The desert, the border, and the city: Staging a spectacle on the Chile-Peru border

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Abstract:

The 1970s saw Chile and Peru, both headed by military dictators, come to the brink of war. In order to avoid such a war, the Chilean military in the far north engaged in techniques of 'spectacle' for two reasons: firstly, to convince citizens on both sides of the border that Chile had a strong miltary and would succeed in the event of a war with Peru, and secondly, to create the impression of 'fraternity' with Peru. To perform these spectacles, the Chilean military employed the geography of northern Chile in three spaces: the desert, the border, and the city. These spaces became stages where acts of military deception could be implemented with the Chileans using fake tanks, military ceremonies, and bogus parades to appear militarily strong. This extends current scholarship by arguing that multiple environments can be harnessed for their specific geographical qualities in order to stage a unified geopolitical spectacle. Previous geographical scholarship has focused on individual environments as military spaces and scholarship on spectacle has treated environments as a backdrop and not a central part of how the spectacle is enacted. Here I show that it was the precise *natures* of the border, the desert, and the city that were exploited for a multi-scaled, heterogeneous, and fractured form of spectacle. Through the orchestrated control of these three spaces that define the border region, a clear narrative of military strength matched with a desire for peaceful co-operation with Peru was created.

Keywords:

Spectacle; Borders; Geopolitics; Chile; Peru

INTRODUCTION

The Chile-Peru border is a contentious space that has been made and re-made since it was officially demarcated in 1929. One of the defining moments in this history was the 1970s, a fractious decade when Chile and Peru almost went to war. In order to avoid war, the Chilean military needed to dissuade Peru from attacking by appearing to have a strong and well-equipped military while also reassuring the Chilean populace that relations with Peru were harmonious. Chile needed to avoid war without losing face. To this end, the Chilean military, at both national and local levels, engaged in acts of spectacle that took advantage of the unique geography of the Chilean far north. The dry and arid north, with few settlements beyond the city of Arica, became a stage for the Chilean military to perform a range of often subtle and partial spectacles that together helped to avoid war. These spectacles were tailored for and shaped by the three spaces that define the far north of Chile: the desert, the border, and Chile's northernmost city of Arica.

Chile and Peru have a complex historical relationship, one marked by a 'zigzagging' between periods of tension and periods of civility (Milet, 2005; Freeman, 2015). At the beginning of the 1970s, Chile and Peru had a largely positive relationship. Chile had elected the Marxist President Salvador Allende (1970-1973) and his policies did not markedly conflict with those of the Peruvian President General Juan Velasco Alvarado (1968-1975). Broadly speaking, even though the Chilean was democratically elected while the Peruvian took power through a military coup, the leaders agreed on the need for agrarian reforms, the nationalisation of resources, and checks on business (Rodríguez Elizondo, 2004).

This all changed in September 1973 when Allende was overthrown by the armed forces and police and General Augusto Pinochet Ugarte assumed power. Pinochet and Velasco were ideological enemies and the Peruvian saw this as the ideal time to reclaim territory that had been taken from Peru by Chile almost a century earlier in the War of the Pacific (1879-1883).

The international border with Peru was immediately closed and an estimated 400 tanks were stationed in southern Peru. The Chile-Peru border was suddenly transformed into a potential battle zone. Arica, located just 18km from the Peruvian border and 58km from the Peruvian city of Tacna, was vulnerable to potential attack and needed to be militarised against the northern enemy.

While Pinochet and Velasco were readying for war from their respective capital cities, the situation in the borderlands was vastly different. The military faction in northern Chile was headed by General Odlanier Mena and southern Peru was governed by General Artemio García. These men sought to work together to avoid all-out war. This was particularly important for Mena who knew that Chile did not have the military strength to match Peru's if war did arise. Chile was more industrialised, urbanised, and with a growing middle class, but Peru was ruled by the agro-exporting elites and the military and had far greater numbers of soldiers and equipment (Rock, 1994). As the anti-communist right grew in strength in Chile, the Soviet Union intensified its relationship with Peru and sold tanks and bombers to Velasco (Meneses, 1982). The USSR offered low prices and generous credit terms on military equipment and by the mid-1970s, half of Peru's arms imports originated from the USSR (Berrios & Blasier, 1991). National military spending, which was concentrated between 1974 and 1977, soon became disproportionate to its economy; between 1968 and 1977 Peru's per capita GNP rose by 40 percent, yet per capita military expenditures increased by over 80 percent (St John, 1992). In contrast, Chile was militarily weak with its equipment languishing in poor condition. Chile's military equipment alone would not be enough to convince Peru that Chile would be a dangerous enemy to provoke.

This paper draws on oral histories and newspaper reports. The oral histories were conducted with twelve individuals who were in the armed forces, in a military family, or worked in city or regional administration in Arica during the 1970s. These were in-depth

interviews that covered people's roles, experiences, and memories of work and life on Chile's northern border during this period. As Kuus (2013) has shown, 'studying up' in policy or diplomatic circles is highly challenging as researchers may be denied access or given stock answers. In my case, the military elites who were making policy decisions in the 1970s were out of reach. As leading figures in a dictatorship some are imprisoned or deceased, and even if any others agreed to speak to me, there would have been significant ethical and safety risks. Therefore, certain additional details are provided by General Odlanier Mena through secondary sources when he gave interviews before his death. Mena was the key military figure in Arica during the 1970s but was later arrested for human rights violations and was imprisoned from 2009 until his suicide in 2013. Given the impossibility of directly interviewing military elites, the machinations of policy have to partly be studied through their effects. For example, newspaper reports, predominantly from the right-wing pro-military *La Defensa*, illustrate the narrative that was fed to the local citizens. The Chilean military had significant power over the press and journalists were amongst those targeted by the violent junta (Reyes Matta, Ruiz and Sunkel, 1986). All newspapers must therefore be read as state-sanctioned articles that can be used to explore what the military wanted citizens to know and believe.

