

THE PARADOX OF STRANGENESS IN ARGENTINE GUIDING FICTIONS AND THE BUILDING OF A NATION

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PREFACE

When the four vice-kingdoms of Iberian America fell apart into 18 independent nations at the beginning of the 19th century, they “had to understand and define their destiny as autonomous units; they had to create guiding fictions of peoplehood and nations in order to approach the ideological consensus that underlay stable societies in other parts of the world.”¹ Those *guiding fictions*, as Nicolas Shumway puts it, were essential to build a national identity and to establish the national state on a social level.

Argentina’s nation building was a long, complex and conflicted process that could finally be realized by the 1880s. It was formed by many dichotomies: conservatism vs. liberalism, protectionism vs. free trade, populism vs. elitism, nationalism vs. cosmopolitanism, federalism vs. unionism, provinces vs. *porteños* and the city vs. the land.² Among these seemingly opposing ends, the definition of strangeness played a major role, as it defined not only the thinking of the population but also the politics of 19th-century-Argentina. But how was this strangeness or foreignness defined? Which were

¹ Nicolas Shumway, *The invention of Argentina* (Berkeley/ Los Angeles/Oxford: Univ. of California Press 1991) 2.

² *Ibid.*, 45.

the elements that hindered Argentina to become a whole nation with a common identity, in the eyes of their creators? And what could be done to overcome these supposed obstacles? Those are the questions I'd like to discuss in the following.

GUIDING FICTIONS

Nationhood need myths, argues Nicolas Shumway in his 1991 classic "The invention of Argentina". These myths, or *guiding fictions* are created by certain components: an origin story, historical events, heroes, (sometimes) anti-heroes and the definition of the foreign or the other. The latter arises from the discursive construction of the "own", that is opposed to the real or imagined "other". Both are the basis for creating a collective identity, which in turn is the foundation of a nation.³

In Argentina these fictions came from the men who built Argentina after independence in the first place and who politically guided the young nation: Men, like Mariano Moreno, Bernardino Rivadavia, Juan Bautista Alberdi, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento or Bartolomé Mitre.⁴ They created their vision of Argentina in similar ways and made "civilization" and "progress" the main topics of their nation-building-process. Their imagination of the state was essential as "[...] por medio del imaginario que se pueden alcanzar las aspiraciones, los miedos y las esperanzas de un pueblo. En él, las sociedades esbozan sus identidades y objetivos, identifican sus enemigos y organizan su pasado, presente y futuro."⁵ In organizing this past, present and future, they consolidated and constituted the nation. By creating origin stories – guiding fictions – of Argentine heroes and anti-heroes they helped Argentina to a self-image of a modern nation-state. At the same time this image produced a counter-image, a mirror, which

³ For further information see: Bernhard Giesen, Robert Seyfert, *Kollektive Identität*, Fassung vom 18.03.2013. URL: <http://www.bpb.de/apuz/156774/kollektive-identitaet> (Online-Abfrage: 23.08.2019).

⁴ For example: Morenos' *Represenación de los hacendados (1809)*, Rivadavias' *El Argos (1822)* – paper of the Sociedad Literaria de Buenos Aires, founded by Rivadavia, Alberdis' *Fragmento preliminar al estudio del derecho (1837)*, and "Mitre's *Galería de celebridades argentinas (1857)*, and *Historia de Belgrano y de la independencia argentina (1859)*. For further information, see: Shumway, *The invention of Argentina*.

⁵ "[...] through the imagination [it is] that aspirations, fears and hopes of people can be achieved. In it, societies outline their identities and objectives, identify their enemies and organize their past, present and future", Basczko 1984, p. 54, cited after Mariana Giordano, "Nación e identidad en los imaginarios visuales de la Argentina. Siglos XIX y XX", *ARBOR Ciencia, Pensamiento y Cultura* CLXXXV 740 noviembre-diciembre (2009) 1283f. (Translation mine, SM)

reflects the other, the alien, the strange.

