

Mountains and Borders, Geographical Approaches from the South. An Araucanía–North Patagonia Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Argentina and Chile share the third world's longest international land boundary (5,150 km) delineated by the mountains of the southern section of The Andes. Complex relationships, migratory and commercial exchanges, as well as imaginaries/representations and policies concerning nature conservation and cultural heritage preservation have either divided or brought both countries together, throughout their history as Nation States and neighbors.

Argentine and Chilean academics have studied regional borderlands as rather watertight compartments. This tendency to reproduce in the scientific research field the social construction of borders as a limit or division has been modified over the last two decades. Critical and binational studies, from multiple disciplinary perspectives and scales, have explored the transformation of this space shared throughout history. This article collects and systematizes background studies on the Araucanía (Chile) and North Patagonia (Argentina) frontier to identify the main theoretical contributions from Geography and other Social Sciences which have improved debates on space in this borderland. This descriptive research is based on a theoretical and thematic analysis of both recent academic production and activities. Some of the conclusions are: (1) Currently, studies focus on the subjective dimensions of borders. (2) The notion of region as a living space enables us to give center stage to the treatment of border subnational areas. (3) The notion of scale permits us to connect power relations to the dialectics nationalism/internationalization, at interregional and intraregional level. (4) The concept of landscape unveils the importance of imaginaries/representations in the processes of territorialization and frontierization.

Introduction

For decades, Araucanía and North Patagonia binational borderland studies have evolved in rather watertight compartments, separating research projects carried out by Argentine and Chilean academics. This tendency is closely connected with the concept of frontier as a barrier, also from the academic and educational scope. Although in the English language

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it is difficult to reconcile the strong connotation of frontier, as the limit of the settlement, with the notion of border, at the present, in Spanish language frontier refers to border. Hence, in order to simplify the translation of the Latinamerican background studies, and to present the several meanings of frontier, the authors prefer to maintain this word in this case.

Such an approach is consistent with a geographical tradition focused on studying geographical spaces within the national state boundaries. This was outlined by Benedetti (2007, 13) with the assertion “from the beginning, Geography identified ‘national geography’ as the main object of study, in an effort to understand and legitimate the links between the formation of national states, as components of a world system, and the material basis which defines a nation.”

Thus, several studies have tried to analyze regional processes disregarding what was happening on the other side of the mountain range, as if the social space, even the natural environment, could not actually extend beyond the international boundary. At the same time, those approaches on frontiers considered them as areas “empty” of sociability.

This international boundary, the world’s third longest one (5,150 km-long), was marked on mountains with different altitudes, running in a north-south direction: in the Central Andes (center and north of Argentina and Chile) there exist several peaks exceeding 6,000 m.a.s.l., while in the Austral Andes, in the Southern region of both countries, there are lower elevations and more valleys and passes across the mountain range which have made human mobility easier in both directions.

In addition to the notion of mountain range as a physical barrier, complex relationships and links have politically divided or brought both countries together, throughout their history as nation states and neighbors. The notion of frontier is understood not as a natural feature but as a social construction, a boundary imposed at the same time the national States were formed. The frontier should be understood as a meeting and exchange space, as a frontier zone (Bandieri 2001, 2005) also from the academic and institutional perspective. Consequently, it is necessary to comprehend diplomatic tensions between both countries and the economic and political ups and downs as factors that, to a certain extent, contextualize the existence of binational networks that link researchers.

Throughout the 20th century there were periods when discourses concerning national security were exacerbated, especially during dictatorial governments (Benedetti and Salizzi 2014). As has been analyzed by Barelli and Azcoitia (2015), these tensions were made explicit in the 1930s when the Argentine State implemented a number of strategies which sought the “deschilenización” (De-chileanization) of the region; such tensions continued during Aramburu’s dictatorship (1955–1958) and the democratic governments of presidents Arturo Frondizi and Arturo Illia (1963–1966). These authors suggest that the complete “pretorización” of the State (Understood as the taking of state functions by the military corporation which largely exceed its specific duties) which was implemented by Juan Carlos Onganía’s dictatorship (1966–1970) created a new framework for these representations, which was marked by political authoritarianism and territorial nationalism (Barelli and Azcoitia 2015, 6–7). These nationalist visions became particularly critical during the last Argentine dictatorial period that was partly concurrent with the Chilean military government of Pinochet (1973–1990). In those years, the production of

geographical knowledge linked to frontier issues put the focus on perspectives concerning “territorial consciousness and a glorification of national essentialism” that sustained the construction of an image of the Andes range as a wall or “trouble” zone (Cicalese 2009). There are also studies that have explored geography school textbooks in which frontier areas were shown as conflict areas, sparsely populated areas whose fundamental need was its protection (Concheiro 2008).

In some segments of the civil society within both countries, there persisted intense geopolitical tensions connected to dictatorial regimes, especially between the 1970s and 1980s. The prevailing social rules shaped societies in which the decisions of the highest political and military leaders were compelling, and the citizens’ participation was drastically restrained. During 1978, in an atmosphere of ongoing tension derived from the Beagle Channel dispute, Argentina and Chile were nearly involved in an armed confrontation.

As part of a territorial-security border policy, Argentine authorities adopted restrictive criteria when granting permanent residence rights to Chilean people, showing clearly the existing tension due to the boundary dispute in the Southern region (Mármora 1984; Sassone 1987).

