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in the re-construction of Argentinian pasts  
Victoria González

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By Victoria Goddard

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Goldsmiths Anthropology Research Papers  
Eds: Sophie Day, Olivia Harris, John Hutnyk

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In July 1996 I attended the closing ceremony of the annual exhibition held at the Argentine Rural Association, the organisation that embodies the interests and identity of the country's agrarian sector and in particular of the land-owning elite. The ceremony culminated in a dramatisation of the ordeals endured by ordinary soldiers during the 'Conquest of the Desert'. This was a protracted war aimed at eradicating the Indian presence from an ever increasing territory, a task that was completed at the end of the nineteenth century, providing more land and resources to underwrite the elite's aspirations of nationhood and progress.

As evening fell the outline of the cavalymen who filled the arena became fainter until the only evidence of their presence was the swaying movement of the torches they carried. The narrator made every effort to recreate an atmosphere appropriate to the enterprise, reflecting the hardships suffered by the soldiers and the dangers posed by the menacing Indian presence. As the story of the battle unfolded, the narrative led us through countless difficulties to culminate in the army's victory. With the final defeat of the Indians and with full visibility restored, the applause grew stronger as a *gaucho*<sup>1</sup> made a dramatic entrance. Galloping his

*'criollo'* horse into the centre of the arena and bearing an oversized Argentine flag, the combined elements of man, animal and emblem seemed to validate the victory and provide a synthesis of its achievements. The narrator poured praise on the *caballito criollo*<sup>2</sup>, which because of its special qualities, was a worthy representative of national, creole values and authenticity. In the final stage of

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<sup>1</sup> The term *'gaucho'* refers to the nomadic or semi-nomadic population of mixed ethnic origin that, until the 1870s, relied on hunting wild cattle, and irregularly became employed as herders on the farming establishments. Although the original meaning of the term no longer applies to the rural population, it is still used to describe certain kinds of rural workers as well as referring to certain qualities and a certain style of comportment and dress. Just as it might be used to portray a hegemonic national identity as in the example cited above, the figure of the *gaucho* can also be deployed to represent counter-hegemonic political positions, as pointed out by Archetti, (1994a) quoted in Radcliffe and Westwood (1996).

<sup>2</sup> *Criollo* or Creole originally referred to the descendants of the Spaniards born on American soil. They were by definition if not by fact white and therefore differentiated from the mixed descendants or *mestizos*, sometimes referred to as *'mancebos de la tierra'* (sons of the land). The term *criollo* then took on the meaning of all things authentically representing the values of the local versus the values of metropolitan centres. *Caballito criollo* refers to the specific mixture of breeds that emerged from the Spanish stock of horses that reproduced in the wild. They are known for their strength and resistance.

the ceremony the audience, accompanied by the army band, sang a well-known patriotic anthem. This long and difficult song had no obvious sequential or causal connection with the events we had been invited to re-experience. Instead, it narrated an episode of heroism in a battle that took place during the war of independence in the early part of the nineteenth century, a generation away from the defeat of the valiant Namuncura. Synchronicity was achieved through the portrayal of military events where patriotic sentiment could lead ordinary men towards extraordinary actions.<sup>3</sup>

The performance took place at a moment when the self-esteem and the credibility of the armed forces were at an all-time low, and appeared to confer on the armed forces a legitimate, creative role in the establishment of the Argentine state. In fact, the protracted war against the Indian did, along with a number of other internal and foreign conflicts, maintain the army at the centre of Argentine political life during the country's formative period in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>4</sup> The choice of the Conquest of the Desert over other episodes is interesting. David Viñas has argued that the extermination of the Indian constituted the foundation and core of the liberal nation-state. Inherent in the Argentine nation-state, is a drive towards the suppression of the other, whether this was embodied in the autonomous Indian or, more recently, in the 'subversives' and 'terrorists' of the dirty war of the 1970s (Viñas, 1982).

My sense of discomfort while reflecting on this was exacerbated by the enthusiastic response of the audience. The dramatisation had succeeded as a political spectacle, in that it provided a 'locus and mechanism of communal identity, the imaginings that constitute social systems' (Taylor 1996: 323). It had effectively generated a collective belonging, drawing the public into the narrative and seducing them into the pleasures of patriotic sentiment. The elements to achieve this had all been present: suffering and self-sacrifice, shared memory, and, perhaps especially, forgetting (Renan 1996).

Indeed, this narration of nationness can be deemed successful both in terms of the actors and events that it elicited and those that it refused to represent. It was significant that the venue should be the Rural, owned by the association founded in 1866 to represent the interests of the land-owning elite which was then consolidating its dominant position after decades of internal war and rivalry. Although there have been tensions and moments of rupture between the army and the elites, they have undoubtedly

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<sup>3</sup> The song relates to the battle of San Lorenzo and to an episode that finds its way into all school textbooks. Cabral, an ordinary sergeant, often described as a *gaucho*, saved the life of his General, Jose de San Martin, hero of the war of independence and frequently referred to as the 'Saint of the Sword' by shielding him with his body.

<sup>4</sup> At the same time, the internal divisions between the regions and the heavy reliance on patronage as a system of recruitment and maintenance of order meant that a permanent professional army didn't come into being until the 1860s.

constituted a powerful alliance. Specifically, the Rural Association was a direct beneficiary of the Desert Campaigns. In 1871 it pushed for the expulsion of the Indian populations south of the Rio Negro in Patagonia, offering logistic support for the venture. The campaigns promoted a fusion and concentration of military, economic and political power in the hands of a few families, as a series of governments granted land concessions in exchange for services rendered against the Indian. And finally, the war against the Indian provided a long-standing *raison d'être* for an army that has had great difficulty in defining a non-belligere role for itself.<sup>5</sup>

The army, through the bodies of ordinary soldiers, was the protagonist. Others, the enemy, were represented merely as shadows, perhaps adequately reflecting the place of the Indian populations in official history and contemporary consciousness. And the narrative offered no opportunity to recognise any role for women, whether heroic or ordinary. The absence of women from the dramatisation was, however implicitly, commented on by the horsemanship display offered subsequently by the mounted police that included women members accomplishing the same feats as their male counterparts, to the rapturous applause of the public.

Although it is estimated that thousands of women accompanied soldiers through the difficulties of life on the frontier, the absence of women from the account is unsurprising and is consistent with most literary, historical and symbolic representations of these

events. Furthermore, what this narrative wanted to communicate was a heroic, militaristic interpretation of the birth of a nation, rather than one based on the efforts of ordinary men and women. The synthesis of the narrative constituted a definition of authentic Argentine identity based on quite specific ideas about masculinity (Archetti 1994a), ideas that were sometimes contrasted but also compared in representations of Indian warriors and creole soldiers.

Witnessing this event and its claims to represent the nation and the people, the relevance of Garcia-Canclini's proposal of 'disentangling the representations from the various struggles that underlie the formation of the nation-state' was apparent (Garcia-Canclini 1991: 92). It seemed important to empirically re-instate the actors and the communities submerged within the national imaginary. On the other hand we need to understand the implications of the fragments, silences and appropriations of heterogeneity within these narratives and address the question as to whether and how these symbolic structures contrive to interpellate even those that they exclude. What are the implications of these absences both for the community and for the subjectivities that

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<sup>5</sup> Julio Argentino Roca, the military leader to whom the final victory of the Desert War is attributed and who was twice president of the Republic, whilst astutely avoiding the costs of a second war against Brazil, lamented the end of the war of the Desert: 'It is a shame that these romantic campaigns to the Desert are concluded for they were an admirable school for the captains and officers of the army' (letter to Gral. Villegas quoted in Walther 1970: 521).

emerge within its space? Or in other terms, how can a national rhetoric be simultaneously inclusive and excluding? How can it claim universal appeal whilst reproducing unequal access to the nation's patrimony?

The process of nation-state building concerns not only the effective extension of authority over a territory and a people, but also the constitution of subjects as 'national' beings, identifying with the claims the state might make over them. If the construction of the state is largely recognised as reliant on realities of annexation, subjugation and co-option, 'nation' is its complement, for its capacity to rally, to generate subjective commitment and elicit a sense of belonging and ultimately to 'forget' the violence that was required to forge it (Renan 1996). But the project of the nation as an imagined community (Anderson 1983) masks its heterogeneity and denies a space both to the communities that become submerged through it and to the alternative imaginaries that it displaces. This heterogeneity is, however, formative to the extent that the nation is 'internally marked by the discourses of minorities, the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities and tense locations of cultural difference' (Bhabha 1994:148).

