



# IDENTITY AT THE MILITARIZED BORDER: *MI MEJOR ENEMIGO* (CHILE, 2005)

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the representation of borders in Latin American film through a close reading of one film of the New South American Cinema movement, *Mi Mejor Enemigo* (Chile, 2005). The border is posited as heterotopic which acknowledges the multi-layered power dynamics imbued in borderlands which profoundly affect how people travel through them. Through film analysis an understanding of how the characters in *Mi Mejor Enemigo* are affected and shaped by the experience of crossing heterotopic borders becomes apparent. An engagement with Third Cinema and feminist film theory highlights how nationalism and gender become heightened at the border. The characters become regarded as 'others' and are affected by their spatial movement with labels based on their nationality, gender, ethnicity or sexuality ascribed to them.

**Keywords:** New South America Cinema; Chilean Film; Identity; Borders; Third Cinema; Feminism

## South American Borders: Challenges and Opportunities for Filmmakers \_\_\_\_\_

*Mi Mejor Enemigo* (2005) by Chilean director Álex Bowen follows five Chilean soldiers and their Sergeant as they are sent to

defend a border region in Southern Patagonia during the Beagle Conflict of 1978. In the film the protagonist Rojas and his comrades set out into the desolate pampas with a dog tagging along when they become lost and dig a trench

for protection until they orient themselves. Much to their horror they realize that overnight their Argentine enemies have positioned themselves in a trench nearby, proudly waving their national flag. Despite initial hostility and fear, over the next few days the enemies form a kind of friendship, exchanging gifts between their trenches and even facing-off in a football match. This relationship is unsustainable however as tensions mount and just after peace has been declared a shootout commences with a Chilean fatality. As Garate (2005) writes, "the film is far from being an epic Hollywood war movie. On the contrary, it is an intimate story focusing on a small group of men trying to find meaning in their lives in the vastness of the pampas" (p.2).

This film is situated here in border theory, film theory, and work by geographers on film followed by an in-depth discussion of the relationship between identity, the border, and representation in the film. Geographers working in the global north have largely neglected South American film and this paper seeks to address how the representation of identity formation at the border is inherently spatial and therefore important to geographers. This paper will frame borders as heterotopic spaces in which individuals who come into contact with a border are profoundly affected by the multi-layered nature of that space. Through employing Third Cinema and feminist film theories certain markers of identity become apparent and this paper assesses how and why this occurs. Identity formation is spatially

uneven and happens disproportionately at borders where there can be intense conflict between the 'self' and 'other' on multiple scales from the individual to the nation.

Latin America is defined by its borders. Torn between a culturally and almost linguistically homogenous identity and numerous national, regional and ethnic identities, the continent is at once both borderless and composed *wholly by borders*. Richard (1996) even goes as far to call the whole of Latin America a border, as it is so often perceived as being culturally peripheral in the global imagination. Despite claims of Latin America being a borderless continent, there are in reality anxieties and struggles over the right to demarcate or cross borders due to a complex history of colonialism and violence. The bordering of Latin America first occurred in the imagination of early European explorers and the subsequent mapping of borders made it a continent "fashioned rather than found", argues Merrell (2004 p.4). This seemingly simple process of drawing lines on maps in faraway offices has profound implications for the land on which they lie and Latin American borders today are far from simple.

Borders are complex spaces of juxtaposition which are deceptively multi-faceted. Coleman (2005) thus terms borderlands, 'heterotopic pseudo-countries'. Heterotopia is a useful concept which makes sense of space as imbued with often hidden layers of meaning and exclusion. Foucault first introduced his conception of heterotopia in

1966-67 and stated that "In general, one does not gain entry to a heterotopian emplacement as if to a windmill... One can enter only with a certain permission and after a certain number of gestures have been performed" (1998 p.183). Reading the border as a heterotopic space exposes previously invisible characteristics of the power dynamics at play here. The heterogeneity of exclusion, conflict, and power, in all its superimposed layers, can become apparent explicitly *relative to* the metropole. The border can encapsulate seemingly discordant characteristics as "The heterotopia has the ability to juxtapose in a single real place several emplacements that are incompatible in themselves" (Foucault 1998 p.181). Borders are "a place of feedback, exchange and process" (Welchman 1996, p.178) and Hamid Naficy (2001), in his work on hybridity, argued that 'border consciousness' becomes multiperspectival and tolerant of ambiguity by shunning binary oppositions in favour of 'a third optique'. It is this heterotopic view of borders, as problematic and chaotic, and rich because of it, that is adopted here. The notion of heterotopia has been criticized in geography, mainly for its contradictory overuse in inappropriate spaces and even Foucault never directly returned to this concept in his later work. However, it still provides a useful foundation from which to conceptualize how we can make sense of conflict and othering in the borderlands.

