

## FILMS REVIEW

### **Jeanette Paillán, *Wallmapu*.**

(Mapuzundun with Spanish subtitles 2001, English subtitled version 2004, 65 mins.)

### **Robert Pouwhare, *Tūhoe: A History of Resistance*.**

(Māori and English 2005, 59 mins.)

**By Kim Mazur**

In 2006, I was privileged to spend time with and film indigenous Mapuche leaders in Chile. During my visit, I became aware of the connections that Mapuche share with Māori.<sup>1</sup> A Mapuche activist told me of a sister he had in New Zealand. I was intrigued, but eventually discovered, after he told me he had many brothers and sisters all over the world, that Mapuche call anyone they feel solidarity with their ‘brothers and sisters.’ A powerful voice expressing that solidarity is found in the emerging field of indigenous cinema, as witnessed in two documentaries: *Wallmapu* and *Tūhoe: A History of Resistance*. *Wallmapu* is not only the first film made by indigenous Mapuche, about Mapuche, it is also the first historical look at Chile from a Mapuche perspective. As such, Paillán offers viewpoints normally silent in mainstream media. Across the Pacific, Paillán’s “brother,” Māori filmmaker Robert Pouwhare, does the same for another indigenous group, the

Māori tribe Ngai Tūhoe. His film *Tūhoe: A History of Resistance* documents a hearing (part of the Waitangi Tribunal) in which New Zealand Government representatives are invited onto a marae or Māori meeting house on disputed tribal land to take account of Tūhoe grievances. There is resonance between these two films in their claim that indigenous people hold their own histories and should tell their own stories. This claim is a central feature of indigenous cinema, or what Māori filmmaker Barry Barclay calls “fourth cinema.”<sup>2</sup>

*Wallmapu* refers to the area stretching from southern Chile across the Andean border to the Atlantic coast of Argentina; it has been Mapuche land for centuries and therefore transcends modern nation-state boundaries. Thus, the title *Wallmapu* locates Mapuche as border-crossers and serves as a marker of identity: both an act of defiance and celebration. Mapuche are the largest indigenous group in Chile and the only group to have successfully resisted Incan and Spanish domination, an attitude that accounts for the struggle for autonomy and self-determination evident in *Wallmapu*. The film begins with Mapuche activists in a face-off with state police over logging on Mapuche land. The scene presents the familiar Chilean stereotype of Mapuche as disruptive and violent but, once their reasons for protest are explained, an audience must ask if there is any alternative to not speaking out, to not taking drastic action? Is silence complicity in one’s own colonisation?



In *Wallmapu*, cinematic techniques function to produce the effect of a never-ending series of historical colonial violations against Mapuche. An extended sequence of aerial footage showcases the natural beauty of the contested Mapuche territory. Images of tranquil rivers and mountains, forests and farmlands are contrasted with a fast-paced narration that outlines the colonisers' extermination, or 'pacification,' campaign. It culminates with the present-day state seizure and sale of Mapuche land to corporations for mining, forestry and hydro-electric schemes. Images of a hydro-dam constructed on their sacred Bío Bío River are filmed through barbed-wire fencing, pointing to the imposed unnatural borders and boundaries of colonisation. The Mapuche protest banners announce their struggle: "No genocide."

Whilst all Chileans struggle to recover from the repressive Pinochet regime (1973-90) that 'disappeared' thousands and exiled millions, Mapuche, however, experience a double repression. Within Chile's distinctly class-based society, indigenous people struggle to be duly recognised not just by the state, but by non-indigenous Chileans (or *wingka*). Paillán reminds the audience of this when a Mapuche community representative asserts the proclamation "I am still alive," as the camera offers close-ups of the Pewenche tree (the monkey-puzzle tree), the namesake of the Mapuche Pewenche tribe, their 'roots to the land.' The loss of this tree, along with other medicinal plants to monoculture cash crops such as pine and eucalyptus, threatens the physical and cultural survival of the Mapuche.

Shot on video, the film is simply crafted. It consists mainly of 'talking head' interviews inter-cut with images of the natural environment which compel the viewer to reflect on the land with which the speakers identify

culturally and spiritually. What is novel about these scenes is that the lawyers, historians and community leaders speaking are Mapuche, as opposed to non-indigenous experts or commentators. Moreover, the conversations with Mapuche are mainly filmed outdoors, and framed by the land, or shot as they work, productively planting or making bread. In contrast, Paillán consistently shows *wingka* destroying the land or protecting those who do. For Paillán, her role is primarily as a film-worker, a video activist, or what in Spanish is called a *comunicador*. A scene in the film shows forestry workers preventing Paillán from filming; it provides a reminder that those involved in 'committed' documentaries face the possibility of intimidation, arrest or worse.