One particularity of Argentine guiding fictions, that rose from the post-independence-conflicts in Argentina, was the denomination of problems. Those “explanations of failures”, which Shumway even sees as a genre on its own, became a main subject of Argentine guiding fictions and were triggered by the reign of Juan Manuel de Rosas (1793–1877), who forced many of his opponents into exile, including Sarmiento, Alberdi and Mitre. Shumway states: “While Rosas was in power, the Men of ’37 were forced to consider how their country produced such a dictatorship and why the lofty ambitions of the Rivadavians came to such a devastating end.”⁶ In consequence, Rosas's power turned into a symbol of (national) failure in the eyes of his adversaries.

OBSTACLES TO ARGENTINE PROGRESS

The supposed main problems of the Argentine Nation, that had grown historically and gave Rosas the chance to rise and stay in power,⁷ were threefold: the vastness of the land, the Spanish heritage and the composition of the population in the country.⁸ All three were linked to Argentina’s progress or, rather its absence, in the eyes of those who wanted to create a nation on new foundations.

The first obstacle – the vastness of the land, the emptiness and the absence of people and economic cultivation became a symbol of Sarmiento's “Barbarism-civilization-dichotomy”: „[En] Respecto de la tierra, los hombres de 37, veían a las pampas argentinas como una bestia que era preciso domesticar.”⁹ The Pampas – the beast that had to be tamed – could only be domesticated through cultivation, by building ports, transportation, private property and through foreign investment, that is, through capitalistic development. An obstacle to this development were the people, who lived in the pampas: the indigenous people or the *gaucho* – both seen as the symbol of Barbarism. They were the other, the strange, the alien that hindered Argentina to reach their goal of development.

⁶ Shumway, *The invention of Argentina*, 113.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

⁹ “[In case of] the land, the men of 37, saw the Argentine pampas as a beast that needed to be tamed.” Nicolas Shumway, *La invención de la Argentina. History de una idea* (Buenos Aires: Emecé editores, 2002), 152. (Translation mine, SM)

These “others” also relate to the supplementary two impediments, the Spanish heritage and the Argentine population. One group in particular, the gauchos, symbolized all three of these “obstacles”. As a very diverse group, they inherited Spaniardism – like the criollos (which were of Spanish heritage) or the mestizos (of Spanish and indigenous heritage) - and represented simultaneously the diverse population that lived in the Pampas.¹⁰ In Sarmiento's eyes they were the reincarnation of nature, the spirit of the Pampas, and all together admirers and idolizers of Rosas. The latter himself became a symbol with his “*Americanismo*”, an approach in contrary to the view of future Argentine elites – as it addressed these three issues (land, heritage and people) in a positive way – as part of Argentina's past and present. But as Rosas's “*Americanismo*” also meant Anti-Europeanism,¹¹ it excluded certain elements from Argentina's development, like Sarmiento and his fellows later did the other way around: another dichotomy with two extreme positions on both ends of this clash.

STRANGERS FROM THE INSIDE

As one of the guiding fictions of 19th century Argentina, *The Facundo* of Domingo Faustino Sarmiento will be addressed in the following as an example for the imagination of foreignness from the inside.

When Sarmiento published his “*Civilización i barbarie. Vida de Juan Facundo Quiroga, i aspecto físico, costumbres i hábitos de la República Arjentina*” in 1845, he had been forced into exile by Juan Manuel de Rosas and could probably not imagine what significance his work would have. The *Facundo* is seen, until today, as one of the guiding fictions of Argentina, even of Latin America in total.¹² The story of Juan Facundo Quiroga – who represents the gaucho lifestyle, the life in the Pampas of Argentina and who is a prototype of the Other – was the story of the barbarian life that had to be domesticated and restructured, in order to gain progress and civilization. Sarmiento started the debate on the role of the gaucho in national imaginary¹³ and according to Solomon Lipp,

¹⁰ Ariana Huberman, *Gauchos and Foreigners. Glossing culture and identity in the Argentine Countryside*, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011), 15.

