

Special Collection:
Heritage, Protests and Coloniality in Contemporary Latin America

Restitution of indigenous ancestors, uncomfortable heritage, and ways of seeing violence in Argentina

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Abstract

The indigenous demands made in Argentina in recent decades for the restitution of their ancestry to museums and other institutions have given rise to the making of several films and photographic exhibitions. The aim of this paper is to reflect on these images as “machinery for the production of sensibilities”, examining the politics of light in the representation and administration of violence and the affects and effects they have on the reconstruction of a past that demands justice on the part of the original peoples. I examine the images dedicated to making public the violence and racism involved in these heritagization processes and the implications, discomforts and positionings that these disturbing memories generate among the Mapuche in Patagonia, in order to discuss the category of “uncomfortable”, “dissonant” or “difficult heritage”, as heritage linked to exercises of human rights violations has been defined. *Keywords:* Images of violence, indigenous people, uncomfortable heritage, Argentina.

Resumen: Restituciones de ancestros indígenas, patrimonio incómodo y maneras de ver la violencia en Argentina

Las demandas indígenas desplegadas en Argentina en las últimas décadas por la restitución de sus ancestralidades a museos y a otras instituciones, dieron lugar a la filmación de varias películas y a exposiciones fotográficas. El objetivo de este trabajo es reflexionar sobre estas imágenes como “maquinarias de producción de lo sensible”, examinando la política de la luz en la representación y administración de la violencia y los afectos y efectos que tienen en la reconstrucción de un pasado que demanda justicia por parte de los pueblos originarios. Examinó las imágenes dedicadas a hacer pública la violencia y el racismo involucrados en estos procesos de patrimonialización y las implicancias, incomodidades y posicionamientos que generan estos recuerdos perturbadores entre los mapuche en Patagonia, con el objeto de discutir la categoría de “patrimonio incómodo”, “disonante” o “difícil”, tal como se definió al patrimonio ligado a ejercicios de violación de derechos humanos. *Palabras clave:* Imágenes de la violencia, pueblos originarios, patrimonio incómodo, Argentina.

Introduction

In 2010, the national law Act No. 25517, enacted in 2001, was implemented. This law establishes the obligation to put indigenous “mortal remains” that form part of museums and/or public or private collections at the disposal of the indigenous peoples and/or communities that claim them. In 2012, the “National programme for the identification and restitution of indigenous human remains” was created for this purpose within the National Institute of Indigenous Affairs (INAI) in Argentina.¹ The enactment of that law and the creation of this programme are products of indigenous people’s demands and of debates formulated by certain academics, legislators, and government officials some decades ago.² Additionally, it was part of a change of direction that was unfolding in other countries – such as the USA, Australia, and Canada – in which, also as the result of the demands of indigenous peoples, they promulgated laws and designed programmes for the “restitution” or “repatriation”³ of the bodies of ancestors as well as manifestations of indigenous daily or sacred life that were heritagized (Ayala Rocabado & Arthur de la Maza, 2020).

The majority of indigenous people’s claims in Argentina in relation to heritage have revolved around the bodies of ancestors that were heritagized in state museums and studied by science from the end of the 19 century onwards; that is, after the military campaigns known as the “Conquest of the Desert” in Patagonia and the “Campaign to the Gran Chaco” in the north of the country. These campaigns led to the extermination of a great part of the indigenous population, the expropriation of their territory, and the subjugation of survivors to western, state, and capitalist orders. Many demands refer to bodies of *caciques* and/or their family members – Mariano Rosas, Inacayal, his wife, Margarita Foyel – who, after the “Conquest of the Desert” were sent to a concentration camp, brought to La Plata Museum at the request of its first director, Francisco Moreno,⁴ to work and be studied by science, and, once they had died there, their bodies were dissected for the purpose of racial study and exhibited as the heritage of the nation’s past. In other cases, bodies were desecrated by removing them from graves, studied and/or exhibited in public museums.⁵

The processes of restitution gave rise to making various films and photographic exhibitions. In this article, I reflect upon – from an anthropological perspective – these images dedicated to making public the violence and racism involved in these heritagization processes, the implications of these disturbing memories and those of the notion of “dissonant”, “difficult” or “uncomfortable heritage” – defined as heritage tied to the practice of human rights violations (Prats, 1997; Tunbridge & Ashworth, 1996; Macdonald, 2013). With this objective, the article is composed of three parts. In the first one, I present some of the most important academic debates that have been developing with regards to the notion of an uncomfortable or dissonant heritage. In the second, I examine the films and photographic images from the archive that, in different filmic and expository languages, were circulated in Argentina. Films and photographic

exhibitions were the products of the discomfort that was provoked among non-indigenous subjects and the knowledge about the way in which these heritage collections and exhibitions of indigenous peoples were created. In as much as photography and filmic records – and not only words – support the practices of remembering and the “machinery of production of the sensitive”⁶ (Mazzuchini, 2019), I examine, apart from these discomforts, how images of violence and racism have illuminated and guided the heritagization processes of indigenous ancestors in the public arena. Finally, given that it is important to me to analyse the policy in light of the representations of violence (Shuffer Mendoza, 2019) and their affects and effects in the reconstruction of a collective past for which indigenous peoples demand justice, the third section examines the implications that some of these films and, in particular, the photographic exhibition from La Plata Museum’s archive, have caused amongst Mapuche people in Argentine Patagonia. The objective I pursue through this analysis is to reflect upon what it is that creates the discomfort about this heritage, who is made uncomfortable, and what becomes of this discomfort so that I can discuss – based on the events revealed in my fieldwork with Mapuche people from the Comarca Andina del Paralelo 42°, Patagonia Argentina⁷ – the unexamined edges of the category of “uncomfortable”, “difficult”, and “dissonant” heritage” itself.

