The construction of an Italian diasporic identity in the city of Buenos Aires at the turn of the 19th century

Daniela Anabel González

Introduction

Between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, Argentina experienced one of the biggest population increases in its history as a consequence of a flood of transatlantic migration. This explosion in population caused deep and far-reaching transformations in culture as well as in the physiognomy of the affected urban centers. The city of Buenos Aires grew to be one of the most densely populated areas of Argentina and, as a consequence, became a transcultural space par excellence in which a fundamentally rural, creole culture and a multiplicity of diasporic cultures came into contact, of which Italian was the largest. In this space, popular art and music expressions became a symbolic arena where all kinds of dialogues, tensions and identity negotiations took place, particularly between an alleged "Argentine creole culture" and a nascent Italian diasporic one.

Now, in this specific context, is it possible to consider the Italian identity as something homogeneous and clearly delimited? Was the process of construction of this identity linear and unequivocal? What characteristics did such a process acquire and what social actors were involved in it? How were the tensions between selfhood and alterity manifested within the aforementioned symbolic arena?

In order to answer these questions, in this essay we analyze the strategies developed by the diasporic Italian community to construct its identity and the particular relationships that it established with the creoles during these processes. To this end, a textual corpus has been delimited. It consists

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839446676-008 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

of approximately 100 written documents that can be classified as: a) songbooks, which contain no musical notation but lyrics and some indications such as the genre or the musical instrument that should be used to play it; b) specialized and general interest magazines; and c) memoires. These documents belong to the Biblioteca Criolla Collection, a group of small printed publications mostly edited in Argentina and Uruguay between 1880 and 1925, and assembled by the German researcher Robert Lehmann-Nitsche during his stay in La Plata city (García/Chicote 2008), preserved in the library of the Ibero-American Institute of Berlin and also accessible online.[1] This wide set of documents is an unavoidable source for scholars interested in Argentina's popular culture. According to Miguel García and Gloria Chicote, this collection constitutes a very valuable and representative documentary archive, relevant for the characterization of the different poetic and musical expressions that circulated in Argentina during this period (2009: 110).

Before going further, it should be noted that the study of the popular music developed in this period of time and scenario is a particularly complex task. Strongly anchored in oral tradition and active in a changing collective imaginary, the popular musical expressions that converged in the city of Buenos Aires between the late 19th and early 20th centuries require for their study a critical and attentive scrutiny of a set of heterogeneous documents that offers very fragmentary and disparate data. To explore such a variety of documents, it is necessary to adopt a qualitative perspective which hierarchizes hermeneutics without neglecting heuristics, promotes the interpretation of what is said and what is silenced, deepens the analysis of socio-cultural contexts, and emphasizes the articulation of textual and contextual aspects.

Taking this into consideration, the processes of identity construction developed by Italian immigrants and expressed in this particular symbolic arena are approached through the analysis of song lyrics, comments made in specialized magazines, memories of the artists of the time, and related bibliographies. To carry out this analysis, it is first necessary to describe the particular socio-cultural context in which these processes take place, with special emphasis on migratory flows and their impact on the urban scenario and the variety of social actors that meet there. Second, some brief and historically contextualized definitions of "creole" and "foreign" culture should

1 https://digital.iai.spk-berlin.de/viewer/collections/biblioteca-criolla-des-iai/

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839446676-008 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - [CC BY]

be presented. After that, the theoretical framework is presented and its key concepts—diaspora, appropriation, resistance and identity—are defined in relation to the case study. Finally, in two successive sections the different processes that Italians developed to build and (re)define their identity in the diaspora, and the variety of relationships that they establish with creoles along these processes, are analyzed.

A brief note on the Argentine social-historical context

Around 1880 in Argentina a period known in local historiography as "the process of national organization" (Halperín Donghi 1980; Oszlak 1997 [1982]; Romero 2004 [1965]) came to end. The culmination of this period involved: 1) the end of armed conflict between the so-called interior provinces (the ones that do not enjoy the benefits of the port), the river lands, and Buenos Aires; 2) the adoption of an economic model based on agricultural export and the incorporation of Argentina into the international division of labor as a provider of raw materials; 3) the establishment of a modern nation-state; 4) the beginning of a period of growing economic development; 5) the designation of Buenos Aires as the capital of the Republic; and 6) the creation and implementation of a systematic plan for settling the land.

