

The dark face of Chilean democracy: the Catrillanca case and the Temucucui community arrest

Jesús Antona¹

Dear Editor-in-Chief:

Following the failed strategy of linking the Mapuche with international terrorism, another crude ruse has been concocted to propagate the image of the 'Mapuche narco' in public opinion to hide the shameful actions of state security forces and justify practices which harm human rights. For some, the operation set up to justify this hoax surpasses anything seen in the south of Chile in the thirty years since the return of democracy (Lavozdelosquesobran.cl, enero 2021).

On the 7th of January, special militarised national police forces, *Carabineros*, deployed 800 police equipped with weapons of war and air support to raid the communities of Temucucui using an unusual level of violence. The pretext for this action was to neutralise drug trafficking networks and combat organised crime in the Araucanía region. In this unfortunate intervention, in addition to the damage inflicted on the Mapuche community members, the Inspector of the Investigative Police (PDI), Luis Morales Balcazar, lost his life in circumstances that have not yet been clarified.

One would have to be very naïve to think that the raid was accidental, as it occurred on the very same day the sentence of the 'Catril-

lanca case' was announced. This case established the responsibility of the Chilean State in the death of Camilo Catrillanca, convicting members of the Special Operations Group (GOPE) of Carabineros from Chile for this homicide and to various crimes related to the same case; obstruction of justice, frustrated homicide, and the illegal kidnapping of the unnamed minor known by his initials 'MACP'.

On the same day of the raid, the Oral Court of Angol convicted the former GOPE sergeant, Carlos Alarcón, as responsible for the murder of Camilo Catrillanca and the attempted murder of his companion, the minor MACP. Six other former police officers and a civilian lawyer were also convicted, to varying degrees, of obstruction of justice, illegal detention and frustrated homicide. On the same day, police raided the community of Temucucui, arresting the wife and mother of the deceased Catrillanca and separating them from their 7-year-old daughter Wakolda, who was held by uniformed officers for several hours. This intervention had the immediate consequence of making it impossible for his family and friends to attend the reading of the verdict.

Camilo Catrillanca was the grandson of the *logko* (Mapuche leader) of the combative community of Temucucui (commune of Ercilla). The proven facts indicate that he was shot by members of the GOPE on 14 November 2018. On the day in question, the Car-

1) Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain.

Correspondence to: jantona@ucm.es

<https://doi.org/10.7146/torture.v3i1.125778>

abineros from the Malleco communications centre received a report that three individuals, with covered faces and carrying weapons, had stolen three vehicles from the Santa Rosa rural school. This information prompted the deployment of a Carabineros Special Forces operation composed of »several [armoured] police cars and a helicopter to locate the vehicles«¹. On finding the road blocked, the GOPE patrol involved descended from the armoured car and advanced on foot, encountering on the road a tractor driven by Camilo Catrillanca and in which the 15-year-old MACP was also travelling. Catrillanca, on seeing the uniformed officers, went backwards and turned around, at which point the police stopped him and, according to the Carabineros, when he ignored the order, they fired several shots at the occupants of the tractor. One of these shots hit Camilo Catrillanca in the back, killing him; other projectiles aimed at his companion missed the target, hitting the mudguard where he was sitting. The minor went down with his hands up without offering any resistance, but was violently subdued, tied up, beaten, and taken to the police station.

On returning to the police station, the Carabineros' commanders concocted a false account of the events with the help of the corps' lawyer, Cristian Eduardo Inostroza, aimed at blaming the Mapuche involved for the crimes of vehicle theft - claiming that they were carrying weapons and resisted detention, leading to an exchange of gunfire in which the victim was shot by chance. However, the proven facts in the trial made it clear that:

»(...) the version of events presented as having occurred on the afternoon of 14 November 2018 given by the accused [carabineros] (...) was devised prior to giving

evidence to the prosecution and instructed by the accused Inostroza Quiñimir and Valdivieso Terán [Carabineros Major and group leader] providing false information«².

In addition, the verdict also ruled that the statements made by members of the Carabineros group to the local prosecutor's office in Collipulli in the early hours of 15 November were false:

»The members of the GOPE patrol had not been attacked with firearms and had fired in response to Camilo Catrillanca's action to elude the Carabineros officers he encountered during his movement«³.

A key aspect in this case was the video cameras that are usually part of the officers' personal equipment. Those involved declared to the prosecutor that they were not carrying cameras or in possession of images of the events, a version that was accepted by the Prosecutor's Office despite the fact that one of the members of the group had handed over a camera, although without the memory card because, according to its bearer, it had been destroyed because »it contained intimate images«. Finally, despite pressure from the high command and the passivity of the Prosecutor's Office, the GOPE agents began to break their initial silence, revealing the fallacy of the police story.