The return to democracy in 1983 in Argentina and in 1990 in Chile marked the beginning of a new bilateral rapprochement era. Some years later, this period was articulated with a process of greater regional integration since the creation of the Common Market of the South (Mercosur) in 1991 formed by Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, and Paraguay as full members and Chile and Bolivia as associate countries. This integration, which in the first years aimed mainly at the free movement of goods, has in the last decade showed visible progress towards a conception of free movement of persons. In line with this last point, the establishment of the Union of South American Nations (Unasur) in 2007 has furthered an attempt to build a regional citizenship. In this respect, the Migration Law No 25.871 passed in Argentina at the end of 2003 is a ground-breaking and paradigmatic case due to its unprecedented approach in terms of migrant’s rights.

However, diplomatic, economic and political changes do not keep pace with social and cultural changes, which tend to be much slower. Thus, many years passed before this collaborative approach evolved in the direction of binational academic productions. The main advances are described in this article.

This research deals with border areas from a perspective that goes beyond the idea of barrier, which is an image that suggests separate realities and prevents the analysis of existing meaningful interactions in demographic, social and cultural terms. Likewise, borders can get porous allowing a rich and complex interchange between neighboring nations. From these starting points, the purpose was to address questions such as: What contributions have been made by geography to analyze the concept of frontier in Araucanía–North Patagonia? Which are the contributions that have been made in this region?

Methodology

This descriptive research aims to explore the academic productions of the last few years related to the border area known as Araucanía–North Patagonia (Figure 1) and to analyze where we stand on the issue of binational studies. The corpus of information comprises the following:

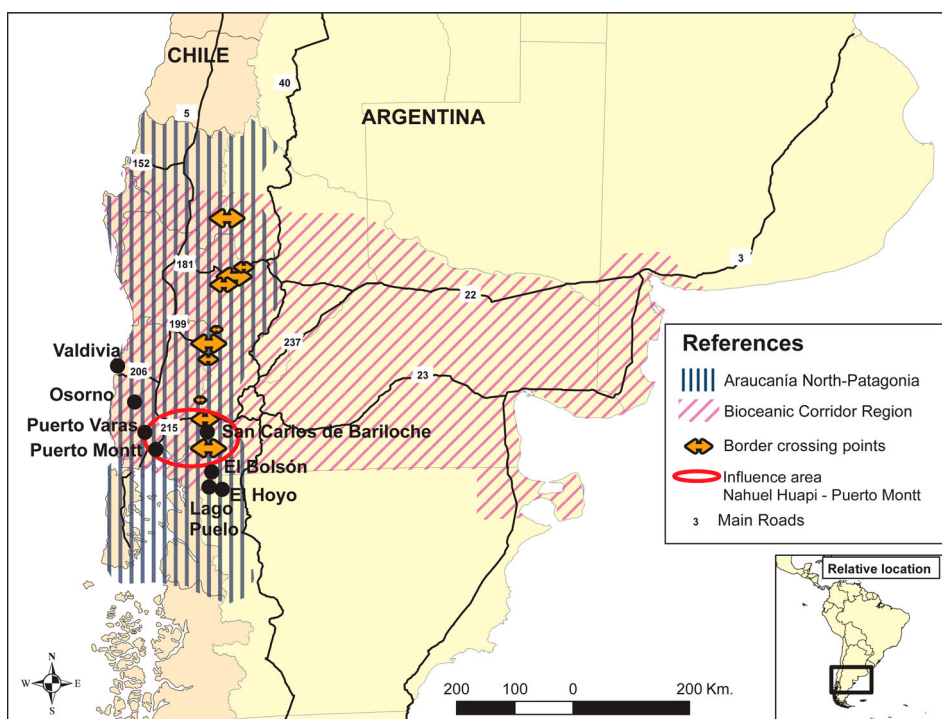


Figure 1. Spatial Delimitations to Define North Patagonia–Araucanía. Source: Own Research Based on Lolich et al. 2011; Matossian and Sassone 2011; Hajduk, Albornoz, and M. Lezcano 2011.

- Proceedings of the Argentine–Chilean Binational Meetings (between 2007 and 2012);
- Books resulting from the two first Binational Workshops organized in San Carlos de Bariloche during 2010 and 2011;
- Background information on geographical investigations on borders made by Argentine and Chilean researchers, in this area of study;
- *Trans-Andean Studies Review*, Journal of the Chilean-Argentine Association of Historical Studies and Cultural Integration.

With the purpose of drawing up a state-of-the-art definition, we first analyze the secondary sources focused on identifying the area of study. Then, key concepts from the field of geography (geographic scale, region and cultural landscape), as well as theoretical and methodological contributions from other Social Sciences in cross-disciplinary investigations are addressed.

State of the Art and Conceptual Debates

Recent Debates on Borderlands in America

The frontier as a common topic for analysis began to be considered as a relevant factor since the work of Turner (1893) in the border between US and Canada. The author considered the frontier not just an evidence of the moving line of settlement, but a process

which structured and conferred a symbolic meaning to the pioneer that dared to enter into the wilderness of a state that was just being formed. As Altenbernd and Trimble Young (2014) point out, the concept of frontier has been central to recent studies on settler colonialism in the western borders of the US and, presently, it is far from the ethnocentric and nationalistic condition that Turner ascribed to the concept. These authors carry out a review of American academics' historiographic work presenting alternative narratives to analyze frontiers as a multicultural and multiscale space.

