



ORIGINAL

Photographic images of indigenous peoples in contemporary Chilean poetry

Imágenes fotográficas de pueblos originarios en la poesía chilena contemporánea

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the literary proposals *De la tierra sin fuegos* (1986) and *Reducciones* (2012) by the Chilean poets Juan Pablo Riveros and Jaime Huenún respectively; works in which the intersection between word and image is privileged in a deconstructive and questioning eagerness. The photographic image of native peoples that is materially incorporated into the textual body of the poems comes, on the one hand, from ethnographic/anthropometric archives, from the priest and ethnologist Martin Gusinde, and from the scientists Robert Lehmann-Nitsche, Herman Ten Kate, Francisco P. Moreno and Hans Virchow. Through this verbovisual assemblage, two different perspectives are presented regarding the procedures of scrutiny that the ethnologist/scientist follows when approaching the indigenous person and the reading he makes of him and his culture: the first becomes a fellow tribesman, while the others exercise a biosocial control over the indigenous person by freely disposing of his corporeality for scientific purposes. In this way, the texts resort to images to reflect on the materialization of ethnographic photography and the material and metaphysical “capture” of the indigenous; they problematize the photographic act, the revealing character of the image and its scenic implications in the exhibition of the indigenous in order to corroborate, denounce and give a face to these subjects. In addition, they point to the hunters and situate the historical context under which these takeovers take place, that is, they are images that violate the viewer by confronting him with the usurpation and death that weighs on the indigenous, particularly in contexts of internal colonization (nineteenth and twentieth centuries).

Keywords: Photography; Native Peoples; Chilean Poetry; Disciplinary Mutations.

RESUMEN

Este artículo analiza las propuestas literarias *De la tierra sin fuegos* (1986) y *Reducciones* (2012) de los poetas chilenos Juan Pablo Riveros y Jaime Huenún respectivamente; obras en las que se privilegia la intersección entre palabra e imagen en un afán deconstructivo y cuestionador. La imagen fotográfica de pueblos originarios que se incorpora materialmente en el cuerpo textual de los poemarios proviene, por un lado, de archivos de carácter etnográfico/antropométrico, del sacerdote y etnólogo Martin Gusinde, y de los científicos Robert Lehmann-Nitsche, Herman Ten Kate, Francisco P. Moreno y Hans Virchow. A través de este ensamblaje verbovisual, se presentan dos perspectivas diferentes en torno a los procedimientos de escrutinio que el etnólogo/científico sigue al momento de aproximarse al indígena y la lectura que hace del mismo y de su cultura: el primero se transforma en un compañero de tribu, mientras que los demás ejercen un control biosocial sobre el indígena al disponer libremente de su corporalidad para fines científicos. De esta forma, los textos recurren a las imágenes para reflexionar sobre la materialización de la fotografía etnográfica y la “captura” material y metafísica del indígena; problematizan el acto fotográfico, el carácter revelador de la imagen y sus implicancias escénicas en la exhibición de los indígenas de forma de corroborar, denunciar y dar rostro a estos sujetos. Además, apuntan a los cazadores y sitúan el contexto histórico bajo el cual se realizan

estas tomas de posesión, es decir, son imágenes que violentan al que mira al confrontarlo con la usurpación y muerte que pesa sobre el indígena, particularmente, en contextos de colonización interna (siglos XIX y XX).

Palabras clave: Fotografía; Pueblos Originarios; Poesía Chilena; Mutaciones Disciplinarias.

INTRODUCTION

The intersection of photography with poetry exposes its nature as a “hunt”, where the photographer endeavors to capture their prey “with the speed of a lightning”;⁽¹⁾ a capture of the objectification of certain unfortunate, socially vulnerable, and mentally unstable human beings (Sontag); of the stark (over)exposure of “exposed” communities; and of “the dignity of those without images”⁽²⁾ which manifests in a dual sense: to reveal and to violate.

Ethnographic photography, in particular, emerges as a transgressive element that the authors enhance within their poetry collections, transforming them into documents beyond their indexical approach, as they are transplanted into a complex framework of senses to denounce crimes, shape a suffering face, and reveal that the relationships between Europeans and natives are imbued with convoluted forms.