Based on archival and bibliographic research, this article will argue that a focus on gender provides significant insights into the contradictory processes of material and symbolic inclusion and exclusion.<sup>6</sup> In Argentina a statist populism has built up a rhetoric of

nationhood that privileges virility while limiting its effects. At the level of government there has been consensus and continuity in the effort to construct a masculine state (though intimately and symbolically bound to a female *patria* or motherland), populated by virile subjects while however containing this virility or even denying it in the case of specific, threatening, social groups. In this process, issues of gender and ethnicity become implicated with other differences based on class and place and are central to the constitution of national subjects. By focusing on Indian and *gaucho* men and on women as marginalised but symbolically potent categories the paper will approach these as agents that have shaped, even if only by their suppression, the content and direction of Argentine nationhood.

### Revolution and the elusiveness of freedom

The 1810 revolution against the domination of the Spanish Crown initiated a process of state building and identity formation that was to be lengthy and contradictory. The expulsion of the Spanish prompted the need for a new political format and a new basis for identity and solidarity defined against the values of imperial Spain. Whereas the republican model inspired by the French and North American experiences prevailed, the

<sup>6</sup> This paper is based on research carried out over three visits to Argentina between 1997 and 2000, supported by the Central Research Grant Committee of the University of London and Goldsmiths College. I am grateful to staff at the Academia Nacional de Historia, the Biblioteca Nacional and the Biblioteca del Congreso, Buenos Aires.

specificities of how this republic would be constituted involved complex issues relating to the distribution of power and thus took several conflict-ridden decades to become defined and established. This was especially true of the conflicts between the interior of the country and the port of Buenos Aires and its hinterland. From 1820 to 1862 a situation referred to in the historical literature as 'the Anarchy' expressed the prevalence of local interests and localised elites over the aims of achieving a modern nation-state.

One of the factors that militated against unity was the territorial configuration of the Viceroyalty with its regionally discrete economic circuits which for example linked the west more closely to Santiago and the North to Lima than to Buenos Aires, and given that extensive areas were not under colonial control. In fact, at the time of the revolution, the territory which constituted the Viceroyalty of the River Plate was largely occupied by native American groups, some of whom were agricultural, many of them subjected to the Spanish Crown. Others were nomadic hunter-gatherers and had resisted incorporation into Christian Spanish American society. As the Spanish and the locally born Creole population moved further into the countryside, tensions between the two populations increased and violence flared up with frequency. The question of the frontier with the nomadic Indian populations was therefore at the forefront of the new republic's concerns. More accurately, the republic inherited the concerns of the

Viceroyalty regarding the disorder that reigned in the rural areas. From 1635, there are expressions of official concern regarding persons living beyond the reach of God, King and Law, and a series of edicts were issued to attempt to curb the freedom and activities of wandering rural men (Izard 1994). After completing an expedition commissioned by the revolutionary government, Colonel Garcia echoed earlier descriptions of the countryside as being in a state of general disorder, with large numbers of people used to living off others and given over to 'vagrancy, gambling and all kinds of vice' (Walther 1970: 122). Garcia's expedition was however intended to establish relations between the new government and the Indian leaders, and one of the outcomes of his expedition was the visit by a number of Indian chiefs or *caciques* to the city of Buenos Aires in 1811. The aim of the visit was to state their formal recognition of the new government, which received them with the following statement:

'The most important service that this government can carry out for its country is that of protecting, through the kindness of its administration, those who adhere to its principles. Regardless of the nation to which they belong, or to differences in language or customs, they will always be regarded as its most precious asset. If it recognises this obligation towards all members of the earth, how much more important is it to recognise the affinity of blood that unites us. Putting aside the causes that have kept us separate until today, it is

sufficient that we are children of the same stem.... Friends, compatriots and brothers, let us unite to constitute a single family.' (Walther 1970: 122-3)

The revolutionaries of 1810 were men of vision, grand ideals and projects and they set about dismantling what they perceived to be the oppressive institutions of Spanish domination. The ideals of the revolution encouraged a benign and fraternal approach to indigenous groups that was to replace the excesses that had all too frequently characterized the colony. For example, the first revolutionary government abolished the tributes that native peoples had been forced to pay the Crown, and ruled against the segregation of 'tame' Indian soldiers in the special regiments defined by race or *castas* (*pardos* and *morenos*). Ironically, members of the revolutionary Junta bolstered their argument by appealing to the original principles of the 'discovery' of the Americas. Specifically, they referred to the wish of the Spanish Crown (the 'Catholic king and queen') that their American vassals should enjoy the same privileges as those bestowed on the Crown's vassals in Castille.

At the same time, the republicans argued that the Spanish conquest had entailed the usurpation of the property and rights of the American population and it was therefore important to recognise those rights that had been withheld during the time of the colony. These good intentions were soon set aside as commercial and political interests took hold. Furthermore, the process of

establishing an independent and stable political unit was to be a long and conflict-ridden one and the perceived necessities of the moment resulted in the postponement of many ideals. Some of these found quite radical expression, at least in principle. Guided by concepts of fraternity and parity, in 1811 the government resolved to grant the Indian population direct intervention in the process of government. In each region an Indian delegate was to be chosen to represent their people in Congress. The decree would only have affected those Indian communities that were already within the jurisdiction of the Viceroyalty and not the groups on the other side of the frontier, but the decision reflected the principle of universal male participation in the polity. But internal conflicts meant that the resolution was never implemented.

To a large extent the democratising measures were counter-productive. Szuchman (1988) argues that the revolutionary zeal of the leadership generated widespread anxieties regarding law and order. He suggests that by eliminating the institutions of colonial government and preaching an anti-authoritarian republicanism, they unwittingly created a political vacuum and a state of instability. The outcome was a reactionary concern with establishing order and authority. Nowhere are the conflicts between ideals and pragmatics more evident than in the legislation affecting slavery. The impassioned rhetoric about freedom that in some cases was extended to include the abolition of slavery, was watered down as

powerful groups made their interests known. In 1813 a law granted freedom to any slave who entered the territory of the Republic but in 1814 Brazilian protests at the loss of slaves brought about by this law resulted in its immediate modification. A more modest approach to the issue was represented by the '*ley de vientres*' (law of wombs) whereby children born to slave women were free. However, here again the radical potential of this law was cancelled out by tight restrictions on the status, rights and indeed freedom of these children or *libertos* (Andrews 1980). In the end, the interests of the owners of slaves prevailed over the revolutionary concern for freedom and fraternity. During the course of the nineteenth century, as Argentina struggled to constitute itself as a political entity, such contradictions were to be witnessed repeatedly. What emerged with increasing clarity and forcefulness was the prevalence of order rather than liberty and control rather than freedom. Anxieties regarding disorder were focused consistently on the poor of the cities and the countryside. African-Argentines, whom slavery had condemned to the bottom rungs of society, were amongst the first to be targeted for social control. They, along with other sectors of the urban poor were identified as the dangerous class.

The danger represented by the lower classes was enhanced by their role in the defence of the city of Buenos Aires during the English Invasions (1806 and 1807) and their efforts during the struggle for independence. African-Argentines who had been prevented from holding weapons during the colonial period now found themselves armed. The use of small weapons became habitual amongst lower class men in cities as well as in rural areas. The question of disarming these sectors of the population was a thorny one and attempts to accomplish this resulted in the unrest that the measures had intended to prevent.<sup>7</sup> Recruitment of men into the army to fight Spain and later the Indians or other internal enemies resolved a number of issues related to social control of potentially dangerous elements and to the manumission of slaves (Szuchman 1988). At the same time, this recruitment generated a high index of female-headed households amongst the urban poor, thus giving rise to a further source of moral and social anxiety, centred on uncontrolled and sexually dangerous women.

<sup>7</sup> Szuchman indicates that there was a racial bias in the perception and punishment of crime. For example, in 1825, in San Antonio de Areco in the province of Buenos Aires, judicial records show a clear majority of convictions of manual workers and of black men: 60% were single men of colour, 65% were menial workers and 85% were semi-skilled. The principal offence for which these men were arrested was drunkenness and vagrancy (42.9% of arrests), followed by fighting and aggravated assault (35.7%) (Szuchman 1988:40).

### An inter-ethnic political economy

Sarmiento,<sup>8</sup> the nineteenth century Argentine moderniser, considered that the problem faced in connection with progress in Argentina was its extension, the vast desert that surrounded it. The 'desert' was a potent symbol of the obstacles in the path of modernisation in much of the literary and political writing of the nineteenth century. It was a conceptual landscape that represented untamed nature and those undomesticated men and women who inhabited it. This was primarily Indian territory although others, particularly the *gauchos*, might temporarily or permanently seek refuge there. Only in the latter part of the century, when the war against the Indian pushed the frontier south, into Patagonia, did the term desert come close to describing the ecology of the area.

