

Bordering Immigrants in Argentina. The case of the Chilean immigration to Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego*

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Abstract

International immigration has been a fundamental element in (and for) the socioeconomic development of Argentina, while migration from the neighboring countries happened at the same time than inner migrations within Argentina. As of 1960 neighboring countries immigration was on a constant increase, concomitantly with determined sectors of both the labor market, and geographical regions. In early 90s, immigration from neighboring countries accounted for more than 50% of the whole immigration entering Argentina. The Chilean migration to Argentina began starting long before the creation of both, respective States, even though the higher importance thereof starts as of mid-20th century. Chilean citizens have migrated to Patagonia mainly (but they are found also in the Metropolitan area of the city of Buenos Aires, in the city of Mendoza (center area of Argentina), and also in the city of Bahía Blanca -to the South of the Province of Buenos Aires). Immigration from a neighboring country involves a population displacement the generation of which has to be sought in adaptative strategies developed into the family economy of poor people, perhaps much more than seeking the immigration motive into the

* Based on the paper submitted to the *MOVE Conference - The Role of the State in Population Movements: The Circumpolar North and Other Periphery Regions*: E. del Acebo Ibáñez: "Bordering Immigration in Argentina". Arctic Centre, Rovaniemi, Finland: October 26-28, 2009.

migrant politics of national States. This article analyzes the migration motives among Chilean immigrants, the insertion types and grades into the receiving society, and also the migratory networks and grade of associativity in terms of social capital and resilience.

Key words: Bordering immigration, Chile, Argentina, Patagonia, Tierra del Fuego

International immigration in Argentina

From an historical point of view, international immigration has been a fundamental element in (and for) the socioeconomic development of Argentina. During the second half of 19th century, and early 20th century, immigration came mainly from Europe. Thereafter, from mid-20s onward, immigration coming from the neighboring countries –namely: Chile, Bolivia, Paraguay, Brazil, and Uruguay was more important each time.

First, migration from the neighboring countries happened at the same time than inner migrations within Argentina. As of 1960, however, neighboring countries immigration was on a constant increase, concomitantly with determined sectors of both the labor market, and geographical regions.

In early 90s, immigration from neighboring countries accounted for more than 50% of the whole immigration entering Argentina. And such a proportion increased since mid-20th century, namely: in 1960 immigration from neighboring countries accounted for 17.6%; in 1970: 24.1%; in 1980: 39.6%, and, in 1991: 52.1%.

Nevertheless such figures and percentages do not cover the whole immigration process actuality: indeed Argentina's borders are both large and very easy to cross –in other words, entering undocumented is not at all difficult if we take into account the following figures:

The length of Argentine borders along neighboring countries is, in kilometers:

- 5,308 km along Chile,
- 1,699 km along Paraguay,
- 1,132 km along Brazil,
- 742 km along Bolivia, and
- 485 km along Uruguay

That means an almost 10,000 kilometer long total border. Either Argentine or foreign populations can cross in/out by road or river systems.

Argentina's border along Chile is the largest border, basically running through the Andean Range. To the North, the range is extremely high while, to the South, the range is much lower, a fact making the border accessibility easier.

As some geographers and sociologists point out, the "border zone" immigration to Argentina can be explained by different key factors, such as:

a) Both the territorial continuity and proximity between the neighboring countries emission zones, and the attraction areas located in the Argentine periphery.

b) In Argentina, a low vegetative growth concomitant with a superpopulation –thus, demographical pressure thereof, in some neighboring countries.

c) Even though immigrant-labor expertise is likely to be low, labor conditions are better in Argentina for migrants.

d) Mainly in Chile, Bolivia, Paraguay, and Uruguay, the existence of systematic expulsion conditions due to either political or ideological causes.

e) In neighboring countries, migratory inclinations among several ethnic groups as a constitution of their cultural heritage.

f) Generally speaking, Argentina's flexibility as regards entrance, re-entrance and residence conditions. In normal

conditions, no entering migrant is demanded a visa or a return ticket –there may exist, however, some higher control periods with regard to undocumented immigration.

