

Remembrance of Rosamel Millaman Reinao

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Rosamel Millaman Reinao was born in 1953 and left this world well before his time in August 2022. He led his life first and foremost as a *dirigente mapuche*, a commitment galvanized in the early years of the Pinochet dictatorship, when he was a student of anthropology at the Universities of Valparaíso and Concepción. Although Rosamel later carried out doctoral studies at the CUNY Graduate Center, becoming an influential scholar of Mapuche cultural politics and a dedicated teacher at the Catholic University of Temuco, he always thought and acted first as a *militante*—in the rich, expansive, and profoundly humanist sense of that term—and when he moved in academic milieu, he embodied the best tradition of socially and politically committed anthropology. This is a remembrance, not an obituary. Rosamel was a dear friend, colleague, and *compañero*. I want to celebrate his life, to pause in thanks for the bond that we forged, and to reflect on his stellar qualities, which drew us to work together over the past 40 years, and from which we all can draw inspiration.

From the first time I met Rosamel in 1981, in revolutionary Nicaragua, he conveyed clearly the layered tiers of his identity: *dirigente*

mapuche first, and anthropologist a somewhat distant second. This did not mean that he took his academic pursuits less seriously—all to the contrary. At that time, he expressed deep reverence for his doctoral program teachers—Eric Wolf, Leith Mullings, and others—a full-on critical engagement with the subject matter, and a quiet confidence that his anthropological training would play a key role in the Mapuche struggles to which he would soon return. Much later, when I observed Rosamel as a teacher at La Católica, parallel qualities came through: he took high-quality teaching for all, and especially his Mapuche students, as a near-sacred commitment. Still, a political compass always guided his work in academia; he brought to each analytical task a grounded connection to his political experience, with a sense of higher responsibility to the political aspirations of his people. I am sure that meeting and working with Rosamel during that conference in 1981 helped convince me—a young college graduate with a heady desire for political engagement—to apply to graduate school in anthropology. That could well have been the last of our interactions, but we kept crossing paths and finding new reasons to work together.



Rosamel's political formation came from an era that, by the turn of the century, already felt markedly distant; resonance with that era, which over time came laced with mild bemusement, contributed to our bond. (A few years ago, in conversation with Rosamel, I let slip the phrase "*configuración de fuerzas*," and he laughed out loud: "Now *there's* a term I have not heard for a long while.") Rosamel's deep ancestral groundings in Mapuche culture had merged early on with a politics shaped with and by the Chilean left, first under Salvador Allende's short-lived democratic socialist government, and then, in resistance to Pinochet. This made for sharp contradictions from the start. Rosamel never held back in his vigorous, visceral critique of anti-Indigenous racism, not only of the right, but also the racism infused deeply within left political cultures—in Chile and throughout Latin America. When we met in Nicaragua, we bonded over a shared perplexity with the particular Sandinista version of that problem: How could such an inspiring revolution be so disastrously tone-deaf when it came to Black and Indigenous people's visions of liberation? Somehow, Rosamel managed to hold those two disparate strands of cultural-political formation in critical dialogue—not just then, but at successive junctures over the next 40 years. I remember clearly the exhilaration of that first encounter in 1981, and of every one since then. We could critically dissect, strategically engage, and even occasionally laugh about this colossal contradiction.

That quality is perhaps what I valued and gravitated toward most in Rosamel: he never shied away from contradictions, whatever the context. Instead, he made them the subject of analysis, whether in outwardly oriented spaces of Mapuche politics or in more intimate conversation. As is often the case with close friends, it was the latter that strengthened our bonds the most. Rosamel loved the sociability at the margins of work relations—at the *casa de cidra*, over a bottle of wine and barbecued meat around the kitchen table—which opened opportunities for candid recapitulation and repartee. Common topics included the *cabras* (headstrong younger activists, who lacked self-awareness); a *vampira* too persistent in

her pursuit of his approval; the maladies of life as a *ñampiao* (the Mapudungun word for an adventurer who neglected matters at home); particular *wingkas* (non-Mapuche Chileans) who walked the talk of alignment with Mapuche peoples, versus those who only talked. These topics blended easily with the more weighty—often revolving around failures of left-liberal political actors and institutions in their professed "*nuevo trato*" (new regime) after the return to democracy in 1990. Rosamel played a central role in the most comprehensive of these efforts, the *Informe de la Comisión de Verdad Histórica y Nuevo Trato*, only to be arrested, upon the study's conclusion, by the very government that commissioned the work! This and many other experiences engendered profound distrust for successive social democratic governments, and skepticism toward these governments' efforts to draw Mapuche leaders into the fold with superficial gestures of cultural inclusion (this became the topic of an article on which we collaborated). No one escaped Rosamel's critical eye.