At the time of the 1810 revolution the territory occupied by the Spanish viceroyalty could be described as a series of inter-connected enclaves within a much wider area dominated by Indian populations. Particularly in the areas to the north bordering with the Chaco, in the centre and south of the country, nomadic groups in particular resisted domination by the Spanish and later Creole attempts at establishing control over the entire territory. As was the case with many of their North American counterparts, the horse revolutionised their subsistence strategies and their social organisation, encouraging an economy based on hunting wild game whilst facilitating raids and warfare. Following from this, the horse was, together with the pressure of the Chilean Creole population on their territories,

probably the principal factor encouraging large-scale migration across the Andes into the plains of what is now Argentina.<sup>9</sup> The Mapuche people, who had proved their competence as warriors by successfully repelling both Inca and Spanish drives to conquer them, colonised large tracts of Southern Chile, the Argentine Pampas and Patagonia, sometimes displacing earlier inhabitants and sometimes mixing with them. The presence of large herds of wild horses and cattle encouraged the Mapuches, as well as other local groups such as the Ranqueles, to develop a successful economy based on hunting wild game and cattle. This articulated with the more settled, agricultural communities of the Mapuche on the western side of the Andes.<sup>10</sup> To some extent, these two forms constituted a single system, whereby young men migrated from the Chilean south to the Argentine plains to train and prove themselves as warriors. At the same time, the goods obtained through their activities in the plains were traded or were given as gifts to the populations in the South of Chile, so that important networks of trade relations, kinship and political alliances cut across the Andes.

<sup>8</sup> Domingo Faustino Sarmiento was President of Argentina between 1868 and 1874.

<sup>9</sup> There has been a great deal of debate and speculation concerning the origins of the Mapuche and some authors have argued that they in fact originated in the Argentine plains. See Juliano (1984).

<sup>10</sup> Where conditions were favourable, groups of Araucanian descent were engaged in agriculture. See in particular the description by Musters (1964) of the Manzaneros' use of their territory, where they harvested apples and pine nuts and grew crops as well as hunting wild game.

The Indians were not the only ones to thrive on the wild cattle and horses. In fact, the economy of the Spanish viceroyalty and later the republic was based on the exploitation of these herds. Wild cattle were hunted for their hides, tallow and later for the production of dried beef, exported to Cuba and Brazil to feed the slave populations there (Bethell 1993). As the trade in hides expanded, alongside the growth of the beef salting industry, this economy of direct appropriation with no investment in future production began to show signs of exhaustion and in 1748 the Viceroyalty was moved to control and regulate the exploitation of wild cattle. These restrictions exacerbated the tensions between Indian and Creole populations, as they increasingly saw themselves in competition for animals and land.

Here as elsewhere in the Americas, there was an essential conflict of interest between the Europeans and the Indians, which was only rarely relieved by trade and alliances. For the Indian groups, especially the horsemen of the pampas, the European was encroaching more and more on their best pastures and hunting grounds. At the same time, the European and Creole settlements constituted an important resource, and raids on rural communities and farms were frequent. The growth of trade between Indian and Europeans/mestizos provided further incentives to steal from settlers. It was one of the factors underlying the rise of the *malon* or large-scale attacks, which became

a feature of life on the pampas and a focus for anxieties regarding the future of the imagined nation and its prosperity. The Indian attacks on settlers resulted in human casualties but the principal objective of these incursions appears to have been the appropriation of wealth: cattle, horses and people.<sup>11</sup>

The capture of people served a number of purposes. In the first place, it provided the Indians with an element they could use when bargaining with the creole authorities. In addition, captive women and children helped to increase the population. Women in particular were highly valued. Vicuña MacKenna explained: 'the glory of the savage of the pampas is measured by the number of captive women in his possession, and his power is measured by the number of children which they bear him' (quoted in Walther 1970: 146). According to Bengoa (1985) amongst certain groups of Chilean Mapuches in particular, there was a deliberate choice in favour of *metissage*, in order to 'fortify the race'. Certain chiefs were also keen to have bilingual children as they saw this as enhancing their leadership qualities and their ability to govern in a context that demanded frequent negotiations with non-Indians. It was principally for this reason that

<sup>11</sup> In one single raid in 1821 in the southern frontier in the province of Buenos Aires, 1,500 Indians took more than 150,000 head of cattle, and a number of captives (Walther 1970: 141).

many were keen to have their children educated in the Spanish and later creole schools.<sup>12</sup>

In the case of the Mapuches of the pampas, this vision appears less clearly in the strategies pursued by the chieftains. However, Calfucura, one of the most fierce opponents of the creole state, sent at least one of his sons to be educated at a leading school some distance from his own territory. Others were sent as emissaries and godchildren to live with important creole men such as Rosas.<sup>13</sup> It is also the case that at least some of the important *caciques* were the children of Indian fathers and 'Spanish' mothers. This was the case of Cacique Ramon, from San Luis on the eastern edge of the country, to whom Walther attributes greater tolerance and understanding of Christian ways because of his mixed origin (Walther 1970: 351). On the other hand, Baigorrita was also of mixed origin but was amongst the last chiefs to fall to the army. He never surrendered and died in battle.

In either case, captive women who were not traded for Indian captives or taken as wives might be presented as gifts to other chiefs. The circuits of exchange in which these women became involved were extensive, as were the networks of political alliances consolidated through strategic marriages. So, according to Bengoa, certain Mapuche chiefs on the western side of the Andes had acquired a number of wives through capture and exchange: 'Chileans', 'Spanish' or 'gringuitas' from Argentina.<sup>14</sup> Whilst in the

south of the province of Buenos Aires during the journey of the Beagle, Darwin witnessed the arrival of a group of soldiers bringing back captives. He comments:

'Among the captive girls taken in the same engagement, there were two very pretty Spanish ones, who had been carried away by the Indians when young, and could now only speak the Indian tongue. From their account, they must have come from Salta, a distance in a

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<sup>12</sup> An important aspect of this interest in education and language is the Mapuche concern with communication as a means of problem solving and settling disputes. Juliano (1984: 133) quotes cacique Ramon Wuala's account of the long war with the creoles, which he explained in terms of a lack of communication, given that the Mapuche did not speak Spanish well enough and were therefore not able to make themselves understood. Bengoa (1985) points out that the cultural and ethnic flexibility and openness of the Mapuche ended in the twentieth century with the defeat of the Indians, at which time they shifted to endogamous marriages.

<sup>13</sup> Rosas was an important landowner and militia commander who first indirectly, and later as Governor of the province of Buenos Aires, dictated an economic policy that favoured the interests of the emergent land-owning elite. As governor, he brought relative peace to the countryside of the province through his policy of alliance and subsidy with regard to the Indians. In spite of his pacification campaigns his military campaign of 1833 made available thousands of acres of land to the creole elite (Bethell 1993: 18-38).

<sup>14</sup> *Gringa* or *gringo* was a term used to refer to European immigrants although it could be extended to describe very light-skinned people. Although undoubtedly some of the settlers in the frontier regions were Europeans who suffered the effects of the raids (as occurred with the mainly Danish settlements near Tandil in Buenos Aires) the majority of the female rural population in the southern borders were Argentine born (see Slatta 1983).

straight line of nearly 1,000 miles. This gives one a grand idea of the immense territory over which the Indians roam...' and he adds prophetically: '...yet, great as it is, I think there will not, in another half-century, be a wild Indian northward of the Rio Negro.' (Darwin 1989: 112)<sup>15</sup>

There is contradictory evidence regarding the treatment of women captives and there is every reason to believe that this varied considerably from case to case and from group to group. Many captives were unwilling to return to their place of origin and others found adaptation difficult once they returned. The conditions of life were as hard in the precarious shelters of the rural poor as they were amongst the Indian populations.<sup>16</sup> The rudimentary material and hygienic conditions that prevailed in the creole 'ranchos' (see Carlino 1976, Darwin 1989, Bond Head 1997, Slatta 1983, Mansilla 1947) during the nineteenth century contrast with descriptions of some of the Indian *toldos* or camps, particularly those of the Araucanians who inhabited the more prosperous valleys at the foothills of the Andes. Muster describes the relative comfort of these people and the habits of daily washing and grooming amongst the Manzanero Mapuches, and to a lesser extent amongst the Tehuelches, the original inhabitants of the southern areas of Patagonia (Musters 1964).

