

WORLD FOLKLORE SERIES

PACHAMAMA TALES

Folklore from Argentina, Bolivia,
Chile, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay



Retold and Translated by Paula Martín
Edited by Margaret Read MacDonald | Illustrations by Luna Núñez

A central illustration in a muted, monochromatic style. It depicts a woman with long dark hair, representing Pachamama, with her hands raised in a gesture of offering or prayer. Above her head is a crescent moon with a human-like face. To the right, a checkered flag is visible. The background consists of stylized, layered shapes that suggest a landscape or a celestial realm.

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EL CUERO (*HUEKE HUEKÚ O TRELKE-WEKUFÉ*)

Leyenda Mapuche de Chile y Argentina.

Una familia de extranjeros estaba de vacaciones en el sur de Chile. Recorriendo la zona, encontraron casi de casualidad un lugar paradisíaco, tan bello como solitario y decidieron acampar allí. Se trataba de un lago entre las montañas, con el agua pura y cristalina, un aire fresco y perfumado y los sublimes sonidos de la naturaleza. Mientras los padres armaban las carpas, los niños juntaban ramas y hojas secas para hacer el fuego.

—Es extraño que no haya más gente en este lugar tan hermoso— dijo el padre.

—Somos más que afortunados de estar aquí —respondió la madre.

—¿Podemos ir al agua? —preguntaron los niños.

—Mejor no, el agua es muy fría en esta zona. —respondieron los padres.

Pasaron un día maravilloso disfrutando de la naturaleza, jugando y descansando.

Sin embargo, al llegar la hora del crepúsculo, algo extraño sucedió. El padre se quedó quieto, muy quieto mirando hacia el agua, hacia un lugar cerca de la orilla donde se podía vislumbrar un extraño burbujear. Sin decir una sola palabra el padre comenzó a caminar en dirección al agua a pesar de los intentos de su familia por detenerlo. Gritaron, intentaron sujetarlo pero el padre estaba hipnotizado por ese burbujear y sin mirar atrás, se zambulló en el lago.

En ese momento las burbujas se transformaron en remolino y del agua se elevó algo que parecía un cuero de vaca extendido. A medida que el cuero iba envolviendo al hombre, enrollándose a su alrededor, su familia pudo ver, horrorizada, que en los bordes de ese cuero había unos apéndices con unas garras filosas como garfios, salvo en uno de los extremos donde en lugar de garras había un par de ojos desorbitados, de un color rojo intenso. El cuero giró y entonces pudieron ver en la parte de abajo de su cuerpo una enorme ventosa que se abría como una boca gigantesca. Luego el cuero se sumergió llevándose a ese hombre hacia lo más profundo del lago de donde ya nunca más pudo regresar.

La familia desesperada fue a buscar ayuda. Luego de un largo andar encontraron a una comunidad del lugar. Al oír el relato, supieron enseguida que se trataba del *Trelke-wekufe* y corrieron a buscar a la *Machi*, la única capaz de atraer el cuero a la orilla y vencerlo.

Al otro día, siguieron todos a la *Machi* hasta el lago y allí la vieron hacer. Reunió varias ramas de arbustos espinosos: *quizco* y *calafate* y los envolvió para que parecieran un bulto humano. Luego dirigiendo su mirada al río, comenzó a entonar un canto y a recitar unas palabras en *Mapudungún*. Poco tiempo después comenzaron a vislumbrarse unas burbujas que se acercaban lentamente a la orilla. La *Machi* comenzó a mover el agua, imitando un chapoteo con algunas ramas. Las burbujas se acercaron más y más y cuando estuvieron bien cerca de la orilla, la *Machi* arrojó el atado de ramas. El cuero se elevó, mostrando sus horribles garras y sus ojos enfurecidos y luego comenzó a enrollarse alrededor del bulto de ramas espinosas. Una tinta oscura invadió el agua cristalina a medida que el monstruo se agitaba enloquecido, y mientras más se movía, más apretaba y más

profundamente se hería de muerte con las espinas. Finalmente, las burbujas cesaron el agua retornó a su calma habitual y ese manto diabólico se perdió en las profundidades del lago.

La gente de la tierra, los *Mapuche*, conocen la presencia del *Hueke Huekú* en los lagos Patagónicos, ese cuero diabólico que absorbe completamente los fluidos de su presa, hasta dejarla seca y muerta.

