Knowledge Transmission through the Renü

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PABLO: Chem amta renü? *(What is the renü?)*
LAUREANO: Renü muten (*Just* renü). [*Silence.*] *Salamanca.*

The baroque literature of the seventeenth century recounts in well-known works the Hispanic legend about *salamancas* (a preliminary gloss could be caves or underground places where special skills are acquired), which always evoke a sense of magic, learning, and pacts with the devil (Farberman 2005: 145). In Argentina, as in neighboring countries, stories about salamancas and the people who visit them (*salamanqueros*) have been passed down since the early period of European colonization. While these folktales have their own regional peculiarities, they exhibit similarities in how they define this magical space where the initiate learns a definite art (taming animals, dancing, playing the guitar, curing, and cursing, among others) by making a pact with the devil, from whom the lessons are learned (Farberman 2005: 145). In Argentine Patagonia the figure of the salamanca marks a narrative genre that often circulates in the privacy of the home or at evening parties around the campfire; in these or other private situations, the interlocutors reveal in whispers that someone is a salamanquero or has had certain experiences with a salamanca. However, we believe that behind these apparent accusations of witchcraft and pacts with the devil, the Mapuche have maintained and redefined a philosophy of being, centering on their relationship with the environment and with the act of

knowing. Although this article concerns stories about salamancas, our aim is to reflect specifically on the process of transmission and acquisition of culturally significant knowledge among the Mapuche living to the east of the Andes.

The essay was written as a collaboration between an anthropologist, Ana, and a *mapunche*, Pablo, who is interested in reflecting on his history. Pablo replaces the ethnic category of Mapuche with the adjective *mapunche* to shine a spotlight on the process of identification as something that is ongoing. While Mapuche embodies a position of attachment, of belonging to a people, *mapunche* refers to an individual involved in a personal search to discover his or her subjectivity as a Mapuche. Our work emerges out of a dialogue between the distinct questions each of us posed. To demonstrate how we attempted to interpret what at first glance seems a matter of magic and witchcraft, we present here the reflections one of us (Pablo) wrote that were subsequently shared during the course of analysis:

> Since I was a child I heard my parents, neighbors, brothers and some strangers talking about the salamanca. Since then, I've heard some stories in which it was said, for instance, "He must be a salamanquero because he never loses at jackstones," "He went to the make a pact: that is why he never loses," "He is a good horseman because his grandfather was a salamanquero and left him the gift," or "That guy has livestock because his family made a pact."[1] That is why, some years ago, when I started to search for my identity as a *mapunche*, some questions arose: What is it like? What is it for? Did it exist? Does it exist now? How does Western culture understand the idea of the salamanca and how does Mapuche culture understand it? Starting with these questions, I will try to shape what is present today among many of the people living in both the town and the countryside of this region. In this search, I found the name of salamanca in Chezüngun (the Mapuche language): "Renü."

The word *renü* in Chezüngun corresponds to the Spanish *salamanca* but at the same time transforms it and situates it in local and historically complex frames of interpretation. Through the analysis of this tension, which we call *renü/salamanca*, we intend to reflect on two different but closely related issues. We examine how different epistemologies (some of Hispanic origin and others Mapuche) are articulated through

the work of selecting, transferring, and acquiring significant knowledge to define a way of knowing as "truly Mapuche." We also focus on the decisions and methodological approaches that are foregrounded in collaborative work, where anthropological forms of interpretive distancing overlap with those approaches that emerge when the experience of knowing is aimed at finding oneself as a Mapuche person. By way of introduction, we present the questions that guided our reflections on each of these levels of analysis.

First, the field encounters from which the stories we analyze emerged consist of conversations between one of us and a Mapuche interlocutor whom we already knew, having established a long-term relationship of learning and exchanging ideas. It is important to clarify this point, since not only do we incorporate our interlocutors' words as citations of authority, but also—as frequently occurs in a relationship with a master—our interlocutors challenged us to identify questions and think beyond their apparent meanings. Consequently, during conversations with them the meanings of words such as "gift," "special person," "cave," or "underground place" were constantly changing in relation to their interpretive frameworks and connections between these frameworks (Bauman and Briggs 1990). Attention to these shifts in meaning, which were more or less apparent, led us to identify a tension between renü and salamanca. The word *renü*, as mentioned, is associated in Chezüngun with the term *salamanca* and is used in restricted contexts to refer to something that is ancestrally powerful and respected (*yam*).[2] On the other hand, beyond their more quotidien and public use, terms such as *salamanca* or *witchcraft* also evoke other knowledge networks, where the divisions between right and wrong, between what is permissible and what is forbidden, can sometimes become prevailing frames of interpretation. These internal and external senses of the words *renü* and *salamanca* are not opposed poles of meaning but are closely linked in a continuous chain of associations (Morphy 1991: 80).

We focus here on the images evoked in stories and reflections on the linked concepts of renü and salamanca. Renü/salamanca can be the cave-shaped portal through which one enters into negotiation with the devil to acquire extraordinary knowledge in exchange for one's own soul or the soul of loved ones; it is the gate to the parallel worlds in which ancestral Mapuche knowledge is located. The cave connects with an underground world, the underworld, which sometimes takes

on the characteristics of Hell in the Christian sense and at other times takes on the characteristics of a parallel world of wealth and ancestral knowledge about life and the environment. External understandings of salamanca are associated with Christian ideas and frameworks of interpretation, where Hell, witchcraft, and the dichotomy between right and wrong predominate. Internal meanings replace the Christian model with other implied scenarios concerning ways of living and interacting with the environment; from this perspective, the knowledge inherited from the ancestors defines both "Mapuche culture" through the experience of an "inside" and the paths to "becoming" part of it.

