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# Uneasy social and psychological landscapes in the cinemas of Chile and New Zealand

Walescka Pino-Ojeda

## Abstract

Distinct modes of social and psychological angst are noted in a significant number of films from Chile and New Zealand, becoming most evident in the way family relations are portrayed, and in various modes through which the protagonists relate to their natural and social environment. This article focuses on the films *In My Father's Den* (Brad McGann, New Zealand, 2004) and *B-Happy* (Gonzalo Justiniano, Chile, 2003). The narrative of both these films centres on lower-middle-class adolescent girls who reside in semi-rural areas, living in a state of unease due to the difficulties they confront in finding social and familial protection, which drives them to yearn and search for alternative geographical, cultural and affective landscapes. This comparative examination suggests that the crisis of identity displacement observed in New Zealand society engenders more tragic results than those gestated by the 'concrete' socio-economic exclusion found in Chile, indicating perhaps that socio-psychological anxieties require more complex and intricate strategies of recognition and eradication than those created by structural forms of social abuse.

**Keywords:** Chilean cinema, colonialism, New Zealand cinema, settler society

## Southern (dis)placements

Feelings of anxiety seem to traverse New Zealand's creative filmic imaginary – a social concern that has been well documented by sociological and cultural critical analysis. In the documentary *Cinema of Unease* (1995), actor Sam Neill (co-director

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and narrator) describes the film culture of New Zealand as being obsessively infused with a 'haunting emptiness' – one in which narratives such as those dealing with travel are deployed not as an impassioned quest for the new, but rather as an escape from a 'suffocatingly dull' quotidian reality. This is a state recognised as early as the immediate post-WWII period, in which numerous films were concerned with voyages and motion, indicating in most cases a difficult and troubling relationship with the natural landscape (Leotta 2009: 37).

When analysing New Zealand's processes of social identity formation, David Pearson (2001) is categorical in distinguishing the European colonisation that took place in Africa, Latin America and South Asia, from the 'British colonies of settlements' established in Australia, Canada and New Zealand. According to Pearson (*ibid*: 6), the latter

emerged from mass settlement and the subsequent *de jure* politically independent creation of settler nation states. Their legal self-governance, however, was and still is, circumscribed by *de facto* economic and political semi dependency within a global system of state relations ... [a condition that confers on them a] semi peripherality hinged on their 'special relationship' with Britain and its Empire, and its peculiar condition of privileged dependence.

In his view, these relations explain the fact that rather than fitting into the parameters of the 'nation-state', New Zealand more accurately represents a 'state-nation' in that its civic and ethnic nationalism is not the direct result of historically inherent social dynamics. Instead, these have been largely shaped by the extensive and deeply rooted economic and cultural relations that New Zealand maintained with Great Britain until 1973, pillars that have contributed to both structuring and prolonging the state of 'privileged dependence'. In New Zealand cinema, this is evident when protagonists of European descent ('*Pākehā*' in the Maōri language) seem to be operating in between, exhibiting inconsistent social behaviours set in motion by colonisation, since '[t]he *privileged* economic and political dependence of settler elites on their motherland was greatly different from the nature of their relations with the aboriginal minorities they dispossessed' (*ibid*: 202, emphasis in the original). This is an assessment shared by Conrich and Murray (2008: 13) when they affirm that 'part of the *Pākehā* unease in this post-settler nation has been due to its unsettled relationship with the indigenous population'. This sentiment acquired a different dimension after 1973, when Britain joined the European Common Market, displacing previous economic relations with New Zealand in a moment that Neill (1995) describes in his documentary as one of 'feeling abandoned and stupid', driving an emergent imperative for the nation's subjectivity to 'grow up'.

At the cultural level, the forced distancing from Britain triggered what has been described as an explosion in New Zealand's filmmaking. Yet in John O'Shea's

(cited in Conrich and Murray 2008: 5)<sup>1</sup> words, ‘the “explosion” ... was more of an implosion – a bursting out within New Zealand of films searching for audiences at home, hoping to find a common awareness, a new consciousness of identity’. Understood in this way, the collective and individual Pākehā identities enacted in an abundant corpus of New Zealand films, exhibit what Māori director Merata Mita referred to in 1992 as the ‘colonial syndrome of dislocation’ (cited in Murray 2008: 175).<sup>2</sup> This colonial dislocation names a sense of displacement that before 1973 was expressed as longing and admiration for the Māori ways of life with respect to nature and community, but which, upon the culmination of this ‘privileged dependence’ (particularly in the cinema of the late 1970s and 1980s), was conveyed as the overwhelming presence of fear about the legitimacy of the Pākehā nation project ‘in the face of the Maori equivalent’ (Murray 2008: 173).