In this context, a series of measures was taken by the government with the objective of contributing to the consolidation and modernization of the recently unified national state and of promoting the development of an expanding economy based on agricultural export. One of these measures was the approval of the 817 Law of Immigration and Colonization, also known as the Avellaneda Law. This law consisted of two sections that were intended to regulate immigration and the settlement of national territory. The first ten-chapter section defined, amongst other things, the category of immigrant, the requisites that must be met, as well as the responsibility of the Argentine state towards him or her. According to the law, an immigrant is:

> any foreign laborer, artisan, industrialist, farmer or professor who, being under sixty years of age and accrediting his morals and aptitudes, arrives in the Republic to settle on a steamships or sailing ships, with a second or third class ticket, or with a ticket paid on behalf of the Nation, of the provinces, or of the

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839446676-008 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

> private companies assigned to protect immigration and colonization (Chapter V, Art. 12; author's translation).

The second section of the law, composed of seven chapters, describes how lands should be divided into lots, to whom they should be assigned, what specific tasks must be undertaken upon them, and how new settlers should be distributed according to the demand for labor. Regarding this law, José Luis Romero (2004 [1965]) notes that while it facilitated new immigrants' incorporation into the country, it did not guarantee their ownership of land. On the contrary, it reinforced the system of plantations that conceded large tracts to a small sector of the population. As a consequence, immigrants that had "scarce possibilities of becoming landowners" (Romero 2004 [1965]: 93; author's translation) tended to establish themselves in big cities, especially in Buenos Aires due to its proximity to the port.

According to the information provided by the first censuses, between 1895 and 1914, Argentina's population doubled in size. Of the inhabitants registered in 1895, 25.4 per cent were foreigners. In the 1914 census, this figure reached 30 per cent. Of this number, 80 per cent were Spanish and Italian. Their geographic distribution was far from being in balance with opportunities for housing or work. Though the law's objective was to guarantee the population rural spaces in order to propel the agricultural economic model, its scarcely regulated implementation brought abrupt population growth to the city of Buenos Aires. According to the census of 1914, 32.9 per cent of the foreign population—777,846 inhabitants—was concentrated in the city of Buenos Aires.

It is important to point out that until 1887, the capital city had approximately 4,000 hectares of territory of which a very low percentage had been constructed upon—less than 1,000 hectares. During that year, the government of the Province of Buenos Aires ceded 14,000 hectares to expand the city and, in 1888, demarcated the city's limits: the Riachuelo River and the General Paz Avenue. As a consequence of this expansion, the capital became "one of largest municipal jurisdictions among the most important metropolises." (Gorelik 2016 [1998]: 13; author's translation)[2] However, only two thirds of the traditional municipal area—that is, the initial 4,000 hectares—and

2 In the same era, Paris had 7,900 hectares, Berlin, 6,300, and Vienna, 5.540 (Gorelik 2016 [1998]).

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839446676-008 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - [cc] BY

only a few blocks of the territory that was later given over to the city contained any significant constructions (Ibid). The complete urbanization of this extensive territory took approximately two decades. During this time period and in the face of a marked population increase, tenement houses—known as "conventillos"—became common. They were collective living arrangements with precarious health conditions in which entire families lived together in a single room and shared the utilities and some common areas, like patios or rooftops, with the other tenants. According to the doctor Guillermo Rawson, by the end of the 19th century there were approximately 2,200 houses of this type in Buenos Aires (Prieto 1988).

Due to the convergence of these heterogeneous social actors, the urban area of Buenos Aires can be defined as a fundamentally transcultural space, that is, a geographic space where culturally different groups actively participated in the development of a shared social life while at the same time fighting to differentiate themselves through the preservation of diverse cultural practices. In this case, the term co-existence doesn't allude to harmonious cohabitation nor does it describe the happenstance sharing of space and time but rather refers to the unavoidable exchange between these actors, an exchange that cannot be stripped of its social and political asymmetry and imbalance of power (Walsh 2012). In this particular context, popular music can be thought of as a symbolic arena, that is, a space or public sphere in which different cultural actors come together to negotiate and/or dispute representations of themselves and the "other". These identity negotiations involved the appropriation, transformation of, or resistance to certain elements of the receiving culture. Of all the immigrant communities that settled in Argentina, the Italian community was the most numerous, coming to far exceed the Spanish community. The integration of Italians into Argentine culture—that developed in this transcultural space and within a recently organized nation-state—implied an extensive and complex process, which found in popular musical expressions a place of manifestation.