Second, from the moment we approached this research as a collaborative work, we directed our questions and thoughts toward a space of enunciation that is clearly neither the indigenous organization nor the anthropological academy. The effort was planned as a collaborative work and a co-theorization among people with different types of training, whereby we aim to develop conceptual tools arising both out of the articulation of interpretations embedded in Mapuche culture and history and out of the academy. In this sense, following the approach of Joanne Rappaport and Abelardo Ramos Pacho (2005), this mode of producing knowledge is part of a political project of rebuilding alternative conceptual frameworks that provide new interpretations consonant with the epistemologies and political priorities of indigenous struggles. Both of us agree that the Mapuche language is the point of departure from which to begin to develop these conceptual tools; such tools should be culturally significant for individuals, organizations, and communities who are searching for intrinsically Mapuche ways of interpreting experience and acting on social reality (and they should also be critical of dominant canons). We also believe that in the collaborative process, the analytical categories arising out of anthropology will be "refined" (Geertz 1987), acquiring nuances in their uses and definitions.

"We" and Its Distances

When we moved from being informal interlocutors to become coauthors of a written work, we discovered that it would be necessary to explain the methodological agreements we had made. When we introduce ourselves in the text, for instance, we seek to avoid hierarchies or assuming stereotypes like anthropologist and Mapuche as well

as avoiding the separation of the roles of academic and activist, roles we believe overlap.[3] We have opted to introduce ourselves as a worker in the field of anthropology and as a person searching for his identity (mapunche rather than Mapuche), since we want to identify ourselves with the actions that led us to think about this collaborative work from the vantage points of our different social trajectories.

In particular the fact that Pablo, after much reflection, decided to identify himself as mapunche and not as Mapuche defined our reciprocal collaboration. This distinction refers indirectly and only partially to anthropological discussions that replace the concept of "identity" with "identification." From the standpoint of Stuart Hall (1996), identification is a contingent way of articulating imposed identities in which people modulate, stylize, produce, or perform the subject positions that appeal to them. In the same line of thought, Brubaker and Cooper (2000) understand identification and self-understanding as a situational and individual approach to identity. These authors begin by critiquing the concept of "fundamental sameness." This is also present in the uses of the native category of mapunche. However, Pablo's attempt at replacing his introduction as a Mapuche with his search for an identity (as a mapunche), does not so much appeal to the joint articulation of ambiguous cohabitations that alternate the self as it proposes a revitalization of social networks, of the act of listening, of the process of transmission of knowledge and its socialization among those who are its very agents. Being a Mapuche is a goal, no matter whether it is achievable or not. What is interesting here is that Pablo's position as mapunche serves as a guide to the process of the reorganization of social networks, dialogue, and transmission of knowledge, in which what is inherited from the ancestors is articulated within the daily experiences (of struggle, of loss, of crisis and encounter) of the most recent generations.

Based on her experience among Nasa intellectuals of Colombia, Joanne Rappaport (2006) points out how spatial metaphors of "inside" and "outside" organize a conceptual topography that mediates between cultural attachment and foreign influence. We adopt this conceptualization to frame our thoughts on the evolution of Mapuche knowledge in the context of their political projects of self-determination. In other words, the aim of these pages is to talk about Mapuche culture from the standpoint of an insider. Therefore, we must first define the in-

side, or the site at which Mapuche culture is usually located, in order to think of how a collaborative anthropology, in which the authors are not always equally "inside," questions or participates in these topologies.

In Patagonia the criteria of belonging and exclusion usually refer to the ethnic dichotomy Mapuche/*wingka* (*wingka* being a Mapuche term that refers to Euroargentines), in which both terms acquire a polyphony as complex as the one that Rappaport finds among the Nasa of Colombia. We do not discuss the concept of wingka here. Mapuche identity depends on various criteria, which involve agreements, collaborations, and different forms of participation that are highly contextual. We explore this as we interpret our own experiences.

Pablo was born and raised in a place called Pantanoso, along the southern boundary of the province of Rio Negro. When he was twenty-three years old he moved from the countryside to the provincial capital of Bariloche in search of work and educational opportunities. He currently earns his living as a craftsman producing leather goods. He is also attending university to obtain an associate's degree in humanities and social studies at the National University of Rio Negro. Although he lives in the city, he still takes part in the ceremonies and meetings held in his community. In recent years he has become involved in Mapuche organizations and has begun to learn Chezüngun.

Ana is a researcher and professor of anthropology. Since 1995 she has worked with Mapuche communities and organizations in Patagonia. She moved from Buenos Aires to Bariloche two years ago to work as a professor at the National University of Rio Negro.