Heritage and violent histories: An academic debate

Since Tunbridge & Ashworth (1996) introduced the concept of “dissonant heritage” to demarcate heritage that escapes the veneration of a glorious or comfortable past, various academics have reflected upon it, turning to various adjectival descriptions as – “uncomfortable”, “negative”, “difficult” – , or rather, replacing the same adjectives but with meanings that do not always coincide. Tunbridge & Ashworth (1996) defined the term “dissonant heritage” as being associated with histories of violence about which there is no consensus as to their interpretation and assessment, nor need for their preservation. It is about a heritage bound by conflict, human rights violations from wars, genocides, state terrorism, and concentration camps that not only creates dissent in the long term but also amongst different social actors. Prats (1997) termed these kind of heritage activation that nobody wants nor knows what to do with as an “uncomfortable heritage”. Within this he added ethnographic collections born of a colonial context that contain indigenous African cadavers or military museums and other repositories of heritage that are “politically incorrect or currently undesirable” (2005, p. 26). Reventós (2007) used this same term, broadening the conceptualisation, to refer to a heritage linked to histories of violence and which is not potentially recognised as a heritage because of a lack of “public usefulness”, “social interest”, or “unpleasantness”, whether because of aesthetic criteria that do not fit in or which contradict the cultural frameworks of the era, or because they create a conflict of interests.

Even when, as Smith (2011) pointed out, the conflict is constitutive of the heritagization processes, the implications and challenges to heritagize expressions, spaces, etc. linked to human rights violations deserve – in my understanding – to have a space of differential discussion. MacDonald (2016) maintains that this kind of heritage, which she has adjectivised as “difficult”, has become an issue in the public sphere from the 1980s, and has been more thematically detailed during this century in Europe and on an international scale. Some academics link the heritage activation of these memories to the existence of a temporal gap between the incidents and their representation. Others connect it to a compulsion to commemorate, and a fascination with bloody histories within the framework of touristic projects called “dark tourism” or “thanatourism” (Lennon & Foley, 2000; Seaton 1996; Macdonald, 2016). However, given that the passing of time does not necessarily turn into a recognition of the atrocities committed, the explication of these heritage movements should be sought less in the temporality of the memory or the attraction to pain, than in a more complex interpretive framework. Macdonald (2016) attributes it to an interest to reflect upon aspects that are not self-satisfying, that stopped being perceived as indicative of weakness, to be thought of instead as markers of moral strength. For her part, Meskell (2002) considers that this “negative”⁸ and disturbing heritage is not always protected by positive educational purposes. On occasion it might be erased or eradicated, and, even when it is preserved, it can create the revitalisation of the racist ideologies that it aimed to eliminate.

Unlike the heritage discussed by these authors, the heritagization processes of sacred or daily expressions, spaces and, of indigenous ancestors did not, at first, cause a dissonant or uncomfortable heritage. It was, instead, a heritage caused by an institutionalised violence that was adopted by a national, white, patriarchal, capitalist, and Western ideology, and appropriated in the construction and dissemination, in museal and extra-museal spaces, of a hegemonic national account. Without a doubt, the critical revision of its history and of the role of science in its creation, were the factors that gave rise to a series of discomforts that, until the beginning of the twentieth century, derived from their dissemination in films and exhibitions of photographic archives.

If the academic analyses about this kind of heritage generally aim to discuss the challenges of its representation, the tension between cognition and emotion in the argumentation of what happened, and the aesthetic that should be accompanied by the memories of atrocities; they either allude to a revision of the implications in civic values, in justice and in the construction of freer and more just societies (Bianchini, 2016). I find it important, in this case, to add the need to debate what is defined as violence and which are the boundaries of the heritagizable.

Images of violence and discomfort

Since 2010, as a product of the interest in disseminating disturbing histories that had seemed destined to stay stored away inside museums and/or unstudied by anthropology, the history of the heritagization of indigenous ancestors started to become an object of public debate, especially through films and photographic exhibitions, in addition to journalistic articles and the INAI web page. At the time of this writing, to my knowledge, seven films have been made reconstructing aspects linked to the drama of the heritagization of indigenous peoples. The majority of these films, with the exception of two, document the trajectory of indigenous bodies that, since the end of the nineteenth century, were studied, heritagized and, in many cases, restituted by La Plata Museum.⁹

The first two films made for digital television, through the prize “*No-sotros*”, were awarded by the National Institute for Cinema and Audiovisual Arts (INCAA) in 2010, which was the bicentennial year in which the law for the restitution of indigenous human remains (Act No. 25517) was enacted.¹⁰ These two short films are “*Hijos de la Montaña*” by Mario Bertazzo and “*Inacayal, señor de estepa*” by Reynaldo Rodríguez. The former reconstructs the history of an Incan mummy that was stored in the Institute of Archaeological Research and Mariano Gambier Museum in the province of San Juan. This mummy, left in the Cerro Toro at an altitude of 6440 meters as part of a Capacocho initiation ritual in the fifteenth century, was found in 1964, and reclaimed a few years ago by this museum. The film incorporates the voice of academics, of descendants of the *vaqueanos*¹¹ who made the expedition, of children in a school in the area, and of the indigenous Warpes, etc., in order to reflect on the heritagization of indigenous bodies as a practice of looting, and the role that the state, the media and science have had in it. The short film relates the genocide of indigenous peoples with these policies; it articulates this denouncement to other existing ones in La Plata Museum; it links the demands for these bodies to territorial demands; and it exposes how, through the exhibition of ancestors and indigenous manifestations from the past, it configures a hegemonic history in which the Warpes people were declared extinct.

