

Armed with Cameras and Guns: A Decolonial Reading of Patagonia, Ethnological Archives, and Nation in the First Peronismo¹

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ABSTRACT: Vezub and De Oto parse out the double discourses present in anthropological photography in twentieth-century Argentine nationhood. Ethnography thus becomes a powerful tool to create the national archive, reaffirming the coloniality of power, by way of representation and through the placement of indigenous bodies in relation to ethnographers who, engaged in processes of internal colonialism, behaved like earlier colonial explorers. This article presents a rupture in the dominant narrative as it interrupts myths of nationhood and integration of the Tehuelches people with a counternarrative that presents decolonial possibilities within the photographic archive. Maintaining the ambiguity in the discourse of Peronism itself, the authors emphasize that, while financing these ethnographic campaigns, Peronist leaders also supported emancipatory policies for the racialized working class. Los descamisados, a shirtless working-class and subaltern figure, emerges with Peronism, as a positive alternative to suit-wearing oligarchs in discourses of nationhood and nation-building. —*Trans.*

KEYWORDS: Imbelloni, Bórmida, photography, Tehuelches, Peronist, peronismo

Imbelloni and Bórmida's Photographic Archive

The conceptual experiments of Argentine ethnography are vast and understudied. In that sense, when we encounter the first contact with the photog-

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raphy archive of the Patagonian expedition led by José Imbelloni and Marcelo Bórmida in 1949, a number of questions become immediately apparent. Without a doubt, the most important were those regarding ways of getting to know those ethnographies, the subjectivities that resulted from them, and the organization of the archive—that is to say, the production of the sources and the political and epistemological plot that surrounded the whole operation. This article contains a section exploring each of these concerns. However, the most important orientation of our inquiry is considering what these ethnographic materials constituted both from the perspective of those involved and from our own reading. Regarding those photographs, our critical effort focuses on thinking about what we could call “disaggregations” of the narratives that were offered in a totalizing (or ethnological) way to the viewing eye. For example, the linking of the ethnographic operation (to employ the term as Michel de Certeau does) and its concrete existence to the general framework provided by the Argentine’s state first *peronismo*, Argentine’s corporate socialist or right-wing populist socialist movement. The operation that we endeavor here, is, according to the terms of a decolonial critique, disaggregating the hierarchies that apparently organize in monolithic terms the connection between science and ideology, and in particular, the link between the ethnographic method in the terms of this exploration and the Peronist political program.

With the idea of disaggregation, we want to express that other forms of knowing are articulated in relation to *peronismo*, with the social *praxis* that comes along with these forms of knowing, that are not necessarily reproduced in the ethnographies of these anthropologists (Imbelloni and Bórmida). We understand a *priori* the polemic character of these affirmations but consider it important to mention them in order to undertake a search for those fissures in the construction of knowledge and its relation to politics. In that particular situation, it was crucial to reflect upon the relationship among nation-building discourses, the institutions, and archives contained in a field rife with tensions regarding anthropological practices in Argentina of the first *peronismo*. In the process of writing this article we established an hypothesis regarding an observation of the visual and written sources, according to what was considered the foundational ethnological knowledge of the mid-twentieth century. This knowledge outlined the notion of racial purity destined to preserve the *Tehuelches* [the exonym for The Aónikenk people] in rural ghettos, as an ambivalent foundation for an Argentina of giants.

This article is organized along two axes. First, it insists on the fascist sympathies of those undertaking the expeditions of 1949 and on the violence of the images they produced. Second, it explores the overflows of interpretation

and visual subjectivity, with their possible relapses into the aesthetics within the terrain of the relationship between *corpus* and nation, in this case referring to the ethnological archives and *peronismo*. The vanguardism of the Peronist movement is rendered visible, along with its differences in respect to the anthropological experiments that it adopted. To that end, we will compare image selections from the Imbellonian register with the Peronist iconography, seeking to discern the ways in which bodies and subjects were positioned through their respective, contemporary archivologies.



FIG. 1: Photographs and Documentary Archive of the Ethnographic Museum (MET), Faculty of Philosophy and Letters, Universidad de Buenos Aires (UBA).

Let us thus examine the hard data and basic information. In the summer of 1949, during Juan Domingo Perón's first presidential term, the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters of the Universidad de Buenos Aires and the general administration of the direction of national parks and tourism undertook an anthropological expedition to the National Territory of Santa Cruz and the Military Governorate of Comodoro Rivadavia, a jurisdiction that existed in the petroleum enclave of the northeast of Santa Cruz and the southeast of Chubu between 1944 and 1955. The social scientists toured 4,156 kilometers with the help of the Argentine military and the National Gendarmerie. According to published sources, one of the objectives was to find out whether there were "survivors of the Tehuelche people." If there were, the "bodily and psychological characteristics of a population that agonizes" would be revealed and documented (Imbelloni 1949a, 5).

Neither harmonious nor conflict-free, the objectives were congruent with those of the National Ethnic Institute and the Army's Ethnic Counsel. These offices elaborated their own anthropological records, anthropometric studies, and data regarding the heights of the creole and immigrant population with the goal of creating a "National Ethnic Archive" (Lazzari 2004, 211). It is not lost on us that the Universidad de Buenos Aires journal where Imbelloni published

the main results was named “*Runa archivos para las ciencias del hombre*” (“*Runa Archives for the Sciences of Man*”). It was a title that underscored a double direction. For the ethnological archive, it alluded to both the Scandinavian written characters and the “Indian man,” as it also invoked the word “*Rune*” (“person,” “human,” “people”) in the Quechua language.