We met formally several years ago at a workshop for indigenous linguists, where Pablo was involved as a Mapuche activist and Ana worked, along with other anthropologists, as a lecturer on the subject of ethnography. Our relationship began when we opened a dialogue about a number of complex figures in Mapuche culture and the *pillañ* (the spirit of the ancestors, associated with volcanoes). Since then our discussions and exchanges of readings have focused on the possibility of connecting seemingly unrelated topics (such as initiations in caves, Mapuche knowledge, the ability to understand the messages of birds, and stories about government genocide, to name a few) as a means of stimulating us to think inside and outside of standard explanations; in the conventional wisdom, for example, certain practices are explained entirely through reference to the *machi* (shamans), the practice of

witchcraft, or the devil. This was how we arrived at such a crosscutting and polemical topic as the salamanca, seemingly external to the Mapuche culture.

Our collaborative work was initiated on an afternoon we spent drinking mate and sharing some stories we had heard from our Mapuche acquaintances. These narratives seemed puzzling or dull from the standpoint of our everyday ways of knowing and understanding. In these stories, images of ancestors danced atop a volcano, women lived underground, and *ñankitos* (local birds) that could speak came together with people with extraordinary skills. We began to realize that each of these narratives was connected to other discourses and practices, creating interpretive frameworks in which words acquired new and sometimes challenging meanings. Shortly afterward we read travel accounts, looking for mentions of the salamanca, and we began conducting interviews. In our regular meetings over the past year our work has focused on identifying questions and possible connections, culminating in the decision to attempt a preliminary explanation in writing.

Even though our work grew out of a common intellectual agenda, it is also lodged in a specific political project. As has occurred in other countries, the "inside" is often associated—by indigenous people and government officials, NGOs or academics—with rural areas, with recognized indigenous communities, and in the particular case of the Mapuche with *Wulumapu* (the modern nation of Chile). Young Mapuches who live in urban centers in Argentina usually travel to Temuco and surrounding areas in neighboring Chile, where Chezüngun is still spoken on the street, or to rural areas farther from *Puelmapu* (Argentina) to commence their pursuit of a Mapuche identity. However, in recent years some Mapuche activists and intellectuals, who live either in cities or in the countryside, have begun to appreciate their own collectives, families, and personal experiences in a different way. By empowering family and local knowledge, not only do they concern themselves with a critique of hegemonic discourses about "the loss of the Mapuche culture" to the east of the Andes and in urban areas, but they have also become extremely creative in using tools to search for and interpret their own cultural heritage, whether it be inherited or acquired through research (Kropff 2010).

We participate in these same initiatives. Certain discursive and nondiscursive images, among which we include those evoked silently or

implicitly, continue to be passed down from generation to generation among relatives and neighbors, even in urban settings. According to Eduardo Kohn (2002), when an image is transmitted as valued knowledge, even when it is not fully understood, it often transmits signs of its potential links with the past and present. Interpretations made about Mapuche culture by new generations (among which we include ourselves) emerge out of the present, at a specific time and place, but they never completely abandon their links with the past. We believe, then, that this is a critical moment, politically and anthropologically, at which potential meanings that are transmitted as part of an "inside" can be interpreted anew within a specific political project, illuminating aspects that were not visible until now and connecting what did not previously appear to be naturally linked or related.

As we developed this mode of understanding and reflecting on culture alongside our common political position, our perception of inside and outside was oriented toward the people with whom each of us was engaged in dialogue. For one of us, the reception of our work among family members or other members of the Mapuche community became important, particularly because we were working on a sensitive issue that aroused suspicion; for the other, academic evaluation was fundamental, particularly as regards the use of authorized quotations and the recognition of previous discussions on the subject. Without prioritizing either in advance, we agreed on an intermediate point of enunciation ("we"), in which we were both partly inside and partly outside. This decision became explicit on several occasions in the course of our work, and as we progressed we took shared responsibility for what had been said. However, during certain stages of our work, one of us might begin to feel somewhat divorced from this collective author. Such moments forced us to refocus the agreement on the "we-author." These experiences were related to forms of distancing that we had not been aware of before.

Pablo found academic writing and the use of anthropological categories to be a challenge, but he was also forced to confront the conceptual distance he needed to create in order to engage in debate. Therefore, every concept was discussed and agreed upon, as was the place of citations of authority in our work. Ethnographic "being-looked-at-ness" (Chow 1995, in Rappaport 2006) resulted in a paradox: on the one hand, it enabled the "we" to emerge as a reflexive subject, with the

methodological advantage of denaturalizing that which we routinely ignore. On the other hand, it also evoked an external point of perception associated with a history of power and asymmetry. The matter then resided in evaluating every academic category that we were to use and discarding suspect ones. For Ana the challenge came from the opposite direction; that is, when anthropological distancing narrowed to the point of becoming almost invisible. This happened when the "we" became a competent speaker in Chezüngun, enabled to connect, interpret, and make associations based on experience, intuition, memories, tales, stories, or pieces of advice. At some point during our work, each of us recognized being simultaneously inside and outside by noting that "they will say I did not do this because I do not write well" or "I feel I am not authorized to assert that a word in Chezüngun has such and such a meaning, without quoting anyone."