As regards the meaning of frontiers, the transition from settlement advance to regional development is analyzed by Kellerman (2007), who maintains that it is difficult to identify active primary settlement frontiers in the original Turnerian sense on the contemporary global map; however, frontier's original meaning as the expansion of human activity from cores into peripheries is not lost. For this reason, they claim that within the context of economic globalization, it is essential to examine the static frontiers (associated to settlement) and the dynamic frontiers (associated to extractive activities).

Within the South American context, there has been significant progress towards the analysis of cultural diversity and biodiversity conservation in some sections of the extensive Amazonian border which is shared by nine countries (Salisbury and Weinstein 2014). These spaces can be defined as peripheral and subject to local-regional strong tensions with respect to the implementation of supranational infrastructure initiatives and local models for biodiversity conservation.

Previously, and in line with this approach, Livingston and Harrison (1980) pointed out that, as metaphor and myth, the concept of border is a powerful one. This fact enabled many researchers to apply the concept of frontier wilderness not only to temporal scales, detached from the social and historical context in which it was coined in the US, but to smaller spatial scales applying it to subnational borders or even to urban internal borders. For Lacoste (1983) this last anthropo-geographical perspective is the type of frontier that currently prevails in Europe, where spatial boundaries correlate with an ethnic group, a people or a nation. However, this author further indicates that the inadequacy of this border categorization lies in that it is exclusively focused on the frontier-line.

The debate on the need to understand the theory of borders as process and changing quality has found a highly productive environment for analysis in the motion turn in the social sciences (Konrad 2015). In this respect, cultural geography and critical geopolitics can contribute to the study of the frontier as a living space, where the diverse social, economic and historical ties have gone through continuities and discontinuities in regional spaces. Throughout the years those spaces have suffered a strong political dependence from the political decision-making centers of the new states, and presently they are subject to pressures from transnational private agents which try to intervene in the territory.

In order to exercise sovereignty over regional areas considered as remote and peripheral, historically, one of the mechanisms used by national states has been the creation of social imaginaries through the selection of cartography and specific landscapes to which they gave distinct personality traits to express an alleged calling for the use of their territory. For example, in the concerned mountainous region of Araucanía–North Patagonia, the selected images evoked an Argentine–Chilean Switzerland; at first, as an area for farming, when immigration from North and Central Europe was being encouraged to colonize the lands that had been taken from the native people by military campaigns on both sides of the Andes at the turn of the 19th century. Later, during the 1930s,

using a similar strategy to that applied by the US at the end of the 19th century, Argentina and Chile created the first national parks of South America in the concerned frontier area. In this second phase, the images depicting an Argentine–Chilean Switzerland were resignified for the leisure and enjoyment of tourists, associated with the image of a pristine and untouched nature. This was in line with the world tendency to create national parks, which in Argentina’s case was associated to a selective type of settlement during the 1930s and 1940s (Vejsbjerg, Núñez, and Matossian 2014).

Recent Debates on the Patagonian Border

Within the Argentine–Chilean border area, the Patagonian region has specific characteristics as regards its historical development. It was a troubled region because during the 19th century the new national states were in conflict with the different indigenous peoples and were trying to debilitate and remove them (Bandieri 2005; Benedetti 2014). In that period the military campaigns also sought to control the mountain passes which led to further native population displacements across The Andes (Bandieri 2000).

After the subjugation of the indigenous societies, the national state planned to start a “white” settlement to establish sovereignty through a strategic military occupation of the region. In that period, between the last two decades of the 19th century and the first years of the 20th century, the *fortín* (fortified outpost) became a distinctive spatial element for border defensive purposes (Bandieri 2000). Frontier control was not completely achieved before the first decades of the 20th century, and the establishment of customs turned out to be one of the strongest elements showing the state’s presence. These explain the particular and late process of fronterization (Grimson 2003) in this region.

Research on the frontier and territory produced studies of great interest from perspectives focused on cartography. Lois and Zusman analyze the process by means of which Patagonia is put on the Eastern world map, through the production of dissemination texts from literary and cartographic works that “gave an account of the progress made by the ruling elite in the appropriation of the alleged domination territory, particularly the cartographic survey activities and the appropriation, exploration and colonization of the Patagonian territory” (Lois and Zusman 2007, 13) after the military campaign, the so-called “desert” campaign. Along the same line, Mazzitelli Mastricchio’s work (2007) analyzes the development of frontier cartographies through the creation of the International Boundaries Office in 1891, the centralized body agency dealing with all issues concerning international borders.

Camino (2007) tackles the frontier issue from an anthropological perspective, analyzing the weight of academic discursive practices concerning geopolitical representations and identity constructs articulated around the notions we-others.

Among the few approaches centered in the spatial dimensions of the frontier, Maiz (2006) explores the perceptions of otherness through the space in the Andean Range. Analyzing the changes in the perception of geographical features such as the mountain range, he claims that the space relation universally supports the specificity of identities. Thus, the author reviews the meanings attributed to the Andean massif *de muro a portal* (from wall to gateway). He also points out the relevance of the notion of mountain range as a barrier, when aiming at the construction of national identities. Besides, he makes an interesting proposition indicating that the Andes range, as a social frontier space, has been shaped

from different representations and that, in the 20th century two visions stand out: one that reinforces the idea of division, and a second one that seeks a cordial and friendly mutual understanding. Generally, the first is linked to the state apparatuses and the second to culture.