Oral histories and newspaper analysis provide one way in to understanding the actions of the military on the Chile-Peru border in the 1970s. However, it is also important to acknowledge what these analyses do *not* show. This paper focuses on the Chilean military and so civilian and Peruvian voices are beyond the scope of this paper (see Freeman, 2020 for an analysis of civilian perspectives of Arica in the 1970s). Given the secrecy of the Pinochet regime and their destruction of official documents, many of the events set out in this paper cannot be verified. This does not make them invalid. Instead, I am interested in how the local press depicted events and how my interviewees remember and understood Chile-Peru relations in the 1970s.

The key contribution of this paper is to argue that multiple environments can be harnessed for their specific geographical qualities in order to stage a unified geopolitical spectacle. Here I show that it was the precise *natures* of the border, the desert, and the city that were exploited for a multi-scaled, heterogeneous, and unspectacular form of spectacle. The case study of the 1970s when Chile and Peru were on the brink of war acts as a vehicle to make this argument. The theatre of military spectacle was multi-sited, and this meant that the Chilean and Peruvian governments' plans for border relations were not always concurrent with what was happening on the ground where the local generals were orchestrating their own spectacles. The spectacle was unified in a broad sense, then, to avoid war, even if there was not cohesive agreement on how this should be achieved. Yet, in concert, these geographically-specific spectacles were employed to convince the Peruvians that Chile was militarily strong and had the support of the US, while they were also used to convince the Chilean citizenry that Chile was at peace with Peru.

SPECTACLES AND THE THEATRE OF WAR

Etymologically, the word 'spectacle' comes from the Latin for 'a public show' and was used in Old French as 'a specially prepared or arranged display'. The visual plays a significant role in such shows and displays as seen through Debord's (1995, Thesis 4) definition of spectacle as 'a social relationship between people that is mediated by images'. Other scholars have primarily thought of spectacles as live performances such as ceremonies and celebrations that have important visual effects (Kong and Yeoh, 1997). A parade, for example, may be considered a spectacle performed for those watching but can be secondarily spectacular through media dissemination (Agamben, 2011).

As Kong and Yeoh (1997) emphasise, spectacles can influence public consciousness and induce feelings of loyalty. Spectacles are often purposively divisive; their aim is to create a reaction (Kershaw, 2003). But this can be key to creating feelings of inclusion and so spectacles have been used as a tool to pacify and distract the 'audience' (Gotham, 2002), and to create a shared imagined community (Anderson, 1983). These tend to be entertaining and popular events that serve to represent a group both to group members but also to those outside of the group; spectacles can shape public perceptions and set the boundaries for agreed-upon opinion. While the literature has often focused on nation-states in this sense, this paper will explore how spectacle can be used to (re)produce a cross-border community as well as a national one. The term 'border performativity' is used to examine how and by whom borders are socially constructed. This construction is not by a singular actor but 'via the performance of various state actors in an elaborate dance with ordinary people' (Wonders, 2006: 64). Wonders (2006: 66) argues that 'although states attempt to choreograph national borders, often in response to global pressures, these state policies have little meaning until they are 'performed' by state agents or by border crossers'. Spectacles, therefore, can play a part in the choregraphing of borders and border relations.

A novel contribution of this paper is to demonstrate how spectacular events are not always bombastic or showy, instead they can be subtle, carefully laid plans that seek, through visual and social relations, to project an image and to convey a message. Most of this work falls into a binary of 'banal nationalism' (Billig, 1995) or hyper-showy exceptional demonstrations of power. This paper seeks a middle ground to show how decisions can be purposeful and planned as a display but that this display is muted or only targeted to a specific audience. There may be parades but they are for locals rather than for international attention. There may be tanks but they will be replicas on display rather than leading an invasion.

These unspectacular spectacles also complicate 'where' spectacles come from. This

builds upon Ley and Olds' (1988) critique of the idea of spectacles as a top-down transmission of hegemonic power, enacted upon a passive public. In their discussion of the 1986 Vancouver Expo they call for analyses of spectacles that account for 'a fractured and negotiated power that [is] never absolute' (Ley and Olds, 1988: 210). The majority of the spectacles discussed in this paper are not dictated by the ultimate hegemonic power in Chile at the time, General Pinochet and his high-ranking colleagues in Santiago, but by the military leaders located on the Chile-Peru border. There is therefore fracturing with tension between military strategy in the capital and that in the borderlands even in a violent dictatorship and the public were not inert audiences to their spectacles.

The form of spectacle I am interested in here is also informed by the idea of 'observant practice'. First used by Fraser MacDonald (2006, 2010) and taken up by Matthew Rech (2015), 'observant practice' complicates the assumed homogeneity of vision. It is concerned with what the public is able to see or not, what they are given glimpses at, and how looking will always be relative, fractured, and contested. Both authors are interested in the military and how the military shapes what is made visible or invisible, what is transparent or opaque (MacDonald, 2006; Rech, 2015). Observant practice is therefore about 'what it means to see' (MacDonald, 2010: 288) and how the management of what is observed can be incomplete and resisted (Rech, 2015).