There were also Indian women held captive in the creole or settler communities. Men, women and children were taken captive by the army and were frequently traded for European and creole captives held by the Indians. There are also indications that women were captured to become the brides of frontier soldiers. On the other hand, Darwin's account of his visit in the 1830s raises some doubts as to the proportion of Indian prisoners kept alive at that time: '...all the women who appear above twenty years old are massacred in cold blood. When I exclaimed that this appeared rather inhuman, he (his informant) answered, "Why, what can be done? They breed so!"' (Darwin 1989: 111). Similarly, he reports that the tendency was for soldiers to sabre every man. Children were taken alive 'to be sold or given away as servants, or rather slaves, for as long a time as the owners can deceive them; but I believe in this respect there is little to complain of.' (*ibid.*)

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<sup>15</sup> It is interesting to contextualise Darwin's observations in relation to his position regarding social evolution. See Bratlinger (1995) for a discussion of Darwin's relationship to social Darwinism with specific reference to Tasmania.

<sup>16</sup> At least until the middle of the nineteenth century conditions were not much better in the homes of land-owners. Darwin and others describe the extremely rudimentary living conditions of men who were rich in land and cattle.



Judging from the available figures of captives taken during Indian attacks or freed by the Argentine army, which are only partial and somewhat inexact, the number of Europeans incorporated temporarily or permanently into Indian society was considerable.<sup>17</sup> The captive, almost inevitably portrayed as female, constituted a powerful symbolic resource within discourses pertaining to conquest, civilisation and the future of the nation. It is an image that has its roots in Spain's conflict-ridden relationship with the Moorish territories of the Iberian peninsula and found fertile ground in the new world where tales of female captives justified the conquest of the native populations (Iglesia and Schwartzman 1987). Whilst the story of the captive evoked the horrors of chaotic nature and provided a symbolic representation of the dangers of barbarism, real men and women crossed the borders and blurred the boundaries between civilisation and barbarism, willingly or unwillingly. Whether as captives, wives, refugees, they became silent but crucial agents in the forging of alliances, and trade networks while also destabilising the hegemonic claims of the modern state.

### The shifting frontier

The *malon* or raid was one, very profitable way of obtaining important items of wealth. But treaties with provincial or national governments constituted a viable alternative. In their attempt to maintain some level of peace in the countryside, different governments reached agreements with important Indian chiefs. As part of the pact, governments were obliged to send gifts or

payments of cattle, silver, clothing, *mate* (tea), sugar and other items. Whereas much of the payment was redistributed within the group, a considerable portion of the more important items, especially cattle, was sent as gifts to other chiefs on the western side or sold on the western side. Interestingly, although this strategy did at various times achieve the aim of relative peace, it also provided the means to improve performance as an economy of appropriation. The flow of goods secured the flow of young warriors across the Andes, confirmed and reproduced alliances which were often crucial when convening attacks on government or other targets, and secured the purchase and exchange of firearms to balance the forces between settler and Indian armies.

In spite of the treaties, the *malon* did not subside. This was partly because the logic of the system required at least occasional incursions into settler territory to obtain cattle and captives and partly because it would seem that even the mightiest chiefs were not always able to guarantee control over all their warriors.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore,

<sup>17</sup> For example, in 1855 Calfucura led 5,000 men against the area of Azul, province of Buenos Aires, and took 60,000 head of cattle and 150 families. At an earlier date, 2,000 captive women freed on the eastern side of the Andes were repatriated to Chile. In 1857, again in the province of Buenos Aires, 200 or 300 women were taken along with 60,000 animals. In one of the later campaigns of the 1870s the army estimated it had recovered 500 captives (Walther 1970).

<sup>18</sup> 'It is difficult for the superior chiefs to prevent, under all circumstances, that the lesser chiefs incur minor depredations...' (Musters 1964:319).

although most chiefs were clear in their minds as to the advantages of peace, they were unwilling to accept the violations of treaties which took place on a regular basis. There are some indications that, along with many other changes effected by the Indian warriors to combat the Europeans successfully, there was a trend from selection towards inheritance of the chieftainship, especially amongst the more militarised groups closer to the frontier. However, the duration of the rule of many of these chiefs could be brief. The *malon* had very clear and pragmatic objectives, that is, to obtain wealth rather than become embroiled in battle. But there were risks involved and this was increasingly the case as time went by and the Argentine State was able to devote more resources to the frontier war.<sup>19</sup> But even more to the point is the fact that by pursuing the logic of appropriation, these chiefs were bound to encounter the military arm of the state. In addition, there were rivalries and take-overs between groups that often resulted in the premature death of a chief.

Having said that, some chiefs ruled over large territories for many years and went a long way towards concentrating authority in their hands. Calfucura was centenarian when he died, having ruled from 1834 until 1873, and his son Namuncura was sixty-two years old when he succeeded his father and led his people until his final defeat in 1884. Calfucura surprised many by dealing with the state authorities as one sovereign to another. He had a number of advisors and assistants and used an official seal in his

correspondence with officials. He had a Chilean Christian secretary, Manuel Acosta o Freyre who helped compose letters and speeches (Walther 1970: 250). Both Calfucura and later his son Namuncura, were extremely able at interpreting the complex flow of political events and rivalries that characterised nineteenth century politics in the River Plate, and at deriving advantage from the conjunctural weaknesses of the government. In a letter to the army commander in Bahía Blanca (southern Buenos Aires) in 1875, Namuncura stated:

'I read in the newspapers that you are involved in some international complications with Brazil and with Chile. This must make you realise that you have to ensure that your relations with us are good, because in case of a war we could be extremely useful as friends and very damaging as enemies' (in Walther 1970: 361).

At a time when most of the creole population had a very undeveloped sense of an encompassing nation, referring instead to their '*patria*' or country as the place of birth, such as a province or region (Slatta 1983, Oszlak 1997: 47), several Indian leaders were inclined to appeal to their own nationality as either Chileans or Argentines, and were

<sup>19</sup> In 1820 the Portuguese invaded present-day Uruguay and a war with Brazil ensued in 1824. As mentioned, a period of internal war also started in 1820 and carried on for the next forty years. Later, between 1865 and 1870 the country was involved in the war against Paraguay.

adept at using national symbols, such as the flag, to express their specific allegiances.<sup>20</sup> In a letter to the authorities Calfucura, declared sovereign of the pampas, describes himself as a Chilean. He claimed to have been invited over to the pampas from Chile by Rosas as part of this Governor's policy of creating alliances with Indian groups to secure some sort of peace in his province.<sup>21</sup> Further south, the less belligerent Cacique Casimiro<sup>22</sup> is said to have carried a blue and white flag at all times. Other famous *caciques* (Ignacio Coliqueo and Raninqueo) from the north of the province of Buenos Aires are described by Walther as: 'Argentine by origin, they proved as much in May of 1865, when they offered their services to General Mitre to fight in Paraguay'<sup>23</sup> (Walther 1970:315). Sayhueque, in the Patagonian area, impressed Argentine observers when he rejected a gift of two Chilean banners offered by a representative of the Chilean government, declaring that he was an Argentine. Sayhueque, recognised by all sides as the overlord of a vast territory stretching from Patagonia to Mendoza, was considered an important ally for most of his life, and an important deterrent to the attempts of the Chilean government to exercise influence over the Indians of the South. The border between Chile and Argentina had not been defined and both countries claimed much of the pampas and Patagonia, which was largely unexplored by non-Indians at the time.<sup>24</sup>

Just as the Creole authorities might use Indians to advance their interests, Indian leaders also resorted to strategic alliances to further their own ends. Mangin, a western Mapuche provides an example of the complex alliances sought across the Andes. Like so many Mapuche men he crossed the Andes over to the eastern side at the age of twenty, returning home after twenty years or so with cattle, silver and a number of alliances contracted through marriage. On the basis

<sup>20</sup> The flag was used in encounters with government representatives and were also displayed during the presentation ceremonies when different tribes met to discuss important matters (Musters 1964: 182).