Imbelloni had migrated to Argentina from Italy in the beginning of the twentieth century, becoming a central figure in the *rioplatense* anthropology inaugurated in the 1920s.³ At the end of World War II, in his position as director of the Ethnographic Museum, he facilitated the immigration of scientists and philosophers of varying degrees of commitment and identification with Central European fascist regimes. Among the transplants was the young Bórmida, the teaching assistant who would succeed Imbelloni as the main authority in Argentine anthropology. Joining the expedition was Willem Ruysch, *Ethnos* journal director, who was in charge of the collection of ethnographic material and blood samples and the ethnographer and physician of the National Germananderie Federico Escalada, author of *El complejo tehuelche: Estudios de etnografía patagónica*, the most important editorial novelty of 1949 for a regional discipline that strove to delimit the totality.

Other specialists dedicated themselves to exhuming skulls and bones, to creating cast masks, acquiring archaeological artifacts, and to registering indigenous traditions, languages, and other modes of expression. Bórmida was in charge of the anthropometric measurements, audio and visual recordings, as well as obtaining six hundred photographs. As a corollary of the investigation, Imbelloni recommended the founding of a rural ghetto (or “reservation,” as understood in the U.S. context), a concentrated area that fulfilled the role of a living genetic reservoir or biological archive of the indigenous population. Deploying the possible impending “physical death of a race that possessed such extraordinary gifts of nature,” Imbelloni proposed segregation “with the goal of conserving at least four or five living families, preserv[ing] them from the economic greed of outsiders and [from] physiological hybridization.” He invoked the U.S. as an example. It had undertaken the “artificial conservation of some red skin stocks.” Thus, he made the political economic terrain explicit in the expeditioners’ essays and photographs. It is worth noting how, for the purposes of this discussion, we are interested in how the ethnological documentation became a productive artifice, to the extent that looming racial death was supposedly overcome by subtracting what was considered wasteful, deposited into an archive as “stock,” or profitable capital for nation-building discourses.

Along with demographic experimentation, the campaign justified itself as for the “convenience of sponsoring the affirmation of Argentine science in

the new era of national life” (Imbelloni 1949b, 1). As evidenced in the Universidad de Buenos Aires’ bulletin’s logo, where the results were also divulged, the objectives were legitimized in the parallel construction of knowledge and a nationality “for the People.” While Imbelloni played a “strong role in [advancing] Peronismo at the Universidad de Buenos Aires” (Lazzari 2004, 212), he and his team also charted their own directions.

Self-proclaimed “humanists,” these scientific missionaries of 1949 were characterized by their ethical and philosophical ambivalence and by their use of zoological metaphors that sought to maintain the last vestiges of a *Tehuelche* “purity” threatened by “racial corruption” and “agony bandits” (those who prey on a people’s misery).



FIG. 2: Logo of *Boletín*, year 3, No. 30, Universidad of Buenos Aires, 1949.

To counteract prevalent, somber forecasts of imminent extinction, Imbelloni proposed to “study thoroughly the residual groups of the ancient *pámpida* race whose assimilation to national life constituted a magnificent program for government activity and an interesting demographic perspective for the Nation.” Aspiring to “offer the most rigorous racial and cultural classification possible” (Imbelloni, 1949a: 7), his team and he plotted a comparative grid in which *Tehuelches* prevailed for their body measurements over the remaining components of the Argentine typology:

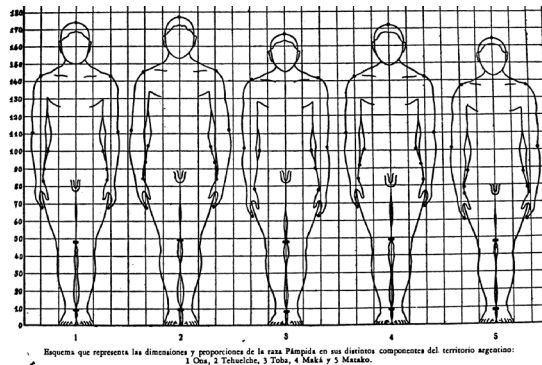


FIG. 3: Imbelloni, 1949a, 50

A central motivation of the expeditions was figuring out whether the elevated height of the *Tehuelches* was a myth. The expeditions also celebrated the systematic generation of significant data about a “human group that had shown itself to be recalcitrant about measurements.” This preoccupation had a long trajectory, presented in earlier works where Imbelloni overturned measurements Janka, Dreising, Virchow, Kate and Lehmann-Nitsche had collected between 1868 and 1905. He criticized their prior efforts for their old-fashioned methods and the small number of individuals they were able to measure. In contrast, in summarizing what he unironically called “our harvest,” Imbelloni was convinced that his team’s would be the “lasting compilation of the [T]ehuelche, in the face of their imminent disappearance.” He showed great pride for having collected “45 anthropometric records, of which 25 belong[ed] to racially pure southern [T]ehuelche males and adults” (Boletín 30, 129). Each person in the study was photographed by means of *intaglio*, meaning “notch” in Italian, a procedure comprised of a photo of the whole body and two busts. This sculptural approach was also utilized in the anthropometric police cabinet record. In this ethnological case, they would yield the physiognomy of the “last” survivors, with the aim of facilitating an understanding of their somatic traits and cultural morphology, along with their virile traits that we will soon discuss.

