

Gaicho, Tango, Primitivism, and Power in the Shaping of Argentine National Identity

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In a newspaper chronicle published in 1932, Roberto Arlt, one of the greatest modern Argentine writers, protested against the extensive use of the image of 'gaicho' in everything that could be defined as Argentine: polo players with names like Miles, Lacey, Harrington or Nelson; tango orchestras with musicians with names like Cattaruzzo, Nijisky, Dupont or Müller; tango singers singing tangos that had nothing to do with rural scenarios; and football players who played with 'creole courage', 'gaicho enthusiasm' or with 'typical pampa technique'. In his complain Arlt confirmed the successful dominance of the 'gaicho/mestizo imagery' in a model of transformation and hybridization that permitted for millions of immigrants coming to Argentina from the 1880s to become 'creolized' and converted symbolically into 'gaichos' (Arlt 1994:101-4). The gaichos were related to the past, to rural life and, in a concrete way, to cultural roots. Football and polo were imported and global sport practices. Tango was also a contemporary creation. Thus, the leisure activities, dance and sport, that became popular, were, in a sense, modern radical creations and models of change, and, at the same time, of cultural continuity. Modernism embraced romanticism and tradition. Strathern has pointed out that "'tradition" is similar to but not quite the same as and hence overlaps with the idea of "continuity"; it is continuity seen from the point of view of what is regarded as characteristic or typical about something' (1992: 14). Tradition and primitivism, as we will see later, are effective because they are defined and perceived as cultural mechanisms for the regulation of social life. Consequently, tradition can come before or be provoked by changes. In other words, the analysis of tradition makes possible a better understanding of cultural innovation. In this sense, some nationalist ideologies, a modern phenomenon, tend to be formulated and articulated in a close relation to what is seen as traditional, as products of an idealized rural past. Alonso

has called this ambiguous Latin American relationship with the project of modernity 'the burden of modernity' (1996).

From 1900 to 1930 Argentina was changed under the impact of massive European immigration provoking a remaking of the national identity. In Argentina the process of nation-state building concerned not only the effective extension of authority over a territory and a people, but also the constitution of subjects as 'national' beings, identifying with and accepting the claims the state might make over them. If the construction of the state is largely recognised as dependent on annexation, subjugation and co-option, 'nation' is its complement, for its capacity to rally, to generate subjective commitment and to elicit a sense of belonging (see Bertoni 2001). Thus, the project of a nation masks its heterogeneity and denies a space both to the communities that become submerged through it and to the alternatives imaginaries that it displays. This chapter is an illustration of these particular processes through the lens of the impact of gaucho imagery and dress in tango. In this context we will see that the gaucho dress and folk traditions were key components of a nationalist revival (see Goddard 2000). I will try to show that the connection between gaucho imagery and dress, in theory belonging to the past, embraces also tango, the modern dance and music created in Argentina in the 1880s and 1890s and exported to the world at the beginning of the twentieth century. The paper will examine the confluence of nationalism in Argentina with European ideas of exoticism in defining a context in which tango could be referred as gaucho music and dance. In this period when Argentine elites were searching for national symbols the accidental and convoluted relationships between the tango, an urban product, and the gaucho clothes offered a powerful temporary solution. It is not an accident that Europeans, particularly Parisians saw tango as 'gaucho dance and music'. I will assume that through this dislocation, representations that are seemingly out of time and out of place are reinforced and 'naturalised'. Thus power lies in the processes which serve to fix a gaucho imagery while obscuring the ambiguities which underpin it (see Melhuus and Stølen 1996).

The social decline of the gaucho and the *gauchesca* literature: the question of a national language and identity

From the end of the nineteenth century and through the first decades of the twentieth century, Argentina became integrated into the global scene of massive world commodity exchange, vast international migrations, rapid urbanization, new forms of urban consumption, world sports competitions and circulation of mass cultural products. The main impulse had been foreign: foreign labour, foreign capital, and favourable foreign markets for its exports (meat and cereals). British investors possessed around 80 per cent of the Argentine railway system, large tracts of its land, most of its tramways and urban utility companies, and some of the most important meat-packing plants and industries. Until the First World War no country in the world imported more goods per head of population than Argentina. Per capita incomes compared with Germany, Holland and Belgium, and were higher than Spain, Italy, and Sweden (Rock 1993).

