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Folk, the Naïve and Indigeneity: Defining Strategies in Violeta Parra's Visual Art

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**FOLK, THE NAÏVE, AND INDIGENEITY:
DEFINING STRATEGIES IN VIOLETA PARRA'S VISUAL
ART**

by

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M.A., ART HISTORY, UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO, 2017**

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
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DEDICATION

In memory of my father Oktar Ilyas Yalkin (1943–2016)
I love you Babacıđım, nur içinde yat.

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ABSTRACT

Since the decades following Violeta Parra’s death in 1967, the life and legacy of the folklorist, singer, poet, and visual artist has been mythologized in Chilean popular consciousness. Throughout her career, which spanned the 1940s to the 1960s, Parra launched a widespread folkloric project for the purpose of the recovery, compilation, transcription, performance, and study of the music, poetry, rituals, proverbs, folktales, and material objects of the diverse regions of Chile. She recorded and performed original music utilizing traditional rural instruments with socially critical lyrics that denounced the injustices suffered by the oppressed sectors of Chilean society, a demographic with which she identified. Parra’s approach to music solidified her role as the “godmother” of *Nueva Canción*, the pervasive protest song movement that combined folk inspired melodies with socially committed lyrics from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s, a period marked by increased grassroots organization and leftist mobilization leading up to and through the brief presidency of Salvador Allende (1970-3).

Despite the proliferation of scholarship on her poetry, song, and folkloric endeavors, however, studies focused exclusively on her visual art have been limited.

Parra's embroideries on burlap or *arpilleras*, paintings, and sculptures are virtually absent from the pages of Chilean and Latin American art history. Consequently, the development of this thesis has been guided by the question: What were the active systems and agents of 'forgetting' or erasure in place at the time of Parra's career, and how do they still permeate the study of her visual art? One answer explored here is predicated on the fact that throughout the period that Parra produced art—as well as posthumously—it has been classified as folk, naïve, and instinctive.

This project, however, is not simply an act of recovery or an attempt to reclaim Parra's artistic career within Chilean and global art history. Moreover, it is not focused on refuting the classification of Parra's visual art as "folk" or "naïve" and arguing alternatively for its place within avant-garde or "modern" currents in the twentieth-century. Instead, this thesis is geared toward addressing the structurally negative relationships and notions of exclusion that permeate the specific contexts of Parra's artistic reception. I do this by identifying three strategies—folk, the naïve, and indigeneity—Parra employed and the various contexts that informed them. Ultimately, they reveal decolonial approaches with which Parra worked against the legacy of cultural imperialism. By exploring these strategies and seeing them as vital products of the social, political, and artistic contexts in which Parra lived and worked, the more difficult it becomes to overlook her contribution to the cultural climate of mid-twentieth century Chile and beyond.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the decades following Violeta Parra's death in 1967, the life and legacy of the folklorist, singer, poet, and visual artist has been mythologized in Chilean popular consciousness. Throughout her career, which spanned the 1940s to the 1960s, Parra launched a widespread folkloric project for the purpose of the recovery, compilation, transcription, performance, and study of the music, poetry, rituals, proverbs, folktales, and material objects of the diverse regions of Chile. She recorded and performed original music utilizing traditional rural instruments with socially critical lyrics that denounced the injustices suffered by the oppressed sectors of Chilean society, a demographic with which she identified. Parra's approach to music solidified her role as the "godmother" of *Nueva Canción*, the pervasive protest song movement that combined folk inspired melodies with socially committed lyrics from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s, a period marked by increased grassroots organization and leftist mobilization leading up to and through the brief presidency of Salvador Allende (1970-3).

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Parra forged a career in her native Chile as well as in Europe as both a singer and visual artist with no formal training in either field. She traveled throughout Europe and the Soviet Union invited by different organizations and agencies to give concerts, as well as recorded albums, and exhibited her artwork in galleries, universities, and museums. She was, in fact, the first Latin American artist to have a solo exhibition at the Louvre in the Museum of Decorative Arts in 1964. Unsurprisingly then, and within the powerful locus of hindsight, Parra has been

celebrated as a national icon, a total artist, and the image of *chilenidad* or Chileanness.¹ The various creative modes in which Parra worked have been examined in countless biographies, scholarly works of literary analysis, musicology, folklore, and in films. However, despite the proliferation of scholarship on her poetry, song, and folkloric endeavors, studies focused exclusively on her visual art have been limited. As it happens, Parra's embroideries on burlap or *arpilleras*, paintings, and sculptures are virtually absent from Chilean art history, and until recently, their analysis has most often been relegated to a chapter within her many extant biographies. These anecdotal narratives frequently take an interview style format, including quotes from different family members or cultural figures of the time that knew the artist well.

Appropriately then, in her 1989 article, "Violeta Parra, pintora: su talento desconocido" [Violeta Parra, Painter: Her Unknown Talent], Chilean poet and essayist Marjorie Agosín notes that "of all of Violeta Parra's artistic production, the most forgotten facet is, without a doubt, her visual art."² While the author argues that this is principally due to the physical dispersal of her oeuvre throughout Latin America and Europe after her death, I believe the absence of Parra's visual art from the history of Chilean art—and Latin American art more broadly—is rooted in a web of more complex issues. Consequently, the development of this thesis has been guided by the question:

¹ José María Arguedas quoted in *El libro mayor de Violeta Parra: Un relato biográfico y testimonial* (Santiago: Editorial Cuarto Propio, 2009), 57; En viaje: "Artista de alma, Violeta Parra es poetisa, música, cantante, artista, totalmente artista. Además es una estampa de chilenidad." (66, en viaje, march 1962, año XXIX, edición no. 341); Victor Casaus, "Artista y publico: el milagro de contacto" in *Libro mayor* "vistos desde hoy, desde la distancia, los resultados de su trabajo pueden aparecer como productos "naturales" de un genio indudable." (15). Translations my own.

What were the active systems and agents of ‘forgetting’ or erasure in place at the time of Parra’s career, and how do they still permeate the study of her visual art?

One answer is arguably predicated on the fact that throughout the roughly eight-year period that Parra produced her art—as well as posthumously—it has been classified as folk, naïve, and instinctive. From the earliest reviews of her clay sculptures, embroideries, and paintings, art critics declared her a folk or popular artist, and described her and her art as naïve, spontaneous, guided by intuition, authentic, childlike and innocent. Throughout her career her work was featured in shows such as, *Exposición de pintura instintiva* [Exhibition of Naïve Painting] in 1963, and was included, for example, in the *Dictionary of Naïve Painters* published by the French critic Anatole Jakovksy in 1967. In the brief entry in this book, Parra is described as a “singer, a well-known interpreter of popular songs, and a ceramic artist; a gifted woman entirely self-taught who also in her spare time, paints scenes showing traditional aspects of her country that are restrained, dark, and rather magical.”³ Evidently, even in the most active years of her artistic production and its exhibition, there were still instances where she was described as someone who painted in her spare time, a virtual “Sunday painter.”

Even when her work was not included in shows focused on “naïve” art, it was still described as such. In a 1964 review of her work in the Swiss newspaper *24 Heures*, for example, the author described her as, “Chilean, Indian by her mother, this little feverish woman looking like a gypsy animates everything she touches: she captures the world and

² Marjorie Agosín, “Violeta Parra, pintora: su talento desconocido” *Plural*, 19, no. 219 (1989), 39. Original Spanish reads: “en el quehacer artístico de Violeta Parra, el aspecto más olvidado es, sin duda alguna, su obra plástica.” Translation my own.

³ Anatole Jakovksy, “Violeta Parra,” in *Peintres naïfs: A Dictionary of Primitive Painters* (New York: Universe Book Inc., 1967), 295.

makes it her art.”⁴ In another review from the same time published in the *Lausanne Tribune*, her works are described as more than just aesthetically beautiful, but magical. The author claims that her art escapes the norms of meaning that can be explained with reason, and instead are driven by passion and thus can only be approached and analyzed with the same emotion.⁵ Evidently, and in the countless extant reviews, catalogue essays and articles from both Chilean and European sources explored throughout this thesis, this language remains consistent. As a result, and considering the treatment of “folk” art within the hierarchy of genres and media that comprise the art historical canon, Parra is predictably absent from the historiography of twentieth-century Chilean art.

This project, however, is not simply an act of recovery or an attempt to reclaim Parra’s artistic career within Chilean and global art history. Moreover, it is not focused on refuting the classification of Parra’s visual art as “folk” or “naïve” and arguing alternatively for its place within avant-garde or “modern” currents in the twentieth-century. I make this clear because the dangers of such an approach are innumerable. In *Differencing the Canon: Feminism and the Writing of Art’s Histories* Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker caution against the impulse of simply enlarging the canon to include women artists (to which I would add queer artists, artists of color, indigenous artists, and untrained artists), the result of which reinforces the binaries of dominance and Other, thereby reinforcing the Other’s celebration only in comparison to the already established

⁴ J. LZ, “Violeta Parra: ‘Chaque personne est une fleur dans mon travail,’” *24 Heures*, November 21, 1964.

⁵ Brumagne, Marie-Madeleine. “‘Cronique Artistique—Violeta Parra—Colette Rodde.’” *Tribune de Lausanne*. May 11, 1964.

hegemonic structures (whiteness, maleness, etc.).⁶ Thus, by just including Other artists and squeezing them into an already established canon, we justify that canon's place to begin with. Instead, they argue, it is necessary to point out the structurally negative relationship and notions of exclusion within the canon because they then become questions about this formation of Eurocentric intellectual domination and the resultant impoverishment of what is read and studied.⁷ Accordingly, much of this thesis is geared toward addressing the "structurally negative relationship and notions of exclusion" that permeate the specific contexts of Parra's artistic reception. To rewrite Parra as *not* naïve or folk, and instead "modern," or to examine her work through a lens that explores its relationship with other established artistic movements would just reinforce the discipline's structures of exclusion that render her absent in the first place. This, I would argue, is an undertaking entangled in distraction, marked by her removal from one problematic category and the insertion of her into another one bound up in all of art history's problems.

Similarly, in "The Art Historical Canon: Sins of Omission" Nanette Salomon argues that the uncritical inclusion of women artists and/or non-canonical works of art into the disciplinary structure of art history is a confirmation not a challenge to "prejudicial" tropes through which women's artistic production is dismissed and disqualified.⁸ Indeed, Salomon warns that simply using inclusion to combat exclusionary frameworks is inadequate and ineffective. Without changing the rules of the game, or to

⁶ Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker, *Differencing the Cannon: Feminism and the Writing of Art's Histories* (London: Routledge, 1999), 5.

⁷ *Ibid.*

phrase it differently—the terms of the conversation as opposed to just the content—we run the risk of reinforcing the strength of the pillars of exclusion that hold the discipline up. Moreover, an approach that simply refutes the classification of Parra’s art as “folk,” assumes that the categories of “folk” and “modern” are at odds with one another, when they are in fact, to use Robin Kelley’s astute definition, “mutually constitutive and constituting.”⁹ In “Notes on Deconstructing the Folk,” Kelley argues that, ““folk” and “modern” are mutually dependent concepts embedded in unstable historically and socially constituted systems of classification.”¹⁰ Similarly, Michael Hall contends that “the allure of folk art reveals itself more and more to be an issue of the politics of marginality and an exercise in the necessary myth-making that fuels the cultural condition we know as “modernism.”¹¹

The aforementioned approach to understanding the concept of the “modern” and its rhetorical legacy is inextricably linked to the history of the European imperial project, as expounded upon by scholars of decolonial theory including Walter Mignolo, Enrique Dussel, and Anibal Quijano, among others. Within this context, modernity is defined as:

A European phenomenon but one constituted in a dialectical relation with a non-European alterity that is its ultimate content. Modernity appears when Europe affirms itself as the ‘center’ of a World History that it inaugurates: the

⁸ Nanette Salomon, “The Art Historical Canon: Sins of Omission,” in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Donald Preziosi (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 351.

⁹ Robin Kelley, “Notes on Deconstructing the Folk,” *American Historical Review* 97 (December 1992), 1402.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Michael D. Hall, “The Mythic Outsider: Haind maiden to the Modern Muse,” *New Art Examiner* 19 (September 1991), 16.

‘periphery’ that surrounds this center is consequently part of its self-definition.¹²

Within decolonial theory, modernity—and its constitutive other coloniality—emerges from the sixteenth-century European imperial enterprise in the Americas, which gave rise to European epistemologies, racial classifications, and a capitalist-labor system. As such, from a context that foregrounded difference between the cultures of the colonizer and the colonized as the measure that designated and invented European progress—hierarchical categorizations such as “modern” and “primitive” emerge.¹³ The notion of European “progress” in the arts was enacted through the colonization of space and time based on the Renaissance invention of the Middle Ages. Through this, a universal concept of beauty in art was developed which would then provide the basis of comparison, i.e. Western superiority in the arts throughout the colonial process and beyond. Accordingly, the rhetoric of modernity is explored throughout the course of this project as an undercurrent that invented the need for the language of “folk,” “naïve” and “primitive” as they have been applied to the arts. These terms, replete with backdating tendencies, often rendered Parra’s practice as “of the past” and as such, denied her contemporary presence, which I believe has greatly affected her place in the history of art.

In addition, an approach that disputes Parra’s art as “naïve” or “folk” is arguably unproductive because the task at hand is not straightforward. Oftentimes, Parra herself was the author and perpetrator of these same classifications when it came to her

¹² Enrique Dussel quoted in Walter Mignolo, “Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of De-coloniality,” *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2-3 (March/May 2007), 453.

work and process. As will become evident in the development of this thesis, Parra, in interviews and performances, and in her chosen media and content, often relied upon and utilized the language of folk and naïve. This ranged from how she narrated her initial experience of creating visual art as one of haphazard discovery, to the basis of folk or folklore with all of its socio-political ramifications as the source from which she drew inspiration for the media and content she employed in her work. Therefore, if we accommodate and embrace her contradictions, they reveal the *process* by which Parra constantly negotiated with and contributed to dominant institutions and ideologies (including counter-hegemonic ones) of her time. In turn, this approach allows us to better understand her art and the context that informed its production.

In *Child of the Fire: Mary Edmonia Lewis and the Problem of Art History's Black and Indian Subject*, Kirsten Pai Buick defines process as a “space through which the artist moves freely, a context which changes just as much for the artist as it does for the audience of objects created by artists.”¹⁴ Buick further suggests that if we can understand process in this way, then we can begin to conceive of artistic intent as the infinitive “to do.” Thus, with this principle as a guiding lens through which to examine Parra’s career, we avoid accepting the passive categorization of her and her art that has historically stymied its reading. Instead, by looking to her process—foregrounding her as an active agent of her career—we can isolate some of the strategies she employed that contributed to the determination of its meaning and trajectory.

¹³ Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Features, Decolonial Options* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 2-3.

¹⁴ Kirsten Pai Buick, *Child of the Fire: Mary Edmonia Lewis and the Problem of Art History's Black and Indian Subject* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), xvi.

This thesis is divided into three chapters, each highlighting a specific strategy I believe Parra employed, which resulted in the successful—and at times unsuccessful—reception of her work. The examination of these strategies, which I have determined here to be folk, the naïve, and the construction of indigeneity, and the various contexts that informed them, in many cases reveal decolonial approaches with which Parra worked against the legacy of cultural imperialism in the Chilean context. By exploring these strategies and seeing them as vital products of the social, political, and artistic contexts in which Parra lived and worked, the more difficult it becomes to overlook her contribution to the cultural climate of mid-twentieth century Chile and beyond.

In Chapter One, I explore the initial classification of Parra’s artwork as “folk” or “popular” in Chile, specifically through her participation in the 1959 and 1960 *Ferias de Artes Plásticas* [Visual Arts Fairs] where she debuted her visual art. Here, the historical implications of the term “folk” and the history of its use in Chile are examined to reveal the effects—often negative—of that terminology when critically applied to Parra’s sculptures and *arpilleras*. Furthermore, the context of the Chilean musical folk boom of the late 1950s and 1960s—of which Parra played a significant part—is highlighted in order to situate her visual strategies within the ideological climate that fueled the movement. Ultimately, this chapter contends that her employment of specific media—clay, wool, and burlap—and content considered “folk” or “popular” reflects a political alignment with the rural and working classes, and reveals a decolonial aesthetic informed by the socio-political context that marked the genre’s politicization at the time.

Several years after her debut at the *Ferias de Artes Plásticas*, Parra moved to Paris where she developed her career as a singer and visual artist abroad. This was not her

first time in Europe, however, as she had traveled to Poland in 1955 where she was invited to play a concert for the World Youth Festival organized by the Communist Party. On the trip to Poland, Parra also traveled to the Soviet Union, France, and the United Kingdom, where she recorded for the BBC in London and met the famed American field collector and champion of folk music, Alan Lomax. When she finally settled in Paris for a period, Parra performed nightly at L'Escale, a cabaret bar in the Latin Quarter that frequently booked South American acts and also recorded her first LP for the studio *Chant du monde*. Parra returned to Europe for a three-year stint in 1961, which culminated in a solo exhibition at the Museum of Decorative Arts at the Louvre in 1964. The language used to describe her work in Parisian and Swiss reviews was not dissimilar to that used by the Chilean press in 1959 and 1960 as explored in Chapter One. The difference, however, was the positive reception of her work abroad. Thus, despite a similar classification, the differing contexts informed distinct results and the aspects of her work that resulted in its poor reception in Chile are the same ones that garnered her success in Europe. This was something Parra recognized, as evidenced in a letter to a friend Joaquin Blaya from June of 1964:

[...] Only I knew the significance of my works. In Chile, despite having been exhibited, they did not say anything to me, you know how Chileans are. However, here: critical success, public recognition, sales; and what matters more than anything, more than artistic fame, is that I am the first South American to exhibit at the Pavillon Marsan of the Louvre Museum. It is easy to show in groups, but to exhibit as an individual is like trying to grab the moon with one's hand.¹⁵

¹⁵ Violeta Parra to Joaquin Blaya, June 19, 1964, in *El libro mayor de Violeta Parra: Un relato biográfico y testimonial* (Santiago: Editorial Cuarto Propio, 2009), 184. Original text reads: “[...] yo sola sabia lo que significaban mis trabajos. En Chile, a pesar de haberlos expuesto, no me dijeron nada, usted sabe como son los chilenos. Sin embargo, aqui: exito de critica, de publico, de venta; lo que vale mas que todo, exito artistico, ya que soy la primera sudamericana que expone en el Pavillon Marsan del Louvre. Facil es exponer en grupos, pero exponer individualmente es como querer tomar la luna con la mano.” Translation my own.

The self-proclaimed cosmic feat, and Parra's strategic approach to her career in France in the mid-1960s is therefore the subject of the Chapter Two.

In the second chapter, I examine the French reception of Parra's 1964 solo exhibition at the Museum of Decorative Arts. The praise of *Violeta Parra: Tapestries, Sculptures, Paintings* was arguably a product of the political and cultural climate of France at the time, marked by the existential search for an authentic human essence in creative expression within the arts, fueled by a period of rapid economic and industrial growth, the rise of a commodity culture referred to the "Americanization" of France, and the end of its colonial empire in Africa. By looking at exhibition reviews from prominent French newspapers such as *Le Figaro* and *Le Monde*, as well as catalogue essays from some of the "Naïve Art" shows that proliferated during the mid-1960s, the meaning of the contextualization of Parra's artwork surfaces. However, when positioned alongside Parra's interviews at the time, it becomes clear that she had an active role in constructing her artistic identity, one that engaged in concepts of the "naïve" and "folk" on equal terms as her critics. The goal of a more critical examination of Parra's artistic production is predominantly achieved through the use of "authenticity"—as posited by Adolph Reed, Kirsten Pai Buick, and Regina Bendix—as a lens through which to extricate both Parra's artistic strategies, as well as that of the Parisian artistic milieu.