One of our aims is to critique the notion that the outside must be separated from the inside in order for the informant to inform properly and for the anthropologist to interpret properly. Instead, we create a "we" in which our proficiencies and weaknesses are combined. This "we" is an expositive strategy through which we account for the methodological freedom we have enjoyed in our written work; it has allowed us to range beyond the inside and the outside in our conversations. The mutual transference of knowledge, skills, and forms of distancing allowed both of us to view things from an unusual perspective. Thus Pablo attempted to distance himself ethnographically when he interviewed his parents about the stories he had been told at home since his childhood. However, his conversation with Laureano, an elderly friend with whom Pablo often "talks about ancient subjects" (*ngütramkam*), quickly shifted from an interview into a communicative event through which Laureano instructed Pablo and gave him advice as a young Mapuche with whom Laureano shares the same attachment to the culture of their ancestors (i.e., the "inside"). The conversation between Ana and Fermín forms part of other communicative networks. Fermín's stories, narrated by a person more than eighty years old and living in a community near the mountains, were told in a context of confidence. However, his ultimate aim was that these stories, told from the "inside" about "what really happened in the past," would become publicly known. Each of these distances was a subject of reflection.

Our joint research was enriching precisely because our autobiogra-

phies and our experiences of Mapuche culture, in particular of the reñü/salamanca, are different. In this respect our methodology involved dialogue and the exchange of explanations to translate jointly the categories that were commonplace to one of us but not to both.

Layers of Meaning Sedimented in History

Delivering layers of meaning sedimented in the course of history, the words *renü* and *salamanca* evoke fields of signification in which the connections between sentient beings and the past are not always the same. Renü/salamanca is a semantic field bringing together different interpretive frameworks about the world and its beings, the sacred, the relationship between nature and culture, and knowledge. In Mapuche territory this semantic field has its own history. It begins to take shape as a place of tension and dispute in the mid-sixteenth century, when the word *pillañ* caught the attention of the first Spanish soldiers and missionaries.[4]

Chilean poet Pedro de Oña (1917 [1596]) translates the figure of the pillañ as an "evil spirit." From early on, chroniclers associated it with the devil and called those who interacted with its forces "soothsayers" (sorcerers or witches). This early reading—Pedro de Oña is just one of its representatives—marks the beginning of a long process of mimesis and appropriation concerning Mapuche sacred beings. Settlers turned to the magic of mimesis, replicating in their imaginary the figure of the pillañ and attempting to appropriate the powers of the original (Taussig 1993). However, it would be anachronistic to argue that the connections they drew between the pillañ and the realm of evil were merely strategies of persuasion and domination. As Fabián Campagne (2002) argues, when authors like Pedro de Oña spoke of phenomena like the pillañ, evil spirits, and the devil's possession of individuals, he was reproducing a natural philosophy grounded in the principles governing the ontologies of the period. In these descriptions of nature, both colonizer and colonized exchange their notions of what was possible and what was impossible. The divorce between nature and society that is characteristic of late modernity prevents us from comprehending that the humanists, missionaries, and chroniclers of that time *could actually see* the power of the devil in the pillañ: "The devil deceives your old men, saying its name is Pillán, and Huecuvoe" (Valdivia 1887 [1606]: trans.

n2) and "They do not worship anything; speak to the devil, to whom they call Pillán. They say they obey him so they do not get hurt" (Lizárraga 1968 [1609]: 283). An interconnection emerges in these accounts between the field of signification of pillañ and that of demonic pacts. In this region and in this particular encounter, those who came across the sea seized the pillañ as their new gloss for referring to evil spells and the machi, who were perceived as sorcerers and the devil's followers.[5]

In 1806 Father Melchor Martínez reflected on the "religion of the Mapuche" in order to decipher, within the limits of his own ontology, whether the pillañ was indeed the devil—a question introducing the possibility that the devil exists: "Some missionaries believe that this Pillán is the devil, with whose opinion I am inclined to agree although I cannot prove it." Martínez believed in the power of "sorcerers" but distrusted their intentions when they claimed they went to a "mountain or cave, to *xantucar* or ask the Pillán" (Böning 1974: 32).

Reading between the lines of the traveler and missionary chronicles of the early twentieth century, we are able to reconstruct different scenarios of dialogue between colonizers and the Mapuche. It is clear that the asymmetric distribution of the power to fix meaning had already established an outside limit to the discourse. For example, when Father Félix José de Augusta (1916: 144) asked his informants, "Is God the Pillán?" he discovered that they "feared affirming it" or he "had to coax them to get the story out of them." Finally, at the insistence of the interrogators, the informants responded: "Pillanes are volcanoes; the sorcerers, the witches, and the evil ones are inside."

The association of the pillañ and the renü with the earth's surface, caves, volcanoes, and the underworld, coupled with European beliefs in their evil powers, combined to foster the emergence of the Western notion of the salamanca as a gloss for them. The devil or *wekufe* and his followers, the sorcerers or machi, became a definitive part of this world of caves and places lying below or above the surface of the land that were called salamancas. In sum, the figure of the salamanca became the synthesis of all these connections. Once it was firmly rooted in popular culture, this synthesis acted as confirmation of the notion of a pact between certain people and the devil.[6] Thus the renü, which at certain moments became unmentionable, shifted into the realm of stories about the salamanca.

We began our research by reflecting on this secret and unmention-

able space. While our reflections are based on a series of conversations, we focus here on an extended dialogue between Pablo and Laureano, an elder from Bariloche. This conversation, which functions as a "synthetic corpus" (Rockwell 1987), begins when Pablo introduces the subject of the salamanca. What we find enlightening is the way Laureano proceeds to establish relationships among diverse narrative performances that directly or indirectly revolve around the topic. In this series of stories we believe Laureano was removing layers of meaning, arriving by the end of the conversation at a network of connections among those things that both Pablo and Laureano perceived as being more "internal," personal, and key to their own subjectivities as Mapuches.

