was created: the special Mapuche language teacher, whose hourly assignment and salary were then defined. At that time, the local community and the school administration were responsible for selecting the teachers

of special classes and for reviewing their work. Although the teachers were not required to have a teaching degree, in practice, "knowing how to read and write" was a requisite. Therefore, certain Mapuche teachers were appointed and began working, although only in 1996; after this date, the post was "suspended" (Díaz 2001).

In the year 2000, the government returned to the MLCTP, mainly in response to the demands for interculturality that were then gaining consensus in society, demands that were articulated around the project by the Coordination of the Mapuche Organizations (COM 2000). However, by arguing that the contact had to be made directly with the communities, the local executive branch did not submit the MLCTP for debate to the Mapuche organizations (Briones 2004); at the same time, the provincial government blocked financing for the COM educative projects from the National Ministry of Culture and Education (Lanusse 2004).

This redesign of the program also involved subordinating the program to a new body, the Department for Mapuche Language and Educational Programs (DMLEP), which was headed by a Mapuche official. The DMLEP got involved in decision making, intervening in the selection, training, and evaluation of teachers, as well as in taking part in the annual decision to renew teachers' contracts. As one collaborator of the department put it, "The teacher appointments are in the hands of the [DMLEP] director." As a result, the post in many cases became a political "clientelistic" benefit, one distributed at the director's discretion. In practice, the post was equivalent in salary and in terms of job precariousness to the minimal welfare subsidy granted to unemployed household heads. In this regard, the MLCTP was questioned "by specialized departments at the Universidad Nacional del Comahue . . . which noted that the program is a maneuver by the governing party, in order to blend in with food boxes and the Trabajar plans (a subsidy for the unemployed) in the communities" (Centro de Educación Popular E Intercultural 2003).

The relaunch of the program, which received plenty of coverage by the local press, added more politically correct terms to the regulation. For example, "Indigenous culture" was replaced by "culture of the original peoples," and a new goal was added, that of "improving the quality of life of the population within the framework of equal opportunities and possibilities." In the following section, I analyze how this program was in fact put into practice.

Analysis of the Program in Practice

Given my interest in the senses of belonging resulting from the MLCTP, my study is not limited to the official documentation, as the daily school experiences express interpretations of reality and values that are not explicitly mentioned in official programs (Rockwell 1995). Here, I address the practices observed at the educational establishments, in conjunction with the experiences and opinions of non-Indigenous officials and teachers as well as of the Mapuche population—teachers, officials, organization members, parents, and students—prioritizing the perspectives of the children who participate in the program. The results are organized through questions, such as where, what, and how is teaching done? I consider how the program has been received by Mapuche children and their parents, and how "Mapuche" is understood in different ways, even when—as I show—all of these aspects are closely related.

Where are Mapuche Language and Culture Taught?

At the MLCTP, the EIB is proposed as a focalized policy, aimed exclusively at the "schools located in Indigenous communities," which materialize the effective state presence in the rural areas of Neuquén. In general, the building conditions of these schools are good compared with the rural schools of other provinces. However, in terms of the quality of education, even the educational department of the province looks down on the teaching done there in practice. Although there is no regulation allowing it, it is important to consider that usually when children who graduate from these schools apply to high school (urban high schools, as there are none in rural areas), they are often asked to first repeat one or two years of elementary school in the city.

The rural community schools range from small to medium size. In the cases analyzed here, there were between 28 and 65 students in each school, grouped in two to four classes that covered all seven grades, with one teacher per class. In these and other cases, the parents have virtually no opportunity to choose another school for their children, as there is only one school at each location and there is no transport available to get students to another school. Therefore, the Indigenous population becomes a sort of "captive public" for the institution, and the educational experience of these children thus rests on the ability and the good will of the "principal of the day." This local term makes reference to the high rotation of non-Mapuche teachers at these schools, a rotation owed to both the fact that the teaching posts frequently are not permanent and also to the decisions of the teachers themselves, who often prefer to work in urban areas. One case is that of Pedro, a non-Mapuche rural teacher from Zapala, who explained, "It's not a good idea to stay too long because the parents get more demanding [the more that] they get used to you."

The level of instruction and the treatment of children by the non-Mapuche teachers—all of whom reside in nearby towns—often set off the sort of conflicts that have historically characterized the state's presence in such contexts. Complaints of a lack of teacher involvement, negligence, and not working the stipulated hours were frequent. The lack of responses to the community demands has, in some cases, led to "student strikes," general long-term student absences (Hecht and Szulc 2004). Given that the renewal of teacher posts partially depends on the number of students enrolled, such actions often modify the attitude of the teachers. In some cases, if the media comes in to cover the story, the provincial government may also intervene and replace the personnel at the school in question.