The judicial reality demonstrated that Camilo Catrillanca was killed from behind and that the teenager who accompanied him was saved by chance, as well as making it clear that neither of the young men were armed. However, the sentence left a bittersweet taste among Mapuche and human rights organisations because, although the truth about the circumstances of the young Mapuche's death

² Ídem

³ Ídem

¹ Verdict, 7 January 2021, Rit-80-2019-1.

and the improper and criminal actions of the rest of the accused had been established, the sentences were below what was expected. This was due to an underestimation of the seriousness of the crimes charged: instead of aggravated homicide (which would have implied a heavier sentence), simple homicide was applied and the accusation of torture inflicted against the minor MACP was dismissed, as were the the accusations of false documentation and dishonest schemes concocted by the Carabineros' advisor lawyer in collusion with his commanders.

The truth is that the GOPE Tactical Reaction Group, also known as the «Jungle Command» had been targeting the young leader of the Temuicui community since at least 2017. Camilo Catrillanca was identified as one of the leaders of the Mapuche Territorial Alliance (Alianza Territorial Mapuche), according to a document leaked by the Centro de Investigación Periodística de Chile (CIPER) and released on 27 November 2018 called: «Exposición coordinación zona de control orden público» from the Unit of Special Operational Intelligence Unit (Unidad de Inteligencia Operativa Especializada) from Carabineros (UIOE). This unit was dismantled after the scandal known as Operation Huracán, when different offences were attributed to them, such as falsification of public instruments, obstruction of investigation, and illicit association.

The communication strategy aimed at tarnishing the image of the murdered Mapuche spread the idea that he was a habitual offender. On the day of Catrillanca's death, the Intendant of the region, Luis Mayol, argued that the victim had a record for car theft, implying this was a clear case of common crime. However, it was shown that Camilo Catrillanca had no criminal record, although the Minister of the Interior, Andrés Chadwick, propagated this

theory, arguing that he certainly did not yet have a criminal record, but only because he had not yet been charged, as his case was still in the procedural phase.

For the Mapuche organisations, this case shows the darkest side of Chilean democracy in Mapuche territory, where militarisation, disproportionate use of force and police set-ups are the response of successive governments to the territorial demands and aspirations for self-determination of the communities, especially the most combative, such as those in the province of Malleco. Raids («Allanamientos»), a kind of military operation that sweeps away everything that gets in the way of the uniformed officers' boot, are the most frequent form of indiscriminate suppression applied to Mapuche communities targeted by police intelligence. This form of collective punishment is frequently used and sometimes does nothing more than reflect the impotence of the police to locate the persecuted activists. However, it is also a strategy to instil terror in the collective mind, penalise solidarity, and encourage collaboration. These actions, which are clearly warlike, seek to establish the image of the overwhelming force of the state in the face of any attempt at subversion in the Waj Mapu (Mapuche territory).

The militarised and synchronised nature of these lightning-fast actions allows them to be carried out with maximum impunity as they take place in a relatively short time, outside urban settings, far from the uncomfortable gaze of the press and behind the backs of the everyday life of urban centres. All of this allows them to perpetrate aggression unscrupulously, taking children, women, the elderly, and all those community members or sympathisers who consciously, or involuntarily, get in their way.

In the «Report on the human rights situation of the Mapuche people» prepared by dif-

ferent organisations to be considered in the »Universal Periodic Review« of the State of Chile, it is pointed out that raids and excessive police violence are a common practice in Mapuche communities, Mapuche Students' Homes, as well as harassment of their traditional authorities.

This type of action has mobilised national and international public opinion, condemning these practices as abusive and contrary to the fundamental rights of the Mapuche. The Co-ordination of Human Rights Organisations of the Araucanía Region issued a communiqué unequivocally condemning the raids on the aforementioned communities and the excessive use of violence:

»These events are indescribable due to their gravity and the re-victimisation they cause to those who suffered the loss of a loved one at the hands of agents of the State (...).«
(CODH, 2021).

The same communiqué points out that far from being isolated acts (and much less attributable to common crimes) these actions are framed in the context of the so-called »Mapuche conflict« and the historical debt that the State of Chile owes them for the »violent invasion« of their territory, which »has been maintained over the last centuries through political, economic and social exclusion, criminalisation and the excessive use of force« (Ídem).

The Mapuche organisations emphasised the traumatic consequences that accompany these police operations, especially the psychological damage to the communities, which particularly affects children and the elderly. In this sense, there is a clear violation of children's rights protected by international law. In this case, there is also the aggravating circumstance that the daughter and the direct family of Camilo Catrillanca were involved in the raid, for this reason it was argued that

Chile had also violated the right to reparation of victims of human rights violations⁴.

The psychosocial damage to Mapuche children is neither trivial nor new. Various reports from researchers in Araucanía (CIDSUR, 2018) point with concern to the serious consequences of police interventions on the health of children in the Mapuche communities that have been raided. Specifically, in Temucucui, one of the most seriously affected communities with more than a dozen raids in recent years, more than 30 children and adolescents have suffered the consequences of these brutal police operations. The catalogue of damage caused to Mapuche children and adolescents includes symptoms of asphyxia caused by tear gas, injuries from the impact of pellets, bruises of varying degrees from blows, manifestations of shock, and nervous breakdowns. According to experts, the psychosocial effects of this type of action on the development of Mapuche children and young people have serious consequences for Mapuche families and constitute a long-standing punishment.