Por este motivo nunca dejan que sus niños jueguen solos cerca de las orillas.

Nota: Hueke Huekú o Trelke-wekufe es un monstruo con forma de cuero de vaca que se cree que existe en los lagos Patagónicos.

Machi: Autoridad religiosa, consejera y protectora del pueblo Mapuche. Generalmente se trata de una mujer.

Mapuche: Significa "gente de la tierra". Mapu = tierra, che = gente.

Mapudungún: El "hablar de la tierra", idioma del pueblo Mapuche.

Quizco: Echinopsis chilensis es un tipo de cactus que se encuentra en el extremo sur de Sudamérica.

Calafate: Berberis microphylla es una planta berberis que se encuentra en el sur de Chile y Argentina. Es un símbolo de la Patagonia. Las ramas están cubiertas de espinas.



THE COWHIDE (*HUEKE HUEKÚ O TRELKE-WEKUFÉ*)

Mapuche legend from Chile and Argentina.

A family of foreigners was vacationing in the south of Chile. Traveling through the area, they came across by accident a paradisiacal place, as beautiful as it was lonely, and decided to camp there. It consisted of a lake between mountains, with pure, crystalline water, fresh and perfumed air, and the sublime sounds of nature. While the parents set up the tents, the children searched for branches and leaves to make a fire.

“It is strange that there are not more people in this beautiful place,” said the father.

“We are more than lucky to be here,” responded the mother.

“Can we go in the water?” asked the children.

“Better not. The water is very cold in this area,” replied the parents.

They spent a marvelous day enjoying nature, playing, and resting.

Nevertheless, as the hour of twilight approached, something strange happened. The father was very still, quietly looking into the water, at a place near the shore where you could glimpse a strange bubbling. Without saying a single word, the father began to walk towards the water, despite the attempts of his family to stop him. Crying, they tried to hold him back, but the father was hypnotized by this bubbling and without looking back, he plunged into the lake.

At this moment, the bubbles transformed themselves into a whirlpool and from the water rose up something that appeared to be a stretched cowhide. As the skin was wrapping up the man, coiling completely around him, his family could see... horrified... that the edges of this skin had appendages with sharp claws with hooks, except at one far end where instead it had huge eyes of an intense red color. The skin spun and then they were able to see underneath the body an enormous sucker that opened like a gigantic mouth. Then the hide submerged, carrying the man to the deepest part of the lake, from where he never again could return.

The desperate family went to seek help. After a long walk they came upon a community there. Upon hearing the story, they believed right away that this was the *Trelke-Wekufe* and ran to look for the *Machi*, the wise woman, the only one capable of attracting the skin to the shore and vanquishing it.

The next day, they all followed the *Machi* to the lake and saw what she did there. She put together various branches of spiny bushes: *quizco* and *calafate*, and wrapped them in such a way that they appeared to be a human body. Then casting her gaze at the river, she began to intone a chant and recite words in *Mapudungún*. After a little while, they began to glimpse bubbles that slowly came nearer to the shore. The *Machi* began to move the water and create a splashing with some branches. The hide rose up, showing its terrible claws and its infuriated eyes and began to roll itself around the body of spiny branches. A dark color invaded the crystalline water as the monster madly writhed about. And the more it moved, the more the thorns pressed and more deeply they

mortally wounded it. Finally, the bubbles having ceased, the water returned to its usual calm and the diabolical mantel was lost in the depths of the lake.

The people of this land, the *Mapuche*, know about the presence of the *Hueke Huekú* in the Patagonian lakes. . .this diabolical skin that absorbs completely the fluids of its prey, leaving it dry and dead.

Because of this, they never let their children play alone near the shore.

Note: The Hueke Huekú or Trelke-wekufe is a cowhide-like monster believed to live in Patagonian lakes.

The Machi is a religious authority, advisor, and protector of the Mapuche people. Usually this is a woman.

Mapuche: It means "people from the earth." "Mapu" = earth, "che" = people.

Mapudungún: This is the "language of the earth," language of the Mapuche people: "Mapu" means "earth," and "dungún" means "speaking." In this case, it's more than the language of the Mapuche people, since it is the language of earth.

Quizco: Echinopsis chiloensis is a type of cactus found in the southern tip of South America.

Calafate: Berberis microphylla is a kind of barberry found in southern Chile and Argentina. It is a symbol of Patagonia. The branches are covered in thorns.