Rech draws a distinction between observant practice and spectacle. In his study of British air shows, Rech (2015) argues that observant practice is a more useful theoretical lens than spectacle because the air show on view is fractured and dependent on who is doing the viewing rather than being a hegemonic, coherent spectacle. Rech (2015: 546) takes observant practice as 'a more compromising concept' than spectacle as the former leaves more room for divergence from the script of the spectacle. However, following Ley and Olds (1988) I am sceptical whether spectacles have ever been so dominant and one-way. I argue that it is useful

to consider observant practice *alongside* spectacle rather than as opposite to it in order to explore the scripted spectacle as intended in relation to what is experienced and seen. The effects of the spectacle are not always what was planned.

The three spaces (the desert, border, and city) can be read as stages where these planned spectacles were performed. The environments of the desert and border in particular were constructed as passive backdrops for theatrical displays. They were 'emptied' and 'de-peopled' in order to become stages. Political geography scholarship on military spaces and environments has to date focused on in-depth examinations of singular spaces. For example, the tropics (Clayton, 2013), the desert (Forsyth, 2014, 2016, 2017), and cities (Graham, 2009, 2011) have been subject to important research. A key contribution of this literature has been to challenge understandings of what constitutes a 'military space'. Militarised spaces are far more expansive than just where military combat happens or where military facilities are located (Davis, 2007), and such research has interrogated the construction and implementation of military power (Woodward, 2014). However, this body of scholarship has not studied *the relationships between* military landscapes, environments, or spaces. Therefore in this paper I do not aim to provide a detailed account of how one environment was militarised and utilised by the Chilean military, but how three distinct spaces were each exploited for their specific geographic qualities and it was these three *in concert* that allowed them to create an illusion of military strength to further their own military power while avoiding war. Each space became a theatre for a different form of spectacle and this was shaped for each particular environment.

The metaphor of the 'theatre' has been used by scholars to explain the performances of political summits (Death, 2011) and conferences (Shimazu, 2013). For Constantinou (2015: 32), 'by underscoring theatrical action in diplomacy we can appreciate how the representation of self/other and the mediation of otherness increasingly entail public performative and affective dimensions'. Drawing on this, by understanding the theatrical spectacle that the

Chilean military was engaging in during the 1970s, it is possible to better understand how the military in the borderlands were mediating a complex relationship not just with the nation-state 'enemy' on the other side of the border but also with their own central military governments and civilians. The Chilean military was asserting its sovereign control over the far north while simultaneously displaying a message of peace, security, and 'fraternity' with Peru. As Coleman (2005) has shown through his work on US statecraft on the US-Mexico border, there is not always one coherent 'script', but instead a set of 'storylines'. What I focus on in this paper is the varying, multi-scalar storylines being played out on the Chile-Peru border with national plans for ensuring Chilean sovereignty in the far north often differing from regional strategies of cross-border co-operation. This resulted in a range of military spectacles that were performed in, with, and through three environments: the desert, the border, and the city.

THE DESERT

The Atacama Desert is the driest non-polar temperate desert on Earth (Bull et al., 2018). It is hyperarid and inhospitable with the Spanish describing the desert as 'barren' and unpopulated' when they traversed the area in the 16th century (Mendez, Prieto & Godoy, 2020). But the area has long been inhabited, with naturally mummified bodies found dating back to 7020 BC. Indigenous communities have continued to live in small settlements but these populations have historically been invisibilised (Quiroz Thompson et al., 2011). Mendez, Prieto and Godoy (2020) have argued that the Atacama Desert was 'naturalised' as an 'empty' desert in the nineteenth century to produce the space as one filled with rich resources for mining and capitalist venture rather than one where indigenous communities have agency. A century later the desert was exploited for its barrenness and openness for another form of state power; militarism. This vast, arid space was transformed into the perfect stage for the Chilean military;

expansive desert horizons mean that objects and movement can be seen from many miles away (Forsyth, 2014). The sandy, 'empty' plains that ran right up to and beyond the Peruvian border could be strategically filled with Chilean arms to show off military strength. The Chileans were therefore aware that this could be used in their favour to display what they wanted the Peruvians to see. There was just one problem. They didn't have anything impressive to show. Their response was to perform a spectacle for the Peruvians based on illusion and deceit.

This deception was necessary due to the weakness of the Chilean military in respect to the Peruvians. When Pinochet took power, Peru's military force exceeded that of Chile's and so the latter was forced into a game of posturing and deception in an effort to appear larger and stronger than its northern neighbour. These strategies were conceived of and enacted by the local military forces as opposed to being national tactics. Through interviews with those who were in the Chilean military during the 1970s, recurring stories of desert trickery, specifically utilising the environmental qualities of the far North, emerged.

The first trick made use of the abundance of Citroën cars in Arica. At the time, the city was a 'free port' and any goods that were brought into it were not subject to import tax. Arica therefore had a wealth of factories that would be the final stage in production, ready to sell the goods in Chile. One of these factories was for Citroën cars and as one interviewee reported, the cheap vehicles were taken out into the desert, painted camouflage, and had barrels strapped atop to make them look like tanks from afar. What the Chilean military lacked in reality they could make up in trickery.

