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The Last Yagan

Reminiscences of Cristina Calderón from Tierra del Fuego

Joachim G. Piepke

In March 2017 Cristina Zárraga, who presently lives in Germany, published a book about her grandmother, “Cristina Calderón: Memorias de mi Abuela Yagan” (170 pp., ill., Ukika: Ediciones Pix). The idea had come to her once she became aware of her Yagan roots (119–120):

En el año 1999 conocí a mi abuela Cristina, cuando ella visitaba Santiago junto a su hermana Úrsula Calderón. Fue nuestro primer encuentro y también para mi padre que no veía a mi abuela desde que partió en febrero de 1967 de la isla Navarino... [Photo 1]

Fue un encuentro lleno de emoción, una familia desconocida para mí, sin embargo al sentir a mi abuela supe que la conocía de siempre y fue en este encuentro cuando ella me pidió que escribiera este libro.

Haciéndome tomar un nuevo rumbo a mi vida en aquel entonces. Pronto me establecí en *Ukika* junto a mi abuela, al reencuentro con mis raíces.

En aquel tiempo pude también compartir con mi tía abuela Úrsula, muchas tardes oscuras de invierno nos encontrábamos en el comedor de la casa de mi abuela junto al fuego, para charlar en yagan e intercambiar historias. Hablar de la vida antigua, cuando se podía navegar libremente por las aguas del extremo sur. Cuando su territorio se extendía ampliamente y libremente para ellos.

Situación contraria que vine a conocer en Navarino. Casi inconcebible a mi pensar, un pueblo canoero y nómade, ahora hacinado en el pequeño poblado de *Ukika* y que cada vez que quieren adentrarse al *Onašaga*^[1] deben pedir autorización.

Cristina was born on May 24, 1928, at Róballo on the island of Navarino in an Indian hut. Her parents were Juan Calderón, *Akačexaninčis* in Yagan [Photo 2], and Carmen Harban, *Lanixweliskipa* in Yagan [Photo 3]. Both belonged to the last generation to have gone through the traditional initiation ritual of *Čiáxaus*, which the anthropologist and Divine Word Missionary Martin Gusinde had documented in photographs and described (Gusinde 1937: 805–961).² Juan Calderón had been one of his main informants. He died 1931 at Mejillones, his wife Carmen also died three years later, leaving Cristina orphaned at the age of six (Photo 4).

Together with her older sister Úrsula she was taken in by their grandparents *Halnpenš* (Williams Harban) [Photo 5] and *Karpakolikipa* (Julia). It was a life in poverty and hunger. A meal of fish and wild potatoes was a rare treat. Her first experience of seeing game killed she describes as follows:

Esa vez nos fuimos a una isla en Ushuaia, tuvo que haber sido el mes de febrero, estaban los pichones recién naciendo, pichones de gaviotines.

Así que llegamos a la isla y ellos empezaron a matar los pichones, la abuela Julia y él [el abuelo]. Los agarraban de las patitas y ¡pam! En la piedra y agarraban otro y dele.

“Ay”, Le dije yo a mi abuelo, “porqué lo matan pobrecito”.

“No”, mi dijo él, “no se dice pobrecito porque esto es para comer. Estos pájaros *Watauinéiwa* [Dios] los hizo para comer y para comer se mata y él perdona, – no tiene que decir usted pobrecito, porque ahora la abuela los va a limpiar y a cocinar y tú lo vas a comer. A la comida

1 Yagan name for the Beagle Channel.

2 Gusinde undertook four expeditions to Tierra del Fuego between 1918 and 1924. Both during the second one 1920 and the third 1922 he managed to organize together with the Yámana (Yagan) their initiation ceremony (*Čiáxaus*) which had fallen into oblivion by this time. Photographs in Barthe and Barral 2015: 194–223.



Photo 1: Cristina Calderón 2014
(Photo Oliver Vogel).

no le puede decir pobrecito, porque eso es para que le alimente a usted”.

“Así que ahora va” y me dio una soguita,

“y vas matando y lo vas atando con esta soguita los cogotitos, todos los cogotitos”.

Así que pucha, me puse criminala. Iba yo y agarraba un pichón y le mandaba, y otro, tremendo atado de pichones.

Their grandfather wanted the children to know the difference between good and evil. Throwing stones at birds that one did not mean to eat was evil. Stealing was wrong, too, since God in heaven, “*Watauinéiwa*, looks down on you and sees you” (21). When one day her older brother Luis Lara stole and butchered a lamb from the flock of the landlord Don Federico Lawrence, this made his grandfather cry piteously, because he feared the consequences for his family if the landlord were to learn about it.