Amid such conflict, the incorporation of the EIB provincial project has generated another type of tension between the school and the Indigenous communities and organizations. That is, some Indigenous people consider that by limiting the program to rural communities, there is an underlying desire for "integration," related to a sense of assimilation. "The idea of integration in these cases is generally used to indicate the direction in which 'they' should move towards 'us.' . . . These discourses are based on the following assumption: that the one who always has to be integrated is the aboriginal, the *other*, the one who is *different*" (Novaro 2004:490). Moving in the opposite direction, which would involve making non-Indigenous students bilingual, is not even conceivable.

In both the city and countryside, Mapuche children and adults are aware that "Mapuche classes" are being given only in rural areas. Many of them are not sur-

prised because this is compatible with the idea—deeply rooted in the common mindset—that whoever migrates to the city is no longer Mapuche (Szulc 2004).

However, considering the demographic and political-cultural weight of the urban population, the fact that this educational program is limited to the rural sphere—and furthermore, to those rural communities recognized by the provincial government—is an interesting sign of the way in which Mapuche identity is defined in this program.

What Is Taught in the Mapuche Language and Culture Teaching Program? And How?

> After saying "hello" in Spanish and in Mapuzugun, the Mapuche teacher took out a small plastic bag with a branch of leaves and a pod. After opening the pod and taking out some peas, she asked in Spanish, "What is this?" Several children responded "Peas!" "We eat these, right?" Then showing the leaves, she asked, "And what do we call this in Mapuche?" After a few seconds of silence, the teacher offered the first syllable of the answer "Ta . . . " and Jonathan finished "*Tapvl*." "Good job!" the teacher said. Then she handed each child a piece of paper with his/her name on it and beneath that, the words "*Tap'l alfish*—Pea leaf." She also handed out one leaf each and pieces of tape. She went around to each child, helping all of them to tape the leaf beneath the written words. [Class of five-year-old students, Huiliches, February 2004]

As seen in this example, Mapuche teachers work as teachers for noncore subjects, teaching each class for a specific period (generally, one or two school hours per week) and giving their lesson to the whole group (both Mapuche children as well as a few non-Mapuche children). The MLCTP is thus a subject, not a linguistic immersion program. The knowledge imparted in such teaching is legitimized by the context, that is, a school located in a Mapuche community. In the cases studied here, no signs were found of the coordinated or interdisciplinary work with the non-Mapuche teachers announced by the DMLEP; such work has neither been contemplated in the current legislation nor implemented, leaving it up to "good will" and the pedagogical capacities of the teachers involved.

In this regard, as the described classroom scene shows, in both the implementation of the program and in the legislation, the Mapuche language is the main focus, although it is subordinate to the Spanish language. It is clear that Mapuzugun is not used to interact with students, but to simply help them incorporate vocabulary from the language. The illustrated classroom dynamic is repeated among other school groups. As a third grader, Facundo (age ten), explains, "She teaches me how to say 'hand' and well, all that. The nose is called *yu* and here (the ear) is called *pilun*. And the head, here, *logko*."

In general terms, after the initial greeting in Mapuzugun, the teachers observed switched to Spanish when asking questions, offering explanations, giving instructions, congratulating students for a correct answer or correcting them, and even when naming the Indigenous language, which is referred to as "Mapuche" instead of Mapuzugun. For this reason, I propose here that in the MLCTP, Spanish—the unmarked matrix language, used for communication—subordinates Mapuzugun, which is only used as the target language.

Our example also allows us to perceive the focus on writing that the MLCTP has had from the very beginning. Although its supposed aim is to revalue the Mapuche

language while incorporating it to the educational realm, it is useful to note that the Mapuche population did not demand to learn to write in Mapuzugun; instead, the DMLEP was responsible for prioritizing it. As explained by María (a candidate for a Mapuche teaching position in Zapala) a few months before taking the exam: "In Neuquén, Ñ. (an official) is going to give us the exam. He makes you write on the chalkboard to see how you will teach the children. If you do well, you are sent to a school and if not, you can work as a sub." Establishing writing was difficult at the beginning "because the future teachers were reluctant to write and to use the chalkboard," explained DMLEP personnel.

Training, however, produced results, as can be seen in day-to-day teaching: instructors regularly prioritize writing over speaking Mapuzugun. For example, when each class begins, the Mapuche teachers write the Gregorian calendar date on the chalkboard in Mapuzugun and the students copy it down in their notebooks, a typical way to start the school day in Argentine elementary schools. Although at times everyday words are selected and transcribed for children (as in the case of the pea leaves), writing is more commonly applied to traditional school topics. On many occasions, children from lower grades were observed transcribing and reciting the numbers or colors in unison. As explained by Juan, an eight-year-old student, his class writes "The date, all . . . the numbers" in Mapuzugun.