Joint Lines of Work: An Interinstitutional Perspective

The growing interest in the study of frontiers during the last decades has also crystallized in research institutions specifically focused on this topic. Although this is by no means an exhaustive list, some key scientific institutions devoted to the regional study of frontier areas which show a rather recent development will be mentioned. One of the first was formed in Europe: the Association of European Border Regions, created in 1971 and with some previous history in the 1960s.

Within the American continent, this interest gained ground decades later. In North America, the creation of the Association for Borderlands Studies constitutes a clear example. Created in 1976, its earlier approaches were linked to the complex border between the United States and México, to then expand to other global frontier areas, from a multidisciplinary perspective (Laine 2014).

In Latin America, academics from different social sciences interested in frontier studies have built working relationships for two decades now. Under the Mercosur framework, the Fórum Universitário Mercosul (Fomerco), created in 2000, is a researchers' network that addresses problems linked to South America integration, including frontier issues. However, in the subregion of concern there is a remarkable background which will be described thoroughly.

The Chilean–Argentine Association of Historical Studies and Cultural Integration, founded in Mendoza (Argentina) in 1995, constitutes the first big effort in this line. Its aim is to embody not only historians but scientists from other disciplines that may go beyond the research and teaching areas and work also with local government, neighboring groups, and other organizations.

Its main academic event is the Chilean–Argentine Conference of Historical Studies and Cultural Integration which has stood out in this binational studies line. Moreover, the association runs the *Trans-Andean Studies Review* which by 2015 had published 17 volumes. This journal presents diverse topics from different viewpoints, thus encouraging interdisciplinary research. It includes remarkable research papers which explore the relationship between nation-states and local communities of “marginal” territories, like Patagonia, all throughout the whole binational frontier. The editorial texts stand out on account of their consistency when positioning the journal within research lines that strengthen integrationist and Latinoamericanist ties.

Also, by the end of the 1990s the Center of Trans-Andean Studies was created in the School of Social and Political Sciences of the Cuyo National University. The center shares common interests and members with the Chilean–Argentine Association of Historical Studies and Cultural Integration. In 2002 the center increased its scope and became the Center of Trans-Andean and Latin American Studies. It has a rather long history in the organization of academic activities which totals 11 seminars. All meetings were held in Mendoza city (Argentina). Having the same venue for the meetings throughout the years, in a way, weakens the binational character of the seminar.

Analysis of the Scales of Studies, Criteria for their Spatial Delimitation

The spatial delimitation of the Argentine–Chilean frontier studies in the region denominated North Patagonia–Araucanía reveals semantic differences as well as a variation in geographical and time scales, according to the issues addressed by each discipline.

As Benedetti highlights (2014, 14) “scales are not defined before the research, but on the contrary, they are part of the research problem.” Consequently, identifying the scales of work in these binational studies constitutes a key element in the analysis. Figure 1 aims to synthesize and compare schematically the different spatial delimitations and predominant criteria used in recent works on North Patagonia–Araucanía. Generally, a spatial delimitation entails taking a flexible stance, which includes resorting to physical and natural traits, a shared regional history, a network space and/or the village concept (the last as a method for anthropological analysis). This fact allows expanding studies to the rural/urban scope according to multiple indicators of socio-cultural practices.

Thus, research projects were grouped around two central core themes: (a) The landscape’s ecological and physiographic dimensions and, (b) the landscape’s sociocultural dimensions.

(a) The landscape’s ecological and physiographic dimensions have been included mainly in investigations related to:

- (1) The interactions and interchanges among pre-colonial human groups. In the case of these studies based on archaeological records at a wider time scale (from 10,000 years B.P. until 1500–1800 years before the military campaigns: “Pacification of Araucanía,” (Chile), and the “Desert Campaign,” (Argentina). It can be concluded that the landscape had a “high degree of sociocultural homogeneity based on a scenario where the environment resources were complementary, with connections-interactions between similar social groups and that would include, as well, contacts with more distant locations like the Atlantic and grassland coasts” (Hajduk, Alborno, and M. Lezcano 2011); these continuous–discontinuous contacts among native peoples in an environment denominated *wooded lacustrine* (lacustre boscoso) by Alborno and Cúneo (2000), are also included, from a totalizing approach, within the great *Southern Cone frontier*—territory formed by the new Argentine, Uruguayan and Chilean States during the 19th century (Tamagnini and Pérez Zavala 2011).
- (2) The state policies which created the first national parks to establish the sovereignty of the national states during the 1920s and 1930s, and the role played by the national state in the construction of the mountain range landscape comprised in the *Argentine Northwest Patagonia* and *Chilean Central Southern* mountain range. The points under discussion include settlement policies towards old settlers/native peoples and the subdivision of these protected national areas according to their use (Pérez, Reyes Álvarez, and Erra 2013).
- (3) The creation of an *Argentine-Chilean Switzerland* image, which was built linking the ideas of an untouched nature within the national parks, with the agricultural activities carried out in the first farming colonies, and the urban/picturesque architecture in the tourist support centers (cities and touristic villages located within the jurisdiction of these first national parks) (Bessera 2011; Lolich, Vejsbjerg, and Ponte 2011). This touristic image contributed to establish this frontier region, full of Andean beauties,

as a “morphological unit in consonance with the national designs derived from the generation of the eighties and beyond the second half of the twentieth century” (Bondel 2011, 45).