Traditionally thought of as simply protective and fortifying "buffer zones" (Herzog 1992 p.ix), the perception of borders

being the *periphery* belies their *centrality* as spaces of violence, instability and conflict, yet also spaces for the fusing of rich cultural spaces. Barth (1969) stressed that identities are formed first and foremost by contact with other groups, at the boundaries of cultures, where cultural mixing is at its most intense. This has been termed "transboundary social formation" by Herzog (1990 p.135) whereby the overlapping of political, economic and cultural networks in borderlands creates unique social relationships. This means that South America which has over 18,000 miles of borders, spaces which have been termed "pressure points" by Bolin (1992 p.172), has multiple spaces of overlap and intensified cultural fusion.

When characters cross borders in South American film, their identities, whether gender, ethnicity, or nationality, shift, transform or become exaggerated. Travel through space shapes subject formation (De Lauretis 1994) especially across borders which are spaces where, through conflict, 'othering' is often made visible and individuals are forced to consider their *selfhood*. Therefore representation of the self and the other is bound together with issues of exclusion and immobility at borders, whether real or imagined. Aldama (2005), who addresses themes of gender, sexuality, and ethnicity in Latin American film, outlines the Derridean and Lacanian viewpoint that "there is no truth or origin about anything, let alone, race, sex and gender- only performance and subjects produced in and through (discursive) performance." (p.39) This

gives the individual agency over their body so bodies can be seen, to use Foucault's term as "vehicles of power" (1980 p.98). Some identity markers rely on bodily characteristics which lead to persistent fictions and stereotypes in film (Mendible 2007, Berg 2002). They can homogenize and flatten bodily difference in a continent in which difference is the only constant (Valdivia 2007) and belittle the heavily raced history of conquest and colonialism in Latin America.

Further work on the politics of identity has been contributed by geographers. Cresswell and Dixon's (2002) work on mobility and film has emphasized that identities are not essentialist, they do change over place and space. If identity is conceptualized as a *process of identification* (Hall 2007) then we can examine the role spatial movement has in influencing this process. Examining the representation of these identities is an exploration of how representation as a constitutive practice is complicit in power relations (Duncan 2000). Non-essentialist understandings of identity whereby identities are conceived of as the outcome of power-laden social processes (Pratt 2000) helps us to understand how space is produced and represented, in this case, through *Mi Mejor Enemigo*.

The representation of borderlands is especially important here because *Mi Mejor Enemigo* is a fictional portrayal of real historical events tied to actions of the state. The film is based on the 1978 Beagle Conflict between

Argentina and Chile and therefore portrays real landscapes, which "speaks a geography, a history, a memory, a meaning" (Aitken and Zonn 1994 p.20). Films dealing with difficult real-life subject matter are important for communities in helping them come to terms with a traumatic past, to understand differing perspectives, and to problematize stereotypes, places, and simplified histories. Films construct the past with a legitimacy of their own and deal seriously with the relationship of the past to the present (Rosenstone 1995) as well as making places in history real. An in depth study of *Mi Mejor Enemigo* opens up these wounds of troubled histories, examines why certain representations occur and the wider significance this has for society.

Cinema arrived in South America six months after the 1895 Lumière premiere in Paris (King et al. 1993) and helped to create an advanced state of cultural modernity on the continent (Shaw and Dennison 2005b, López 2000). National cinemas developed at differing paces across the continent but by the 1960s the 'New Latin American Cinema' was born. This movement was "largely devoted to the denunciation of misery and the celebration of protest" (Chanan 1996 p.740), positive social action and the reworking of oppressive discourses in film and society more widely. In direct lineage from this movement, the term 'New South American Cinema' entered popular usage in 2008, exemplified by Demetrious Matheou's (2010) definitive work on the subject. The New South American Cinema

differs from the earlier New Latin American Cinema in terms of being less militant and more concerned with “curiosity about identity-personal, national, continental” (Matheou 2010 p.12). The films of the movement tend to share a concern with spatiality and mobility (Fojas 2011), introspection, and gritty subject matter. While national distinctions cannot be ignored, New South American Cinema has been born from shared experiences of colonialism, repressive dictatorships, corrupt governments, and economic crises. Brazilian director Walter Salles states that this new wave is a result of South American directors finally being able to express themselves without fear of persecution and so these films are capturing the birth of the new cinema (Matheou 2010).