The images not only shaped the idea of *Tehuelche* alterity, but also legitimized the anthropologists that supported an account of nationality based on telluric premises that did not completely break with the celebrating of overseas immigration [to whiten the nation], a historical process that, after all, had brought many of them to Argentina. If Imbelloni compared the *Tehuelche* measurement of Juan Gókenq with that of Bórmida, he did so with the goal of creating empathy among the respective races. The article clarifies that the European-descended research assistant was the tallest and that if it didn’t seem so in the photographs, it was due to the advantages of the “Patagón architectural



FIG. 4: Imbelloni 1949a

model” that possessed “a lustful skeleton of bone matter and a grand muscular system . . . like . . . the athletic champions of the best-built people on earth” (Imbelloni 1949a, 54). Put differently, if the European-descended research assistant could rival the height of the *Tehuelche*, this was a considerable feat. However, the empathy that the archive suggested was unstable. The people who collectively resembled athletes shared that register with other archetypes, in this case the decadence of a man nicknamed “Wisky,” who sat at the feet of Bórmida in torn garments. His people’s and his “agony” is thus opened and accentuated synchronously as background to each figure. Athletes and decadents are thus represented proportionally in a record that splits in parallel series—on one hand, there is the “splendor” and, on the other, the “misery of the [*T*]ehuelche people” (Imbelloni 1949a, 54). As viewers, we are asked to lament a noble people that is doomed to decline and decay.

Violence and the Archive in Patagonia

As the photographs demonstrate, the expeditioners did not limit their “object of study.” They also photographed themselves. Moreover, they photographed themselves taking photographs. As they measured, interviewed, and photographed the “last,” “pure [*T*]ehuelche,” they consecrated themselves as the “last” authorized anthropologists, in an operation that Bórmida would later duplicate (Cf. Bórmida and Casamiquela 1964). For this reason, we argue that the archive informs us more about the relationship between ethnologists and those that were photographed than about the “*Tehuelches*” themselves. This orientation to

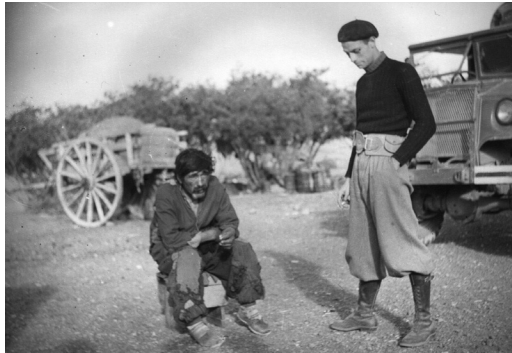


FIG. 5: “Wisky” and Marcelo Bórmida
(Photographs and Documentary Archive, MET-UBA)

the archive allows us to ascertain precepts in place from the onset rather than following, at face value, the performative diagnosis that supposedly emerged about “the imminent disappearance.”

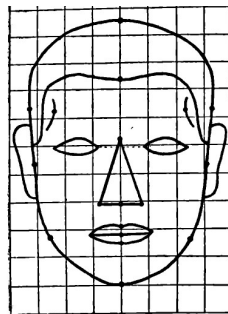
One of the most controversial dimensions of our work, we are aware, is in our insistence on the violence of the images or the analogies we draw between the squad of photographers and the firing squad, the visualization of a premonitory aura of the dictatorships of the decades that would soon follow and the looks and gestures that restrict the autonomous and unconstrained movement of bodies. Isn't the science where “Wisky” appears to be interrogated by a uniformed Imbelloni and by Bórmida, with a gun on his hip, violent? We were told, in previous informal discussions, that Claude Lévi-Strauss was also armed when he traveled during his ethnographic campaigns to Mato Grosso.

Let us examine Figure 1. In it, we see an image of scientists, technicians, and military professionals surrounding a man sitting on the monolith pedestal behind a canal that encloses the garden barracks. When we focus our gaze on the order and attributes of the bodies in the image, the minimal information provided by the photograph breaks down. The violence of the visual register coincides with the violence of the written register along with a political economy of an archive aimed at extracting the productivity of bodies, techniques, and objects. Would another version, with one of the expeditioners sitting, changing places with the standing “Tehuelche,” be possible? It seems unlikely, as this latter image presented a convergence of the “military,” “scientific” and “indigenous,” which, in turn, unfolds into two other subseries, “Tehuelche splendor” and “Tehuelche misery.” While we can suppose that “Wisky” stored weapons in the ranch, these are not exhibited in the photograph.



FIG. 6: Imbelloni, “Wiskey” and Bórmida
(Photographs and Documentary Archive, MET-UBA)

In turn, the revolver at the hip becomes highly relevant for the archetypes, not so much to intimidate the “informant” as to write the direction of the ethnological text and order the archival series: “The instruments that allow us to understand cultures different than ours are the same ones that have allowed us to dominate them” (Ginzburg, cited in Bascopé, 2009: 60). This sentence is not a judgment of the veracity of ethnographic understanding developed at gunpoint. The existence of the “*Tehuelche* population” is presupposed as a totality that allows the description of their physical and psychological characteristics for its subsequent circumscription in a ghetto that aimed to eliminate their previous territorial demarcation. In this respect, there are no significant differences between Imbelloni and Lévi-Strauss; none of their records or methods remain outside of the visual representation they pose, which necessitates the demonstration of the technical devices—including the armament—thanks to which other classifying categories are used. The record’s violence cannot be fundamentally explained by ideological questions or fascist sympathies. It is the ethnological process that constitutes the visual series that organizes the dialectic between continuity and the residual condition of the “*Tehuelche* people.”



Esquema de las dimensiones y proporciones de la cabeza del Tehuelche (valores medios de la serie relevada por la expedición).