- (4) The conservation policies in a frontier area which has a homogeneous landscape and where, in 2007, among other recognitions, UNESCO declared two adjacent zones as Biosphere Reserves: the Andean–North Patagonian Biosphere Reserve (Argentina) and the Southern Andes Temperate Rainforest Biosphere Reserve (Chile). Both protect a mountain range strip of approximately 600 km shared by different habitats belonging to the world’s southernmost temperate forests. It is worth mentioning that the authors refer to only one Biosphere Reserve in the Chilean–Argentine North Patagonian Region (Navarro Floria 2011; Rosales Urrutia 2011).

(b) From the landscape’s sociocultural dimensions, the following approaches can be mentioned:

- (1) The commercial relationships between Southern Chile (including the Araucanía zone and cities like Valdivia, Osorno, Llanquihue) and the Argentine North Patagonia (Almonacid 2011).
- (2) The complex network of trade routes controlled by mapuches, huilines serranos and pehuenches, during the 18th and 19th centuries between Araucanía–Valdivia (actually Chile) and the Trans-Andean or Buenos Aires pampas (actually Argentina) (Carreño Palma 2011).
- (3) The regional sectoral alliances linked to trade circuits in the territory comprised between the 42nd and 43rd parallel South, delimited to the West by the Pacific Ocean and to the East by the Nahul Huapi Lake shoreline (Méndez and Muñoz Sougarret 2013).
- (4) The strategies for tourism and urbanization development in the axis formed by the cities located in Chile’s X Region (Puerto Montt, Osorno, and Puerto Varas) and the Andean North Patagonia (Bariloche’s influence zone) which set the bases for creating landscape attractiveness as well as territorial connectivity, which have continued until today (Lolich et al. 2013).
- (5) The existing consistency both in the aesthetics and memory of the Chilean–Argentine North Patagonian frontier and the Aysén Region in Chilean Patagonia (Núñez 2011). Studies connected with researches related to the historical population mobility among different Argentine North Patagonia provinces (Río Negro and Neuquén) and the Chilean Araucanía (Chilean X Los Lagos Region and XIV Los Ríos Region) (Matossian and Sassone 2011). Passes identified in Figure 1 correspond to those having greater human mobility, as regards population movements in the second half of the 20th century. The Puyehue and Tromen Passes stand out at first level on account of their highest absolute values (De Marco and Sassone 1994).

As has been proven, the point under discussion continues to be delimiting the area of study generally known as Araucanía (Chile)–Norpatagonia (Argentina). Besides the complexity which introduces the time variable, that explains the change in the use of toponymical names and/or the inclusion of others, it is essential to mention the existence of other elements which have been largely worked from geography. Such elements as the concepts

of geographical scale (which, in turn, implies considering social actors from different social levels), region (as a dynamic space and not *a priori* delimited) and cultural landscape (which allows us to explain the relational dynamics beyond the jurisdictional boundaries between both nation states) serve as a basis for the analysis of a frontier space.

North Patagonia–Araucanía: Identities and Representations from History

The *Trans-Andean Studies Review* has published articles focusing on the north area of the Argentine–Chilean Patagonia, where interesting questions were raised from history about the frontier space and the construction of sovereignty in the “peripheries.” Teobaldo declares that the landscapes and inhabitants have been reduced to mere representations. Elements such as the physical geography, the vast spatial dimensions, the isolation resulting from physical and mental distances and the lack of means to solve it, were the raw material from which discourses on Patagonia territories, their inhabitants and the agents who had to civilize them, were woven. “The high recurrence of certain metaphors used in their reports can be understood as the institutionalization of an image linked essentially to the defence of the national sovereignty and the consequent formation of the national identity as the safeguard of borders” (Teobaldo 2008, 94).

Along the same line and focused on identity constructions, Benclovitz (2012) gives an account of the limitations imposed on Chilean migrants in Argentina by the Decree Law 15.385/44 denominated Creation of Security Zones in frontier areas which declared it was convenient for national interests that properties located in the security zone belong to native Argentine citizens. He also explains how by revaluating the national state activities, a double invisibilization of indigenous communities gained ground through discourses that propounded the previous extermination of native peoples, and others that referred to the Chilean-indigenous elements as negative elements. This line was also analyzed in the work of Porma Oñate (2012) about the impact of the collective imaginary of a dominant and hegemonic culture linked to the nation state which, using a colonial logic, aims to homogenize the construction of a stereotyped image of the mapuche people as wild and barbaric.

Another significant contribution was made by Navarro Floria (2007a) with respect to the representations of time and space in the future projects designed for North Patagonia. This author suggested that Patagonia’s regional reality was organized around a positivist idea of progress, according to which the National Territories constituted, by the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, an experimentation where the peoples could not exercise political sovereignty.

These meaningful contributions were still analyzing this space differentially with respect to the national states of Chile or Argentina. The following section examines those which went further in an integrated approach.