Some 250 years earlier, the colonial experiences undergone by Latin America can be seen to contrast sharply with those of settler societies, being dependent instead on the exploitation of pre-existing natural resources, and indigenous knowledges and labour. Far from having overturned this violent colonial foundation, Latin American countries such as Chile have been culturally led and politically ruled mainly by a *criollo* (European descendant) minority. This *criollo* elite has positioned Europe as its cultural foundation and model, leading to the attempted obliteration of the ancestral indigenous cultures and peoples, selectively appropriating parts of their cultural capital as symbols of the new nation.<sup>3</sup> Confronted by the impossibility of claiming Europe as the motherland – unlike the case with New Zealand – up to the 1920s efforts were largely placed on emulating European cities, institutions (legal and economic) and cultural paradigms, first from Spain and Portugal and later mainly from France and England. From 1898 these models would become gradually displaced by those of the United States (US) in the aftermath of the Spanish-American war, when this North American nation began to exercise neocolonial power over Latin America. Since that time, the region has been subjected to numerous sequential political and economic forms of control set in place by the US’s foreign policies toward the American continent. These policies have sometimes been exerted through formalised (though exploitative) trade agreements or other ostensibly amicable forms of power, but often also through more direct means, such as economic embargos, the co-opting of political classes, or by supporting and appointing dictatorial regimes when more subtle means of securing hegemony have been challenged.<sup>4</sup>

Like New Zealand, the year 1973 also represents a turning point in the history of Chile. This was the moment when the Chilean economic elites saw their social order violently restored by the armed forces, with political power usurped from the Popular Unity government led by socialist president Salvador Allende and returned to them, while the rest of the population were forced to accommodate their societal aspirations to the state terrorism policies implanted by the dictatorial regime of

General Augusto Pinochet (11 September 1973–11 March 1990). This socio-historical context explains why, between the late 1950s and up to the coup d'état, Chilean cinema had been mainly concerned with representing and confronting structurally exploitative institutions and social dynamics. Naturally, Chilean cinema during that period had aligned itself with Italian neo-realism and the various aesthetic trends put forward by Latin-American third cinema. Moreover, from the authoritarian regime of the 1970s and 1980s up to the present, Chilean cinema's militant concern has been accompanied by the need to represent and exorcise the traumas created by state terrorism and its imposition of the neoliberal *trickle-down* economy. In addition, Chilean cinema has not relinquished but has rather broadened its collective scope to focus on both social and psychological forms of repression, with the political figure of the *desaparecido* (the opponent of the dictatorship who remains missing) becoming an unnameable, haunting and overwhelming presence in the physical and psychic landscape of the films' characters.

### **Physical and emotional locations: south, down under, Antipodes**

Amidst the coercive forms of colonial and neocolonial experiences described above are Latin-American processes of decolonisation, which are still in progress. These would come to be especially accentuated from the mid-1950s, responding not to the former colonial rule of Europe, but rather to the aforementioned neocolonial interventions of the US, and, in the last 40 years, of international and local multinational corporations. Since the 1950s, intellectuals, artists, working-class organisations and progressive political groups have acted on the need to challenge such northern political, economic and cultural interferences. It is within this framework that the discursive 'South' [*el sur*] emerged as a decolonising political stratagem to contest the neocolonial discursive paradigm of the North. The South has found expression in all forms of Latin-American culture: third cinema, the Latin-American new song movement and new Latin-American literature, which in the 1960s was promoted by multinational editorial houses as the 'Latin-American Boom'. Against the backdrop of the South as a site of contestation, the Bolivarian ideal of a federalist united *America* has always been a constant presence, a vision that in the late 1800s was reignited by the Cuban intellectual José Martí in his renowned essay *Our America*. At the end of the second millennium, and after three decades of entrenched neoliberal policies, the Bolivarian model was resurrected in the 1990s by the successive governments of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, which under the ALBA alliance (Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America) in 2005 created the Tele Sur TV channel (with the tagline: 'Our North is the South'), and the Bank of the South, which continues to gain new members from the Latin-American community.<sup>5</sup>

