

2 Arrival in the Present

Elections | Immigrants | The Argentinians | Protest Potential

Flight with Aerolineas Argentinas, from Madrid to Buenos Aires in 12 hours, dinner without the usual alternative: chicken or pasta. Now there is only pasta, hard, almost inedible. When the seats recline, the passengers in economy class are wedged in until breakfast – it is animal class. Meanwhile, in human class, the beds are pulled out and alcoholic beverages are served. In the morning, passengers lament the rapid end of the night, while in animal class, hope springs eternal that the stiffness in their limbs, the fright caused by turbulence, the fitful sleep and the boring films on the back of the seat in front of them will soon be over, and they can distract themselves with a meagre breakfast. Flights with other airlines don't look much different, but here you can see the consequences of a long economic crisis. At 4 a.m., the plane touches down gently on the runway.

In the taxi, we talk about the traffic congestion and the inaction of the administration. It would be very easy, says the driver, to widen the motorway. But the politicians aren't interested. Sixty years ago, they were normal people, now they're all millionaires. Why 60 years, I wonder? Because in the first 30 years, military dictatorships and civilian governments at the mercy of the military took turns in power, and in the second 30 years, the representatives of the bourgeois parties treated democracy as a self-service shop. Everyone lined their pockets. However, those who did so unscrupulously, such as former President Cristina Kirchner, ended up in court.

Elections It is disillusioning for the taxi driver that Kirchner does not belong to the rich and reactionary upper class of rural landowners, but to the social democratic wing of Peronism, which is nevertheless corrupt and obviously does not care about the interests of the population. If the populist, pro-people faction falls due to corruption, the only option left is Argentina's oldest party, the liberal UCR, which has also been happy to help itself in the past. That leaves unstable electoral alliances or – yes, banging your fist on the table and saying: I'll vote for whoever cleans up your mess, like Trump and Bolsonaro.

Isn't that to be expected? Shortly afterwards, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation declared: "To the great surprise of all experts and election researchers, the undis-

puted winner of the primaries is Javier Milei, leader of the party he founded, *La Libertad Avanza* (Freedom Advances). This surprise is no coincidence; it is part of the problem. Don't experts realise that enormous inflation is rapidly impoverishing the population? Within three weeks, the value has fallen by 10% and continues to fall. Don't they hear the rattling noises of taxis that are almost unroadworthy, don't they feel the violent swaying of the suspension? Does the taxi driver have to explain the obvious to you: that he has no money for repairs when the fare is a tenth of what it would cost for a similar journey in Berlin? That a new taxi cost 2 million pesos last year, but now costs 3 million? That he has cut back on food and drink, that he really needs to buy new trousers, but keeps putting it off? That he has two children but can only afford school fees for one – but which one? Don't the experts notice how happy this driver is about a tip with the comment that it's for a beer after work, for him alone, without thinking about whether the money is enough?

Don't the experts notice how run-down Buenos Aires is? The once-rich metropolis with its imposing bank buildings, hotels and government offices that give the impression of being in Rome or Paris? Behind one façade today are the sales rooms of a fashion chain, behind another, the yawning emptiness of a once luxurious grand hotel and a small university seminar room. And between the buildings is a dilapidated pedestrian arcade with cheap shops, street vendors and money changers.

In contrast, nearby along the former port of Puerto Madero, there are two kilometres of large residential and office buildings, next to former port buildings that have been converted into a private university, and behind them a nature reserve with a wooden footpath – all of which is very remarkable and incomparably larger than Potsdamer Platz in Berlin, which was glorified as Europe's largest construction site after German unification.

Immigrants Every time they pay what seems like a ridiculous price, foreigners rejoice inwardly. How cheap this trip is. Even for the many Brazilians in the city. Now it's worth it. That's what their feelings tell them. And reason remains silent. But reason must feel, not so much our profit as the losses of those who are becoming impoverished. Emotion must question reason, but reason must also feel, so that with every cry of joy, at least one silent cry of pain can be heard.

