

**Title,** Antarctic Village – No Borders

**Author,** Ann Marie Pena

**First published,** The Hub

**Date,** March 2007

***Bandera Antártida***

*Hacia el sur en el blanco profundo se fundieron los colores del mundo  
y el silencio se hizo voz y el amor se hizo agua, y el agua se hizo paz y belleza  
Antártida, Antártida, escuela de humildad de ciencias y... ecoamistad.  
Antártida, Antártida, altar de hielo y luz, reserva de agua y paz.*

*Manuscrito en una servilleta Hotel Savoy, Rosario 1992*

Antarctica, *the end of the world*: boasting the most hostile climatic conditions, the coldest place on earth with temperatures reaching -80 °C in winter, the largest frozen desert in the world, containing 90% of the world's ice (approximately 70% of the world's fresh water), no permanent human residents, and no indigenous population. Yet over 4,000 research scientists from 27 different nations are constantly monitoring the ecoszone of this southernmost continent, not to mention the hundreds and thousands of new eco-tourists aboard the cruise ships navigating the Half Moon Island, Whalers Bay, Deception Island, Paradise Harbor, Port Lockroy, Petermann Island.

*"[...] Vowing one day to venture to these invariably far-flung and often wholly inhospitable lands. Antarctica's treacherous, spiny tendril was one such irresistible location [...] Like the bristly tail of some giant, prehistoric sea creature, the Antarctic Peninsula thrusts out past the Antarctic Circle, lunging vainly toward its sibling, the Andes, across the infamous Drake Passage. I'm standing on the bow of a modern ice vessel watching hefty chunks of disintegrating pack ice thud against the hull as we pick our way gingerly through a narrow channel. Lonely groups of Adélie Penguins watch curiously as we inch past, while in the distance, a lone Leopard Seal dives for cover under the flow." An Antarctic tourist<sup>1</sup>*

Antarctica presents a unique symbol of investigation.

While slogans such as the onslaught of urbanization, information highways, population explosions, real estate booms and the like can be used to describe the other qualities of 21<sup>st</sup> century living, Antarctica and its rugged beauty cannot be defined by any contemporary catch phrases, and does instead situate itself as the last unblemished land. The Antarctic Treaty was signed in 1959 to establish freedom of scientific investigation, environmental protection, whilst also banning all military activity. Defined as such, the land that lies in an area between 90°W and 150°W is in many ways a land still pure, a last fragile hope.

Drawing upon this visualization of hope, the project *Antarctic Village – No Borders* was first developed in the early 1990's by Lucy + Jorge Orta as a Utopian endeavour through which the artists could consider the current climate of migration and the refugee status in which many people throughout the world find themselves. A recent

---

<sup>1</sup> <<http://members.ozemail.com.au/~rodeime/antarctica/>>

UN source states that 2.2 million migrants will arrive in the rich world every year from now until 2050. Over the next four decades mass migration will occur mainly from the African and Asian continents, 377,000 and 1,2 million each year respectively, resulting in an unprecedented global upheaval.<sup>2</sup>

Here Antarctica, along with all the freedom and aspiration that it symbolizes, becomes a filter through which the Ortas reflect on the horror of hundreds of millions of men and women hunted from their native homelands by economical ruin, political terror or war, and sent on the endless road to exile. "Perhaps here, at the 'end of the world', another world is possible?" reflects Lucy Orta.

*"There are many challenges facing the international community today but few, in my mind, are more pressing than those of finding humanitarian solutions to refugee problems. We talk of regional conflicts, of economic and social crises, of political instability, of abuses of human rights, of racism, religious intolerance, inequalities between rich and poor, hunger, over-population, under-development and I could go on and on. Each and every one of these impediments to humanity's pursuit of well-being are also among the root causes of refugee problems."*<sup>3</sup>