As can be expected, and due to its vastly different experience in relation to the metropolitan North, New Zealand's conception of the South does not have a defiant

alternative meaning that would imply setting itself apart from its northern British origins. In New Zealand, the geopolitical meaning of the South does not constitute the central pillar of the collective sense of identity, as it has become in Latin America. As can be seen most acutely in New Zealand's film production, conveyed within its own southern experience is instead the aforementioned sense of dislocated identity. The colloquial expression put forward by Australia, which New Zealanders have themselves also embraced, of being a 'world down under' does convey the idea of location. This location, however, only exists in relation to an 'other' located up high, thus precluding a sense of being and belonging to the South. This is because the South does not exist as a self-contained geographical entity, but rather as an 'under', that is, as a secondary and dependent term, thus implicitly bestowing ontological centrality on the North. Only when Britain deserted its economic and political association with its colony did New Zealand begin to see itself as a Polynesian country and as truly belonging to the South Pacific. But the feeling of having been removed from the protectorate of the North seems to have rather accentuated the sense of living in the Antipodes, that is, on the opposite side, the furthest point from the northern centre, mentally and emotionally located in Britain. Thus, the state of unease identified in New Zealand's cinema derives, precisely, from feelings of being geographically and culturally removed from Britain, a sense of isolation accentuated by being on an island and in the South, thus forging a collective sense of dislocation, a feeling of displacement that after 1973 shook the ethical grounds that have sustained the legitimacy of the British settlement itself. In contrast, the cultural anxiety reflected in Chilean cinema can be seen to have been derived from a history of much more structural, political and social abuse, created first by colonial rule, followed by neocolonial and then neoliberal agendas, which are visible in economic inequality and quotidian social discrimination.

### **Psychological dislocations: silence, hope and fear**

Distinct modes of psychological angst manifest in a significant number of films from Chile and New Zealand, becoming most evident in the way family relations are portrayed, and the various modes through which the protagonists relate to their natural and social environment. Attention to these forms of interaction facilitate the unveiling of distinctive social formations in Chile and New Zealand, and thus signal the different socio-psychological traces left by colonisation and settlement, respectively. Furthermore, 1973 was the key year in which both societies started to confront a new phase in this condition of social unease. In the case of Chile, state terrorism controlled collective feelings and modes of interaction through political repression, which was successfully promoted by infusing a profound and general sense of fear among the populace. In New Zealand, the 'privileged dependency' that helped to sustain feelings of having a northern British identity would give way to

a new sense of being, driving moves not only toward economic independence but, above all, toward the imperative to consolidate a sense of belonging to southern landscapes and to face, from a different identity mindset, the relationship with the Māori people and their history.

I will now focus on two comparable movies that I see as paradigmatic examples of the abovementioned dynamics: *In My Father's Den* (Brad McGann, New Zealand, 2004) and *B-Happy* (Gonzalo Justiniano, Chile, 2003). Both films' narrative centres on lower-middle-class adolescent girls, who live in semi-rural areas in a state of unease due to their difficulties in finding social and familial protection, which drives them to yearn and search for alternative geographical, cultural and affective landscapes.<sup>6</sup> Based on the 1972 novel by New Zealand author Maurice Gee, *In My Father's Den* tells the story of 15-year-old Celia (Emily Barclay), an incipient writer living with her mother, a stepfather who is constantly sexually menacing her, and two younger siblings in a small landlocked town in the central South Island where her mother owns a butchery. Paul Prior's (Matthew Macfadyen) arrival in town from the UK to attend the funeral of his father after an absence of 17 years unleashes the events that drive the film's plot. Through flashbacks, we learn that Paul had left home at 17 to escape his dysfunctional family: a bipolar, ultra-religious mother who committed suicide, and who previously had maintained an unusual and unhealthy bond with her older son, Andrew (Colin Moy), thus alienating Paul even further. Paul had also abandoned Andrew, a very insecure person, who never recovered from his mother's tragic death, and subsequently married a woman with similar psychological and physical features. We also learn that Paul shares Andrew's sexual dysfunction, which precludes them from achieving real intimacy with their partners. Most importantly, Paul had also left behind his father, who had secluded himself in the privacy of his den – which lends the film its title – surrounded by books, music, atlases and globes, occasionally accompanied by young girls who granted him sexual favours. One of these was Celia's mother, who also happened to be Paul's girlfriend at the time.

Celia is a fatherless, inquisitive and creative child, who upon Paul's arrival as the town hero for his award-winning journalistic photographic work in various war zones, immediately takes an interest in him as a mentor, seeking to learn from his life about experiences in the wider world. After realising that Paul was her mother's boyfriend 17 years earlier, she undertakes a personal campaign to unearth the past – a task that coincides with Paul's suspicions that Celia may very likely be his own daughter. These unspoken, intertwined agendas craft a very solid bond between them, compelling Paul to talk about his professional ventures and family memories, and allowing Celia the freedom to convey her dreams of becoming a writer and a citizen of the world. All of these interactions are marked by the backdrop offered by both the intimacy of the father's den and the openness of the majestic natural scenery of southern New Zealand. In the end, the attachment created between Paul and Celia

is undone not by Celia's realisation that Paul is actually her half-brother, but rather more tragically by the actions of Paul's brother's wife, Penny (Miranda Otto), who, suspecting that Celia might be having an affair with her husband, unintentionally kills her by pushing her from a second-floor balcony.