This explains why the tango shows are poorly attended. Artistic dancing, the wonderful Aníbal Troilo orchestra with two bandoneons, two violins, a double bass, a piano and a singer, musical and dance perfection, performed in a large 1920s-style café on a street corner, *Café de los Angelitos*. Behind the curtain, a large theatre opens up with long tables where you can eat to music and dancing, or just drink wine. At a show in *La Ventana*, Argentina is presented as a nation accompanied by tango, with Andean music showcasing its diversity and simplicity with a nationalistic flag parade that almost blows your glass off the table in the fervour of the performance. Of course, *Evita* is also a must.

The experiences of migration are widespread:

Adiós mi España querida/ Dentro de mi alma te llevo metida /Aunque soy un / emigrante jamás en / La vida yo podre olvidarte
Yo soy un pobre emigrante / Y traigo a esta tierra extraña / En mi pecho un estandarte / Con la alegría de España / Con mi patria y con mi novia / Y mi virgen de San Gil / Y mi rosario de cuentas yo me quisiera morir

Farewell, my beloved Spain. / I carry you in my soul, resting there / Even though I am an emigrant, I could never forget you in my life.
I am a poor emigrant / and I bring to this foreign land / a banner in my chest, / full of the joy of Spain. / With my homeland and my bride / and my Virgin of San Gil / and my rosary of stories / I would like to die.

El emigrante, Antonio Molina

Another emigrant comes from Berlin, Paul Zech. His relationship with the truth is fragile. It seems that he did start an apprenticeship as a baker, but all other information about his profession and academic title, Dr Zech, is invented. He is a talented expressionist poet, Else Lasker-Schüler promotes him, and he maintains a long-standing correspondence with Franz Werfel. He eventually finds a job at the Berlin State Library. When he is dismissed in 1933 because of his proximity to social democracy and is investigated for stealing several books from an estate, he flees via Trieste to Buenos Aires. He leaves his family behind. He publishes poetry collections that almost no one buys and writes 20 plays, hardly any of which are ever performed. He writes for the German-language *Argentinisches Tageblatt*, and his travelogues through South America are fictional. His novel *Michael M. irrt durch Buenos Aires. Aufzeichnungen eines Emigranten* (Michael M. Wanders Through Buenos Aires: Notes of an Emigrant), however, is based on his own experiences.

He had experienced all the hellish aspects of being an unemployed gringo. From begging on the streets to staying in a cave camp for homeless people. He had often been rounded up by the police for being in these “uncivilised” areas. And he had been even more thoroughly plundered, stabbed and beaten by the hyenas of misery, eaten by vermin and plagued by the cold of the night and scabies, when his fate had taken the lowest turn in Germany.

Night, lights, the moon, they all reflect the state of mind of the immigrants, more clearly visible in the darkness than during the day.

And where people sometimes still stood together under a group of trees, an ice cart next to them and a hearse beside it, a picture emerged, a huge painting, stark

and shadowless, reminiscent of the primitiveness of Henri Rousseau's images. This moon painted ever new evening landscapes with its broad flowing brush. Sometimes they were almost like paintings by van Gogh, so compressed and condensed to the essence of all things. And then again, ghostly Edvard Munch, in between with blown-off green and bluish inks, the houses shimmering with an unreal light, the trees in a cloud of earthiness, completely grey and tired and almost in the blackness of doom. At the outer edges, the apparition of death, a death that instils fear and terror.

As I gaze at this moon-like landscape, constantly changing in its painting style, I forget the most obvious thing: to take a tram.

And so the homeless reappear in earthly form.

Young actors, merchants and bank clerks who had left their homes to become farmers on a new earth [...] People who bravely set out for a country that actually still has plenty of room for the new Canaanites, but no money and no awareness of how to make these vast spaces habitable for human beings, have once again become bundles of misfortune, haunting the streets of Paris, Prague, Amsterdam and London in the first weeks and months of their homelessness. After a few weeks of hospital care, former young actors, merchants and bank clerks will once again become apprentices in a new working district: weavers, meat packers, warehouse workers or peddlers. Innocent, sensitive souls who often have to crawl into the most worn and stinking rags of misery to earn their daily dry bread and bed of bugs.