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839446676-008 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - [cc BY]

How to understand "creole" and "foreign" at the turn of the century in Argentina

Before moving on to the study of popular musical expressions—and the tensions and negotiations that take place within them—it is important to describe, even if only briefly, what is meant by creole culture in this context and in what way the delimitation of it is linked with foreign presence. The ethnic composition of the population that inhabits the territory known today as Argentina has been, from the period of conquest, heterogeneous. The result of the encounter of the Spanish, native groups and slaved Africans is a population that is fundamentally mestizo and whose main characteristic is its diversity. In this framework, the definition of local identity and the differentiation from the "other" constitute complex and changing constructive processes that should be thought of in their specific historical contexts. The appearance of creole culture as the general paradigm for local identity around the end of the 19th century was a strong response to a significant influx of foreigners. In this era, foreigners—and mostly Italians—were perceived as a "perturbing presence" (Prieto 1988: 13) that "[…] threatens to disintegrate the Argentine spirit." (Vega 2010 [1981]: 33; author's translation) As Adolfo Prieto attests:

> […] particularly in Buenos Aires, the number of immigrants, during many years, was equal to the native population, creating an air of foreignness, of cosmopolitanism that was *as irresistible as it was confusing* in its trends and manifestations (Ibid: 13; author's translation; emphasis added).

This situation (re)activated the dichotomy "self/other" under a particular expression of "local/foreign". It is important to highlight that during the period after the declaration of independence from Spain (1810) and until the creation of the nation-state (1880), the "self/other" dichotomy had fundamentally adopted two shapes. Within the country, it represented the tension between: 1) the native populations of the interior, embodied in the figure of the "gaucho"—the inhabitant of the pampas considered brutish, lazy, dangerous and marginal—and the "caudillo"—a political leader conceived as a demagogue that hindered the establishment of the nation-state; and 2) the creole elite of Buenos Aires. Outside the country, it generally denoted Argentine/Spanish. At the time, Spain with its oppressive monarchical system was con-

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839446676-008 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

sidered basically greedy, cruel and archaic, and represented an "other" from which it was necessary to become completely independent and different.

As a result of the massive arrival of immigrants, mostly Italians, at the end of the 19th century, this conception of "self" and "other" started to change. According to Santiago Javier Sánchez (2011), the increasing presence of Italian immigrants—especially of Sicilians and Calabrians—was perceived by the Argentine creole elite as a threat. So, many intellectuals started to see in Spain, in their shared history, and in the cultural and idiomatic legacy, a reinsurance against the immigration advance (Ibid). In this way, authors like Manuel Galvez affirm that: "We [Argentine people] are Spanish because we speak Spanish [...] Language is perhaps the only element that characterizes races [...] the kinship of the language originates the same or similar ways of feeling, thinking and even proceeding." (1943 [1913]: 17; author's translation)

Together with this Hispanic movement that sought to erect an Argentine nationality with Spanish roots, the so-called Traditionalist Argentine Movement (Vega 2010 [1981]), also named "nativism" (Romano 1998), "Cultural Argentine Traditionalism" (Fernández Latour de Botas 2006) or simply "Traditionalism" (Rubione 2004), emerged. This movement, widespread between 1890 and 1915, vindicated the development of presumably rural cultural expressions as a way of constructing an authentic national identity. With the aim of building up such an identity, the members of this movement founded creole centers, civil associations that try to revitalize rural practices—linked with the figure of the "gaucho"—through the organization of popular parties in which rural musical genres are performed and danced, and where other rural traditions are (re)created—such as the use of specific clothing or certain verbal expressions. They also published specific periodicals,[3] created the creole circus and creole drama, and spread "gaucho" literature and poetry (Ludmer 2012 [1988]). In symbolic terms, this movement appealed to the romanticization of the "gaucho" as a mechanism to outline a homogeneous, rural identity, named creole. So, the once despised "gaucho" became an experienced and sensitive man of the country, a faithful soldier of the motherland, and a pillar of local tradition. The mestizo character of the "gaucho"—born

3 For example, *La aurora* (*The Aurora*, directed by Antonio A. Ferrari), *La enramada* (*The Brush*, directed by Alfredo I. Marini), *Revista criolla* (*Creole Magazine*, directed by Rafael Cejas), *El fogón pampeano* (*Bonfire on the Pampa*, directed by Francisco J. Neira), *Pampa florida* (*Flowered Pampa*, directed by Raúl M. Peña), *La tradición* (*The Tradition*, directed by Floro Racero), among others.