2. Important events in contemporary Patagonia

In 19th century “the State strengthening process coupled to the success obtained by the military conquest of indigenous lands, derived in the affirmation of the definitive sovereignty of the national State over those regions. At the same time that tribes were decimated by either the Army or smallpox epidemics (another, equally lethal, weapon of civilization), a new occupation mode of the Patagonian space took place. Lands belonging to indigenous communities were transferred to the State that, in turn, transferred again those estates to new owners. At the same time, the procedure started in the 1880 decade caused an intense, systematic destruction of native cultures” (Bandieri, 2009: 146). The socio-cultural destructuring of native populations –wherein the introduction of alcoholic beverages as a type of domination was of tremendous importance, caused a change in the relationship between people and the land: from an intimate, constitutive relationship between **indigenous cultures and the land**, there occurred a switch in favor of natural resources private appropriation. At the same time –further than any intentions at stake, the conversion to Roman Catholicism was a means to eradicate indigenous creeds that were inextricably united to their cultural ways –that is: after indigenous had been uprooted from their land, they were uprooted from their cultural environment, all of a sudden.

At a geographical level re-location processes took place –more or less forced, more or less mediate but always unjust, however in full accordance with the capitalist system logic as well as the pro-European dominating culture. The so-called “friendly Indigenous” –that is who had accepted the military / economic conquest fostered by the State, were relocated in “colonies” within their same Patagonian zone, while the indigenous that had fought

against the Occidental conquest endured a Diaspora the results of which were marginality, poverty, and exile.

“At that time, either incorporation or extermination seemed to be the sole alternative for discussing [the indigenous problem]” (Bandieri, 2009: 153): i.e. while some people were struggling to incorporate natives after they had been “civilized”, other people were struggling for killing them all, direct.

From those questions arose the strong tendency to “Argentinizing” the Patagonian populations, either overcoming or ignoring the cultural diversities, in search for a supposed “national community” that was considered to be culturally homogeneous. It must be said that this problem still exists in Argentina, being one of the structural causes of our socioeconomic and sociocultural unsolved problems.

“However, such a process was neither swift nor simple – particularly in the border zones wherein the indigenous, Chilean, and mestizo populations dominated, mainly in rural zones where they stood for an absolute majority” (Bandieri, 2009: 165).

Table 1: Evolution of Population in Patagonia (1895-2001)

Censos	Neuquén	Río Negro	Chubut	Santa Cruz	Tierra del Fuego	Total Patagonia	Total país	%
1895	14.517	9.241	3.748	1.058	447	29.011	3.954.911	0,73
1914	28.866	42.242	23.065	9.948	2.504	106.625	7.885.237	1,35
1920	29.784	42.652	30.118	17.925	2.608	123.087	–	–
1947	86.636	134.350	58.856	24.522	5.045*	309.409	15.893.827	1,95
1960	109.890	193.292	142.412	52.908	11.209	509.711	20.013.789	2,55
1970	154.143	262.622	189.920	84.457	15.658	706.800	23.364.431	3,03
1980	243.850	383.354	263.116	114.941	29.392	1.034.653	27.862.771	3,72
1991	388.833	506.772	357.189	159.839	69.369	1.482.002	32.615.528	4,54
2001	474.155	552.822	413.237	196.258	101.079	1.737.551	36.260.130	4,79

Source: Bandieri, Susana; 2009.

3. On Chilean migration to Argentina (Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego)

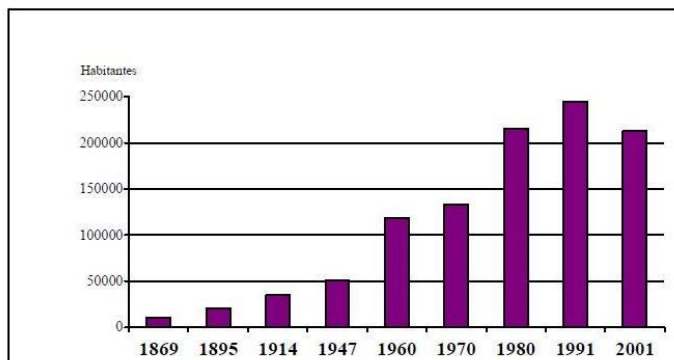
The Chilean migration to Argentina began starting long before the creation of both, respective States, even though the higher importance thereof starts as of mid-20th century.

Chilean citizens have migrated to Patagonia mainly (but they are found also in the Metropolitan area of the city of Buenos Aires, in the city of Mendoza (center area of Argentina), and also in the city of Bahía Blanca -to the South of the Province of Buenos Aires).

Up to early-90s, Argentina has been a primordial destination for the Chilean immigration, as is has been for both the Bolivian and Paraguayan immigrations too as Argentina was the attraction pole “with the higher relative development and higher quality of life and shared well-being” in the region, until that date (Sassone, 1994: 107).