Review of Studies carried out on Borderland Thematics in Southern Argentina and Chile

To date, a small number of studies from Chilean and Argentine researchers have adopted a definite binational perspective when addressing their borderlands. However, there are many important works which analyze frontier dynamics. The research on Trevelin

(Argentina) and Futaleufú (Chile) settlements carried out by Baeza (2007) stand out. Baeza maintains that the frontier spaces located on the nation's hinterland revealed ways of generating social practices different from those in the rest of the nation. She gives priority to the metaphorical use of the internal and external frontier, linked to the process of building cultural identity based on the collective memory of the Argentine–Chilean frontier.

From a historical perspective, it is worth mentioning the research of Méndez (2005) on the importance of the axis San Carlos de Bariloche–Puerto Montt; also, Pablo Lacoste (2005) compiled the work “Argentina, Chile and their neighbors (1810–2000)”. Moving forward in the analysis of frontier spaces, we find the studies of Bandieri, particularly *Crossing the mountain range. The Argentine-Chilean frontier* (Bandieri 2001).

In a significant book concerning frontier studies: “Frontiers on the move and geographical imaginaries” (Núñez, Sánchez, and Arenas 2013), Chilean and Argentine researchers address a wide range of topics from interdisciplinary perspectives. The editors rely on a geography that includes memory, historicity, diversity, and complexity as the cornerstones supporting the study of a frontier space from its material perspective and taking into account the spatial dimension of the social element. Geographical imaginaries are understood “as the result of social narratives, actions, mechanisms, discourses that fix in the collective retina a way of perceiving space and therefore, a way of acting in it” (Núñez, Sánchez, and Arenas 2013, 16). These authors emphasize how the image of a solid mountain range frontier formed part of a broader process of spatial rationalization, derived from the colonial period and consistent with centrality parameters. From a semiological approach, Paulsen Bilbao (2013) examines teaching textbooks and highlights how the imaginaries used to teach a national geography built a notion of a mountain range that isolates, while functioning as a natural guarantee of the country's sovereignty. On the other hand, Araya Palacios (2013) analyzes recent texts from the multidimensionality of the Andes mountain range and concludes, that the gradual diversification of texts allows us to go further in the consideration of the topic, from physical and geopolitical dimensions.

As regards the relevance of scales in frontier studies, as Tapia and Ovando (2013, 265) point out, “the relations that give meaning to the frontier space affect their configuration and representation—one at territorial scale connected to the global, towards the trans-frontier and the mobility; another at national scale towards the frontier as containment and fragmentation.” This idea takes up again the key notion of scale to comprehend the complexity of associated representations in the frontier space. Besides, Tapia and Ovando warn that the approaches must transcend the methodological nationalisms to really tackle frontier spaces in their contradictions as scale condensers and power struggles in divergent directions.

Finally, Benedetti and Laguado (2013) examine the Argentine–Chilean frontier space based on the notion of places system. They identify a North Patagonia subzone in which the places system is defined by numerous towns and small medium-sized cities nearby the border and by the presence of National Parks.

Taking a Step towards Binational Joint Research: The Binational Workshops

The binational perspective in borderland studies transcends the analysis of a territory that goes beyond the national states' boundaries; it also refers to binational approaches in the

works' authorship and academic efforts. In this respect, the binational workshops organized by the Research Institute for Cultural Diversity and Processes of Change (IIDyPCa, CONICET-UNRN) in San Carlos de Bariloche (Argentina) during 2010, 2011 and 2015 and in Pucón (Chile) in 2013, encouraged through in-person meetings and debates the start of joint research work among academics of both countries belonging to different universities and science centers. One of the outcomes of said meetings was the publication of three books compiling scientific articles. In those works, the thematic organization of studies and the tendency to publish papers between Argentine and Chilean authors stand out; this has broadened the area of studies and increased the number of compilation units on both sides of The Andes. It is also possible to identify theoretical and conceptual frameworks from political geography, cultural geography, demography, and tourism geography.

It must be made clear that this set of studies located in the North Patagonia–Araucanía region, mainly focused on the social and cultural aspects of Geography's most relevant notions, have been enriched by perspectives articulated in many recent studies. In Latin America, from the pioneer works of Milton Santos (2000) to the contributions of Lindón and Hiernaux (2012); Zusman, Haesbaert, Castro, Adamo (2011) and Souto (2011), among others, a relevant theoretical basis which proposes a change in the comprehension of certain traditional geographical concepts has been consolidated during the last few years. In some cases these studies revisit and re-signify Francophone and Anglophone contributions with a Latin American imprint. These contributions from the fields of Social, Cultural and Political Geography, which were briefly referenced in this article, have formed a necessary and indispensable context for the production and development of works on the concerned region, based on an open binational dialogue.

The dynamics of joint work itself strengthened the integration of disciplines and theories, where the perspective of the geographical analysis was enriched by contributions from regional history, urbanism and architecture, political sciences, philosophy, and anthropology.

The following synthesis aims to evidence the main concepts related to the discussion of frontiers in which geography has a long history in the study (geographical scale, periphery/geographical isolation, region, cultural landscape, and territorialization processes). Likewise, the synthesis identifies types of approaches and/or disciplines related to geography, the spatial delimitation, names and criteria used by different authors when defining the study areas, all which allowed analyzing the North Patagonia–Araucanía frontier space.

Geographical scale is a key concept largely used in different works; the territorial logic underlying in its definition still remains under discussion.