Secondly, interviewees told me of the desert airport that they constructed. It was vital that the Chileans appeared to have strong links with the United States. Having an airport in the far north would give the impression of mobility and the potential of connections further afield. The Chilean military therefore constructed a fake airport at the foot of the Andes in Zapahuira complete with wooden planes to create this impression for the Peruvians. As one ex-soldier

explained, ‘Chile didn’t have aeroplanes, it just had some very old Hawker Hunters, so they made these wooden planes, and they constructed a false control tower, everything was a lie’. This was backed up by false radio communication by the Chileans to trick the Peruvians into believing that the Chilean military was speaking to Americans. As one interviewee clarified, the Chileans ‘had a guy who spoke very good English, so in these times he would speak on the radio... as if he were an American and making things up, and it was all a lie’. Combined with the airport, a well-connected Arica, backed by the US, seemed possible.

In the 1970s, the Chileans *wanted* Peru to see their military equipment, or false representations of it at least. The Chileans were using the open plain of the Atacama Desert as the perfect display board for these wooden airplanes and tanks made out of cars. The aim was not disguise, but exposure. Strategies of deception had been used earlier in World War II, where instead of concealment, the British military began to use tactics to mislead their enemy, to make them believe one thing was happening when in fact the opposite was true (Rankin, 2008). The British used dummies in the desert that required careful construction to ‘appear lively, yet not too overt and visible from the aerial view. In other words, the enemy still had to think that some effort had been made to camouflage and hide; if the dummy was too starkly visible the enemy would most likely ‘smell a rat’’ (Forsyth, 2012: 237). The British used the art of deception to make certain movements conspicuous and others invisible. Likewise, the Chileans had to camouflage their fakery just enough to look real but still to be seen by Peruvian eyes. The key was to use the desert landscape to their advantage, by rolling the fake military equipment into the plains of the desert and adding some camouflage and netting, the Chilean military made it *appear* that they were hiding their equipment and mobilising for war. Yet in reality this was a distraction.

The desert was a harsh environment but it was also a duplicitous martial stage, one where a particular spectacle could be displayed for the enemy to view. And this was no

accident, the desert's materiality was being harnessed in order to make the spectacle possible. It was the scale, aridity, and perceived blankness of the Atacama that allowed it to be seen as 'empty' and thereby used as a stage. The gaze of the Peruvian military was being directed toward the display of fake tanks, an airport, and radio communication but they would not have known what the Peruvians looked at in actuality. This potentially fractured observant practice means it cannot be known whether the Peruvian military even noticed this carefully orchestrated show. There was a belief that the Peruvians were engaging in high levels of surveillance, as one interviewee who was in the armed forces during the 1970s claimed, 'of course both Chile and Peru had spies, but spying was more of a Peruvian practice, to have many Chileans under surveillance'. But the audience reception was hidden from the Chilean military. Moreover, given the might of the Peruvian military, it is unknown whether they would even have been intimidated by Chile's display. Nevertheless, through the harnessing of the desert landscape, the Chileans were constructing a spectacle of sovereignty in a covert manner. This was not posturing for the view of all and certainly not for the Chilean civilians; the intended audience remained confined to the Peruvian military engaging in surveillance. Chile was forced to leave clues for the Peruvians, to create military traces in the desert.

THE BORDER

As the driest city in the world, where annual precipitation is less than 3mm (Sarricolea, Meseguer Ruiz, and Romero-Aravena, 2017), Arica is defined by the desert. But it is just as defined by its proximity to the Peruvian border, just 18km to the north. Northern Chile constitutes both an international and an internal border; adjoining Peru, Bolivia, and Argentina

while also being an area marginalised and isolated from the rest of Chile (García Pinzón, 2015). The Chile-Peru border is especially complex and was formalised in 1929 after Chile took territories from Peru and Bolivia during the War of the Pacific (1879-1883) (Palacios, 1974). In the fifty years in between, the provinces of Tacna and Arica (formerly Peruvian) were administered by Chile yet were not Chilean sovereign territory (Díaz Araya, 2003). After a failed plebiscite, the 1929 Treaty of Lima awarded Tacna to Peru and Arica to Chile, thereby creating the international border and splitting the previously united provinces (Freeman, 2015). This border history has been imbued with violence yet a shared history and culture between Tacna and Arica has remained. This created complexity in the roles of various actors in the borderland in the 1970s. Military strategy differed between the centralised administration in Santiago led by General Pinochet and the on-the-ground plans of those in the forces in Arica.

Indeed, by some accounts, the Chilean military in Santiago discounted the far north as secure Chilean territory. The military strategy of the Pinochet administration raises questions over where the border really lay. While the official international border followed the boundary set by the 1929 Treaty of Lima, Arica in the early- to mid-1970s was a 'grey area', a frontier zone of questionable security as opposed to a well-defended military line. As my interviewees argued, the 'true border', the border that the centralised Chilean military would *actually* protect in the event of military conflict was at Camarones, 80km south of Arica.[1] Oral histories provide statements such as 'they began to defend the country from Camarones', 'the border really lay at Camarones', and 'the strategic idea for the area was designated as an open city and to retreat to Camarones, defending it from there'. The 'border' was therefore not a fixed line, but a moveable one and its location depended on the priorities of those demarcating it.