Lastly, Chapter Three explores how Parra constructed indigeneity in her artwork as, throughout her career, she maintained a performative and visual relationship with the indigenous Mapuche culture of Chile. Specifically, this is examined through a close

analysis of two *arpilleras* from 1964: *Los conquistadores* and *Fresia y Caupolicán*. I consider these embroideries as works with which Parra utilized the concept of a “usable past,” with specific reference to the sixteenth-century colonial epic *La Araucana* published by Spanish nobleman Alonso de Ercilla beginning in 1569. Parra’s *arpilleras* that depict scenes of conquest are also juxtaposed with paintings by nineteenth-century French artist Raymond Monvoisin, who illustrated the same events in his work and who subscribed to an Orientalist visual language imbued with colonial fantasy typical of the period. Unlike both Ercilla’s account and the nineteenth-century paintings, Parra’s depiction of these events avoids the proclivity to romanticize Mapuche suffering by emphasizing heroicism. In contrast, she foregrounds the visualization of violent repression thereby alluding to the creation and legacy of a colonial wound. Ultimately, I argue that Parra’s construction of indigeneity in these two embroideries, and in her oeuvre more broadly, challenge the longstanding political and cultural belief in Chilean ethnic homogeneity or ‘exceptionalism’ as perpetuated in state rhetoric and cultural discourse. Alternatively, she emphasized Mapuche cultural specificity and influence—the status of which was still being challenged in the 1960s—amidst increased Mapuche organization and the growing political mobilization of the rural class.

The exploration of these three strategies reveals an approach geared toward a more nuanced understanding of Parra’s work, one that exposes the negotiations, the contradictions, and the inconsistencies that animate her and unveil her as the agent of her career and artistic practice, and not a passive recipient of its classification and or meaning. As a result, we see that her art and aesthetic philosophy were guided by these strategies that expose acts of resistance that engage in, challenge, and at times subscribe

to the dominant cultural institutions that shaped the conditions of the period in which she lived and worked.

CHAPTER ONE: FOLK AS STRATEGY

In an interview for the Swiss magazine *Je Vois* in the mid-1960s, Violeta Parra was asked about the Chilean press' opinion of her and her work, to which she responded:

There are some newspapers that are not very good to me, especially the right-wing papers of the bourgeoisie. For them, the word folklore is already a racist thing. I am a woman of the people. And whenever I am involved in politics, these people are mad at me. They only want me to be a singer.¹⁶

Parra recognized the contentious position occupied by folklore in Chile at the time. She not only highlighted the prejudice with which it was approached by certain cultural critics, but also declares her position as a “woman of the people,” arguably aligning herself with “el pueblo,” a specific socio-economic demographic. Moreover, her response suggests her perception of the connection between folklore and politics and as such, we may glean how Parra framed her engagement with folkloric content and her artistic practice as a politically motivated endeavor, one that did not always result in a positive reception of her work.

In this chapter, I trace the initial classification of Parra's artwork as “folk” or “popular” in the Chilean context. Specifically, this is examined through the critical response to her participation in the 1959 and 1960 *Ferias de Artes Plásticas* [Visual Arts

¹⁶ Hubert Joanneton, “Une Grande Artiste Chilienne: Violeta Parra,” *Je Vois*, September 17, 1970, 24. Original text reads: “Au Chili, il y a des journaux qui ne sont pas gentils avec moi, les journaux de droite, de la bourgeoisie. Pour eux le mot folklore est déjà une chose raciste. Moi je suis une femme du peuple. Et chaque fois que je m'occupe de politique, ces gens là se fâchent contre moi. Ils voudraient que je sois seulement chanteuse.” Translation my own.

Fairs] where she debuted her art to Chilean audiences. Second, I analyze the historical implications of the term “folk” in Chile and the effects of that terminology when applied to Parra’s sculptures and *arpilleras*. Lastly, I explore the context of the Chilean musical folk boom of the late 1950s and 1960s—of which Parra played a large role—in order to situate her visual strategies within this ideological climate. Ultimately, I argue that her employment of media and content considered “folk” or “popular” reflects a decolonial aesthetic informed by the socio-political context that marked the genre’s politicization at the time.

FERIAS DE ARTES PLÁSTICAS

The initial classification of Parra’s artwork as “popular” or “folk” is connected to her participation in state sponsored art events. In 1959, Parra exhibited at the premiere annual *Feria de Artes Plásticas* in Santiago’s Parque Forestal organized by the lawyer, Germán Gasman. From December 5-13, artist stalls lined the Mapocho River, mimicking the Parisian art vendor stalls along the Seine (figure 1). For the first fair, Parra obtained a booth and exhibited ceramic sculptures of portrait heads, guitar players, and zoomorphic vessels. In addition to showing completed works, she created sculptures in front of her public as well as played the guitar and sang. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of visual documentation of Parra’s clay sculptures, largely with the exception of press photographs from the 1959 fair (figures 2 and 3).¹⁷

¹⁷ They are rarely featured or reproduced in scholarship on her artwork, which may be due to fact that many haven’t survived or their possible location in private collections. Many of the works are documented purely through photographs such as personal studio shots or press related images. A reproduction of a ceramic sculpture appears in *Violeta Parra: Obra visual* (Fundacion Violeta Parra/ Ocho Libros 2012).

An exception is a work that survives in the private collection of the artist's brother, Nicanor Parra, which provides one of the only opportunities for close visual analysis (figure 4). In this untitled work, Parra depicts a human head created from molded clay. The absence of hair and ears augments the expressive features of a nose, eyes, and mouth. The eyes remain closed, with the detail of facial lines added by Parra to create furrowed brows; and the face is tilted slightly upward suggesting an expression of pensiveness. While it is not clear that this work was modeled after a specific person, according to a Chilean newspaper that covered the fair at the time, many of them were portraits of popular singers.¹⁸ Parra's clay sculptures from this time also included small guitar playing figures or *guitarreras*, as well as zoomorphic vessels of ducks and other types of birds. These latter works are closely related visually to the pottery produced in the town of Quinchamalí in the province of Ñuble, southeast of Chillán, the region where Parra was born and spent her youth. Quinchamalí is known as a major ceramic center for the production of black clay works and vessels with incised white decorative lines, often of *guitarreras* and different animals (figures 5 and 6).

Arguably due to her notoriety as a folklorist and singer by that time, Parra's participation in the fair was covered in the news. *La Nación* reported that people were coming to Parra's booth to hear her sing rather than to see her ceramics and "folk art" and as a result, she "enjoyed more success as a folklorist than a novel potter."¹⁹ On December 10th *La Nación's* reporter Orlando Cabrera commented:

¹⁸ "Cuadros, música y buen humor en la Feria de Artes Plásticas," *La Nación*, December 8, 1959, 2.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2. Original text reads, "Violeta Parra sigue teniendo más éxito como folklorista que como novel ceramista. La gente acude a su stand mejor para escucharla cantar que a ver sus cerámicas de cantores populares." Translation my own.

Violeta Parra with all the criollismo of her songs [...] that come from the old days of naïve Chile, back in the reign of the guitarrón and the refalosa. But Violeta does not only sing and go back in musical time. She also makes ceramics that are being shown for the first time at this event in a country of such refined and distinguished artists. They are clay figures, made of clay from the wet hills, where the farm and the tree provide subject matter for the painter. Chile is represented as it was and as it should be: innocent, simple, expressive, and without small talk or *posticismos*.²⁰

La Nacion's observations on Parra's work ranges from the urge to classify it as "folk," to overt criticism, and finally, the romanticization of both her music and art. The negative response to her clay sculptures is apparent in the declaration of Parra as a novel potter, and the belief that she is better off limiting her creative endeavors to singing, reinforced by the distinction made between Parra and other "refined and distinguished artists." Cabrera's analysis of Parra's work situates it in terms of the past—of a "naïve" Chile—denying it visual legitimacy in the present, and ultimately deeming it simple, expressive, and innocent. In addition to the press' response to Parra's debut as a visual artist, her son Angel remembers that at the fair his mother's work was looked at with disdain by academically trained artists, or with "friendly" expressions that insinuated a sort of false appreciation or charmed impression.²¹

²⁰ Orlando Cabrera Leyva, "Los artistas Chilenos ya ganaron la calle," *La Nacion*, December 10, 1959, 22. Original text reads, "Violeta Parra con todo el criollismo de sus canciones: 'Mi maire quiso a mi paire?' Vienen desde los viejos tiempos del Chile ingenuo, allá por el reinado del guitarrón y la refalosa. Pero Violeta no solo canta y retrocede en el tiempo musical. También cultiva la cerámica y la muestra en este torneo sin precedentes en este país de artistas contenidos y desatados. Son figuras de barro, de ese barro de las colinas húmedas, donde el ranchito y el árbol prestaron tema al pintor. Chile está represente, tal como era y tal como debe ser: inocentón, sencillo, expresivo, sin chácharas ni posticismos." Translation my own.

²¹ Delphine Grouès, "Si alguien quiere entender a la Violeta. Entrevista a Angel Parra.," *IXQUIC: Revista Hispánica Internacional de Análisis Literario y Cultural*, no. 9 (December 2008), np. Original text reads, "[...] y era mirada con desprecio por los artistas formales o con una simpatía entre comillas." Translation my own.

In 1960, Parra participated again in the *Feria des Artes Plásticas*, this time exhibiting her embroideries on burlap or *arpilleras* and oil paintings on cardboard, which she began creating earlier that year (figure 7). She also accompanied her works with live demonstrations of her embroidery techniques (figure 8.). Her technique of *arpillera* making is perhaps loosely connected to the embroidery practices of women on the island of Chiloé, where she visited the year before, and wherein coarse burlap or jute is embroidered with hand spun and natural dyed wool. This practice differs from the *arpilleras* produced in Isla Negra and other mainland Chilean enclaves that use fabric appliqué stitched onto cotton cloth. Here, she exhibited several *arpilleras* including *La cantante calva*, 1960 (figure 9), the title of which was given by her brother Nicanor after the play *The Bald Soprano* by the Romanian-French playwright Eugène Ionesco. In the large composition on burlap, two seated figures and a standing small child occupy the scene. Two dogs are also featured, one seated in profile at the foot of the child and the other, reclining on the ground under the feet of the seated figure closest to the foreground. One of the seated figures plays the Chilean harp (similar to the Paraguayan harp), which in folk music is traditionally played by women. Horizontally across the composition—as if on top a mantle—are six ceramic zoomorphic vessels and *guitarerras*, similar to those produced by Parra and the potters of the Quinchamalí region.

Parra's participation in the second annual *Feria* was recorded in *El Diario Ilustrado*. José María Palacios notes that while Parra is normally known as a folklorist, researcher, and interpreter, she is exhibiting here as a textile artist and painter. Palacios also observed that, “her line in drawing, weak like that of a child, offers however, that invaluable elementality, [...] that judges the transcendent not with reason but with

intuition. From here a certain graphic functionality, related to the one used by *campesino* potters.”²² Here, the author situates Parra’s work within the realm of intuition, not reason, and compares the aesthetic of her line work to that of a child, language that would become commonplace in the reviews of her oeuvre.

Another review of the 1960 *Feria*, moreover, although it doesn’t reference Parra specifically, is revealing because it sheds light on the perceived lack of standards regarding the event as a whole. On December 3, *Las Últimas Noticias* reported that:

Some believe that there should be a jury prior to the exhibition of the work in order to select works that are truly worthy. Some say that a jury is not the solution, but instead what needs to be done is to give more space and certain privileges in terms of placement for established artists. Novices are content with the spirit of the fair: they present to all what they want to exhibit without making a distinction between them [and the established artists].²³

In addition to the belief in the need for a preliminary jury, there existed the general conviction that a physical distinction should be made between established artists and so-called novices. Furthermore, the awards that were given at the 1960 fair evidence who these established artists were and thus the type of work valued by the Chilean art milieu at the time.

²² José María Palacios, “Segunda Feria de Artes Plásticas,” *El Diario Ilustrado*, Arte y Cultura, December 7, 1960, 2. The original Spanish reads: “Su línea en el dibujo, débil como la de un niño, ofrece en cambio ese imponderable de la elementalidad, ese avizorar sin penetrar, que juzga lo trascendente con intuición y no con razones. De aquí una cierta funcionalidad gráfica, emparentada con la utilizada por los ceramistas campesinos.” Translation my own.

²³ “Lágrimas y sonrisas en la “Rive Guache” Mapochina,” *Las Últimas Noticias*, December 3, 1960, 3. The original text reads: “Algunos opinan que debiera existir un jurado-cedazo, previo a la exposición, para que se seleccionen los trabajos que verdaderamente valen. Hay quienes dicen que un jurado no es la solución, que lo que se debe hacer es dar mayor espacio y ciertos privilegios, en cuanto a colocación, a los artistas consagrados o por lo menos que tienen un nombre y se dedican al oficio. Los novatos están muy conformes con el espíritu de la Feria: presentan a todo el que quiera exponer sin hacer distingos entre ellos.” Translation my own.

Prizes in painting went to Jose Balmes, Carlos Sotomayor, and Francisco Brugnoli; first place in sculpture to Teresa Vicuña; and printmaking to Eduardo Martínez Bonati. Balmes, a Catalan artist who immigrated to Chile, was the founder of Grupo Signo in 1955 (which included Bonati), a group of artists inspired by the informalist abstraction of the Catalan painters Antoni Tàpies and Modest Cuixart, a style they assimilated to the Chilean context. Both Balmes and Brugnoli were known for their gestural and expressive painting techniques and the inclusion of found materials such as photographs, newspapers, magazines, and urban debris in their work, which referenced pop culture and at times, the national and international political climate. They aligned themselves with what they perceived to be “defeatist” post-war movements in Europe such as Nouveau Realism and Arte Informal (Informalismo in the Latin American context).²⁴ Sotomayor was known for his experimentation with a Cubist visual language and Vicuña, for terracotta sculptures of smooth organic forms. All of these artists graduated from the School of Fine Arts at the University of Chile. Thus, both the belief in the leniency of the standards of the fair and the value it placed on established, formally trained artists demonstrates the lack of space for Parra who worked outside accepted media, and who focused on content that was associated with what critics perceived to be “naïve” tendencies of the past.

MODERNITY, COLONIALITY, AND THE IMPLICATIONS OF “FOLK”

The early negative reception of Parra’s visual art evident in its description as innocent, naïve and “going back in time” is heavily rooted in the historical implications of

²⁴ The style was prevalent not only in the artistic current of Chile at the time, but also experienced popularity and accolade in other Latin American countries such as Argentina with

the term “folk.” As early as 1911, Chilean literary scholar, Julio Vicuña Cifuentes, ruminated on the significance of folklore and its objects of study, as well as attempted to carve out a place for the discipline. In “Que es el Folk-lore y para qué sirve?” [What is Folklore and What Purpose Does it Serve] Vicuña references the definition of folklore as first coined in 1846 by William J. Thoms, a British folklorist and literary scholar. As posited by Thoms, Vicuña cites folklore as “the knowledge or wisdom of the common people.”²⁵ He argues for the validity of studying customs, popular traditions, thought, ballads, legends, and proverbs of “el pueblo” as a means of understanding its heterogeneous origins and so-called true expression, naming them as practices that contribute to the “richness” of the nation.

In his essay, Vicuña ultimately declares folklore a new science of an entirely modern application, thereby separating himself—and as a consequence his audience—from the customs and people intended for study.²⁶ Using language that suggests the capacity of “them” to teach “us,” a discourse of Othering is established within the early delineations of folkloric study. Moreover, the author claims that the “pueblo” in possession of folklore is naturally skeptical, their religious faith limited by superstition, their scientific faith impeded by a lack of empiricism, and an economic faith restricted by

Otra Figuración and Nueva Presencia in Mexico.

²⁵ Julio Vicuña Cifuentes, “Qué es el Folk-lore y para qué sirve? *Revista Chilena de Historia y Geografía*, 1 (1911): 441. Original text reads: “el saber del pueblo.” Translation my own. While “el pueblo” can be translated as the people, the nation, the country, and/or the common people, I chose “common” since the general tone of the rest of the article insinuates that Vicuña is referring to a specific rural demographic within Chile. This decision was furthermore informed by the fact that in the original definition proposed by Thoms, he refers to the wisdom of “unlettered” populations.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 442. Original text reads: “folklore es una ciencia nueva, de aplicación enteramente moderna.” Translation my own.

distrust.²⁷ Positioning “el pueblo” at odds with progress, he elevates the value of popular expression while simultaneously declaring it a limitation to those whom it is attributed. As a result, folkloric study is best left to be contemplated and evaluated by a so-called modern scientific discipline practiced by a privileged, arguably urban, class.²⁸ Since the early twentieth century in Chile, prevailing ethnic, social, and class hierarchies characterized folklore as both object and discipline. Those who study folklore and those who are considered the “folk bearers” are firmly positioned in socially constructed categories that delineate the significance and value of their contributions to scientific and artistic discourse.²⁹

By the late 1950s, the definition of folklore did not shed its negative connotations, which also extended to the subfields of folk and popular art. In 1959, the same year Parra exhibited her visual art for the first time, a roundtable discussion was held in Santiago by folklore specialists resulting in the publication of *Chilean Popular Art: Definitions, Problems, and Current Situation* the following year. At this conference, a definition of folklore was proposed as a preliminary step towards identifying the characteristics of popular art, suggesting that the two were intimately connected. The panelists utilized Thoms’ definition (cited by Vicuña) stating that folklore:

[...] has been concretely defined as the traditional wisdom of the uneducated classes that exist in civilized societies. This definition incorporates the study of a universal culture with the study of the knowledge of popular classes that for many centuries has remained, in a way, outside of scholarly and scientific knowledge.³⁰

²⁷ Ibid., 443.

²⁸ Emily J. Pinkerton, “The Chilean Guitarrón: The Social, Political and Gendered Life of a Folk Instrument” (PhD Diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2007), 54.

²⁹ Ibid., 50.

³⁰ Universidad de Chile, *Arte Popular Chileno, Definiciones, Problemas, Realidad Actual; Mesa Redonda de Los Especialistas Chilenos, Convocada Por La XIX Escuela de Invierno de La Universidad de Chile, Con La Colaboración de La UNESCO* (Santiago, Chile: Editorial

Despite the development of the discipline over the course of decades, definitions were still grounded in stagnant dichotomies that positioned those who bear “folklore” as uneducated, existing in opposition to the “civilized” society within which they reside.³¹

The civilized versus uncivilized debate creates a stigma that considers folkloric traditions and more importantly, the “folk” who practice them, as impediments to “progress,” a position in direct opposition with larger society. Having established the broader field of folklore within which popular arts must be situated, the conference panelists then put forward a working definition of that latter as,

Traditional formal expressions, materials, and people whose deepest roots are in the past and survive under the conservative spirit of the common people. Moreover, it is also the spontaneous and instinctive expression executed by artisans and folk artists, who are not educated in a systematic way.³²

Accordingly, the popular arts are characterized as a form of traditional, material culture, which incorporates the people who create it, and the present practice of which is an extension of its deep rooted past. The term also applies to artisans and folk artists who are self-taught, or do not attribute the knowledge of their practice with a formal institutional education. This claim situates self-taught artists and their work under the umbrella of popular art and consequently subject to the same social and aesthetic ramifications of

Universitaria, 1960), 25. Original text reads: “El folklore ha sido enuciado en forma bastante concreta como “la sabiduría tradicional de las clases ineducadas que existen en las sociedades civilizadas” (Willaim J. Thoms). Con esta definicion se incorpora al estudio de la cultura universal el estudio del saber de las clases populares que por muchos siglos habia quedado, en cierto modo, fuera del conocimiento erudito y cientifico.” Translation my own.

³¹ The approach to folklore in terms of institutional value would evolve over the course of the century. For example, folklore would be established as an academic discipline at the university level, as well as taught in schools, often as part of programs rooted in nationalistic aims. By mid-twentieth century, a level of democratization penetrated the field with regards to who participated in folkloric study.

objects considered “traditional” and therefore of the past and feels particularly relevant when considering the reception of Parra’s art in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

The definition of “folk” (as applied to “lore” and “art”) developed in this context must be seen as the product of the rhetoric of modernity as invented through the colonial process. In *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, Walter D. Mignolo defines modernity as, “a complex narrative whose point of origination was Europe; a narrative that builds Western civilization by celebrating its achievements while hiding at the same time its darker side, “coloniality.””³² In a theory proposed by Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano and expounded upon by Mignolo, coloniality is posited as constitutive of modernity, the latter of which could not exist without the former.³⁴ Within decolonial theory, modernity and its constitutive other, coloniality, is seen as evolving from the European colonization of the Americas which facilitated the rise of European epistemologies, racial classifications, and a capitalistic system of labor. Consequently, from a context that emphasized notions of cultural difference between the colonizers and colonized as the measure that designated and invented European progress, concepts and categories such as “modern” and “primitive” emerge.

Robin Kelley argues that, “terms like “folk” and “traditional” are socially constructed categories that have something do with the reproduction of race, class, and gender hierarchies and the policing of the boundaries of modernism.”³⁵ Thus, both Mignolo and Kelley delineate folk and modern as conceptual products of coloniality that are two sides of the same coin. The colonization of space and time as a hallmark of the

³² Universidad de Chile, *Arte Popular Chileno, Definiciones, Problemas, Realidad Actual*, 26.