¹¹ See: Solomon Lipp, “Sarmiento Revisited. Contradictions and Curiosities”, in *Sarmiento and His Argentina*, ed. Joseph T. Criscenti (London: Lynne Rienner Publ., 1993), 8.

¹² It was translated into French, English, Italian and German. Vgl. Zilly / Sarmiento (2007), S. 421.

¹³ Ariana Huberman, *Gauchos and Foreigners*, 17.

ironically, immortalized him with his *Facundo*.¹⁴ In the following, two examples of the image that the gaucho held in Sarmientos view, will be addressed.

THE IMAGE OF THE GAUCHO - PHYSIOGNOMIC EXPLANATIONS

In his second chapter "*Originalidad y caracteres argentinos*" Sarmiento describes the life in the Pampas, their inhabitants and pays homage to another member of the group of '37, Esteban Echeverría and his *la cautiva*.¹⁵ He introduces the reader to the "Gaucho", whom he categorizes into four different types: *el rastreador*, *el baqueano*, *el gaucho malo* and *el cantor*.¹⁶ While three of these types represent good gauchos as the beholders of history and singers, the tracer and the guide; the *gaucho malo* is portrayed as the outlaw, the squatter, the misanthrope.¹⁷

This classification of mankind was common in the 19th century and is deeply rooted in racial thinking.¹⁸ That Sarmiento was open to this kind of thinking is shown in the *Facundo* itself. Sarmiento concludes on *Facundo*'s nickname "tigre de los Llanos" with a phrenological approach and links *Facundo*'s physiognomy and character to animals: "La frenología i la anatomía comprada, han demostrado, en efecto, las relaciones que existen entre las formas exteriores i las disposiciones morales, entre la fisonomía del hombre i la de algunos animales a quienes se asemeja en su carácter."¹⁹

The connection of physical characteristics to emotional and behavioral ones was common in the natural sciences and was transferred to a social level. It served Sarmiento as an explanation for Quiroga's wild behavior, his unpredictability and violent attitude. At the same time, Sarmiento drew the conclusion that Quiroga was meant to lead: as a

¹⁴ Solomon Lipp, "Sarmiento Revisited. Contradictions and Curiosities", 10.

¹⁵ A poem, that addresses the capture of a soldier and his woman by Indians. Another example of demonstrating "otherness" by opposing indigenous against white people.

¹⁶ *El cantor*: the singer, the poet or gleeman of the middle ages, see: Zilly / Sarmiento (2007), S. 62.

¹⁷ Berthold Zilly, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Barbarei und Zivilisation. Das Leben des Facundo Quiroga* (Frankfurt am Main: Eichborn Verlag, 2007), 60.

¹⁸ see: C. Loring Brace, "Races ranked by early scientist", in *Encyclopedia of Race and Racism* Vol. 2., ed. John Hartwell Moore (Detroit 2008), 463.

¹⁹ *The phrenology and the purchased anatomy have shown, in effect, the relationships that exist between the former forms and the moral dispositions, between the physiognomy of man and that of some animals whom he resembles in his character.*, see. Berthold Zilly, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento: *Barbarei und Zivilisation*, 96. / Spanish version: Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Facundo ó Civilizacion i Barbarie en las Pampas Argentinas* (Paris: Libreria Hachette y Cia, 1874) (4th edition), 57., (Translation mine, SM)

Caudillo, a charismatic leader who gained his power from the masses, he argues again that his physiognomy shows his privilege to lead, it says “[...] La estructura de su cabeza revelaba [...] bajo esta cubierta selvática, la organizacion privilegiada de los hombres nacidos para mandar.”²⁰ By linking Quiroga's character and his physiognomy to a certain racial profile, Sarmiento was able to create an image of the “other” – in this case the unwanted who dissociated himself and a whole group, his warriors for civilization, from the Quirogas of the world. These racial theories were an important part in the discussion of the Barbarism-Civilization dichotomy: “The idea of race is one that played a critical role in determining how people have seen themselves and others.”²¹