The migratory flows from Chile to Argentina have been influenced, however, by regional inequalities and also by the successive economic and political crises in, and between both countries. Actually, the migration-originating Chilean areas –mainly the Southern areas, had a low demographical density and a scarce contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Matossian, 2006: 3; Marshal y Orlansky, 1981).

Table 2: Chilean Citizens In Argentina: Their Evolution Through Censuses



Source: Matossian, Brenda; 2006.

As per Argentina's national 2001 census, the total population of citizens born in Chile, residing in Argentina, sums 211,093 people (masculine index = 91.55) The total of citizens born in Argentina, having either a Chilean father or a Chilean mother sums 218,615 people (masculine index= 108.94 which means that women's proportion is higher than men's). When summing up both subtotals concerning people born in Chile and Argentina, the population of Chilean descent amounts to almost 430,000 people.

The highest number of Chilean immigrants is registered in the following Patagonian Provinces:

- Río Negro: 18.7%
- Neuquen: 13.5%
- Santa Cruz: 9.7%
- Chubut: 9.5%

(When summing up the percentages pertaining to the above mentioned four Patagonian Provinces, a total percentage of 51.4% is attained, regarding residents in Patagonia)

- Tierra del Fuego: 4.2%

As regards the age range of population born in Chile, residing in Argentina is basically located within the 35 to 59 years age-range: that is within the most productive period.

As regards the Chilean immigrants' residence years in Argentina, 66% of them have been living in Argentina for 20 years or more –a percentage contrasting strongly with the percentage of Chilean immigrants living in other parts of the world: less than 47% have been living in other countries for 20 years or more.

4. Migration motives

Immigration from a neighboring country involves a population displacement the generation of which has to be sought in adaptative strategies developed into the family economy of poor

people (Benencia, 441) this, much more than seeking the immigration motive into the migrant politics of national States.

Almost half of immigrants (49. 6%) has taken the decision due to **economic** reasons; the following motives are: **family** reasons (30. 3%), then, **political** reasons (8.5%), and, finally, **educational** reasons (0.7% -these account for the migrant concentration in the city of Buenos Aires).

When the gender variable is introduced, it can be observe that men migrate in a higher percentage than women, owing to both economic and political motives. In a greater percentage, women migrate due to family-related motives (cf. Burnett, 2006: 106ss).

As several authors have observed (Toutudjian y Vitoria de Holubica, 1990:13-19; Benencia: 2004: passim) the Chilean immigration has evidenced their own behavioral patterns that can be differentiated from the behavioral patterns followed by immigrants coming from other neighboring countries: this immigration was much more similar to the inner migration currents within Argentina. Contrariwise, the Chilean immigration was much more oriented to a rural-rural type. That is in the first place it was linked to either seasonal activities such as the wool shearing. Thereafter immigration has been much more linked to fruit-picking in the higher valley of Negro river.

Since 1960 but, more especially since 1980, a detail that cannot be ignored is the **settlement of Chilean workers families in Patagonia**, mainly in peripheral districts of important cities located in the above mentioned higher valley, such as General Roca, and Cipolletti, among others. So, when those families go to fruit-picking activities in the higher valley, they embody a labor percentage that surpasses significantly all the temporary immigrants likely to come from Chile. As Benencia acknowledges (2004: 477) “Now, they form part of the local labor force” (64% of total involved).

5. Insertion types and grades, into the receiving society

Generally speaking it has been observed that “with regard to the register of Chilean citizens living in foreign countries, in Argentina the Chilean population is wider, has been settling there for a quite long time, is older, and their economic situation is quite inferior to the economic situation Chileans enjoy in other parts of the world. Paradoxically, however, the Chilean population living in Argentina are the least interested in getting back to their homeland, and, apparently, evidence the highest degrees of satisfaction for their country of residence” (Burnet, 2006: 99). Anyhow, up to what grade does that satisfaction imply a successful integration into the Argentine receiving society, is a fact that should be checked out.

Both the level and the relative insertion success of Chilean citizens into the Argentine receiving society depends upon several factors, namely: a) marriage patterns (either endogenous or exogenous patterns), b) education levels, c) having either a urban or a rural background, d) work-related insertion, e) either manifest or latent motives for migration, f) links immigrants had with some acquaintances when they arrived in Argentina, g) basic needs satisfaction level, h) access to health insurance and retirement (Burnett, 2006: 99).