The students who take the classes unanimously mentioned the emphasis on writing: "She writes, writes, and writes and never explains anything. . . . All we do is copy" (Valeria, age 14). Writing is presented as an end in and of itself, which is one of the reasons the students and their parents deem the program inefficient, as I show later on.

In some cases, Mapuzugun is also used for the formal greetings between the Mapuche teacher and the entire student body during the daily assembly, as can be seen in the ethnographic situation described at the start of this article. Such a verbal use of Mapuzugun in disciplinary practices and in the daily school acts, along with its marked absence in classroom interactions, points out that the incorporation of the language that the MLCTP promotes is to a large extent superficial.

In addition to being framed within Spanish, the matrix language, and not used as a language for communication as in other cases (Meek and Messing 2007), the Mapuche language is reduced in practice to formal greetings and writing. Writing is limited to what is defined as relevant according to "school logic" and to an orthographical system, which, as I show below, frames *Mapuzugun* in Spanish spelling.

The MLCTP uses a standardized writing system for Mapuzugun, recently drafted by the DMLEP, which approximates the language's pronunciation to Spanish, a project that dates back to 1990 (Briones 1999). In theory, this makes it easier for children to learn to read and write in the Mapuche language. At the same time, the DMLEP rejects the Ragileo graphemic system, "a subversive writing system" (Golluscio 2002:162) approved by numerous Mapuche organizations, "that [uses] the Spanish alphabet but reassigns its phonetic equivalents to avoid the pronunciation or the writing of Mapuzugun from turning into Spanish" (Briones 2004:124). The officials and some of the Mapuche teachers interviewed argued that the graphemic system is "Chilean," because of the nationality of its author. It is important to bear in mind that the "problem with Chile"—which borders Argentina to the west and to which Argentines have consistently attributed an ambition to overtake the Patagonian-Pampa region of Argentina—has historically been the main argument to

implement and exercise Argentina's sovereignty along border zones. In Neuquén, it has also been a "justification in terms of identity for turning the 'desert' into a province" (Briones and Díaz 2000:45). The rejection of the Ragileo system reveals the way in which the MLCTP conceives the Mapuche identity, incorporating it within national and provincial identities and contesting the transnational definition of the Mapuche held by political and cultural organizations. Given that the Indigenous languages not only constitute an instrument of communication but also the locus in and through which identities are recreated (Sherzer 1981), such disputes regarding the selection of the orthographical system cannot be reduced to mere linguistics. On the contrary, they are imbued with "political and social meaning" (Golluscio 2002:160) as they define the sense of Mapuche belonging in diverging ways.

With respect to Mapuche culture, the implementation of the MLCTP has generally involved the presentation of isolated cultural elements such as "medicinal plants" and "Mapuche legends" to students. The explanations are given in Spanish, and less time is spent on such cultural lessons than on Mapuzugun itself. As occurs with the language, Mapuche culture is reduced to a "school logic," which involves a strong emphasis on writing and decontextualizing the words and ideas presented by the teacher (Chiodi 1997).

This decontextualization is in line with the MLCTP's goal of "preserving culture," a goal that involves selecting contents from times past and exclusively from the symbolic realm. These contents emphasize otherness and recreate this otherness in school, setting aside the living conditions and the history of the Mapuche people. The program, thus, is based on a restricted, limited vision of culture that frames Indigenous culture in school terms, a practice that has already been noted in other contexts in which EIB programs are implemented (Franzé 2008; Hecht 2004; Hermes 2005).

The Mapuche population itself pointed to such a selection of contents and to the methods used in the MLCTP as determining factors in the results of the program, as I show below.

Reactions to the MLCTP

It is not my goal to objectively establish whether (or to what extent) the children have incorporated the contents offered by the Mapuche teachers. Like Rockwell and Ezpeleta (1985), I am not examining the internal dimension of appropriation, that of individual learning, although I acknowledge that this does play a role in the events observed. However, it is noteworthy that the vast majority of the children—along with their parents and both Mapuche and non-Mapuche teachers—claim that they have not learned Mapuzugun or made progress in terms of "preserving their culture" as a result of this program. Yet, there are diverse interpretations and opinions among the Mapuche population with respect to the MLCTP.

In the first place, part of the Mapuche population has acknowledged this educational enterprise as an achievement, an opportunity for school to achieve what so many Mapuche adults didn't attempt or were not able to do: to teach Mapuzugun to their children, and thus "recover the culture, language, customs and beliefs."