Chilean film took off in the 1950s when the Universidad de Chile established a cinema club (King 1990) and a cinematic culture was born and sustained until film production was effectively destroyed by the Pinochet government in 1973. The military regime forced many Chilean filmmakers into exile and damaged Chilean filmmaking so badly that with the transition democracy in 1990, national cinema was effectively starting from scratch (Matheou 2010). In recent years the national film industry has strengthened despite low budgets and little legislation promoting the industry. Films have therefore relied on international funding. *Mi Mejor Enemigo* is Álex Bowen’s first full-length feature film and is a Chilean/Argentine/Spanish co-production supported by a major funding prize from

Ibermedia. The very production of this film therefore is part of memory work between Chile and Argentina, helping to consign a troubled past to history by showing the futility of war and the potential for divergence between individuals beliefs and their countries nationalistic beliefs.

### **Framing Cinema**\_\_\_\_\_

To analyse how *Mi Mejor Enemigo* represents identity and the heterotopic border, formal film theory and the work of geographers are employed as lenses. Choices in filmmaking such as camera angles, lighting, mise-en-scène, dialogue and numerous others can all be understood through these lenses such as ‘Third Cinema’ and feminist film theories (Monaco 2009).

The term ‘Third Cinema’ was coined in 1969 by Solanas and Getino who wanted to demystify neocolonialism in Latin America and develop a new film language that reflected and advanced national concerns. While Third Cinema has closer ties to the New Latin American Cinema of the 1960s it has undoubtedly influenced contemporary New South American Cinema.

Third Cinema describes films that attempt to subvert the mainstream reproduction of bourgeois values and reject capitalist sources for funding and distribution. Stam and Spence (2004) believe that it is necessary to acknowledge the disparity between Western film production and production strategies that

are available in the 'Third World'. They stress that audiences must take this into account when watching non-Western cinema which can rarely achieve the 'Hollywood effect', especially as Third Cinema is the only major film theory to be born out of a non-Euro-American context (Guneratne 2003). Recent South American film has however managed to replicate Western standards of production and has embraced capitalist sources in order to raise funding and disseminate their films.

Third Cinema has often failed in its representation of women both in film and film production, leading to my simultaneous implementation of feminist film theory. Early theorists such as Mulvey (1975) and Johnston (1973) showed the advantages of applying feminist film theory to better understand the representation of gender and discourses of power through film. Mulvey weaves psychoanalytic and feminist film theory to examine sexual difference, erotic ways of looking and spectacle and how women in narrative film are bearers of meaning, not makers of meaning. These gazes by the characters and the camera, argues Bordwell (1989), establish power relations within film. Kaplan's (2004) retrospective view of feminist film theory successfully focuses on how the field has at times neglected minority and marginalized women but, as McHugh and Sobchack (2004) have shown, a modern global perspective is helping to change this. This more nuanced feminist film theory is more sensitive

to 'Other' experiences and has influenced how I study the portrayal of women in the film.

Film analysis through these theoretical approaches will also be grounded in work by geographers, even though geographers have paid disproportionate attention to films produced in the West (Rose 2000b). Geography and film can be seen as intertwined, as Gamir and Manuel (2007) claim, films have, "contributed to a new level of geographic culture" (p.407) and have emphasized "the importance of cinematic representation to understanding our *place* in the world" (Aitken and Zonn 1994 p.x). Geographers have also focused on film industries as the geography of film is a complex "production-consumption matrix" (Macdonald 1994 p.27) which interconnects places and meanings across a global film industry.

Importantly to this study, geographers have noted the significance of the border in film as Escher (2006) writes, "the cinematic space of a movie is created as a result of continuously crossing borders" (p.308). Geography also helps with a reading of borderlands because "cinematic landscapes relate to the analogous nature of representation" (Harper and Rayner 2010 p.17).

To ground these theories, qualitative microanalysis coding is employed to break the films down into themes, styles and occurrences based on a combination of theoretical grounding and preliminary readings of the films. A coding structure tailored to the research question helps to create order (Boeije 2010)

and make analytic interpretations which can

illuminate studied life (Charmaz 2006).



Plate. 1. The five soldiers (L-R: Orozco, Mancilla, Almonacid, Rojas and Salazar) with Sergeant Ferrer (far right) as they venture into the pampas. *Mi Mejor Enemigo* Dir. Álex Bowen. 2005. DVD

## Situating History: The 1978 Beagle

### Conflict

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*Mi Mejor Enemigo* opens with the statement, "1978. That was a bad year." This was the year of the Beagle Conflict between Argentina and Chile. The entire Chile/Argentina border was disputed until 1899 and the relatively recent events of 1978 illustrate that the control of borders remains central to the political agenda of Latin American nations (Van Dijck et al. 2000). As Lindsley (1987) outlines, the conflict was over three islands; Picton, Lennox and Nueva, which had been Chilean occupied since 1892 while