³³ Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, 2-3.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

invention of modernity naturalizes it as a universal global process based on the notion of linear “progress,” therefore allowing for the creation of and need for terms like tradition and folk with their inherent backdating tendencies. Furthermore, part of the formation of what Quijano describes as the ‘colonial matrix of power’ was the commodification and exportation of Western knowledge for the “modernization” of the Western world. As a result, existing types of power and knowledge formation were repressed, erased, and replaced by European notions and methods. These were based on, for example, written language (as opposed to orality or other forms of recording), empiricism, and the invention of an aesthetic hierarchy based on a universal concept of beauty. The systems of power put in place through the colonial process render definitions of the folk and popular—both as practices and practitioners—as rooted in the past, outside of knowledge, and uncivilized as they are the basis of non-European alterity that forms modernity’s ultimate content.

Concomitantly, these descriptions contribute to the steadfast connection of “popular art” or “folk art” to the working and rural classes of Chile’s stratified society as highlighted in the scholarship of the period. In “Folk Art,” published in 1950, Tomás Lago, writer, professor, and founder of the Museum of Popular Art in Santiago defines popular art as “criollo,” a blend of Spanish and native elements. According to Lago, the contemporary working classes are the descendants of the same part of society that produced the ‘criollo’ people in the period of Spanish colonization.³⁶ Discrete from this group, is the upper class of Chilean society, who as suggested by Lago, is more “cosmopolitan,” and as direct heirs of urban Spaniards, possess cultural tendencies more

³⁵ Kelley, 1402.

readily Europeanized. As a result, Lago identifies considerable differences between these two classes, and each has visibly defined characteristics as it pertains to cultural production.³⁷ In light of this, Lago argues that, “popular art in Chile has a vigorous existence [...] that is traditional, intuitive, and lives on the margin of written culture and corresponds to a clearly established social class.”³⁸

In the 1964 article, “The Museum of American Folk Art, Santiago de Chile,” Lago recounts the early tribulations of starting the first Folk Art Museum twenty years prior. He explains that the museum was set up as an institute of the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Chile and opened with the primary aim of “restoring the dignity of the traditional work of the community by ridding it of the inferiority complex which oppressed it.”³⁹ The need was a response to, according to Lago, “the general picture of the Chilean people [as being] poor in certain respects: archaic craft processes usually based in the use of natural materials—plants for basket-making, clay for pottery, and raw wool for fabrics.”⁴⁰ For Lago, the problem faced by this project of bringing traditional work into a formal institution was that these objects were still available for sale in the market place, and as such, nobody had considered them of high value.⁴¹ Ultimately, the author confirms the dynamics of class tension that pervaded the founding of an institution dedicated to folk art and the inferior status it occupied in the Chilean art world.

As such, an attempt to change public opinion of objects labeled under the category

³⁶ Tomas Lago, “Folk Art,” *The Studio* 139 (1950), 150.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Tomas Lago, “The Museum of American Folk Art, Santiago de Chile,” *Museum* 17, no. 2 (1964), 109.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

of popular arts was enacted through a change in curatorial methodology at the time. Lago believed it fruitful to depart from the common anthropological approach to cultural objects and artifacts and instead, to introduce an aesthetic one. He suggested that this was becoming easier in the mid-1960s due to folk art's popularity and its praise by connoisseurs of abstract art who looked at popular and indigenous textile and ceramic traditions as innocent, authentic works of artistic mastery. A formalist approach such as this, however, is embedded in the longstanding art/artifact debate in the study of so-called non-Western arts.⁴² As argued by Aaron Fry for the case of native North American art, this method has “actually reinforced a Eurocentric concept of aesthetics via formalist, modernist discourses [...] which is little more than ethnocentrism masquerading as anti-ethnocentrism.”⁴³

According to Lago, this aesthetic approach to so-called ethnographic objects was less prevalent in the 1940s due to contrasting attitudes held by Chile's stratified society regarding the value of folk art. The first, Lago notes as the apparent upper class position of contempt for anything deriving from the lower classes, and second, the conservative “common” people who concealed their affection for things belonging to “their own despised emotional climate”⁴⁴ While the opinion toward folk art attributed to the upper class may be gleaned from a historical lack of interest or institutional support, the claim of lower class contempt for objects related to their “own despised emotional climate” is an overly generalized statement that places too much emphasis on the effects of “upper

⁴² Despite South America's geographical location within the Western Hemisphere, the arts of the continent are more often than not discussed and described as falsely “non-Western.”

⁴³ Aaron Fry, “Local Knowledge & Art Historical Methodology: A New Perspective on Awa Tsireh & the San Ildefonso Easel Painting Movement” *Hemispheres: Visual Cultures of the Americas* 1 (Spring 2008), 50.

class” opinion or taste, and therefore problematic. Nevertheless, it is evident that the field of popular art was molded by class tensions. According to Lago, it wasn’t until these objects could make their way into a formal exhibition setting in a national institution, that Chilean society could apparently realize their full value and potential.⁴⁵

These articles, written by the main institutional figure in world of folk art serve as crucial documentation of the field during the course of the 1940s to the 1960s, shedding light on the contentious debates over “high” and “low” art in the Chilean context. Lago’s scholarship shows that class tensions pervaded the attitudes and debates surrounding the value of popular traditions. Ultimately, I have highlighted the circulating definitions of popular and folk art during the period in order to reveal the consequences of the categorization of Parra’s artwork as such. However, beyond merely reflecting the societal attitudes towards folk or popular art as it was attributed to her artistic practice, it demonstrates the significance of Parra’s choice of media, as well as the content of her artwork as derived from folklore. These choices place her at the forefront of a socio-cultural debate that characterized the tension between what was perceived as “high” and “low” in the Chilean context. More importantly, however, it situates her aesthetic strategies in their conscious alignment with the “folk” within the latter’s popularization and politicization in the 1950s and 1960s.

⁴⁴ Tomas Lago, “The Museum of American Folk Art,” 109.

⁴⁵ What is also important to note, is that both articles appear in journals circulated to European audiences, the *Studio* a British fine and decorative arts magazine, and *Museum* likely being a French language publication due to the article’s printing in both English and French. This suggests that, rather than specifically engaging a Chilean audience, these articles made an appeal to European art scholars, collectors, and institutions, perhaps in an attempt to garner international support as part of the underlying cause of boosting the value of popular art at home.

FOLK IN CONTEXT: THE 1950s & 1960s

In 1954, the Chilean Association of Entertainment Journalists awarded Parra the esteemed Caupolicán Prize for ‘folklorist of the year.’ The honor recognized the project she launched in 1952 that would last throughout her career: of the recovery, compilation, transcription, and study of the music, poetry, rituals, proverbs, folktales, and material objects of the diverse regions of Chile. While this research initially focused on the countryside outside of Santiago, she would travel well beyond the Central Valley as far as to the island of Chiloé. In 1957, she went to the southern city of Concepción under contract by the city’s university to research and archive the folklore of the region. The following year, as part of the same university directed project, she founded the Museo del Folklore [Museum of Folklore] which included artifacts from the region like pottery, leather goods, clothing, textiles (lace and wool work), utensils, musical instruments, riding spurs, among many other objects of cultural importance. Unsurprisingly then, these endeavors alongside her musical recording reflected the significant role Parra played in the “folk boom” experienced in the Chilean cultural and musical scene of the 1950s and 1960s.

Singers and musicians including Margot Loyola, Gabriela Pizarro, Victor Jara and the groups Concumén and Quilapayun, among others, facilitated a widespread folkloric project that was national in scope. For many, notably Parra and Jara, this involved traveling throughout Chile collecting and transcribing what they perceived as the “true” folkloric expression to be showcased on radio shows, recorded albums, and concerts. While interest in folklore was not a new phenomenon by any means, during this period it

departed from the romanticization of rural life that characterized former moments of folk revival, such as literary *criollismo* in the 1930s, and the political adoption of rural identity by both the left and right within governments of the 1940s in order to define “lo chileno” to garner support for their respective agendas.⁴⁶

The growing popularity of folklore in the mid-century was a response to various factors. First, for many, folklore was perceived to be under imminent threat as a result of accelerated urbanization. The swelling of metropolitan populations, specifically Santiago, occurred over the course of the first half of the twentieth century fueled by unprecedented unemployment caused by the collapse of the mining and nitrate industry.⁴⁷ While prompted by the Great Depression and foreign ownership of Chile’s key natural resources, it was also a reflection of a failing agricultural industry that caused rural workers or *campesinos* to head to urban centers for work. Second, the desire for singers and musicians to search for what they believed to be the true Chilean musical identity was enacted in the face of the “foreign invasion” of the radio airwaves and television—technology that became widely accessible during this period—from the United States, the United Kingdom and other Latin American countries.⁴⁸ For decades, Chilean consumption of music from abroad, and radio programs’ dependence on playing it nearly

⁴⁶ See Patrick Barr-Melej, *Reforming Chile: Cultural Politics, Nationalism, and the Rise of the Middle Class* (Chapel Hill; London: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

⁴⁷ Between 1920 and 1950, Santiago’s population grew from about 500,000 to 2,000,000.

⁴⁸ Ericka Verba, “To Paris and Back: Violeta Parra’s Transnational Performance of Authenticity,” *The Americas* 70, no. 2 (October 2013): 275.

exclusively, exposed the message that foreign culture was desired because it was refined, sophisticated, and significant.⁴⁹

However, what began in the 1950s as a search for a Chilean musical and cultural identity rooted in folkloric tradition, evolved into a more militant movement known as *Nueva Canción* or New Song by the mid to late 1960s. In addition to performing melodies and songs sung by generations of rural musicians, Parra and the musical acts that would eventually comprise the *Nueva Canción* movement, contributed to the politicization of the genre. By the early 1960s, Parra began to infuse rhythms and melodies played with traditional instruments with original lyrics of socially conscious and political content, denouncing injustice, and reflecting the growing mobilization of the popular sectors. The political, cultural, and ideological climate was marked by the amplified radicalization of extant social movements and the mobilization of new ones of which students and rural and urban workers were at the forefront. These grassroots groups began to demand rights and political inclusion within the elitist systems that perpetuated economic underdevelopment, extreme poverty, social inequality, and the lack of access to basic welfare services.⁵⁰ In the early 1950s, more than one third of the Chilean population had either no housing or poor housing, and lived in shantytowns or *pobladores* in city outskirts. These settlements were created by waves of migrants, including *campesinos* and former mining workers and their families who lived without electricity, plumbing,

⁴⁹ Romina A. Green, “Unearthing Violeta Parra: Art as Multilayered Discourse and Manifestations of Anti-(Neo)Colonialism, Anti-Modernism, Nationalism and Otherness,” (Thesis, Tufts University, 2012), 18.

⁵⁰ Until the 1960s, the political system was controlled predominantly by wealthy elites and Chilean democracy was as Patricia McSherry explains, “narrow and oligarchic with minimal electoral participation by the popular sectors.” Patrice McSherry, *Chilean New Song: The Political Power of Music, 1960s-1973* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015), 25.

and sanitation services.⁵¹ The living condition of rural workers and the semi-feudal agricultural system still in place was similarly appalling as only ten to eleven percent had access to supplied drinking water, and their votes (up until a law passed in the 1960s) belonging to landowners.

The conservative government of President Jorge Alessandri (1958-1964) marked a continuation of right wing policies that restricted state intervention, gave increased autonomy to private industry, and freed the Chilean economy to foreign trade. His somewhat marginal defeat of the Socialist candidate Salvador Allende, moreover, ignited a fear among both Chilean elites and the U.S. government to quell the growing power of the Left. In response to this, the U.S. began to direct funds to center and center-right parties such as the newly formed Christian Democratic Party, whose candidate Eduardo Frei Montalva, would win the next election in 1964. Moreover, the wake of the Cuban Revolution of 1959 and the increasing strain to U.S.-Soviet relations that marked the Cold War prompted in Chile—like in other Latin American countries—a tension between two opposing paths: reform and revolution.⁵² The success of the Cuban project presented the tangible reality of radical change via Communist revolution, and as a response, the United States government launched the Alliance for Progress, a foreign policy initiative that sought to provide incentive for economic modernization and social reform from above. At the same time, however, the U.S. initiated counterinsurgency programs for Latin American militaries in countries that had opposing visions of economic progress. Opposition mounted during Alessandri's presidency due to popular demand for land

⁵¹ McSherry, 41.

reform, improved welfare, and the nationalization of Chilean natural resources that had been in the hands of foreign (mainly U.S.) control since the nineteenth century.

The cultural movements that emerged during these decades, including the growing popularity of folk music, were a product of this socio-political climate. Musicians and cultural actors created art forms rooted in folk traditions in order to express the struggles and objectives of the time, many of which associated cultural domination with oligarchic rule and U.S. and foreign imperialism. In “My Guitar is Not for the Rich: The New Chilean Song Movement and the Politics of Culture” Jeffrey Taffet recognizes that both nationalism and anti-Americanism were central components of leftist ideology, and the desire for economic and cultural independence was expressed within New Song. The potency of “folk,” therefore, is evidenced as a method of establishing and supporting this desired independence.⁵³ These interests and efforts contributed to an effervescent climate where artists and musicians could simultaneously denounce injustice and envision change.⁵⁴ Moreover, this counter-culture interest in folk music as a means of expressing issues of social justice was not unique to Chile. Folk “revivals” across Latin America, the United States, and Europe were taking place during this time, as were youth led political and cultural movements that fought for the rights and recognition of marginalized sectors of society.

FOLK AS STRATEGY

⁵² Elizabeth Q. Hutchison, Thomas Klubock, Nara Milanich, and Peter Winn eds., *The Chile Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, Latin America Readers (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 344.

⁵³ Jeffrey F. Taffet, “‘My Guitar Is Not for the Rich’: The New Chilean Song Movement and the Politics of Culture,” *Journal of American Culture* 20, no. 2 (Summer 1997), 92-93.

By locating Parra's visual art within this larger rejection of cultural imperialism, her choice of media—as well as the subjects and themes of her artwork—emerge as conscious strategies that dismantle its limited reading as “folk” with all of its negative connotations when applied by critics. More productively, I believe it positions her use of and engagement with “folk” as a politically infused act shaped by her socio-cultural context, a lens that reveals it as a decolonial approach both aesthetically and ideologically. In “Latin America's Epistemic Break: Towards a Decolonial Aesthetic,” Dolores Galindo argues that,

Aesthetic coloniality is based on the universal definition of art, established as a point of reference in order to classify and disqualify all that does not comply with its ideas. In opposition, decolonial aesthetics looks to decolonize the concepts complicit in art and aesthetics in order to liberate the inherent subjectivities of each culture.⁵⁵

Clearly, the critical reception of Parra's work in the late 1950s and early 1960s reflected the general subscription to universal definitions of art and beauty firmly rooted in a Euro-American formulated canon. As a result, her use of media—clay, wool, and burlap—typically associated with popular art, consciously removed her work from the realm of mainstream, institutionally promoted art. Also, it is worthy to note that her choice of material was dictated by her financial situation, and Parra worked with media she could afford and that was widely accessible. In some respects, this further contributes to the political message of her aesthetic strategy, as it promotes the democratization of art during a period when cultural agents were consciously attempting to overcome institutional elitism.

In *Pintura en Chile, 1950-2005: grandes temas*, Cecilia Valdés Urrutia argues that in Chile, painting and the museum attracted the utmost recognition, a favorable setting that allowed for painting's persistence.⁵⁶ Valdés further indicates that painting was associated with the official institutions of capitalism, like museums.⁵⁷ Parra's early use of clay and fiber as her preferred media arguably positioned her at odds with institutionalized arts.⁵⁸ Furthermore, as illuminated by Lorna Dillon, the ideologically motivated institutional bias in the Chilean art scene was, according to some scholars, related to the U.S. promotion of non-representational art in Latin America as part of a larger political agenda.⁵⁹ The advancement of abstract art in this context was connected to an institutional network created by an internationalist project, which included for example, the International Council of the MoMa, the Pan-American Union, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and transnational corporations.⁶⁰

The aim of these agencies, as indicated by Nestor Canclini, was to "disseminate an apparently depoliticized formal experimentation, especially abstract expressionism, as an alternative to social realism, muralism, and all currents concerned with the national

⁵⁵Dolores Galindo, "Latin America's Epistemic Break: Towards a Decolonial Aesthetics," Dissertation, Goldsmith's University of London, 2011, 19.

⁵⁶ Arguably she mentions this because this period witnessed a global trend that moved away from the dominance of painting, but in many cases it still persisted as a medium of choice in Chile and abroad. Cecilia Valdés Urrutia, *Pintura en Chile, 1950-2005: grandes temas* (Santiago, Chile, Cecilia Valdés Urrutia, 2006), 17. Original text reads: 'En Chile la pintura y el museo concitan el máximo reconocimiento y el ambiente en nuestro país para la persistencia de la pintura ha sido siempre favorable' (17). Translation my own.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ She would also take up oil paint usually applied to cardboard and in some cases canvas.

⁵⁹ Lorna Dillon, "Violeta Parra's Visual Art" (Dissertation, King's College, London, 2013), 174.

⁶⁰ Nestor García Canclini cited in Andrea Giunta, *Avant-garde Internationalism and Politics: Argentine Art in the 1960s* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2007), 5.

identity of our countries.”⁶¹ Accordingly, Parra’s artwork fell into the latter categories, as it was not only figurative, but also highlighted social practices and customs that characterized her rurally rooted vision of Chilean identity. Her visual language differed greatly with the popular styles of movements practiced by artists in Grupo Signo and Grupo Rectángulo in the 1950s and 1960s that promoted experimentation in both informal and geometric abstraction. The styles that characterized these artists work and the philosophies behind them were part of a larger wave of popularity in abstraction in Latin American art with similar groups and movements emerging in Brazil, Venezuela, and Argentina.⁶²

Thematically, the subjects of Parra’s artworks are drawn from her own cultural experience growing up in rural Chile, as well as from her travels and status as a folklorist who recorded a wide variety of social customs. In her work, Parra depicts fables, legends, festivities, dances, indigenous Mapuche healing rituals, rural funerary services, as well as historical and contemporary events.⁶³ Moreover, among the many dances Parra depicted in her artwork as well as performed throughout her career, the *cueca* features most

⁶¹ Nestor García Canclini. “Estrategías simbólicas del desarrollismo económico,” in *La producción simbólica teoría método en sociología del arte* (México: Siglo XXI Editores, 1979), 106.

⁶² Examples include Neo-concretism in Brazil, Neo-plasticism and Op-art in Venezuela, and Concrete art and Informalism in Argentina.

⁶³ Rural funerary customs such as *velorios de angelitos* [wake of little angels], for example, figure prominently in her work. They represent the vigils held on behalf of deceased infants and small children (who die before reaching the age of three), wherein the body is dressed up and placed on view for a period of time while specific songs and prayers are performed. Parra’s representation of this custom documented the very real high statistic of infant mortality in Chile at the time partly due to poor healthcare service and living conditions, a tragedy she personally suffered as well.

prominently.⁶⁴ The dance, most often performed by a male-female duo, reenacts the courting ritual of a rooster and a hen, wherein the dancers move in a series of circles and semicircles, never touching, but each waving a white scarf. The *cueca* is a subsequent manifestation of the original dance known as the *zamacueca*, which in the early part of the nineteenth century came to Chile from Peru, and became popularized among all factions of Chilean society. Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, the dance took on a more regionalized Chilean form and by the start of the twentieth century was renamed the *cueca* at the time of its first recording in 1906.⁶⁵

Between the 1920s and 1940s, artists who performed and recorded *cuecas* infused them with a strong sense of *criollo* identity, and different regions developed their own versions of the dance. These regional variants were influenced by class distinctions; for instance, the *cueca* performed by rural laboring classes was different (in form and costume) from that of the dance performed by a *patrón* or landowner.⁶⁶ While the increased popularity of the *cueca* should be seen within the context of the Chilean “folk” boom of the 1950s and 1960s, its branding as a national symbol and “essence” of Chilean identity as proposed by the state dates back to the Popular Front era governments of the 1940s when the rural folk dance was suggested as a prime example of Chileanness.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Parra performed countless *cuecas* throughout her career and dedicated much time to the performance of the dance, as she taught extensive workshops on the topic, notably during a summer session as an artist in residence at the University of Concepción in 1957.