METHODS

In this article, the pursued objective is to review the interactions between European/non-European scientists and indigenous populations, which, within both poetry collections, are marked by the specific interests and perspectives of the former, positioning themselves to examine and catalog a sort of ontology of indigenous people. In this context, the concept of knowledge circulation is explored,⁽³⁾ which takes shape in the development of science practiced by these erudite individuals. It is no longer just about armchair or desk anthropologists, instead, this new generation initiates a systematization of the found/“discovered” that, in some instances, they will conduct it in the field, that is, within colonized territories, where scientists integrate with the indigenous groups under study, as Martin Gusinde did. In other cases, the “pieces”, in this instance referring to the bodies of the indigenous people, will be transported to spaces where this knowledge is centralized, primarily museums, and the findings derived from their captivity will be disseminated among those who possess the power to preserve such knowledge. Within these museum spaces, indigenous individuals will be studied, exhibited, and, in most cases, meet their demise. This *modus operandi* established in these noble knowledge spaces, differs from what some scientists or ethnologists will do in the field, as their work will openly antagonize with the abduction, outrage, and death that awaits many indigenous people.

To demonstrate these disparities, the analysis specifically focused on the documentary review of the poetry collections *De la tierra sin fuegos* (1986; 2001)¹ by Juan Pablo Riveros and *Reducciones* (2012) by Jaime Huenún, based on the photographic images incorporated into their respective frameworks. Both works question the use and significance of photography within Chilean poetry, presenting distinctive perspectives on the acculturation processes and the indigenous genocide in the southern austral macro-zones of Chile and Argentina, to shed light on the trajectory of death during internal colonization.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

These poetry collections stand out for their hybrid discursive construction or texture, typical of the disciplinary mutations characterized by incorporating into the poetic domain “production resources and discursive strategies from other disciplines, preferably from the so-called social sciences [...] the sciences and the philosophy of language, [...] through the expansion of the text based on paratexts, especially epigraphs and notes; and the natural and exact sciences (biology, physics, mathematics, frequently in an obliterated, ironic, and deconstructive manner)”.⁽⁴⁾

In response to this sense of hybridity, in *De la tierra sin fuegos* (2001), Riveros creates a global, hybrid, and ethnocultural collage that privileges a syncretic enunciation in which the voices of several subjects converge, articulating discourses in different languages, thus privileging a double ethnolinguistic register. Through *transliterary intertextuality*, the poet incorporates fragments of diverse origins into this collage, encompassing both verbal and visual elements in nature.^(5,6) In *Reducciones* (2012), Huenún generates a textuality constructed from the encounter of a multiplicity of voices and textures, incorporating documentary text; chronicles; autobiographical accounts; testimonies, as well as photographs sourced from documentary and family archives; fragments of indigenous Aché-Guayakí and Mapuche songs such as Elías Necul’s *collage*, which serves as epigraph

1 Originally published in 1986, Riveros reissued the poetry collection in 2001; a second edition where some significant differences are observed: some verses are modified; new poems are incorporated; the order of some poems in the sections is changed; new photographic material is added; some epigraphs are eliminated; some titles are modified, and the graphic of the text support is redistributed with the addition of new images. The notes have been relocated to the bottom of each page, eliminating the section at the end of the text. Additionally, Riveros added an explanatory prologue about the reasons for these changes, thanked his collaborators, and reiterated that, despite the magnitude of Martin Gusinde’s work, it has been widely ignored by the Chilean scientific community. Due to these rectifications, this article uses the second edition (López, 2017), as it expands the semantic depth of the work from its first version.

opening the poetry collection; scientific texts -whether anthropological, physiological, or anatomical-, and a rewriting of Hispanic Colonial chronicles in Castilian mixed with Mapudungun.⁽⁷⁾

A point of convergence in both poetry collections is the reference to the *Araucana* and its author Alonso de Ercilla y Zúñiga; through the transtextual strategy, both the conquistador figure and his epic poem are incorporated by means of apocryphal rewriting (López), whose presence accounts for the parodic and relativizing nature that both poetry collections adopt toward the foundational meta-narrative of the nation.