<sup>21</sup> According to Bengoa, Rosas invited Venancio Cohuepan who was bilingual and may have been the son of a settler woman, over from the western side of the Andes to support him against Calfucura. Furthermore, Bengoa refers to one informant who describes the populations on both sides of the Andes as Mapuche: 'That Calfucura was a Mapuche Indian, very powerful in Argentina. They defended all this land, Huenteche (highland Chileans) and Argentines. Then it was divided. Argentina stayed over there and Chile stayed over here.' (Bengoa 1985: 89)

<sup>22</sup> Casimiro was a Tehuelche, a group that had inhabited the south prior to the arrival of the Mapuches. They were on good terms with the government and Casimiro followed the position of earlier generations of rulers in establishing alliances with the settler governments. Walther suggests that one reason for their more peaceful position was their distance from the settlements and their relative under-utilisation of the horse (Walther 1970: 255).

<sup>23</sup> This refers to the war with Paraguay from 1865 to 1870.

<sup>24</sup> With reference to the Mapuche use of the blue and white flag, Juliano (1984) points out that this was compatible with the symbolic system of the Mapuche, so that the flag and the rosettes displaying the national Argentine colours were those elements of Argentine identity that could be unproblematically incorporated within Mapuche cultural practice.

of these alliances he became a *cacique*. He established an alliance with Calfucura who at the time controlled the Salinas Grandes, the major source of salt for the populations of the South of Chile and Argentina including the creole economy. As part of the alliance he sent his son to live with Calfucura and in turn he received *yerba*,<sup>25</sup> tobacco, alcohol, clothing and cattle. These items were part of the subsidies that Calfucura received periodically from the Argentine army as a condition of the peace treaty. The alliance between Mangin and Calfucura involved reciprocal support in case of war. Mangin was suspicious of the new Chilean state, and had supported the Spanish during the war of independence. Following the defeat of the Spanish Empire he then supported various regionalist groups in an attempt to thwart the formation of a strong central state which would be antithetical to Mapuche interests. When the regionalists were defeated he sought an alliance with the government of Buenos Aires, offering them control over Araucania, including the south of Chile. Mangin saw that the survival of Araucania depended on building up strength through alliances within Chile and Argentina. With this in mind he established alliances with Pampas, Pehuenches, and different Araucanian groups, attempting to unify all Araucanians under a single government (Bengoa 1985: 84-8).

There was no unanimity as to what the government's policy towards the Indian frontier should be; pacification and treaties ran parallel with skirmishes or military

campaigns. In 1873 the Minister for War put into practice his plan for a defensive line to separate the two parties, which would include a ditch to be dug across the plains to keep the Indians out and consolidate a border separating the two populations. Furthermore, although the frontier between Indian and Christian was seen to express a net opposition of and struggle between Barbarism and Civilisation this frontier was more fluid than might appear at first, and the opposition was not always so clearly defined. Not only hostile Indians were to be found on the other side – allied Indians who had been incorporated into colonial and later on creole society often escaped the servitude of the *mita* or other similar coercive arrangements under which they worked and lived. And for the European and creole population too, the Desert could represent a refuge.<sup>26</sup> This was especially the case for men who could find in the desert, often in the Indian camps or *tolderias*, a freedom that was being increasingly undermined in the cities and in the territories under the control of the state. Several categories of men were likely to prefer the barbarism of the desert to the civilisation of the creole settlements. The principal push factors were the forcible recruitment of men into the army and the changing conditions of material survival.

<sup>25</sup> *Yerba mate* is a tea which is widely used from Paraguay to the south.

<sup>26</sup> The ration due to Calfucura included 1.500 mares, 500 cows, drink, clothing, yerba, and tobacco. Some listings include paper as an item.

During the revolutionary wars against Spain the burden of supplying manpower fell most heavily on the poor, and amongst them, the *mestizo* and black population (Szuchman 1988). Slaves were encouraged to join the ranks with promises of manumission at the end of the period of service. Mortality figures amongst these men were extremely high. However, desertion was a common feature in the armies during the entire nineteenth century and it is likely that a proportion of those declared dead were men who took to the desert. As the liberation war gave way to a series of wars with neighbouring countries such as Brazil or between different regions within what had been the Viceroyalty of the River Plate, the issue of forcible recruitment of soldiers became more pressing. The desert offered an escape to both rural and urban men intent on avoiding many years of unpaid, dangerous work as soldiers. Parallel to forced recruitment into the army was an attempt to delimit the freedom of individual men and to curtail their alternatives to wage employment. Here again, the desert offered the opportunity to escape from the drudgery of the peonage system. The desert also offered refuge to those evading the law, and given the violence and instability of the political scene, it could offer freedom from death and political persecution.<sup>27</sup>

For their part, Indian groups maintained a number of contacts with merchants interested in skins, hides and cattle. Contraband sales of hides to European and US merchants along the shores of the Atlantic was a permanent feature of the economic system, as was the contraband of animals across the Andes to

Chile. The interests of merchants were a considerable factor in promoting the phenomenon of the *malon* (Walther 1970). At the same time, Indians who were engaged in the trade in furs, skins and other goods, were concerned to protect their trading outlets. On this basis, they might establish alliances to prevent the destruction of these strategic settlements by other Indian groups. Musters (1964) witnessed an impressive conference that took place between Pampas, Tehuelches and some Araucanians like Sayhueque's people to establish an alliance with the intention of restricting the activities of Calfucura and protecting strategic Creole settlements.

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<sup>27</sup> Coronel Baigorria spent twenty-two years with the Indians. He left for the desert when his close political ally in Buenos Aires was murdered. Fearing for his own life he chose to exile himself and during this period he led groups of Indians and creoles in raids against the settlements. He later became reincorporated into Creole society when Rosas fell, and when he fought alongside Mitre at the battle of Pavon. After the victory of Mitre he returned to the desert, this time fighting for the Army. He was very much admired by Indian leaders and a famous cacique was named Baigorrita after him. Other Creoles found a place in desert society, such as the Chilean Carrera who led a group of Indians and Chileans in raids as far as the frontiers of Buenos Aires and Santa Fe (Walther 1970: 135). Similarly, the four Pincheiro brothers belonged to a well established Chilean family but had opted to support the Spanish side during the war of independence. With the defeat of the Spaniards they settled in the south of Mendoza in 1818 where they led a group of between 500 and 1000 men. These were Spaniards, Chileans and Pehuenche Indians and obtained their livelihood from raids on Mendoza and Chile. Similarly, the Briton Peter Campbell, who had deserted from the British forces which invaded in 1806 and 1807, led a group of about 600 Tapies Indians (Walther 1970: 135). Army deserters in particular had much to offer the Indian caciques, both in terms of information and training.

The forcible recruitment of men and women provides perhaps the most significant link between two aspects of the same objective: the creation of a state based on order and the establishment of authority throughout the territory. On the one hand there was the conquest of the Indians and the appropriation of the lands they occupied. This became more pressing as the export-oriented livestock industry developed and as technological innovations, in particular the invention of refrigeration, widened the commercial opportunities on the world market.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, there was the issue of control of Creole (and as the nineteenth century advanced, immigrant) urban and rural populations. The interests of large landowners, focused on consolidating their claims to land and disciplining a work force, clashed with the concern of the rural population, especially the male population, to conserve its freedom and its capacity to reproduce independently of relations of exploitation and domination. The interests of the landed class coincided with the anxieties felt by the urban middle and upper classes concerning what they perceived to be the excesses of the popular masses which they identified with rising crime rates and a moral crisis.

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<sup>28</sup> In 1879 'Le Frigorifique' successfully carried a cargo of Argentine lamb and beef to Europe, initiating a crucial export activity which would finally establish a profitable niche for Argentina on the world market. At the same time, production of wheat had increased and the first export took place in 1878, with exports to Europe expanding dramatically hereafter.

### The decline of the *gaucho*

The framework utilised by Sarmiento to analyse the conditions of his country was a strongly gendered and racialized rendering of the opposition between Civilisation and Barbarism, which in turn was grounded in a contrast of rural and urban mores and values. He attributed specific and negative traits to the fusion of Spanish, Indian and African races that prevailed in the country and to the habits that had evolved in rural areas. The figure of the *gaucho*, and *gaucho* values and traditions, were intimately linked to his ideas of barbarism and this lay at the heart of his critique of Rosas and his analysis of the internal war that raged between the provinces during much of the nineteenth century. The *caudillo* or local leader was based on the *gaucho* way of life and the leaders' credibility relied on the proper performance of *gaucho* skills and ethos. For Sarmiento, it was precisely this ethos that led to the domination of barbarism. Only the defeat of the *caudillos* and their *gaucho* followers and the erosion of rural values and their replacement with modern urban objectives would enable the country to progress (Sarmiento 1868). So the discourse of civilisation versus barbarism related to ideas of progress versus backwardness and stagnation and to order versus disorder and despotism.