Meanwhile, many parents argued against school being a proper location for learning Mapuche language and culture, and they attributed the meager success of the MLCTP to the teaching methods used. The parents believed that "school logic" is to some extent incompatible with the teaching of their language and with the contextu-

alized learning so common within the realm of the home, in which learning "takes place in real contexts, in everyday situations that are meaningful and significant to the children and to their lives in the community" (Hecht 2004:4). In the words of Sergio, a father of four, "I don't think you can learn that way, because all they do is write. And they don't learn how to speak or pronounce things right; all they do is write. The language used to be learn[ed] by hearing and speaking it at home." While doubting whether Mapuzugun can be acquired through the formal educational system, the Mapuche have demanded that traditional school subjects be taught effectively. The association of that knowledge with social mobility again reminds us of how the subordinated sectors appropriate these beliefs, as occurs across Latin America. "The right to education has been a popular demand and not simply an arm in the hands of the dominant sectors" (Batallán and Neufeld 1988:2).

Given that the MLCTP is already under way, the community members concurred in their claim that it should accomplish a competent use of Mapuzugun by the children, as a communicative resource. The goal should be for these children to be able to speak with elder community members and to participate in community ceremonies, in which speaking Mapuzugun is imperative. In this respect, their demands are the same as those of other Indigenous groups (Godenzzi 1997) and also coincide with the critical relevance identified in numerous investigations on the intergenerational transmission of the language and its use in the household and community sphere (Fishman 1991; Henze and Davis 1999).

In the second place, there is a large amount of evidence indicating that—in spite of having been adjusted to "school logic"—this subject has not been adequately incorporated to the curriculum or to the regular functioning of the scholarly institution and educational system. Isabel, a non-Mapuche principal, concurred with the Mapuche population that the lack of teacher evaluations by the DMLEP was one of the reasons for the lack of success of the program. As she explained, "The school is not involved; it only offers advice to personnel in conjunction with the Department for Mapuche Language and Education. But [Mapuche teachers] are really on their own." At the same time, the children reported that the subject was not included on report cards until 2004. "But they still haven't written anything" (Facundo, age ten). In practice, then, Mapuche language and culture are not equivalent to traditional school subjects within the program.

In this regard, some non-Mapuche teachers and school officials made reference to the lack of training of Mapuche teachers. For example, Isabel explained that "not just anyone can be a teacher. Sometimes it's hard to keep control over a class. Even though they have their own pedagogy, it's not the same. A teacher has to know how to teach and how to establish classroom guidelines. But it's not easy." Taking into account the historic emphasis on discipline and normalization that has characterized teacher training in Argentina (Davini 1995), such statements expressly show that these Mapuche instructors are not considered "real teachers." Such a denial of status is further complicated by the job precariousness and the pitiful salaries of such posts. Given these conditions, we shouldn't take for granted that writing in Mapuzugun will contribute to this language maintenance, because for now it does not empower the individuals who learn to do so (Hornberger 1995).

In the third place, the fact that the Mapuche teachers are so discredited may have contributed to the lack of interest on the part of the children. In fact, there is consensus among the different social actors on children's attitude as one of the reasons behind

the poor results, even among children themselves. "Because they don't listen to the Mapuche teacher (laughing), *we* don't listen" (Valeria, age 14). Some parents attributed this to the "school logic" of the program; the children would, they argued, be more interested in learning "history, how to speak, and how to respond when an elderly man greets them."

For some Mapuche teachers, the lack of interest and the poor performance of the children is the result of their parents' rejection of the language—either currently or in the past—owing to the historical influence of the educational system. This can be seen in the words of Rosa:

> Kids don't care because of the education they receive at home. Their tongues are tied because they are used to speaking Spanish, as their parents stopped teaching them [Mapuzugun] because they were ashamed . . . because when they spoke Mapuche, the teachers would say, "You aren't speaking right!" because it used to be hard for them to pronounce Spanish, just as now it is hard for these children to pronounce Mapuche.

Several children agreed that their parents play a critical role. "And besides, if your parents never bothered to teach you! If the parents aren't interested, children will care even less" (Rita, age 13). Some of them stated that their schoolmates' unwillingness was part of their denial of their Mapuche identity, as explained by Valeria (age 14):

> They are all Mapuche, but they won't admit it. . . . Let's just say that they don't *want* to admit that they're Mapuche. For example, I have a classmate who says that she doesn't study Mapuche because her mom and dad don't know how to speak Mapuche and because her grandmother and grandfather weren't Mapuche. So there she is [in the class], but she doesn't seem to care and she doesn't study, she doesn't do anything, I mean, in Mapuche [class].