Physically the installation Antarctic Village in Antarctica is emblematic of Ortas' body of work, composed of what could be termed modular architecture and reflecting qualities of nomadic shelters and campsites. The dwellings themselves are hand stitched together by a traditional tent maker with sections of flags from countries around the world, along with extensions of clothes and gloves, symbolising the multiplicity and diversity of people. Here the arm of face-less whitecollar worker's shirt hangs, there the sleeve of a children's sweater. Together the flags and dissected clothes emblazoned with silkscreen motifs referencing the UN Declaration for Human Rights, make for a physical embodiment of a *Global Village* (a phrase originally coined by Marshall McLuhan to describe the information age); except that, only in this case the artists have called it a 'Village of Mankind'. Within this new community, Lucy + Jorge Orta hypothesize the metaphorical Antarctic Village could proportion rights, which are often lacking in the status of refugees and immigrants. With these rights, however the artists insist, the new citizen of the world will commit him/herself to deny all acts of barbarity, to fight against terror and poverty, to support social progress, to safeguard human dignity and to defend the inalienable rights to liberty, justice and peace in the world. The artists propose amending the Article 13 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights so as to include a citizen's inherent right to freedom of movement. Article 13:3 would read, *Every human being has the right to move freely and cross frontiers to their chosen territory. Individuals should not be deemed of an inferior status to that of capital, trade, tele-communication and pollution, all of which have no boundaries.*

To realize the work, in February 2007 Jorge Orta travelled to Antarctica aboard the Hercules KC130 flight to install the first materialization of Antarctic Village. The journey lasted several weeks and became a symbol of

---

<sup>2</sup> Telegraph, March 15 2007

<sup>3</sup> Poul Hartling, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 1978-1985

the plight of those struggling to transverse borders and to gain the freedom of movement necessary to escape political and social conflict. The trip, taking place during the Austral summer, coincided with the last of the scientific expeditions before the winter months, before the ice mass becomes too thick to traverse. Aided by the logistical crew and scientists stationed at the Marambio Antarctic Base situated on the Seymour-Marambio Island, (64°14'S 56°37'W), Jorge and his team scouted Antarctica by helicopter, searching for different locations for the temporary encampment of their 50 dome-shaped dwellings. Dotted along the ice, the tents formed a settlement reminiscent of the images of refugee camps we see so often reported about on our European television screens and newspapers (official figures put the numbers of foreigners who die trying to reach Spain in 2004 at 141, but Human Rights in Andalucia claimed the death toll was 289, or 58 Chinese people discovered dead through dehydration by customs officers in the back of an articulated lorry in Dover, UK June 2000, to name but a few.<sup>4</sup>)

By way of calling the Orta Antarctic expedition to an end, the artists staged the first in a series of symbolic football games, *Heads or Tails, Tails or Heads*. Meteorologists, paleontologists and geologists from the Marambio Antarctic Base joined the Orta team, which was composed of Jorge Orta, photographer Thierry Bal, video cameraman Nick Price and writer Jonathan Holmes. They played a symbolic *All Nation* match. The Antarctic football shirts, created by the artists make it difficult to identify the adversary as the front and back of the shirts are stitched together with different countries' football team colours. "This match mirrors human behaviour. *"Appearances are often deceiving. Someone we think is a friend may actually be playing against us, while a total stranger can surprise us with an act of solidarity. It is not appearances that count, but rather decisive actions in critical moments. We hope that our voyage to Antarctica and the spirit of cooperation that we gained in Antarctica will generate greater awareness to the plight of refugees."* Jorge Orta comments.

We were reminded of the football match played coincidentally just over 100 years earlier by the stranded Shackleton Antarctic expedition team, during the most famous expeditions conducted by the explorer Ernest Shackleton and his 28 men (1914–1916), as he watched his ship *Endurance* being consumed by the pack ice, leaving his men stranded in Antarctica waiting for the rescue team that took 24 months to arrive. *"Difficulties are just things to overcome, after all."*<sup>5</sup>

It is timely that 2007 marks the start of the much-awaited 'International Polar Year', which will run until March 2009. During this period numerous international scientific experiments and expeditions will be conducted to gain a greater understanding of the roles the Polar Regions play in Earth's weather patterns and environmental state. This is the backdrop for the 1<sup>st</sup> End of the World Biennial in Ushuaia City, Tierra del Fuego. This is the first contemporary art biennial which aims at creating a poetic North-South axis between Art and Politics, Poetry, Ecology and Technology. *Antarctic Village - No Borders* has been supported by the biennial and is the first cultural projects of its kind to take place in Antarctica. [www.bienalfindelmundo.com](http://www.bienalfindelmundo.com).

---

<sup>4</sup> Legrain, Philippe, *Immigrants your country needs them*, Little Brown 2006

<sup>5</sup> Ernest Shackleton's diary, 1914-1916