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839446676-008 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

from the union of Spanish and native people—may have helped to reinforce, in this context, the search for a common past that has its ethnic and cultural roots far enough removed from the Italians. Facing a newly defined nation-state, and a strong cultural eclecticism, the "gauchos", their way of speaking and their customs, became "the plasma that seemed destined to unite the diverse fragments of the racial and cultural mosaic." (Prieto 1988: 12; author's translation)

In this scenario, some specific groups of European immigrants that settled in Argentina were perceived as true outsiders and identified as the counterpart of the creoles. These groups built variable bonds with the local culture and, at the same time, developed their own community spaces—where they fomented, recreated and reterritorialized their customs and cultural expression—and exchanged tangible and intangible goods with their family abroad, such as money, books, photographs, news, musical expressions, etc. Of all of these groups, the Italian was not only the most numerous but also the most obsessively represented and discussed in the popular musical expressions of the time.

Studies of musical change: Some concepts of interest

To analyze the exchanges and negotiations that took place within the aforementioned popular music, a few concepts from the studies of musical change have been put to use. Before referring to them specifically, it is worth noting that the processes that have emerged in the meeting of cultures and the effects that this has had on music have been an area of recurrent interest for ethnomusicologists and popular music scholars. Along these lines, between 1960 and 1980 some researchers (Blacking 1973; Nettl 1980) expressed their concern for the growing Western influence in the expression and practices of non-Western music, going so far as to predict the latter's disappearance. Most of the examples that these scholars selected for their analysis pertained to colonial situations where relationships were markedly asymmetrical. Therefore, in referring to these relationships, they used a series of concepts that crystallized this asymmetry—for example, "Westernization" or "acculturation".

This trend began to change near the end of the 1980s, in line with the development of post-colonial thought and emergent theories of globalization.

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839446676-008 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Since then, the interests of ethnomusicologists and popular music scholars, among other things, have been directed towards: the phenomenon of world music and its production and spread (Bohlman 2002; Feld 1994); the influence of emergent technology and mass media on music and its practice (Frith 1998; Mintjes 1990); and the music industry itself (Frith 2006). In this framework, reflections on musical change multiplied and diversified significantly, giving way to diverse perspectives.

One of these perspectives centers on the analysis of immigration. The use of concepts like diaspora (Ang 2013; Bohlman 1997; Clifford 1994; Gordon/Anderson 1999; Hall 2010; Solomon 2015) or nomadism (Pelinksi 2000; 2009) gave accounts of the displacement of individuals, musical expressions, instruments, practices, discourses, etc. The interest in the circulation of symbolic and material goods beyond the borders of nation-states provided a second point of emphasis (Wimmer/Glick Schiller 2002; Glick Schiller/Levitt 2004). Next came inquiries into the processes of identification and/or rejection developed by immigrants (Hall 2000; Kartomi 1981). The fourth major thematic point turned its gaze to the study of the re-signifying of music in new geo-political situations (Slobin 1994; Turino 2004). This perspective highlighted the multiplicity of processes that music undergoes when it is moved from one space to another. Additionally, this perspective deepened the interconnected relations between music, space and identity.

The exchanges between Creoles and Italians in light of the musical change

In line with this last perspective, which focuses on the analysis of population displacements, a series of concepts that help to account for the negotiation process developed on popular musical expressions are taken up in this study. The first one is the notion of diaspora that can be defined, broadly speaking, as “a denotative label for the dispersed people removed from a common territorial origin.” (Gordon/Anderson 1999: 284) In more specific terms, diaspora is thought of as the displacement of a group of social actors from one place to another, and the set of strategies designed by this group to coalesce into the new territory (Solomon 2015). This coalescence is neither univocal nor does it develop in a single direction. According to James Clifford, diaspora involves

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839446676-008 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

"forms of community consciousness and solidarity that [help to] maintain identifications" (1994: 308) with the country of origin.