The selection of contents rooted in the past and distant from the students' own experiences was mentioned by some Mapuche teachers as the reason behind such apathy. Mirta, for example, offered this explanation:

> If I start telling [students] some story from the past, they don't have . . . the faintest idea, you know, it's something that happened to me. . . . For example, when we talk . . . about houses, for example. Because most of the kids today live in another type of construction, and they don't know a thing about the kind of houses we used to live in. . . . And well, that's when, like I said, maybe they ask themselves what good it will do them to learn about that, right?

Certain students adopt an attitude that is not only indifferent but is also in fact resistant to Mapuche language and culture, particularly those who participate in some of the diverse evangelical churches, whose significance among the Mapuche population in southern and central Neuquén has grown progressively since the 1980s (Radovich 1983). Briefly, some of these churches present evangelism, Catholicism, and the Mapuche culture as different and mutually excluding religions. In fact, Mapuzugun, which is in some cases considered demoniacal, is particularly disapproved of, and speaking the language is prohibited within the churches. It is no surprise, then, that certain parents—the members of these churches—have repeatedly asked to meet with school authorities to ask that their children be excused from the MLCTP; or that the evangelical children themselves openly acknowledge that "I'm *never* going to learn," because "I don't make the effort of asking the teacher how to say something or to tell me what it is" (Gisela, age 11).

There are also cases of children from families with a history of Mapuche political and cultural militancy. Such children are against Catholicism, evangelism, and nationalism, considering these impositions on their culture; nevertheless, these students generally are not very enthusiastic about the MLCTP, either. They perceive the program to be "contaminating" Mapuche culture with Christian beliefs and with national and provincial symbology. "We argue with the Mapuche teacher just because. Because she talks about God and all that and since I don't believe in God. . . . And she says yes, that God exists, you know?" (Valeria, age 14). Therefore, political and cultural disputes over how to define Mapuche identity also occurred daily at the school.

It is important to point out that in spite of these drawbacks, some students have appropriated some of the knowledge imparted in the MLCTP. One example is Facundo (age ten), who, taking a leaf from a tree next to his house, explained, "This goes like that, you fold it over and then you can use it as a cream, that's what the Mapuzugun teacher told me, you leave it on all night and your face gets better, just like that." Note how he avoids using the Spanish name for his language.

Also interesting is the way in which children from this sector—following behavior parameters identified as Mapuche—noted contradictions between the way their Mapuche teacher acts in and out of school. According to them, this is not simply the result of personal attributes but part of a general issue that crisscrosses the community, in which my young interlocutor, Valeria, included herself:

> Because here, for example, I argue with the Mapuche teacher because, well, for example, she says that we have to say hello in Mapuche and whatever, and when she's out walking around, she doesn't say hello, as if that weren't the case, as if only at school she were Mapuche. And the fact is that here. . . . In the three days of the *rogativa* (a Mapuche ceremony), oh wow, they are all so Mapuche! Then the *rogativa* ends and they're no longer Mapuche, they're just *cualquiera* [lit. anyone]. I mean . . . I mean, when it comes to being Mapuche, yeah, we are. But we don't speak the language, I mean, we don't treat one another the way we are supposed to.[6]

Therefore, although there may be a few differences in their opinions, the Mapuche population has been consistently demanding other contents for the EIB, as explained by Marta, the mother of four students of the MLCTP: "They teach you random words, the names of the instruments, the *kulxug* (a percussion instrument). But is this what they should be teaching? They should be teaching history, nature, the respect that you owe to each *newen* (force of nature)." In such terms, both parents and children alike criticized the fact that Mapuche culture and language had been reduced to the teaching of "random words." Instead, they demanded that children learn Mapuche knowledge, the guidelines for adequate Mapuche behavior and in some cases, "the history" of their enduring resistance and their subsequent subjugation starting at the end of the 19th century. Within the framework of the MLCTP, these contents are considered politicized and therefore, inadmissible (Briones 1999), given the folkloric, "harmonious" perspective in which, as I show, this program is based.

The Dispute over the Mapuche Identity

In both the schools and other educational institutions of Neuquén, the confinement of Mapuche elements to a remote past fossilizes Mapuche culture and makes contemporary cultural manifestations illegitimate (Chiodi 1997), leading children to dis-

regard the lessons taught and thus lose interest. Furthermore, this may create confusion among children, such as that shown in the following quote. "In the past, the Mapuche were monkeys, all covered with hair" (Esteban, age ten). Or the belief that the Mapuche coexisted with the dinosaurs, as can be seen in the following fragment from an interview with nine-year-old Mapuche children who currently reside in the city of Junín de los Andes, although they hail from a rural community that they visit often. The children here commented on how the objects are displayed in the Mapuche Museum of that city of Neuquén—an obligatory visit for schoolchildren. Along with vessels, clothing, jewels, and other undated objects, petrified wood is displayed alongside two enormous replicas of "dinosaur bones." There is no further explanation of the significance of these artifacts.