The Argentine population feels European, not South American. This is encouraged by the constitution: since independence in 1810, immigrants should be primarily Europeans, according to the first constitution of all 13 provinces, with the exception of Buenos Aires in 1853. Article 25 is entitled "Promotion of immigration" and reads: "The federal government shall promote European immigration; it shall not in any way restrict or impose taxes on the entry of foreigners into Argentine territory who come with the intention of cultivating the land, improving trade, and introducing and teaching science and the arts." This article survived seven constitutional reforms, the last one in 1994. The architect of the constitution, Juan Bautista Alberdi, justified this article in his 1852 work "Fundamentals and Starting Points for the Political Organisation of the Argentine Republic" with the aim of combining progress and industrialisation, i.e. attracting a suitably qualified European workforce.

This was a controlled European immigration policy.

To govern means to populate in the sense that to populate means to educate, improve, civilise, enrich and enlarge spontaneously and quickly, as has been done in the United States. But in order to civilise through population, it is necessary to

deal with civilised populations; in order to educate our America in freedom and industry, it is necessary to populate it with populations from a Europe that is more advanced in the development of freedom and industry [...] There are foreigners of all kinds; and even if Europe is the most civilised part of the world, there are still more millions of savages in Europe and in the heart of its glittering capitals than in the whole of South America. Everything that is civilised is European, at least in origin, but not everything that is civilised is European; and one can easily imagine the burden of a new country populated by Europeans who have even less knowledge of industry and freedom than the hordes of the Pampas or the Chaco.

The Argentinians Is that where the arrogance comes from? “We Argentinians are not modest, we are very conceited,” explains Pope Francis, himself an Argentinian, and asks journalist Valentina Alazraki with a smile: “Do you know how an Argentinian commits suicide? No? He climbs on his ego and throws himself off.” (14 March 2015) The Argentinians know this. “The worst thing about Argentina is ourselves. Apart from that, it’s the best country in the world.” Enough reason for neighbouring Brazil to mock them. Especially when the economy and finances are in a permanent crisis, politicians mainly serve their own clientele, and revolutionaries and the military shake the community to its core.

Reasons for psychotherapy. Buenos Aires has the highest number of psychologists and psychiatrists per capita. In the 1930s, many psychologists came from Germany and Europe. This puts Argentina, as in many other areas, far ahead of its neighbours. With the decline of Argentina and the military dictatorship that began in 1976, many fled to Brazil. The neighbouring country is catching up. “Argentina is a country enthusiastic about psychotherapy,” writes the German medical journal *Ärzteblatt*. There is “hardly any other nation that takes psychological and psychotherapeutic services for granted as much as the Argentinians.” Given the long waiting lists, “many patients from the lower classes are treated with short-term therapies” – in order to have more time for the middle and upper classes.

The ambiguity of arrogance and decline, self-importance and self-doubt is also the subject of psychological studies. The “Argentinidad-Report 2017” by the Universidad Siglo XXI in Córdoba surveyed 1000 residents of Buenos Aires and other cities aged between 18 and 65 and came to the following conclusions: 45 percent consider themselves interesting, 38 percent display a compulsive personality, 33 percent consider perfectionism important, and 55 percent feel compelled to keep their emotions completely under control, which indicates difficulties in dealing with frustration; A histrionic personality disorder in the form of attention-seeking behaviour, a need for recognition, theatricality and excessive emotionality contradicts the much-vaunted “thought control”.

After all, 35 percent of those surveyed consider feelings and intuition to be more important than rational thinking and planning. 25 percent felt ignored. The most

histrionic, i.e. narcissistic and compulsive, are the 51- to 65-year-olds, with 32 percent considering Argentinians to be histrionic, while the 18- to 31-year-olds emerge as the most paranoid in the survey. Paranoid behaviour is accompanied by mistrust of others, with 33 percent agreeing with the description of Argentinians as paranoid, 54 percent mistrusting others, and 25 percent feeling bad when ignored. Perhaps the many visits to therapy are just part of the game.