Between 1890 and 1914, Argentine became one of the great immigrant nations in the modern world. In 1914 around one-third of Argentina's population of almost eight million, which the third census showed had increased more than fourfold since the first census of 1869, was foreign-born, the majority being Italians (39,4%) and Spaniards (35,2%). Russian immigrants, primarily Jews escaping from political and ethnic persecution in the Russian Empire, formed the third largest group (4,1%). Syrians and Lebanese (2,7%) arrived after leaving another oppressive empire, the Ottoman. Immigrants also arrived from France, Germany, Denmark and Austria-Hungary (mostly Serbo-Croatians and Friulans) (Solberg 1970: 38). A powerful minority were the British. It is also important to point out that at least one quarter was composed of the descendants of immigrants from the past two generations.

Argentina received, between 1869 and 1930, more immigrants in relation to its native population than any other modern country. A mirror of this historical pattern exists in the growth and development of the capital city of Buenos Aires (the city of tango). The city grew rapidly from 180,000 inhabitants in 1869 to 1,576,000 in 1914. By 1930 the city had almost 3 million inhabitants, one third of whom were immigrants (Ferrer 1972: 146), The proportions of foreigners was 13.8% in 1869, 24%

in 1895 and 42.7% in 1914 (Vázquez Rial 1996: 24). A gender imbalance in the arrival of female immigrants primarily among the younger population meant that for long periods in the history of Buenos Aires there was a predominance of males (see Gay 1991). Buenos Aires became a kind of cultural Babel, wherein English was the language of commerce and industry, French was the language of culture, and the tongues of daily life were a mixture of Spanish (and Galician), Italian (various dialects) and a mixture of Western and Eastern European languages. Buenos Aires in the 1920s, like New York, represented, in effect a 'truly global space of cultural connections and dissolutions' (Clifford 1988: 4) long before anthropology discovered global culture, diasporas and multinational encounters.

By the 1920s a social and economic transformation of Argentina had been achieved and an incipient democracy consolidated. The country had 'survived' the arrival of millions of immigrants and the changes provoked by new technologies, global connections, immersion in the world market and massive urbanization (by 1930, 63% of the population of Argentina was urban). The country and the city of Buenos Aires were not only heterogeneous in the objective sense of being the product of ethnic and cultural mixings, they were also *imagined* as such by intellectuals, writers, politicians and, of course, by the population in general (see Halperin Donghi 1987; Sarlo 1996; Bernand 1997). To imagine a homogeneous 'imagined national community' in this historical setting was not easy. Much more imagination is required than is necessary when imagining the national in more ethnically homogenous societies with fewer dramatic demographic transformations. Rojas, one of the most important nationalist writers of the period, conceived the massive immigration and the lack of a clear educational policy oriented towards the integration of foreigners as a menace to cultural reproduction and national belonging (1909: 89-90). Images of 'invasion', language 'corruption', moral and sexual 'chaos' are present in his work and in the work of other writers like Lugones, Galvez, Bunge and Ibarguren. Even a modernist writer like Borges in 1926 wrote about the city of Buenos Aires as a cosmopolitan fusion, contrasting the margin of Buenos Aires, populated by a creole population, with the centre of the city where the 'babelic, the picturesque, the tearing off from the four points of the world, the Moor and the Jewish' dominated (1993: 24).

By the First World War, the nationalists had found, in the male gaucho – the free cowboy riding in the pampas, hunting, gathering and working for a wage when he needed – a symbol to represent the cultural heritage of the nation under ‘threat’ by immigration (Solberg 1970; Slatta 1985; Prieto 1988; Delaney 1996). The liberal Argentine intelligentsia imagined that the arrival of immigrants from North and Central Europe would lead to the purification of the race and a radical improvement of the work ethic of the creole population. The result was not exactly as they expected. Italian, Spanish, Jewish and Middle and Far Eastern immigrants prevailed (Schneider 1996), and the nationalists continued to claim the figure and the cultural meaning of the gaucho as the primary symbolic type of Argentine nationality. Paradoxically enough, the nationalist discourse revived the ‘barbaric’ subjects who had been condemned to disappear through immigration, hybridization and modernization. This reinvention of tradition was made possible by the privileged place that the *literatura gauchesca* (gauchesque literature) occupied in popular urban and rural literary consumption from the 1880s. The epic poem *Martin Fierro* written by José Hernández in 1872 in a style reproducing gauchesque rural language was a synthesis of the idealization of the gaucho (Borges 1980: 108). Its narrative of a gaucho struggling against state injustice in order to keep his freedom was transformed into a model for a ‘national literature’. He was accompanied by other mythical figures such as *Santos Vega* and *Juan Moreira*, both noble gauchos like himself, fighting for what they considered just and representing freedom and tradition (see Ludmer 1988; Rama 1996: 50-63). Prieto has shown that gauchesque literature was also read in the cities, especially among European immigrants, to whom the colourful rural iconography was the only expression of something national, local Argentine, in the middle of the ‘generalized disorder produced by the cosmopolitan swallows’ (1988: 98-9). This literature created moral human types in situations of conflict and tension introduced by modernization and cosmopolitan values. These figures were brave and violent, but also elegant and polite when treated decently. They were men of honour and courage, symbolizing idealized aristocratic images. They were also important figures in other expressions of popular culture like pantomime, circus and Carnival (Chasteen 2000).