In particular, the assumptions of the traditional political geography (PG), which through a geometry of power aimed to delimit a territory physically on the basis of the institutionalization of the nation states during the 19th and 20th century, are under review. As Laurín and Núñez (2013) point out, in this context it was not possible to consider a North Patagonian frontier because, for decades the national level constituted the only territorial rationality, and consequently they think it is relevant to start addressing this space by appreciating the territorial and frontier particularities. They propose that in order to analyze the dialectics between nationalism and globalization in the 20th and 21st centuries, it is essential to define PG as a project or as a process of comprehensibility based on a relational fact, to address scale as a phenomenological issue (Laurín 2011).

Therefore, this perspective would allow considering the frontier region as a new territorial configuration where the involvement of other agents create new social relations which imply new spatial relations (Sánchez 1992).

From cultural geography, Núñez (2011) points out that frontier interpretations based only on the political delimitation of nation states have acted following the logics of a strong territorial discourse which is imposed as social identity and ends up as an actual fact. He included the time dimension to identify and examine the existence of weak territorial discourses that are in conflict with the design that aims to homogenize and incorporate geographically isolated territories to national and global contexts.

In line with the above, Bondel (2011) makes an in-depth analysis of the notion of socio-cultural space, highlighting the value of territorial practices with horizontal orientation and transcending the icons (for example the mountain range) which have historically operated as a barrier in a frontier space.

Summing up, Zusman emphasizes that though it is possible to perceive similar policies as regards the territorial organization in Chile and Argentina, “defining territoriality is not an exclusive prerogative of states, but also of groups and individuals building their territoriality” (Zusman 2011, 67). Zusman further suggests, following Sack’s (1986) relational, time, and plural conception of territoriality, that said territorialities can be activated and deactivated.

From a migratory police and demography approach, Matossian and Sassone (2011) make reference to the *scale* concept as a social construction. It reveals hierarchies that, from the national structure operate disregarding local orders and consequently affecting social integration. This territory, and its frontier migration, presents a trans-frontier condition which provides a specific connotation to the analysis, because it does not allow a similar consideration and assessment as an international or intercontinental migration process does (see Matossian and Sassone 2011).

The need to examine, throughout time, the mechanisms and designs of different intervening social agents (public and private) in frontier sub-national spaces has generated among historians, anthropologists and heritage conservation experts, discussions referred to theoretical assumptions strongly rooted in their fields when tackling different geographical scales in regional studies. It is possible to identify two positions: on one hand, Graciela Iuorno wonders whether the Argentine–Chilean North Patagonia region constitutes a real historical subject or an “example of particularity in processes of regional space formation which are not always synchronous with respect to the formation of nationality and the structuring of national states” (Iuorno 2013). Basing her position, she refers to the Argentine historian Chiaramonte, among other authors, who from the synthesis/total history perspective objects that “a region exists when it has a historical presence in the global history of a specific country” and that “the regional aspect has two dominant features: the regional as a historical whole, with a distinctive identity and, at the same time, as part of another greater whole, which would be the nation” (Chiaramonte 2008, 184).

In addition, there is a second position which consists in conceiving the region and the regional histories as “interpenetrated organisms that in their relations with other similar systems constitute the national history and not vice versa” (see Méndez and Muñoz Sourgaret 2013). Consistent with this new way of perceiving the trans-frontier reality as a region, Núñez and Almonacid indicate that the integration of territories is an issue in itself, and that, from a centralist logic of the state political power, the historical assumption

of Patagonia as an homogenous region is reproduced deep into these territories while simultaneously there is no homogenous development agenda. This generates long-term dependence and subordination factors (Núñez and Almonacid 2013).

This need to redefine how to build national history and which place the regional history occupies within this process of territorialization has taken Méndez and Tozzini (2011) to admit a network approach with the aim of giving density to political, economic and social practices at a regional level. In this case, the analysis uses the concept of village conceived after the 1960s by anthropology, as the point from where, in terms of method and strategy, one can undertake an ethnographic study. Thus, the authors consider the Argentine–Chilean frontier as a place for meeting and interchange; its regional boundaries and extension do not require being previously determined.

In consonance with the above, the frontier concept was approached from a cultural perspective by way of analyzing cities (from urbanism and architecture) as an indicator of the collective representations of a particular society at a certain time, and tourism (with contributions from tourism geography) as a productive activity common to all these cities. Lolich, Vejsbjerg and Ponte (2011) took these comparable elements in the region between the Andean North Patagonia (Bariloche influence zone) and part of the Chile X Region (Puerto Montt, Osorno, and Puerto Varas influence zone). In this way, when identifying and describing practices aimed at forming the built space (habitat) and tourism practices (activity planning and marketing schemes), they discovered that sectoral interests, especially those linked to tourism and the conservation of natural areas, allowed the persistence of certain integration practices which were regulated at local and national levels, irrespective of the political breakdowns and continuities experimented in this frontier space. However, they alert us to the significant decrease of national states' power in matters related to the conservation of cities' architectural heritage and sustainability of tourism practices at local and regional levels, in times marked by globalization and super-structural decisions at a global scale (1980–to present). For this reason, they propose to analyze this frontier space from a regional point of view, supporting thus the hypothesis of Waisman who claimed that “the idea of region, as opposed to the idea of periphery, situates each culture within a system based on a plurality of regions, a system where none of them is hegemonic and consequently can not establish itself as a valid universal model,” proposing “the treasuring of ‘marginal’ cultures ...” as a way of building cultural pluralism (Waisman 1990, 72).