⁶⁵ Christian Spencer Espinosa, “Cueca Chilena,” ed. David Horn, *Bloomsbury Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World Volume 9: Genres, Caribbean and Latin America* (London; New Delhi; New York; Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2014), <http://www.credoreference.com/book/bloompwv>.

⁶⁶ Green, “Unearthing Violeta Parra,” 13.

⁶⁷ The Popular Front governments of the late 1930s and 1940s in Chile were characterized by governing coalitions of Radical, Socialist, and Communist parties. The presidencies of leaders such as Pedro Aguirre Cerda (1938-1941) have been recognized their impact on facilitating the

Education journals of the time including the *Boletín del Instituto Nacional* hailed it “the great organ of popular lyricism” and the “alma mater of our race.”⁶⁸ These opinions marked a significant change in the treatment of the dance within national consciousness since the decades preceding the Popular Front. Prior to this period, the *cueca*, like many other rural customs, was seen as unsophisticated. As such, the elite governing classes prior to the Popular Front era who favored a cultural alliance with Europe and the United States promoted foreign inspired dances such as the fox trot.

Parra’s most monumental depiction of the dance can be found in her *arpillera La cueca* from 1962 (figure 10), a work of wool-embroidered burlap depicting a male and female figure performing the national dance. The backdrop, devoid of representation, suggests Parra’s monumentalizing of the subject, focusing only on the presence of the figures engaged in the performance of the dance. The body of each figure is compartmentalized through blocks of bright colors, as well as given additional texture through linear patterns of alternating colored yarn. The female figure on the left is adorned with a green dress and a black embroidered apron, while the male figure appears in a multi-colored red purple and cream outfit. The male figure also sports spurs on his boots reminiscent of those found in the region of Chillán, which were being collected by Tomás Lago at the time and displayed at the Museum of Folk Arts in Santiago.

Parra’s representation of the *cueca* points to her privileging of the dance as a rural custom from Chile. It also, however, demonstrates its value as potent socio-political content in the sense that the dance has historically been an appropriated national symbol

“democratization” of Chilean society through social welfare reforms that sought to incorporate the working classes.

⁶⁸ Barr-Melej, 205.

throughout the century, affected by power interests reflecting social tensions. The couple that Parra depicts in *La cueca*—as indicated by costume—is representative of the laboring rural class, and not that of the landowning elite. This is evident since the vestment of the landowning elite would include black tight fitting pants and a white shirt for a man, and a long black skirt, white blouse and black hat for a woman. Thus, in her *arpillera*, Parra emphasizes the *cueca* as a rural practice over that of an elite manifestation of the same dance.

Ultimately, the media Parra employed and the content of her artwork was strategically drawn from “folklore” or folkloric culture, which, as demonstrated by the literature at the time, was marked by class tensions. Arguably, this fact resulted in the negative reception of her visual art in Chile following its debut as official opinions of “folk” were informed by institutional elitism, and the colonial legacy marked by the rhetoric of modernity. However, instead of passively accepting her artwork’s classification as folk insofar as critics applied it, a more nuanced understanding is revealed when we see it as strategy Parra consciously employed. As a result, the context of her artistic production becomes a key informant of the source and implications of her choices, and reveals that she was constantly negotiating with, and taking part in the formation and opposition of the different institutions and ideologies of the time.

CHAPTER ONE IMAGES



Figure 1. *Feria de Artes Plásticas*, Parque Forestal, Santiago, Chile, photograph, c. 1959-60



Figure 2. Violeta Parra at the 1st *Feria de Artes Plásticas*, Parque Forestal, Santiago, Chile, photograph, 1959



Figure 3. Violeta Parra at the 1st *Feria de Artes Plásticas*, Parque Forestal, Santiago, Chile, photograph published in *La Nación*, 1959



Figure 4. Violeta Parra, *Untitled*, modeled clay, n.d., 19 x 15 x 16 cm. In the collection of the artist's brother.



Figure 5. Encarnación Zapata, Quinchamáli, *Guitarrera* (botella), 1935. Smoked, modeled clay, incised decoration with pigment, 44.8 x 31.4 cm



Figure 6. Hortensia Garcia, Quinchamáli, *Pato*, first half of the 20th century. Smoked, modeled clay, incised decoration with pigment, 13.2 x 18.3 x 10.5 cm



Figure 7. Photograph of Violeta Parra at the 2nd *Feria de Artes Plásticas*, Parque Forestal, Santiago, Chile, 1960



Figure 8. Photograph of Violeta Parra embroidering an *arpillera* at the 2nd *Feria de Artes Plásticas*, Parque Forestal, Santiago, Chile, 1960



Figure 9. Violeta Parra, *La cantante calva*, 1960. Jute embroidered with wool, 166 x 203.5 cm

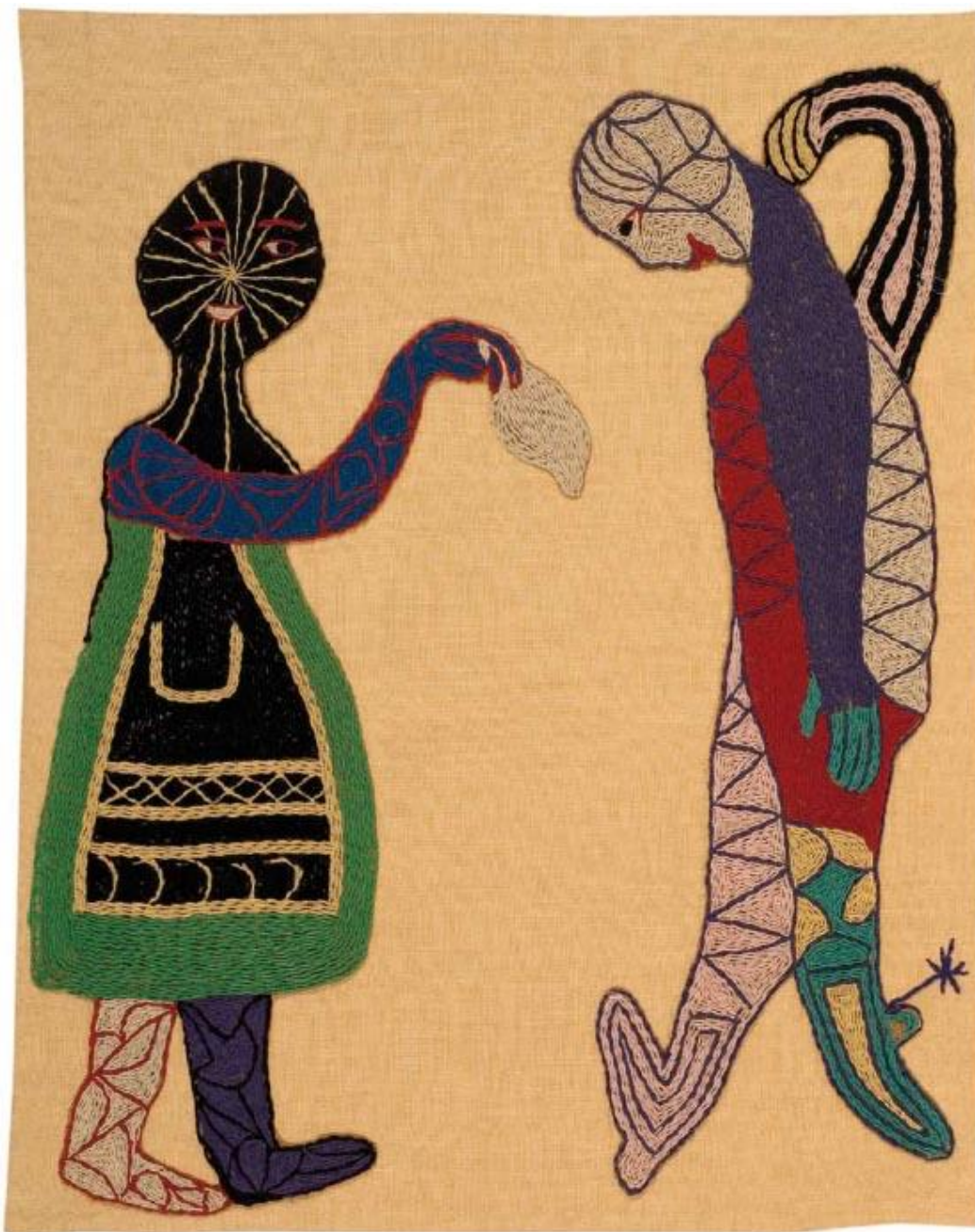


Figure 10. Violeta Parra, *La cueca*, 1962. Jute embroidered with wool, 146 x 121 cm

CHAPTER TWO:

PARRA AT THE LOUVRE: THE 'NAÏVE' AS A STRATEGY OF THE AUTHENTIC

A bout of hepatitis kept me in bed for eight months. I was not permitted to sing or play the guitar, but I was not about to remain inactive. One day I took a piece of burlap and a little bit of yarn and I embroidered. I didn't produce anything interesting. Days later, I returned to start with new ideas. I wanted to make a vase and what emerged was a bottle. An engineer that saw it said that my tapestry was art, and relying on his affirmation, I pursued my work.⁶⁹

Madeleine Brumagne: But you knew how to embroider, didn't you?

Violeta Parra: No, I didn't know anything. The stitch I use for embroidery is the simplest. I don't know how to draw.

Madeleine Brumagne: Then you have invented it all anew?

Violeta Parra: Yes, but everyone can invent; it isn't a specialty of mine alone.⁷⁰

In the wake of her 1964 solo exhibition at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, Parra was interviewed in Europe on several occasions. In these instances, she was often asked about the origin, subjects, and techniques used in the creation of her art. The first

⁶⁹ Francisco Diaz Roncero, ““Tapices de Violeta Parra” es La Exposición que se Inaugura Hoy en el Palacio del Louvre,” *El Mercurio*, April 8, 1964, 42. Original Spanish: Una hepatitis— agrega—me iba a retener en cama durante ochos meses. Yo no podía quedar inactiva, ya que cantar ni tocar la guitarra me estaba permitido. Un día tome un trozo de arpillera y un poco de lana y bordé. No dió nada interesante. Días mas tarde volví a comenzar con nuevas ideas. Quise hacer un jarrón y salió una botella. Un ingeniero que lo vió, dijo que mi tapiz era arte, y confiado en su afirmación proseguí mi labor. Translation my own.

⁷⁰ Swiss Society of Television and Broadcasting, *Violeta Parra, Brodeuse Chilienne*, Switzerland, 1964. Interview with the Chilean artist in her studio in Geneva by Madeleine Brumagne. Interview accessed through the RTS, Radio Télévision Suisse website: <http://rtspro.ch/rts/archive/view-archive/archiveid/15217>. French transcription reads: Brumagne: “Mais alors est-ce que vous saviez broder ? Vous aviez appris ? Parra: No, no no no j'ai.j'ai....Je sais rien, et c'est le point, c'est le plus simple du monde, et c'est pas dessiner. Brumagne: Donc vous avez tout ré-inventé? Parra: Oui, mais tout le monde peut inventer, c'est pas ma spécialité à

excerpt, reproduced above, is from a review of the exhibition published in the Chilean newspaper *El Mercurio*. In this interview, Parra supplies a narrative of haphazard “discovery” that excavates the roots of her artistic experimentation whilst taken ill for eight months in 1960. She concludes her answer that explained her early trials with embroidering different motifs with a telling remark: “An engineer who saw my tapestry said it was art, and relying on his affirmation, I pursued my work.” Here, Parra positions the start of her career in the visual arts not only as an unknowing amateur of sorts, but more importantly, she describes her reliance on another’s declaration of her embroidery as “art” as the necessary affirmation for her continued artistic practice.⁷¹

In the second interview, conducted in Parra’s Geneva studio by Madeleine Brumagne for a short documentary special that aired on Swiss television, Parra further elaborates her construction of naïveté that began with her “discovery” of embroidery. In this filmed interview, Parra notes that she lacked a previous knowledge of how to embroider and even still does not know how to draw, and in light of these factors, she invented the skills anew. She stipulates, however, that this invention is not a specialty of hers alone, and that anyone can do it. Once again, Parra is an innovative inventor, not a trained artist. She is relatable to her public, and desires not to be seen as different from her prospective audience. Consequently, these two instances reveal what I believe to be Parra’s very conscious self-fashioning as “naïve” to her critical public in Europe. The narrative that would circulate regarding Parra and her artwork and its classification as

moi.” Translation my own.

⁷¹ As Gary Alan Fine argues, this “myth of discovery” is furthermore a significant and familiar narrative in the context of self-taught art, as the recognition of value from another figure saves the work of the artist (and the artist him or herself) from “oblivion.” Gary Alan Fine, *Everyday*

naïve, folk, and authentic, was one that arguably began with Parra herself. As such, I argue that the ‘naïve’ in this context, is a strategy of the authentic, as Parra’s artistic and social agenda of promoting Chilean rural customs required an authenticated stance for her European audience.

In this chapter, I examine the Parisian art world’s reception of Parra’s 1964 solo exhibition of embroideries, oil paintings, and sculptures at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs. The language present in the reviews of Parra’s show, concomitant with the accolade it enjoyed, is indicative of the context and framework of discourses present in France, which heralded the proliferation of naïve art, art brut, and “primitivism.” Efforts to formally demarcate these genres demonstrates their importance as an avenue through which the Parisian art world created a dialogue about art they perceived to be more genuine and authentic in the face of modernization and post-war confusion. Moreover, the praise of Parra’s show was symptomatic of the French artistic milieu’s existential search for an authentic human essence in creative expression, partly fueled by the end of its colonial empire in Africa in 1962 at the close of the Algerian War.

The positive reception of Parra’s exhibition was both a reflection of France’s desire for authenticity within the arts and larger cultural scene, as well as the artist’s own construction and performance of authenticity. This was not a passively received characterization of her art and consequently her persona as inventive, naïve, spontaneous, and instinctual—adjectives part of the litany of vocabulary used to describe folk art, self-taught art as well as “primitive” art. Instead, it was a portrayal that Parra had an equal part in constructing. She actively emphasized those same aspects used by her critics to qualify

her techniques, which aided in her own personal quest to revive Chilean rural culture and customs. As evidenced in the first chapter, Parra felt this was a necessary project as the practice of these customs was waning in Chile due to increased urbanization and the general disdain for rural cultural attributes seen as “backward.” Thus, the more authentic the French art world deemed Parra, the more it strengthened and reified her own construction of authenticity, knowing that a positive European reception and view of Chilean traditions might convince her native audience of the validity of her quest. Instead of being another example of European “Othering,” or a projection based in longing or nostalgia that utilizes a primitivizing discourse, Parra’s case presents a more complex, layered circumstance.

THE SEARCH FOR AUTHENTICITY

Prior to an analysis of Parra’s exhibition and its reception, the use of certain terms such as “modern” or “modernity,” “authentic,” and “primitive” necessitates clarification in this context. In *Tradition through Modernity: Postmodernism and the Nation-State in Folklore Scholarship*, Pertti Anttonen defines the modern as a “temporal category that also constructs its own otherness.”⁷² Anttonen argues that as both a temporal and spatial concept, the modern is a “reified category of time, history, civilization and development.”⁷³ By including certain changes and processes such as acceleration, development, ruptures, new regimes or revolutions in time within the overarching classification of the “modern,” the category itself becomes more than descriptive. The

Chicago Press, 2004), 85.

⁷² Pertti J. Anttonen, *Tradition through Modernity: Postmodernism and the Nation-State in Folklore Scholarship* (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2005), 27.

process of naming such events as aspects of modernization or manifestations of modernity, Anttonen suggests, “Pre-modernizes earlier institutions and practices in more than temporal ways.”⁷⁴ This division formulates a qualitative advancement, and modernity is imagined as modern only in relation to its opposite: the non-modern. The ‘non-modern’ is affixed with different labels and characteristics, which include pre-modern, classic, primitive, feudal and traditional. Thus, modernity and the modern must be understood as constructed through their constitutive others, and the perceived spatio-cultural differences that remain outside the “sphere of modernity” are given meaning through the discussion of difference.⁷⁵

Similarly through this framework of difference, the meaning of authenticity as engendered through the comparison between self and ‘Other’ emerges. Adolph Reed suggests that the concept of the authentic is “always hortatory rather than descriptive.”⁷⁶ The idea of ‘authenticity’ as a strategy that seeks to exhort, as further discussed by Kirsten Pai Buick, is particularly applicable to the context of both Parra’s aims, as well as those of the mid-century Parisian artistic milieu. Buick discusses nineteenth-century sculptor Mary Edmonia Lewis’ employment of authenticity as a strategy in her artistic career and argues that Lewis was wholly complicit in the construction of herself as “authentic,” and by extension “other.”⁷⁷ In extrapolating on this argument, Buick quotes Philip Deloria who argues,

⁷³ Ibid.,28.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Anttonen, 28.

⁷⁶ Adolph Reed, “‘Tradition’ and Ideology in Black Intellectual Life,” in *W.E.B. DuBois and American Political Thought: Fabianism and the Color Line*, 127-162 (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 132.

⁷⁷ Buick, *Child of the Fire*, 115.

The authentic, as numerous scholars have pointed out, is a culturally constructed category created in opposition to a perceived state of inauthenticity. The authentic serves as a way to imagine and idealize the real, the traditional, and the organic in opposition to the less satisfying qualities of everyday life.⁷⁸

Moreover, *In Search of Authenticity* folklorist Regina Bendix identifies the search for authenticity as a peculiar yearning that is simultaneously modern and anti-modern.⁷⁹

According to Bendix, this quest is directed toward the recuperation of an essence whose disappearance has been realized through modernity, and whose recovery is attainable only through methods and sentiments created in modernity.⁸⁰

In the context of France in the 1950s and 1960s, the desire for authenticity manifested from the rejection of the pace and progress that characterized its post-WWII thirty years of increased economic and demographic growth, what Daniel Sherman refers to as the “period of the country’s most acute and comprehensive embrace of the modern.”⁸¹ As a consequence, in *French Primitivism and the Ends of Empire*, Sherman attributes the potency of cultural primitivism in French society as revealing of the allure of something different, a longing for the past, rooted in tradition and otherness that obscures postwar France’s embrace of modernity.⁸² Primitivism, for Sherman—as an artistic and cultural tendency—denotes a pointed attraction to or affinity for people believed to be living more simply or naturally than societies in the “modern West.”⁸³

⁷⁸ Ibid., 115. Original quote from: Philip Joseph Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 101.

⁷⁹ Regina Bendix, “Introduction,” in *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 8.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Daniel J. Sherman, *French Primitivism and the Ends of Empire, 1945-1975* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 3.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

In light of this, he argues that primitivism in the French context was simultaneously a discourse, a myth, and a fantasy, effectively “part of a larger colonial or neocolonial apparatus [...] with one or more of these roles predominating at any given moment.”⁸⁴ The author isolates the pervasiveness and function of primitivism in post-World War II French society as a refracting lens on French modernity, here constitutive of rapid industrial growth and the development of a consumer society. This lens sought to place value on the idea of primitivism as an inventive form of expression that could critique the sterility brought about by this period of rapid change. Ultimately, primitivism, as characterized by the reverence of supposedly “simpler and more authentic others,” functions as a re-inscription of the legitimacy and superiority of the Western observer.⁸⁵

The period that Sherman refers to as France’s most critical embrace of the modern, spans the years 1945 to 1975. It is described as the “Thirty Glorious Years,” which alludes to the unparalleled increase in economic growth and consumer affluence.⁸⁶ As a result, the popular narrative that surrounds this period focuses on this historical moment as one marked by France’s crucial transition from a rural-agrarian society to a “modern” one.⁸⁷ Similarly, in *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture*, Kristin Ross refers to these thirty years as marked by the unprecedented speed at which French society changed from being a rural, imperialistic, Catholic country into a completely industrialized, de-colonized, and urban one.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Sherman, *French Primitivism and the Ends of Empire*, 5.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Richard Wolin, “France during the 1960s,” in *The Wind From the East: French Intellectuals, the Cultural Revolution, and the Legacy of the 1960s* (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010), 45.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Despite Ross’s claim, I would argue that France never became “de-colonized.” Kristin Ross,

The rapid economic development accompanied by a new consumer or commodity culture is often called the “Americanization” of France, in reference to the United States’ economic and cultural influence. The impending “Americanization” of French culture became a concern for many Parisian intellectuals of the time who looked at this phenomenon critically, fearing the influence of a country that they viewed as having “no real culture” and instead “gloried in crass materialism.”⁸⁹ In the wake of the feared takeover of consumer culture and the emphasis on mass produced goods, the French cultural sphere engaged in a quest for a perceived “authenticity” that could distract from the so-called sterility of the present.