Such stories are the result of interactions between European beliefs and local knowledge. Nevertheless, we found similarities between Laureano's early narratives and stories about salamancas recorded in other regions (see Farberman 2005): (a) the salamanca as a place for relaxation, where you can play cards, dance, play the guitar or the accordion, where beautiful women live—"like a bar," as Laureano explained it—and (b) as a place where wealth or skills can be obtained, for which the devil will exact a charge—for instance, the lives of loved ones. We will not dwell here on the first group of stories; they fulfill a ludic or playful function for Laureano. In contrast, the stories in the second group embody a series of interpretive frameworks that focus on knowledge and its forms of transmission. One point of departure is to argue that European meanings silence inherited knowledge, the renü, which even today remains highly valued. As the epigraph to this essay demonstrates, talking about the renü implies whispering and evoking a context of privacy and respect.

The Salamanca and Contexts of Knowledge Transmission

The art of storytelling, according to Benjamin (1991), lies precisely in narrating a story free of explanations. Laureano was a practitioner of this art in his conversation with Pablo: "That is why I am telling you this, *eymi ta füta wentruaymi* (and when you grow up), you will be telling it yourself. It never ends; it is a chain."

Because for Pablo the research process was also a personal search for identity (in which the collection of information merged with the creation of relations of shared affinity with our interlocutors), we were able

to redirect our initial questions about the salamanca toward questions of its transmission. Laureano invited Pablo to take part in a chain of conversations in which talk about the mysteries of the salamanca not only functioned as information but, above all, served to advise and guide the younger man in his quest to be mapunche. Laureano grounded his exchange with Pablo in an "inside" when he began to replace definitions and straightforward explanations with highly poetic and enigmatic indirect accounts. By resorting to this kind of narrative art, Laureano not only identified Pablo as a young man who valued his culture but also included him in a chain of transmission and shared belonging. This style of transmission has a performative outcome, so that while he listened to Laureano, Pablo was being trained through good words and pieces of advice that would guide his efforts at "becoming" mapunche.

Following the interpretive framework Laureano established, we do not explain what the renü is but instead think through how Laureano invited his interlocutor to build upon one of the more constitutive practices of the meaning of being Mapuche; that is, the practice of knowing.

VALUING KNOWLEDGE: *YEWEN*

Laureano narrated one of his first stories using the poetic form of an *ayekan*. This genre is characterized by a humorous interplay between reality and fiction. When an anecdote becomes an ayekan, the truth about what occurred no longer matters; what is central is the knowledge it transmits. The subject Laureano introduces in this ayekan is how to value ancient knowledge.

The event he narrates takes place during the journey of a man who was transporting wool in oxcarts, intending to sell it. The narrative begins when he and his companions arrive at a resting place:

LAUREANO: What is it? There is name for when they come to stay? It has a meaning. How do you say it?

PABLO: *Künitu*.

L: That's right. Resting place. They met, precisely, in the densest part of the mountains, a beautiful spot. They decided to rest and make a fire there. One of them was there, another there, another over here. Well, there they were, *yerbeando* [drinking maté around the campfire], others were singing, having some drinks. Some were singing in their

language [in *Chezüngun*]. Food was served; they were about to eat. All of a sudden, they say the earth moved. And some bugs they had never seen before appeared. Then one of them shouted, "*Renü mew ta muleiñ pin*" [We are on the renü]. Pah! They rushed off [ran away]. And it turns out they were wrong! It was turtles buried below, who sensed the heat of the campfire and came out [he laughs]. How they ran into the night, the poor fellows! No one knew what they were and they all came to look at them. Ugh!!! *Pülli tati chipay wezake pülli* [Spirits outside, evil spirits; he laughs]. It's funny, you see?

P: *Ayekan tati?*

L: *Ayekan may, may.*[7] . . . *Feymu ta renü mew ta ngütramkeafuy ñi fütachaw* [My dad used to tell me this]. It really scared him. He was a kid. That time he really got scared. That is why he used to tell me, "Don't make a fire without first asking if you can or cannot. Ask the place, in case it's a renü." How ignorant, huh? He's still afraid. Dad was already old then. But it was nothing: they were turtles! He told a man that it was not a salamanca but a turtle's nest that was just below where they made the fire. So that's what he remembered about the renü.

The story grows out of mistaking a turtle nest for a renü, highlighting the inappropriate behavior of the characters, who thought the place they had chosen to rest was a renü. Laureano points out their mistake of "still being frightened" and describes the fear of this seeming-renü as ignorance. The appropriate alternative behavior was to "ask the place" and see "if you can or cannot" rest there. The correct approach was not fear but respect.

One word that describes these attitudes toward knowledge is the term *yewen*. In some translations *yewen* is rendered in Spanish as "shame" or "fear," but our interlocutors refer instead to "respect" or "knowledge." The confusion that provokes laughter in this ayekan belongs in the same mode: the travelers, in their ignorance, were afraid of what they should have known and respected.