In sum, addressing the center–periphery dichotomy and the dependence of the latter with respect to the first, the analysis of the frontier space as a *region* presents itself as a centrality.

In this line, papers relying on fundamentals from science philosophy, ecology and history provide evidences confirming that the “policies for the protection of nature are closely connected to the territorialization of natural spaces which generated spatial configurations defined as strongly centralized and concentrated in terms of decisions, interests and resources in extraregional metropolis” (Navarro Floria 2011, 150).

The concept of *landscape* also has a long tradition within geography. In the Binational Workshops there is background information on articles which examine landscape from different perspectives. They indicate that the interpretation of the symbolic load of material constructions (visible aspects of landscape) allows explaining the national state aim of creating Argentine identity (Bessera 2011). In line with the above, a comparative

study addresses the way in which both national states territorialized this frontier space (mainly through hotel building projects) by means of railway companies and national parks protection agencies (Lolich et al. 2013).

In turn, there is a remarkable contribution to “explain some phenomena connected to the appropriation of territory, such as displacements, travels and migrations, as well as human cultural adaptation to the environment, among other issues” (Mora Mora 2013, 53). The landscape literary reconstruction through the analysis of heritage assets, as a method to discover identity elements, has been one of the recent developments in that direction (Pastor and Raffa 2013).

From philosophy, studies have gone deeply into the symbolic fundamentals linked to the notion of landscape, with the object of explaining social exclusion and even territorial subordination (Núñez 2011). Likewise, from history it is also relevant that Navarro Floria’s study on Patagonia or *Patagonias* and the characterization of this/these as frontier spaces considered at a national scale as areas which can be incorporated to become productive processes or *landscapes of progress* (Navarro Floria 2007b).

Conclusions

The advance of studies on borderland and the creation of scientific centers related to these themes required, to some extent, a favorable geopolitical context. The return to democracy, after a period of dictatorships and the creation of integration regional blocks as Mercosur and Unasur, laid the foundations for the emergence of this thematic from geography and other social sciences.

As if cultural geography were irrelevant when analyzing the symbolic dimensions which intervene in landscape construction, in the borderland studies on the Araucanía–North Patagonia area, as Benedetti (2014) pointed out for frontier studies in general, geography is not properly valued in these works that consider space anthropology. Even so, based on the analysis carried out in this work, a marked turning point towards studies accounting for the subjective dimensions of frontiers and emerging from renewed geographical perspectives can be inferred.

Following the suggestion of Tapia and Ovando (2013), changes in the conception of states and nations bring about the centrality of frontier spaces and provide an opportunity for the frontier region and frontier theory to discuss, from within, the privileged center hegemony, denationalizing and deterritorializing the nation-state. In geography, this renewal of the region concept as a living space starts a very fruitful dialogue with disciplines such as urbanism and regional history, when considering the frontier space as a region belonging to a system of regions. Each one of these subnational spaces acquires central stage when being dealt with, as opposed to the traditional dichotomy center–periphery and the dependence of the latter in respect to the first.

Geographical scale and landscape are the other concepts widely analyzed from disciplines such as history, philosophy, architecture, ecology, in joint works carried out by Argentine and Chilean researchers. The analysis of the notion of scale involves an ongoing dialogue with political geography, for it particularly stresses power relations articulated with nationalism and globalization dialectics, both in an interregional and intraregional sense. On the other hand, the concept of landscape as a social construction, from its materiality and immateriality, illustrates the importance of the study of discourses, either

strong or weak, and their influence within the territorialization and frontierization processes. These three key concepts, region, geographical scale and landscape, mark out largely the route from geographical contributions to frontier studies in North Patagonia.

Regarding the frontier and transnational interests of public and private agents, it is relevant to point out that, though the Andean-lacustrine North Patagonia region has retained a significant trans-frontier dynamism and possesses high-value economic resources, which could lay the foundations for an integral binational development (for example, hydroelectric potential and tourism), there are no long-term scientific studies directed to generate concrete action plans and strategies for the development of a space which represents a unicity transcending political boundaries. The systematization of information at macro scale on trans-frontier population dynamics is essential as a first step to advance studies on specific issues, as well as to formulate development strategies; these aspects are being addressed in a second phase of collaborative work between Chilean and Argentine researchers.

At the same time, it is worth mentioning the interest in furthering current phenomena knowledge which under different (ecological, economical, geo-political, demographical, among others) logics, and the incorporation of transnational public and private agents which also operate on this frontier space through the implementation of initiatives such as the Bioscenic Corridor and the Biosphere Reserves program. These perspectives contributed to question the construction of the frontier and even of the Andes mountain range as impassable walls and consequently to perceive them as genuine meeting regions, even more in its southern part. There is nothing natural in considering the mountain range in the North Patagonia Araucanía as a frontier. According to Lacoste's (1983) affirmation, the frontier taken as a whole is determined not by "natural" factors but by military and political power relations.

Theoretical concepts such as multiterritoriality, symbolic frontiers, spatial representations and imaginaries should take a central role in cultural geography border studies in order to include the immaterial dimension in the complex and multiscale broadening processes studies. As Lindón and Hiernaux (2012) propose: the study of the imaginary in geography is an innovation in spatial and social thought oriented towards roads less traveled.

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