

Ingrid Wildi Merino

Arica y norte de Chile no lugar y lugar de todos

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To speak of Chile and its political, economic, and social identity, the speaker must first unpack part of the substantive essence of what it is to exist in the local reality. For example, strongly driven Chilean territorial expansion during the last quarter of the nineteenth century (both in the northern regions of Antofagasta and Tarapacá, and in Araucania in the south) was undertaken through a strong focus on territorial organization that consistently omitted the socio-cultural and political-economic processes of these locations. North and south made the Chilean territorial expansion policy into a problem that has failed to manage the basic components of its identity right down to the present day, which has made it possible for local identities to be excluded from state-level decision-making. Hence, the separation between state and local identity has been excluded from the fundamental historical analysis of an entire nation.

In the socio-cultural field, the notion of identity is known to be closely related to those of nation, region, social class, ethnic group, or ethnicity in various theoretical frameworks and with differing outcomes. Ticio Escobar summarizes this question, describing the issue of identity as a dark cellar where continual struggle ensues between the real and the symbolic and asking: What happens to the term ‘identity’ when the great key founding concepts of the term (people, nation, community, class, territory, etc.) are brought into question?¹¹

¹ Ticio Escobar, *La belleza de los otros* (Asunción, 1993), p. 104.

But unfortunately there is so very little that can be said or seen of local identity in Chile. This identity has mostly not been reliably portrayed by any discourse that defends its respective “ethical cataloguing.” However, contemporary artistic creation and its aesthetic regulatory framework provide an attractive horizon on this front for those who include irrefutable concepts of the ‘local’ and a basic synopsis of the north of Chile.

Views on identification with the others, their territory and identity, helped prompt Ingrid Wildi Merino to undertake her project *Arica y norte de Chile no lugar y lugar de todos*. In this project that ran alongside her work as a curator in *Dislocación*, the artist generates a film essay that displays her experience of this outlying and multicultural Arica region and the scenery that defines its identity.

In all the processes of the work, Ingrid Wildi Merino involves us in the research and action allowing us to envisage her motivations through critical analysis of the schemas that dictate the geopolitical reality of the north and its inhabitants.

The work of the artist is composed of two projections (travel footage and interviews) that are played face-to-face at opposite ends of the room. The travel footage shows landscapes from Arica, Iquique, Alto Hospicio, and la Pampa del Tamarugal broken into desert, beach, precarious architectural features, and others. Meanwhile, the opposite wall provides sights and sounds—in the half light of the same exhibition room—that include the hierarchy of the script and the faces of the interviewees. The location of the exhibition also bears a symbolic charge: the Museo de la Solidaridad Salvador Allende (Salvador Allende Solidarity Museum) exerts a sociological perspective that goes from identity to the oral history of the north of Chile and its inhabitants.

This oral approach certainly produces a dialogue that comes into constant conflict with the desert space and casts us as tacit witnesses of various organic impulses. Shrewd and ingenuous thoughts on human existence are shown in counterpoint to remarks on economic

drivers that compel migratory mobility—where enforced multicultural transfiguration becomes a subsistence tool. Every so often a reflection jumps out from the tales told in *Arica y norte de Chile no lugar y lugar de todos* on the relation between socio-cultural diversity, mobility, and territory.

The constituent individual characters of *Arica y norte de Chile no lugar y lugar de todos* question their space, make deductions about the concepts raised by the local situation and even the way in which they deliver their oral discourse. At times, the main precept of their testimony consists of their daily sorrows and the stigma of *mítico folclor* (mythical folklore).²² In the film, academics, workers, intellectuals, and housewives coexist in a diversified culture where they experience being both Chilean and outsiders at the same time. Each interviewee appears as a real person who replaces their stories with their own imaginings.³³ In simple terms, the fiction is built by the artist telling the various tales through different dialects. This frontier living, coexisting, and thinking creates bonds of self-determination and indifference toward the structures of power encountered in the fiction called *metropolis and capital*.

With gruff narration the Chilean artist has re-examined several instances of eminently social, political, and local matters that already form an essential part of the identity shaped by the topography of the location.

Ingrid Wildi Merino invites us to think locally not only from within but as part of the broadest social processes. The local issue certainly brings us back to the problem of the territorialization of social and cultural processes.

The work takes arms on various fronts against the premise that identity does not coincide with territoriality; where the false land divisions override negative reactions to distinctions and oppositions involved in the timing and location of the formation of local identities. However,

² This point refers to the responsibility of the state of Chile in relation to management of and education about regional identity. The concept of identity in Chile has always been subject to a form of indigenous folklore (based on a concept of an idealized Andean model) and not on the true conceptual consideration of inhabitants, especially in frontier regions.

³ Gilles Deleuze, *La imagen-tiempo. Estudios sobre cine 2* (Barcelona, 1987), p. 202.

even though local identities may be based on historically formed geopolitical divisions—delegations, neighborhoods, or towns—they are, above all, the outcome of a social and cultural construction process.

This film essay and the interviews in the work truly examine the relationship between events and the environmental backdrop where life takes place. Even more so when considering how the roads of this desert cultivate the life experiences of the people who permeate the culture and politics needed to survive in the coastal zones, gorges, pampas, and high plains of this vast area of the country.