In the case of the photographs, in both poetry collections, the images exhibit an ethnographic nature, captured between the last decades of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century; a fin-de-siecle encounter that prompts questioning regarding the scientists' stance in their approach or study of indigenous ethnicities. In *De la tierra sin fuegos*, the images are attributed to the Austrian priest Martin Gusinde, who visited southern Patagonia, specifically Tierra del Fuego, between 1918 and 1924 to live with the indigenous people whom he referred to as *Fuegian*. In *Reducciones*, the images stem from the scientific investigations of Germans Robert Lehmann- Nitsche and Hans Virchow, Dutchman Herman Ten Kate, and Argentinian Francisco P. Moreno. Predominantly, these images of indigenous individuals were captured for anthropometric purposes as part of ethnographic or scientific reports of that epoch; within this context, it was common to exhibit indigenous people completely nude to capture their physiognomy in detail: "[t]he enforced nudity, compelled by photographers, was possible because all the indigenous people were captives".⁽⁸⁾

The verbovisual assemblage advises on the one hand, of the intricate physiognomy of these texts, which from their heterogeneous composition, they reflect the difficult visual construct of the *other* and the indigenous world. On the other hand, this assemblage points to a certain degree of scientism among many who researched indigenous ethnic groups, ultimately dissecting their cultures and existences.

De la tierra sin fuegos

Riveros' work aligns with the construction of the *ethnographic* poem (Carrasco), a type of textuality typical of *Chilean anthropological literature* (Carrasco and Alvarado), which is characterized by its exploration of "themes or problems characteristic (though not exclusive) of anthropological or archaeological discourse, particularly the search, yearning, encounter or disconnection with otherness, travel, intercultural relations, age groups, and metadiscursive reflections".⁽⁹⁾ This form of poem operates as a *photo-textuality* (Perkowska), a kind of text where verbal and visual elements interact on "the same space and level", enabling the development at the graphic level of these ethnographic themes "through the inclusion of photographs, drawings, or other elements".⁽⁹⁾

From the 17 photographic images by Martin Gusinde, the poetry collection shapes the itinerary and approach of the young Austrian priest from the Congregation of the Divine Word across the southern Patagonian territory, specifically focusing on his 14 months living with the *Fuegian* people. When he moved to Tierra del Fuego, the indigenous ethnicities were significantly diminished; therefore, he hastens to gather linguistic terms, elements of material and immaterial culture, and conducts the due anthropometric measurements.⁽³⁾ He must achieve his work through the approval of the natives, viewing him as a *koliot* (foreigner) who seems to harbor genuine affection for the indigenous individuals (Gusinde 135). With this advantage, he gains access to their traditions and languages; he is allowed to live among them, eat their food, sleep in their huts, and engage in their initiation rituals: the Hain selk'nam and the Kina yámana.⁽¹⁰⁾ While Gusinde's primary intention is to create a photographic-ethnographic record, intended as a photographic device,⁽¹¹⁾ there is also a significant transposition of himself in his research as someone who seeks, with a particular emic sensitivity, to integrate and experience the culture of the southern ethnicities; he thus becomes one more member of the community.

Gusinde's photograph integrated into the ethnographic poem enriches the choral form of the poetry collection by interweaving the voices of the priest/poet/alter ego and certain indigenous individuals. These individuals, on the one hand, collaborate with the ethnologist in constructing his documentary-visual archive, and on the other hand, they urge him to partake in the rituals and traditions of the community to, ultimately, become a "tribe companion". The introduction of the photograph of the *Mankatchen* or *shadow hunter*, allows the companion/poetic voice/traveler to configure cultural aspects of the Other, framing ethnocultural situations experienced both as a witness or participant; it constitutes a record that, within the mutable textuality order of the poetry collection, takes part as a "representational fold that disrupts the surface of the text, problematizing reception, and intensifying the reader's gaze, [producing] aesthetic, ethical, and political meanings whereby concerns and debates of the current era are articulated" (Perkowska 58).

The black and white images are presented as a progressive series that depicts Gusinde's work and coexistence with the natives in Tierra del Fuego. Through the captions, the poetic intention emphasizes the degree of closeness between the indigenous individuals and the *koliot* in his role as guide, godfather, or friend. In the poem "Jon, el hechicero" the voice of the Selk'nam authority -some of the portrayed individuals: Tenenesk or Halimink- queries the foreigner about the responsibilities and abilities of the Jon from his place of origin. Hence, the captions and the portrait clearly indicate their rank, name, and relationship with the ethnologist.