Similarly, the *longko* (chief) Maripan, who defined the salamanca as the place "where the devil and other stuff are," when he was asked specifically about the renü, added: "It's like a school. He who arrives thinking in one way leaves in good shape. He who arrives with two types of thought goes wrong: you have to enter with yewen." In an informal chat with a Mapuche friend, Pablo mentioned that we were

doing a piece on salamancas, and the friend described having talked about it with his grandfather. The grandfather recalled that during a trip with his own father, they spied a large fire where some people were gathered. His father said there was a meeting taking place there and that they had to make a detour, since it was "a very important meeting" and you could not enter "just like that."

Based on these and other conversations, we understand the yewen to comprise a particular attitude toward knowledge that is free of doubt, fear, or hesitation. That is, with *kiñe rakizuam* (only one thought), or having *feyentun* (belief).[8] Yewen meant one would *kiñe piwke, nor piwke nien küme amun ñi amual* (act correctly to be well), or *kiñe ka küme züngu nentuy, ñi kimual, ñi lonkoal, ñi ngütramkawual, ñi küme feleal* (say a good word to be able to learn, think, converse, to be well).

KNOWLEDGE AS A GIFT

Behind the notion of a pact underlying the meanings that in the course of our conversations came to be associated with the salamanca, the "gift" that is to be discovered in these caves is associated with witchcraft. While such meanings are evident in many of the stories we heard, receipt of a gift does not always imply skills in witchcraft, nor does it necessarily require a contractual relationship with evil spirits.

Widening our perspective, Laureano declared renü to be ubiquitous: "El renü dicen que está en todos lados, donde usted pueda" (It is said the renü is everywhere, wherever you can [find it]). We believe Laureano presented his ayekan about the turtles in order to prepare the conversational ground to shift his interpretive framework and introduce Pablo to deeper knowledge about the renü. This was when Laureano departed from his first accounts of salamanca (not transcribed in this paper), which recounted pacts with the devil and gifts one could acquire to inflict harm. In the next story we recount, once the necessary respect and terms of belief were established between the two, Laureano calls upon Pablo as a special person who is receiving the gifts associated with the renü at the same time that he is listening to the narration.

Special people, those who have acquired a gift, are also individuals who possess the ability to interpret the signs through which knowledge about life is transferred. The last part of the conversation between Laureano and Pablo, which was framed as a deeper and more complex "inside," introduces another notion of the gift. In this story, Laureano

thinks of Pablo as someone who is able to interpret the messages properly. He goes on to advise Pablo on the correct way to treat the "messenger," represented in the story by skunks. Even though messengers or spirits can interfere negatively with the fate of families, those who possess the gift of interpretation can also intervene positively in their own future. The proper way to interact with messengers is by treating them well, without challenging, hurting, or killing them, since they will report to the sender or "owner," according to Laureano, about the treatment received during their mission. To convey this advice Laureano uses a true story about a man who acted in fear and ignorance after a visit from two skunks associated with a renü near his home, thus causing a harmful outcome for his own family:

P: And did your mother have the gift?

L: No, we have the gift right now. Because if tomorrow or the day after tomorrow you see [a messenger] in your house, you will not remain silent. Because you already have the gift to tell it something. Tell it to leave, just as it came. Tell it not to leave bad things. And that's why I'm telling you this: it's not a good idea to challenge them, you have to treat them well, so they will go away. So, when the messenger returns in one piece, then it will surely say to the owner, "I was treated well there. They told me to go, not to return anymore." Then, the chief [the owner], seeing the messenger is in good shape and has not been challenged, will no longer pursue you. What happened to a neighbor some time ago? There, in that same house, I told you there was a salamanca. Those people lived very well, it was a beautiful family. They had two children, two grown children: one was sixteen and the other one eighteen. He said his mother looked out the window and saw two skunks coming. Over there, they came down that way (the path).

P: *Epu zañi*? [Two skunks?]

L: *Epu zañi ta inainawingu* [Two skunks, coming one behind the other]. They came up to their plantings [*la chacra*], and the renü was there, as always, right around there [he points]. Well, when the woman looked again, the skunks were passing by the house-garden, but they came directly to the house. Well, after that, she felt something was wrong; she felt a bit upset. When she looked again, the skunks were already at the gate. She closed the door. She says the skunks made like this [he scratches the chair to demonstrate the sound the skunks made

when trying to enter the house]. They wanted to come in. Soon after, the dogs started barking. The neighbor was coming, the woman's husband. And then she told him that two skunks wanted to come into the house. The neighbor, who was ignorant, of course, and doesn't talk much, he unleashed the dogs and burned the skunks alive, throwing them into the fire. It wasn't even a week, when one of their boys gets sick. Look, isn't that ignorance? I always say, you should never kill a spider that comes into your house. Go away, far away, because they are all spirits. If a lizard comes in, don't kill it, no, no: let it go, it can come as a *werken* [messenger]. Let it go away. Well, do you see how it works? If they had not killed them, they would have been saved forever. Look at how it works, right? That's why I am telling you this: it's a gift. So remember it as a reminder of what we're dealing with. You can't see the spirit. It's inside the skunk, and it comes out from that little body that it's taken over, from the skunk, and it will tell [its owner], "They hurt me badly, they burned me." The other one [the owner] gets angry and he sends a legion, an unknown creature, a bird, many times it is a bird, perhaps. That is why you have to say good words: *Amungue amungue tufameu mulelay tami zuam amutunge muten, inche chem sume ta zewmayu* [Go away, there is nothing for you here; just go away, I will not hurt you]. That's all. The owner understands Chezüngun and Spanish. He knows everything. That's how it happened. We have a gift when we are able to hear well.