THE BARBARISM-CIVILIZATION DICHOTOMY

This contrast – barbarism vs civilization – is the main topic of the *Facundo*. Thus the second example focusses on the portrait of both. In his ninth chapter “*Guerra social/ La Tablada*”, he describes the battle of Tablada between Juan Quiroga Facundo and José Maria Paz – both adversaries and symbols for each end of this dichotomy. First Sarmiento portraits Facundo with the following words:

Facundo, **ignorante, bárbaro**, que ha llevado por largos años una **vida errante** que solo alumbran de vez en cuando los reflejos siniestros del puñal que jira en torno suyo; valiente hasta la temeridad, dotado de **fuerzas hercúleas**, gaucho de a **caballo** como el primero, dominándolo todo por la **violencia** i el **terror**, no conoce mas poder que el do la **fuerza brutal**, no tiene fé sino en el caballo; todo lo espera del valor, de la lanza, del empuje **terrible** de sus cargas de caballería. ¿Dónde encontraréis en la República argentina un tipo mas acabado del ideal del **gaucho malo**?²²

While Facundo is represented as the gaucho malo per se: brutal, violent, an excellent

²⁰ “The society in which they are born gives these characters the special way of manifesting themselves: sublime, classical, so to speak, they are leading civilized humanity in some parts: terrible, bloodthirsty and evil, they are, in others, their stain, their reproach.” See: Sarmiento, *Barbarei und Zivilisation*, 58. (Translation mine, SM)

²¹ Nancy Stepan, *The idea of race in science* (Hamden: Macmillan Press, 1982), IX.

²² Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Facundo ó Civilizacion i Barbarie en las Pampas Argentinas* (Paris: Libreria Hachette y Cia, 1874) (4. Auflage), 98.

horseman with herculean strength – a so called “*white-skinned savage*”²³ as Kristine L. Jones put it; Paz is the smart, controlled and calculated man of the city, a man of Europe, who solves problems with thinking instead of physical violence:

Paz es, por lo contrario, el **hijo lejítimo de la ciudad**, el **representante** mas cumplido **del poder de los pueblos civilizados**. [...] Paza es **militar a la europea**: no cree el valor solo si no se suborina a la **táctica**, a la **estrategia y a la disciplina**; [...] Es el **espíritu guerrero** de la Europa, hasta en el arma en que ha servido: es artillero y por tanto **matemático, científico, calculador**. Una batalla es una **problema que resolverá por ecuaciones, hasta daros la incógnita, que es la victoria**.²⁴

This sequence is a good example to show the mechanism of creating the image of “the other”. Attributes as barbaric, brutal, violent stand against terms like tactical, calculated and scientific. Thus the reader is guided in their image of the two leaders. Giordano claims: “De esta manera, se atribuía una identidad a “los otros” (gauchos e indígenas), considerándolos como objetos exóticos del drama de la pampa, y diferenciándolos de la identidad de la élite, que se correspondía con el paisaje urbano [...]”²⁵ This attribution of otherness and the inherent differentiation and distance from the supposed other, served Sarmiento and his fellows to construct an image that determined their later politics. This was a common strategy of 19th century guiding fictions.

Interestingly Sarmiento's view on the Gaucho was transferred into a field, that he saw as the solution of the supposed threefold problem: the immigration of European citizens. In a guide for German immigrants, which was written by Johann Eduard Wappäus (1812–1879) in 1848, the author used some of Sarmiento's images on the gaucho to let possible candidates for immigration get the spirit of the Argentinean pampas.²⁶ Here he draws an almost romanticized picture of the gaucho: he who works on the so called *Estancias*, he

²³ Kristine L. Jones, “Civilization and Barbarism and Sarmiento's Indian Policy”, In *Sarmiento and His Argentina*, ed. Joseph T. Criscenti (London: Lynne Rienner Publ., 1993), 40.