The search for the authentic was prevalent in the widespread embrace of existentialism as a philosophy and way of life. In *Paris Post War: Art and Existentialism 1945-55*, Sarah Wilson argues that existentialism in post-war French society became a sign for “nihilism and the extreme” and was related to the recovery of tradition within the spirit of reconstruction. Wilson sites the objectives of artists such as Jean Dubuffet, Antonin Artaud, and Henri Michaux as focused on a search for authenticity and a return to origins. Moreover, much of Jean Paul Sarte’s popular theories of existentialism revolved around the notion of “beginnings” and applied the necessity of authenticity to discussions of new painting and sculpture.⁹⁰ We can further locate this pursuit of “authenticity” as directed at the presence of Latin American artists in Paris in the 1960s—

Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1995), 4.

⁸⁹ Ross, 43.

⁹⁰ Sarah Wilson, *Paris Post War: Art and Existentialism 1945-55* (London: Tate Gallery, 1993), 26.

as many French critics considered these artists and their art works to represent an escape from consumer society and the Americanization of France.⁹¹

A final significant factor that contributes to a better understanding of the context of Parra's reception in Paris during the early to mid-1960s is the impact of the Algerian War (1954-1962) and the subsequent decline of France as an imperial power. Algeria's independence dismantled France's "imperial self-conception."⁹² In "Post-Colonial Chic: Fantasies of the French Interior, 1957-62," Daniel Sherman argues that this abstract process of decolonization is a cultural and a political phenomenon, as well as having a role in constructing French modernity in the visual sphere.⁹³ Thus, the context in which Parra lived and exhibited her art works in Paris is embedded within in this neo-colonial framework. The loss of France's last colony accelerated nostalgic sentiments, perhaps even threatening to sever the ties to a society and culture that had served as a crucial referent or locus of difference for many years.

ORIGIN STORIES

At the time of Parra's exhibition at the Museum of Decorative Arts, she had been living in Europe for roughly two and a half years, dividing her time between Paris and Geneva. Prior to this, she had settled in Paris briefly in the mid-1950s, prompted by an invitation by the European Communist Party to give a concert in Poland for the World Youth Festival in July of 1955. During both stints in Paris, Parra established a career singing Chilean folksongs at various Parisian Left Bank *boites de nuit* or nightclubs. She

⁹¹ Isabel Plante, "Les Sud-Américains de Paris: Latin American Artists and Cultural Resistance in Robho Magazine," *Third Text* 24, no. 4 (July 2010): 447.

⁹² Daniel J. Sherman, "Post-Colonial Chic: Fantasies of the French Interior, 1957-62," *Art History* 27, no. 5 (November 2004): 774.

secured a regular slot at L'Escale, which had a reputation for booking almost exclusively Latin American acts at the time, thereby demonstrating the firmly established Parisian taste for Latin folkloric musical genres, specifically of the Andean variety.⁹⁴ At L'Escale, she performed original material as well as songs she had collected and transcribed during her extensive travels in Chile prior to her European arrival.

Two different narratives surround Parra's acquisition of a solo exhibition at the Museum of Decorative Arts. The first anecdote maintains that while carrying her works in her arms on the streets of Paris with the intention of exhibiting them somewhere, Parra was handed a business card by a stranger with an address on it that brought her in front of "an enormous building:" the Louvre.⁹⁵ Correspondence held in the Louvre archives, however, suggest an alternate means by which the exhibition was attained. The Chilean ambassador to France, Carlos Lynch, wrote a letter of introduction to Jean Cassou, the director of the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, referring Parra and her work with the hopes of a possible exhibition. Consequently, as noted by Ericka Verba, "the first story positions Parra as authentic—naïve, unworldly, standing outside of the modern, which is symbolized in this case by what is arguably the most prestigious cultural institution of the West. The official letter of introduction, in contrast, offers a cosmopolitan Parra with considerable savoir-faire."⁹⁶ It is within this locus of contradiction—of a carefully constructed ingenuousness and happenstance on the one

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ For more on the popularity of Andean folkloric-popular music in France in the 1960s see Fernando Rios, "La Flûte Indienne: The Early History of Andean Folkloric-Popular Music in France and its Impact on Nueva Canción" *Latin American Music Review*, 9, no.2 (Fall/Winter 2008): 145-189.

⁹⁵ Patricia Stambuk and Patricia Bravo, *Violeta Parra: el canto de todos* (Santiago, Chile: Pehuén, 2011), 126.

hand, and strategic careerism on the other—that we may glean a more nuanced reading of the successful reception of Parra’s exhibition in Paris.

In Lynch’s letter to Cassou, the ambassador highlighted Parra’s recognition in Chile as a folklorist whose “research and creations in the genre of Chilean peasant music have attracted tremendous interest not only in Chile but abroad, due to their authentic and original artistry.”⁹⁷ The correspondence from the Louvre’s archive indicates that Parra had a meeting with Bernard Dorival, the head curator at the Museum of Modern art sometime in the autumn of 1963, and that no interest in a show materialized. Instead, Dorival sent a letter to Michel Faré, the curator in chief at the Museum of Decorative Arts wherein he stated that Parra’s works were “worthy of interest, for she renewed in them the tradition of Indian folklore from her country.”⁹⁸ Parra showed her embroideries, oil paintings, and wire sculptures to Faré, but after conferring with other curators at the museum, Faré informed Parra that despite his affection for her work, the curators would have to decline giving a show to an “unknown.”⁹⁹ As a result of her persistence, Parra secured another meeting with Faré, after which her show was accepted and scheduled for April.

Dorival’s referral of Parra’s work to the Museum of Decorative Arts provides a clear commentary on the perceived value of her artwork and the appropriate type of

⁹⁶ Verba, “To Paris and Back,” 270.

⁹⁷ Carlos Lynch, Letter from Carlos Lynch to Jean Cassou, n.d. Louvre archives.

⁹⁸ Bernard Dorival, Letter from Bernard Dorival to Michel Fare, October 1963. Louvre Archives.

⁹⁹ The museum’s initial refusal to show the work of an “unknown,” is interesting considering the proliferation of “Naïve” art shows in France, the Netherlands and Italy. Additionally, just three years after Parra’s exhibition, the Museum of Decorative Arts would be the venue to host the first extensive Art Brut show of Jean Dubuffet’s expansive collection. This was perhaps a result of institutions favoring group exhibitions of self-taught artists or those with mental afflictions, and not awarding an individual exhibition to a person considered “naïve.”

institution for its promotion. Concomitantly, it reinforced the integrity of the space of the Museum of Modern Art as dedicated to the modern and contemporary. The emphasis placed on her work as one that revives “traditional Indian folklore” from Chile, and the fact that it was not seen fit for display in the museum of *modern* art suggests several crucial consequences of its resulting classification. First, as artistic products linked to “Indian folklore,” her works were slotted into an ethnographic domain. As such, the narrative that surrounded Parra and her works denied her coequality—spatial and temporal coexistence—to use the terminology proposed by anthropologist Johannes Fabian.¹⁰⁰ Within this colonizing discourse, her work is subsequently not contemporary—let alone avant-garde—but instead is seen as traditional and therefore decorative.

In *The Social Production of Art*, Janet Wolff attests that,

The division we generally make between the ‘high’ and the ‘lesser’ or ‘decorative’ arts can be traced historically, and linked to the emergence of the idea of ‘the artist as genius.’ [...] It is difficult to defend the distinction between, say, the painting of an altarpiece and the design of furniture or embroidery on any intrinsic grounds.¹⁰¹

The legacy of the Renaissance era’s invention of ‘artistic genius,’ which contributed to the birth of a hierarchal separation of artistic genres and media, resonates in Parra’s circumstance.¹⁰² The language curators such as Dorival ascribed to her work— terms like

¹⁰⁰ Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

¹⁰¹ Janet Wolff, *The Social Production of Art* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1984), 17.

¹⁰² This classification was also a consequence of her position as a woman artist. In the hierarchy of arts sculpture and painting enjoy a higher status than other artistic forms such as embroidery, which is labeled “applied,” “decorative,” or “lesser.” This art and craft division is also characterized by the sexual categorization of art forms, which consider methods such as embroidery as distinctly feminine and therefore lesser. See Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).

“folk,” “tradition” and “Indian”—eliminates a sense of individual expression. Instead, a collective authorship is affixed to the work, which permeates many of the criteria used to define folk art and which circumscribe the objects of anthropological study. I would argue, however, that the idea of Parra’s work being associated with a collective voice rather than individual production likely would not have bothered her—and better yet would have been seen as an advantage. Throughout her career, as we saw in Chapter One, Parra persistently identified herself with “the people,” and that the Chilean people were in fact the reason she created music and visual art.

In addition, it is worthy to note that the exhibition that ran simultaneously with Parra’s at the Museum of Decorative Arts was *Peintres Algériens* [Algerian Painters], the first exhibition of contemporary Algerian painting since the former colony’s independence in 1962. Interestingly then, both contemporary painting from Algeria and Parra’s work were decidedly exhibited in the same institution, subject to the same colonizing discourse, and viewed as objects of nostalgia, longing, and fascination. While I am not suggesting a definitive or conclusive exhibition philosophy held by the museum, I do believe that its separate entity as a “decorative” arts museum is telling of the effects of hierarchical classifications, which are subsequently projected onto the works exhibited within its walls.

PARRA AT THE LOUVRE

Parra’s exhibition featured twenty-two *arpilleras*, twenty-six oil paintings, and thirteen sculptures. The works varied greatly in scale, from small paintings and sculptures only a foot tall, to embroideries with dimensions up to ten feet. Parra, who was present

each day in the exhibition salons from the opening reception to closing day, greeted guests, played songs on her guitar, and sang. During museum hours, she demonstrated her technique of embroidery, as well as served Chilean food and beverages. The environment created by Parra was effectively reminiscent of a Chilean *ramada*, a popular celebration expressive of a rural identity that evolved into a hallmark of national and patriotic expression.¹⁰³ *Ramadas* are festivities that revolve around dancing, typical Chilean food and beverages such as empanadas and wine, and live music performed by folk musicians. In this way, the environment created in the exhibition halls reinforced a sense of Chilean cultural identity rooted in rural customs.

Parra's continuous presence in the galleries was part of the exhibition—a performance crucial to her audience's understanding of her work. The performative aspect of her exhibition, however, was not unique to Parra's show at the Louvre, but had already been part of her repertoire. We saw this in her participation in the *Ferías de Artes Plásticas* and with her tendency to accompany the display of her work with singing and active demonstrations of techniques. Likewise, it would have been familiar to her French audience—given the nation's history of World's Fairs inaugurated in 1867 with the Exposition Universelle, and its ethnographic exhibitions of human beings.¹⁰⁴ Within the context of the Louvre, Parra's performative aspect contributed greatly to her invention of

¹⁰³ Definition provided by: <http://www.memoriachilena.cl/602/w3-article-3545.html#imagenes>.

¹⁰⁴ This relates more specifically to the later manifestations of the expositions, such as the 1931 Exposition Coloniale Internationale in Vincennes. By this time, the 'performer' became transformed into 'artist' who played a particular role in the exhibition. The stationary display of native bodies had virtually disappeared, and instead 'performers' were exhibited to the public partaking in active roles that emphasized their 'artistic abilities.' This evolution indicates the fact that the ethos transformed from that 'of the zoo' to that 'of the music and folk festival.' Pascal Blanchard, Nicolas Bancel, and Gilles Boetsch, et. al., *Human Zoos: Science and Spectacle in the Age of Colonial Empires* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), 36.

authenticity and to her artworks being understood as crucial reflections of her identity and the identity of the larger traditional Chilean collective culture she sought to promote. In turn, her French audience could project their nostalgic longings onto the persona of Parra, while associating her works with a human referent. Parra's daily physical presence in the galleries reinforced the commonplace significance placed on the relationship between identity and self-taught art, particularly in qualifying the value of the latter. In *Everyday Genius: Self-Taught Art and the Culture of Authenticity*, Gary Alan Fine argues that within the parameters of self-taught art, the identity of the artist is embedded in the definitions of the field, and as a form of "identity art," the designation of self-taught art often deems the characteristics of the creator as important as the characteristics of the work itself.¹⁰⁵

The museum's first solo exhibition of a Latin American artist had a significant turnout. Among the crowd were collectors, critics, diplomats, artists, and high society Parisians (figures 11 and 12). The positive reception of the show was seemingly unanimous. The renowned Chilean painter Roberto Matta visited the show on several occasions, while ambassadors and museum directors of Italy, Holland, and Belgium expressed interest in exhibiting Parra in their capital institutions. Furthermore, an Italian jeweler who attended the exhibit revealed to her that he could "see her works hanging in the palazzo in Florence."¹⁰⁶ The show sold relatively well, with some of her embroideries going into the personal collections of European aristocrats such as the famed Baroness de

¹⁰⁵ Gary Alan Fine, *Everyday Genius: Self-Taught Art and the Culture of Authenticity* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 15. This is also true of avant-garde artists—
it is just that different sets of characteristics get emphasized.

Rothschild.

Parra's *arpillera*, *Hombre con guitarra* [Man with Guitar] of 1960,¹⁰⁷ featured in the exhibition, is a large-scale work of jute embroidered with wool (figure 13). The entire left side of the composition is occupied by a standing figure shown in profile holding a guitar, which is the sole subject of the scene. The length of the figure, from head to toe, vertically spans the entire piece of jute, while the presence of the guitar creates a strong diagonal, stretching into the upper right quadrant of the work. Parra compartmentalizes the body and head of the figure through triangular blocks of juxtaposing shades of green, namely a combination of olive, forest, and dark green. The same dark colored yarn is used to create the outlines of each triangle, as well as the larger outline used around the length of the entire figure.

The right foot of the figure is shown resting on a red stool that hovers over the bottom edge of the work, and the red stitching of the stool is echoed in lips of the figure. The only break in the uniformity of the green is the left arm of the figure, which is contrastingly executed in white yarn, and is a solid triangular mass. The arm in white stitching culminates in multicolored fingers of pink, red, and green, which stroke the guitar strings. Lastly, Parra depicts the guitar through a combination of dark purple and violet colored yarn, the latter used solidly for the body of the instrument. The dark purple

¹⁰⁶ Violeta Parra, Letter from Parra to Gilbert Favre, May 1, 1964. Reproduced in *El libro mayor de Violeta Parra* (Santiago: Editorial Cuarto Propio, 2009), 182-183.

¹⁰⁷ In the 1964 catalogue for Parra's show, this work is listed under the title *l'homme* and dated as 1962. Whereas there is an *arpillera* by Parra entitled *El hombre* [The Man] from 1962, the description of the work listed as *l'homme* in the catalogue suggests it is the same work as *El hombre con guitarra* (1960). The translation of the description in French states: "He is green because he is the hope; his soul is music, but it escapes him incessantly like a bird." The tapestry, *El hombre on guitarra* features a green figure of a musician holding a guitar which flows into the form of a bird, whereas *l'homme* (1962) is a figure of man with a large hat and a llama to his left.

yarn is used to stitch the outline of the guitar, the strings on the neck, as well to create an ornamental pattern of swirling curvilinear lines on the on the body. From the neck of the guitar emerges a composite of the overlapping bodies of three birds (purple, green, and blue) that share the same set of legs. The lack of personalized characteristics of the figure, and its placement on a background devoid of any representation monumentalizes Parra's chosen subject, and removed from any specific context perhaps alludes to Parra's suggestion of a timeless quality. The added abstract elements that foreground pattern and color remove from the work an attempt of an overtly realistic depiction of the musician, allowing the work to also function as an aesthetic experimentation with forms, as well as exploring the possibilities of texture inherent in the technique of embroidery. These various qualities allowed her audience to read the image devoid of specified time, placing it in an otherworldly realm, which often pervaded the discourse of the value and assessment of what was perceived as "naïve" art.

It is worthwhile to consider the formal qualities of *Hombre con guitarra*—and Parra's oeuvre more broadly—within some of the circulating definitions of "naïve" art outlined by the critics of the time.¹⁰⁸ In a review of the traveling exhibition, "The World of Naïves," organized by Jean Cassou, the aforementioned curator at the National Museum of Modern Art in Paris, Edith Hoffman proposes several underlying visual

¹⁰⁸ These outlined characteristics certainly extend beyond the period of the 1960s and are persistent today, as well as existed prior to the era highlighted. The most frequently cited attributes of "naïve" art include: idiosyncratic scale, the use of bright colors, a poor grasp of anatomy, a lack of or "non-scientific" perspective, sharply outlined forms, and objects or figures that tend to float within the composition. This selection of commonly mentioned formal qualities of "naïve" art or "outsider art" comes from: Roger Cardinal, "Naive art." *Grove Art Online*. *Oxford Art Online* (Oxford University Press, accessed December 3, 2014, <http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T060783>) and Roger Cardinal's *Outsider Art* (New York: Praeger, 1972).

similarities between the works featured in the show. In the 1964 article published in *The Burlington Magazine*, Hoffman states that the artworks:

[...] at any rate many have certain characteristics in common: a predilection for frieze-like compositions, the inclination to enumerate descriptive details, an ornamental repetitiveness, an unconventional treatment of proportion and perspective, a preference for en face views and strict profiles, bright colors [...].¹⁰⁹

Hoffman's emphasis on ornamental detail, unconventional proportions, the use of bright colors, and strict profile all correspond to the aesthetic formulation of *Hombre con guitarra*. In this respect, the compatibility clarifies why Parra's work was seen as "naïve." However, the assumption that Hoffman is making—as did many other critics, curators, and art historians of the time—is that these aspects are the inherent formal clumsiness that is the natural product of an untrained artist, not an aesthetic choice. In contrast, I believe that Parra's visual language or formal aesthetic (as well as her chosen content and techniques) was in some respect, crafted in this way to achieve this classification to her benefit. Moreover, this deliberate connection forged between her artwork, in regard to technique and subject matter, and the qualities of "naïve" art at the time, is also evident in the way she spoke about her art in interviews.

CRITICAL RESPONSE

The exhibition reviews in the Parisian and Swiss newspapers situate Parra's work within the contemporary French discourse that lauded the supposedly authentic qualities of "naïve" and "primitive" art. In a review printed in the April 16th edition of *Le Figaro* from 1964, critic Sabine Marchand noted Parra's naïve style, the depiction of her subjects

¹⁰⁹ Edith Hoffman, "Naïve Painters in Rotterdam and Paris," *The Burlington Magazine*, 106, no.739 (October 1964): 473.

and her chosen material of burlap or canvas, exploding with “natural character.”¹¹⁰ The author further alludes to Parra’s lack of predetermined compositions, instead allowing her “needle to run and create in fiery tones,” and the ability of the audience to perceive in her wire sculptures, the artist’s “sensibility and taste for spontaneous poetry.”¹¹¹ Marchand’s classification of Parra’s work as naïve, and the explicit emphasis on her natural character, inventiveness, and spontaneity remains in line with the language used to praise the supposed genuine and authentic spirit present in “naïve art.”

A week earlier, in the same newspaper, a review was published of the show “Les Naifs” at the Primavera gallery in Paris that highlighted the show as indicative of a successful and increasingly popular trend appreciated by the general public. The isolated experiences of the exhibited artists is noted, as well as their desire to experiment with art by a deep rooted need, and without possessing any pretense of playing a role in the history of art.¹¹² In May of 1964, naïve shows would go up in Rome and Milan, as well as the aforementioned traveling exhibit, “The World of Naives,” organized by Cassou¹¹³ that would begin in Rotterdam and end in Paris in October.¹¹⁴ The catalogue essay for this show celebrated the “love of the art of modern primitives because of its naïve and spontaneous strength of expression, as it helps us to endure the cold climate of our

¹¹⁰ Sabine Marchand, “Les formes sonores des frères Baschet et les tapisseries de Violeta Parra,” *Le Figaro*, April 16, 1964.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Marchand, 1964.

¹¹³ It is interesting to note that the same curator, Jean Cassou, who declined giving Parra a show at the Museum of Modern Art in Paris would in the same year organize and curate a traveling exhibit of “naïve” art. This can perhaps be attributed to the idea of treating naïve and/or folk artists as a whole, a collective voice rather than a single artist, which might suggest novelty, originality, or “genius.”