The other short film arises from an encounter that director Reynaldo Rodríguez had with the mausoleum where the body of the *Longko* (chieftain) Tehuelche Inacayal was deposited, in the locality of Tecka (Chubut-Patagonia): “In the encounter with Tecka’s mausoleum, something in my head clicked” (interview with Rodríguez, 2015). The remains of Inacayal were the second to be returned in Argentina, in two stages: in 1994, the osseous remains and, in 2014, the soft tissue remains. The purpose of the film was to “reflect on how they [the indigenous people] were treated by the state: tricked, forced into displacement, culturally devalued, eliminated” (Rodríguez in *Diario Jornada*).¹² The short film gives an account of the history of how indigenous people in the Andean mountain range region of Patagonia were taken prisoner, moved to Martín García Island concentration camp, and then sent to La Plata Museum

to work and be studied until their death, upon which they were constituted as objects of study and heritage to be exhibited alongside other remains. The film contains two narrative strands. The first one fictionally recreates the battle where Inacayal is subjugated, and when he is moved with other survivors to Martín García Island and later to the Museum. In this fictionalisation, indigenous people that are not actors, many of whom live in El Bolsón and El Hoyo (Comarca Andina), acted as their ancestors. The re-creation was part of the director's quest to stay faithful to the descriptions in the state documents and those of the ethnographers of the era. The indigenous people acted in the places where the events took place, conversing in the Mapuche language and re-creating photos that form part of the archive at La Plata Museum. The second strand of the documentary jumps to the present and narrates aspects of the first restitution of Inacayal. It includes images of the mausoleum and of La Plata Museum. It incorporates interviews with Hipólito Solari Yrigoyen, a politician who was a driving force of the first restitution, and the GUIAS (Grupo Universitario de Investigación en Antropología Social) collective that appears in a number of films, since they have played an important role in the restitutions of indigenous ancestors from La Plata Museum and in the reconstruction and transmission of the histories of those ancestors to the communities who claim them.¹³ The film emphasises the incomplete nature of the first restitution of Inacayal, which shows the practice of dissection operated upon indigenous bodies, and ends by indicating that more than “10000 people are waiting to be returned to their land”.

In 2011 another documentary directed by Myriam Angueira and Guillermo Glass about Inacayal won the INCAA's National Competition for Telefilm Documentaries for the bicentennial year *El Camino de los Héroes*. Its production was the result of a request from *longko* Sergio Nahuelpan to reconstruct the history of Inacayal. The film *El Camino de los Héroes* begins with the text of Sergio Nahuelpan's disquieting question as to where Inacayal's head was left, which, until that point in time, still had not been returned by the Museum. Using this text, these directors exposed, from the very beginning, the cruelty and racism with which science and the heritagization of their bodies had suffered. Unlike the former documentary, this one not only reconstructs the history of his subjugation but also his heroism and resistance in the face of the conquest, and it describes the process of heritagization of the indigenous bodies and the experience of the restitutions of the remains of Inacayal. The film is nourished by the accounts of his Mapuche-Tehuelche descendants about the lineages of Foyel and Inacayal, his unanswered questions and his denouncements of the robberies and injustices committed against indigenous people. Moreover, they incorporate accounts from intellectuals and academics such as Osvaldo Bayer, Walter Delrio, Marcelo Valko, and the GUIAS collective. As images and paintings, ethnographic photos and documents from La Plata Museum's archive are shown; they describe the military campaigns in Patagonia; the desecration of graves by Zeballos¹⁴ and Francisco Moreno; the forced dis-

placement, torture and concentration camps to which indigenous people were sent following the Conquest of the Desert; and the relocation, dissection, scientific study, and exhibition of their dead bodies in La Plata Museum. The researchers emphasise the contradictions and concealments of this institution and make a strong criticism of its first director Moreno.

The photographs of naked indigenous people from the Museum's archive; the prejudiced descriptions of the indigenous people who were relocated alive and taken to this space of detention; the cruelty, dissection, and dehumanised exhibition of the indigenous mortal remains that were obliged to observe those who had been sent alive to work in the Museum are some of the practices denounced by these academics in the film. The title of the film, *Inacayal la negación de nuestra identidad* expresses the tension that flows between a "national we-feeling", and an "indigenous we-feeling" who have been subjected to violence and denied. The film recalls the incomplete nature of the first restitution as indicative of the objectification of the indigenous person, it outlines the suspicions of their descendants as to what was restituted, and ends with the words of Mercedes Nahuelpan who, during the ceremony, visibly moved, expressed thanks for the return of "our grandfather" and recognised the importance of acknowledging "the dignity of the aboriginal people who are in this Argentina". Years later, the documentary makers added images of the second restitution of Inacayal with accounts from Mapuche-Tehuelche people, from Fernando Pepe, who has been at the forefront of the programme for the restitution of human remains at INAI, and from Osvaldo Bayer, to highlight the struggle for restitution as a triumph and its importance in the recovery as peoples.