In that sense, *the family type migration patterns* existing among this class of immigrants have also to be classified –namely: who is the first one who migrates?

a) A married man, more or less 35 years of age, with many children. He is the first one to migrate, looking for a job. Then, he will bring his wife together with the younger children and, finally, he will call the older children to Argentina.

b) A young couple, with, in general, a small child. Thereafter, once they are settled in Argentina, they will have more children.

c) Two or more young people (in general they have some degree of kinship (they are brothers, etc.). They migrate with or

without their couple. (cf. Benencia, 2004: 442).

6. Migratory networks and chains

Of course, relationships established among immigrants and local people are of great importance –and, particularly, relationships set up with other Chilean citizens. Considering the socioeconomic and psycho-sociocultural conditions extant in the native area has always been customary, however it is also necessary. Now, such aspects have also to be considered as regards the arrival or reception area. Reason for which, taking into account the social networks ruling the “migratory chains” is also indispensable a task so that the migratory phenomenon is better understood within its actual, current, and prospective dimensions.

This phenomenon also causes that “...once the immigrant wave is settled, attaining a certain density, a feedback phenomenon occurs, favored by the existence of social networks fostering migration through the dissemination of data and contacts that reduce the economic and emotional cost of migration significantly” (Benencia, 2004: 437).

If we analyze the main Argentine sectors or regions wherein the higher nuclei of Chilean immigrants are settled, we observe the following percentages, dealing with 18-year old or more Chilean immigrants who acknowledge that, when they arrived in Argentina, **they were aware of the existence of known compatriots**: in the Patagonian city of Río Gallegos: 64 %; in the Patagonian city of Neuquen: 63 %; in the higher valley of Negro river: 59,8 %; in towns located into the Greater Buenos Aires: 53 %; in the capital city of Buenos Aires: 45 %; in towns located into the Greater Mendoza: 36,5 %.

Burnet (2006: 109) is quite right when he says that, “as far as Río Gallegos, Neuquen and the higher valley of Negro river are concerned, it is supposed that [previous links with compatriots living in Argentina] are stronger in more rural communities and

smaller urban communities wherein the primary relationships are stronger”. In other words, these are more *Gemeinschaft*-type communities, instead of what happens with Chilean immigrants who, when in Chile, lived in cities where predominated more *Gesellschaft*-type impersonal relationships, wherein information dissemination did not depend on a “common knowledge” relationship: instead, in large cities, dissemination is both swifter however more depersonalized through more formal communication systems –in this case, these are the immigrants who prefer settling themselves in other important urban centers such as the city of Buenos Aires, and the city of Mendoza.

These aspects imply both the consideration and analysis of the preservation of links and pre-existing social networks (by means of phone calls, letters, etc.), mainly when they had taken place in the same city / town / village of origin. This occurs at the same time than social relationships that immigrant have set up with their known compatriots who lived already there when the migrants arrived in Argentina (It does not matter whether the said compatriots were family or not).

In Patagonian towns, the number of Chilean citizens who – before they migrated, had known compatriots already living in Argentina, doubles the number of immigrants who lacked such a contact. Again, this means that the need for increasing more solid networks is always present –and most probably, this feature is due to the rigors of both Patagonian climate and landscape.

What do the existence and support of the belonging social networks tell us? That the Chilean immigrant is not considering to settle definitively –at least, at the beginning of the migratory project. Keeping alive the links with family members and neighbors from their original, local community is a fact that feedbacks their radical belonging –thus the idea to request their ID and settling definitively in the receiving country becomes dysfunctional because, as Benencia (2004:437) observes accurately: “Almost always, settling is lived as a violent fact, from a personal

standpoint inasmuch as it supposed a symbolical rupture with one's roots, with one's fatherland". To which we would like to add a subtle but nonetheless present fact –namely, what do Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego mean as geographical spaces? They exist under the burden, so to speak, of a peculiar symbology: they embody the Patagonian desert; they are “the ends of the earth”, “the land of the end of the world”. An area wherein both political and territorial limits are blurred due to the strong presence of a social and cultural imagination making easier both the symbolic (and actual) appropriation of a geographical area what “goes” beyond national States. Once more, the limit has to be visualized as a psychological and cultural phenomenon much more than, or instead than a geographical and political phenomenon.