He came to a tragic end in 1934. On September 18, he attended a festivity at Mejillones together with the children. A Yagan named Felix Milicic was playing the accordion. The grandfather, already rather drunk, gave a kick to the accordion, saying, “What is that chap doing with this thing?” A Spaniard leveled a hard blow at his tummy, which he died of. Cristina’s godmother, her aunt Gertie, took the weeping girl home with her. But she was about to marry a Chilean at Remolino, so she handed the child on to Clara, an older cousin.

Until she was 9 years old, Cristina spoke only Yagan. In this cousin’s household, she came into contact with Ema Lawrence, who had a tutor all to herself at Róbalo. From Ema Cristina learnt her first Spanish words. Many Yagan died quite young of tu-

berculosis or pneumonia, and due to the discrimination by the Spanish-speaking settlers, even mothers did not teach their children their native language any more. As a result, Yagan was more and more forgotten. Today Cristina is the last Yagan to still be able to speak the language fluently.



Photo 2: Juan Calderón 1922 (Photo Martin Gusinde).



Photo 3: Carmen Rosa 1922 (Photo Martin Gusinde).

During the summers, the family lived a nomadic life on the sea. They roamed about in their canoes and lived by fishing. During this time sheep were shorn, which allowed the Yagan to earn some money on the farms of Remolino, Harberton and Róballo. The winters were spent at Mejillones, where they occasionally hunted guanacos and otters. The fur of the guanacos was used to make shoes (*kili*), since Indians could not afford to buy proper shoes

or boots. The *kili* were very warm, since they were worn with the pelt on the inside. They did not last longer than a few months, though, before becoming stiff and brittle and hurting the feet. Twice a year the coast guard ship *Micalvi* came from Punta Arenas, bringing supplies and taking the wool harvested at the farms. For the children this was the big event of the year, since the ship also brought musicians who provided entertainment.

Cristina's aunt Nelly Calderón was married to Federico Lawrence, a son of the Anglican missionary John Lawrence. They had six children and an exemplary marriage. Nelly was one of the most important informants Martin Gusinde had, quite indispensable for his research about the life of the Yámana (Yagan). The Lawrence family consisted of three brothers, Federico, Martín and Alberto, and a sister Mini May, who married Guillermo Bridges.

The Indians treated the forces of nature like superhuman personalities. Cristina describes her first visit to the bay of Yendegaia³ in the north-western part of the Beagle Channel for hunting otters (47 and 49) (Photo 6):

Esa vez anduvimos en las nutrias en Yendegaia para arriba, ahí hay témpanos [glaciares], *Aniowáea* se llama, y ese cae hasta el mar. Y ahí cuando uno pasaba en el bote nos pintaban la cara con pintura negra, no teníamos que mirar al témpano, claro que nosotros podíamos mirar, porque me decían "Usted está pintada, usted puede mirar". Pero yo no quería mirar nunca, me daba miedo, aunque estaba pintada. Porque dicen que esos son igual que una persona. Cuando se rompía el témpano de ahí salía, seguro que la corriente lo llevaba y lo lleva a la bahía esa y en

³ Site of the glacier *Aniowáea-táun* (today known as "Italia").



Photo 4: Gusinde with his informants Chris Dunich (left) and Juan Calderón (right) 1922 (Photo Martin Gusinde).



Photo 5: William Halpens (Photo Martin Gusinde).

la tarde vuelven a su lugar otra vez, siempre era así. Y la bahía queda lejos. ¡Ah! Yo le tenía miedo. ...

Dicen que el témpano era igual que una persona y hay que tenerle respeto, así dicen que decían los indios anti-

guos, y así seguíamos siempre, por eso yo le tengo respeto al témpano.

When she was 15, her kin urged Cristina to marry Felipe Garay, an older man whose wife had left him years before. They considered this a good match financially, which would provide well for the orphaned girl. They could not get married by civil law since his first wife was still alive. When she was pregnant with their third child, he died of appendicitis. Since their marriage was not legally valid, all of his wealth was lost to her. By the end of 1948 she found herself literally without a roof over her head and without any income. She survived on what little her relatives, who were also poor, could share with her. In 1949 she met Lucho Zárraga, a Selk'nam, with whom she lived for the following ten years. He worked as headman of the shepherds on the farm of the Bridges at Harberton. They had three sons and two daughters. The eldest, Daniel, became the father of the author of these memoirs. Each year after the sheep were shorn in March, they took a boat to Mejillones, where they lived with kin for some time. In 1960 Cristina managed to get the help of the navy station to build a small house at Ukika. The reason she insisted on this was her desire to have her children get an education in the school of the navy station. It was the first house at this location, Ukika, where more and more of her relatives settled in the course of time. Lucho died in 1962, also probably of tuberculosis.