¹¹⁴ J.W., “Les naifs,” *Le Figaro*, April 9, 1964, sec. Les Arts.

technological civilization.”¹¹⁵ The essay stressed that in the art of those considered “naïve,” are the reflections of archaic imagery of a lost landscape, a timeless primitive instinct, and the eternal will of a childlike creation.”¹¹⁶ Thus, both the catalogue essay and the review point to the fact that the attributes given to the artworks and consequently the artists, were sought out to fill a void of the genuineness of creativity that was apparently lacking in contemporary art and society.

In the article published in *Le Monde*, critic P. M. Grand refers to Parra as a “solo ensemble of peasant art” and notes that she is present to play guitar, sing sad and expressive music, embroider inventively, and comment without guile.¹¹⁷ Here, the author makes specific comments on Parra’s appearance, referring to her as petite and brunette, at once simple and complex like her own sculptures.¹¹⁸ The diminutive tone in Grand’s gendered assessment of Parra is clear, but what is also evident is his notice of her performance, which he believes is conducted “without guile.” Grand assumes that Parra’s behavior and consequently her art are presented without artifice or craft, genuine representations of self and artistic reflection, stripping the artist of her agency to the point of denying the possibility of her hand in crafting this role.

Moreover, the phrase that describes her as at once simple and complex is a type of description that folk art historian John Michael Vlach calls, “double speak,” or a pattern of alternate denigration and praise in the same breath.¹¹⁹ Vlach highlights the prevalence

¹¹⁵ O. Bihalji-Merin, “Le Monde des Naifs,” in *Le Monde des Naifs, 14 Octobre- 6 Decembre 1964* (Musée National d’Art Moderne, 1964), n.p.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ P.M. Grand, “Trois variations sur themes populaires,” *Le Monde*, April 17, 1964.

¹¹⁸ Grand, 1964.

¹¹⁹ John Michael Vlach, “Folk Art and Art Worlds: Essays Drawn from the Washington Meeting on Folk Art Organized by the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress” (UMI

of the tension between criticism and accolade that permeates the discourse of folk art. Another example of “double speak” exists in a review of Parra’s show by Swiss documentary filmmaker Madeleine Brumagne. In the *Lausanne Tribune*, Brumagne claimed that Parra, without realizing it, “has turned her life into art, and art that is crude and at the same time very refined, authentic.”¹²⁰ Parra is again stripped of her own agency, left only with inherent inventiveness and spontaneity.

STAGING THE NAÏVE

In contrast to these assumptions, I believe Parra had an active role in constructing her “authentic identity,” one that at times enacted the very qualities pointed out by critics. As mentioned at the start of the chapter, in several interviews in 1964 Parra referred to the initial development of her *arpillera* making as instigated by her sheer will to experiment, prompted by eight months of necessary bed rest. She further commented on the lack of her prior knowledge on how to embroider with wool and burlap, and when asked directly by her interviewer Brumagne, if she “invented it all anew,” she concurred.¹²¹

In the same interview, Parra explains that she lacks the skill of drawing, and does not plan her compositions prior to executing them. Rather, with her *arpilleras* she begins in one corner, allowing each form to flow into the next, never looking at the entire

Research Press, 1986), 15.

¹²⁰ Marie-Madeleine Brumagne, “‘Cronique Artistique—Violeta Parra—Colette Rodde’” *Tribune de Lausanne*, May 11, 1964. Original French reads, “En effet, sous la stylisation des attitudes, l’emblématique des couleurs, c’est la vie que l’artiste a saisie au vol et qui est devenue, sans qu’elle le sache elle-même, de l’art. Un art brut, en meme temps très raffiné, authentique.” Translation my own.

¹²¹ Swiss Society of Television and Broadcasting, *Violeta Parra, Brodeuse Chilienne*, Switzerland, 1964. Interview with the Chilean artist in her studio in Geneva by Madeleine

product until it is finished (figure 14). In regards to her oil paintings, she highlighted her technique of using one color at a time—painting everything black or red on the canvas at once—to avoid the “annoying” task of cleaning her brushes.¹²² Consequently, Parra referred to her own techniques and mental processes as inventive, and although not exactly stated, one could gather through interpretation, spontaneous or impulsive. Her self-explanation utilizes a similar vocabulary as those of her art critics, but for the purposes of inventing her own unique authenticity, both justifying and mystifying those who might be exasperated by her lack of formal training.

A final point that permeates the reception of Parra’s work in Paris is the inherent paradox of its classification as ‘naïve.’ In “Crafting Authenticity: The Validation of Identity in Self-Taught Art,” Gary Alan Fine argues that self-taught artists are, “unburdened by assumptions of strategic careerism or lofty intellectualizing.”¹²³ Similarly, the review of the ‘Les Naifs’ show, argued that the exhibited artists made work with no pretense of playing a role in the history of art. As such, it is clear that Parra defies easy categorization as “naïve” based on these stipulations, as she possessed career driven goals, and sought venues to exhibit her visual art as well as to perform her music. She engaged with the cosmopolitan artistic scene in France as well as in Chile, despite her native country’s lackluster response to her work, which would only change slightly with the positive reviews and numerous exhibitions in France and Switzerland.

Nevertheless, the classification of Parra’s art as naïve underscores the genre’s

Brumagne. Interview accessed through the RTS, Radio Télévision Suisse website:

<http://rtspro.ch/rts/archive/view-archive/archiveid/15217>.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Gary Alan Fine, “Crafting Authenticity” *The Validation of Identity in Self-Taught Art*,” *Theory and Society* 2 (2003): 155.

popularity, and the appreciation of its supposed inherent qualities prompted the French artistic and cultural actors' invention of authenticity during a time of rapid social and technological change.¹²⁴ A closer look however, reveals that Parra crafted her visual vocabulary, technique, and performativity in dialogue with her audience, as she too sought to justify her own authenticity in her chosen path as a folklore revivalist. The artwork she created thus served her larger goal of reanimating aspects of her native culture that she felt were on the brink of extinction. Ultimately, Parra's construction of authenticity mirrored that of the 1960s French artistic milieu, revealing that their incentives were in fact, not so different.

¹²⁴ Parra was neither the first nor the last artist from Latin America whose works and supposed inherent worldview were seen in Paris with a desirable innocence. In the article, "Les sud-américains ont pris Paris," published in the journal *Le Nouvel Adam* from February of 1968, Christiane Duparc referred to South America as "a cultural island where pre-capitalist values such as friendship, solidarity, affection and virility still prevail, value which are difficult to find in the consumer society in which, right or wrong, we try to stay afloat. These indolent people who have no timetables, these obstinate and tireless country folks definitively have something to teach us." Reproduced in Isabel Plante "Les Sud-Américains de Paris: Latin American Artists and Cultural Resistance in Robho Magazine," *Third Text* 24, no. 4 (July 2010): 447.

CHAPTER TWO IMAGES



Figure 11. Photograph from the opening of "Violeta Parra: Tapestries, Sculptures, Paintings,"
Museum of Decorative Arts, Paris, April, 1964



Figure 12. Photograph from the opening of "Violeta Parra: Tapestries, Sculptures, Paintings,"
Museum of Decorative Arts, Paris, April, 1964



Figure 13. Violeta Parra, *Hombre con guitarra*, 1960. Jute embroidered with wool, 157 x 118 cm



Figure 14. Photograph of Violeta Parra embroidering an *arpillera*, n.d.

CHAPTER THREE:

INDIGENEITY AND STRATEGIZING THE USABLE PAST

*Arauco has a sadness that cannot be silenced
it is the injustice of centuries revealed for all to see
No one has put a stop to it though there is a remedy
Rise up Huenchullan!*¹²⁵

Throughout her career, Violeta Parra maintained a performative and visual relationship to the indigenous Mapuche culture of Chile. In her *arpilleras* and paintings, she depicted Mapuche history and rituals, as well as used indigenous instruments such as the *kultrun* in songs that featured lyrics denouncing indigenous repression like those reproduced above from the 1961 song, “Arauco Has a Sadness.” In this chapter, I consider how Parra visualized constructions of Mapuche indigeneity in the two *arpilleras*, *Los conquistadores* and *Fresia y Caupolicán* both from 1964. Through the lens of a “usable past,” these works are considered in relation to the sixteenth-century colonial epic *La Araucana* written by Spanish nobleman Alonso de Ercilla. Concomitantly, these works are juxtaposed with representations of the same “events” in the work of nineteenth-century French painter Raymond Monvoisin, who subscribed to an Orientalist visual language imbued with colonial fantasy typical of the period.

In direct opposition to the epic and the nineteenth-century paintings, Parra avoids the typical romanticization of Mapuche suffering through an emphasis on heroicism and

¹²⁵ The original Spanish lyrics read: Arauco tiene una pena/que no la puedo callar/son injusticias de siglos/que todos ven aplicar/nadie le ha puesto remedio/pudiéndolo remediar/Levántate, Huenchullán. English translation by Ericka Verba, reproduced in *The Chile Reader*, Elizabeth Q. Hutchison, et. al., eds (Duke University Press, 2013), 372.

instead highlights violent repression and the legacy of a colonial wound. The visual construction of indigeneity as examined in *Fresia y Caupolicán* and *Los conquistadores* evidences Parra's formulations of a counter-visibility that engages with artistic and rhetorical precedents concerning the place of the Mapuche in Chilean history and society and interrogates them in order to destabilize traditional narratives and myths. In these works, Parra challenges the long held political and cultural belief in Chilean ethnic homogeneity or 'exceptionalism' and consciously visualized Mapuche existence and cultural influence—the status of which was still being challenged in the 1960s—amidst increased indigenous organization and the growing political mobilization of the rural class.

Before delving into an analysis of Parra's *arpilleras* in this context, it is important to clarify the term indigeneity as employed here. In "Negotiating Indigeneity," Nancy Postrero references Judith Friedlander in defining indigeneity as, "a historically contingent formulation that changes over time, and [...] a relational concept that emerges from contested social fields of difference and sameness."¹²⁶ The construction of indigeneity is a changing, relational process enacted in political, cultural, artistic, and intellectual realms, and formulated through acts of differentiation. Viewed as an evolving discursive framework, it is sustained by and produces specific forms of power and knowledge built and challenged by indigenous and non-indigenous actors.¹²⁷ Moreover, in "Indigenous Encounters in Contemporary Peru," María Elena García contends that, "to encounter indigeneity is not to simply describe it 'as it really is,' but rather to explore

¹²⁶ Nancy Postrero, "Introduction: Negotiating Indigeneity," *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 8, no. 2 (2013), 108.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

how difference is produced culturally and politically in a variety of social fields that involve a wide range of actors.”¹²⁸ As such, the formation of Mapuche indigeneities exemplifies an overlapping, evolving process by various agents who enact these constructions from a position that reflects their own cultural beliefs, agendas, and political gains.

LA ARAUCANA AS A USABLE PAST

In 1918, U.S. literary critic Van Wyck Brooks coined the term a “usable past.”¹²⁹ Brooks was referring to his perception of the “poverty of American culture,” specifically, with regard to literary history. In response to this lack of a ‘usable past,’ then, he suggested the need for American artists to discover or invent one. According to Brooks, this “spiritual past” or cultural memory, did not have an objective reality, but instead was constituted by any subjective characteristics a nation might choose to include in it. Furthermore, in *The Usable Past: The Imagination of History in Recent Fictions of the Americas*, Lois Parkinson Zamora argues that the term usable “implies the active engagement of a user or users, through whose agency collective and personal histories are constituted.”¹³⁰ Thus, what is deemed usable is valuable, and what is valuable is formed according to specific cultural and personal needs and desires.¹³¹

¹²⁸ María Elena García, “Introduction: Indigenous Encounters in Contemporary Peru,” *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 3, no. 3 (November 2008), 217.

¹²⁹ See Van Wyck Brooks, “On Creating a Usable Past,” in *Van Wyck Brooks, the Early Years: A Selection from His Works, 1908-1925*, Claire Sprague, ed., 219-226 (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993).

¹³⁰ Lois Parkinson Zamora, *The Usable Past: The Imagination of History in Recent Fiction of the Americas* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), ix.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, ix.

The “usable past” becomes productive to apply to the context of Parra’s visual construction of indigeneity as she engaged with the historical legacies of the representation of Mapuche culture in Chilean literature, art, and state rhetoric. There was no dearth of imagined ‘cultural memories’ with regards to the malleable myth and legends of Mapuche “founding fathers.” So, instead of a novel invention of a usable past, Parra participated in a significant re-imagining or re-visualization of a past that had been highly manipulated over time.

The scenes depicted by Parra in *Los conquistadores* and *Fresia y Caupolicán* are visual representations of episodes described in the sixteenth-century chronicle written by the Spanish nobleman and soldier, Alonso de Ercilla, who arrived in Chile in 1557. Ercilla’s account took the form of an epic poem entitled *La Araucana*, which was published in Madrid in three parts in 1569, 1578, and 1589. The epic is referred to as the first work of Chilean literature and Chile’s first history.¹³² Furthermore, as explicated by Joanna Crow, *La Araucana* has been officially endorsed through museums, school textbooks, and the national anthem as “the foundational epic of the Chilean nation.”¹³³ Ercilla’s chronicle describes his experiences in the conquest of *Nueva Extremadura*—the name given to the territory by Spanish conquistador and first royal governor of the region Pedro de Valdivia in 1541. The central portion of the epic, which was written in complex stanza structure, describes the Spanish military campaigns and the longstanding War of Arauco launched by the Spanish on the native inhabitants, referred to by the former as ‘Araucanians,’ for territorial, economic, and religious domination and exploitation. The

¹³² Hutchison, et. al., *The Chile Reader*, 85.

¹³³ Joanna Crow, “Recreating National Icons: Gabriela Mistral, Pablo Neruda, and “Indigenismo” in Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Chile,” *Bicentenario* 3, no. 2 (2004), 4.

term Araucanian encompassed a variety of indigenous culture groups, including the Mapuche, which would become an overarching label for the once diverse native groups of the southern region.

Over the course of a century, Spanish attempts to conquer the southern portion of Chile (below the Bío-Bío River), were largely thwarted by the Mapuche as they waged what was the longest most successful resistance to European rule in the hemisphere.¹³⁴ The Mapuche's chronic frustration of Spanish settlement in the region resulted in a treaty signed by Spanish officials in 1641 that recognized Mapuche territorial and political autonomy. Mapuche autonomy would last until the late nineteenth century, when the Chilean state launched "pacification" campaigns to incorporate their territory into the nation. Shortly following Chilean independence from Spain, a treaty was signed in 1825 that recognized Mapuche independence, but also refers to them as Chilean citizens, which would allow for state "protection" when necessary. Beginning with the expansion of the wheat market south of the Bío-Bío River—which was deemed a necessity of national economic security—pacification campaigns were launched that reduced Mapuche landholdings and relegated them to *reducciones* (a reservation system). These campaigns were justified by the state as a civilizing mission against "barbarians" who were backward, anti-modern, and a threat to Chilean progress.¹³⁵

Arguably due to the Mapuche's sustained resistance and effective war tactics during the period of conquest, Ercilla's poem frequently lauded them as a noble but bellicose people. The author narrated tales of encounter that suggested the indigenous

¹³⁴ Hutchison et al., *The Chile Reader*, 59.

groups met by the Spaniards were simultaneously honorable and barbaric in their opposition to the “civilizing” mission of the Spanish crown. Thus, Ercilla’s epic created a romanticized foundational myth of the ‘indomitable warrior,’ a myth that would serve as a rhetorical tool for nineteenth-century nationalist writers and nation builders, as well as twentieth-century Chilean intellectuals who propagated ideas of “mestizo” identity as a union between the two warrior races.¹³⁶

Many of Ercilla’s *cantos* of the epic focus on Mapuche *toquis* (war chiefs) and *caciques* (community leaders) and the heroic sacrifices—often of their lives—made to defend their land and lifeways. In *Canto XXII*, Ercilla narrates the story of the leader Galvarino who was held captive and tortured by the Spaniards following the outbreak of the Arauco War. He describes Galvarino as a “barbarian” whose punishment by means of amputation was ordered by the Spanish governor Garcia Hurtado de Mendoza. The violent penalty was enacted as an example to those in neighboring towns, and the nature of the scene is described:

Where on a cut off branch
places his right hand (I was present),
which with a rigorous blow is cut,
later he took out the left one happily,
from the trunk it also left parted,
without turning his brow nor wrinkling his forehead,
with contempt and scorn
stretches his head and spreads his neck.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Information cited from a lecture delivered by Scott Crago at the University of New Mexico on September 11, 2014 entitled, “An Exceptional Regional History: State Formation and the Origin of the Ecological Crisis in La Araucanía, 1818-1961.”

¹³⁶ Hutchison, et. al. eds., *The Chile Reader*, 85.

¹³⁷ Original Spanish reads, “Donde sobre una rama destroncada/ puso la diestra mano, yo presente/ la cual de un golpe con rigor cortada/sacó luego la izquierda alegremente/ que del tronco también saltó apartada/ sin torcer ceja ni arrugar la frente/ y con desdén y menosprecio dello/ alargó la cabeza y tendió el cuello. Translation from, Alonso de Ercilla y Zúñiga, *A*

In *Los conquistadores* (figure 15) Parra presents a large-scale work of jute embroidered with wool depicting this same legend. In the *arpillera*, a tumultuous and fiery sky of alternating red, orange, yellow, and brown stitches takes up the upper half of the composition, which dips down at points, hovering over the main figure groups. The ground is depicted in a similar manner in terms of form, but in cool colors of blue, purple, dark brown, and maroon. In the center of the scene, Parra places a figure on horseback dressed in Elizabethan era style trunk hose and doublet, a Spanish morion helmet and a spear in his arms. As noted by Lorna Dillon in, “The Political Dialectic of Violeta Parra’s Art,” the style of clothing Parra depicts the Spaniard on horseback wearing is anachronistic to the time of the conquest since soldiers would have provided their own clothing and did not have uniforms. Parra’s choice however, reflects a general style type that would be associated with the time and therefore immediately legible to her audience.¹³⁸ The head of the horse is overlapped by a figure of a priest, identified by his long robes, a cross hanging from his waist and a gold chalice in his hands used to perform the Eucharist. To the far left, an identical figure to the one on horseback stands hunched over with an axe in hand.

The purple figure of Galvarino is planted in the foreground as the focal point for the other characters in the scene. He is shown in the moment following the removal of his second hand, indicated by the inclusion of red stitching connoting a flow of blood from

Translation of Alonso de Ercilla’s La Araucana, Louis Carrera, trans. (Pittsburgh: Rose Dog Books, 2006), 348.

¹³⁸ Lorna Dillon, “The Political Dialectic of Violeta Parra’s Art,” in *Seeing in Spanish: From Don Quixote to Daddy Yankee: 22 Essays on Hispanic Visual Cultures* (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009): 257.

his sustained wound and the presence of his recently dismembered hand at his feet. The blood surging from Galvarino's left arm appears to be funneling into a white vessel of some kind that rests on a plinth. Parra uses the same white yarn for the vessel as she does for the religious figure, thereby linking visually this act of brutality with religious oversight. The connection underscores the role of religion as an active "civilizing" agent in colonization, a mask behind which the Spaniards could forcibly enact their economic and political agenda.

According to the legend, Galvarino placed his other hand in front of the axe, a gallant act of resistance, which has consequently immortalized him as a hero in Chilean collective memory. However, in Ercilla's chronicle, Galvarino is described as an "infernal barbarian," a "savage," and a "beast." Following the amputation of his hands, Galvarino attacks with only his bloody stumps a slave who approaches the scene with "barbarian spoils." During the scuffle, unable to defend himself Galvarino is described as "eating by the mouthfuls" his foe, who without the help of the Spanish would have remained badly wounded. Galvarino refuses to take his own life (or let it be taken) and escapes. The act of survival, according to Ercilla, was meant to offend the Spanish and deny them satisfaction. Ultimately, Ercilla's account actively suggests not only the brutal savagery of the Mapuche leader but also highlights the role of the Spanish as a necessary civilizing agent thwarting supposed acts of cannibalistic behavior, thereby justifying and naturalizing the act of conquest.

Similarly, *Fresia y Caupolicán* (figure 16), another work of dyed burlap with wool embroidery, depicts the legend of the capture and execution of the sixteenth-century Mapuche war chief Caupolicán. Set against a purple background, two stylized red and

orange trees—reminiscent of weeping willows—frame the central action of the scene. The upper portion of the embroidery is taken up by a tumultuous sky rendered in shades of green, gray, and blue. A group of four figures occupy the heart of the composition, framed in between the two trees. A female figure holding a baby and male figure in blue are frontally oriented, while figures in green and gray are shown in profile framing the couple in a moment of action. The gray figure holds a lance or spear directed horizontally at the figure in blue, while the green character holds chains that are wrapped around his neck and ankles. To the left of the central group, seven figures depicted in the same green yarn as the rightmost character are shown in single file from the bust up, crouching beneath the tree. Lastly, in the bottom right corner of the scene, a cross is rendered in black and yellow as a compositional counterbalance to the figure group on the far left.