The skunks associated with the renü came to the neighbor's house with a message. Laureano defines the gift as the ability to hear and interpret this sign and respond appropriately to the messengers.

In this narrative Laureano emphasizes the importance of *ngülantuwun*, or the sharing of knowledge. For example, when he tells Pablo that they have the gift "right now," it is because he is transmitting his knowledge and experience to Pablo. Or, as he later explains, "That's why I am telling you this: it's a gift. So remember it as a reminder of what we're dealing with." He closes his narrative by returning to this same idea: "We have a gift when we are able to hear well," thus explaining the gift as an ability to hear. In this sense *kimun*, or knowledge, cannot be comprehended outside the context of transmission from which it emerges and is shared.

We believe that when Laureano says the renü is everywhere and

"wherever you can [find it]," he is situating knowledge in the place where a person has acquired *kimlu*, the ability to receive knowledge from the environment. A special person, then, is one who in the process of his or her own attainment of knowledge acquires the gift of relating to others (people, ancestors, spirits, or forces of nature).

Special People and the Acquisition of Knowledge

Laureano situates the renü everywhere, wherever you can find it, and at the same time defines Pablo as someone who is on the way to becoming a special person. On the basis of these key readings by Laureano, we began to think about the connections between being a salamanquero, being a special person, and having acquired knowledge and particular gifts at the renü. Reflecting on the meanings of these expressions, Pablo remembered the stories he had heard at home and then offered to interview his parents, Celia and Segundo. They associate the salamanca with their childhood, when people were more knowledgeable, more supportive of one another, and above all, everybody was a "special person." Celia said her mother knew that if they buried the remains of sheep they had butchered, they would always "have work and everything they needed." Segundo remembered that he had buried the eggs of *ñankitos* (birds) in the ground and had always done very well. A *ñanko* looked after Celia's mother's animals: "If she noticed an animal was missing, she knew it was in the corral."

On the heels of these personal memories, Celia and Segundo reminisced about a neighbor who was a salamanquero and was very wealthy. Both made it clear that "people had wealth because they believed in it, but that it was to have more wealth, not to harm another person." Celia's mother always said they were successful at raising capital because "she had a *gift* she had inherited from her late father." Similarly, with reference to other neighbors whom "the old men" also called salamanqueros, Celia reported that when the older community members died, all their animals died too, because none of their children had inherited that power.

In these narratives Pablo's parents emphasize the importance of the act of sharing and transmitting (*ngülantuwun*) skills and expertise in interacting with the environment (*kimlu*) within families. Those who have acquired this knowledge or gift are to be named or remembered as spe-

cial people. The fact that their parents foregrounded the intergenerational transmission of this knowledge, from grandparents to parents and from parents to children, defines Pablo as a participant in a network of relationships and legacies; the stories are thought of as a domestic mandate.

Based on these conversations, we reread some of Ana's dialogues with local residents of the town of Cushamen in the province of Chubut. A conversation that particularly caught our attention was between Ana and the elderly Mapuche man Fermín regarding the return of Mapuches from the concentration camps in which the Argentine military had imprisoned them in the late nineteenth century. Comparing this exchange with the preceding ones in which Laureano and Pablo's parents drew Pablo into a learning process as a young mapunche, we ask what Fermín's intentions were in telling his side of the story, an act that revealed deep meanings from the "inside" that Ana did not understand at the time. Fermín's story was about an old woman who returned, along with her husband, from the place where she had been imprisoned for over a year. These were times of hunger and sadness. One day her husband found her covering a pot in which she was cooking a child. She escaped him and dug into the earth, and the "people from below," the ancestors, came for her. After spending half a year underground she returned, wiser and with agricultural skills, which she shared with her close friends.

This underground place, where "the other people from below" live, is also associated with the renü.[9] Laureano believes this is "where the dead are"; and in Chezüngun, where the *küyfikecheyem* or the most ancient ancestors are.[10] The history of relations with the state, of violence and the destructuring of society, has, as its agents of change, those special people who acquired the gift to intervene in forging the future of the group through the renü. The old woman inherited from her ancestors the knowledge of an ontology she had lost, and in this dual return, as she returns both to her family and to Mapuche knowledge, Fermín recounts the history of violence, beginning with social reorganization and Mapuche agency. We believe that in this exchange Fermín talked with Ana about ways of interpreting the past, the meaning of history, and what official narratives silenced; he concluded, "This is what is not told".

Once we associated the stories Laureano told with those narrated by Pablo's parents and Fermín, we began to identify an interpretive framework in which the renü is no longer related to the cave or salamanca

where knowledge about witchcraft is acquired. On the contrary, it is an epistemological principle concerning the transmission of knowledge: knowledge is experienced as though it were one's own, inherited from one's ancestors.

Kimun (knowledge) and kimlu (the gift) are the result of perceiving, speaking, and thinking about "everything that exists" in contexts of transmission of knowledge. As a result, a special person is one who has the ability to handle certain energies or forces that shape the universe. We believe Laureano's affirmation that the renü is everywhere, wherever you can find it, is a deep and complex philosophical principle referring to notions of relationality. The renü, associated with the place where knowledge and gifts are acquired, implies a relationship with "what is there" (*mapuzüngun*). This is achieved through socialization and transmission, through a subjective engagement with the physical universe, and through the interpretive agency of people. In other words, knowledge exists everywhere in the universe, but it depends on our ability to perceive it, talk about it, teach it, and integrate it into our subjectivity.