[1] Incidentally, the river at Camarones has historically been discussed as a 'natural' border between Chile and Peru (González Miranda and Ovando Santana, 2017).

Reports from civilians and military personnel illustrate the prevailing view that as Arica was so close to the Peruvian border it would be almost impossible to prevent a Peruvian invasion. Therefore, it would be geopolitically strategic to protect the city of Iquique,[2] 308km to the south, where the Chileans would have a stronger defensive position. Alejandro Guillier Álvarez, a sociologist and journalist who is now a Senator, was interviewed by a television news programme in 2014 where he described Arica in the 1970s a 'zone of sacrifice' whereby the city was largely abandoned militarily.[3] Military troops were stationed in the far north but without vital auxiliary services such as a medical unit. Arica was painted as a no-man's land yet at the same time it was territory that was filled with Chilean citizens; an impossible situation if war came. Chilean soldiers from the 1970s stated emphatically that Arica would not have been safe in the event of war and would have to be recovered in a counterattack. This northern city became a pawn in this game of potential war; Arica was too difficult to hold and so the city would be lost and Chile would attempt to regain control later.

Therefore, from 1973 while Arica was becoming militarised, the Chilean military would have focussed its efforts on holding the line at Camarones in the event of an armed invasion by Peru with the expectation that Arica would be lost. However, as the 1970s progressed and the Peruvians continued to state their aim to 'recover' Arica (particularly with the centenary of the War of the Pacific approaching in 1979), Pinochet and his government became increasingly keen to defend Arica and so strengthened the international border. From 1976 Arica became seen as a vital stronghold that could not be relinquished to the Peruvians who could remain there and then move further south.

[2] Iquique received favourable economic benefits compared to Arica under the Pinochet regime, led by the launch of ZOFRI in 1975, a walled industrial district where goods can be traded without taxes or duties. Meanwhile, Arica, which had received similar benefits in the 1950s with the 'free port' and the introduction of a regional development board (Junta de Adelanto de Arica), suffered under the Pinochet administration as the JAA was disbanded in 1976. It is clear then, that Iquique was favoured by the new administration as the economic centre of the Chilean far north.

[3] MrAricaSiempreArica. (2014). Arica quedó abandonada por Chile, por posible guerra con Perú. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N6q00SGRN-M

Eventually the military increased the numbers of troops stationed in Arica and built military complexes and defences. 2,500 conscripts were stationed at the border and the military began the installation of tens of thousands of landmines. By the 1980s, 70,000 mines had been lain at the border which shifted the nature of the Chile-Peru border from a political border crossed regularly by workers and cross-border families, to a militarised and violent one (Holahan, 2006). The geopolitical position of the border changed throughout the 1970s, turning Arica from a vulnerable city to an increasingly fortified and militarised one, ensuring that it wouldn't be lost in the event of conflict with Peru.

The Chilean military was not a homogenous mass, however, and direct forms of militarisation were not the only strategy employed to dissuade Peru from invading. General Odlanier Mena was in command of the Rancagua Regiment on Chile's northern border and his approach to border relations differed from that of the officials in Santiago. According to Mena, 'the mission I was given was to defend the territory against a massive armoured invasion by Peru, which could occur at any time' but he purposefully strived for peace at the border. While some officials certainly wanted to invade Peru before they could strike to take the upper hand, others such as Mena viewed war as unnecessary and costly. Through efforts by Mena, the border also became a used in spectacular ways to demonstrate the goodwill between Chile and Peru. While both were readying themselves militarily (or pretending to), the military generals at the border performed peace and friendship. This top-down performance by military elites did not mean that local citizens were not geopolitical actors (Freeman, 2020), but in their attempt to avoid war, General Odlanier Mena in Chile and General Artemio García in Peru used the symbolism of the border to write their own 'storyline' (Coleman, 2005).

Members of the armed forces of Peru and Chile held many ceremonies and meetings 'to reaffirm ties', the largest and most well-known of which was the 'Abrazo de Concordia'.[4] On the 16th November 1974, the armed forces of Chile and Peru sealed the amicable relationship between both countries with an 'abrazo' [embrace], a symbolic show of friendship on the border [the Concordia] to which all citizens were invited and over 6,000 attended. This was a form of 'observant practice' that was imbued with symbolism, the abrazo needed to honour the militaristic nature of both states while being respectful and peaceable. To this end the event consisted of parades, the singing of national anthems, and the planting of an olive tree to represent the lasting peace between the two countries.

General Mena was central to this message of peace and he managed to avoid a warmongering agenda without revealing the relative military weakness of Chile. When Peruvian General Francisco Morales Bermúdez (who deposed Velasco to become President in 1975) suggested taking an equal number of tanks each to the ceremony, Mena proposed a symbolic approach with music and banners as opposed to armaments. The truth was that Mena only had two tanks in the regiment while Morales Bermúdez was suggesting each bringing 40 or 50 and so his suggestion of demilitarisation was out of necessity. As Mena explained before his death,

> *I said to him 'Francisco, do you think it would be better to do something symbolic? With bands, banners, and a platoon of 30 men, what would we be doing with demonstrations of force?' In reality, I didn't have any other alternative, because we only had two tanks in the regiment and that was the truth.*

This ceremony was a performance with a variety of end goals. The two nations were performing sovereignty at the border, affirming their geographic limits for their own national

[4] Such an 'abrazo' was not unique to Chile-Peru relations. In 1976 The 'Abrazo de Charaña' took place on the Chile-Bolivia border where Pinochet and Hugo Banzer, Bolivia's military dictator met to discuss Bolivian access to the sea.

security. Unlike the desert spectacle, this performance was also for local populations to see the authority of their state on the land they ruled but in a secure, peaceful setting. This served to reinforce the discourse of 'security' that the Pinochet dictatorship was attempting to instil across the length of Chile. The specific environmental qualities of the Concordia border, located in an arid desert that the audience had to specifically travel to, made this an ideal stage. Through the Abrazo de Concordia both Chile and Peru could broadcast a message of goodwill but also of assured sovereignty and strength to an attentive audience.

