BARBED WIRE TALES

This zine was created by Lucía Brutta based on a script written by James Scorer and includes a reflection by James Scorer

# Zine transcript

1. **Barbed Wire**

An endless strand of cactus hands grasping each other

An endless Escher twirl of enclosure and exclusion

A double-spiked entity that projects multi-directional violence

1. **History I**

Barbed wire is a history of violence.

It was first patented in the US in the 1870s to prevent the movement of livestock.

Barbed wire was cheap, easy to erect, and durable, less subject to decay, less subject to the wind

Barbed wire was the solution to the cost of controlling territorial vastness

1. **History II**

But human inventiveness knows no bounds: less than twenty years after its invention barbed wire was being used by the British to incarcerate Boers

Soon it was a tactical weapon, bodies suspended like washing on the line while survivors listened to what Wilfred Owen called ‘mad gusts tugging on the wire’

It was used to inter Dust Bowl refugees in labour camps in the US

Its cold heart was ubiquitous to the freezing archipelagos of the Russian Gulags

And to the imposition of racial eradication in the camps of Nazi Germany

1. **Civilisation vs. Barbarism**

Argentina’s livestock industry and vast pampas made it ideal for wire fencing.

Domingo Faustino Sarmiento declared ‘¡Cerquen, no sean barbaros!’ (Fence do not be barbarians). He praised wire for combatting ‘la falta de límites en los campos’ (the absence of limits in the territory).

Wire was the limit of civilisation, the demarcation of modernity

Gradually barbed wire would be used to keep the cattle in and the barbarians out

1. **Parenthesis: Wood**

Wood is an essential component to the history of barbed wire

The coming of barbed wire did not stifle the market for wood; on the contrary, it exploded

In Argentina, the wood praised by estancieros (ranchers) for wire fences was the ñandubay tree, named by the Guaraní as ‘comida del ñandú’ (food for ñandú), the bird that inhabits the pampas

The Guaraní have a legend about the creation of the ñandubay…

1. **Parenthesis: The Legend of the Ñandubay**

Vignette 1

Many centuries ago the Cacique Curumbé discovered the young Umanday, one of his best warriors, with his hands intertwined with the sweet and tender and Ivotí, his daughter, the person he loved most in the world.

Vignette 2

-traitor! Is this how you repay me for the trust I have always given you? I will kill you like a viper!

- I love your daughter and I want to marry her, this is my only wish, you can kill me if you understand it fairly, but I will defend myself

Vignette 3

- I will test you to see if you are worthy of Ivotí. You will have to stand 3 days in the same place, without taking a step until I return

If you disobey me, the guard will kill you immediately

On the other hand, if you keep your firm you will have my permission to mary Ivotí

-I acept

Vignette 4,5,6

Umanday waited motionless day and night under extreme conditions for the deadline to pass. The custodian was watching.

Next page

Vignette 1,2,3

To chase away the dream, he bit his lips

He dug his nails into his chest

But fatigue and suffering were gradually bending his legs

Vignette 4

Only after 5 days, the cacique returned. The young Indian was no longer breathing, but he was still upright

Vignette 5

Curumbé pushed him violently, without managing to knock him down. Umanday’s legs had joined the hard trunk. From his head and body sprouted twisted and thorny branches

Vignette 6

The Ñandubay was born, a tree suffered and tough as the Indian that sustains it with its nerves and muscles, with powerful bones and with its brave and indomitable blood.

1. **Camps in Argentina**

As elsewhere, barbed wire would be used to incarcerate political prisoners.

After Dowek’s paintings of no ways out, in the 1980s Norberto Gómez sculpted pale, outsized, perfectly shaped barbed wire installations

‘Argentina, Napalpi, June 26, 1924

Letter to the President,

Mr. President, thank you for granting us the means to achieve the suffocation of the enemy’

These barbed wire imaginaries echoed Viñas’s suggestion that the Indigenous tribes were the disappeared of the nineteenth century

Barbed wire and violent exclusion

1. **Barbed Latin American**

Some imaged barbed wire as the generous gift of the US – the ‘protection’ offered by the Monroe Doctrine.

But the history of barbed wire in Latin America is tied up with racial exclusion

After all, barbed wire – and its caustic cousin razor wire – have long been used along the US-Mexico border.

1. **Barbed Latin America**

Others write of barbed wire as the manifestation of economic imperialism.

In Manuel’s Scorza’s novel *Redoble por Rancas* the wire fence weaves its endless way across the highlands of Peru, the long tentacles of another Latin American octopus, the Cerro de Pasco Corporation.

The wire is alive, throbbing, advancing with violent life:

‘The scumbag was born one rainy day, at seven in the morning. At six o'clock in the afternoon, he was five kilometres old. He spent the night at Trinidad. The next day he ran to Piscapuquio: there his ten kilometres spread out. Do you know the five lakes of Piscapquio? For the one who arrives, drinking it is a gift. For the one who leaves, it is a cherished memory. No one can become fond of those lakes anymore.’

1. **Neoextractivism**

Today barbed wire marks out the limits of the extractive frontier

Fences keep out indigenous populations from the green desert of palm trees

Fences keep out local people from water sources sucked up by mining corporations

Barbed wire has even been used to tie up indigenous leaders

THE END

# Reflection by James Scorer

Graphic Entanglements

When Lucía asked if I’d like to write a script for her to draw as part of the CORALA project my thoughts turned immediately to barbed wire. I’d just finished reading Manuel Scorza’s 1970 novel *Redoble por Rancas* in which barbed wire creeps insidiously across the Andean highlands, the material and symbolic presence of a pernicious extractivism. Scorza’s work also reminded me of a similar dynamic between wire fences and the harsh realities of Latin America’s new open veins found in the 2016 Colombian ethno-graphic work Caminos condenados. And Sarmiento’s cry for the civilizing effects of wire had long been circulating in my conceptual landscape of Argentina. All three countries covered by CORALA, then, were immediately linked together in my mind by wire.

Lucía’s mastery at wielding comics as a tool of counter imaginaries comes to the fore in this zine. If barbed wire materializes ideological division, a metallic-wood intervention that demarcates friend from enemy, ‘civilized’ from ‘barbaric’, racially and culturally ‘pure’ from ‘impure’, then Lucía wields the comic form, and particularly the multivariate lines of panel edges, gutters, and text boxes, to highlight its multifaceted, transtemporal divisions. Just as barbed wire gradually takes over the land in *Redoble por Rancas*, so too does barbed wire creep into the panel edges of Lucía’s frames, dividing up the territory of the page. But her images also remind us of the need to reach out and cut through the racial exclusions that continue to be part of the Latin American landscape. She highlights how visual culture can make visible the bodies that are tangled up in such racial exclusions but which all too often pass unseen.

James Scorer