Argentina was a 'new country' with a history in the making. Thus, tradition had to be imagined and, in many ways, recovered from the past. In a turbulent present much affected by the influx of foreigners and a rapid and chaotic growth of cities, the nationalist writers believed that the cosmopolitan Buenos Aires was not the place to look for the new symbols of nationality. These symbols found in the past, in the landscape, in the soil of the pampas, and in the imaginary reconstruction of a rural culture with its epic masculine figures in the gauchesque literature. Borges observed in 1926: 'Buenos Aires, in spite of being packed with two millions individual destinies, will remain deserted and without a voice, until a symbol will inhabit her. The province is people: there are Santos Vega and the gaucho, Cruz and Martin Fierro, possibilities of gods. The city is still awaiting poeticization' (1993: 126).

This movement was not only confined to literature and reading. 'Societies of traditionalists', 'creole centres' or 'creole academies' were created with the mission of recreating the customs of the gaucho which included music and dance. According to Vega in the period from 1898 to 1914 hundreds of centres were established in the city of Buenos Aires and its suburban neighbourhoods with names closely related to the mythical figures of the gauchesque literature such as *Martin Fierro*, *Los perseguidos del Juez*, *Cruz*, and *Tradicion de Santos Vega* (1981: 13-57).¹ The recuperation of lost choreographies of traditional dances was one of the main aims of the associations. This effort was joined by the itinerant theatre companies (*zarzuelas criollas*) and the so-called 'creole circus' (*circo criollo*) playing gaucho dramas which included live music and traditional dances as part of the performances. Dances like *cielitos*, *estilos*, *pericones*, *media caññas* and *triumfos* were performed. Moreover, the incipient film industry was inspired by gaucho traditions, producing films with titles like *Alma Criolla*, *Tierra Argentina*, *El gaucho* o *Romance Argentino*. In the record companies labels like *criollo* and *nacional* were commonly used for people or groups singing folk songs or tenors singing classic opera, and tango orchestras that were called *orquesta tipica criolla* (typical creole orchestra). The two most important record companies were *Records Creole* and *Records National*. □ It

¹ Oliven (1996) has shown how the Gaucho Traditionalist Movement in contemporary Brazil has recreated regional and national identities. Many of his observations and empirical findings can be

is against this historical and cultural setting that the tango appears as representing the urban and the city of Buenos Aires and, at the same time, being creole and national. The paper will argue, as has been pointed out in the introduction, that change is better understood as a process related to traditions because the existence of given cultural continuities legitimizes innovations. The complexities of tango representation are in subtle ways related to the revival of gaucho traditions.

The transformations of tango: from urban dance and music into a gaucho representation

The tango was born in the *arrabales* (the outskirts of the city) of Buenos Aires in the 1880s. Borges pointed out that tango was a typical suburban product and that in the *arrabales* the rural presence was still important but did not radically influence its development. He wrote that 'the tango is not rural, it is *porteño*. Its fatherland are the pink corners of the streets of the outskirts, not the countryside; its milieu the poor neighbourhoods; its symbol, the weeping willows, never the *ombu* (the typical tree representing the pampas)' (1994: 103). One of the social figures in the *arrabal* was the *compadre*, a male character with roots in the rural areas, often employed in the slaughter houses that proliferated there. Collier has vividly described him as follows:

The free nomadic *gaucho* world had more or less vanished by the 1880s, yet the suburban *compadre* did perhaps inherit certain *gaucho* values: pride, independence, ostentatious masculinity, a propensity to settle matters of honour with knives. More numerous than the *compadres* were the young men of poor background who sought to imitate them and who were known as *compadritos*, street toughs well depicted in the literature of the time and easily identifiable by their contemporaries from their standard attire: slouch hat, loosely-knotted silk neckerchief, knife discreetly tucked into belt, high-heeled boots' (1992: 94-5).