The defeat of barbarism entailed not only domination over the Indian, but the capacity to transform the entire rural structure. In fact, the victory over the Indian accomplished through the Conquest of the Desert also spelled the doom of the rural poor and in

particular the survival of the nomadic *gaucho*. The *gaucho* was characteristically a solitary nomad, whose only property was his herd of horses and the silver that adorned his belt, his knife and his saddle. He could be white, Indian, Black or any mixture of these. What the *gauchos* had in common was a fierce defence of their autonomy and a rejection of any external source of authority or code of conduct. They typically lived off temporary herding jobs and for most of the year could get by through hunting down wild cattle and horses. The war had not only been against the Indian, but also against the various 'Christians' who sought refuge amongst them, *gauchos* intent on preserving their independence, others escaping the control of the authorities, and might as we have seen, join in the forays against the ranches and settlements. As the Indian chiefs were forced to succumb to the authority of the army and the state, and to sign allegiance, they were instructed to hand over all 'Christians who lack the required passport or licence issued by a Frontier Captain'. (Walther 1970: 580).

Yet the concern with documentation was only secondarily a response to the creoles and foreigners who lived side by side with the Indians. More to the point, they represented an important element in the strategy to control the urban and rural poor, and to solve the constant shortage of labour faced by the ranchers. In the first place, the countryside was seen as an extension of the desert in its unruliness. The rural poor, who had successfully maintained their independence through the exploitation of

wild cattle, both for their own consumption and through the contraband sale of hides, were seen as a threatening force. The rural areas were thus characterised as amoral, as a space where there could be no sense of right and wrong, no recognition of the boundaries between legality and illegality. The rural population was perceived as having no sense of family and no concept of private property. Indeed, to the rural man, 'the pampa and its numerous animals are the property of all, a God given gift which he might exploit for his own use, killing animals when he is hungry, building his *rancho* (hut) wherever he pleases, with or without the permission of the owner of the land.' (Wilde quoted in Carlino 1976:96). At the same time, the author (Wilde) points to some of the causes of the rural population's mistrust of authority, when their experience of hard work results in their dispossession, imprisonment and forcible recruitment into the army.<sup>29</sup>

The *gaucho* has become the principal icon of Argentine identity, but from the eighteenth century he experienced little other than persecution and marginalisation. It is the characteristics of defiance and dignity that are associated with the *gaucho* that persist.<sup>30</sup> During his visit to the River Plate, Darwin says of the *gauchos* (in what is now Uruguay) that 'their appearance is very striking; they

<sup>29</sup> See G. Gori (1965:49).

<sup>30</sup> The image of the *gaucho* is a very contested one. For a discussion of different representations of the *gaucho* during the nineteenth century see Slatta (1983) and Izard (1994).

are generally tall and handsome, but with a proud and dissolute expression of countenance.' (Darwin 1989: 73).<sup>31</sup> Travellers in other parts of the River Plate and the pampas provide similar descriptions, emphasising the *gaucho's* pride and independence, as well as their excellent skills as horsemen. These skills made them the ideal recruits as the process of incorporation of lands and cattle proceeded and the land-owners' need for labour grew. Typically, the *gaucho* was an itinerant worker, moving from ranch to ranch to carry out seasonally specific tasks and able to subsist largely on the exploitation of wild cattle. Work on the *estancias* or ranches was highly seasonal but labour shortage was nevertheless a constant source of concern for large landowners. Initially, control over the *gaucho* was attempted through the requirement of passports and passes, plus proof of employment that seriously curtailed his mobility. Later, the introduction of wire fencing in 1844-45, and the extinction of wild cattle reduced his capacity of survival and of a nomadic existence. Gradually, and despite his limited needs, the *gaucho* was affected by the process of commoditisation, linked to the country's closer incorporation into the world market. British imports in particular became an integral part of daily life. The rural man's poncho, his spurs and his riding tackle were made in England and eventually his handmade 'colt boots', were replaced by industrially manufactured European boots.<sup>32</sup> As private property took over the entire expanse of the pampas, worked its way into the Desert, the subsistence and independence of the *gaucho* was ended (Slatta 1983: 73).<sup>33</sup>

The qualities of fearlessness and good horsemanship also made the *gaucho* the perfect recruit for armies, whether those led by the provincial *caudillos*, or the armies of provincial and later national entities. The vagrancy laws and the stipulation of documentation amongst a population that was by choice and necessity nomadic – and was also illiterate – rendered the *gaucho* vulnerable to the recruitment tactics of the army.<sup>34</sup> Thus, those who were not permanently

<sup>31</sup> The characteristic dress of the *gaucho* became an important issue of identity and resistance, as did the possession of his own herd of horses. Sarmiento, in his attack on the barbarism of rural areas and the disruptive power of rural leaders identified the dress of the *gaucho* with all that he saw as backward and negative in the rural sector, and argued for the importance of getting rid of the *gaucho's* attire (Slatta 1983:76).

<sup>32</sup> The *gaucho*, like the Indian, was used to making his own boots, generally from the leg hides of colts. As landowners invested in breeding cattle and horses there were important shifts in the value attributed to animals. Although the attempt to curb free use of cattle went as far back as the colony, the increasing value attributed to animals meant that greater energy was applied in preventing unauthorised slaughter.

<sup>33</sup> Slatta (1983: 90) suggests that by the 1880s 'what was uniquely and identifiably *gaucho*' had all but disappeared. Others suggest the continuity of *gaucho* values and identity, albeit in a proletarianized version (see for example R Guiraldes, Don Segundo Sombra), and the *gaucho* continues to be a readily identifiable figure within public discourse (as we have seen in the example of the Rural) and the values associated with him are relevant to how people address and describe themselves and others.

<sup>34</sup> Gori (1987:61) points out that in spite of illiteracy in the countryside, there is evidence that the provincial authorities received many written complaints regarding the arbitrary implementation of the law by rural Justices of the Peace. There is also evidence that these complaints were ignored, which could only have confirmed the distrust towards authority amongst the rural population, which so many authors testify to.

employed in exchange for very scant remuneration on the *estancias*<sup>35</sup> were recruited into the army where they faced danger and hardship for little or no remuneration at all.<sup>36</sup> Many soldiers faced death and many deserted, as does the hero in Jose Hernandez' epic poem '*El gaucho Martin Fierro*'.

The *gaucho's* love of freedom and attachment to a nomadic existence certainly prompted both admiration and concern that he would be unable to adapt to a changing, modernising country. At the same time however, as Martin Fierro's experience shows, the policies of arrest and forcible recruitment had a devastating effect on the capacity of poor creoles to settle down in the rural areas. When Fierro returns after years of exile in the Desert having deserted from the army, his home and his family are gone, his children dispersed. This was a common experience amongst rural families, where males would be absent for long periods of time, where Indian incursions might destroy their small farm and carry away women and children, or where landowners might expropriate their land and leave them in a state of absolute poverty.

At the same time government policies, prompted largely by the interests of the emergent elite, aimed at domesticating the *gaucho* and the pampas, but the *gaucho* and his family were marginalised from the process of modernisation and domestication was hampered by the difficulties of establishing a family.

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<sup>35</sup> According to Slatta, as late as 1908 only 42% of adult male livestock workers had year-round employment in the province of Buenos Aires (Slatta 1983:32). Although remuneration was poor and in many instances tokens were given instead of coin, the *gaucho* was frequently able to hold out for favourable conditions. For example, Salvatore and Brown's study of an eighteenth century Uruguayan *estancia*, shows that managers faced difficulties because the *gauchos* insisted on working for silver alone. Indeed, silver and horses were considered the only significant wealth of the *gaucho*, and silver was (and is to this day) displayed in the riding gear, the *facon* or traditional knife, and the coins attached to the wide belt used by them. With regards to the horse, indispensable to the *gaucho's* survival and sense of identity, the possession of a herd or *tropilla* became a liability as employment became more necessary and as employers discriminated against those who owned horses and therefore had a greater capacity for autonomy (Slatta 1983: 150).

<sup>36</sup> Gainza was one of the few members of the elite who spoke up against these laws and challenged the definition of a vagrant. He argued that if a man who owns 10 or 15 horses, works 4 or 5 days a month, earns 150-200 pesos per year was a vagrant, then half the rural population fitted the description (Slatta 1983:113). Paz' newspaper '*La Prensa*' spoke out against the policies that attacked the poor of the countryside and further circumscribed their capacity to earn a livelihood. The newspaper spoke out against the arbitrary nature of authority in the countryside and the criminalisation of poverty (*La Prensa*, 2nd April 1870).