FIG. 7: Imbelloni 1949a, 38

“*Tehuelche*” characteristics were not limited to their remarkable physical height. There was also a focus on a second classification, of their head’s geometry, which was supposedly a result of “average values of the series revealed by the expedition.” Recurring references to the average show that when Imbelloni measured individuals who approached the exterior and imprecise limits of what was considered “*Tehuelche*,” they were framed as the problem rather than raising questions about the measurements, which, in reality, had been determined *a priori*:

It would seem that the interaction of the union between the three southern races, especially between the [T]ehuelche and the [M]apuche, should produce an integrated hybridity in Patagonia, resulting in an equality of the model of mixture, without the possibility of discerning which of the components each individual belongs to. Strictly speaking, I must affirm that this monstrous effect has been verified only in a small number of individuals, of which, especially in the artificial life of the reserves, have acquired an indefinable morphology (and psychology) by the overlapping of the most diverse genes. It can be generally distinguished among the current survivors the predominance of one of two types: Tehuelche or Mapuche. (Imbelloni 1949a, 23)

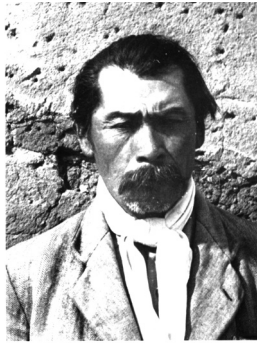
How that “natural” random result operates is neither clear nor observable from analysis of the data. To support the claim of a “predominance of type” regarding the low levels of hybridization, which is attributed to the shoddiness of the reservations he wanted to found, Imbelloni comments that he cannot give “particularities of a genetic nature,” presumably due to technical and methodological limitations of the time. With justifications of the same tenor, certainty gives way to geological or historical explanations that are more or less tautological. He concludes that “the promiscuity of the families and unions of the time that preceded the last battles sustained by the Tehuelche against the Arawak invaders in all of the nineteenth century should not be exaggerated” (Imbelloni, 1949a: 23). Negotiating with these difficulties, Imbelloni distributes his “anthropometric material” in ten groups or among the forty-five people that were measured. Within the first group he included “12 individuals that genuinely represented the Aónikenk” because “they do not have in their immediate ascendance (first and second generation) a mix of Arawak or white blood.” This assured that those twelve individuals presented “with fidelity the physical type of their ancestors, as described in travel descriptions, in the anthropological measurements, and in the iconography” (Imbelloni 1949a, 24). The disdain to-

ward previous narratives and scientists that the article espouses are suddenly left to the side in order to give value to evidence of “physical type,” in conjunction with the images and information reduced to the previous two generations. While Imbelloni’s science is “soft,” it is dressed up as “hard,” with the intent of establishing founding “psychological characteristics” in the photographic archive, enabling this “morphometry” of the gesture and the disposition of the bodies that we now rehearse. However, the anthropologists must also become part of the iconographic analysis.



FIGS. 8 and 9: Photographs and Documentary Archive, MET-UBA

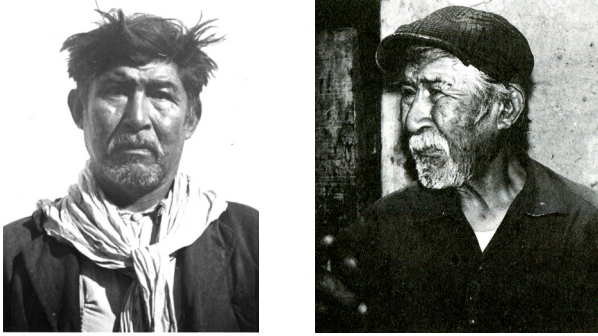
It is possible to reorganize the images of the same ethnological archive to recover the attribution of the data and the names of the people and places traversed by the anthropologists. We can thereby reconstruct a cartography of the sociopolitical networks that supported the expedition. According to this alternative strategy, photographs act as a key to an intertextual archive, capable of demonstrating both the physiognomy and the social dynamics of Peronista Patagonia. Some of this was rehearsed by Enrique Perea (Cf. Perea 1998), a hospital director for a number of years in Alto Río Senguer in the southwest of Chubut, when he published a half dozen photographs in a compilation without any methodological pretenses. He accompanied each image with more recent photographs of the same people, obtained by him during the 1970s. Perea himself recently collaborated with the Ethnographic Museum at the University of Buenos Aires in identifying the individuals who had been anonymous until that point. Without intending to, he politicized these individuals, by contextualizing them in a larger plot of documents and events that placed them as actors or protagonists.



FIGS. 12 AND 13: Mariano Guala in 1949 (Photographs and Documentary Archive, MET-UBA) and 1974, in the picture with Ximena and Iñaki Perea (Perea 1998, 192)

Without intending to do so, his inclusion of his children in the photos exhibits an ethnological paternalism or anthropological humanism that has been cultivated to this day. Still, when comparing the human residues in the Imbelonian record with the letters declassified by Perea, written about those same subjects around 1930, the image of agony and alienation is changed into one of political agency. In the letters, we read of competing claims and lawsuits over land, indigenous militancy in the right-wing militancy in the Argentine Patriotic League, or networks between local elites and *Mapuche-Tehuelches* that surely followed the gendarmes and anthropologists to the ranches in 1949. These networks moderately managed those claims as indigenista bulwarks against foreigners, while reinforcing their containment through the planning of ghettos. Ernesto Bohoslavsky was one of the few that documented these connections with the right to the Buenos Aires editors of the nationalist newspaper *Crisol*, while he picked up a group of indigenous people from Colonia Cushamen, in Chubut, to express gratitude for their land claims (Bohoslavsky 2007).

Other publications of that tenor, such as *El Pampero*, or the magazine *Argentina Austral*, sponsored by one of the principal Patagonian capitalist groups, used to echo the same telluric approaches. This last piece of information was also demonstrated by Walter Delrio (Delrio 2005), although the way in which the right-wing movements influenced the configuration of *Mapuche* memories seems to be underestimated in that interpretation. In the case of Bohoslavsky, he is attentive to what he calls “fascistoid nationalism” in the decade previous to *peronismo*.