Until the middle of the 20th century the life of Yagan families was centered on Mejillones. At this point the Chilean army began to relocate the Indians to Ukika and settle them there permanently. This meant the end of their independent nomadic life-



Photo 6: Glacier Darwin of the Beagle Channel 1922 (Photo Martin Gusinde).

style, which had already been restricted by the national interests of Argentina and Chile. Their land, the island of Navarino and the surrounding islands, was allocated to white settlers in order to use the natural resources more productively. The Indians were left with just the small area around Ukika. Today only a small part of Mejillones is owned by the Yagan people, even though officially it is defined as “Terreno de la Comunidad Yagan.”

In 1964 Cristina met her third husband, Teodosio González. Since he also worked shearing sheep, she travelled with him from one farm to the other. In 1967 their daughter Lidia was born. In 1972 they accepted an offer by the Chilean authorities to settle on the eastern island of Picton. They were provided with a property and a new house, because the government wanted Chileans to populate the eastern islands south of the Beagle Channel in order to underpin their territorial claims to them against Argentina. Medical help was precarious there, so that her youngest son Mauricio had to be taken to Punta Arenas when he had appendicitis and she as well with gallbladder problems. They found the isolation hard to bear and moved back to the island of Navarino for good in 1975. About Teodosio she says (116):

Cuando se enojaba conmigo, “Cuidadito”, le decía yo “porque no soy nada la Catalina [su primer mujer]”, así me lo tenía siempre. Pobrecito, pero era bueno él, trabajador, nunca pasamos hambre, él me quería mucho, mucho, mucho... Fuimos buenos compañeros él y yo, nos queríamos mucho.

The bond with Teodosio, whom she had wished for even as a girl, lasted until his death in 2009.

It was the myths, legends, and magical acts passed down from the ancestors, which gave meaning to Cristina’s life. The close connection she felt with the nature around her helped her to see her place in her small cosmos and bear the problems she faced. Life and death, fortune and misfortune, poverty, hunger and illness, love and hatred – all of these were a part of the nature she lived in and which was in fact as she experienced it. Adversities nature placed in one’s path were not insurmountable obstacles; the important thing was rather knowing how to overcome them:

Eso lo vi yo sí. ...Una vez íbamos nosotros de Róbalo para arriba, viento, y Felix, hijo de Milicic dijo “Voy a bajar acá un rato y voy a pedir que cambie el viento, le voy a llevar un poco de leña a éste”. Yo estaba escuchando y decía a quién será, así que sacó unos palitos de esos, astillas y se fue a tierra. Había una piedra, así alta en donde fue él a poner palitos arriba y empezó a hablar y le hacía con la mano así, echando el viento para arriba, después se bajó y dijo, “Ahora, un rato más va a calmar, porque ya lo

pedí”, él creía en lo que hacía. Y claro fue cierto, calmó el viento, ya no hubo viento en proa, calma, llegamos hasta Mejillones, eso lo vi yo (121).

Young people going through puberty were prepared for their future tasks and duties within the community. The instruction focused on caring for the elders, providing food and proper behavior towards one’s fellows. The biological changes in the young people’s bodies were usually explained by resorting to myths:

Cuando yo era niña nunca sabía que las guaguas nacían de uno, porque ellos decían que eso lo traía el mono, el *Hannuš*^[4], yo lo creía...

Una vez tuvo una guagua una mujer, y estaban conversando ellas haciéndome lesa a mí. Llegó mi tía Gertie y le dijo a mi mamá “Pucha, anoche que manera de correr”.

Y yo escuchaba.

“*Hannuš* pasó con una guagua al hombro, lo correteamos”.

Y como se reían, como si fuera de verdad.

“Corrimos y me pasé a caer, como es ligero *Hannuš* para correr, pero yo lo alcancé, pero la guagua no la quise criar yo, se la di a la otra mujer”.

“Y por qué” le decía mi mamá, “lo hubiese crecido usted no más”.

4 The *Hannuš* was a gigantic ape-man living in the woods that the Yagan were afraid of.



Photo 7: Úrsula at the tomb of relatives near Mejillones 2001 (Photo Mario Pfeifer).



Photo 8: Mourning paint (Photo Martin Gusinde).

“No, no porque ya no estoy para criar guaguas, así que se la di a ella no más”.

Y se reían ellas, porque estaban mintiendo. Y yo pensaba entre mí “Pucha, yo a esa guagua no lo voy a ver porque le tengo miedo, a lo mejor esa guagua es *Hannuš* igual”.

Después me dice mi mamá, estábamos en Mejillones, “Vamos a ver una guagua que pescaron ayer”, “A donde” dije yo, “Allá donde los Balfour”. Así que fuimos, llegamos allá, yo miraba de lejos y su mamá estaba acostada con su guagua. Así que me dijo mi mamá “Anda a ver la guagua”, “No, no” dije yo y la miré de lejos un poquito y como las guaguas cuando nacen siempre tienen pelitos acá en la cara así negrito, yo le tenía miedo (123–124).