In 2015, *Damiana Kryygi* was released, a full-length film directed by Alejandro Fernández Mouján, and made along with the advice of some anthropologists. The film tells the account of the restitution of an Aché girl, and part of the discomfort or interjection of the gaze of one photograph in the Museum's archive. The gaze registered part of the discomfort of plunder, cruelty and violence carried out by a scientific and patrimonial racialising practice in the photograph of that girl, who was obliged to pose naked for the Museum's anthropologists. As Berger (1998) indicates, photographs are relics of the past, an imprint of what has happened, a prophecy of a memory and of a policy to be achieved. The film starts with the tension and a question provoked in the director by the gaze of this girl captured in a photo: "When I look at this photo I ask myself whether it's possible to reconstruct her history" (Fernández Mouján, 2015). The question instils the record of a conflict in which the device of the camera and the person who looks through the lens of the camera propose a "way of seeing" (Berger, 1998) that goes against the grain, that denounces the domination written into her life, her body, her peoples, the archive, her photos. But there is also the doubt and the tension of who wants to see and show that which was hidden and humiliated, and from that gaze makes a starting point to testify to the violence and pain of those who still suffer from it.

The documentary builds a bridge between the past and present revealing that which was omitted and left only in its fragments: the massacre of this indigenous people, their colonialisation, forests that have been expropriated for mechanised agriculture, the *criadazgo*, their history, the girl's kidnap, the photograph, the dissected skeleton, that which is not identified and what is left in doubt. It is done through a careful account and a commitment expressed by the director's tone in his voice-over, the inclusion of accounts and songs of the Aché's pain, the film's leitmotiv and the conversations with those currently working in the institutions through which she was obliged to pass in life and in death. It is the journey of Damiana – whose family was killed, who was abducted as a baby, whose name was changed, and who was converted, once she was dead, into an object of heritage collection and racial study – until her arrival at Kryygi, as she was renamed by the Aché when she returned to her land in order to remove the name imposed by the murderers of her parents. But it is also the journey of a camera and a director who, affected by that photograph and that history of domination, accompanies the Aché in the investigation into that girl's life and in the dissemination of their experience of violence, their wounds, and their struggles. Told from a subjectivity that shows itself to be involved and respectful of the subject matter, the film reveals and implicates the audience in these experiences of violence, expropriation, dehumanisation, and pain provoked by a racist, capitalist, extractive, and colonial system, which science, religion, the camera, heritage regimes, and museums have not been unconnected to.

In 2019, *4 Lonkos*, by Sebastián Díaz, was released, and in 2020, *Gigantes* by Natalia Cano. The former gives an account of the life, death, and desecration of four graves of *longkos* who are very well-known in Pampa and Patagonia: Calfucurá, Cipriano Catriel, Mariano Rosas, and Vicente Pincén. It is a documentary with a historical style that includes photos from the era, animation, and readings of those who collaborated with the conquest – for example, Zeballos – with accounts from current historians and some of the descendants of those indigenous caciques. The film has an educational profile in which it thematises and connects the genocide, the desecration of the indigenous skeletons and skulls, and their exhibition in museums. It also deconstructs the pedestal that was configured around Perito Moreno, Roca¹⁵ and Zeballos, and examines the figure of the indigenous person as “disappeared”. It takes as a starting point the trajectory of Pincén, unique amongst these four as the location of his body is yet unknown. The second film, *Gigantes*, reconstructs the struggle of the Mapuche-Tehuelche community Sacamata Liempichun for the restitution of their ancestor – *Gigante Liempichun* – from the *Musée de l'Homme* in Paris. The film examines the exhumation of the son of the *longko* Liempichun by Count Henry de La Vaulx during his journey to Patagonia in 1896 and lays bare European cultural colonialism.

Although they differ in aesthetic proposals and content, all of these films are the product of the discomfort and concern triggered in these directors upon

learning of these histories of violence. From the discomfort provoked by observing a “captive”¹⁶ mummy in a display cabinet in San Juan – who has not been returned despite the demands of the Warpe people for many years –, by contact with the space of the mausoleum where Inacayal is located, by the question of a *longko* about his head that, when filming began had not been returned, and by what is expressed in the gaze of a photograph that does not want to be photographed. These discomforts are reinstated not only in the context of interviews carried out with the directors, but also through texts written by them that commence or close the films, from the voice-overs of some of the directors that appeal to the sensitivity of the viewers to accompanying images, from the images they disseminate, from the selection of accounts and knowledge of those they interview, etc. It concerns the discomfort caused by the silence surrounding these acts of violence, the impediments and spoils of capitalism, of science, and of the heritage mechanism that each one, product of an ethical-political and affective commitment, proposes in the reconstruction and public disclosure with the objective of destabilising common sense.