The tango was thus populated by *compadres* and *compadritos* at a time when the gauchos heroes were important in popular culture and literature. Gauchos and *compadritos*, in a kind of unusual blending, become, during this period,

related to the ideology and objectives of the traditionalist movement in Argentina. His rich

representative characters in Carnival processions held in Buenos Aires (Chasteen 2000).

By 1890 a new style of couple dancing was called *baile de corte y quebradas* (cut-and-break dance) referring to sudden stops and breaks. It was also known as *milonga*, a name that also designated a rural dance. In the new form the *compadritos* combined the *milonga* with the style and movement of the *candombe*, the popular dance of the Black Argentines living in Buenos Aires, characterized by *quebradas* and *cortes*. The *quebrada* was an improvised, a very athletic contortion, while the *corte* was a sudden pause, a break in the normal figures of the dance. In the *candombe* the movements were done by women and men apart while in the tango the *quebradas* and the *cortes* were performed when the partners danced together. Chasteen correctly writes that 'the characteristic profile of modern tango choreography finally emerged from an encounter between *candombe* moves and the closed-couple choreography of the international ballroom repertoire' (2000:54). The *candombe* withered into a conventional courtship dance during the second half of the nineteenth century joining popular dances like the polka, mazurka, and especially the *habanera*, the Spanish-Cuban rhythm that was very trendy in Latin America. Carpentier has observed that in the tango the Argentine black population that almost had disappeared by the end of the nineteenth century was recuperated in a kind of unexpected marriage with the European *habanera* more than with the Cuban *contradanza* (2001: 99). It is, thus, commonly accepted that the influence of *candombe* movements into the closed-couple choreography of *habanera* is the closest antecedent of tango. Collier has perfectly summarised this creative process:

'The tango...was just a fusion of disparate and convergent elements: the jerky, semi-athletic contortions of the *candombe*, the steps of the *milonga* and mazurka, the adapted rhythm and melody of the *habanera*. Europe, America and Africa all met in the *arrabales* of Buenos Aires, and thus the tango was born - by improvisation, by trial and error, and by spontaneous popular creativity' (1992: 97).

Urban life in Buenos Aires was rapidly transformed during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Luxury hotels, restaurants, bistros, hundreds of cafés, a world-famous opera house and theatres were built by European architects. This

prompted changes in the use of leisure time and created a new environment outside the walls of privacy and home. The appearance of public arenas created new conditions for public participation and enjoyment where cultural life, sports and sexual concerns dominated. Four institutions, where tango as dance was prominent, provided the public with new excitements and opportunities for the deployment of sexual fantasies: the brothel, the 'dancing academies' (*academias de baile*), 'cafes with waitresses' (*café de camareras*), and the cabarets. These arenas provided a space for women, albeit of a special kind. The tango was directly related to these public contexts: in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the brothel and the 'dancing academies' were the places where the original tango dance was created. Later, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the cabaret became a privileged public space for dancing, playing and singing. It has been assumed that originally the tango was only music and was mostly danced by male couples. However, the importance of the 'dancing academies' as meeting places for men and 'waitresses' or for couples cannot be overlooked. The first period of tango, lasting from 1880 to 1920, has been called *la Guardia Vieja* or 'the old guard'. Harp, flute, violin and the guitar dominated the orchestra until the 1920s, when the piano and bandoneon were gradually introduced. Because the main objective was to produce music for dancing, the style of playing was 'oral', in the sense that musicians improvised all the time without performing real solos. The playing took the form of a kind of dialogue between the orchestra and the dancers in which the musical improvisation were closely related to a rich and complex 'erotic' choreography. At the beginning, then, the tango was for dancing and not for listening. The texts accompanying the music were direct, daring, insolent, and, in the opinion of many, reflected a kind of male primitive exhibitionism (see Romano 1991)

The new tango developed after the 1920s, and has been called the tango of *la Nueva Guardia* or 'the new Guard' (Ferrer 1960:31-6). Both the musical composition of this period and the new orchestras gave more freedom to the soloists, drastically reducing the degree of improvisation and the conductors became more concerned with details and nuances in the orchestration than with the performances of improvised solos. In this sense, the tango evolved in the opposite direction of jazz. The most important change, however, can be observed in the lyrics. The new authors

of the tango tell compressed, moving stories about characters and moral dilemmas that were easily understood and identified by a vast, heterogeneous lower and middle class audience. Thus, the tango shifted from being first and foremost a musical expression to being primarily a narrative interpreted by a plethora of extraordinary singers, both male and female.