Such official events literally on the border were one spectacle, but a more informal spectacle of *crossing* the border was also used. At one serious point of tension, Mena rang García and said he would go to Tacna in Peru, the two would meet for lunch, buy some books together and they would tip off journalists so that this casual meeting of friends would make it into the papers. That way no-one could believe that war was imminent. As Mena later explained, 'gestures like these were repeated many times and had a great effect because they calmed the tense atmosphere. If the two commanders who were supposedly enemies walked together as friends then we couldn't go to war'. Again, these border performances were for the benefit of the local citizens. It was the purposeful invitation of journalists that created a spectacle for the public. The local press was an important way in which the military government could disseminate information to citizens and inform their 'observant practice'. The press was highly engineered under Pinochet and so consistent messages of goodwill ceremonies and friendship between Generals García and Mena were used to reassure the local population that the border was a space of security, not of risk. The geographical closeness of Arica and Tacna, then, a proximity Arica does not share with any Chilean city, could be utilised to highlight the desired socio-cultural closeness of the two cities too.

Perceptions of the border were also manipulated more generally in the local press through a great number of newspaper articles reporting on positive aspects of Chile-Peru border

relations. Articles reiterated the 'brotherly' 'friendship' between the two countries, [5] that 'war between Peru and Chile is impossible' with rumours otherwise being 'fantasies',[6] and that 'all the rumours about alleged difficulties with neighbouring countries are unfounded'.[7] The press was therefore an important tool for the Chilean military to disseminate information about the friendly border relations with Peru. Following Wonders (2006), this is a form of border performativity that brings the inter-state relationship on the border into being. At this time the border was an important symbolic space; one where Chile needed to mark its sovereignty through increasingly fortifying the far north and performing displays of friendship between the Chilean and Peruvian military. This spectacle was 'a social relationship between people that is mediated by images' (Debord 1995, Thesis 4) and the way in which these border relations were broadcast to the local population was fundamental to creating a seemingly secure and militarised border space. Local media, so controlled by the state, was a tool of border performativity and the border was more than a physical location, it was an imagined socio-political space.

The border was therefore a complex space. For the military government based in Santiago it was a vulnerable line that became increasingly fortified so as to consolidate Chilean territory. Constructing a clear and secure border was symbolically powerful. To follow Brown (2014), borders are theatrical and project an image of power and this was a spectacle to ensure sovereign control. Yet, on the ground, the border became a zone of contact and meeting between the Chilean and Peruvian generals and citizens. The local military leaders were enacting their own spectacles for the same purpose as that of the centralised Pinochet administration; the avoidance of a war with Peru. Through Mena and García's actions the border was constructed as a symbolic space of friendship rather than a potential battlezone.

[5] *La Defensa*. 18th July 1975
[6] *La Defensa*. 30th April 1974
[7] *La Defensa*. 18th March 1974

This created a shared, cross-border imagined community that was not solely dictated by national identity but by a localised sense of border dwelling. While the geographical location of the border was in question at the beginning of the decade, the way in which the border was practiced by the militaries brought the border into being. The Concordia line as a socio-political environment was a stage on which to perform the trans-national spectacle of friendship.

THE CITY

The desert and the border are inhospitable, largely uninhabitable spaces that were utilised as blank stages for the spectacle of military might and performed friendship. But the Chilean border city of Arica also became imbued with military life. Arica, nestled on the coast with two lush valleys that make the edge of the Atacama liveable, is currently home to over 97% of the region's inhabitants but in 1970 it was a small city, with a population of 92,500. Under the Pinochet dictatorship, Arica, like the rest of the country, was transformed. Citizens were faced with cruel and violent physical and psychological repression (Delgado Torres & Maugard Bravo, 2018), and the city of Arica became highly militarised (Chovanec, 2009).[8] For Rosenthal (2000: 33), '[t]he history of the city in twentieth-century Latin America can be seen as a long contest over the exercise of urban public space', and during a dictatorship access to public space is restricted to the point of elimination. The far north saw police and military repression, the destruction of civil and political rights, and targeted violence against leftist (often Indigenous) activists (Gundermann Kroll, Vergara del Solar & González Cortés, 2019). Northern Chile has historically been an area with a high level of border movement and in-

[8] This is not to say that Arica had never been militarised before this period. Between 1883 and 1929, as a result of the War of the Pacific, the provinces of Tacna and Arica were 'disputed provinces' under Chilean control (but not sovereignty). In order to win a plebiscite in the mid-1920s, Chile engaged in a highly violent process of 'chilenización' involving attacks on Peruvian schools, churches, and bodies, to the extent that the plebiscite was abandoned.

migration from Peru and Bolivia with travel for work, leisure, healthcare, and to visit family (Tapia Ladino, 2012), but the usually fluid border crossings between Arica and Tacna were immobilised as soon as the coup occurred. The city itself also became a space of questionable security.