In effect, the directors embarked upon disseminating, through images and terms, these discomforts on the cruelty of science, religion, and Western, white, capitalist policy upon a collective political body: the indigenous peoples. The images – photographs from the archives of museums, restitution ceremonies, mausoleum, former exhibition of the remains in La Plata Museum, etc. –, the accounts, tones of voice, music, and terms used to name what happened – “captivity”, “racism”, “colonialism”, “plunder”, or “expropriation”, to define that logic of heritagization, or appeal to what is “ours”, as the case may be – are key in this sense because they give testimony as to what occurred and also produce feelings and affects. They have done so by establishing ties between these processes and the territorial expropriations from indigenous people, and, in some of these films, by establishing the communicative vessels between the violence done to these peoples and those of the most recent military dictatorships in South America.¹⁷ Even, in some cases, exposing the pain, reinstating what can be known, but also showing the doubts about that which might never be known, as a product of the erasure produced.

Together with these films we could add the exhibition of some ethnographic photographs from the archive at La Plata Museum, titled “Prisoners of Science”. Towards the end of the nineteenth century and the beginnings of the twentieth century, scientifically confirming the existence of different racial types as well as “seeing and showing race was an imperative that was consumed in the exposition of cultural difference though the staging and administration of the indigenous body” (Masotta, 2011, p. 16) and scientific photography. Researchers at La Plata Museum, with the purpose of revealing the existence of different types of humans, took copious photographs of individual indigenous bodies, often naked or semi-naked, posing head-on and side-on to the camera – similar to a police photograph – or else as a group, and always in scenes that had been previously set up.¹⁸ The exhibition “Prisoners of Sci-

ence”, organised by the GUIAS collective, is composed from a collection of photos of indigenous survivors of the “Conquest of the Desert” who were taken by force to this Museum at the end of the nineteenth century, obliged to pose before a camera and later, once they had died in the Museum, their remains were exhibited as exotic objects in display cases. The shots and the expressions on their faces – generally serious, angry, or carrying shame – show the violence and humiliation exerted towards those who, in captivity and subjugated, were captured by the racialising and colonial lens without wanting to be there. The exhibition has been displayed in various parts of the country and in neighbouring countries; and many of these photographs appear in the films described above, on social networks, in books, and in journalistic articles based on certain restitutions.

The majority of the images – filmic or photographic – linked to the restitutions focus on the practices exercised upon indigenous people in Patagonia by scientists who worked in La Plata Museum at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century; the museum upon which INAI has principally based its operation of the programme for the restitution of indigenous human remains, regardless of the fact that other institutions contain and/or have collected indigenous bodies up until recent times.¹⁹ Both the films and this exhibition aim to accompany the indigenous struggle and to instil a critical gaze that causes discomfort; that is, that raises questions and sensibilities in society around these experiences. But, can a bridge be built between these experiences and the “we-feeling” in a country like Argentina, while, though it recognises certain indigenous peoples’ rights, it continues to carry out different forms of violence, negation, and discrimination with the indigenous peoples? I refer to the racism and physical violence that continue to take place through events of repression by security forces, lack of basic health services, killings whose objective is to take their territory, deaths caused by conditions of poverty and malnutrition, among other things. But I also refer to symbolic violence that is exercised through discrimination by racial profiling; accounts that continue organising values and practices in a hierarchy determined by the white European man, suspicions as to the veracity of the indigenous character of some of them when their demands challenge the system’s interests, and erasure of indigenous presence in presidents’ voices of different political colours that, in lockstep with showing themselves with indigenous representatives, reiterate, publicly, the foundational myth of the nation of Argentina, that is, that “the Argentines descended from the boats” (Aranda, 2011; Briones, 2005; Cardin, 2013; Álvarez Leguizamón, 2017; Gordillo, 2020; Crespo, 2020a). In this framework, can the intensity of these experiences develop a collective moral repudiation and create a common sensibility? Do they make all of us uncomfortable? Does the same thing make each of us uncomfortable?

Ways of seeing: Alienations and boundaries of the exhibitable

Even if the images – whether they are filmic or photographic – can be useful in denouncing violent events that were overshadowed and designated to acting as supports, archives, and pedagogical mechanisms for remembrance (Feld & Cattogio, 2019); insofar as racism towards indigenous peoples is not diluted, the images and the knowledge of these experiences have created divergent affects and effects. As Aby Warburg (2014 in Mazzuchini, 2019) indicates, the images move around between different times and intermingle among different temporalities: that which is linked to the conditions in which they were produced – the museum, the ethnography at the beginning of the twentieth century – and those linked to the conditions in which they were circulated and their possibility to constitute themselves in memory. These temporalities give the images a vitality of interpretation and use that, to paraphrase de Certeau (1996), can be understood as a second production, since those who inhabit it transform it with their own gestures, accents, memories, and interests. In this way, while these images about these disturbing histories permitted, in certain cases, for the audience to “be moved” (Mazuchini, 2019) and created awareness about the relationships maintained with indigenous peoples; in others the audience seemed comfortable and, amongst indigenous people, it provoked differentiated stances.

For example, during the period 2016-2019, the INAI carried out a number of restitutions of indigenous human remains, meanwhile, the national security forces deployed a series of ferocious repressions against Mapuche communities, they destroyed others, and high-ranking government officials together with hegemonic media outlets defamed them in order to legitimate policies of repression. The director of this institution accommodated the dissemination of the restitutions, their images, and other heritage policies within a discourse of human rights that, amongst other things, allowed her to place the violence in a distant past and omitted discussing her agents; thus returning – to take up Segato (2019) again – a “remembrance to file and store away” (Crespo, 2020a). A remembrance that closes off a place in the future and does not take account of the inconclusive nature of violence or that does not make visible those responsible becomes incapacitated in its ability to transform social relationships.