The tango gradually entered into the popular theatre, the *sainete*, displacing the other music and dances that predominated during the creole theatre (*zarzuelismo criollo*). The first appearance was in 1918 in the *sainete* *Los dientes del perro* (Dog's teeth) where Carlos Gardel sang *Mi noche triste* (My sad night), composed in 1917 by Pascual Contursi. In the mythology of tango this tango inaugurates the epoch of the New Guard. Since then, and during the 1920s there were tangos, orchestras and singers in the most popular *sainetes*, normally performed in the context of cabarets, a typical urban arena.

The orchestras also entered into the dancing halls and in the cabarets. The cabarets of Buenos Aires in the 1920s were generally elegant, but also dark and secretive, definitely not a place for family entertainment. The cabaret became both a real and an imagined arena for 'timing out' and, for many women, for 'stepping out', even though only a minority of women actually moved into its sphere. It was both an existing physical space, and a dramatic fictional stage for many tango stories. In the tango lyrics the cabaret appears as a key place for erotic attraction, a powerful image to contrast to the home, the local bar and the *barrio* (the *neighbourhood*). In this setting, as well in the different dancing arenas, the clothes were urban, modern, elegant and sophisticated. Neither dancers nor orchestras or singers used gaucho clothes, a matter evidently out of place. Tango was thus disconnected from the rural origins, the mixed dress of the *compadritos*, and turned into the representation of a quintessential urban way of life.

The globalization of tango took place during this period with the help of modern technology: radio, movies and records. Some of the singers, as we will see in the next section with the case of Carlos Gardel, and the orchestras became famous worldwide. This very process of globalization served to invent a 'tradition', a mirror in which Argentines could see themselves precisely because the 'others' began to see them. The narrative, the dance and the music of tango became a key element in the

creation of a 'typical' Argentine cultural product. The texts as a written discourse became a sort of 'popular poetics'. However, the impact of the words without the power of the music would probably have been quite different. The forceful combination of text and music gave the written emotional stories a special dimension because they were both sung and danced. In Europe, in contrast, the music and the dance were more important than the lyrics. In this context, and especially when orchestras or dancers performed in cabarets and different types of show the gaucho costumes, as a symbol of the typical Argentina, gained importance.

The tango as a dance arrived to Paris as early as in the in the 1910s and it was seen as exotic as other musical genres: tropical Cuban music, flamenco, Russian and Hawaiian dances, and, later, North American jazz.² It is in this context that an urban dance will be associated to a typical gaucho bodily creation. The European gaze conditioned the evolution of the dance and the way the opposition between wild and sophisticated eroticism was presented. Dress was important in establishing the symbolic frontiers and 1913 was the year when in France one could feel that almost everything was related to tango: tea-tango, champagne-tango, chocolate-tango, dinner-tango and exhibition-tango (Zalko 1998:72). The tango-colour, an intense orange, was popular in the making of women clothes. A popular drink, the mixing of beer and grenadine, that even today is possible to get in Paris was called tango. The impact on women dress was also important: tango cocktail-dresses were designed, being the harem trouser-skirt and the tango corset the most successful innovations. The latter was defined as revolutionary because it was flexible and led to many women to abandon orthodox fixed corsetry (Savigliano 1994:125).

The tango was experienced as different not only because it brought about the changes I mentioned but also because it was coming from a distant place, from a country with a vast pampa populated by gauchos that had attracted in the last decades millions of European immigrants. Savigliano has pointed out that the fascination of tango as a dance was not necessarily related to an instinctive

² Brody has pointed out that the Great Expositions of 1867 and 1878 in Paris prepared the way for the great impact of exotic music in 1889. The organizing committee in 1889 envisaged music as one of the main attractions of the exposition, She writes that for 'the first time at this exhibition, there were performances of "exotic" music which were perceived as "musical" performances' (1987: 94). She concludes saying that by 1889 'many Europeans showed a readiness to listen to music as a cultural universal, even if its origins were Cambodian or Sioux' (1987: 95).