With Arica in the 'grey zone', lacking the military fortifications of more southern cities for much of the 1970s, the city had to be strengthened in other ways. This was primarily through soft strategies and the spectacle of military strength. General Odlanier Mena described Arica during the 1970s as 'a very important anti-tank obstacle'. The city environment was seen as a physical barrier to impede any Peruvian invasion. He recalled that the city was militarised through physical interventions such as 'artillery sites in schoolyards' as well as strategies such as 'uniforms so that the school children were dressed like War of the Pacific soldiers'.[9] Residential areas too were infiltrated by the military. Chovanec (2009: 25) includes the perspective of one civilian of Arica in the 1970s who recalled,

> *[a]s a frontier city, the dictatorship had a different characteristic here. From my point of view, it was a city militarily surrounded … For every two or three houses, one was a house of a military. In this way, they neutralized the neighbourhood. They kept an eye on everything and knew everything that happened in the población.*

Everyday life became imbued with militarism (Freeman, 2020).

The city was also subtly militarised for the eyes of those in the military only. Looming over the city of Arica is the morro, a rocky headland that stands out in an otherwise flat city. As one interviewee, an ex-soldier, explained, in the 1970s a silent siren was installed on top of the morro in the form of a large bulb that would light up and act as a call to quarters for soldiers but had no meaning for civilians. The particular geography (and topography) of the city itself

[9] These uniforms existed before the 1970s, but oral histories suggest that they became more widespread in this period.

was being used to communicate military messages, but only for those in the know. Through this, the Chilean military in Arica were able to ready themselves militarily without jeopardising the message of peace for local citizens.

The city of Arica was also simultaneously militarised through the presence of Pinochet. The mid 1970s saw Pinochet travel to Arica many times, a trend that decreased noticeably once relations with Peru improved. Through the newspaper record it is clear that the greater the threat from Peru at the border, the more involved Pinochet became. His multiple visits in 1974 were a subtle form of spectacle to show that he took the far north seriously. His visit to Arica on the 6th June 1974 was lauded by the press as 'a demonstration that [Pinochet] has a lot of affection and appreciation for the city of Arica' which was reasoned to be because he had spent a significant part of his military career in the province.[10] During the visit, Pinochet spoke from the top of the morro, the geographic point where on the 7th June 1880 Chile successfully captured Arica from Peruvian control, symbolically re-staking Chilean claim over the territory. Other subsequent trips taken by Pinochet, often accompanied by ministers, variously 'revitalized the hopes of Arica', allowed Pinochet to visit military bases and construction projects, visit a military base in Putre in the interior, and to visit public works.[11] The frequency and timing of these visits illustrate the waxing and waning of the geopolitical significance of Arica in direct relation to potential conflict with Peru. The Chilean government acted to assert their presence when Chilean sovereignty was being threatened. It was also important to emphasise the presence of the military dictatorship in what had traditionally been a left-wing city (Chovanec 2009), and so Pinochet's visits reaffirmed the right-wing state leadership.

[10] *La Defensa*. 6th June 1974. This was an important date for Pinochet to be in Arica as it coincided with the annual June 'week of Arica' which is celebrated with great fervour with battle re-enactments, dances, parades and fairs. By visiting at this time, Pinochet was able to capitalise on 'archetypes which form part of an idealised Chilean tradition' to insert a highly traditional way of performing Chilean-ness into a region that had previously been Peruvian (Díaz Araya, 2010: 14).

[11] *La Defensa*. 2nd December 1976; *La Defensa*. 10th February 1976; *La Defensa*. 29th December 1977; *La Defensa*. 27th January 1979

Physically visiting the city, which is over 1660km from Santiago, was an important way for the administration to emphasise the geopolitical importance of Arica, the commitment to securing it against attack from Peru, and to consolidate state control in a traditionally left-leaning region. These visits were the spectacle of authoritarianism with the 'father' of Chile bestowing his presence and the associated power of that, on Arica.

Under Pinochet, the government was no stranger to elaborate displays of nationalism and military force, particularly on dates such as the anniversary of the 1973 coup. With the centenary of the War of the Pacific (1879-1883), when both Tacna and Arica had been captured by Chile, approaching, the local military in Arica organised a large march at the hippodrome with additional military parades in the rural interior. Once again, the military didn't in reality have the number of soldiers that they wanted to portray to local citizens (or Peru) and so they reverted to tricks and spectacle to appear stronger than they really were. In an event that would not seem out of place in a Monty Python sketch, a group of soldiers had to find a way to appear more numerous than they were. As one interviewee explained:

> *There was a parade at the hippodrome which started at midday and guys marched out and when they went out they went to a warehouse, changed their uniform and returned, they were marching until about 8pm, marching thousands, thousands of people, really impressive and it came out in the newspaper that they were running around, entering the warehouse, changing uniform and continuing to march, they spent hours marching, they were exhausted.*

Another explained how through this deception, the parade was lauded as 'the largest military parade in the history of Chile'. For Davis (1986: 6), 'parades are public dramas of social relations' but what we see here is the public drama of the *aspiration* of social relations. This fake parade was orchestrated as a form of citational practice to make Chilean military strength a reality. The Chilean military wanted a military city and the parade created this

illusion. Nationalistic spectacles such as military parades are a form of 'emotional bordering' (Paasi, 2013) that draw the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. As Taylor (1997: 29) writes of the Argentine dictatorship, '[p]ublic spectacles… are the locus for the construction of communal identity' and the parade in Arica aimed to create such a communal identity. Military parades and events also work to naturalise and affirm military presence as part of everyday life; for Taylor (1997: 67) '[t]he iterability of the performance contributed to the dictatorship's legitimacy'. By repeating such spectacles imagined communities are brought into being and the militarism of life in the city is reinforced.