The Jon is responsible for instructing him about the significance of his work in the southern land, extending beyond the healing of illnesses, as they are figures that contain and unite the *haruwen* (group), shaping their life around them to attain ancestral knowledge and fundamental education: “I ask you: Do you, kolliot, have men like our Jon? The Jon is the most serious part of the Selk’nam” (Riveros 56).



Figure 1. The elderly Jon Tenenés, friend and collaborator who taught M. Gusinde the traditions of the Selk’nam people (caption in the poetry collection)



Figure 2. Martin Gusinde with his Yámana godparents, during his first participation in the initiation ceremonies into puberty (caption in the poetry collection)
Source: *De la tierra sin fuegos* (2001)

Tenenesk was the final great Selk’nam Jon; a *man-memory* whose existence upheld the cohesion of the group (Le Goff 137), which comes to an end with his demise occurred during the 1923 measles epidemic. In this way, the tribe disintegrated, and the companion is left adrift: “What *has been* (Barthes) of the Jon is all that remains of his tutelary figure and a living indigenous past crushed by genocide” (López).

Reducciones

The ancient territory of Chauracahuín, the native denomination for the region which is currently known as

the city of Osorno, and its surroundings constitute a space divided into two sectors by the Rahue River: on one side the colonial society of yesteryear and the contemporary Chilean society is located, and on the other side resides the Mapuche community (Mansilla 16).

From this space, the poetry collection signifies the entrance into the imperative world of the Crown and later the Chilean state. Both sides are separated by their differences, their wartime diatribes, their languages, and beliefs, but also by the imposition of a dogma in an exercise of superiority. In this regard, the work presents “a nuanced blend of memory, imagination, and a desire to heal the historical wounds that colonial violence caused at the time and still causes” (Mansilla 15). This is evident in certain events related to Mapuche acculturation and genocide process, such as the Huilliche massacre of Forrahue in 1912. Likewise, the title of the poetry collection, as a concept that loses its original acceptance of detriment, acquires “an affirmative significance connoting the expansion of the Chauracahuín chronotopes to the condition of metonymy of Latin American miscegenation [...] a result of institutionalized colonial violence sustained over time” (Mansilla 17).

The photographic images accentuate the mutable textuality of the poetry collection, as observed in the initial pages of the volume. These pages feature the reproduction of an image of a coin showing a Mapuche woman² surrounded by two frontal portraits of Mapuche women in a style typical of a family or personal album, and later in the collection, portraits of Mapuche individuals or their descendants are introduced, summoned by the mission of the Society of Jesus, established in Chile in 1593. In Chauracahuín the central figure of this mission was the priest Luis de Valdivia, who proposed implementing *defensive war* to peacefully evangelize the territory through the dispatch of missionaries.

The “Four Funeral Songs” section stands out, where the photographic images of an Aché indigenous person from Paraguay; a uniformed Mapuche; a young Yagán, and the skull of an indigenous individual without ethnic identification are contrasted with excerpts from scientific reports; a kind of disconcerting *carte de visite*. Preceding these visual poems is the Aché-Guayakí song, which illustrates the overlay of scientific reports (Mansilla 16) that will shape the chants: “The Whites, what characterizes the eternal Whites is that now they live examining us, us, the very old, us, the already dead” (Huenún 69). In sterile containment facilities, indigenous people were “subjected to rigorous anthropometric examinations and used as test subjects in scientific sessions” (López 86,87). In the highlighted sample in the poetry collection, all the natives were photographed while being held captive at the Museum of La Plata in Argentina.³

In “Canto I/Damiana” and “Canto II/Catriel”, signed by Robert Lehmann-Nitsche, a German physician and ethnologist who served as the director of the anthropology section at the Museum of La Plata, and Francisco Pascasio Moreno, a naturalist and politician who founded the museum, respectively. Both images contrast due to the absence and type of clothing, but the reports provide information about the context for the shots: the woman sick with tuberculosis is photographed in the courtyard of a psychiatric hospital where she succumbs two months after being portrayed; the “Argentinian Indian” (Sepúlveda 295) dressed in military attire served as a liaison in the Conquest of the Desert (1878-1884), which aimed at nationalizing indigenous territory; their skulls and brains were a “jewel” (Huenún 71) for anthropometric study. In “Canto III/Maish Kenzis” with the signature and report of Herman Ten Kate, a Dutch anthropologist and explorer, and the first manager of the Anthropology Section of the Museum of La Plata, a Yagán native is shown and described as “obedient, loyal, unsociable, wild” (Huenún 72) who was used in the preparation of human skeletons displayed in the museum and died at an early age from a pulmonary disease.⁽⁶⁾