sensuality, like in many 'primitive' dances, but to what she calls the process of seduction: a couple dancing and keeping their erotic impulses under control 'measuring each other's power's (1994: 110). However, tango was seen as an exotic dance coming from an exotic place with a flavour of primitivism. Andre de Fouquieres, a dance pedagogue, wrote in 1913 that tango 'was a dance of the famous gauchos, cattle herders in South America, rough men who evidently cannot enjoy the precious manners of our salons - their temperament goes from brutal courtship to a body-to-body that resembles a fight- the tango...cannot be directly imported. It must be stopped at customs for a serious inspection and should be subjected to serious modifications' (1913: 58). Primitivism was the imposition on others and their cultural products of a set of European expectations as Connelly has pointed out (1999). Primitivism was seen as 'subverting the foundations of rational order in order to pursue the irrational for its own sake' (Connelly 1999: 14). As an artistic expression it was seen rude, naive, expressing great feeling and great passion, lacking structured narrative and putting a strong emphasis on extreme bodily exhibitions. In this sense tango was as 'primitive' as primitive African art. The post-war Parisian passion for *l'art negre* created an intense cult of the exotic figures and masks of African art that fitted with the European interest in cubist and surrealist aesthetics. Thus, the association with the wild life of the gauchos in the Argentine pampas was not an accident, it was central to modern visual art. In the 1910s Argentine dancers had problems in finding jobs in Paris and if they did many of them were obliged to wear gaucho costumes. In this way it was communicated that the 'wild' and 'exotic' dance was performed by authentic Argentines. The same happened with touring orchestras and dancers all over Europe and United States. Nochlin has characterised this attitude as a way of defining the 'other' in relation to a 'peculiar elusive wild life' (1989:50).

However, the fascination for primitivism in the European representations of the tango was ambivalent because it became a typical dancing-hall and ball-room dance. The exotic wild and original choreography, developed by Argentine dancers, was transformed by French pedagogues into a stylistic and almost ballet-like dance. Concomitantly to this insertion in the labour market 'modern choreography' became a field in which the French dance pedagogues reigned. De Fouquières, concretly,

suggested a kind of choreographic revolution replacing the countless steps into just eight main figures. Savigliano observes that 'these attempts to domesticate the tango were for the most part favourably received' (1995: 122). Tango was thus transformed into a global dance once a reduced choreographic grammar was produced. Borges commented on this transformation, pointing out that, before the triumph in Paris, the tango was an 'orgiastic devilry' and, after it, just 'a way of walking' (1980: 89) - from sexual wildness into urban dance.

Bioy Casares observed that the tango danced by Rudolf Valentino and Beatrice Domingues dressed in gaucho clothes in the *The Four Horseman of the Apocalypse*, a 1921 Hollywood silent movie, anchored a kind of dominant aesthetic model identified with traditional Argentina (1970:27). His conclusion is that the gaucho dress to a certain extent was imposed by a kind of colonial gaze and that for many *porteños* this image was 'false' and they were afraid that in the real world Valentino clothes and attitudes should be identified with Argentine gauchos. The connection between Argentina, gauchos, primitivism and tango was maintained for a long period of time. Even in the 1930s, as the great tango poet Enrique Santos Discépolo experienced, it was possible to find in Paris orchestras and dancers wearing gaucho clothes. Discépolo called them 'incredible and inexplicable gauchos' and in the cabaret *Le Lapin* he even saw a 'gaucho sailor' (Zalko 1998:138).

During the 1910s in Argentina it was clear that the tango was the most typical product of the cosmopolitan urban culture of Buenos Aires. In the interior, the folklore was practised in rural areas and was part of traditional rituals and ceremonies. I have pointed out the importance of the traditionalist movement in the provinces comprising the pampa region. In the province of Santiago del Estero, located in a relatively poor area in North Eastern Argentina, Andrés Chazarreta, a teacher and improvised musician, started in the 1910s the compilation of folk songs and the systematic recovery of the choreography of traditional dances. He acknowledged that his inspiration derived from the reading of gauchesque literature, the attendance to performances of the creole circus and the resistance towards imported dances like the mazurka and polka that were still danced in his province (Vega 1981:102-3). In 1911 he formed a company with dancers and

musicians and performed with a great impact in Santiago del Estero.³ They danced *chacareras, gatos, escondidos, palitos, huellas, bailecitos* and *malambos*. The company, dressed in gaucho clothes, was called Creole Dancing Company (*Compania de Baile Criollo*). The visit and performances in some cities of Northern Argentina did not bring about the same success. His main aspiration, however, was to present his group in Buenos Aires. He waited ten years. In 1921 with a new group called Company of Native Art (*Compañia de Arte Nativo*) he presented a spectacle that conquered the public and the critique of Buenos Aires. Such was the response that they performed, with full audiences, one and a half month. Vega explained the triumph of folklore in Buenos Aires as an indication of the discovery by the 'foreign and cosmopolitan' Buenos Aires of the existence of the 'other Argentina' and its marginalised native population with their traditions (1981:141-3; see also Alen Lascano 1972). The press unanimously defined the success as an example of national revival.