If public policies operate only, as occurs in this country, to recognise indigenous people’s rights in the body of law, and if they are not made effective in daily life and the racism, state violence, and stigmatisation in various dominating media outlets persists, the positive effects that those images could have had as “vehicles of remembrance” – and even, in other spaces of discussion about the subject matter – will end up being limited. The mobilisation in civil society in public spaces in 2020 and 2021 against the Mapuche who went to recover territory both in Bariloche and El Bolsón, and the prevailing racism – as I described previously – is a clear example of those limits, in which despite these images and articles, the “indigenous history” does not manage to move on and

constitute itself as “ours”. But just as “the legibility of the image cannot untie itself from the time of the enunciation of the gaze” (Magrin, 2019, p. 25), inasmuch as this becomes part of spatial frameworks, it is appropriate to add that the argumentations and sensibilities it produces are not able to do it from the space they are situated in and from the other subjectivities that see them.

In an interview, Reynaldo Rodríguez, who lives in El Bolsón, told me that his short film about Inacayal had been well received and the filming had had a reparative quality for those who took part. However, he also mentioned that some Mapuche did not agree with the images of weakness and subjugation with which he presented Inacayal in the film. During the restitution of the body of Margarita Foyel²⁰ in this same locality, for example, the Mapuche community *Las Huaytekas* who claimed her appealed to recall the violence perpetrated against Margarita and the indigenous people in Patagonia, together with the struggle against that subjugation. As we know, the decisions as to what to show, why, and how, tend to create tensions because the stances as to how they want to be seen and the way of showing themselves are variable, and they are not confined to the past, nor are the wounds healed. And this leads me to present another event that took place in El Bolsón.

On the anniversary of the 24 of March in 2018 – “National Day of Remembrance for Truth and Justice” in Argentina, which seeks to raise awareness about human rights violations carried out during the last military dictatorship (1976-1983), state terrorism, and seek justice in this respect – the Institute of Teacher Training in El Bolsón chose to display the exhibition “Prisoners of Science” by the GUIAS collective described above. The proposal arose from an interest in reflecting upon the genocide and state violence carried out against indigenous peoples. Over the years, the display of this exhibition has permitted many indigenous people and non-indigenous people to get to know certain aspects of the scientific and heritage practices that had previously been unknown. During a public conversation organised in 2020 around the restitution of Calfulcura’s Toki (Chief),²¹ one of his descendants, Gustavo Namuncurá, expressed gratitude at having been able to access these painful images to see and know what had happened. In 2010 when the exhibition was displayed in the Patagonia Museum in Bariloche – a locality near El Bolsón –, some of the visitors stated having felt outraged at what had happened, others decided not to go because they questioned what the exhibition had made of the scientific “heroes”, and others because they could not bear seeing and remembering so much pain, as Walter Delrio said.²² In El Bolsón, the images gave rise to dissimilar gazes, interpretations, and discomforts.²³ Of these discomforts, I will pause only to look at those held by representatives of the Mapuche community *Las Huaytekas*, who strongly suggested that the photographs of their naked ancestors should be removed from the exhibition at the Institute, hence these discomforts allowed for the revision of some points as yet blind to common sense; in particular, those relative to the heritage field.

Without a doubt, the dissent was linked to the political times, sites, and the gaze of those subjects (Shuffer Mendoza, 2019), sensitised by the aftermath of this drama and with that which, since the “Conquest of the Desert” continues to be hampered. On one hand, in 2015 this Mapuche community had the body of Margarita Foyel returned to their territory. As a counterbalance to the objectification of Margarita and of other indigenous people exhibited as objects – whether in the display cabinets of museums or in touristic policies –, their members decided not to display the burial of Margarita, and instead, they broadcast through their own radio programme the painful history of Margarita, of the Mapuche people, and the tensions that occurred during the restitution (Crespo, 2018). On the other hand, at the end of 2017, a ferocious repression by security forces had taken place against two Mapuche communities who had tried to recover their territory in two areas near El Bolsón: Villa Mascardi inside Nahuel Huapi National Park and Leleque, property of the multinational company Benetton. In Argentina, the recognition of indigenous people’s territorial rights is a matter yet to be resolved and there are numerous indigenous territorial demands and recoveries of spaces that were expropriated from them. During the first repressive operation, a young non-indigenous man – Santiago Maldonado – who was supporting one of the territorial recoveries, disappeared and was found dead two months later; in the second, the prefecture killed a young indigenous man – Rafael Nahuel – who had gone with his community to recover territory in Villa Mascardi. The repressive operations attained national coverage. Media outlets and high-ranking government officials circulated a series of defamations and stigmatisations about the Mapuche, a number of communities in Patagonia were destroyed and many Mapuche, who supported these communities from the locality of El Bolsón, were brought to trial. This framework, in which violence was neither in the past nor was territorially distant, gave rise to an exercise of remembrance during which indigenous discomforts and disputes about the photographic exhibition turned on three aspects: that which is conceived as heritage, that which is defined as violence, and who gets to decide the boundaries of the visual administration of certain archives.