Psychologists interviewed by the newspaper *La Nación* confirm the conclusions: "A certain intolerance to frustration and difficulty empathising with others, [...] a certain difficulty in developing a community project, [...] (and) not accepting common rules." This corresponds to the type of government that exists in Latin America: [...] personalistic leadership that was legitimised after the economic and party-political crises of the late 1990s." (*La Nación*, 6 July 2017)

Accommodation in a holiday apartment in the old district of San Telmo. Two storeys for four people, modern furnishings, the owner is Danish, the manager a young Argentinean. Everything is nice, practical and perfect. It feels like being in Europe. But then again, not quite, because in winter the electric heating panels hanging on the wall, one per room, don't provide enough heat unless you sit right next to them. On the second evening, the power suddenly cuts out, lights are on everywhere except in this apartment. The heating panels cool down, mobile phones stop charging, and eventually the computers shut down. All that remains is the sofa or bed with a few thin blankets. Fortunately, cafés with power sockets and hot coffee open the next morning. By the afternoon, the damage to the power supply has been repaired. When it happens again the next evening, we know the routine.

In the historic market hall of San Telmo, at one of the many food stalls, we mention that our colleague lives in Slovenia. Where is that, asks the young man behind the counter. Between Italy and Austria. Oh, I see, he says slowly, looking through all the hall walls into the distance. Should he admit that he doesn't know where Italy is, when at least half of Argentina's population comes from there (), or is it Austria, which for him, if anything, has something to do with Vienna, but where is Vienna?

Your Spanish sounds wonderful, two taxi drivers say independently to Cristina, the Spanish woman. Argentine Spanish is characterised by an Italian sing-song, which suits the melodramatic Argentine way of life better than the rough and sonorous Castilian. But that may be a reminder of the ancestors who once came to Buenos Aires.

Have I arrived? Against the backdrop of former banks and hotels? The cafés where dozens of small espresso cups used to wait on the counter for the employees who rushed in in the morning, gathering noisily at the bar before disappearing back into the tall grey buildings half an hour later? Have I arrived at the magnificent Ateneo bookshop, where theatre was once performed and where vast quantities of books are now sold? Arrival is a long, repetitive process. It is full of surprises. Every day, you struggle with jet lag, your freedom of movement is restricted by COVID,

and you stumble into holes and trip on raised paving stones, resulting in a painfully sprained foot.

Or he comes up against the renewed border regime. Arrival as a delay in getting there. Waiting time.

Protest Potential Day trip across the River Plate to Colonia de Sacramento in Uruguay. Early to the harbour, in a hall the administrative Argentine-Uruguay border (not the geographical border). Marked by a row of two-person border huts, with an Argentine official sitting in front and a Uruguayan behind, looking in the opposite direction. At the front is Argentina, which you are leaving, and two metres further back is Uruguay. These huts are located in a large building, and you don't just walk from one official to the other, but join a queue that winds its way around until you reach the second official.

In the evening, the return journey is on a large ferry painted black, like a modern pirate ship. Cars drive into the belly of the ship and passengers climb up to the upper decks. The duty-free shop is emptied within minutes, with sweets, alcohol and toys flying off the shelves.

Arrival. Crowds stream out of the ship and into the building. Those who have forgotten are now reminded that they will not be getting home quickly, but will have to join a long queue and slowly, practically standing still, glide into the building – is it the same building? Will it be the same control booths? Like in a large car park, the arrivals move almost invisibly towards two lost hours. Then the waiting people suddenly start clapping and booing, louder and louder, clearer and clearer. When they stop some faces light up, others are red with anger. It seems as if things are moving a little faster. Everyone has understood. The new arrivals are not sleepwalkers, nor have they forgotten. When I tell those present about this later at dinner, a student beams: "That's why I love living in this country." Having a say in how you arrive.