FIGS. 10 AND 11: Lorenzo Liempichún pictured in 1949 (Photographs and Documentary Archive, MET) and 1972 by Enrique Perea (Perea 1998, 169)

Considering his own motivations, directed toward “the disorganized search for the broadening of alliances, of setting themselves apart from other groups that occupied the same ideological space and the incorporation of new topics” (Bohoslavsky 2007, 143), he states that this was all part of a “plebeian turn,” destined to attract support among rural popular sectors without modifying or challenging the property claims of landowners. Although more intrigued by the opportunism of this current among indigenous people, Bohoslavsky sees the right-wing action rather than what indigenous people actually did with these practices and right-wing discourses. What concerns us is to point out that these *Mapuches* and *Tehuelches* were not hostages or clients of the organizations with which they built contacts. Finding a space to dialogue about said politics, their response requires an understanding that exceeds the account of manipulation or “false consciousness.”

We thus discover two archives when, using the same data, we integrate Imbelloni’s alienated iconographic record with the documents about the networks that facilitated the obtainment of the photographs. As Diego Escolar would insist, referring to the *Huarpes cuyanos*, indigenous memory is not exclusively the memory of indigenous people; the sovereign or hegemonic actors also intervene in its historical and narrative elaboration.⁴ The photos thus operate as the index of the Patagonian archive that overflows with the classificatory desires and national ethnologies, opening up the spectrum for the intervention of other mythologies. Its technological properties guide the remaining paraphernalia of instruments and measurements of the expeditioners, which induce a reading of the archive itself as a technology, capable of condensing the subaltern historicity that precedes while happening in the photographs, saturating the intentions of the anthropologists and their devices by highlighting the timelessness of the images, even though they were inscribed within the scientific discourses of the time. The narratives that these

photographs weave among themselves have a seemingly centered focus but are inscribed in a slow continuity of a long *durée*. The discomfort that is provoked by the confirmation of this *indigenismo*,⁵ juxtaposed to the dysfunctional nature of transatlantic immigration, should not obliterate the conditions of conceptual possibility for preaching against proletarians and foreign traders, who put themselves at the forefront during the strikes of the 1920s, when the speeches in favor of recovery of the land by its original inhabitants were activated, in spite of the absence of genuine commitments or concrete policies to support it. Up until the mid-nineteenth century, when the nation-state was not able to destabilize the autonomy of the *Mapuche-Tehuelche* leadership, the primary mode of negotiation with them was to bestow the role of territorial gendarmes on some among them, a role which they assumed efficiently.

A pornographic dimension overlies the Patagonian myth that exists in tension with the series that institutes the story, especially with those that show the “splendor” and “*Tehuelche* misery,” both fundamentally defined by their seismic proportions.⁶ It is fascinating to imagine the scale of a nation that rests on the gigantiness of *Tehuelche* peoples and their values. This can be observed in the graph that compares the groups of the Pámpida “race” with the homoerotic attributes of the athletic silhouettes. This pattern is repeated in a repertoire where women are practically left aside for a sensual enjoyment that privileges naked torsos or the dialogue between the *quillango* [fur blanket] and the defying and misogynist image of Bórmida. It also illustrates the decadence of men, but it is mainly about a masculine, anthropological-military adventure that masculinizes that which is photographed and measured. Its tone is penetrating or that of rape. It disposes of and objectifies bodies. Hence, the gloating over the twenty-five anthropometric records of “*southern masculine and adult* [T] ehuelches, *that are racially pure,*” or the observation that “the *Tehuelche* completely deserves the admiration of De la Vaulx for their high masculine beauty, that inspires respect” (Imbelloni 1949a, 55). The homoeroticism, which was also present in the French explorer’s narrative at the end of the nineteenth century, seems to institute another theme that neither stems from nor is a consequence of the expeditioners’ ideology: cars, jeeps, motorcycles; ranches; chaps, leather jackets, and uniforms. Masculinity and technical fascination that, as we can see, is socially redefined with *peronismo* in an expedition that was organized from Comodoro Rivadavia, the petroleum enclave, a modern place par excellence, to highlight the ethnographic narrative as the vehicle for national truth supported by the myth of the archive and origin myths, as “a way to begin” (Cf. González Echevarría 2000).

In thinking about the availability of *Tehuelche* bodies for the ethnologists, Achille Mbembe's account of the production of what he calls "dead worlds," or new and unique forms of social existence in which populations are forced to have an existence equivalent to that of the "walking dead," offers greater descriptive and conceptual capacity for the case of regulating a population, than does "biopolitics" (Mbembe 2003). This is crucial for the epistemological problem at hand. After all, the notion of biopolitics is informed by European historical processes and, in the case of Giorgio Agamben, extended on the basis of an arcana found in Roman law itself: the *homo sacer*.⁷ Mbembe thought that the plantation and the colony offered a better genealogy for this kind of violence. In sum, the key to coloniality seems better endowed to account for these historical experiences than the conceptual regulation modulated from western genealogies of the metropole and its imagined classical forebears.

The disequilibrium from the biological field of the "walking dead" finds the recurring topic of the stature of the ancient *Tehuelches* as a foundational myth of Argentine nationality and simultaneously a way to form empathy with the northern European races and their limitless capacity to adapt and transform. The somber diagnosis regarding agony would become part of the planning program of the reservations and rural ghettos like those of which Artayeta (Artayeta n.d.; Escalada 1949; and Imbelloni). The Patagonian photography archive left a vital vacancy for an Argentina of giants, a *lebensraum* of sorts, traversed by the wind and the *Tehuelche* zombies, a space that would immediately become rife with conflict with the Peronista social metamorphosis.