Argentina held maritime rights. Argentina first disputed Chilean claims in 1915 and a political stalemate ensued. In 1971, the governments submitted the border dispute for arbitration by the British monarch Queen Elizabeth II. The British judgment was issued in 1977, by which point both Argentina and Chile were led by military governments, Jorge Rafael Videla and Augusto Pinochet respectively (Domínguez et al. 2003). Eventually it was decided that the International Court of Justice at The Hague would submit a decision to the British monarch who could choose to accept or reject the award



but not to alter it. The ICJ made a ruling which largely favoured Chile. Argentina, refusing to accept anything less than its preferred boundary position, rejected this decision, and both countries began to initiate military action with Chile as the inferior adversary (Church 2008). The Beagle channel was important economically for both countries in terms of fishing, minerals and petroleum (Garrett 1985), but national pride was also at stake. Luckily, amidst this climate of fear the conflict was dissipated before full-blown war materialised and the Treaty of Peace and Friendship was ratified by Argentina in 1984 (Church 2008) giving the islands to Chile but maritime rights to Argentina. The intervention of the Roman Catholic Church who held a position of enormous prestige in the two countries was crucial. Pope John Paul II agreed to mediate and both Chile and Argentina conceded to his authority. This significance of Catholicism on the continent is shown by one scene in the film just before the Pope intervenes and a bloody war appears unavoidable. At base camp the Lieutenant leads his men in an *Our Father* and simultaneously in the pampas, one of the Chilean soldiers, Almonacid (Andres Olea) clutches his rosary, squeezes his eyes shut and mutters the Hail Mary.

Chile understandably feared Argentine expansion as Chile had conceded land before and the ribbon of a country could not feasibly lose much more (Garrett 1985). The Malvinas/Falklands conflict with Great Britain made Argentina more readily willing to settle its

conflict with Chile as did the lure of the desirable rich oil deposits in the Tierra del Fuego area (Herzog 1992).

*Mi Mejor Enemigo* is set in the few weeks when war seems imminent and so both countries send out small bands of soldiers to secure the border. Because the Beagle Conflict occurred in state offices and in the borderlands, the general population was removed from its events. As the protagonist in the film, Rojas (Nicolas Saavedra), says about the three islands he is defending with his life, "I didn't even know they existed."

Representation through film is important therefore to provide images that make such events real. War films, argues Richards (2011), fix boundaries about the event in the collective, usually national, imaginary. Film is an important medium for reflecting and shaping the way we understand the world and war cinema in particular forces us to become morally engaged with political violence (Slocum 2006). Even though Álex Bowen was influenced by US war films (Richards 2011) it is exceedingly rare for Latin American films to reify war and violence in any comparable register. Far from glorifying the events, *Mi Mejor Enemigo* portrays the Beagle Conflict as futile and pointless which is contrary to the national propaganda of 1978. The film is therefore following in the footsteps of Third Cinema which argued that film should reconstruct historical events to subvert the hegemonic discourses produced by repressive state leaders in the Third World. Getino (1984)



argued that film should challenge national discourses but still be close to national culture, exalting national patriotism while distancing itself from political patriotism. In this sense at least, *Mi Mejor Enemigo* is a film in the Third Cinema spirit.

In *Mi Mejor Enemigo*, the Chilean and Argentine soldiers become self-consciously patriotic, they embody their nationalities. Additionally, through approaching the border the men are forced to personify *machismo*, to be action-orientated and masculine to protect their borderlands. This section will also assess how two other characters we meet in the film, a young woman and a gaucho, become inscribed with certain gendered identities and how the sole indigenous character is represented.

### **Bourgeoning Nationalism at the Border**

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Borders may only be “imagined projections of territorial power” demarcated from the capitals (Baud 2000 p.42) but they define national identity (Van Dijck et al. 2000). This becomes apparent in the film as the young soldiers become defined and fixed as either Chilean or Argentine in their efforts to defend the border. *Mi Mejor Enemigo* highlights the futility of this nationalism through the mulish jingoism of Orozco (Victor Montero) the Chilean ‘real soldier’ who is disgusted by the notion that the Argentines are worthy of any respect or friendship which is juxtaposed with the good-humoured Salazar (Juan Pablo Miranda) who illustrates the similarities

between the enemies by sharing cigarettes, tea, and pornography. Leaving their ordinary daily lives for one of a soldier in the inhospitable pampas inevitably forces the Chileans to bond with one another. They were strangers when they first set foot in the borderlands which is evident through the camerawork. The first time the Chileans eat together the camera cuts sharply between their faces but later on the camera pans smoothly between them showing them to be a united and cohesive military unit. Similarly, Sergeant Ferrer (Erto Pantoja), who at the beginning of the film uses the formal ‘usted’, switches to the informal ‘tú’ when addressing his men midway through the film.