The Institute and the GUIAS collective agreed not to display the photographs from the archive which contained naked people, as the community had requested. The display of the exhibition with those absences led to a debate during its inauguration which, as one historian who was present pointed out, entailed the construction of another narrative storyline. Even when members of the Mapuche community considered that the exhibition did not trivialise nor prolong the horror suffered by indigenous people, they argued their right to privacy and the sensibility of the victims and their families to administer the images of violence in the public sphere. They raised this issue not only because of aesthetic or moral issues, but rather as part of a long history of ongoing subjugations and of different perspectives as to the way of seeing violence and the memorable, that asked not to be excluded from the production of meaning of the exhibitable. Although other non-indigenous people who were present at the

inauguration of the exhibition understood that the photographs were a mechanism of dehumanisation and humiliation because of the sexual abuse that they showed and because they had been taken of indigenous people in captivity by force; nevertheless, the indigenous people themselves emphasised the violence in other aspects in the photographs that was not readily perceptible to the rest. They affirmed that the camera had captured the spirits of their ancestors and, therefore, had violated their spirituality and worldview. In relation to this, they emphasised the violent nature of the very same heritage regime – within which they place the photographs – that, with the central concept of the exhibition, had operated as a practice of looting their forbearers *vis-à-vis* of the subjugation of their epistemologies and their ways to form relationships:

On top of taking away our liberty, territory, we were also stripped of our culture, of our identity, of our language, of our family (...) as well as everything they took another denouncement must be added for those who they photographed here: they took their spirits (...) The damage is very tremendous and in these photographs, that weren't shown now, there were grandmothers, grandfathers, girls, boys that were photographed in a situation of sexual abuse. (...) Who decides this? Is it decided by the owner of the exhibition? By the people who recovered this and denounces – let's say – what the state did? Or do we the victims decide? Who does cultural heritage include? Are we included in that? Can we decide? What happens with the families of the disappeared during the last military dictatorship? What happens with that historical archive over there? Is it at the disposal of all of Argentine society? Should it be? Is it historical heritage or is it the family's? (...) How do we look at it? And what do we want as well? In other words, I insist and celebrate that it's an exhibition and that the GUIAS collective have taken the work to carry forward and denounce and make visible what has happened to our peoples; but beyond that, re-examine some concepts that have to do with worldviews that clash (Elisa Ose, Inauguration of the exhibition "Prisoners of Science", El Bolsón, 2018).

In this way the community argued about the heritage logic of the photographic archive but also of the exhibition itself. Although they recognised that the latter had the intention of questioning heritage policies linked to indigenous peoples, they understood that the proposal continued to operate under this same logic – the logic of exhibition – in which others administrated what is theirs. They affirmed that it was not a historic heritage, and therefore not public, but rather belonging to their family. In addition they considered that the heritage regime as a form of violence of which they and their ancestors were victims, from which they claimed the authority to decide in accordance with their worldviews and sensibilities what should not be displayed in the visual field: not only the defeat but also especially the humiliation of their ancestors.

The representatives of the community differentiated between cognition and emotion. They maintained that some could understand, or not, the humiliation

of the first political prisoners that the country had had – that is, the indigenous people –; but beyond cognition, the shock that they feel upon seeing those photographs of their forebears and that subjugation that they resist in their daily lives justified their decision:

Therefore there are photographs that can't continue to be shown... the humiliation that our people have suffered, because some understand it and others don't, but we feel it, and we feel it deep inside, with a lot of pain (...) that history is part of this place, this territory, that which is called Argentina, that we all share (...) That past has a present, and that present still suffers all the consequences of that past. And not everything has been resolved. Every so often issues of repression return to our people (...) from the Argentine state itself or sometimes locally or sometimes provincially... (Mirta Nancunao, Inauguration of the exhibition "Prisoners of Science", El Bolsón, 2018).

The description of these indigenous dissents does not intend to establish an evaluation but rather highlight that just as the images and the camera can be mechanisms to denounce injustices and make memories visible that were kept in the shadows or made into a pedagogical tool, they can also create, in other contexts, interjections that show not only that remembrance is an open, plural field and one in debate, but also that the worlds and ways of seeing and displaying violence are also situated, in conflict and pluralities.

Final reflections

The examination of memories, forms of violence, and the nexuses of signification that the images – photographic and cinematographic – have put a focus on or have left out, and the heterogeneous effects that this provokes, urge us to rethink what is called "uncomfortable heritage". The dissemination of filmic images about the articulation between the conquest, racism, and regimes of heritagization relating to indigenous matters has been very important in getting to know aspects that have been silenced and to question policies that were legitimated as positive forms of preservation. However, having revised their reach, we now ask ourselves: how should we construct remembrances about these processes of violence with questions that implicate us and make us uncomfortable as a collective departing from the unfurling of a sensibility that revises our forms of coexistence not in the past but in our time? What other heritage spaces and times need to be reconstructed, argued, and seen in the present in images, beyond La Plata Museum and the events of the beginnings of the nineteenth century in order to undo the racism that has not yet disappeared? And what other questions, logics, and episteme need to be replaced?