As indicated by the title of the work, the central figures are Mapuche *toqui* Caupolicán, with chains around his neck and ankles, and his wife Fresia, who holds a wailing infant in her arms. The specific scene comes from *Canto XXXIII* wherein Ercilla tells the tale of a traitor within the Mapuche community who agrees to bring the Spanish to the whereabouts of Caupolicán in order to facilitate his capture and execution. According to Ercilla, at the moment of Caupolicán’s imprisonment and Fresia’s discovery of this event, she throws their son at his feet shouting, “Take, take your son who was the knot to which I committed myself to licit love, [...] I do not want the title of mother, for an infamous son of an infamous father.”¹³⁹ Ercilla then describes Fresia’s state as “irritable and rabid” throwing the infant with “frantic and furious anger.”¹⁴⁰ Following a

¹³⁹ Alonso de Ercilla y Zúñiga, in “*A Translation of Alonso de Ercilla’s La Araucana*,” Louis Carrera, trans., 524.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 524.

monologue by Caupolicán wherein the leader warns his captors that upon his death there will be more heads of state, “one thousand more Caupolicáns” to take his place,¹⁴¹

Caupolicán is impaled with a spear. Ercilla describes the scene:

Barefoot, bareheaded, on foot, naked
dragging two heavy chains,
with a rope on the neck and a thick knot,
by which the executioner went pulling,
encircled by weapons, and the small
populace behind, looking and looking again,
if it were possible that what is happening
when, seen by one's own eyes is still doubted.¹⁴²

In light of this description, we can see that Parra's visual recreation of this “event” follows Ercilla's text quite closely. Parra includes all the necessary visual cues and persons associated with the legend in a way that would make it immediately legible to a Chilean audience accustomed to the story as narrated in Ercilla's chronicle.

In “Reading Spanish Colonial Literary Texts: The Example of *La Araucana*” Kevin Krogh describes Ercilla's epic as an example of the way in which European representations of conquered “Others” employ what anthropologist Johannes Fabian calls the process of “Othering” or the “making of the Other.”¹⁴³ This process involves the creation of knowledge in which those doing the representing must remake the “Other” as Krogh suggests, in “anticipation of what he perceived would be the response of his readers.”¹⁴⁴ For this reason, colonial texts such as *La Araucana* are more valuable for what they tell us about the author and his world rather than those represented in the

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 527.

¹⁴² Ibid., 528.

¹⁴³ Kevin Krogh, “Reading Spanish Colonial Literary Texts: The Example of *La Araucana*,” *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies* 10, no. 1 (2004): 36.

¹⁴⁴ Krogh, 36.

text.¹⁴⁵ The creation of the Mapuche thus reflects a personal ideology and the experiences of Ercilla at the time, and how to best create a dramatized account of an unknown world for a European audience. Ercilla's account simultaneously took a laudatory tone and a description of savagery, painting Mapuche foes as noble due to the Spanish inability to suppress them, yet inferior and in thus in 'need' of "civilized" domination.

Despite the prominence of Ercilla's epic and its title as Chile's first work of literature and history, it must be seen as a creative work of fiction located in the conqueror's worldview and language. As such, the Mapuche were re-made through the eyes and text of a Spanish author for a European audience. Ercilla's making of the Mapuche enacted the perpetuation of the 'noble savage' trope in the Chilean context, a dichotomy that has undergone various transformations depending on the ideological convictions of those who utilize Mapuche "founding fathers" for their political, historical, or artistic benefit. Consequently, it is necessary to examine how Parra interrogates this process and legacy in the arts, and what the results are of her re-visualization of this pervasive Chilean myth.

An integral part of the historical visual construction of Mapuche indigeneity in regards to the conquest period, are the subsequent artworks that depicted this content. This figured most prominently in Chile during the nineteenth century, as few other representations of episodes of conquest exist outside of the period. Unlike the art of other Latin American countries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (such as Mexico) where the representation of indigenous peoples as romanticized symbols of nationhood and national identity figured prominently, it was not popular in the Chilean context.

¹⁴⁵ Krogh, 37.

Depictions of the Mapuche—both of the conquest and contemporary eras—seemingly did not proliferate. Aside from nineteenth century European painters like Raymond Monvoisin and Mauricio Rugendas, as well as the botanist and illustrator Claudio Gay, who each resided in Chile for a time, few other artists, to my knowledge, take on the subject matter.¹⁴⁶

19TH CENTURY ROMANTICIZED ANTECEDENTS

In 1854, Raymond Monvoisin, a French painter and prominent portraitist who lived in Chile for a portion of his career, painted *The Capture of Caupolicán* (figure 17), an oil on canvas work depicting the same scene described by Ercilla and as represented by Parra in *Fresia y Caupolicán*. In Monvoisin's work, Caupolicán appears with his arms tied behind his back, in front of a crowd of indigenous and Spanish onlookers. Five Spanish soldiers are presented in the foreground, holding halberds, the tips of which are also echoed in the background, rising above the heads of those in the crowd. In this rendition of the legend, Fresia appears adorned in classical robes, kneeling on the ground bare breasted and distraught, and holding one hand on her forehead and the other stretched outwards towards her husband. Unlike in Parra's work, where Fresia holds the infant, Monvoisin presents the *toqui*'s son writhing on the ground, unattended—akin to Ercilla narrative.

More indigenous women are shown bare breasted, hiding their faces in fear and agony, or looking onto the scene with dismay. While Monvoisin suggests the action that

¹⁴⁶ In the twentieth century, artists including Mario Tora, Pedro Luna, Celia Leyton Vidal, Laureano Guevara, and mural brigades of the 1960s and early 1970s include Mapuche content in their respective oeuvres.

is about to take place—Caupolicán’s impending fate indicated by the presence of emotional bystanders—he avoids a depiction of the violence, instead creating a scene of almost static tranquility. Monvoisin also employs conventional devices of European Neoclassical-style history painting, evident in the compositional treatment of this work. The partial nudity of distressed women adorned in anachronistic (and culturally invalid) drapery grounded in the middle of a scene in which men are the propagators of violent acts with weaponry in hand, are reminiscent of works such as Jacques Louis David’s *The Intervention of the Sabine Women* of 1799 (figure 18).

Furthermore, Monvoisin’s work must be seen within the context of the popularity of Orientalism in European painting during the mid-nineteenth century. *The Capture of Caupolicán* as well as his 1859 painting *Caupolicán, Prisoner of the Spanish* (figure 19) emerges from the French proclivity to depict “exotic” scenes of “Others,” as was customary of the movement.¹⁴⁷ Both of Monvoisin’s paintings that depict the capture of Caupolicán are highly romanticized scenes derived from a colonial visual framework based in fantasy that deny cultural and historical specificity and instead rely on imagined exoticizing tropes, which are not informed by historical knowledge or direct experience.¹⁴⁸ The Mapuche figures depicted in both paintings are representative of a larger concept of a colonial “other,” and could be interchangeable for example, with those found in works in France of the period that illustrate colonial subjects of North Africa. In

¹⁴⁷ Other artists in Chile such as Mauricio Rugendas (German born) also invented or imagined scenes involving indigenous protagonists during the 1830s and 1840s. Rugendas depicted the Mapuche in paintings that represented Mapuche “raids” in which semi-nude indigenous men on horseback are shown acting violently, taking white women captive.

Monvoisin's paintings, violence and repression are substituted with eroticism and the picturesque, with an intended tantalizing effect geared toward European consumption.

COUNTERVISUALITIES AND DECOLONIAL APPROACHES

While Parra's scenes of conquest remain in line with Ercilla's narrative with regards to the basic components and characters, she takes important liberties with her representations that are crucial to her construction of indigeneity and counter-visibility. In "Indigeneity and Colonial Seeing in Contemporary Art of Guatemala," Kency Cornejo maintains that, "a decolonial approach to visibility, art and visual thinking requires an unveiling and de-centering of Western perspectives and their monopoly over meaning, beauty and art, and a visual rewriting from a position of colonial difference."¹⁴⁹ Similarly, in *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory to Visibility* Nicholas Mirzoeff argues that visibility—all of which is imperial—is an articulation of the assertion of authority in coloniality, meaning the "trans-historic expansion of colonial domination and the perpetuation of its effects on contemporary times."¹⁵⁰ The authority of coloniality thus always requires and relies on visibility to supplement its use of force. As suggested by Mirzoeff, counter-visualities then, are and were, "visualized as goals, strategies, and

¹⁴⁸ For example, many of the British and French painters associated with the Orientalist movement never visited the places they depicted in the Middle East and North Africa and thus they remain an imaginary construct.

¹⁴⁹ Kency Cornejo, "Indigeneity and Colonial Seeing in Contemporary Art of Guatemala," *FUSE Magazine* 36, no. 4 (Fall 2013), 25.

¹⁵⁰ Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visibility* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 5.

imagined forms of singularity and collectivity [...] one that depicts existing realities and counters them with a different realism.”¹⁵¹

As such, I believe that Parra’s representations of the stories chronicled in Ercilla’s epic function to destabilize it, as well as the nineteenth-century paintings of the same “events.” Parra displaces the traditional romanticized narrative, which includes noble Mapuche resistance, and instead foregrounds the legacy of colonial violence not only of the conquest period, but also its contemporary systemic repercussions still highly prevalent in the period in which the works are made.

Parra’s subversion of historical visualizations of conquest in Chile is evident first in her choice of medium. Instead of large-scale oil painting, which is the institutionally established and accepted medium of depicting “historical” narratives, *Los conquistadores* and *Fresia y Caupolicán* are embroideries connected to the tradition of fiber arts. While Parra’s *arpilleras* can be associated with regional traditions of wool embroidery such as those practiced by the women of the island of Chiloé—as well as to the history of weaving with wool in Mapuche communities—another connection can be made to pre-conquest Andean textile traditions. Many pre-Inca civilizations on the south coast of Peru including the Paracas (600-200 BCE), Nasca (100 BCE-800 CE), and Tiwanaku-Wari (600-1100CE) had embroidery and needlework traditions employed for variety of products including vestments and funerary mantles, among many others.

In these examples (figures 20 and 21), we see the use of brightly colored yarn of wool or camelid fiber to stitch figural motifs on woven natural backgrounds. Lorna Dillon has further argued that some of the stitches used by Parra, for example in the border of

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

Los Conquistadores, recall tubular borders found in textiles from a cultural hybrid known as Nasca-Wari.¹⁵² While it cannot be concretely confirmed that Parra had contact with pre-conquest textiles, Dillon also argues the needlework used in those cultures has been passed down and used in contemporary products. Moreover, while these civilizations mostly occupied territory in present-day Peru, the Tiwanaku empire extended into the north of Chile and the products and legacies of these cultures and their textile traditions certainly made their way throughout the region as well as into museum collections such as that of the Museo de Arte Popular in Santiago under the charge of Tomás Lago, a friend of Parra's and champion of her work.

For many central and southern Andean cultures of the pre-and post-conquest period, textiles were the most highly regarded form of cultural production, used for record keeping, currency, clothing, funerary ritual, communication, and historical documentation. For example, cultures such as the Inca, who did not record language in the written form, used cloth and string which provided the source, production, and documentation of knowledge.¹⁵³ In light of these connections, Parra's employment of embroidery in the works *Fresia y Caupolicán* and *Los conquistadores* achieves two important ends: first, it ruptures the white, male European model and privilege of academic history painting; second, in an act of epistemic de-linking she records historical events embedded in the Chilean national imaginary not with the written word or oil painting as has been historically imposed by European artistic imperialism, but with textile art, a reference to a pre-contact medium that was highly privileged and that

¹⁵² Dillon, "Violeta Parra's Visual Art," 68.

¹⁵³ For example, the Inca used *quipu*, a system of recording through knotted cords made of cotton.

provided the source of knowledge production and retention for the cultures who practiced it. Made from a position of colonial difference—in narration, medium, and in the identity of the creator—Parra enacts decolonial visibility and provides an alternative account that defies the naturalization of the colonial process.

Consistent with the desire of decolonial aesthetics to liberate the inherent subjectivities of distinct cultures, Parra incorporated particular cultural attributes to the Mapuche figures in order to enhance cultural specificity, as opposed to vague, generalized ‘Othering.’ While these specific cultural markers in the form of costume may have existed at the time of conquest, they seem to be drawn from a twentieth-century context, still relevant and used in the period of her artworks production and thereby suggesting the importance of cultural continuity and contemporary existence. In contrast to Ercilla’s account, where Caupolicán is described as “barefoot, bareheaded, on foot, naked,” Parra does not render the Mapuche leader in the nude in *Fresia y Caupolicán*. Instead, she depicts Caupolicán in a uniform color of blue, but utilizes a lighter shade of blue yarn in order to add some distinctive accoutrement. Parra’s use of a lighter color yarn on Caupolicán’s chest and thighs suggests the presence of armor (figures 22 and 23).

Additionally, as noted by Viviana Hormazábal-González, Parra depicts Caupolicán wearing a *cintillo* or a *trarilonko* (figure 24), a headpiece worn by *caciques* or *toquis* in Mapuche culture.¹⁵⁴ Fresia too is adorned with a *trapelacucha* a silver chest piece worn by Mapuche women, and a *kupam*, a black rectangular woolen cloth wrapped

¹⁵⁴ Viviana Hormazábal-González, “La obra visual de Violeta Parra: Un acercamiento a sus innovaciones conceptuales y visuales a través del análisis iconográfico de arpilleras y oleos,” (Thesis, Universidad de Chile, 2013), 161.

around body often accompanied by an embroidered trim or a belt (figures 25 and 26). In Parra's work, she not only denies her protagonist the romanticized nudity associated with humiliation suggested by Ercilla's text, but also eliminates the trope of "savage" nakedness perpetuated by the epic and Monvoisin's works. Parra gives her protagonists identity markers in the form of adornment that foreground cultural specificity as well as continuity, as they were very much a part of Mapuche culture during the mid-twentieth century, and still are today. I would further argue that both the figures of Galvarino and Caupolicán resemble the wooden funerary posts or statues known as *chemamull* (figure 27), which adds another interesting layer to the interpretation of the works that introduces the element of commemoration and remembrance.

Finally, the way in which Parra depicted the scenes from the chronicle and her emphasis on emotion and violence differ not only from Ercilla's description, but also from the nineteenth-century depictions of the same legends by Monvoisin. Instead of appearing "irritable and rabid," throwing her child on the ground at Caupolicán's feet, Parra shows Fresia holding her infant in her arms with an expression of shock, indicated by her gaping mouth. This defies the colonial narrative's attempt to highlight moments of incivility, and in Fresia's case, thwarting her characterization as a "bad mother." Similarly, Caupolicán lacks the arrogance suggested by Ercilla's creation of his final diatribe, and instead appears vulnerable and static, also with his mouth open. In Parra's work, Caupolicán is being impaled with the spear and thus suggests not only acts of brutality and the punishment of indigenous bodies but also his vulnerability at the time of his execution. Similarly in *Los conquistadores*, Galvarino's punishment by means of amputation is not depicted as an action about to occur that would intimate violence but

deny gruesome details. Parra decidedly depicts the moment of physical torture, showing a dismembered hand and two streams of blood running from each respective wound.

Parra's conscious decision to foreground the violence of the scene strays from the nineteenth-century depictions of the legend seen in Monvoisin's works. Monvoisin's paintings depict the leader in the moment of capture, or as a prisoner as in the case of *Caupolicán, Prisoner of the Spanish*. Here the protagonist is shown reclining, tied to a stretcher adorned with animal furs as he stares longingly at a female figure (not Fresia) kneeling at his side. In these paintings, the Mapuche are sexualized and treated as erotic objects baring their flesh in scenes in violent events instead depicted with tranquility. As opposed to solemn and romanticized heroicism then, the Mapuche leaders depicted in Parra's tapestries are shown enduring hateful acts of violence that incriminate the colonial process showing it for what it really is. As such, the myth of noble Mapuche resistance is rejected in order to visualize the violence of colonial repression. Violence, moreover, is not suggested as a necessary evil of the colonization and an opportunity to heroicize a decidedly vanishing people, but instead to highlight it as an injustice—the creation of a colonial wound—which carries longstanding repercussions into the present moment when the works were made.

A FUNCTIONAL PRESENT

In addition to reading *Los conquistadores* and *Fresia y Caupolicán* as works with which Parra challenged historical examples of Chilean visual and literary culture, this “usable past” must be seen as accessed through the needs of a functional present. When examined within the intellectual, cultural, and political climate of the 1960s, these *arpilleras* emerge as vital products of their time. Throughout the decade (and those

preceding), debates surrounding the indigenous rights and cultural presence of the Mapuche within constructions of national identity occurred on a variety of stages including anthropology, literature, politics, and history. Moreover, Mapuche political and grassroots organization proliferated throughout the period, which contributed to new formations of indigeneity at the time.

As elucidated by Elizabeth Hutchison, Thomas Klubock, Nara Milanich and Peter Winn in *The Chile Reader: History, Culture, Politics*,

One recurring national myth is that Chile—in contrast to its neighbors—is constituted of an ethnically homogeneous mestizo population. In this imaginary, ethnic “others” have been located not within the nation, as in many other Latin American countries, but outside it.¹⁵⁵

The myth was perpetuated and enacted through state policy and rhetoric and at times the outright refusal of governments to recognize the existence of indigenous peoples. In *The Mapuche in Modern Chile*, Joanna Crow cites a famous example of this denial in Pablo Neruda’s experience as consul to Mexico in 1940. With the hopes of raising Mexican awareness around Chilean culture, Neruda published a magazine he titled *Araucania*, the cover art featuring a photograph of a Mapuche woman. When he sent the issue to state officials in Chile expecting praise for his endeavor, they responded with “We are not a country of Indians!” and told him to either change the name of the magazine or suspend its publication.¹⁵⁶ While this is just one small example of the refusal to acknowledge the indigenous presence in Chile from a myriad of pervasive platforms, it

¹⁵⁵ Hutchison, et. al., *The Chile Reader*, 210.

¹⁵⁶ Joanna Crow, *The Mapuche in Modern Chile: A Cultural History* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012), 86.

provides an informative window into the cultural sphere of the making of Mapuche indigeneity within which Parra's contributions should be seen.

Moreover, much of Joanna Crow's scholarship addresses the overlooked presence of *indigenismo* in Chilean intellectual and cultural discourse, as she challenges claims made by historians that suggest a so-called 'ethnic exceptionalism,' which has denied its presence in the wider Latin American movements of *indigenismo*.¹⁵⁷ Crow cites the scholarship of Chilean sociologist Sergio Larraín who argued that Chile never developed an *indigenista* intellectual movement comparable to Mexico or Peru, as well as that of historian Paul Drake, who contended "countries like Chile were unsuited to put such an emphasis on the Indian."¹⁵⁸ What Crow makes evident is that perhaps despite the lack of a formal or cohesive *indigenista* movement (as was the case in Mexico) it is not that *indigenismo* did not exist, but that instead the myth of Chilean 'ethnic exceptionalism' was so pervasive that the results prevented discussions of or scholarship regarding its impact on intellectual, cultural, and political debates. Whereas the straightforward denial

¹⁵⁷ *Indigenismo* was an ideology or movement constituted by intellectual, artistic, and political currents that rose to prominence in the 1920s in Latin America, and through its various manifestations sought the "emancipation and integration of the exploited Indian." Its development has been strongly linked to the contexts of post-revolutionary Mexico and figures such as Alan Knight and Manuel Gamio, as well as in Peru as the term "indigenism" itself was coined by philosopher and journalist Jose Carlos Mariategui. *Indigenismo* in the Mexican context, as noted by Holly Barnet-Sánchez was "a project comprising ideological constructs, post-Revolution government policies, and aesthetic discourses; it aims at characterizing the material culture and artistic production of pre-Hispanic civilizations and living Indians and incorporating these within modern Mexico. *Indigenismo* did little to improve the living conditions of the Indian population or preserve indigenous traditions, however, because the government officials and intellectuals (conservative and liberal alike) generally agreed that to have a cohesive, modern nation the large Indian population had to be incorporated into the *mestizo*/white social, economic, and political system by eliminating indigenous languages, traditional forms of agriculture, and other practices deemed "backward" and counterproductive.

