

The narrative of the hunt has had a potent influence on modern cinema – whether as a signifier for a particular model of patriarchal masculinity that cannot break away from a dangerous hunter-gatherer archetype, as with John Boorman’s *Deliverance* (1972), or as a metaphor for a society simmering with latent violence, as with Carlos Saura’s *La caza* (1965). Ezequiel Yanco’s *La vida en común*, set in a remote dusty region of northern Argentina, takes a slightly different slant. In delineating the adventures of two boys on the cusp of adolescence tracking down a cattle-eating puma, it shows elements of the Ranquel people and the ways they survive – both economically and emotionally – in a society that is consistently forcing them to assimilate. The hunt represents a coming of age for friends Isaías (13) and Uriel (11), and the camera lingers on the boys giggling about their haircuts and facial hair, shyly observing a new girl and seeking to integrate themselves into the adult-led hunts.

Yanco’s film positions the adults at the peripheries of the narrative. It is the boys and their dogs that the camera follows, and it is through their eyes that the changes experienced by their community are narrated. Returning to the *pampa*, the small Ranquel community inhabits concrete tents built by the regional government to emulate their traditional housing. These spectacular houses create a dramatic scenographic contrast to the empty landscape, and are one of many examples – Isaías’s recording of birdsong on his mobile phone for the hunting of small birds is another – that show modernity shaping the indigenous community’s way of life.

Uriel’s voiceover narrates the history of how different children came to the area, and film footage, prints and photographs point to the political and familial histories the children have inherited. The legacy of the devastating 19th-century Conquest of the Desert – the state-legitimised massacres of the indigenous population, highlighted by Lisandro Alonso in *Jauja* (2014) – hovers over the film.

The pursuit of the puma represents the boys’ entry into the world of adulthood, a way of articulating their agency in a society where they are expected to acquiesce. Uriel and Isaías are frequently seen climbing the concrete structures built for the community. They want to control what they can of this vast space, to train their dogs, to ride a motorbike, to provide food – as in the graphic opening sequence of a boar being captured and butchered. They want to belong. Avoiding simple binaries, Yanco opts to let the boys tell their own stories against the shifting light and multi-layered sounds of this extraordinary landscape. The result is a poetic work where the layered resonances of colonialism are all too present.

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