Before the Chileans come into contact with the Argentines, various scenes project Chilean notions about nationalism and the border. For example, the soldiers discuss economic migration from Chile to Argentina in times of hardship. Almonacid, a placid indigenous islander, explains that older people leave his island to shear sheep in Argentine Patagonia to make ends meet. Orozco is repulsed by such behavior and retorts with “call yourselves Chileans?” Furthermore, the men posit ideas of Argentine inferiority such as the quality of their meat and all vow to kill at least five Argentines each. It also becomes clear as the Chileans talk that those who inhabit the borderlands are detached from conflict between the nations and often have family on both sides of the border. This causes Mancilla (Pablo Valledor) to muse, “so that’s why we’re all Northerners. They take people from the North

to make sure we'll fight." This raises issues of regionalism in the film, Chile is not a homogenous country where an equal level of Argentine hatred is felt throughout but there are invisible borders whereby lived experiences reflect how Chileans feel about their neighbours.

However, as the film progresses the Chileans appear to become increasingly aware of their status as pawns in a nationalistic game. The Beagle Conflict was a war between two military dictators, Pinochet and Videla who both wanted to distract their populations from hardship and repression with nationalistic fervour. *Mi Mejor Enemigo* shows how ordinary people on the periphery of political decisions were brought to the fore. The Chileans discuss the potential rewards if their side wins, pondering whether they will receive money, medals or a pension. Salazar replies despondently, "if we win, sure. But if we come second, nothing."

This realization softens the Chileans initial hostility to their enemy. When one Chilean, Mancilla, is injured, the soldiers are put in an uncomfortable position. The Chileans debate whether or not to ask the Argentines in the proximate trench for penicillin and an almost identical debate occurs within the Argentine trench over whether to give it. These scenes highlight how similar, in age, appearance and character the two sides are. This contact over the penicillin leads to increasing communication between the sides and they

even engage in a football match, using their guns for goalposts.

The director Álex Bowen was influenced by the legendary 1914 'Christmas Truce' between German and British soldiers whereby both sides played an amicable football match (Richards 2011). Football is intensely significant in Latin America, according to Shaw and Dennison (2005a), "soccer has aided repressive governments by providing an escape valve for social frustrations." (p.82) Meanwhile, Archetti (1996) argues that "in Argentina, football is not only an eminently masculine social arena but it is also associated historically with the construction of national identity." (p.34) The borderland pitch is a heterotopic space in the way this nationalist pastime is re-enacted in miniature. This sporting cold war is deemed to be "a historic chance to beat the Argentineans at football" by the Chilean sergeant until the match is suspended by military planes rocketing over the makeshift pitch. It is a stark reminder of the gravity of the situation and the absurdity of this amity.

However, this goodwill emerges again later in the film when a passing sheep-herder gives the men one of his flock to share. The soldiers reluctantly decide to roast the sheep together over a fire in a spirit of camaraderie, a *fiesta* in which patriotic Orozco refuses to take part.

When their bellies are filled the men compare their national dances, the Argentine *tango* versus *la cueca* from Chile. La cueca, is a courtship dance of seduction which has become

an expression of national identity at home and abroad (Knudsen 2001). As with the football match, the enemies are asserting their heterotopic nationalism and their claims to the border as well as asserting their masculinity. Both sides postulate their dances as the more masculine. Salazar says of *la cueca*, "it's like your tango, but less girly." Salazar calls up the overweight mild-mannered Almonacid with "Almonacid, you are my girl. You guys, sing 'Fat Man Loyola'... *la cueca* is all about seducing the girl." Almonacid makes the perfect substitute woman, short, curvaceous and submissive, it

would be impossible to imagine Salazar dancing with any of the other men without compromising his heterosexuality. Sergeant Ferrer watches the national loyalties of his men dissolve as the enemies joke and laugh over this comical dance and the border fades into insignificance. As posited by Augelli (1980), borders are spaces where loyalties can become blurred, and this perturbs Orozco, the 'real soldier'. He says to Sergeant Ferrer, "Do you think it'll be easy to kill after this?" Ferrer replies solemnly, "There are some things you do without knowing why. This is one of them."



Plate. 2. Salazar (left) dances *la cueca* with Almonacid (right) as the other soldiers sing and clap. *Mi Mejor Enemigo* Dir. Álex Bowen. 2005. DVD

As well as this concern with nationalism and the border, *Mi Mejor Enemigo* is also about

*borderlessness*, about being lost in a hybrid space which may be demarcated by maps in the metropole but is invisible on the ground. This

fear of being lost, worsened by an accident whereby the group's sole compass is smashed, is juxtaposed with the precisely drawn maps at base camp which appear in almost every scene set there. The lieutenant at base camp is fixated on locating the soldiers and asks Ferrer, "can you confirm you are on Chilean soil?" As Tom Conley (2007b) has argued, maps have a narrative function in film and act as a border between fiction and reality showing the similarity or dissimilarity between the film and the real landscape and they also, as extrinsic elements, help viewers get their bearing (Conley 2007a). The maps in *Mi Mejor Enemigo* refer to real Patagonian landscapes and the intricately drawn markers on the maps at base camp serve to underscore the disorientation of the soldiers.