Author: And what's the Mapuche museum like?
Jorge: Well . . . there are pots, pots that belonged to the Indians, and there are bones, dinosaur bones. . . .
A: And what pots belong to the Indians?
Matías: There are . . . there are arrowheads.
A: And pots belonging to which Indians?
Jorge: Pots, no, those belonged to the dinosaurs.
A: The bones?
Jorge: Yes.
Matías: The Carolini.
Jorge: Yeah, there were bones and other stuff and drinking fountains where the dinosaurs drank.
A: The dinosaurs?
Jorge: Yeah. I don't know what they drank.

The Mapuche identity is also forced into remote margins through images that stereotype Indigenous people based on the prototype popularized in Hollywood Westerns. This became apparent in the comment made by Matías during the group interview cited above. When asked again which "Indians" the pots shown in the museum belonged to, the boy responded, "The Indians who say, 'uh, uh, uh, uh'," while tapping his mouth with the palm of his hand, imitating the stereotypical sound that characterizes the Apache in movies. It was interesting how the interview suddenly shifted when Facundo (a ten-year-old resident in the rural community, but whose personal history involves Mapuche organizations and urban experience) intervened. After joining in with Matías in imitating the "Western" sound for a moment, he switched to the vehement Mapuche ritual hailing—based on a war cry attributed to the historic Mapuche leader Lautaro. "E, ye, ye, ye . . . *mariciwew, mariciwew, mariciwew*" (We are alive tenfold, we will overcome tenfold). Then he explained, "This is what you say during the *rogativa*, right?" Matías responded, "Yeah, when they do the *purun* (group dance), they lift their faces and say, '*Mariciwew!*' "

Therefore, what these children learn through their everyday experiences is confronted by the exoticized notions that often pervade everyday school life and textbooks. This is clear in the words of Rita (age 13):

"The books don't tell the truth about the Mapuche, saying they danced, . . . turning in circles. . . . But that's not what they do here [in the community's ceremony]. I showed this Billiken book to my uncle [a ritual leader] and he told me that they treat us like we're crazy, and that it's not like that at all. And the teachers go by what the books say, and that's it."

By reducing Mapuche culture to a page in pre-Hispanic history, to the rural and traditional sphere, the conflict is neutralized and a "harmonious" perspective is strengthened. The MLCTP thus participates in the local style in which hegemony is constructed in Neuquén, by sidestepping "crucial issues of oppression—colonialism, socioeconomic inequality, and racism" (Hermes 2005:44). As Novaro indicates, "History is based on refusing to acknowledge inequalities, enemies and conflicts" (2003:3) based on "positivism," which continues—as Batallán indicated—to present "a society model that likens it to a biological organism. Existing social functions are harmonious and any attempts at modification can make the social organism unstable, representing a threat to its health" (1988:24).

The efforts to transmit this harmonious vision to Mapuche children—a vision so central to Neuquén's identity—are patent in one of the most publicized activities of the DMLEP: a Mapuzugun translation of the provincial anthem. Done by the advisors of the "Counsel of the Elderly" and the Mapuche teachers, the translated version was later performed at several official ceremonies by a choir made up by Mapuche teachers. Informally, it became a fundamental content for community children.

The importance granted to this translation shows evidence of the program's commitment to the "political economy of diversity production" prevailing in Neuquén (Briones 2005), which, while conceding the Mapuche identity a certain validity, nevertheless subordinates this identity to the provincial one. The preeminence of all things "provincial" and the clear bias in the incorporation of Mapuche language and culture are more likely to distance children from Mapuche culture as opposed to bringing them closer to it. Therefore, I posit that this is a provincialist school discourse, which has many points in common with the nationalist school discourse presented in Novaro 2003. This is the reason behind the title of this article: "Becoming *Neuquino* in Mapuzugun." The continuity of assimilation-based educational policies and the resulting subordination of the Mapuche were explained in simple terms by Antonio, a Mapuche teacher who refused to join the choir referred to above. Antonio claimed that the MLCTP aims to "continue colonizing children with nationalism through the use of Mapuzugun."

The nonconflictive perspective transmitted to children also applies to the relations between the Mapuche people and the Catholic church. In spite of the fact that public education officially has no religious affiliation in Argentina, at many rural public schools across the country, catechism classes are often given after hours. In addition, such schools often implement daily practices such as saying a prayer before lunch or allowing missionary activities by Catholic high schoolers on the school grounds. This "harmony," which is poetically evidenced in the words of the provincial anthem,[7] is politically reinforced by the DMLEP through joint efforts with private institutions both Catholic and evangelical. Although we can offer only a brief explanation of this phenomenon here owing to space limitations, it is relevant to note that this syncretic perspective is transmitted to children by the MLCTP on an everyday basis. In some cases, in fact, one of the first phrases taught to children in Mapuzugun is: "*Mañumain el que tev* = Thanking God" (third grade notebook).