Building up a farm was practically impossible.<sup>37</sup> The only option was peonage on the large estates. Peonage tied men to an employer but did little else to further the process of domestication. Here again, setting up a family based social structure was impeded by the fact that women were generally considered undesirable on the ranches and only the foreman was allowed to keep his family on the estate. All of these factors are reflected in the consistently high rates of male celibacy in the rural areas.<sup>38</sup>

The destruction of the undeveloped manufacturing industries of the interior was paralleled by the rise of the ranching elite and the predominance of Buenos Aires over the rest of the country. The landed elite had always exercised power, and with the defeat of the Indian and the *gaucho* their power was confirmed and consolidated, as incorporation into the global economy established the supremacy of cattle-rearing and with it, the dominant position of the large landowners of the east. Between 1822 and 1837 the value of exports increased dramatically from \$3,641,186 (Argentine pesos) to \$33,396,529. The position of Buenos Aires grew with this, so that in 1837 Buenos Aires contributed an export value of approximately \$22,000,000 to the \$11,000,000 contributed by the rest of the provinces. The export sector was crucial to the economy of Buenos Aires, in that local demand for its products was very limited. Furthermore, expansion of production for export could be carried out at very little cost, simply through the annexation of new land.

At the same time, the centrality of the export market discouraged investment and growth in those areas that were not directly connected to markets abroad (Halperin Donghi 1982: 11-13).

The Conquest of the Desert had confirmed the trend towards concentration of wealth and power. The *gaucho* and the common soldier got little out of the venture. Most returned to their homes as poor as when they were recruited. The majority of those whose services were rewarded through gifts of land from the 'recovered' territories, were forced through economic necessity to sell their titles to speculators or those who already owned land. The major beneficiaries in the provinces of Buenos Aires and Santa Fe were the large landowners whose names recur in Argentine history as a consolidated elite group, and large companies, many of them with foreign ownership or connections. The last major onslaught against the Indians in 1878 resulted in the extension of

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<sup>37</sup> There is disagreement about the characteristics and historical processes governing the marginality of the *gaucho* between Gelman (1989) who emphasises the marginalisation of the *gaucho* with increasing commodification and globalisation, and Salvatore and Brown (1989) who stress the importance of the *gaucho's* orientation towards mobility and independence and view the historic process as one of successful resistance to proletarianisation. Given the orientation of the *gaucho*, slaves constituted the only reliable source of labour on the *estancias* on both sides of the River Plate until the end of the century. See also Slatta (1983).

<sup>38</sup> In 1851, in Lujan, province of Buenos Aires, 78% of *estancieros* (ranch owners) were married as compared with only 17% of rural workers (Slatta 1983: 162).

latifundia to the South, with titles given as rewards to the army leaders who, given their profession, were unlikely to exploit these lands effectively (Carlino 1976: 205). The consolidation of the elite and their definitive control over the best arable lands and best pastures in the country was paid for by the marginalised provinces, the dispossessed Indians, the *gauchos* and the rural poor.

The *gaucho*, like the Indian, was posthumously idealised and praised for his proud and virile demeanour and an indissoluble link was made between his person and the ideals of honour and freedom. In the end he came to be seen as embodying the best of '*criollo*' values as opposed to the decadence of the cities and the shortcomings of the immigrants, especially in the hands of the nationalist writers of the first decades of the twentieth century. The *gaucho* became the means to recover – much as he was expected to do at the Rural – a sense of positive, authentic identity.

### A dubious victory for Civilisation

The destruction of the power of Indian chiefs and the displacement of Indian populations from the South was seen as a major victory for Civilisation. But although the Indian was disdained as a savage, he was admired by many for his skills as a warrior. It was in this dual role that he was incorporated into public rhetoric, where the Indian warriors of the pampas were seen as a race, as 'the most virile in all of South America...and one of the most advanced after the Incas.'<sup>39</sup> The victory of Civilisation over Barbarism was a

matter of national honour, and the outcome of a battle between two virile antagonists, so that the drawn-out conflict could be described as an opportunity for display:

'One side just as the other, whether as auxiliaries or enemies of the national troops ... demonstrated their worthiness as representatives of a virile race, combating with audacity and unswerving commitment to their ideals.'<sup>40</sup>

However, the fate of the virile race of Indians was far from glorious. Whereas the requirements of war meant that Indian *caciques* and those warriors who gave up their arms were incorporated into the army battalions, where, according to Walther (1970:466), they displayed their capacity for civilisation, for many defeat meant enslavement and humiliation. One observer referred to the influx of defeated Indians into the cities:

<sup>39</sup> These are the words of General Julio Argentino Roca, recognised as the military leader who provided the final blow to the Indian population's resistance against the Argentine State. (quoted by Walther 1970: 573).

<sup>40</sup> This tendency towards idealisation of the warrior characteristics of Creole and Indian was far more marked in Chile, where identity was forged on the basis of the fusion of Araucano and Spaniard/Creole. This was in spite of the protracted war that took place to establish domination of the Araucano peoples and their territories (see Bengoa 1985). Following their defeat the Argentine Indians were isolated in regions of the South and the North of the country and were largely forgotten and ignored by social reformers and politicians (see C. Hale 1996). Argentina is one of the countries of Latin America with the smallest percentage of native American population, at approximately 1% (Hernandez 1984).

'To see these crowds of Indians of all ages and sexes enter the cities with such humility and good comportment, distributed amongst the families, the educational and industrial establishments, installing them immediately in civilised life, was the most satisfactory and moralising spectacle that a civilised people could behold.'<sup>41</sup>

By 1881 the majority of Indians were under the control of the government. Incorporation meant that families were divided, with the women and children being allocated to families as servants, frequently through the beneficent societies. Men between the ages of 18 and 40 were forced to enrol in special army squadrons. As volunteers they could enter the regular forces. Roca, the military leader who finalised the war with the Indians and became president between 1880-6 and 1898-1904, disapproved of the US model of reservations. He preferred a system of integration of the Indian through work. Many were sent to work on the sugar mills in Tucuman under the supervision of the 'Defender of the Poor and of the Minor' in order to avoid exploitation. In spite of this, many voices were raised against the abuses committed and the conditions in which Indians lived, ranging from religious leaders to politicians (Martinez 1972:47 – 51). There were also proposals to establish colonies, whereby 30 hectares were to be made available to each family. *Caciques* were the most likely to benefit and might obtain up to 100 hectares of land. This distribution of plots had been an ongoing process, aimed at

incorporating chiefs and therefore weakening Indian power. For example in 1869 the government granted Cacique Raniqueo six square leagues of land (*La Prensa*, 21st October 1869). On the other hand there is also evidence of chiefs and their descendants having to rely on the good-will of sympathetic *estancieros* to pasture their animals given the scarcity of land at their disposal (Schoo Lastra 1997).

Similarly, the defeated, constrained *gaucho* was to offer the opportunity to elaborate and defend national characteristics. Ironically, this was promoted with particular vigour in response to the large-scale influx of European migrants. After the conquest of the desert, Argentina's Indians remained marginalised in isolated areas of the country and were largely ignored by policy makers of the positivist era in the early twentieth century. The future of the country appeared to lie with the impact of immigration from Europe and the Middle East. By 1914 around 2,400,000 immigrants were permanently settled in the country and 30% of the population was foreign born (Bethell, 1996). A far cry from the Anglo-Saxon yeoman that Sarmiento had hoped would colonise the country, the immigrants came from the poorer sectors of European societies, anxious to make a new life and to succeed. They came with clear material objectives and, in many cases, with experience of political confrontation. These Europeans, most of whom came from Italy

<sup>41</sup> Manuel J. Olascoaga, 'Estudio topografico de La Pampa y Rio Negro', quoted in Viñas, 1982: 275.

and Spain, came to be seen as lacking in those values that the *gaucho* now came to represent: a free, independent spirit and a disdain for the material comforts of life. Here was a new 'mass' to threaten the order that the pacification of the countryside promised to offer the elite. By 1915 immigrants had become the scapegoats for urban social problems (Bethell 1996: 172).

Labour disturbances fanned these anxieties and in the early years of the twentieth century the immigrant workers were dealt with through repressive legislation. Cosmopolitanism, so desirable during the nineteenth century, came to signify materialism and political radicalism, both of which were considered negative additions to the local cultural repertoire. The consolidation of the landed elite signalled the exclusion of the Indian, of the *gaucho*, and for that matter, of the family farmer.<sup>42</sup> It in fact meant the exclusion of domesticity in the rural areas. The idealisation of the conflict with the Indians underwrote the superior virility of the victors. The idealisation of the extinct *gaucho* provided the template for Creole masculinity and Argentine identity as inseparable aspects of national identity. The wild virility of the Indian and of the *gaucho* had to be destroyed but somehow recovered through domesticated alternatives. The urgency of this became clearer as the Creole elite feared that its values and life-style might be swamped by the influx of immigrants.