When communication commences between the two sides, the Argentine Sergeant says to his Chilean counterpart, Ferrer, "neither you nor I have the slightest idea where the border is." This state of not knowing is unbearable for the Sergeants so they decide to demarcate their own border with fire, literally making it the Tierra del Fuego [Land of Fire] as Southern Patagonia is termed. The fierce Southern winds begin to blow the fire off

course; the pampas refuses to be subjected to nations. In the words of Rojas, "the Patagonian wind decided to mark its own border." In the blind faith of nationalism this fire-drawn border becomes more important than the soldiers' lives as when the Argentine sergeant tells Ferrer to move his men or else they'll die, Ferrer retorts, "Our mission is to defend this line, and that's what we're going to do." This attempt to tame the inhospitable pampas shows the extent to which the Chileans are out of place in these foreign Southern lands. The pampas, described by the Lieutenant as "fucked up", can almost be seen as an extra character in *Mi Mejor Enemigo*. The film exalts in the colours and temperament of the pampas with many shots of the soldiers tiny and insignificant in the vast plains. As Richards (2011) describes it, "the sense of dislocation among the northern Chileans sent to the far South is palpable." (p.165) This ridicules the idea of attempting to discipline the terrain especially combined with the soundtrack which is often simply the harsh winds propelling over the barren grasslands. The pampas are configured both as a place of tension as shown through rapid-movement shots and tense music but also as a melancholic static space with fixed extreme long shots and sombre music.



Plate. 3. Four personalities of the pampas. *Mi Mejor Enemigo* Dir. Álex Bowen. 2005. DVD

## Becoming Macho and the Male Gaze \_\_\_\_\_

The border, and the ability to dominate it, is posited as highly masculine with all but one character being male. This disproportionate number of male characters reflects the military setting with men seen as more capable of

fortifying and defending the border. In times of conflict the border is heavily gendered and infused with *machismo*.

The one female character in the film, Gloria (Fernanda Arrejola), receives just 1:50 minutes screentime. The romantic interest of our protagonist Rojas, she is a thinly drawn character who is only commented on for her appearance. This is emphasized in the first scene when Rojas takes a photograph of Gloria.





Plate. 4. Rojas photographs the object of his affections, Gloria, outside the café where she works. *Mi Mejor Enemigo* Dir. Álex Bowen. 2005. DVD

Rojas takes this photograph to the pampas and Gloria is therefore constantly subject to the gaze of Rojas and his companions. Salazar tells Rojas that if he spits on the photo then within the month Gloria will be his. When it seems that death is inevitable for the Chileans, Rojas takes out the photo and duly spits on it.

This exemplifies claims from feminist film theory that women are always images to be looked at in cinema (De Lauretis 1987), and they are looked at passively due to their gender whereas the male is the active looker (Mulvey 1975). In contrast, the male characters are active, assertive, and exaggeratedly masculine. Such ideas were extended very convincingly by Melhuus and Stølen (1996) in their study of Latin American gender imagery.

They concluded that economic, political and cultural processes on the continent

are inescapably linked with gender. Perhaps the image most associated with Latin American men is that of *machismo*.

The notion of machismo is central to the construction of social and subjective identities in Latin America (Pick 1993). Stereotypical Latin American machismo abounds in *Mi Mejor Enemigo* as the soldiers are keen to assert their masculinities. It is the heterotopic nature of borders which cause this masculinity to become so exaggerated. In Lafazani Olga's words, "Heterotopias are something like counter-sites in which all the other real sites that can be found within a given culture are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted." (2013 p.5) In this synecdochical view of borders, the machismo which is ever-present in Chilean society becomes even more highly valued at the instable border whereby only dominance and

aggression can protect the feminine interior. Drawing from Foucault, the border as a parallel space of conflict allows for the utopia of a conflict-free interior to be realized.

Machismo is partly defined by fear of homosexuality (Creed 1992). According to Foster's (2004) extensive work in queer theory, patriarchal society is founded on heteronormativity and so homophobia is employed as a weapon with which to defend itself. This homophobia is present in one scene when Rojas and Salazar are searching for water. Rojas photographs Salazar who says "come on Rojas, take the photo, they'll think we're gay!

How did I look?" "Gorgeous." Rojas replies. To counter this fear of homosexuality the men of both sides emphasize their heterosexuality and virility. Machismo is made visible through sexual prowess and being action-orientated and aggressive (Merrell 2004). This comes in the form of the Argentines making sexual gestures towards the opposition's dog and stating that "Chilean bitches always prefer us." Later on, when a friendship is budding, Salazar takes pornography over to the Argentine trench and makes sexual hand gestures. The conflicting nations are able to find common ground in their heterosexuality.