Silence and hope are the two concepts that delineate Celia's poetic and psychological imagination, as conveyed in her short stories, narrated as they are in the voice-over that establishes in her voice the film's initial, central and closing narratives (in flashback). In the opening scene on silence, the camera focuses on her hand as she leaves ink fingerprints on a white piece of paper. Later, the silhouette of a bird can be seen gliding across the horizon of a cloudy sky. This is the same bird that we later find out was the one Paul was observing in flight while his mother drowned herself in the river. This scene reaches a climax with Celia lying between the rails of an approaching train, which runs by, with her body lying just to the side of the railway line. This scene evokes a macabre cinematic sensation that serves to foreshadow the death of both the protagonist and the literary testimonial that her interior world will leave behind. At the same time, however, the behaviour of the protagonist shows her toying with death, which from the outset establishes the psychological profile of Celia, the general environment that surrounds the characters, and the fate that awaits the protagonist.

One day in a town at the edge of the world, a tide went out and never returned. The sea just left without warning. At first people were a little more than puzzled; they continued to gossip and fight over the same old things. As soon as the silence began to permeate the township, a desert of unbelievable magnitude was forming before their very eyes.

The imposition of an overwhelming silence takes place before the remote character and the surprising abandonment that the sea has made of this place, and for this reason the sudden absence of a communicating space with the outside world is what permits silence to take control of their lives. The compounded remoteness of being both inland and on an island seems to create a claustrophobic condition in which subjects appear to withdraw to the point of neurotic self-isolation; separated by a psychological desert that notably clashes with the lush greenery that surrounds them; a natural environment marked by walkways, rivers and a wide-open sky bordered by trees and mountains. The silence that encroaches with the retreat of the ocean and its waves, leaving agendas and identities obfuscated, is the same one that can be seen to conspire against Celia's life, thus resulting in her premature death, which is described by Andrew as 'a simple misunderstanding'. In this way, while Paul's mother opts to employ the current and depth of the river as her suicide weapon, Celia becomes the victim of the psychological desert gestated by a lack of communication.

Almost halfway through the film, her reflections on hope are introduced as a school assignment she reads before her class when Paul is her substitute teacher. This

sequence is divided into three cross-cut scenes, beginning with Paul's sister-in-law Penny discovering her husband's file of intimate photos of Celia. Penny is unaware that these photos were in fact taken by her own son (Jimmy Keen), who had been spying on Celia for some time, and had been confiscated by Andrew in response to the fear of his son's unknowingly incestuous attraction. From Penny's suspicious gaze at her husband – one that we know will culminate in Celia's death – the film transitions to a scene in which Paul retrieves the family painting, conveniently entitled *Hope*, by well-known Victorian artist George Frederic Watts.<sup>7</sup> In it, a red-headed woman (much like Paul's mother and Penny) is sitting on a globe with her eyes bandaged. She is playing a lyre that has lost all its string except one, and leaning deeply downwards she searches for the fading melody that the single string produces. This pictorial reference thus creates a direct dialogue and connection with Celia's narration on hope. At the same time, Paul's recovery of this picture evidences a process of grieving and overcoming of 17 years of familial trauma: his mother's suicide, probably motivated by his father's abusive conduct, which was likewise manifested in his seduction of Celia's mother (Jodie Rimmer), previously established as Paul's girlfriend at the time. His father's abuse is then most visible in his psychological emasculation of Paul, leading in turn to the latter's difficulties in conducting his intimate sexual life. The voice-over narration's focus on hope closes by directing our gaze towards Celia herself as she takes a bath and writes the words we hear in her notebook. As she does so, her stepfather enters the bathroom to urinate, spying on her lasciviously through the curtain, prompting Celia to abruptly close it further.

Hope: her mind is a graveyard, her heart is an island. She and I are not good friends, but I have known her all my life. She sits in my belly hollow and distant, and whispers words of encouragement whenever it comes for me ... I am on to her tracks, her false promises ... 'Go away!' I tell her. 'I am busy today! I got things to do!' But this acquaintance never knows when to leave. It is not a question of why she befriended me in the first place; it's more a question of why I chose to let her stay.