Concurrently, even though for a number of indigenous people it was relevant that the photographs of the La Plata Museum archive were made public, the Mapuche disagreements in El Bolsón present a challenge that does not only

refer to questioning how to aesthetically represent and interpret the horror and violence – as suggested by the authors that have reflected on “dissonant”, “difficult”, and “uncomfortable” or “negative heritage”. The vision of a form of violence linked to other frameworks to think of worlds, and the question as to who should administer these images in the museal archive, challenges, in any case, a Western cultural heritage logic that has not been dislocated. It is not about an argument that simply operates in the aesthetic or moral dimension but rather in an epistemic and ontological dimension, all those policies that compete to undo our thoughts, ways of seeing and world-making, and rethink our modes of coexistence. Many indigenous people argue about heritage policies in how they have been subjects of expropriation, practices of power, violence and colonial exhibition. Facing this, what to do when what makes us uncomfortable is the heritage mechanism itself? Can we continue thinking of exhibiting uncomfortable or difficult heritages when what is found to be violent, painful, and object of debate is the heritage policy itself? Who establishes the boundaries? Some indigenous peoples and communities in Argentina – as in other spaces – are proposing the deheritagization of the bodies of their ancestors and all that which belongs to them, including, their territories.

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Notes

- 1 Currently “Area of identification and restitution of indigenous human remains and protection of sacred sites”.
- 2 The first claims for “heritage” restitution date back to the 1970s (Podgorny & Politis, 1990). However, indigenous people’s opposition to the practice of collecting the skeletons of their ancestors can be found at the end of the 19th century in Argentina (Vezub, 2009; Crespo, 2020b).

- 3 The terms in use vary in each country. In Argentina the notion of “restitution” is officially used although many indigenous people turn to terms such as “restitution” or “recovery” (Curtoni, 2022).
- 4 Moreno was a naturalist, founder, and first director of La Plata Museum. Building began in 1884, and the museum was inaugurated in 1888. For over 130 years scientists of different disciplines have worked at this institution which houses indigenous and natural science collections.
- 5 In some cases “objects” associated with these remains were returned and, specifically, the sacred space the “Quilmes Ruins” (Ciudad Sagrada de Quilmes) was reconstructed for tourism.
- 6 Mazzuchini (2019) indicates that the images trigger affectivity because they link us to a presence placed before our eyes.
- 7 The Comarca Andina of the Paralelo 42° – from this point on Comarca Andina –, is found in the Andean mountain range, bordering Chile. It is made up of the locality El Bolsón, in the province of Río Negro, and the localities of El Hoyo, Lago Puelo, Epuycén and El Maitén, in the province of Chubut.
- 8 Meskell defines “negative heritage” as that “site of conflict that is transformed into a repository of negative memory in the collective imaginary” (2002, pp. 558).
- 9 It was the only one of this kind in Argentina when, following complex debates, it carried out a policy for the restitution of indigenous ancestralities. (https://www.museo.fcnym.unlp.edu.ar/restituciones/restituciones_presentacion-21).
- 10 It is worth clarifying that the law is popularly known in this way but does not carry this title nor is it limited only to the restitution of indigenous human remains.
- 11 People in rural areas who hold local wisdom.
- 12 <https://www.diariojornada.com.ar/provincia/>
- 13 A self-convened group from the Faculty of Natural Sciences and La Plata University Museum whose objective has been to deal with demands not to exhibit and to retribute the “human remains” of the indigenous people that were collected by this Museum. Since 2006 they focus on identifying these “remains” so that they can subsequently be restituted (see: <http://colectivoguias.blogspot.com/>).
- 14 He was an intellectual and politician who drove the Conquest of the Desert. Amongst his most memorable phrases the following is found, “Barbarism is wicked and in La Pampa neither the vestiges nor its bones will remain”.
- 15 Roca was an army general and statesman who served as President of Argentina from 1880 to 1886 and from 1898 to 1904. He is known for leading the “Conquest of the Desert”.
- 16 The inverted commas respond to a concept used by the director himself to describe what happened.
- 17 In Argentina, the concepts of “genocide” and “forced disappearance” have been tied to more recent periods in history from the 1970s onwards and, in particular, with the last military dictatorship from 1976 to 1983. Over the last few years, numerous academics and the indigenous peoples themselves have indicated the need to broaden the temporality of these categories and document the particularity that each case has had. On one hand, recognising the genocide of indigenous people upon which the nation-state of Argentina was founded. On the other hand, many indigenous members reflect on the heritage mechanism as a forced disappearance mechanism in a sense that is not strictly tied

- to concealment, as in the case of the last military dictatorship, but rather in the visible presence of their ancestors in a blurry, unnamed and violating manner in their worldview, in museum collections in warehouses, display cabinets, and others' accounts. A more exhaustive and complex analysis regarding this can be found in Crespo (2020b).
- 18 The standardisation in the recording of photographs expresses their purpose to reveal human groups (Martínez & Tamagno, 2006).
 - 19 While Decree 701/2010 establishes the conduct of surveys of the “mortal remains of aboriginal people” that form part of museums and private and public collections, they still have not been conducted exhaustively in other spaces.
 - 20 Margarita Foyel was the daughter of longko Foyel. She was sent to La Plata Museum in 1884 along with other families and longkos who were kept as prisoners on Isla Martín García after the Conquest of the desert. She worked in the Museum and died there in 1887. Her remains became part of the museum collection as the object of scientific study. The restitution of her body was carried out in 2015.
 - 21 Public conversation: “The road of the Toki Juan Calfucurá, towards historic reparation”.
 - 22 The text of this academic was read during the inauguration of the exhibition El Bolsón.
 - 23 For more details about the debate that developed with the exhibition, see Tozzini (2019).

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