FIG. 14 : General Juan Domingo Perón. FIG. 15: José Rondán, 1949
(Photographs and Documentary Archive, MET-UBA)

Peronismo, Bodies, and the Archive

The initiators of the “biology of the image” or the “biology of the ornament” of the second half of the eighteenth century called “formal affinity” (Severi 2010) to the kind of intimate connection that we find in these two contemporary equestrian photographs. The affinity intensifies in light of the maternal genealogy of the general, in relation to Rondán’s photograph, another of whose images was accompanied by an epigraph in one of the publications that states that it is “a pure *Tehuelche*, covered with his *quillango* of leathers of Chulengos painted in the back” (Imbelloni 1949b). Let us read how Juan Domingo Perón remembers his father in relation to *Tehuelchidad* [“Teheuelchitness”]:

His authority did not cease to be profoundly human. I will always remember a case that remained recorded in my poor child’s imagination: it was about an Indian, one of those that still remain dispersed and abandoned in the Patagonia. He came to my house and asked to speak to my father; my father attended to him like a great man. My father spoke to him in his own language, *Tehuelche*, and received him with the usual “Marí-Marí.” They immediately became comfortable with each other. The Indian’s name was Nikol-man, meaning Flying Condor (Niko, meaning that flies; Man, an abbreviation of manke, or condor). The Indian did not have more than a few pieces of clothing and his horse with a black and white mane. I witnessed the interview because my father made me stay, maybe to show me a lesson in sincere humanism. My father told him that he could stay and set up in the countryside, assigning him a paddock where he built a small home like the ones the Indians used back then, half house, half tarp. He also gave him a *puntita de chivas* [a baby goat, a kid]. When I asked him why he was so considerate with an Indian, he responded, “Have you not seen the dignity of that man? It is the only inheritance he has received from his elders. We call them Indian thieves and forget that it is we that have stolen everything from them.” (Perón 1975, 300)

Without going into detail about the classifications of the *Tehuelches*, we have transcribed Perón’s lengthy anecdote because it creates another ethnological series. It is similar to Imbelloni’s project but it simultaneously exceeds it, as it dissolves the figure of the Indian into a figure of “the people” and their remaining dignity. Imbelloni conserves the memory of the museographic register of national identity. Yet Perón’s childhood memory reveals the narrative of a different practice. It is not conservationist; on the contrary, it rests on the

idea that dignity is the ultimate good that restitutes all others. On the road to obtaining some goods, a small house in the countryside and other minimal possessions are given by the same person who has stolen them. A displacement is produced that would be crucial for *peronismo*. It institutes the anecdote, namely, the proliferation of reparative gestures toward those that embody “the people.” There’s no accident that, in the figure of the rural pawn and his statue, in that of the shirtless (*descamisado*)⁸, and many other subjectivities, the processes of social aggregation minimize the indigenous condition.

Peronismo thus contains the ethnographic practice of Imbelloni, but this is not its ideological justification. *Peronismo* is a combination of practices that, in their concrete functioning, do not reveal the same kind of operation as Imbelloni’s ethnology. While, in the latter, the structure of representation remains untouched, inasmuch as neither the representation nor the ethnologists that carry it out are affected by the revelation they are carrying out. In the case of *peronismo*, the social space is radically modified, even while knowing that the political subjects that comprise its base are convened by relatively homogeneous notions of “the people,” dignity, and nation. The social space where these events occur is no longer the same, no matter what the direction of change. The Imbellonian register will never put “its feet in the fountain” because, despite sharing the same historical time, the topics and institutional coverage of the first *peronismo* do not do much more for that popular call. At most it will leave an image of crossing the bridge, without getting its boots wet, above the water that separates it from the object that is to be classified.



FIG. 16: José Imbelloni, 1949 (Photographs and Documentary Archive, MET-UBA)

There is no movement in these photographs of the expedition, except for that of the ethnologists. Almost no one does anything other than stay in place or “remain in the mold.” When we contrast them with the famous image that triggers one of the longest-lasting rituals in contemporary Argentina, that of

workers with their “patas”⁹ in the Plaza de Mayo fountain, nothing comes near. This photograph, taken on 17 October 1945, shows people “out of place.” The challenge, in this sense, is important because various risks are taken at the same time as different seductions are put into play. Notice that the worker’s mobilization and imaginary that concluded with Perón’s release from prison remained inscribed in the popular immersion as “patas” (paws) and not “pies” (feet). But let us proceed slowly.

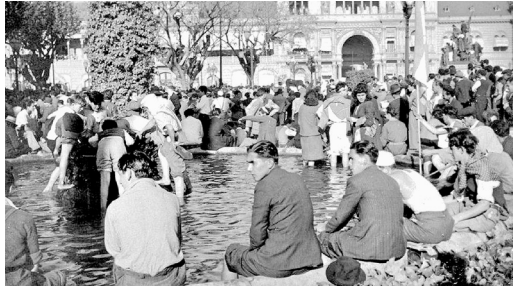


FIG. 17: Plaza de Mayo, 17 October 1945.

There is an initial impulse to bring together and organize iconographies based on how they seemingly inhabit the same representational space. However, Imbelloni’s photographs stage representation as a closed domain. There is no evidence, and we do not speak about processes linked to representation but instead simply to the arrangement of photographs in what would constitute the anthropological archive. The ethnographic space has been altered by the arrangement of the bodies in the images. Everything occurs under control and the occupied places are not interchangeable. The representation of difference embodied by the “*Tehuelches*” is kept stable because the sequence that organizes it goes from racial remnants as the ulterior foundation of the nation to the ethnographic and museum object. If we ask what other deployment could have existed, everything else becomes unthinkable.