The centralised administration and the local leaders were intervening in the city through different means but for the same ends; to secure Arica in case of an invasion from Peru and to reassure the local populace. The urban space of Arica was a different stage from the desert or the border. Instead of being a distant stage, one where the Chilean military could direct a spectacle, far from the local citizens, actions within the city were specifically engineered to engage with the local population. These citizens were not just a passive audience, they were engaged with through dressing in warlike uniforms, through Pinochet's visits, and through the bogus parade. This was a stage where the citizens were the actors too, even if unknowingly. Moreover, the city was not simply a backdrop for military activity, Arica's urban form was utilised and shaped for militarism and the city environment was core to the spectacles performed there.

CONCLUSION

In the 1970s in the far north of Chile, the border, the desert, and the city were all harnessed for their specific geographical qualities in order to stage a unified geopolitical spectacle. It was imperative that Chile, despite being militarily weaker than Peru, was able to appear capable of

defeating its northern neighbour in war while simultaneously appearing to maintain friendly relations with them. It was the specific environments of the border, the desert, and the city that were exploited for a multi-scaled, heterogeneous, and often unspectacular, fractured form of spectacle. Spectacles were successfully implemented to prove strength and power even when it did not exist but simultaneously to promote peace and reassure a vulnerable population. This northern border was 'performed' through this delicate relationship to bring specific state and inter-state realities into being. And the war never came.

The fact that the war never came was a crafted outcome, achieved through a set of decisions and events. Through displays of power and directing the geopolitical gaze, the Chilean military created the conditions that allowed for the absence of outright war. This had two effects: the consolidation of Chilean sovereignty in the far North and the (attempted) reassurance of Chilean citizens in Arica that they were safe and secure from attack by Peru under the Pinochet administration. In the absence of a well-equipped military, spectacle and deception had to be employed to realise these effects. Militarism was perhaps at its most stark in the construction of fake weaponry, the staging of parades, and the 'abrazo' but it also bled into the everyday lives of civilians and the city of Arica. The messaging of the press and of events such as the parade served to create a narrative and thereby create a national consensus. The spectacles were ways to promote national and ideological identification on the territory of the far north.

The performance of military power needed to be adapted for the three environments of the desert, the border, and the city and this resulted in different forms of spectacle. The perceived blank space of the arid desert was used as a theatrical stage with props such as the 'tanks' wheeled out and displayed for the Peruvians. The border was used as a meeting space for different actors; a stage where they could perform the scripted roles of friendly generals and show off their pageantry and pomp. The city was a space of direct military intervention

with citizens in order to secure the city and send a message of strength to reassure the population. The impenetrability of the dictatorship and the terror it inflicted gave the military significant power and scope to control the geopolitical gaze and dictate what was seen by the Peruvian military as well as Chilean citizens even if it is impossible to know precisely what was observed by the various audiences. The geographic qualities that were being exploited, therefore, were environmental but also cultural and imaginative. Individually, the way in which these three spaces were utilised is interesting, but it was how these three spaces were orchestrated *together* that created the particular situation whereby Chile could avoid war while appearing to be capable of winning one.

However, while these spaces were orchestrated together, due to differing military strategies between the centralised Pinochet administration and the regiments stationed in Arica, these spaces were not always being orchestrated by the same actors. And this was principally differentiated between the three environments. Strategies in the desert were largely led by local military leaders whereas the city and the border saw differences between the national and local levels of the military. In the city itself national leaders were intervening in promoting a national sense of unity such as through Pinochet's visits while local leaders were preparing the city through subtle militarisation and the sham parade. At the border, leaders in Santiago had their own set of values around the military importance of defending Arica and this shifted during the decade but the military located at the border engaged in their own spectacles to secure the border in more subtle ways such as through displays of friendship. While, with the opacity of the dictatorship, it is impossible to know what was directed from Santiago and what was autonomously decided from Arica, there were differing military practices and the Chilean military was not homogeneous. Thus, while the overarching aim remained the same, to defend Chile from a Peruvian attack, the approaches to ensure this varied within the Chilean military in multi-scalar ways. The actions of the local generals helped to create the sense of a shared

imagined community (Anderson, 1983) by drawing on the historical cross-border co-operation between northern Chileans and southern Peruvians.

Through the case study of the 1970s border relations between Chile and Peru, this paper has extended both the concept of the spectacle and geographical work on military spaces. I have argued that spectacles can be subtle and 'unspectacular' and that they can be intrinsically intertwined with the environments in which they are performed. This performance can occur *across* spaces. While earlier work has examined individual military environments, I have shown how one military strategy was simultaneously enacted in multiple environments, even if the actors involved had differing approaches to performing this spectacle. Geopolitical spectacles are embedded in their environments and political geographers are well placed to explore this relationship.

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