Thoughts of death and feelings of isolation re-emerge here, this time in relation to hope. Meanwhile, the film's visuals accompanying Celia's declaration recount all these characters' unresolved pasts in which each shoulders their pain and trauma alone amid a vast desert of silence. It is in such a claustrophobic, isolated situation that Celia's fate is determined as the final link in the culmination of a familial and communal tragedy. Though this oppressive silence leads Celia to reject hope's reassurance, she still grants it a place in her life – something that manifests in particular through her writing, just like the obstinacy of the woman in Watts' painting who clings to the lyre's diminished sound. It is both her immediate escape valve and,

more expansively, the means through which communication is achieved across the atomised human universes this film engages with.

Although the film's last sequence takes place after Celia's death, her voice-over ties the latest scenes together. This progression begins with Celia's mother visiting Paul after her daughter's funeral while he prepares to leave town and sets his father's house and den on fire. Over the sequence, Celia's voice-over narrates:

The people had no choice but to trust that their horses will lead them into the ocean. Without reins or saddle they rode their horses across the barren land. But the ocean had disappeared for good, and the people together alone had no choice, but to face each other on their loss.

The allegorical nature of this narrative is evident in the context of this analysis, particularly if we remember that this is an adaptation of a novel published in 1972, only a year prior to the concrete economic divorce of the UK and New Zealand. 'They made a home for themselves in a new environment, although one that had changed forever. They learnt to live in a space the ocean had left, although lingering in their dreams'. The overcoming of this kind of radical change as such requires the opening of the self, freely to transit through the desert of communication ('Without reins or saddle'). In order to resolve this anxiety, it becomes necessary to assume the new environment which the subject inhabits, though they may still recall and long for the presence of the now absent ocean. In this way, and though Celia suffers a tragic premature death, the film suggests that it is through her narration, and later her death, that the claustrophobic silence that hangs over her community might be broken. It is through this that the remaining characters can accept the new conditions of life that the withdrawal of the ocean has created. The new environment they must reconcile themselves with is in the process of becoming a home to them, one in which the desire for a lost past is still present.

Celia's voice-over ends with a flashback depicting Paul reading her story, which has been published in the local newspaper. We see that her voice-over comprises the story. As he finishes reading, Celia appears, placing this flashback before her death. In this final scene they talk, and Paul surprises her with a ticket to Spain. They say goodbye as siblings, and Celia walks away through the open, majestic landscape of southern New Zealand.

*B-Happy* centres on the life of Katty (Manuela Martelli) a 15-year-old girl who lives with her loving mother and her immature older brother on the outskirts of Valparaíso, Chile's main port. Katty is left orphaned when both her parents die from illness, with her father having been absent for a large part of her life due to his incarceration for robbery. Their abandonment leaves Katty unprotected amidst a series of traumatic experiences and forms of marginality: she is raped by her mother's lover, then imprisoned, and eventually she becomes a prostitute for a time.

In a manner not unlike that of *In My Father's Den*, *B-Happy* is thematically framed by Katty's voice-over monologue. In her narration, Katty speaks about fear: 'I'm not afraid of anything: dogs, Gypsy women, the night, wind, tremors. I'm not afraid of anything.' Her reiteration of this affirmation with small variations towards the end of the film reveals that the film's narrative is framed as a flashback, with Katty's narration in fact occurring in the inner space of a character who has already lived through the traumatic experiences that we will witness as the narrative progresses. In this way, the reiteration of her list of potential threats serves, above all, for Katty to free herself from the fears that have accompanied her as a young orphan who has been sexually abused amid familial and social abandonment. The shape that Katty's mental dissociation takes in these instances is understandable, given the fact that she is a child carrying the experiences and suffering of an adult – a juxtaposition that is made all the more obvious when noting that the things she cites as threats correspond to the realm of childhood fears – darkness, dogs, Gypsy women.

From a socio-political point of view, as I suggested earlier, fear is the feeling that has most deeply marked Chile's social environment since the dictatorship. Katty's words then channel a collective sentiment: the desire to overcome social traumas that have been building up for four decades, and which were crystallised in what has been referred to as the 'transition towards democracy'. This socio-political conversion lies in parallel to Katty's own transition to adulthood.<sup>8</sup> Though not dealing explicitly with Chile's dictatorial past, *B-Happy*'s framing of its young protagonist's loss and trauma under the rubric of fear speaks to a social narrative in which the pain of the past and neoliberal politics are the foundation upon which the characters enact their familial, intimate and quotidian lives. This is the background that fundamentally shapes their daily interactions, be they economic and/or affective. After experiencing the world of prostitution and other traumas, Katty finds out that her father has been hospitalised, she visits him and spends time with him in the hillsides and on the coastline of Valparaíso. They take pictures together and sit down to eat:

- Katty: Pass the sugar.  
 ...  
 I don't know why I came looking for you – I've never been able to count on you.
- Father: ... [looks up in surprise]
- Katty: You're my father ... Anyway, don't worry, I haven't come to ask you for anything.
- Father: ...
- Katty: I've gotten used to being alone.