It also important to mention a strong revivalist movement that was initiated in 1926 in the town of San Antonio de Areco, in the province of Buenos Aires. Ricardo Güiraldes, the author of a master-piece of gauchesca literature *Don Segundo Sombra*, was rendered tribute by a gaucho movement. Hundreds of people with gaucho clothes and horses visited him in his estancia 'La Porteña': folk songs were played and danced, the '*retreta del desierto*' was played, traditional horse races were organised and a show displaying ability with the horses culminated the feast. A local committee was formed with the aim of creating a national day of tradition. In 1939 The Government of the Province of Buenos Aires declared the 10th of November the Day of Tradition, as a commemoration of the day of birth of the writer José Hernández, author of the epic gaucho poem *Martín Fierro*. Since this year the Day of Tradition is celebrated in the town of San Antonio de Areco (see Blache 1979).

The tango, exotic and wild, was appropriated by Europe as a symbol and expression of Argentina. The global travel was thus related to a particular cultural

³ Chazarreta defined himself as a *folklorista*. He was not a member of the incipient group of people introducing the science of folklore in Argentina. By 1900 due to the work of Roberto Lehmann Nitsche folklore as an approach to understand traditions was accepted in intellectual circles in Buenos Aires. Ricardo Rojas, the nationalist writer, supported Chazarreta's work and saw himself as taking part of the this movement of recuperating the lost traditions of North Eastern Argentina. In 1922 he founded the first section of folklore at the Institute of Literature, University of Buenos Aires (Vega 1981: 90).

product that was generalised and seen as representing 'the national'. Obviously, tango was not the only music and dance of Argentina. The folklore presented by Chazarrera, also defined by Argentines as national, did not travel to the world, remained rural, local and particular. Paris recreated tango, while Buenos Aires discovered the hinterland of Argentina. In Argentina the coexistence of folklore and tango was evident. Even before the New Guard period initiated in 1917 great singers cultivated the creole music of the pampa provinces before moving to the tango. The distance between these two genres was not so extreme. Some of the performers were transformed from 'rural' into typical 'urban' singers through the practice of tango. I will illustrate this transformation with examples of the life of Carlos Gardel, the mythical Argentine tango singer.

The transformation of the singer Carlos Gardel: from folk songs to tango

In the early 1910s Gardel was a Buenos Aires local bar singer (from El Abasto) with a certain acknowledgement in other neighbourhoods (Barracas, Corrales or Palermo). His repertoire was 'creole rural music' (*estilo, cifra, triunfo, cielito, milonga, zamba, vals criollo*), songs that had a wide acceptance all over Argentina and were also very popular in Buenos Aires. In 1912 he joined Francisco Martino in a three months tour along the West Railways Line, singing in all the small towns of the provinces of Buenos Aires and La Pampa. In 1913 he made some phonograph records for the Columbia label. Gardel, accompanying himself on a guitar, recorded fifteen songs, fourteen of which were issued, on seven double-sided records. Most of the songs were *estilos, triunfos* and *cifras*. In the same year Razzano, a rather famous singer, joined Gardel and Martino. They went touring the province of Buenos Aires from July to September, performing in social clubs, cinemas, bars and in some cases in infantry barracks. The local newspaper in Rojas commented that 'the provincial airs, *estilos* and *vidalitas* executed last night by the trio...were heard with profound delight and went straight to the hearts of the few creoles who were at the performance' (an allusion to the fact that the majority of the audience was composed by immigrants). The newspapers in Bragado informed that the show was given by 'professional singers' and not by local *payadores*. In general Viamonte, *La Tarde*

reported a 'delightful and agreeable evening' provided by 'three creoles of purest breed' who 'gave us pleasant hours of patriotic reminiscence, singing beautiful *estilos* and various other songs with the traditional feeling of the *gauchos*' (Collier 1986:133). The connection between creole authenticity and traditional gaucho feelings was expressed in the music of Gardel, Martino and Razzano. The nation was being reproduced through its music and dance.