*Tūhoe: A History of Resistance* turns such intimidation around and puts the colonial world on trial. Set on contested land in the Urewera ranges of the middle North Island, Pouwhare opens his film with a deafening haka or war dance – Tūhoe will be heard! In filming solely in the context of the marae hearing, Pouwhare brings us into an alternate world, 'te Ao Māori.' In such a world, writes Barclay, "another set of rules apply, or additional rules, or prior rules."<sup>3</sup> It is the aim of fourth cinema to present such a world, not in contrast to colonialism, but as a world existing parallel in its own right. Playing on the 'savage' stereotype, Tūhoe stage a graphic theatrical re-enactment of the desecration of their land and people as they greet and challenge the Crown at the site where these injustices took place. They littered the entry road to the marae with upturned, burning cars and the chalked outlines of bodies, symbolising their loss. In a controversial act of sedition, activist Tame Iti shoots a colonial flag. Any unease felt by viewers at these proceedings mirrors the discomfort Tūhoe

deliberately want the Crown's representatives to experience. *Tūhoe* concludes with one man's innovative presentation to the Waitangi Tribunal. Accompanying himself on the guitar, he sings to the tune of Bob Marley's *Redemption Song*, "All we ever do...is march and sing songs of protest." Is this a lament on the futility of protest or an affirmation of indigenous people's rights and self-determination? As if in answer, *Wallmapu* closes with a story of successful land reclamation that offers hope, a recovering of voice, to other communities, other brothers and sisters.

Both films speak, indirectly, of 'first law,' or natural justice, for first nations people and provide a counter-history to colonial reality. Here there is a place with its own law and logic which the people are trying to present and preserve. Significantly, no representatives of the state (the police, the Crown) or private corporations are given voice in either film. Such reverse exclusion, or silencing, counterbalances generations of silenced indigenous peoples. "I don't need to talk to the president, who is he to me?" says Berta Quintreman, a Pewenche leader. The voice of *their* leadership is found in the score of *Wallmapu*, which relies on the traditional *trutruca* horn and *kultrun* drum into which "the wise men and women shout... before it is sealed, telling their knowledge about their culture."<sup>4</sup> In *Tūhoe*, Iti, with his whole body traditionally tattooed, takes pride in the fact that "the indigenous people themselves have written their history from their perspective," eliminating the need for colonial anthropologists and historians.

These films also represent an emerging global indigenous media network. In an act of solidarity, Pouwhare brought Paillán to New Zealand for screenings, organised a translation of her film into English and helped get it broadcast on Māori Television.

Mapuche were amazed and encouraged to hear that Māori had their own indigenous television station, unthinkable for Mapuche, as is the idea that *Wallmapu* could be shown on the privatised Chilean television network (partly owned by the forestry and logging companies occupying Mapuche land). It is ironic that the work of indigenous filmmakers is screened and lauded in foreign countries while home markets reject the work, either for lacking commercial viability or for being too controversial. Pouwhare has thus far been unsuccessful in his attempts to screen his film on that same channel, perhaps because addressing the claims in the film would pose too great a challenge to the Pākehā way of life. These films are not merely "denunciatory documentaries" or the oppositional modes of voice found in third world cinema.<sup>5</sup> They offer, beyond that, an alternative reality.

In a metaphorical 'meeting house,' these alternate voices converge. *Wallmapu* and *Tūhoe* remain largely unavailable to audiences outside academic circles, independent media outlets or indigenous film festivals. Nonetheless the use of video to produce such films allows indigenous peoples across the globe to see and affirm the struggles of other native peoples, creating a unique dialogue across continents and oceans. Though neither speaks the others' tongue – native or colonial – the Mapuche and Māori have found a voice with each other, which they share with us.

- 1 This filming took place in Santiago and Temuco, Chile, in November and December 2006, as part of an exchange about indigenous rights between the Mapuche and Māori law lecturer Dr Nin Tomas, assisted by lecturer on indigenous peoples, Dr Kathryn Lehman, both from the University of Auckland. Dr Lehman was also a central participant in the translation and subtitling of both *Wallmapu* and *Tūhoe: A History of Resistance*.
- 2 B Barclay, "Celebrating Fourth Cinema," *Illusions*, 35 (Winter 2003). As outlined by Barclay, fourth cinema refers to those films made by indigenous peoples in a non-indigenous nation state. This goes beyond Hollywood cinema (first cinema), art house film (second cinema) and even the third world cinema of 'underdeveloped' countries concerned with resistance and liberation.
- 3 B Barclay, "Exploring Fourth Cinema: A Talk Given in Hawaii as Part of Summer School Lectures," *Re-imagining Indigenous Cultures: the Pacific Islands*, for the National Endowment for the Humanities, Summer Institute, July 2003, 23.
- 4 LO Shultz, *IDENTIDAD. IDENTITY. Fotografías. Textos* (Santiago: Editorial Sudamericana, 1995), s.p.
- 5 J F Salazar, "Imperfect Media: The Poetics of Indigenous Media in Chile," unpublished PhD thesis (Sydney: The University of Western Sydney, 2004), 84. These ideas, along with the concept of "committed documentaries," are also discussed in J G Espinosa, "For an Imperfect Cinema," trans. Julianne Burton in *Jump Cut*, 20 (1979), 24-26. (The original Spanish version was first published in *Cine Cubano*, 66-67, 1969.)

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