The Yagan did not practice interment. The dead were taken to places where many rocks were available. They were placed on the ground with their modest personal belongings and rocks heaped over them, so wild animals would not be able to get at the bodies [Photo 7]. The ceremonies of mourning Cristina describes as follows:

Dicen que *loima* hacían cuando se muere o le matan a una persona, ahí cantan y bailan, eso es *loima*.

Nosotros veníamos no sé de qué parte con mi abuelo y veníamos llegando a Mejillones a la playa, abajo, donde estaba la casa de mi abuelo.

Y venían de allá, venían gente de allá de lado de la casa de Milicic, ahí estaban haciendo reunión ellos. Y cuando vieron que veníamos nosotros, ellos nos fueron a gritar, a avisar que fulano de tal falleció, que esos días había muerto alguien o lo habían matado no sé cómo. Y llegaron ellos, todos pintados con remos, cantando, gritando, gritándole a mi abuelo, cantando decían ellos “Falleció tal persona y nunca pensamos eso nosotros”, como llorando, lo decían en yagan, y nos mostraban el remo. Yo me asusté. Yo era chica, mi mamá ya no estaba. Yo vi eso.

Mi abuelo le gritó también del bote, tiró un poco el bote y yo me tiré abajo, me puse a llorar, porque tenía miedo, yo dije éstos le quieren pegar a mi abuelo, eso pensé yo, y no era nada que le iban a pegar, le venían a dar la noticia, todos pintados y con esa cuestión de *uška*^[5] [Photo 8].

Después ya no se hizo más *loima*. Pero siempre se creía en Dios, en *Watauinéiwa*... (125–126).

The most important ceremony the Yagan had was the initiation ritual. After in 1935 one boy died in a fatal accident when his group was felling trees for firewood for the ceremony in the *Čiáxaus* hut, the ritual was forbidden by the Chilean authorities.

El *Čiáxaus* era para enseñar a los niños, a ser respetuoso, como una escuela, que sea trabajador y cuando uno tiene una cosa, por ejemplo, se iba a buscar *chaura*^[6] tenía repartir a todos, aunque sea de a poquito, pero para todos, para enseñar eso, varias cosas bonitas, que nunca hay que tener un desprecio a un anciano. A tener respeto, todo eso y ayudar cuando ve a un anciano ayudarle, traerle agua, leña.

No te mostré una vez en Mejillones cuando anduvimos arriba donde tenía casa mi papá, ahí estaba la choza del *Čiáxaus*. Y ahí fue donde le aplastó un palo al chico, ahí murió Dionisio, cuando cortaban palos para leña.

Yo lo vi, yo estaba ahí, y nos prohibieron, nos dijeron que nunca más hagamos el *Čiáxaus* porque sino, íbamos a ir muriendo todos así. Los carabineros de Navarino lo prohibieron. Por eso que ya nunca más lo hicieron eso (127).

In 2003 her older sister Úrsula Calderón died. Once again, the heavens darkened for grandmother Cristina, who had seen her whole family pass away, one after the other. Each time a Yagan died – whether Benito Sarmiento, Grandfather Felipe or Rosa Yagan – the unvoiced question would be: Was this the last one? One day her granddaughter asked

5 *Uška* denotes the headdress made from feathers of wild geese, which was worn as a mark of mourning.

6 *Chaura* (*Gaultheria mucronata*, Prickly Heath) is a South American shrub with edible berries in, formerly eaten mixed with seal oil.



Photo 9: 3 generations Yagan (from right to left) – grandmother Cristina, granddaughter Cristina, and great-granddaughter Loimuska 2014 (Photo Oliver Vogel).

Cristina, “Are you the last of the Yagan?” “No, of course not,” she replied, “I am neither the only one nor the last one!” (Photo 9)

(Translation from German by Angelika Striegel)

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(Re-)Constructing History

A Review Essay on Three Mapuche Examples

Ulrike Bieker

I

The Mapuche of southern Chile and Argentina are well known to Romance language students from reading Alonso de Ercilla y Zúñiga’s epic “La Araucana” from 1569 which starts with these lines: “Canto I. El cual declara el asiento y descripción de la Provincia de Chile y Estado de Arauco, con las costumbres y modos de guerra que los naturales tienen; y asimismo trata en suma la entrada y conquista que los españoles hicieron hasta que Arauco se comenzó a rebelar” (Ercilla y Zúñiga 1972: 29). This cornerstone of Mapuche historiography, especially their resistance to Spanish colonialism, remains perceptible to this day. It invokes lingering questions like, who writes history and what is its subject? What archives of knowledge are used?