At the same time, diasporic cultures can never escape—even when trying—from practices of accommodation because diasporic movements comprise not only displacement, travelling and disarticulation but also—and sometimes fundamentally—settlement, dwelling and (re)articulation—what Ramón Pelinki (2000) called reterritorialization. As Clifford (1994) points out, diasporic cultures simultaneously combine strategies of community maintenance and cultural interaction. This combination produces a tension between selfhood and otherness and attempts to assume, against the norms of the modern nation-states which permanently pursue cultural homogeneity and unity, the "nation-state/assimilationist ideologies" in Clifford's terms (1994: 308). So diasporic cultures, constituted by displacement, try to negotiate and also to resist their socio-cultural reality, which means that they struggle to incorporate themselves into the new culture and at the same time intend to maintain their differences.

This was the case for the Italians who arrived in Argentina at the end of the 19th century. As mentioned above, their massive arrival weakened the recently unified Argentine national state, caused tension the relationship between selfhood and otherness, and prompted the redefinition of an allegedly homogeneous and unified creole identity. Likewise, Italians carried out actions to preserve their cultural identifications and, at the same time, developed strategies to integrate themselves into the receiving culture. In this regard, they built, on the one hand, a variety of institutions—social, recreational, mutual[4]—that were used by a significant number of immigrants not only to send remittances or important news to their homeland but also to socialize, develop their political lives and strengthen their customs and cultural expressions (Devoto 2006; Weber 2011). On the other hand, they enrolled in public school en masse, in numerous cases they aspired to nationalization, they actively participated in patriotic celebrations, and they even attended dance or parties organized by local creole centers (Garavaglia 2003; Casas 2015). This permanent and unsolved attempt to resist and integrate into the local culture finds a place to express itself in popular music.

4 For example, newspapers and magazines, banks, the Italian Hospital, the Italian Chamber of Commerce, multiple law firms, etc.

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839446676-008 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

In order to understand this complex process and to delineate the strategies developed by the Italian diasporic community in Argentina, the concepts of appropriation and resistance are used. Appropriation can be defined broadly as the use of some culture's symbols, objects or expressions by another culture. This action is inevitable when different cultures come into contact even though they strongly try to preserve their own "purity." (Kartomi 1981; Rogers 2006) More specifically, it can be said that appropriation is a voluntary process, which means an "active 'making one's own' of another culture's elements." (Rogers 2006: 476) Nevertheless, this action is always conditioned by a variety of issues like power relationships, the use of violence, and the characteristics of the cultural element in question. Likewise, the appropriation of some element of another culture can be creative, partial, fragmentary and/or subject to changes. Besides, the term resistance accounts for the process of opposition or the "virtual rejection" (Kartomi 1981: 235) of cultural interchange. This process, as has been suggested before, is never completely possible. Even when members of a culture intend to remain impervious to contact with others, cultural exchanges occur anyway. However, preserving certain aspects of their own culture—in some cases more systematically, in others less so—reveals how this process of resistance operates.

Finally, the concept of hybridity helps in referring to the results of these cultural exchange processes. Closely related to the notion of diaspora, hybridity appoints "the novel combination of heterogeneous cultural elements in a new synthesis." (Hall 2000: 240) It is important to make clear that the notion of hybridity does not imply the existence of a "pure" or essentialized culture in contrast to a hybrid one. It simply seeks to emphasize the synthetic, unfinished, and potentially changing character of cultural constructions, particularly from the diasporic ones. In Stuart Hall's approach, it is used to recognize the "necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' lives *with and through, not despite, difference*." (Ibid: 235; emphasis added)

At this point, it is worth noting that the notion of identity which underlies and articulates this work is the one synthesized by Eduardo Restrepo (2007), who in turn was inspired by the ideas of Stuart Hall, Lawrence Grossberg, Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, and Judith Butler. According to the author, identities are: 1) constructed in relation to "others" through a series of identification and differentiation practices; 2) procedural, historically situated, potentially changing but not simply "freely-floating"; 3) produced, disputed

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839446676-008 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

and transformed in the discursive sphere, which does not mean that they are "pure discourse" that takes place outside a social and material reality; 4) traversed by power relations and capable of becoming places of resistance and empowerment; and 5) not defined in a stable and unequivocal way by all the members that ascribe to it—"[the meanings] associated with a specific identity derived from concrete significant practices, from the specific interactions between different individuals." (Ibid: 31; author's translation)

The Italian elite and the civilizing discourse: An integration strategy through difference