By maintaining classification as the conceptual structure of the archive, Imbelloni and Bórmida can carry out their operation with certain flexibility over the bodies that present as different, yet the rules within the representation and, in that sense, the event itself exceeds them as well. In other words, there is no exteriority of those bodies that challenges the sequence of representation. If the photographs affirm difference, they do so to integrate this difference within the narrative of what has already been said in the expeditioners’ publications and articles. But there is something even more interesting. The possible series they organize do not seem to connect with the nation-founding project at all. This observation deactivates the presumption of an ideological

operation that would be shaping the data. Imbelloni and Bórmida seem to link with the ethnological procedures that both subtract themselves yet are ubiquitous. In this direction, the bodies do not move nor are they disputed. There is no outside of this operation that can be perceived in any of the ways we arrange the photographs. Moreover, the bodies of the anthropologists are within very strict limits. The difference is clearly that they are the ones carrying out anthropology. In stark contrast is the “feet in the fountain” series and the representations of the mechanical media in the Peronista photographs. The “feet in the fountain” is a discontinuity in the representation of popular sectors that would be present in all the rhetoric and politics of what *peronismo* describes as nation and people. What is at play is precisely a profound discontinuity. On the one hand is the normative space that representation constructs with the fountain as a place for aristocratic ideals and the Pirámide de Mayo as a place dear to republican aspirations. On the other hand there are the bodies of the men and women who submerge their “*patas*,” breaking down the social space of occurrence because, without the mediation of interpretation, they are out of place. They do not belong. Strikingly well-dressed in this foundational event, they do not adhere to the representational form of the “shirtless (*descamisado*) *peronista*” or to Imbelloni’s photographs where the shirtless (*descamisado*) is exposed, naked. Thus, we may presume, and the data is not insufficient, that the social space of occurrence of those bodies in the fountain has been shaken. It is on the road to becoming another, although it is revisited by the lexicon known to the people, or the normalized workers.



FIG. 18: On the left, Andrés Cuyapel, 1949
(Photographs and Documentary Archive, MET-UBA)

Escolar (2007) refers to the incorporation of subaltern subjects as workers stimulated by the “generalized reciprocity” contained by the social contract of the Argentine welfare state. That contract “included as ideological machinery an implicit identity pact with the ‘black heads,’ to whiten and citizenize them,

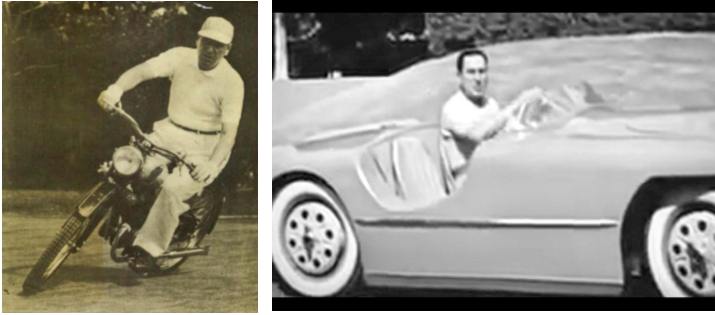
via their construction as a class or corporate community” (Escobar 2007, 226). In short, assimilation as whitening.

Imbelloni and Bórmida eloquently differentiate themselves from this policy, to the extent that they do not seek homogeneity but rather to acknowledge and document racial difference. Undoubtedly, the categories of “white” and “citizen” will no longer be the same after the emergence of the Peronist masses. The social and cultural space has been modified in such a way that it has reached the point of no return. That is, the unexpected alteration of the space where *peronismo* intervenes, through its practices and the installation of new classifying series, imposed a discontinuity of the order prior to its emergence, despite the renewal of disciplinary attempts that it also contains. The erasure of cultural differences that *peronismo* promoted as a basis of inclusion are debatable from a multicultural perspective. One would have to ask if the effort at erasing Indigenous and black peoples through processes of whitening did not suggest a more devastating critique of the resulting social order. This transformation may be observed by comparing the series of machine photographs by Imbelloni and Bórmida with the many photographs that illustrate Perón on either a motorcycle, boat, or in an automobile. In the ethnographic photographs, the machinery is organized on two levels. First, there is a cultural certainty surrounding the trip, taken by safe and strong means. Second, the journey marks the sidereal distance with the rural world of the *Tehuelches*.

Trucks against cars, jeeps against horses and dogs, revolvers against horse whips, cameras against bodies, tape recorders against silences. In a manner that could not be defined as discursive, there is a much more powerful continuity between the machinery and the ethnographic method than the relationship between ideologies, manifest intentions, research project, and the like that Imbelloni and Bórmida put forth. It is once again the disposition that is achieved by the effect of the representation and its structure. In that sense, it is easy to deduce that the *Tehuelche* bodies are at the disposal of the machines and of the allegories they produce, including the ethnographic machinery.

A certain pleasure or delight can be perceived in the photographs (and this functions as an intuition of what is evident) with technology and its masculinization, in the same way that the athletic image of Perón in cars, motorcycles, and boats is perceived. If differences can be noted in this case, they might be associated with the fact that both situations seem to produce different normalizations. In the case of Perón, in the majority of instances, it is about a demonstration of national industry, of the embodied political project, because the machines used are “national machines.” Their names are a feat unto themselves: “The Justicialist” sedan, the “Justicialist Sport Pre-Series” car, the two

door “Graciela,” the “Gauchita.” Perón uses these machines and, if the allegory is permitted, these machines define “the people.” The normalization is that of the relatively homogenous space that presupposes such an idea. There is a strange continuity between the “legs in the fountain” and the “The Justicialist” sedan and the “Puma” motorcycle.