Therefore, the MLCTP addresses children from a perspective that combines "Mapuche"—fossilized and depoliticized—with "Catholic," ultimately geared to turning them into loyal Argentine citizens and, above all, loyal *Neuquinos*. By establishing certain meanings and values that "seem to be reciprocally confirmed as they are experienced as practices" (Williams 1997:131), the MLCTP contributes to renew-

ing the hegemony in which Neuquén envelops this specific articulation of identity, one that is broadly shared by the Catholic church and by a great part of the Mapuche population. At the same time, the MLCTP also reveals the different ways in which this hegemonic perspective is challenged on a daily basis. One of the most outstanding antihegemonic initiatives is the sense of belonging proposed by the organizations with Mapuche philosophy and leadership, one that counters the confinement of Mapuche to the rural realm and its elucidation in provincial, national, and religious terms (both Catholic and evangelist). In contrast, it defines Mapuche identity in transnational terms, giving a diacritic hue to the knowledge and practice of Mapuzugun, as well as to the "millenary worldview" and the "demand for fundamental rights" (Piciñan et al. 2004:253). This is indicative of what I defined in a previous work as "the contesting definition of Mapuche identity" (Szulc 2008), which can be discerned to a great extent in the mentioned words and daily practices of Mapuche children and adults in reference to the MLCTP.

These conflictive constructions of Mapuche identity lead to much discordance among adults, among children, and between adults, children, and teachers. There have been cases in which teachers reprimand children for missing class to participate in a protest in the provincial capital; cases of fights between Catholic and evangelist children, or between these and other children who are neither one religion nor the other; and cases of parents demanding that their children not be taught Mapuzugun, or insisting that their children indeed be taught the language but that "the true story" must be told. There have also been complaints made by non-Mapuche teachers to parents of children who refuse to swear their loyalty to the Argentine flag or wear the uniform white jacket required of all Argentine public school students at the elementary level.

For the Mapuche people, then, childhood is evidently more than a heterogeneous field: it is a battlefield in which Neuquén's way of constructing and struggling for hegemony reigns. It is also a field that involves several actors besides the family and school, the two actors to which the strongest influence on childhood is generally attributed.

Concluding Remarks

The analysis of the Neuquén case seeks to make a contribution to the field of anthropology in the following ways. In the first place, it is clear that official EIB programs are framed within the Indigenous policy of the country and province in which they are developed. In our case, the MLCTP is clearly connected to a national historic trend, one based on "giving specific answers to specific issues . . . starting from the moments critical to the consolidation of the Argentine state" (Briones 2005:36). At the local level, it is closely related to the welfare-based, paternalistic, "clientelistic" style of Neuquén's Indigenous policy (Falaschi with Sánchez and Szulc 2005). Moreover, the implementation of the MLCTP involves actions based on a hegemonic sense of belonging for the province's citizens that at the same time is reinforced by this program. As we have seen, by fossilizing Mapuche culture and limiting it to the rural sphere, the MLCTP subordinates that culture, incorporating it in the program's redoubled efforts to make Mapuche children loyal citizens of Argentina and Neuquén as well as good Catholics.

The MLCTP, at the same time, is part of the recent trends to decentralize, segment, and narrow the focus of social policies, trends that have characterized the transformation of conservative neoliberalism (Grassi with Hintze and Neufeld 1994). By confining the program to rural communities, instead of interculturalizing the hegemonic sectors (López 2006), this program does not distance itself from the stereotypes in which cultural diversity is considered a disadvantage, stereotypes that interculturality was supposed to eliminate (Bordegaray and Novaro 2004). In spite of its promise to acknowledge diversity and ensure equal opportunity, the MLCTP proves inadequate in improving the educational trajectories of Mapuche children, and it is even less capable of reverting the segmentation of the educational system in schools marked by deep inequalities.

In the second place, Mapuzugun takes a secondary role in the MLCTP in practice and is framed by Spanish, the matrix language, thus reinforcing the imbalance in the power relations between the languages and their speakers, as noted by Meek and Messing (2007). Thus, the announced attempt to revalue the language is thwarted by its very implementation. Therefore, the way in which Mapuche language and culture is filtered through the school is not, as Novaro warns, merely a " 'modification' of the contents (as a possibly necessary attribute, considering that young students are involved)" but a "distortion, of an ideological nature as opposed to an educational one . . . of the very meaning of knowledge" (2003:13).