An indicator of the higher or lesser grade of integration to the immigration place is the **adoption of other nationality**: So, while only 13.2% of Chilean residents in Argentina have adopted the Argentine nationality, 32.2% of Chilean living elsewhere worldwide has adopted the nationality of the country they are living now. This low tendency to change their nationality has also been observed among Chilean citizens living in other Latin American countries. Most probably, this attitude could be due to the fact that not only in countries distant from Chile or pertaining to other continents, adopting other nationality constitutes a strong adaptative strategy a migrant has to deal with –when this is not an obligation stated by the receiving country.

Social capital, resilience, and grade of associativity among Chilean immigrants

Burnett (2006:126) is right when he says that: “One of the factors contributing to migrants’ resilience is their level of associativity. This, in principle, allows a migrant to resort to the accumulated experience of the collectivity he pertains to, in order to favoring his own incorporation within the receiving society.

Associativity allows reducing uncertainty, assuming the circumstances he has to live through, optimizing a valid and efficacious decision making, as well as reducing risk factors. Associativity also allows resorting to a contact network, and constructing a base from which this person is apt at projecting his influence within the receiving society.

Verifying that the more important residential urban centers are in Argentina, the lesser participation grade occurs in social organizations. So, “Chilean citizens living in the higher valley of Negro river, and the Province of Neuquen offer the highest associativity grade: approximately half of families one of whose member was born in Chile participate actively with organizations pertaining to the civil society [53.2% and 50.1%, respectively]. Thereafter, percentages are as follows: the city of Río Gallegos (32.9%), the Greater Buenos Aires (31.8%), the Greater Mendoza (28.3%) and the city of Buenos Aires (27. 4%)” (Burnett, 126). As Burnet points out to, among other factors, those percentages are correlated, or not, to the fact that families either counted on known compatriots when they come to Argentina, or not.

This is why, among Chilean immigrants residing in Patagonia, the following ranges are observed: a higher range of associativity, a greater number of immigrants who had a known compatriot there when they come to Argentina –and, also, theirs are much more endogamic relationships (cf Burnett, 126). In Burnett’s opinion the development of the associative capacity among Chilean citizens living in Patagonia reflects also the socioeconomic level of migrants involved: “It is quite possible that Southern Argentina localities count on the most homogeneous Chilean populations found in places under survey. Basis thereof is likely to lie on a greater identify for the development of social organizations: a strong link with towns/villages the origin of which had been of a rural type (i.e. a common history is shared), and, in social terms of a more popular aspect, they share common vulnerability factors such as a relatively lower education level, and a low ranking as

regards labor capacity. Finally, in Southern [...] localities conjugal relationships are of a higher endogenous character than relationships observed in towns / villages from the central area of Argentina” (2006: 126).

The participation of Chilean citizens residing in Argentina is observed in different types of organizations. It should be noted that their higher participation occurs in *religious organizations* (80.2% in the higher valley of Negro river; approximately two thirds in the remaining Patagonian localities; a percentage lowering down to 52.1% in the city of Buenos Aires).

Thereafter, in percentage, we have: a) a participation in either recreational / sport, cultural organizations (43. 2% in the city of Buenos Aires while, in Patagonian areas, percentages oscillate between 32 and 22%); b) a participation in *neighborhood organizations* (approximately 16% in areas pertaining to either small or more extensive urban zones). Percentages get reduced to fewer than 10% in Patagonian localities.

Burnett (2006: 127) points out that the participation in *political organizations* occurs only in 10% of families having at least one member devoted to some class of associative participation –with the sole exception of the Patagonian city of Río Gallegos, wherein almost 25% of families have at least one member who was born in Chile, and now participates in either political or social organizations. Only in 7% of families wherein one member participates associatively, such participation occurs in *compatriot organizations*. This means that, on the one hand, adaptative strategies are oriented to the labor/economic activity and, on the other hand, both endogamic relationships / relationships with compatriots residing in Argentina comply with both manifest and latent functions so that participating in this type of organizations endowed with a “national” characteristic is not considered as being so fundamental.

7. (In) Conclusion

We are also to conclude, or (in) conclude with some questions. All that within the apparently opposite tendencies to *globalization* and *differentiation*, as Crespi (1996:17) states when dealing with the “the specificity of the different signifié realms and the growing autonomy of inner relationships dynamics within family structures, economic relationships, judicial and political relationships, and so on...” The ways Habermas (1988) has to set out his case, could also be somewhat considered, in terms of a separation between the *social system* level (strongly hit on account of the impact caused by the rationalization process in highly industrialized societies) and *the world of life*. This “world” existing at the daily experience level in such a way that Crespi (1996: 21) commits himself to a new reflection (and valuation) on the concept of existence apt at allowing integration, solidarity, and social justice values to be recovered.