Father: ...  
 [from surprise he goes to tenderness, and then to discomfort at feeling confronted] Well Katty, that's life. If it were up to me ... I'd change so many things ... This is the hand I played. There isn't any more to it.

Katty: ... Pass the mustard.

In contrast to Celia's feelings of being overwhelmed through an asphyxiating silence in *In My Father's Den*, Katty has conviction lent to her through the concrete condition of having been abandoned – something that, in contrast, she is able to make explicit in this confrontation with her father, whom she addresses almost as an equal in their respective life journeys. In a further display of brutal yet helpful honesty, she receives no apologies or demonstrations of comfort from him in this conversation, but instead a blunt response about the options and choices life grants all of us. This dialogue reveals that Katty is not dislocated from herself, but is a victim of social circumstance culminating in familial abandonment. Seen this way, we may understand that, even though her declaration against fear appears centred on a small child's subjective positioning, her confronting of her father evidences a maturity that both surprises him and confronts the audience. It is in witnessing this empowerment that the father can in turn respond with total honesty, with a statement that in other contexts might seem insensitive or crude. It is because of these circumstantial factors that Katty can be implicitly understood to absolve her father – something that is expressed in the fact that this exchange takes place not as an argument, but a conversation carried out with total naturalness. In addition, this key scene is underlined by a precise cinematography that emphasises silhouettes, high contrast, and control of perspective to keep our attention focused on the emotions of the characters; a tight framing which, along with the relaxed mood, emphasises closeness and intimacy, despite the fact that the characters are located in a public urban space. This sense of closeness between father and daughter is also evident in the dialogue's sound design, which is carried out in a volume which suggests a quiet, intimate encounter. Katty pardons her father, absolving him of guilt (at least internally) – something that would have been impossible if she had seen that he effectively possessed the ability to act freely. Her father's declaration, 'If it were up to me ... I'd change so many things', denotes a distinct lack of options, a socio-economic precariousness that obliges individual subjects to prioritise survival over ethics.

### **Social and geographical landscapes: the bleak and the sublime**

The circumstances created by the abandonment that takes place in *B-Happy* are not a sole product of economic conditions alone, as Katty's family's financial situation is so precarious that she would be seen as an easy candidate for such experiences. Her father is the grandson of a Croatian immigrant who (for circumstances the film does

not explain) has placed his family in a precarious economic situation, with the mother as the only regular financial provider, while both male figures in the household resist taking on working-class jobs. The decay in which the protagonist finds herself is seemingly explained, then, by the father's economic expectations and consequent dissatisfaction at not being able to achieve them. Thus, his social deviance is framed as being motivated by the desire for easy and quick money, as is the behaviour of her older brother, leaving both men relinquishing their responsibility within the affective familial social contract.

Ethnic identity and the father's motivation to become a thief separate *B-Happy* from the Chilean social realist cinema of the 1960s, such as *Valparaíso, mi amor* (Aldo Francia, 1969), with which this film establishes a direct dialogue in terms of plot and location. Francia's focus is on a cohesive working-class family comprised of a single father with three children threatened by their socio-economic circumstances. It is this that drives the father to steal food – an act for which he is incarcerated. These events make it impossible for the children in this earlier film to sustain their familial unit, leading the two young boys to delinquency and eventually to death, and the adolescent girl to prostitution. By the 2000s, the protective role of the father has vanished, wherein communal and filial safety nets have been torn asunder due to the pre-eminence of a social ethos that promotes economic success achieved through individualistic agendas shaped around meritocracy, that is, emphasising goals, with no attention given to the means of achieving them. These departures are a clear indication of the strong influence exerted by the neoliberal social and economic rationale that has determined Chilean life since the imposition of the dictatorial regime in the early 1970s. It is along such lines that the Chilean cinema of the 2000s can be distinguished from that of the 1990s. While the latter, produced in the direct aftermath of the dictatorship, evidences feelings of defeat with respect to those social projects overturned by the outgoing regime (Cavallo, Douzet and Rodríguez 1999: 247), the cinema of the 2000s is one in which 'action has been replaced by wandering: wayfaring through necessity, be it internal or external, through the need for escape ... [bodies] uncomfortable with both themselves and their surroundings, interjected within what we might call a "poetic of discomfort"' (Urrutia 2011: 127).