These virile virtues excluded women who, however because of that exclusion could become optimal vehicles for reflections concerning the abuse of freedom and the excesses of virile authority as under the 'tyranny of Rosas' (Masiello, 1992). They also excluded immigrants to the extent that they might refuse to adapt to, or be unable to adopt these virtues of Argentine identity.<sup>43</sup> At the heart of these values lies the unresolved conflict between the early ideals of liberty and equality – never completely forsaken and living on, if only in the ideal of *gaucho* integrity – and the pragmatics of order and government. By the end of the century, these priorities had become inextricably linked to the necessity of protecting the interests of the powerful against the threat of the masses. These might some day take quite literally, and claim for themselves, the call for brotherhood and freedom.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup> There were a number of attempts since the 1810 Revolution to foment a family holding system, very much along the lines of the 'homestead' movements in the United States. Especially important were Saavedra's 'law of emphyteusis' in 1820 and Alsina's policies towards the end of the century. However, these attempts were generally unsuccessful and in fact tended to increase concentration of land in a few hands (see Bethell 1993).

<sup>43</sup> See Archetti (1994b) regarding the transformation of gaucho virtues and virtuosity into forms that were more socially acceptable and more accessible to urban and immigrant men.

<sup>44</sup> Oszlack (1997) and Luna (1997) draw attention to the strategy adopted by the political elites to emphasise progress in terms of creating the conditions for work, education and freedom of crede, compatible with the intention of colonising the country through immigration. But this view of progress excluded the granting of political rights, which were postponed until such time as the population had acquired the 'maturity' to exercise these rights.

## Conclusion

At the battle of Pavon in 1861 Buenos Aires ended the provinces' struggle for autonomy and the hegemony of Buenos Aires was confirmed. It was a victory of the central state over the provinces, of the urban centres over the rural hinterland, of the landed elite over small producers. As market opportunities grew and technological innovations facilitated control over cattle and land, there was a parallel increase in the concern to expand the exploited territory and to control sources of labour. The next battle was that fought and won against the Indian. And with the defeat of the Indian, the *gaucho* and all those who had sought refuge in the desert found themselves with nowhere to go but to succumb to the latifundia and the state. Major steps towards Sarmiento's project of a modern nation-state had been achieved.

European immigrants flocked into the country. But the relationship was not a happy one. Many of those who left their homes in Wales, Denmark and elsewhere in Europe to participate in the rural colonies set up under the auspices of national and provincial governments, returned home, unable to survive the hardships of the environment and finding little support from the government. Urban immigrants faced different risks. They were safe from Indian attack but most lived in squalid slums and faced exploitative and uncertain working conditions. At the same time, there was disappointment amongst the elite with the 'quality' of the immigrants who chose Argentina as their destination and anxieties grew about an expanding and

potentially dangerous urban mass. These anxieties were exacerbated by somewhat isolated but dramatic evidence of working class consciousness and militancy.<sup>45</sup> Soon the virtues of the rural population embodied in the *gaucho* seemed an attractive and autochthonous alternative to the dangerously international urban culture of the urban working classes and was used to shore up a sense of creole identity in these apparently threatening circumstances.

However, most of the immigrants were here to stay. So the question was how to turn these people into Argentines, into *criollos* or creoles. The formula of domesticity embodied in women's comportment, containing the virility of men was at the heart of this transformation, as it had been in the domestication of the desert. It was creole virility that could be understood and recognised and was therefore required. Those foreign-born men who found themselves on the frontier, fighting the Indians, proved to be brave but sadly lacking in the qualities and skills, such as good horsemanship, that had appeared to be a natural consequence of manhood. But an urban cosmopolitan culture provided new opportunities for safe displays of virility, most notably in the tango and in football (Archetti 1994a and b). In spite of the growing influence of a dynamic urban culture the *gaucho* continued to carry the burden of creole

<sup>45</sup> This was, as with the Indian and the *gaucho*, repressed energetically. See Osvaldo Bayer's classical account of the fate of the workers involved in strikes in Patagonia, in which the Army played a dominant role (Bayer 1974).

authenticity and found himself at the centre of heated debates between nationalist and cosmopolitan writers, artists and politicians. Peron's populism also promoted a renaissance of *gauchesco* and rural 'folklore', not only to mark his attempts to bring the rural poor into his movement but also because these were preferable to what he considered the decadent values expressed in the urban tango.

A glance at the history of this process of emergence of the nation from the perspective of the margins (Masiello 1992) allows us to appreciate first of all the ways in which resistance to the hegemonic claims of the state have shaped the course of events and the models built after them. The attempts of men to evade the discipline of wage labour and the army, the struggle of poor women to survive in a hostile natural and social world, and the Indian emulating and manipulating the political strategies of the creoles, seeking alliances, patronage, kinship with strategic men. Indeed, mobilising the discourse and performance of nationhood and belonging in pursuit of these strategies. Women played a part in the domesticating project of the state, of order through family based authority as well as in the visions of the chiefs, many of whom wished to pursue a racialized strategy of political survival.

But these actors and the events they initiated or were involved in should be recognised not only to provide the history of people without history as proposed by Eric Wolf. It is also the case that it is through them that we can trace the genealogies of power, of mobilisation

and of exclusion that articulates the political and constitutes the subjects within it. So, Viñas (1982) notes the continuities between the genocide of American Indians and the persecution of 'terrorists' and 'subversives'. The intolerance of difference, the anxieties of conformity are to be found here at the roots of the virile state. Taylor (1996) describes the choreography of disciplined virile male bodies, military bodies, communicating their power, their suppression of alterity in the 1970s.<sup>46</sup> Rotker (1999) finds in the silence and the absence of trace of the Indian captives an echo of the fate of the disappeared. How can we stand by and be, feel patriotic in the awareness or semi-awareness of excesses in the name of the nation? Is virility so inscribed in our bodies that we can't fail to respond to the call for heroism – if only indirectly, in sympathy and at a distance? The edifice of gender identities, fraught with contradictions, is a powerful source of symbolic communication. But just as these systems of communication can be deployed to elicit a sense of identity and legitimise the military invasion of civil society (Taylor 1996), so too can it provide the means to destabilise the certainties of power and subvert the systems of meaning to demand justice and representation. As is exemplified so famously by the mothers and grandmothers of the disappeared, speaking from the margins can sometimes be the best or the only place to speak from.

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<sup>46</sup> See also Larsen (1983).

In everyday life, the qualities of the men defeated by modernisation and centralisation, by progress and order, continue to be valued – albeit in modified and constrained versions. Diverted towards more plausible and acceptable contexts or revealed in gestures, habits and feelings. The *gaucho* provides the synthesis of these processes and offers the possibility of identification across class, region or genealogy. This is why, in a country largely defined in Eurocentric terms, where we might expect that the values of civilisation would have prevailed over the values of the hinterland, it is criollo values derived from the mythical figure of the *gaucho* that define 'Argentineness'. So, 'To be seen as an Argentine one dressed as a *gaucho*, drank *mate*, sang *payadas*, and went to clubs like 'La Pampa' or 'Los Rastreadores' (Ojelsky 1985: 115).<sup>47</sup>

The rhetoric of freedom, transmitted from generation to generation through song, performance, narration, coexists with the reality of mis-government, abuse of power and a long history of repression. Not everyone becomes as aware of the contradictions as the military officer who, during the 1960s refused to join in the collective ritual of singing the national anthem. He objected to what he considered to be the subversive lyrics of the national anthem, which indeed reflects the ideals of the early years of the republic, exalting freedom, equality and fraternity. These he perceived – quite accurately – as in direct contradiction with the aims, methods and objectives of the military, intent on controlling the different

waves of opposition which generations of citizens have launched against the continuing tradition of repression and control. For most, the contradictions are integral to everyday experience and constitute tacit or explicit frameworks for contestation, distrust and conformity. For most, the various projects of modernity are not abandoned or entirely forsaken, merely postponed.

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<sup>47</sup> 'Payadas' are competitions or duels fought through improvised song and poetry. There are a number of clubs for urban Argentines where they can recreate a rural life style, wearing *gaucho* dress and engaging in activities and displays which often revolve around horsemanship.



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