FIGS. 19 AND 20: Juan Domingo Perón in the Puma motorcycle and the Justicialist sports car.

In the other, ethnological instance, the machines are the limit. They cannot be accessed by those destined to become objects in the museum of the nation. By this contrast, we are noting that *peronismo* could have functioned as a grand general framework that gave way to but that doesn't necessarily explain these institutional experiences of the archive.

The other dimension that is at stake is the prosthetic character of machines and how they become a kind of evidence in the photographs. They make possible the voyage to southern Patagonia, and, at the same time, are indispensable to the normalization of the ethnography at play. However, this is not the disturbing issue; in fact, there is a long saga of ethnographers with machines. Two elements seem contiguous. On one hand is the impossibility of the fact that the machines appear to be offering an identical prosthetic function to the *Tehuelches*, which presupposes their biopolitical availability (in terms of bodies for stock). On the other hand, such a prosthetic function in respect to the anthropologists seems to be inverted. They seem to be the prosthesis of the machines and their allegories. At its most extreme, this is not a narration about the story of the revolver at Bórmida's hip, which quickly leads to the story of consciousness and ideology, whether of fascism or otherwise, but of the bodily disposition that emerges from the revolver. The two elements seem to offer the perfect narrative to assure the reproduction of the ethnographic process and method. For some, that reproduction is impossible to reach, and for others, it is impossible to escape. Ethnography requires it not be interrupted.

There is an impression that what ethnography does and functions as is an allegory of the ethnographic machine that reproduces itself. The difficulty, in thinking about the problem of the archive, is to assume that the surviving remnants of the exploration, the record, and the Imbellonian data, should reinscribe themselves as an ethnographic archive of the same order. In turn, Perón articulates a field of power from the political that redefines and organizes the iconographies, although the photograph of the “*patas*” in the fountain was taken without an ethnographic or ethnological intent. (The photographer was unaware that the image would become a mythical moment in the articulation of the Peronist field of power.) Somehow, the ethnological archive is always subject to the updates of what is done with the record.

Returning to the 1949 expedition, we need to identify the relationship between the residues that are collected (the “anthropometric material” or the forty-five people that were measured) and their project. That is, to what extent was it viable to build a nation of giants, or to perfect the *homo criollo* species, based on Descartes? The economic yield will not be what the Fueguino and Salesian farmers studied by Bascopé are looking for (Cf. Bascopé 2008).¹⁰ Their yield should be primarily political, so long as it works on bodies that have been normalized as rural workers. The anachronism lies in the desire to remove them from the farm to the ghetto. What is unfeasible or artificial about the confinement project is emphasized with the strokes that frame the figure of an old woman with her *Tehuelche* cloak, cutting her off from the rest who wear modern clothing for the purposes of publication, the only possible terrain to imaginatively segregate the “indigestible trace-carrying remnant” in the way that Menard (Cf. Menard 2010) critiques the incompatibility of mestizo and cannibal logics in Boccara’s fusion (Cf. Boccara 2007).



FIG. 21: Expedition to Patagonia, 1949
(Photographs and Documentary Archive, MET-UBA)

We conclude that Imbelloni and his crew vacillate between the logics of the museum and political logics, cautioning that “in the face of the anguish suffered by the last *Tehuelche* that survived not everything is dead matter and academic topics” and that “someone had to warn those voices and the peremptoriness of this solemn hour” (Imbelloni 1949a, 58). If the program fundamentally responded to the diagnosis of the death rattle, one could distinguish between two eugenic projects in conflict and negotiation, the Imbellonian one and the *peronismo* that contains it. One is the archive of a people in anguish, while the other is of the same people at play in the foundation of a new nation.

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ENDNOTES

1. This article was first published in Spanish in *Otros Logos: Revista de Estudios Críticos*, no. 2 (2011): 135–162. ISSN: 1853-4457.
2. We are grateful to the Photographic and Document Archive of the Ethnographic Museum “Juan B. Ambrosetti,” Department of Philosophy and Letters, University of Buenos Aires.
3. Born in Italy at the end of the nineteenth century, Imbelloni migrated to Argentina. He returned to Italy to fight in World War I. While there, he received his doctorate in Natural Sciences at the University of Padua in 1920 (Lazzari 2004, 227).
4. “For this reason, in my opinion, to speak of ‘huarpes memories’ or indigenous memories does not imply referring only to those of subaltern groups marked as aboriginal, but also to those that have circulated in one way or another in the regional society as a whole, and even among those sectors that deny their existence” (Escolar 2007).
5. *Indigenismo* is the movement in Latin America advocating a dominant social and political role for Indigenous peoples in countries where they constitute a majority of the population.”
6. To further consider the relationship between anthropological photography and pornography, see André Menard and Jorge Pavez (2008).
7. Cf. De Oto and Quintana, 2010.
8. *Descamisados*, or shirtless, refers to people (mainly men) of very humble social extraction, who supported Juan Domingo Perón (and Eva Perón) during his first and second presidential periods. It is a key term in the Peronist political tradition, denoting the link between the movement and the subaltern classes.
9. In Spanish, *patas* describe animal paws or legs while *pies* are used to name the feet of human beings. Peronism transformed the racist and negative connotations of *patas* into a positive one, so positive that it constitutes a reference for the social movement.
10. See also Jaime Jacques, “Farmers Strike in Argentina” (2008).

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