¹⁵⁸ Joanne Crow, "Rethinking National Identities: Representations of the Mapuche and Dominant Discourses of Nationhood in Twentieth-Century Chile" (PhD diss., University of London, 2006), 24.

of the continued existence of indigenous populations had helped to facilitate a false belief in the homogeneity of Chilean society and therefore an indication of its desired “exceptionalism,” cultural debates by leading actors in science, history, literature, and anthropology took place in the mid-twentieth century.

In the 1960s, this was still marked by the persistent refusal to acknowledge the presence of indigenous populations. An example of one of Parra’s contemporaries in the field of history that denounced the role of indigenous peoples in Chile was the conservative Jaime Eyzaguirre, a representative of “hispanismo.” In 1964, the same year Parra created *Los Conquistadores* and *Fresia y Caupolicán*, Eyzaguirre published *Historia de Chile: Genesis de la nacionalidad* [The History of Chile: The Genesis of Nationality]. In this work, and in his scholarship more broadly, Eyzaguirre consistently and fervently glorified the Spanish roots of *chilenidad* or Chilean-ness.¹⁵⁹ As such, he strongly denied the presence of miscegenation between the Spanish and Mapuche and claimed that “of all the peoples happened upon by the conquistadores, it was the Araucanian that least contributed to the formation of Chilean nationality.”¹⁶⁰ Consequently, for Eyzaguirre and others that supported this school of thought, the Mapuche did not possess historical agency and as a result did not factor into the development of the country or its “progress” as measured by conservative nationalists of his kind.

Despite these examples, it is obvious that members of academic, artistic, and literary communities, which included Mapuche producers and activists, engaged with the formation of indigeneity in the Chilean context and advocated for successive

¹⁵⁹ Crow., 54.

governments to address the issue of indigenous rights. This is evident in the formation of groups such as the National Association of Indigenous People (ANI) in 1953 as demonstrative of the wave of indigenous activism that took place. Mapuche activism experienced continued momentum in the face of the Christian Democratic government of Eduardo Frei (1964-1970). During his presidency, Frei introduced a program of social change, which was characterized by agrarian reform, the expansion of education coverage, and the promotion of trade unions and neighborhood groups to help facilitate “top down” popular mobilization.¹⁶¹ However, facing the pressures of increasingly radicalized social movements on one side and the U.S. Alliance for Progress that promoted social reform to thwart the appeal of communism on the other, Frei’s government focused on trying to make capitalism more inclusive and efficient.¹⁶²

The so-called “Revolution in Liberty” fell short for many rural and urban workers, and by the mid to late 1960s mass street demonstrations in urban centers and rural land takeovers or *tomas* were common. In line with these popular mobilizations was Mapuche political organizing that involved *eje comunitaria*, or grassroots organized direct actions that were aimed at the recuperation of communal lands that took the form of *corridas de cerca* (moving of fences) and *tomas de fondas* (land occupations). Furthermore, the province of Cautín became a central location for indigenous mobilization, and Mapuche rural workers joined forces with the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR) in order to seize lands that were theirs by ancestral and legal right, the distribution of which under the program of agrarian reform was moving at a frustratingly slow pace.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 56.

¹⁶¹ Crow, *The Mapuche in Modern Chile*, 122.

¹⁶² Ibid., 117.

In response to this idea, Rafael Railaf, a prominent Mapuche activist at the time argued that, “once we saw that there really was no solution, that all the courts and judges were corrupt and useless, we began to organize ourselves.”¹⁶³ Railaf also drew inspiration from the Araucanians of the colonial era stating that, “we used to say to ourselves, we are going to have to fight, *witrapetu* Lautaro, *witrapetu* Caupolicán, it doesn’t matter if we die, for other combative warriors will come forth.”¹⁶⁴ Mapuche students throughout the 1960s organized and had an important presence in the cities of Temuco, Valdivia, Osorno and Santiago. They promoted the importance of a culturally distinct Mapuche identity through the creation of new journals and magazines, which included poetry written in the native language of Mapudungun. Moreover, in 1964 during his presidential campaign, Salvador Allende signed the Cautín Pact with leftist Mapuche organizations in the southern city of Temuco. The pact ensured that in return for the pledged support of these Mapuche organizations for Allende’s campaign, he would introduce significant socio-economic reforms, which provided a potentially hopeful sign for the future.¹⁶⁵

A few of the last stanzas of Parra’s “Arauco Has a Sadness” include the verses:

Then the blood runs, the Indian knows not what to do
his land will be taken, he must defend it
Dead falls the Indian at the feet of the invader
Rise up Manquilef!

Arauco has a sadness even more black than his chama (poncho)
no longer are the Spanish those who make him cry

¹⁶³ Crow, *The Mapuche in Modern Chile*, 122.

¹⁶⁴ Crow, *The Mapuche in Modern Chile*, 122.

¹⁶⁵ When he won the presidency, Allende did in fact introduce reforms that addressed the concerns of Mapuche rural communities. Allende, with the help of Alejandro Lipschutz, a Marxist scientist and anthropologist that advocated for the rights of indigenous communities in Chile (and for their autonomy and respect of their cultural specificity) became involved in drawing up the new Ley indígena passed by Congress in 1972.

The Chileans themselves take away his bread
Rise up Huenchullan!

The lyrics to her song, much like *Los Conquistadores* and *Fresia y Caupolicán*, addresses the injustices faced by the Mapuche in the conquest period echoed in contemporary times. In this way, Parra's music and visual art together form part of a larger social and cultural agenda that challenged the racist belief in Chilean ethnic "exceptionalism" by foregrounding aspects of Mapuche culture and that highlights a history of struggle. By emphasizing the violence endured by Mapuche leaders and their communities in the sixteenth century during a campaign in which the Spanish first and foremost wanted to claim land, the contemporary context of land disputes in which the Mapuche were still fighting for land becomes highly relevant.

Furthermore, in *Fresia y Caupolicán*, the atrocities that we can call "history" are being witnessed by the group of figures in the lower left of the scene, and it is unclear whether they are Spanish or indigenous. Nevertheless, they watch the events unfold and as the viewers we bear witness to their observation of the scene, a compositional device in which Parra implicates her current audience. Just like in the lyrics of the song "Arauco Has a Sadness," she makes it a Chilean issue or, perhaps more broadly, a contemporary one, warning against the repetition of history and making a revolutionary call to rise up as the only means to end this historical legacy of injustice. Parra's reference to the Chilean state as the perpetrator of repression is fitting within the context of the state of politics in the 1960s, and the need for revolution reflected the current climate and sentiment of popular mobilization. Thus, her construction of indigeneity via an engagement with a 'usable past' involved a re-visualization or counter-visibility that was inextricably linked

to the present moment.

CHAPTER THREE IMAGES

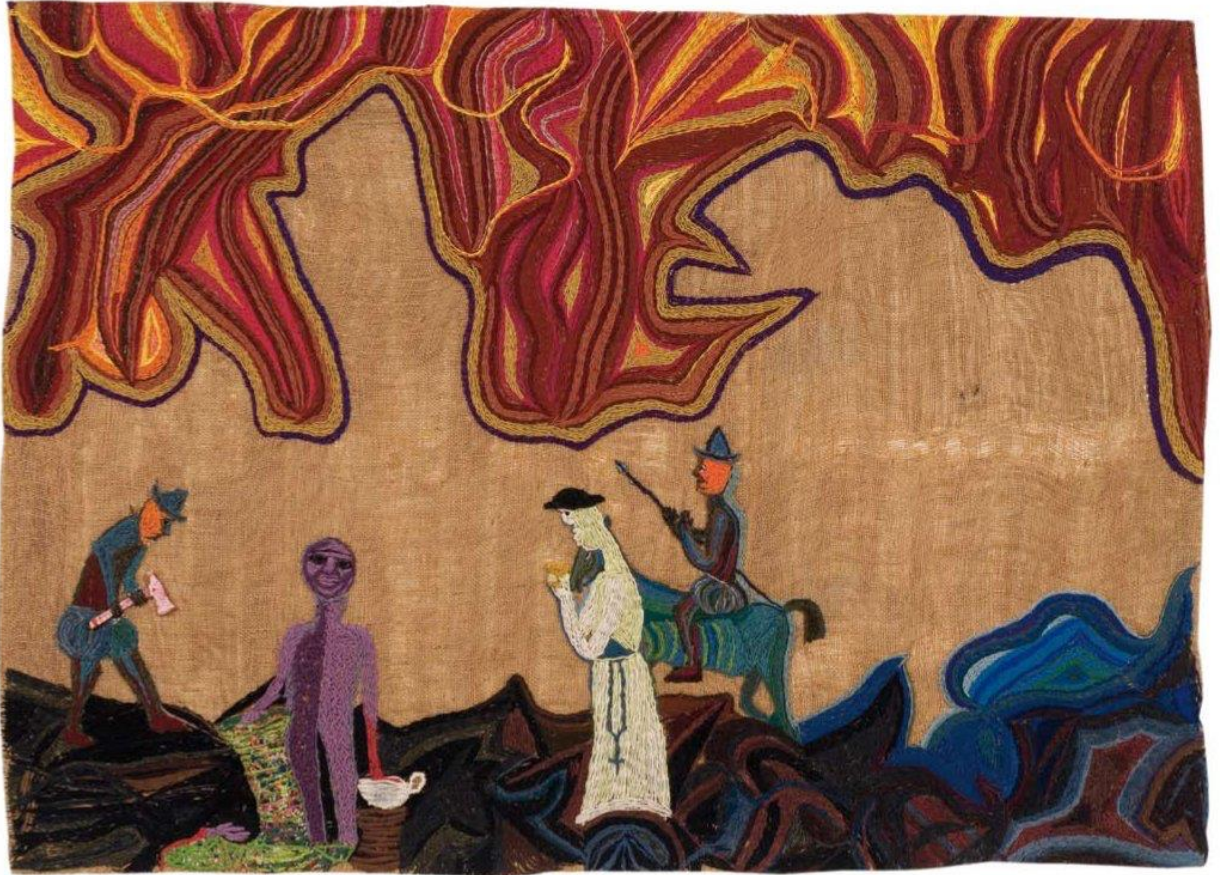


Figure 15. Violeta Parra, *Los conquistadores*, 1964. Burlap embroidered with wool, 171.5 x 221 cm

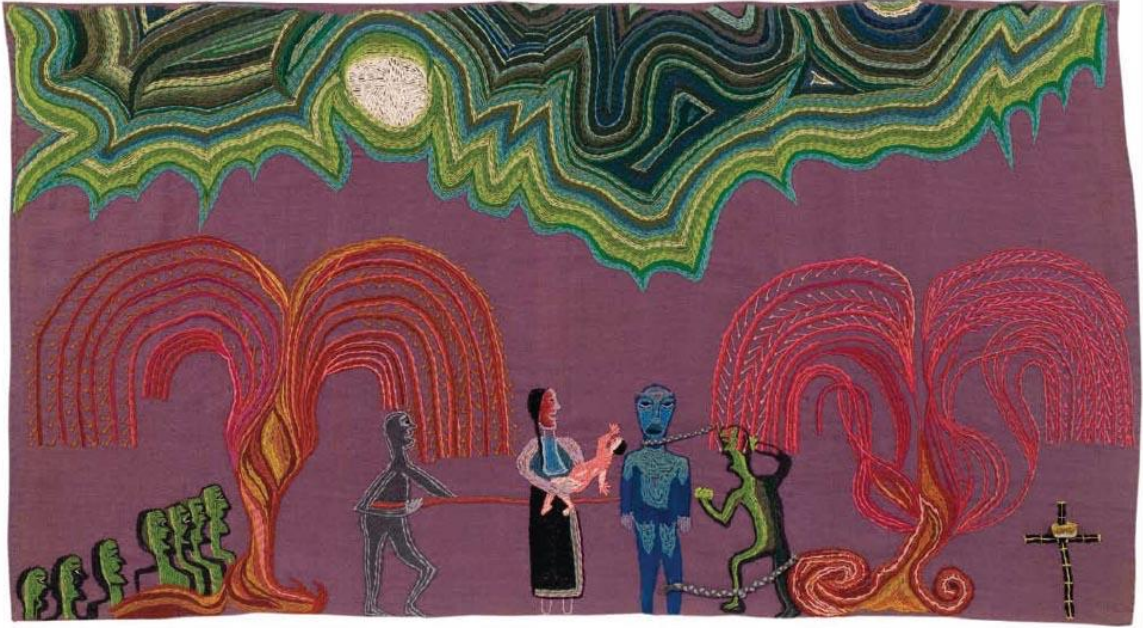


Figure 16. Violeta Parra, *Fresia y Caupolicán*, 1964-5. Burlap embroidered with wool, 158 x 259 cm



Figure 17. Raymond Monvoisin, *The Capture of Caupolicán*, 1854. Oil on canvas, 300 x 410 cm



Figure 18. Jacques-Louis David, *The Intervention of the Sabine Women*, 1799. Oil on canvas, 385 x 522 cm



Figure 19. Raymond Monvoisin, *Caupolicán, Prisoner of the Spanish*, 1859. Oil on canvas, 226.5 x 281 cm

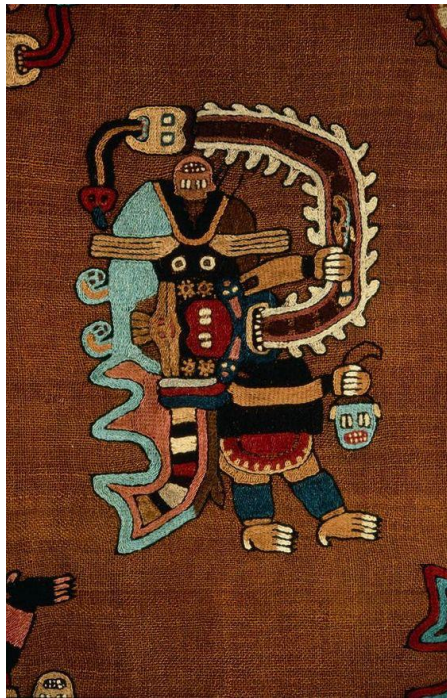


Figure 20. Example of embroidered mantle from Paracas, 100-200 CE

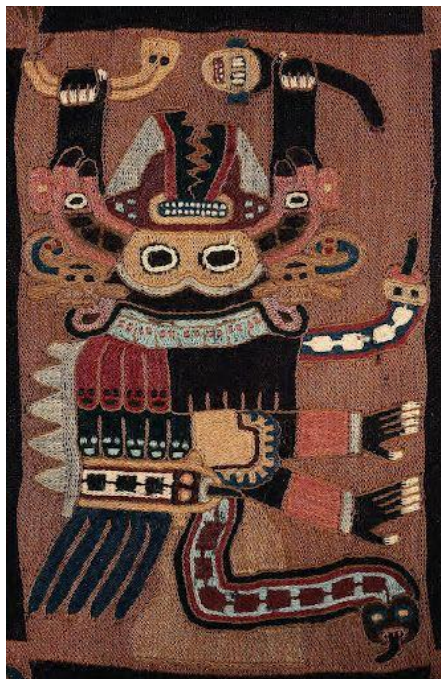


Figure 21. Mantle, Wool plain weave with stem-stitch embroidery.
Peru, Paracas, South Coast, Early Intermediate, 100-200, CE Boston Museum of Fine Arts



Figure 22. Violeta Parra, detail of *Fresia y Caupolicán*, 1964



Figure 23. *Sequil des tres cadenas* (*Adorno pectoral*), unknown maker, Chile, southern zone, second half of the 19th century, silver, 34.5 x 12.1 cm



Figure 24. *Trarilonco* (head adornment), Mapuche, second half of the 19th century.
Silver, 4.8 x 45.5 cm



Figure 25. Photograph of Mapuche women wearing *kupam*, date unknown.



Figure 26. Photograph of Mapuche women wearing *kupam*, date unknown.



Figure 27. Mapuche, *Chemamull*, wood, Museo Chileno de Arte Precolombino, date unknown.

CONCLUSION

When Violeta Parra returned to Chile from Europe in 1965, she dedicated the last years of her life to realizing a long-held dream: to open a multi-purpose cultural center dedicated to folk music, performance, and art under one tent known as “La Carpa de la Reina.” A large circus tent erected in a the old park La Quintrala in the commune of La Reina, north-west of Santiago near the Andean foothills, La Carpa, where Parra would live and work, fulfilled her desire to offer the Chilean public a “center for popular art.” Here, people could as she stated in a 1966 interview in *El Siglo*, the Communist daily paper, “listen to unknown songs, those that burst forth from *campesinas*, from the sorrows and joys of miners, the dances and poetry of the islanders of Chiloé.”¹⁶⁶

La Carpa opened to the public in December of 1965 and hosted live performances nightly, offered workshops on how to dance the *cueca* and play the guitar, and featured Parra’s artwork on display, often functioning as backdrops to the various types of performances carried out under its roof. This space is where Parra realized a total art experience steeped in the folk culture she dedicated her career to documenting, performing, and utilizing as the source of the content and media of her artistic production. Furthermore, while she had the support of the local mayor don Fernando Castillo Velasco, this was a not a conventional, cosmopolitan city center establishment.¹⁶⁷ Rather, it should be seen as intentionally anti-mainstream or bourgeois, rustic in its nature and reminiscent of what would be found in more rural parts of the country.

¹⁶⁶ Excerpted in Isabel Parra’s *El libro Mayor*, 206. Translation by Ericka Verba in “To Paris and Back: Violeta Parra’s Transnational Performance of Authenticity” *The Americas* 70, 2 (2013): 286.

¹⁶⁷ The land, measuring four hectares, was given to Parra to use by the mayo for free.

At La Carpa, Parra was the ultimate performative host, welcoming guests, playing the guitar and singing, and pouring wine and serving food.

As noted by Ericka Verba:

This performance extended to the intimacy of her living quarters as well. This can be seen in the interview she gave to *El Mercurio* reporter Alfonso Molina Leiva aimed at building the venue's public. She greeted him by proclaiming: "Come in . . . this is my home, this is how I live." In response to the reporter's shocked incomprehension that he was being welcomed into a rustically furnished, one-room shack with dirt floors, she explained: "To you, all of this must seem strange, that I live this way...For me, this is comfort, I grew up in the countryside and lived like this for a long time and I have never changed my lifestyle [*modo de vida*]."¹⁶⁸

Arguably her last great performance of authenticity, living and working at La Carpa allowed Parra to embody and enact the cultural and political ideals she had propagated in all facets of her art, allowing them to converge in once space for her public to consume. Sadly, the cultural center did not experience the success she had hoped and mostly due to its remote location, it was unable to draw the crowds necessary to maintain itself.

In "Black Art, Folk Art, and Social Control," Eugene Metcalf astutely observes that, "definitions of art are highly political. They are major battlegrounds on which the struggle for human and social recognition is waged. A people can ill afford to let others control the definitions by which their arts are classified and evaluated."¹⁶⁹ Similarly, in *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, Michel Rolph-Trouillot attests that, "terminologies demarcate a field, politically and epistemologically. Names set up a

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 287. Original source, Alfonso Molina Leiva, "Vengan a cantar junto a mí," interview published in the "Suplemento Dominical" of *El Mercurio* (October 1966).

¹⁶⁹ Eugene Metcalf, "Black Art, Folk Art, and Social Control" *Winterthur Portfolio* 18, no. 4 (Winter 1983): 271.

field of power.”¹⁷⁰ Consequently, it has been my hope with this thesis to demonstrate the ways in which terms like “folk” and “naïve,” and “indigenous” used to classify Parra’s art were highly political definitions molded by cultural institutions and discourses often permeated and informed by elitism and the colonial legacy marked by the rhetoric of modernity.

More importantly, however, it was the aim of this project to elucidate the ways in which Parra actively contributed to the formation of these definitions—whether subscribing to or co-opting them—in order to animate cultural practices she felt were important, to express her discontent with the injustices suffered by sectors of Chilean society, and to forge her career and lasting contributions as a folklorist, activist, performer, and visual artist. When her engagement with the concepts and the content of “folk” and “naïve” and “indigeneity” are examined as strategies she actively constructed and invoked, we avoid the pitfalls of passively accepting the classification of her work which has historically limited its reading and removed her from the historiography of Chilean art and beyond. Furthermore, when these strategies are considered critically within the larger climate in which Parra worked, the context of her artistic production becomes a key informant of the source and implications of her choices and she becomes indisputably stitched into the fabric of mid-century Chilean art, a reality difficult to undo.

¹⁷⁰ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 115.

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