The series “Canto IV/E 1867” concludes with the signature of Hans Virchow, a German anatomist and son of Rudolf Virchow, the founder of the Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte, who exhibited a group of Fuegians in a physical anthropology course at the Berlin Zoo (Báez and Mason). The photographed indigenous people undergo a transition towards the atomization of their physiognomies and ultimately become skulls, bones, and dissected shells: “I HAVE DISSECTED MANY CORPSES/ AND NEVER FOUND A SOUL” (Huenún 73).

The act of renaming the photograph and the scientific report that compose the poem serves as an act of denunciation regarding “the position of enunciation of scientists from the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century” (Sepúlveda 297). This critique emphasizes that these scientists did not consider listening to indigenous people but rather engaged in a dialogue among erudite individuals who shared ways of seeing, acting, and naming the Native Other (Sepúlveda). Likewise, this denunciation makes tangible a painful memory that adds to the mnemonic thickness of indigenous life, bringing faces and bodies back to their vital origins.

2 It concerns the current 100 Chilean pesos coin that, with the image of a woman “intensifies the idea, in principle, of a certain concern for the most discriminated minorities in the country” (Paredes 40), that which for certain Mapuche groups, this is seen as a vindication of indigenous culture, while for others, it is considered disrespectful as this sort of homage is “nominal in character, as in practice, it does not match their living conditions and state policies aimed at improving them” (Paredes 40).

3 The article *Anthropology of genocide. Identification and restitution: “Collections” of human remains at the La plata Museum* by Fernando Pepe, Miguel Añon and Patricio Harrison from 2010 explain the itinerary and fate of indigenous individuals who were held in the museum.



Figure 3. Canto III/Maish Kenzis
Source: *Reducciones* (2012) by Jaime Huenún

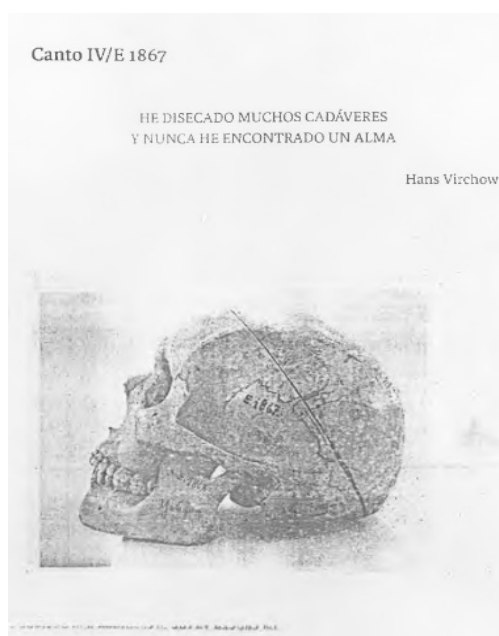


Figure 4. Canto IV/E: 1867
Source: *Reducciones* (2012) by Jaime Huenún

CONCLUSIONS

The circulation of knowledge is observed in a dissimilar manner in both poetry collections; there is a different treatment and approach to indigenous people by scientists, as observed in the photographic images of ethnographic character. Within these mutable texts by Juan Pablo Riveros and Jaime Huenún, a gaze prevails that debates the ways of conceiving the knowledge acquired through observation, coexistence, and outrage toward the Native Other, and there are discrepancies regarding the actions and consequences that these had on the existence and genocidal collapse that befell them.

Independent of the contrasting approaches that the works take in expressing themselves through their verbovisual marriage, both propositions discuss the emergence and establishment of a kind of nineteenth-century imperialistic and colonialist positivist science that generated images of indigenous people for itself. In some cases, these images depicted them in conditions of subjugation with the objective of atomizing their bodies and cultures. In other instances, despite functioning as an anthropometric tool, photography preserved significant cultural remnants through the scientist's emic actions. In light of this, indisputably, the poetry collections serve as a memory of the devastating scientific advancement of Europe in Latin America, consolidating an image of the captured indigenous individual as, even though dissimilar perspectives are adopted, these are captures or acts of possession; "the inventory of what is to be dominated, occupied, exploited. In a way, they are *Whites*" (Kay 29) just like that.

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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