Plate. 5. An Argentine soldier makes sexual gestures when the dog goes over to the enemy trench. *Mi Mejor Enemigo* Dir. Álex Bowen. 2005. DVD

However consciously the young men try to embody machismo in the name of their respective nations, there is one character who

highlights their futility. At one point when both sides are huddled in their trenches a *gaucho* (Tallo Mancilla) rides calmly and confidently



between them. The gaucho is imbued with significance as an emblem against European colonizers and their culture. This post-

independence exaltation of the gaucho has been emphasized most strongly through the 1872 epic poem *Martín Fierro* by José Hernández.



Plate. 6. The gaucho drives his sheep through no-man's-land. *Mi Mejor Enemigo* Dir. Álex Bowen. 2005. DVD

As he drives his sheep through the pampas the gaucho motions to the men that they are welcome to a straggling sheep. The herder here is the epitome of masculinity; rugged and silent, a supranational figure who appears to belong to the pampas, not either nation. The gaucho transcends their petty squabbles and shakes his head disdainfully as the young soldiers pounce on and fight over his gift. Those who inhabit the Argentina/Chile borderlands are often far removed from national politics (Bolin 1992), and instead, contrary to claims from the metropole, the border can be a place of harmonious coexistence.

Another borderless character is the dog which follows the Chileans into the pampas and later acts as the go-between for the Chileans and Argentines. The dog, exempt from human loyalties to borders happily traverses the no-man's-land carrying tea and cigarettes between the trenches. The film's director Álex Bowen said in an interview, "the canine element is an irony: the most human figure in the story is a bitch... paradoxical, no?" (Richards 2011). This freedom from geopolitics makes a mockery of the soldiers so entrapped by their nationalisms.

## Indigenous Chile \_\_\_\_\_

Ethnicity does not become a significant issue at the border because the soldiers are united by a nationalism which necessitates precedence. However, there is one exception. All the soldiers are Hispanic/mestizo in appearance apart from one, Almonacid, a young man from the island Chiloé. Almonacid is the only indigenous character and, as is a common stereotype in South American film, is portrayed as being closer to nature than the other men. For example, Almonacid predicts the onset of the rain because of the warm North wind and quietly whittles wood while the others clean their guns. In one of the final scenes, Almonacid is fatally shot in a flurry of repressed anger and frustration resulting in gunfire from both sides. The final scene sees the surviving Chileans toasting their friend and declaring him "the only hero of a war without history. The only hero of a war that never was." The least macho and nationalistic character becomes a martyr for his nation and a symbol for the futility of war. The fact that the only death was of the indigenous soldier is worryingly reminiscent of the 'whitewashing' which disproportionately occurs in South American film. This only reinforces notions that indigenous populations are not tied to the nation.

## Conclusions \_\_\_\_\_

Representation of hybrid border spaces through film elucidates an understanding of the

culture in which *Mi Mejor Enemigo* was made and suggests how crossing borders affects people, at least in an imagined, fictional sense. A close reading of the film examined how the characters who cross borders become subjects upon which labels are ascribed from outside. The border becomes inscribed on the body and the mind from markers of identity based on appearance such as ethnicity and gender as well as markers based on contact with the 'others' such as machismo and sexuality. Through spatial movement these identity makers become fixed.

The primary message about border crossings in *Mi Mejor Enemigo* is fear. Fear of crossing the border unknowingly, fear of not knowing precisely where the border is, and fear of those who confidently inhabit the hybrid borderlands. In a heterotopic sense, the greatest fears of the metropole are concentrated in the vulnerable borderlands. Heterotopias exist solely in relation to other places, in this sense the border is explicitly everything the metropole is not while simultaneously containing many of the metropole's characteristics. The peripheral nature of borders is what leads them to be unstable and conflict-ridden relative to the comparative homogeneity of non-borderland spaces. The border forces certain characteristics out of the Chilean soldiers: nationalism and machismo most evidently, and their spatial movement towards the border fixes these identity markers, defining them. However the film also attempts to deconstruct the fixed markers by making a hero

out of the least stereotypically macho soldier, Almonacid, and showing the inanity of nationalism through the mirroring of the two sets of enemies.

Feminist film theory was helpful in understanding the overwhelming pressure of machismo in a patriarchal society and how the one female character, Gloria, is subjected to the male gaze. The relationship between New South American Cinema and Third Cinema was more complicated because the film retains some aspects of the aims of Third Cinema such as contesting oppression and subverting hegemonic narratives while departing from it in other ways in terms of funding sources and commitment to Western standards of production. Third Cinema's radical aims have therefore been reconceptualised for the New South American Cinema, keeping the essence of the anti-colonial aims but making them relevant today. Many types of borders are crossed in New South American Cinema in many different ways. New South American Cinema is born from border crossings and the spirit of this legacy continues on. The borderlands of South America are open wounds, they are difficult, hybrid spaces which affect people. Even the most *macho* of soldiers.