The concluding observations of the Periodic Review of Chile in 2015, within the framework of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child:

»(...) urges the State party to modify those aspects that generate structurally violent conditions (...) [the Committee also urges the Chilean State to] act immediately to put an end to police violence of all kinds against indigenous children and their families (...).«
(Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2015: 19, in CIDSUR, 2018: 57).

The overexposure of Mapuche children and young people to the territorial conflict is

4 Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law (2005).

seriously detrimental to their development. The stress generated by the images of violence and the fear that their parents, relatives, or friends could be harmed, creates a permanent state of emergency in children, as they fear that at any moment there could be another action by the police, which leads to the normalisation of violence in their daily lives. Moreover, the experience of violence at such an early age, during cognitive development, creates disturbing associations that will be fixed in the collective subconscious of those who constitute the future of the community.

The testimony of a Mapuche child shows the emotional and psychological impact of violent police operations on Mapuche children. The six-year-old girl interviewed by specialised professionals said that she did not know what the people who had forced their way into her community looked like. She could not even imagine what was behind those clothes and helmets, even expressing disbelief that there were people behind those ‘masks’ (CIDSUR, 2018 pp.57 y ss.). Das noted that the subjectivity of terror produces phantasmagorical images that become realities for those who experience them, and these terrors are somehow expressed through these images in an attempt to rationalise inexplicable facts that escape language and reason (2008, p. 346).

On the other hand, if this repressive strategy fulfils the function, intentionally or not, of instilling terror, it also reaffirms the idea of a continuum of violence from the Chilean state against the Mapuche, which is why it often has the opposite effect. This has been demonstrated in cases of children of repressed traditional leaders and authorities who have now taken over Mapuche activism, setting themselves up as the new *weichafe* (Mapuche activists or fighters) and generally wielding more radical approaches than those before them. This collective intergenerational damage, far

from putting an end to Mapuche resistance, becomes a factor of intergenerational resilience in the face of the occupation of their lands by Chileans. As Das has rightly pointed out, sometimes memory is created by inflicting pain, indeed, the direction of memory is not the past, but the future (2008, pp. 95-144).

However, the damage to the new generations has already been done. The fate of many young people exposed to these traumatic situations, or belonging to criminalised communities, tends to be irreparable, as they are forced to follow a path full of suffering and sacrifice by opting for political strategies that often result in arrest, imprisonment or flight and hiding, dictating their potential at a very early age, as their future will already be marked by the stigma of ‘terrorism’. In this way, the authorities are writing off the new Mapuche generations in order to engage in a political dialogue that will allow them to find fair and peaceful solutions to the conflict, avoiding undesirable outcomes.

20 March 2021

References

- Coordinadora de Organizaciones de Derechos Humanos de la Araucanía (CODH). “Declaración Pública frente a los hechos ocurridos el día 7 de enero en el contexto de la lectura del veredicto del caso Catrillanca y la muerte del Inspector del PDI, Luis Morales Balcazar” (enero de 2021).
- DAS, Veena (2008), «Lenguaje y cuerpo. Transacciones en la construcción del dolor», en *Véena Das: Sujetos del dolor, agentes de dignidad*, en Francisco A. Ortega, Editor (2008),
- «En la región del rumor», en *Véena Das: Sujetos del dolor, agentes de dignidad*, en Francisco A. Ortega, Editor (2008), pp. 95-144. Bogotá (Colombia): Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana p.346.
- Activistas o luchadores mapuche.
- El Dinamo.cl “Estas fueron las palabras del Intendente Mayol sobre Catrillanca antes de que Gobierno reconociera que no participó en robo” <https://www.eldinamo.cl/nacional/2018/11/15>.

- Emol.cl, “Gobierno asegura que Camilo Catrillanca tenía antecedentes” <https://www.emol.com › Nacional › 2018/11/16>
- Fundación Instituto Indígena (FII), Asociación Auspice Stella, Lof Juan Paillalef, Lof Willilafkenche y Enlace Mapuche Internacional. “Informe mapuche presentado al Examen Periódico Universal para ser considerado en el Informe del Estado de Chile: situación general de los derechos humanos mapuche” <https://www.mapuche-nation.org/espanol/html/documentos/doc-124.html> , (30 de junio de 2013).
- Lavozdelosquesobran.cl, “Cronología del brutal allanamiento que remeció el Wallmapu” <https://lavozdelosquesobran.cl/cronologia-del-brutal-allanamiento-que-remecio-el-wallmapu/>, (11 de enero de 2021) (f. c. 15 de enero de 2021)
- Rojas, Nicolás, Constanza Lobos y David Soto (Editores), (2018). *De la operación Huracán al Comando Jungla. Anuario del Conflicto Mapuche 2018*. Centro Vives, Universidad Alberto Hurtado y Observatori del Conflict Social de la Universidad de Barcelona.