Third, this case also reveals the disputed nature of the process of constructing and articulating senses of belonging, the process in which the MLCTP is clearly involved. This is not merely the case of a dominant class imposing a preconstructed worldview that is closed and coherent; it is a series of processes in which the Mapuche population—parents, students, teachers, and officials—all actively participate, either by consenting or contesting the hegemonic meanings.

Finally, the ethnographic approach also allowed the perspectives of Indigenous children—that is, those who are affected by this type of educational policy day to day—to emerge. I am interested in emphasizing that children are not just the object of the identity battles that I have analyzed here: they also act as agents, resignifying and articulating the different and conflicting messages.

Acknowledging children's capacity as agents does not mean overlooking structural conditions of a social, economic, and political nature that limit them in many ways. This explains the fact that in many cases, their practices and representations do not differ from or contradict those of the adults. For this reason, I have not analyzed "the children's point of view" separately. Since it is not a closed or homogenous block, it cannot be extricated from the points of view of the adults and institutions. Instead, I have attempted to present the heterogeneous perspectives of children regarding the subjective positions at stake, showing how whereas at times they appropriate hegemonic definitions and articulations, in other cases they debate, reformulate, or reject these same definitions. By articulating their subjectivities, they do not automatically assimilate the identities imposed by others; instead, they make connections, resignify, and reorganize the diverse mandates, meaning, experiences, interests, and identities in multiple ways (Grossberg 1989). For example, consider Valeria, who felt "more Mapuche than ever" when she participated in a revitalized Mapuche initiative ceremony in the unfamiliar and seemingly hostile capital city, rather than in her "ancestral" rural community, or Darío (age 12), who—distancing himself from the contesting definition of the Mapuche identity

held by his family—defined himself as Mapuche and Catholic, while he enthusiastically studied the script for the school play in which he would play "Argentina's founding father."

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Notes

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1. For the terms in Mapuzugun, I have utilized the Ragileo graphemic system, which has been approved by many Mapuche organizations in Neuquén, except for the word *Mapuche*—which would be written *Mapuce* in the Ragileo system—and when literally citing words and phrases written in the MLCTP classes following another system.

2. The fieldwork was done during four periods in the counties of Zapala, Huiliches, Lacar, and Confluencia. The implementation of the MLCTP was studied in rural communities located in Huiliches and Lacar, material which we analyze here in conjunction with the interviews done with Mapuche teachers, DMLEP officials, and members of Mapuche organizations in the cities of Neuquén, Junín de los Andes, and Zapala. I do not mention the community or organization to which each speaker belongs to ensure their anonymity. For this same reason, the names have been changed.

3. After Neuquén became a province (Law 14 408 of 1955), the MPN permanently assigned a reservation of government or "fiscal" lands to 18 communities—then referred to as "groupings"—by Decree No. 737 in 1964. The winter grazing lands were measured at the beginning of the 1970s, as stipulated in the provincial constitution. Since then, other communities have been recognized, making for a total of 47, although the legal status of some of these communities has not been recognized at the provincial level. In all cases, the full ownership of the assigned lands is still under dispute, and there has been no recognition of the traditional summer grazing lands, which are of crucial importance to small migrating livestock, which represent the most important source of income for the Mapuche rural population.

4. In 1994, Article 75 Section 17 of the National Constitution recognized the rights of indigenous communities in Argentina for the first time. The section states: "To recognize the ethnic and cultural preexistence of the indigenous peoples of Argentina. To guarantee respect for their identity and the right to bilingual and intercultural education. To establish a legal entity for the communities and grant community possession and ownership to the lands they traditionally have inhabited." The right of the EIB is also acknowledged in National Law No. 23.302, the Federal Education Law and Resolution 107/99 of the Federal Counsel of Culture and Education. In June 2004, the National EIB Program was created by the National Ministry of Education.

5. The recent reform of the Neuquén constitution, in February 2006, included recognition of the preexistence of "Neuquén indigenous people" and their right to bilingual and intercultural education, among other rights.

6. In daily speak, referring to someone as *cualquiera*, literally "anyone" or "anything," implies that their behavior is completely inappropriate.

7. For example, one of the verses of the Neuquén anthem says about this young province: "A *Machi* vision/runs through its blood/multiplying bread loaves/just like the *Nguenechen*." The

biblical intertextuality is evident in the reference to "multiplying bread loaves." In addition, bear in mind that *Genecen (Nguenechen)* is a word used in the Mapuche language to refer to a supreme divinity, an enculturation of the Christian notion introduced by Jesuit missionaries in the colonial period (Nicoletti n.p.:14).

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