## Note

### Film Details:

Director: Álex Bowen  
 Screenplay: Álex Bowen (with input from Paula del Fierro, Jorge Duran, Fernando Labarca, Julio Rojas & Beltran Stingo)  
 Producers: Hugo Castro Fau & Adrian Solar  
 Cinematography: Jose Maria Hermo & Patricio Riquelmo

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IDENTIDADE E A FRONTEIRA MILITARIZADA: *MI MEJOR ENEMIGO* (CHILE, 2005)

RESUMO: ESTE ARTIGO EXAMINA A REPRESENTAÇÃO DAS FRONTEIRAS DO CINEMA LATINO-AMERICANO POR MEIO DE UMA LEITURA ATENTA DE UM FILME DO MOVIMENTO NOVO CINEMA LATINO-AMERICANO, *MI MEJOR ENEMIGO* (CHILE, 2005). A FRONTEIRA É CONCEBIDA COMO HETEROTÓPICA, RECONHECENDO AS DINÂMICAS E MÚLTIPLAS CAMADAS DE PODER IMBUÍDAS NAS FRENTE DE POVOAMENTO, AS QUAIS AFETAM PROFUNDAMENTE A FORMA COMO AS PESSOAS VIAJAM ATRAVÉS DESTES ESPAÇOS. ATRAVÉS DA ANÁLISE FÍLMICA, COMPREENDE-SE COMO OS PERSONAGENS EM *MI MEJOR ENEMIGO* SÃO AFETADOS E MOLDADOS PELA EXPERIÊNCIA DE CRUZAR FRONTEIRAS HETEROTÓPICAS. UM ENGAJAMENTO COM O TERCEIRO CINEMA E A TEORIA DO CINEMA FEMINISTA DESTACA COMO O NACIONALISMO E O GÊNERO TORNAM-SE INTENSIFICADOS NA FRONTEIRA. OS PERSONAGENS SÃO CONSIDERADO COMO "OUTROS" E TEM SEU MOVIMENTO ESPACIAL AFETADOS POR RÓTULOS BASEADOS NA NACIONALIDADE, GÊNERO, ETNIA OU SEXUALIDADE QUE LHE É ATRIBUÍDA.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: NOVO CINEMA LATINO-AMERICANO, CINEMA CHILENO, IDENTIDADE, FRONTEIRAS, TERCEIRO CINEMA, FEMINISMO

IDENTIDAD Y FRONTERAS MILITARIZADA: *MI MEJOR ENEMIGO* (CHILE, 2005)

RESUMEN: ESTE ARTÍCULO EXAMINA LA REPRESENTACIÓN DE LAS FRONTERAS DEL CINE LATINOAMERICANO A TRAVÉS DE UNA LECTURA ATENTA DE UNA PELÍCULA PERTENECIENTE AL MOVIMIENTO DEL NUEVO CINE LATINOAMERICANO, *MI MEJOR ENEMIGO* (CHILE, 2005). LA FRONTERA SE CONCEBE COMO HETEROTÓPICA, RECONOCIENDO LA DINÁMICA Y MÚLTIPLES ESTRATOS DE PODER IMPREGNADOS EN LAS FRENTE DE COLONIZACIÓN, QUE AFECTAN PROFUNDAMENTE LA FORMA EN QUE LA GENTE VIAJA A TRAVÉS DE ESTOS ESPACIOS. A TRAVÉS DE ANÁLISIS DE PELÍCULAS, SE ENTIENDE CÓMO LOS PERSONAJES DE *MI MEJOR ENEMIGO* SE VEN AFECTADOS Y MOLDEADOS POR LA EXPERIENCIA DE CRUZAR FRONTERAS HETEROTÓPICAS. EL COMPROMISO CON EL TERCER CINE Y LA TEORÍA CINEMATOGRAFICA FEMINISTA DESTACA CÓMO EL NACIONALISMO Y EL GÉNERO SE INTENSIFICAN EN LA FRONTERA. LOS PERSONAJES ESTÁN CONSIDERADOS COMO "OTROS" Y TIENE SU MOVIMIENTO ESPACIAL AFECTADO POR LAS ETIQUETAS BASADAS EN LA NACIONALIDAD, EL GENERO, LA ETNIA O LA SEXUALIDAD QUE SE ATRIBUYE A LOS MISMOS.

PALABRAS CLAVE: NUEVO CINE LATINOAMERICANO, CINE IDENTIDAD CHILENA, BORDERS, TERCER CINE, FEMINISMO