The characters in *B-Happy* are also possessed by the imminent need to move elsewhere. Katty's father wishes to reach Arica, the northernmost port of Chile. Her friend, Chemo, also yearns for Arica. Having recently moved from Punta Arenas, Chile's southernmost town, he wants to reach the other extreme, the desert's north gate, where Katty finally heads as well, and where she most likely will be reunited with her friend Chemo following her father's death. It is worth noting that in all these relocations, while characters are all heading north, they do so inside of Chile's own geographic borders. That is to say, they traffic within a cultural identity imaginary that is circumscribed inside the national and the local. This is in contrast to *In My*

*Father's Den*, where what is being sought lies completely outside New Zealand's geography, but is nonetheless framed as being aligned with the characters' identities in other dimensions. This divergence is likewise observable in these films' treatment of their respective landscapes. Thus, the tamed and polished natural scenery and roads of *In My Father's Den* contrast sharply with the disarray and precariousness of the spaces inhabited by Katty in *B-Happy*; as stressed earlier, it is not dissociation with their physical surroundings that compels the characters in this Chilean film to flee, but rather dissatisfaction with their socio-economic realities.

Shots of natural scenery are abundant in *In My Father's Den*, featuring rivers, snowy mountain peaks, and wide-open roads framed by large, healthy trees. Counter-intuitively, given the subject matter, these shots suggest a free flow of natural elements and peoples. In the analysis of New Zealand film, the incongruity between the characters' state of unease and the natural beauty of the spaces they inhabit has been described as resulting from a 'sublime' relationship with the natural environment (DuPuis 1996; Rueschmann 2005; Schafer 1998; Wexman 1999):

The landscape and images of New Zealand in films are as impressive and moving as those created by novelists and poets. ... [A] complex feeling engendered by experiences with nature ... the sense of magnificence or awe that is tempered by unease, by shadings of fear. ... The Sublime conveys a 'pleasing terror' or a synthesis of pleasure and pain ... New Zealand's modern films build on this radically mixed emotion, this *discordia concors* of sensation. In them, we follow a rapid course of beauty inextricably blended with fear and disquiet. (Schafer 1998: 180–182)

This 'mixed emotion' or '*discordia concors*' through which the natural landscape is experienced as beautiful yet alien, is related to 'the settler's or colonizer's feelings of displacement and homelessness' (Rueschmann 2005). It is important to emphasise that this sublime relationship with the natural environment in New Zealand's cinema is constructed precisely because of the feeling engendered in the characters' displaced identities as they exist outside of the nucleus to which they see themselves belonging. It is in such a context that nature becomes landscape, that is, nature is not experienced as a realm that is interlocked with its inhabitants, but rather as a site of contemplation, with human occupants relating to their natural surroundings in an aesthetic rather than ontological manner (Pellitero 2011: 61). In this sense, the natural landscape being presently experienced, while still beautiful, will function as a constant reminder of its inhabitants' displaced identities. It is New Zealand's settler history that shapes its lived experience, reaffirming that 'landscape is not simply scenery; it is also a substantive political landscape' (Olwig 2005: 36).

In *In My Father's Den*, this discrepancy can also be observed with respect to the film's soundtrack. On the one hand, Patti Smith's song *Horses* establishes a dialogue with the horses cited by Celia in her short story, while also standing in for

the punk sensibility of Celia's mother's and Paul's generation rebelling against the aesthetic formulas and moral precepts of bourgeois society. On the other hand, Kiri Te Kanawa's performance of the bucolic traditional Occitan language piece *Bailero Chants d'Auvergne* underlines the conflictive emotional locations that the earliest of New Zealand's European settlers seem to have passed on to subsequent generations. The lyrically sublime interpretation of Te Kanawa accompanying Celia's dream of being in Spain, suggests a pastoral, primal and pre-libidinal relationship with the landscape that settlers never really had the opportunity to have with the land they came to inhabit. Preoccupied as they were with the idea of taming the wild and vast lands they encountered, theirs was a relationship shaped instead by primarily instrumental needs. Thus, the film's choice of music functions as a signifier of cultural memory in the characters' backdrop and, as suggested earlier, serves to accentuate a sublime disjuncture, underlining the fact that the New Zealand landscape, far from being envisioned as a bucolic site of amorous encounters between shepherds, was instead perceived initially as an alien nuisance to be overcome through settlement. Indeed, New Zealand is functionally still a country of shepherds, and though there is love and appreciation for the magnificence of the natural spaces, these do not seem to come from the profound depths of a collective subjectivity. This is shown in the film aestheticism towards the already beautiful natural scenery, a splendour that nonetheless does not seem to ease the angst of its inhabitants since, as Celia states in the film (speaking of her dream of being a writer living in Spain): 'I would rather be nobody somewhere, than someone nowhere.'