Yet somehow, Rosamel always managed to temper his critique with a higher sense of political purpose and a healthy dose of humility. This combination of qualities is what made him so special. Especially in more intimate settings, the lens often turned inward, making sure that we academics did not take ourselves too seriously, reminding us that we could savor the humor—even absurdity—in our political commitments, without abandoning them. This was a constant theme in our final and most substantive collaboration. We served as co-principal investigators of an extensive study framed around the tensions between the forest products certification system (implemented by the Forest Stewardship Council, or FSC) and Mapuche territorial claims. FSC principles stated that no forest company could be certified without proven support for Mapuche territorial rights; yet Mapuche communities throughout southern Chile were locked in intense conflict with FSC-certified forest companies. Working on this project together for three years put us in contact with the very best of the Mapuche movement and with some of its shortcomings,

and it provided ample opportunity for frank self-reflection: What could we hope our analysis would contribute in the face of this immensely complex, multifaceted, historically engrained conflict? Was our own position justified and coherent? Stepping back, there are two features of this collaboration that will always stay with me. First is the reliable wisdom and consistent bearings of Rosamel's political analysis. I did more of the writing but always felt that I learned much more than I gave, since Rosamel ensured that our conclusions had political ground in truth. Second is the sheer pleasure of working together on an academic endeavor with such direct political repercussions. We often laughed quietly at ourselves, and at others, as we struggled to critique FSC certification while using it to open space for Mapuche land claims.

Although there was much that Rosamel probably did not share with me, I am sure that his steady vision and wisdom came in the first instance from his groundings in place, ceremony, daily routines, and spirituality of Mapuche community and culture. For many years Rosamel served in leadership roles in his *lof* (a community called José Jineo Ñanco), which he described with a smile as being "*lleno de ex comunistas*" (the smile signaled both virtue and vice). The *lof* had struggled for years to obtain expanded "reparations" territory from the Chilean government, which they finally achieved in the foothills of the cordillera. Rosamel dreamed of retiring there to work the land. He never learned to drive, and took the 30-minute bus ride to work from his *lof* every day, always leaving the city before the last bus around 8:30 p.m. Because of his widely respected stature as a *dirigente*, he received a constant flow of invitations to the *Nguillatum*—the Mapuche harvest ceremony of prayer, feast and sociability—and accepted many. I accompanied Rosamel and Ximena (his *compañera* at the time) as their guest in one *Nguillatum*, which moved me on many levels, including the opportunity to see Rosamel in his element: not an ardent participant in the prayer, but fully engaged with the ceremonial sociability, affirming what this meant for the vitality of Mapuche culture. Rosamel held Western and Mapuche medicine in balance, having played a

central role in the founding of the iconic Hospital Makewe, an Indigenous medical provider with ongoing support from the state. (In one of my last conversations with Rosamel, he lamented not being able to embrace this balance more fully in the management of his illness). This embodiment of Mapuche cultural values and practices came through most strongly in Rosamel's relations of trust and respect with other Mapuche *dirigentes*. His primary role in our FSC study—one that no one else on our team (or for that matter, few in the country) could have performed—was to interview older-generation Mapuche leaders, many of them "semi-clandestine" or seriously at risk, to garner their views of the lumber companies and the Mapuche struggle. He proudly reported on their receptivity, which often came with the proviso, "I'll do the interview, but only because it is with you."

These groundings are the essence of Rosamel's version of *antropología militante*. His guiding principles, his North Star, came from a *proyecto de vida* and from Mapuche lifeways that are not, and never could be, fully legible in the academic world. He served willingly as a bridge between these worlds, an interpreter of sorts, when he found the political purpose to be sufficiently compelling; and through this role he acquired an influential voice. Yet by his own choice, he never became fully of academia, and he grew weary, at times impatient, with this "bridge" role. I sense that he ultimately opted to remain at the margins because he knew that trying harder to belong would undermine the deeper groundings that gave his life project meaning; and that most likely, the academic world still would not have fully accepted him.

I was drawn to work with Rosamel and grew to love him in deep appreciation of this liminal, at times painful, but also profoundly generative space that he occupied. For those who think of entering their respective academic worlds with life experiences like those of Rosamel: I hope you will always nurture these groundings, give them priority, allow them to guide you and others. Take inspiration from Rosamel, who gleaned what he needed from so-called universal knowledge forms while never letting

their hegemony displace the *otros saberes* that made his home. Those like me, who have found meaning and connection in more distant struggles, can also take inspiration from Rosamel in the need to find our own home, and in the immense pleasure of working with soulmates who engage the contradictions without letting them undermine our commitments, who keep us real with Sisyphean humor, and keep us focused, as Rosamel always did, on touchstone ethical-political values, on the best answers we can muster to the bare truth question, *¿para qué?* //