As far as immigration policies are concerned, Argentina works as a new bifrontal Janus: on the one hand Argentina constitutes the receiving nucleus of the Latin America Southern Cone migratory subsystem. On the other hand, Argentina keeps being (since mid-20th century) the ejector of Argentineans who migrate to either Europe or the United States, basically.

The current immigration of native people from neighboring countries is a multidimensional phenomenon both bounded and conditioned by the expansion of international trade, the exchange and circulation of goods, services, and technology as well as labor –a phenomenon also conditioned by the sub regional integration processes (such as MERCOSUR in the Latin America Southern Cone –MERCOSUR is an economic community comprising Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay). Consensus among countries involved is needed when it comes to designing immigration policies –the only way to protect the right to circulating, migrants’ human rights, and the legitimacy of the

existential projects dealt with by “the other one”. There exists a need to analyzing and working on the *expulsion factors* in force in the migrant’s country, so that, *ex post facto*, pre-existing social and economic problems are discovered, that, indeed, existed *ex ante* any individual started elaborating his/her migratory project.

The counterpoint between an ejector country and a receptor country could be, at the same time, cruel and/or full of benefits to be dilucidated insofar as parties involved to not acknowledging their mutual need (and dependence).

Because –in this as in many other cases, not every opinion is no longer hypocritical (mainly from the dominating culture standpoint), and hypocrisy could keep being a way to considering facts.

This is a complex phenomenon: migration proper, citizenship, civil and political rights, social rights –that is, human rights hence the migratory problem becomes *a total phenomenon* on its own right.

As Sassen (2003: 62) states: “Inasmuch as many processes are of a transnational nature, governments are no longer competent to deal with some important questions either unilaterally or (from the confines of the interstate system) closely defined. This does not mean the end of State sovereignties, but the ‘exclusivity and reach of their competence’ has changed [...] inasmuch as there exists a narrow range within which the authority and legitimacy of the State keep being operative”.

We are facing a *topology* of the “crossing borders process” –in this case as in many others, either in Latin America or worldwide: a travel to the nearest place, a discovery of what was already known, a crossing to the place we had already abandoned, a feeling of anxiety over what we had already been suffering from, a hope about what we had already thought of, a total risk into an intimate safety, menaces confirming convictions, biographies endowed with ancient resonances.

A dialectic based on the here and there, the inside and the outside, acting as a pavement over all the crossing roads, and every

border space – a fact that, precisely, moves Serres (1995: 61) to ask us as well as himself, permanently, in search for the true question: “The spirit that/who is there, the being that/who is there is nowhere to be seen, however at times it/he reveals itself/himself to somebody who is not from there. Or, is this possible that the being that/who has just arrived from out there [*hors-là*] appears visibly to the deeply rooted? How can we understand the relationships between the spirit of the place – but, is it a matter of what or who? And the spirit from another place or either the spirit or the place? All this summed up to a radical disorientation implied within the post-modern space wherein – as says Castro Nogueira (1997: 392): “you are never, necessarily, where you are, and you do not fail to be wherein you are not”.

In that sense, Lash and Urry (1998: 430) insist that what is peculiar in this new, contemporary construction of the place is “how important is image, and, especially an (aesthetic) reflexivity of the place, the impact of global waves and, mainly the impact of information, games, and willing visitors who invite you to rebuild places at an increasing speed; and the relative weakness of the national States (and the national classes) when facing those waves and effects thereof on the extraordinary re-capture the expression of the place”. This is all the more feedback due to the fact that Patagonia is also a mythical territory, it is a metaphor of the ends of the earth, it a Southern circumpolar quality, it is an unlimited space breaking pre-imposed limits – maybe a place inherited from the indigenous imagination.

An itinerary, a crossroad, a rotation point, a conflict: all this is a border space, a real and symbolic topic of *globality*. A place wherein boats are burnt but with the idea of reconstructing them. A place wherein you sink as a way to float to the surface. And, in the case we are dealing with, a way to inhabit, and possess the “land of the ends of the world”, existentially speaking.

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Received: September 8, 2010

Accepted: October 17, 2010