As has been said before, Italians composed the highest percentage of the vast number of immigrants that arrived in Argentina at the end of the 19th century. According to the census of 1895, more than half of the foreigners that lived in the country were Italian. Of the 3,954,911 inhabitants registered in the census of 1895, 492,676 were Italian. The second largest group of immigrants was the Spanish with 198,684 inhabitants (that is to say, less than half). As one might imagine, the composition of this large population group was not homogeneous and neither was its identity. Although the largest volume of Italians living in Argentina at that time belonged to the working classes, a relevant minority of high-class intellectuals coexisted with them. While the first arrived on the new continent in search of work and better living conditions, the latter sought to establish themselves as an identifiable and important elite in the local intellectual scene. With this objective in mind, Italian intellectuals advocated for the creation of specialized magazines, such as *La patria degli Italiani* (*Italians' Motherland*), *El mundo del arte* (*The World of Art*, 1891-1896), *La revista teatral* (*Theatrical Magazine*, 1896-1908), *La revista artística* (*Artistic Magazine*, 1908-1909) and *El arte* (*The Art*, 1885-1886). Likewise, several of them actively participated in Argentina's extensive traditional and large-circulation newspapers such as *La Prensa* (*The Press*) and *La Nación* (*The Nation*, Weber 2011).

The specialized magazines quickly became important tools for cultural promotion, and, surreptitiously, of identity construction. José Ignacio Weber says that through these publications this group

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839446676-008 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - [CC BY]

> [...] sought to raise awareness of the achievements of their compatriots, debate trends in local culture, and create and promote spaces and practice of idiosyncratic congruence between the culture of the migrants and that of their host country (2011: 108; author's translation).

Thanks to diligent cultural work in the local press, this group of intellectuals won recognition from the upper class in Buenos Aires, establishing themselves as a prestigious elite linked to artistic activity.

The aforementioned process of identity construction finds in the set of specialized magazines its favorite means of expression. Among the most significant and persistent publications over time is *El Mundo del Arte* (*The World of Art*), founded and published by the Neapolitan Giacomo De Zerbi,

> an influential character from Naples who as a young man joined the national army, was a politician and journalist, edited the newspaper "La Patria" in Naples and founded "Il Piccolo" that became the third-most distributed newspaper in the city (Weber 2011: 104, author's translation).

El Mundo del Arte has alternated since its founding between Spanish and Italian—in fact, on the cover page it is made clear that the magazine is written "in national and Italian language". Thus, on May 25, 1892, it published an article with the intention of commemorating Argentine Independence, which contained statements such as:

> [It is not] possible to compare the secular labor which prepared our revolution [...] with the *brief historical development of Argentine Independence* which was intrinsic and completely formed the day that Spain fell to insolent Napoleonic conquest [...] The voice of this *young nation* was thunderous however [...] The current state of the Argentine Republic doesn't measure up to patriotic daydreams, nor humanitarian ideal (3; author's translation; emphasis added).

The celebratory, strongly paternalistic tone of this example speaks to a relevant trait in the process of the construction of this particular Italian identity.

With respect to music, there are several references—some of them more, some of them less explicitly emphatic—to the central role that Italian musicians, composers, and critics played in the development of Argentine culture. The Italian theater critic and dramaturge Vincenzo de Napoli-Vita's (1906)

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839446676-008 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - [cc] BY

historic essay constitutes an example of this strategy of identity construction. According to the author, with his work he hopes to give an account of "[...] the history of Italian art that has come here [to Argentina] to *contribute to its civilizing efforts*." (Weber 2016: 265; author's translation; emphasis added) Through the course of his writing, Napoli-Vita carries out a careful "operation of selecting experiences from the past in order to construct a history of Italian contributions to musical theater in Buenos Aires." (Weber 2011: 113) With this sort of operation—which includes biased omissions and classifications—the representatives of the intellectual elite defined the Italians as a kind of "other" that integrates into local culture from a position of superiority and wrought a pedagogic, even civilizing influence in Argentina.

This particular way of building an Italian diasporic identity might also be conceived of as a resistance strategy, insofar as it advocated at some point the strengthening of its own culture, intended to maintain its differences and helped to firm up the identification of its community. However, this procedure worked as an integration practice since it involved, on the one hand, the strategic appropriation of local news, themes and/or artistic expressions on the part of Argentine journalists and critics, and even in the "local language". Taking this into consideration, it could be said that the Italian identity was constructed here in relation to others and through, not despite, difference. On the other hand, through this procedure of identity building, the elite presented an alternative narrative that opposed the extended hispanophile perspective by incorporating the Italians into the "local genealogy" as an important cultural influence.