²⁴ Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Facundo ó Civilizacion i Barbarie en las Pampas Argentinas*, 98.

²⁵ “In this way, an identity was attributed to “the others” (gauchos and indigenous), considering them as exotic objects of the pampas drama, and differentiating them from the identity of the elite, which corresponded to the landscape urban and social life of Buenos Aires.” Vgl. Mariana Giordano, “Nación e identidad en los imaginarios visuales de la Argentina. Siglos XIX y XX”, 1286. (Translation mine, SM)

²⁶ J. E. Wappäus, *Deutsche Auswanderung und Colonisation*, Erste Fortsetzung. Deutsche Auswanderung nach Süd-Amerika (Rio de la Plata) (Leipzig: Verlag der J. S. Hinrichs'schen Buchhandlung, 1848)

who has no permanent residence and who offers his assistance to where it is needed.²⁷ A picture that is clearly drawn from Sarmiento's initial representation of the "good" gaucho and that Wappäus needed, to draw the picture of an open immigration state, where everything was possible.

STRANGERS FROM THE OUTSIDE

As I've already mentioned, to overcome their threefold "failures" – land, heritage and people – only one solution was sought: immigration. Through colonization and migration all three "problems" would be overcome at once: the land would get populated and cultivated, the Spanish heritage would be diluted, and the population could mix with new people.

Sarmiento's views on immigration were formed in Chile, while living in exile. At the end of the 1840s he formulated his main ideas: he saw it as an essential aim to overcome the Spanish heritage and to build a new, prosperous civilization. The United States became a role model for him, he saw immigration as the cause of its growth and progress.²⁸ In his *Facundo*, he claims

Porque él ha perseguido el nombre europeo y hostilizado la inmigración de extranjeros, el Nuevo Gobierno establecerá grandes asociaciones para introducir población y distribuirla en territorios feraces, a orillas de los inmensos ríos, y en veinte años, sucederá lo que en Norteamérica ha sucedido en igual tiempo [...]²⁹

So Argentina would be able to progress, just as the United States did, where cities,

²⁷ „Gauchos heißen ursprünglich in den Provinzen von la Plata die Leute, welche auf den großen Estancias (Viehhöfen) den Dienst versehen, aber keine festen Wohnsitze haben, sondern ihre Dienste bald diesen, bald jenem anbieten.“; see: J. E. Wappäus, *Deutsche Auswanderung und Colonisation*, 126.

²⁸ Samuel L. Baily, "Sarmiento and Immigration: Changing Views on the role of Immigration in the Development of Argentina", in *Sarmiento and His Argentina*, ed. Joseph T. Criscenti (London: Lynne Rienner Publ., 1993), 134.

²⁹ "Because he has persecuted the European name and harassed the immigration of foreigners, the new government will establish large associations to introduce population and distribute it in fertile territories, on the banks of immense rivers, and in twenty years, we will achieve what North America has had achieved in the same time.", see: Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Facundo ó Civilizacion i Barbarie en las Pampas Argentinas*, 170. (Translation mine, SM)

provinces and states revived the deserts.³⁰ But Sarmiento wasn't the first to bring the theme up; he himself referred to Bernardino Rivadavia (1780–1845):

Traia sabios europeos para la prensa i las cátedras, colonias para los desiertos, naves para los rios, interés i libertad para todas las creencias, crédito i Banco Nacional para impulsar la industria, todas las grandes teorías sociales de la época, para modelar [Rivadavia's] gobierno.³¹

This thinking was translated into politics after the end of Rosas's reign (1829–1852). The constitution of 1853 took the theme up and legalized immigration in article 25 of the constitution of the Argentine Confederation, true to Alberdi's principle *gobernar es poblar*, (*to rule is to populate*).³² With this liberal immigration politics Argentina paved its way for the image of an immigration country.