Knowledge as a "Gift of Relationality" (A Conclusion)

Our thoughts originate in the personal experiences of one of us and, at the same time, out of extended conversations between us. We do not talk about knowledge (or ontology) as something equally experienced and felt by all Mapuches, but as a conceptual framework containing ideas that are diverse and in circulation, through which we seek to identify theoretical connections in order to speak of knowledge as a "gift of relationality." We understand this as the knowledge and ability to interact with the environment. We also consider that by mining this knowledge, relationships and links among people in the world can be framed. When our interlocutors talk about the renü, they define their own epistemologies about what it means to know.

During our collaborative work we discovered that the ways we introduced ourselves (as a worker in the field of anthropology, as a mapunche person searching for his identity) guided our work more than we had assumed at the outset. We discovered in the renü possible answers to the questions that Pablo voiced in his ongoing process of dialogue and listening and in Ana's intentions of identifying less ethnocentric frameworks for comprehending memory and its process of

transmission (not as a loss of culture or assimilation but as the reorganization of knowledge). In collaboration, we were able to expand the dialogic contexts in which words acquire their meanings. Some interviews became pieces of advice or mandates, while others served as guides to reinterpreting official history, depending on whether Pablo or Ana carried them out. However, in both cases, we were able to share the senses of the renü from an "inside," where it was possible to perceive the clues or traces of a Mapuche epistemology of social relationships, knowledge, and its transmission.

We believe these reflections are important in understanding processes of remembering and forgetting, because when knowledge is understood as a relationship—with the environment, among living people, among those who have begun to live in other, connected, worlds—the course of history is no longer controlled by the linearity of official narratives of the past, oriented toward progress, loss, assimilation, or reemergence, but instead by creative reencounter and the reconstitution of relationships. This search for heretofore-silenced interpretive frameworks is part of a broader political project, now widespread among different Mapuche organizations and communities, that seeks to discover other senses of history and other criteria for imagining policies. Such alternate senses of history include, for instance, agents as unthinkable as the ancestors living underground; and alternate kinds of policy criteria include, for instance, spirituality, special powers, and the ability to read the messages of nature or receive statements from the ancestors in a conversation.

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PABLO CAÑUMIL, mapunche, is a leather craftsman. Since he arrived in Bariloche, Argentina, some years ago he has taken part in the activities and discussions coordinated by Mapuche organizations and communities. The learning process of Chezüngun, the Mapuche language, has led him to visit different neighborhoods and places as well as into exchange with scholars in diverse disciplines, such as history, literature, and anthropology. In 2010 he began to attend the National University of Rio Negro to obtain an associate degree in humanities and social studies. He is currently a researcher on the project "The Dialectics between Geographical and Social Spaces" at the same university.

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Notes

1. A gambling game widely played in rural areas of Argentina and Uruguay, jackstones consists of throwing an anklebone (usually from a lamb), winning from one to four bets if the projecting parts of the bone remain upward and losing the bet if the broad parts of the bone remain upward.

2. We use the word *yam* to refer to something that does not have an ordinary or common meaning but for which meaning derives from narratives and knowledge shared in special contexts, where elements of the environment are also involved.

3. In this respect we agree with the approach presented in Briones et al. (2007: 72), who explain in their proposal for collaborative work between anthropologists and Mapuche activists: "We wanted to avoid formats in which the 'indigenous voice' would appear as an ethnographic record in the service of 'anthropological writing.'"

4. The technical translation of *pillañ* is "volcano." However, like the word *renü*, in its more internal sense it is associated with the spirits of the ancestors and is one of the principal sacred sites of ritual initiation.

5. A machi is a Mapuche shaman who mediates among people, the ancestors, and the forces of nature. The form of this mediation, specifically through the use by machis of paradoxical discourses about male and female and what is right and wrong, has been extensively studied in the ethnographies of Ana Mariella Bacigalupo (2007).

6. The early notion of a pact, understood simply as giving something in exchange (a gift) to create a moral obligation, is one of the earliest meanings of contract in Roman law. According to Henry Maine (1861), these legal contractual concepts operated as a terminology that was plastic and recyclable in almost the totality of the Western thought but that specifically influenced forms of reasoning and the technical discourses of theology and metaphysics. The salamanca became, then, not only a discursive complex through which certain entities were related to evil but also the scenario in which relations with the sacred acquired a contractual framework.

7. Pablo asks if the story is an *ayekan* (a specific discursive genre), and Laureano assents.

8. Having only one thought system is positively valued as a way of acting in a respectful, safe, and honest manner. We use the word *belief* here to refer to those situations when you are convinced that what you are doing is right. It is about getting carried away by the situation where you are, whether it is *kamarikün*, *nguillipun* (both are rituals), or taking part in a renü.

9. On the basis of his knowledge of the Mapuche language, Pablo noted that the root of the word *renü* is also present in expressions like "to dig a hole," "to dig," and "ditch."

10. The use of the suffix "-em" (loved ones) expresses a deeper feeling of love, lending the ancestors a larger importance in people's lives.

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