Martino left the group and the famous Gardel -Razzano Duo was born. The formal debut was in the cabaret 'Armenonville' in December 1915 where they shared the show with a tango orchestra integrated, among others, by extraordinary musicians like Roberto Firpo on piano, Eduardo Arolas on bandoneon, and David Roccatagliata on violin. As I have pointed out before the cultural scene in Buenos Aires during the 1910s was dominated by the traditional forms of Argentine theatre: *sainete* and *criollo*. By 1920 there were 50 theatres in the city. The theatres but also the cinemas were important for Gardel and Razzano because during the intermezzos live entertainment was offered. The Duo toured other big cities of Argentina: Rosario, Santa Fe and Córdoba. The duo's repertoire of creole folk songs – or rather, popular songs composed in folk or countryside idiom – was coming to be recognized as something original and distinctive. In 1916 they also started an international career, first in Uruguay and later in Brazil. The tour to Brazil was very important and consolidated the fame of the singers. As always they played in the intermezzos of the plays, *sainetes* or *criollos*, interpreted by the Compañía Dramática Nacional. The Brazilian press presented Gardel and Razzano music as regional, rural and creole (suffering creole songs). Creole folk songs were now completely established as part of the variety repertoire. Gardel and Razzano, the unchallenged leaders in the field, and their style being now extensively imitated by less talented artists. An important turn was his encounter with the famous theatre actor José Alippi. (His great success was the performing of the popular gaucho drama 'Juan Moreira, a favourite of Buenos Aires audiences ever since its first performance in 1886. In November 1915 a new and spectacular production of Juan Moreira was launched, Alippi playing the part of Moreira, the unfortunate gaucho. Gardel and Razzano sang their songs in scene 6, as part of a 'grand country fiesta', and contributed in no small degree to the show's great success. Creole music was played

in gaucho dress. The rural imagery was part of a show in which the gaucho life style was portrayed in its different facets: the gaucho's his preferences, his woman, his horse, his dances and the typical every-day routines in his life.

In 1917-18 Gardel encountered the new popular song, the tango, far removed from the normal folk repertoire of the Duo. Collier write that 'these were the years when Gardel and the Argentine tango finally came together, the years when this superb artist began the gradual ascent to his ultimate, undisputed position as the supreme figure of the entire tango story' (1986: 54). □Gardel entered into the world of tango and represented it until his sudden death in 1935. Even today Gardel is seen as the legend of tango. From 1925 to 1930 he consolidated his fame touring in Europe and becoming a film star. Nevertheless, Gardel never gave up singing creole songs, introducing in 1925 in his repertoire some of the compositions by Chazarreta. He was still recording them in the 1920s and early 1930s. The career of professional artists like Gardel and other musicians and singer illustrates the interfaces between different genres of music. The musical landscape of Argentine was multifarious and reflected the complexities of a nation that was in the making. The distance, therefore, between gaucho representations and modernity was not so great. It is in this context that is more easy to understand why tango musicians and singers accepted without resistances the European gaze defining them as 'gauchos'.

Conclusion

My contribution shows the subtle ways in which dress, dance and nation were expressed through tango and folklore. I have been able to show that the external (post-colonial) gaze creating tango and gaucho clothes as representing the nation as important but, at the same time, this connection has been latent in Argentina and the transition from creole folk songs to tango was, in many cases, without conflicts and contradictions. The life of Carlos Gardel is an example of the transformation from folk songs /gaucho clothes into tango. Through time gaucho dress will be less identified with tango than with folk songs and traditionalist movements. The end of the story is clear: tango become a more universal dance and in this process gaucho clothes lost its meaning. However, the revival of folk songs in the 1940s and 1950s

consolidated the gaucho dress as a symbol of a virile and masculine nation. Tango music and dance became, in many ways, universal and less national, while folk creole songs represented the 'deep nation'.

In a country of massive immigration we can see national discourse, images and performances as examples of dislocated identities and we can expect from these that the meaning of 'otherness' shifts. In more homogeneous societies, if such exists at all, I expect dislocation to be less apparent and the lack of an explicit model of transformation more evident: nationality is defined and experienced as more evident, as less problematic. In a society like the Argentine one an accomplished national imagery will attempt to integrate the different 'otherness' because it needs all the fragments, all the dislocated and mismatched identities, and it relies on the changing character of the groups that inhabit a given territory. Argentina entered into modernity by producing a series of identities and cultural contradictory tendencies that impeded integration and containment in a single national imagery as envisaged by the nationalists and the representatives of traditionalist movements. My examples show that Argentine cultural identity was thus highly dependent upon multiplicity. Folklore encompassed tango and vice versa. Gerdel was a folk singer as well as the quintessence of tango. Confronted to rapid changes tradition, or better what was defined as tradition, was perceived as a guarantee of cultural continuity, as a way of generating a sense of belonging.

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