The focus lay on northern and western European countries, but Spain, their colonial heir and therefore seen as one of the problems, was excluded in their wish for a new people. The promotion of immigration should lead to the development of economics and the cultivation of the land. It was seen as server to European (and North-American) values. Ruggiero even states that it was a tool to "whiten the population [... and] to mix with the populations of more advanced countries, so they ... [might] teach ...[them] their arts, their industry, their activity and adeptness at work [...]."³³ Their politics for new people did and did not work at the same time: demographically, immigration policy proved to be a success – while Argentina had 2 million inhabitants in 1869, this amount increased by another 2.5 millions by 1919. But ideologically their plan did not work, since the main immigration groups were Italians, Spanish and Russians. Only 1 to 3 % were of French, British and German origin.³⁴

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 170.

³¹ "He brought European scholars for the press and faculties, colonies for the deserts, ships for the rivers, interest and freedom for all beliefs, credit and the National Bank to promote industry, all the great social theories of the time, to model [Rivadavia's] government.", see: Sarmiento, *Ibid.*, 80. (Translation mine, SM)

³² see: Anne Saint Sauveur-Henn, „Die deutsche Migration nach Argentinien (1870 – 1945)“, in *Die Beziehungen zwischen Deutschland und Argentinien*, ed. Peter Birle (Frankfurt/Main: Vervuert, 2010), 22.

³³ Kristin H. Ruggiero, "The Legacy of Sarmiento's Civilization and Barbarism in Modern Argentina", in *Sarmiento and His Argentina*, ed. Joseph T. Criscenti (London: Lynne Rienner Publ., 1993) 183f.

³⁴ Kristin H. Ruggiero, "The Legacy of Sarmiento's Civilization and Barbarism in Modern Argentina", 183. The result is not surprising if one considers that Italian and Spanish Europeans were more competent

CONCLUSION

During the nation-building process the gaucho became a synonym for the absence of progress and the historical failures that hindered Argentina's development. As a man of the pampas, of Spanish heritage and as a representative of the mixed population – the gaucho – or even more the *caudillos* – like Quiroga, Rosas or el Chacho – represented the barbarian lifestyle as a whole. It's no wonder that Sarmiento pins Argentine failures to those that forced him into exile, in this case Juan Manuel de Rosas – who again – was the main figure in Argentine politics for more than 23 years and who was a "caudillo" in the sense Sarmiento understood the term. While the latter political generation revived the gaucho and stylized and identified him as a true Argentine, Sarmiento paved the way to this image. Lipp summoned this paradox as follows:

There is a certain irony in the fact that Sarmiento is best known for portraying Facundo, a character he wanted removed from the Argentine scene. As suggested, he succeeded in immortalizing those whom he wanted to destroy.³⁵

The other aspect was immigration policy, which was already sought under Bernardino Rivadavia and was an issue under Sarmiento's presidency. Europeans were encouraged to go to Argentina to "whiten the population", to cultivate science and to bring foreign investment, and fulfill roles that presumably lead to progress and civilization. It was a symbol of hope, of a better future that Sarmiento, being in exile during his reflections on the theme, held onto and saw as a tool against Rosas's *Americanismo*.

In the end both sides clung to their end of the dichotomy – neither being able to bring the two worlds together, as Solomon Lipp suggested: "The true or ideal personality of a country (if this is at all a viable concept) - the true character - is a synthesis of the indigenous and the imported."³⁶ Instead both sides were alienated – the gauchos as strangers from the inside and the immigrants as strangers from the outside.

language-wise, while the educational systems of, for example Germany did not include Spanish in their curricula.

³⁵ Solomon Lipp, "Sarmiento Revisited. Contradictions and Curiosities", 10.

³⁶ *Ibid.* p. 12.

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