As has been suggested, such a definition of the Italian diasporic identity represented only a fraction of this numerous and heterogeneous group of immigrants. Broad social sectors of this community remained outside this definition and developed their own identity construction strategies.

Popular arts and music expressions as symbolic arena of the "other Italians"

In the transcultural space of Buenos Aires, popular arts and music expressions constituted a symbolic arena in which identity negotiations and exchanges were put into action. In this arena, different socio-cultural groups participated in the construction of their own identities—either as creators,

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839446676-008 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

performers or audience—in relation to other groups, revitalized cultural differences and disputes, and tightened the relationship between selfhood and otherness.

Likely because of their numerical predominance and their identification as "true alterity", Italians were the immigrant community most represented in popular arts and music, as well as the favorite target of jokes. The analysis of these representations within the particular socio-historical context in which they developed and in relation to the comments of some protagonists of the local artistic scene allowed us to realize that Italians' identity construction processes have been heterogeneous and variable. The inevitable coming together of the Argentine lower classes and the large masses of Italians—with whom they shared everyday spaces such as factories, taverns, dances, parties, tenement houses, schools, etc.—promoted different kinds of exchanges which gave rise, in the long term, to significant cultural transformations embodied in new and hybrid identities.

One of the most eloquent examples of the basically hybrid character of these identity constructions is the "cocoliche". In the memoirs of the actor and dramaturge José Podestá (2003), it is stated that "cocoliche" emerged as a drama character during the staging of *Juan Moreira*, a very popular theatrical piece centered on the life of a famous "gaucho". In relation to this, Podestá relayed that during one of the representations of this play (c.1890), the creole actor Celestino Petray unexpectedly bounced into "the scene of the country party" (Ibid: 66) dressed up ridiculously and mounted on "a skinny useless horse not fitted at all for work." (Ibid) Once in the scene, Petray presented himself using a mixed jargon of Spanish and Italian, saying: "My name is Franchisque Cocoliche and I am a creole to the marrow of my calf bone, just look at me, my friend." (Ibid; author's translation) According to the author, the success of this character was immediate and, from then on, he was included in the plot of this theatrical piece—which was put on stage for at least two more years. It is possible to think that such a role, created and initially performed by a creole, could have later been interpreted by some Italian actor (Cara-Walker 1987; Seibel 1993). The possible incorporation of Italians as performers of this mocking representation of themselves must have provoked significant identity transformations. Their insertion as new enunciators in this symbolic arena can be thought of as a gesture of relative acceptance of this "identity assignation", as a strategy of identity (re)definition, and also as an opportunity to dispute power.

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839446676-008 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

But this character quickly transcended the limits of the theater. Thus, the word "cocoliche" started to be used as a cultural label that designated the Italian immigrants who adopted—in diverse and creative ways—some characteristics of the "gaucho", and as the specific name of the mixed jargon used by them. Hence, it is possible to find different songbooks that refer to the "cocoliche" and that, by the use of popular music genres, relay the vicissitudes, entanglements and ambitions of this character, generally in a humorous way.

So, in the songbook *Canciones Napolitanas y Criollas* (*Neapolitan and Creole Songs*) by the creole folksinger Manuel Vargas (1902: 16), a series of popular genres from the countryside—such as "estilo", "milonga", "copla", and "vidalita"—written and sung by "cocoliche" are presented. The first verses of one "copla", for example, reads:

I am a real creole Creole of the most refined, An amateur folk singer Who sings about his destiny.	Io sono propro cregoyo cregoyito de lo fino, pachatore di afisione que cantare il suo destino.	Soy un verdadero criollo criollito refinado payador aficionado que canta sobre su destino.
I wander about the countryside And walk in the town centre I hold on to my guitar Which is the best instrument.	Io vagu per la campaña É pasiego per lu centro E mi agarro á la gatarra Que es el mecoro strumento.	Yo vago por la campiña y paseo por el centro y me agarro a la guitarra que es el mejor instrumento.