The films I have examined in this article seem to suggest, paradoxically, that the crisis of identity displacement as seen in New Zealand cinema may lead to even more tragic results than those gestated by 'concrete' socio-economic exclusion. This may indicate that socio-psychological anxieties require more complex strategies of recognition and eradication than those created by structural forms of social abuse. Moreover, we have established that a lack of communication, a rejection of hope and a climate of fear are all manifestations of dislocated psychological frameworks, which in the case of these two films are the result of diverse forms of affective and material abandonment. These forms of neglect should be seen as the direct outcome of the socio-cultural landscapes these characters inhabit. For *In my Father's Den* it is the insular and detached matrix of British culture that serves as the primary source of the characters' dislocation – a detachment that is eloquently communicated through the way they are juxtaposed in relation to their natural surroundings, which are framed more as landscape than as habitat. In *B-Happy*, the environment is more evidently shaped by the socio-political context of the film's diegesis. It functions as an extension and reflection of said reality, but not necessarily of its characters' inner emotional lives, which are for their part shaped more by the structural circumstances of Latin America's colonial history. Where both films respond to colonial dynamics,

then, *B-Happy* deals with their abusive socio-economic relationships, while *In My Father's Den* reflects the socio-psychological effects of New Zealand's settler culture.

## Notes

1 See also O'Shea (1999: 28).

2 See Mita (1992: 47).

3 The dictum that best illustrates this Euro-centred cultural and political paradigm is 'civilisation and barbarism', coined by Argentinean intellectual and politician Domingo Faustino Sarmiento in his 1845 volume *Facundo: civilización y barbarie*, written while in exile in Chile (1840–1855). In Sarmiento's liberal thought, progress lies in the development of modern cities and encyclopaedic models of education, while backwardness and barbarism were embodied by the nomadism that took place in rural regions and was carried out by certain indigenous nations. In Mexico in the late 1800s, the dictatorial regime of Porfirio Díaz (1876–1911) came to epitomise a way of governing designed around the principles of progress and order put forward by the modern European powers, especially when he appointed a group of bureaucrats conveniently labelled as *los científicos* (the scientists) because of their positivistic stance on politics. Their advisory role was part of Mexico's modernisation project carried out by Díaz, who saw indigenous cultures and peoples as the main obstacle for such endeavours. The revolution that overthrew Díaz (1911–1920) disrupted such policies, and by placing land reform at its centre necessarily and as never before gave indigenous peoples a central place in local governance, thus setting an important precedent for the rest of Latin America.

4 Three pieces of legislation are essential for understanding US–Latin American relations up to the 1940s: The Monroe Doctrine established in 1823, in which the US nominated itself as protector and guarantor of safeguarding the independence of the newly formed Latin-American nations; the Platt Amendment of 1901, which after the Spanish-American war made Cuba a self-governing protectorate of the US (while Puerto Rico was made a protectorate), depriving Cuba of conducting its own foreign policy and trade alliances, while ceding Guantanamo Bay to the US to establish a naval base. The Good Neighbor policy of 1933 under President Franklin D. Roosevelt was established to ameliorate the negativity the previous two policies caused among Latin Americans. To redefine the relations between North and South, a set of cultural and touristic endeavours was put in place. Among the most important of these was the role acquired by film corporations, such as Disney, which aimed to displace the negative stereotypes that until then the same film industry had created about Latin America, both in the US and the rest of the world.

5 This institution gained further credibility with the establishment of the New Development Bank (NDB), signed in 2013 by the five member states of the BRICS partnership: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

6 Eva Rueschmann analyses this film in her article 'Coming of age at the edge of the world' and compares it with other New Zealand films that also feature female adolescent protagonists. While the focus of her analysis is on issues of gender and age and their allegorical meaning in processes of national formation, my primary interest here is related

to socio-psychological dislocations, which are essentially derived from New Zealand's colonial past, and subsequently reflected in the family and societal interactions in which the adolescent protagonist lives.

7 I would like to thank the external reviewer for directing me to this information, originally provided by Ian Conrich in his article 'New Zealand gothic'.

8 The relationship between the dictatorship's state terrorism, the neoliberal economy, and the current social obstacles to overcoming the traumas of the past, is discussed in Pino-Ojeda (2011).

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### **Filmography**

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