These verses are written neither in Spanish nor in Italian but rather in a mixed jargon that clearly shows that the singer has not mastered Spanish. However, he categorically affirms that he is a creole, and adds that he is a "payador", a folk-song improviser. To reinforce this auto-denomination, the singer appropriates a fundamental creole cultural element: the guitar. The counterpoint between these statements, which describe the romanticized, stereotypical image of the "gaucho" and this character's mixed way of speaking, results in an absurd discourse that promotes laughter. This absurd discourse also shows the tension between selfhood and otherness. The creole folksinger who wrote these verses highlighted through them just how ambitious the Italian immigrants were to incorporate the receiving culture and, at the same time, how threatening this ambition could be for the creole lower classes, who were not organically or stably incorporated into the re-

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839446676-008 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

cently unified nation-state. Likewise, the "average Italian" is represented as prone to integration—for instance, through the strategic appropriation of elements of the creole culture—but also as resistant to merging himself with the "other". Even if the literacy plan promoted by the Argentine state was widespread and mostly effective, the first generations of Italian immigrants in Argentina resisted—more or less systematically or consciously—speaking Spanish. The result of this resistance is reflected in the previously mentioned hybrid jargon called "cocoliche".

In the same songbook (Ibid: 26), a few pages later, verses from another "copla" are placed in the mouth of a Neapolitan.

I am Italian but Naturalized Argentine That is why I love this country Of Moreno and San Martín. My son is creole And creole is my wife And I have come to be Under your flag.	Songo tano, ma peró neutralizato arcantino, e per quisto amo la patria di Moreno y San Martino. Lu mio filho e cregoyo E cregoya ma muquiera E io é venito a meterme Suta la sua bandiera.	Soy italiano pero naturalizado argentino y por esto amo la patria de Moreno y San Martín. Mi hijo es criollo y criolla mi mujer y yo he venido para estar bajo su bandera.

In contrast to the previous example, here there is no humoristic effect that emerges from an absurd discourse or situation. Even though the singer also uses the "cocoliche", he identifies himself as an Italian immigrant that has acquired Argentine nationality through the legal process of naturalization. He also affirms that his wife and his son are creoles, which represents a very common situation at the time and illustrates the strong miscegenation between creoles and Italians. Then, the singer adds that he loves the country that has welcomed him and that he is willing to respond to its flag. As in the previous case, two strongly representative elements of the Argentine culture are appropriated by the singer: Mariano Moreno and José de San Martín, fundamental figures during the process of the organization of the nation-state. The former was an ideologist and promoter of the May Revolution that led to the definitive independence from Spain; the latter was a military man in charge of the liberation of Argentina. The use of Argentine history as a means for demonstrating belonging and loyalty to the receiving country is a resource that appears recurrently in many other examples. This recurrence can be considered, on the one hand, as a sample of the effects that the application of the law of common, secular, free and compulsory education had

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839446676-008 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - [CC BY]

among Italian immigrants in Argentina, an important feature in the process of cultural integration. On the other hand, the recurrent appearance of Argentine patriots and/or historical facts in the mouths of Italian characters in popular music songs can be considered a pedagogical strategy that sought to contribute to the immigrants' integration.

Finally, in the songbook *Nuevas y Últimas Canciones del Napolitano Cocoliche* (*New and Last Songs of the Neapolitan Cocoliche*) (1902: 15), which is entirely dedicated to this character, the following verses appear:

What do you think, Moreira About this Italian "payador"? Even the blonde girl looks at me When I sing to her about love And the circus owners Offer me a liter of wine So I can sing them milongas The ones typical in the countryside.	Cá te pariese Morieria Isto tano payatore Si asta la rubia ma mira Cuando le canto el amore Y del circo lo patrone Me da nu litro di caña Per ca le cante mironga Desa de per la campaña	Qué te parece Moreira Este italiano payador Si hasta la rubia me mira Cuando le canto de amor Y del circo los patrones Me dan un litro de caña Para que les cante milongas De esas de la campiña

In this last example, also written in "cocoliche", the relationship between creoles and Italians is again exposed to tension but in a different way. In this case, the singer—who is called Francisco Cocoliche—provokes the exemplary "gaucho" Juan Moreira. Not only does he emphasize that he is attractive to women—particularly blond woman—but he also remarks that he is such a good "payador" that the owners of the circuses pay him to interpret Argentine popular music from the countryside—that is to say, creole popular music. The level of integration that the singer shows seems to be such that he can comfortably live and grow in the receiving culture. With great irony, this character seems to defy the subaltern, loyal and respectful attitude that his Italian contemporaries adopt in the previous examples.

These limited yet representative cases show the different strategies that the broader Italian diasporic community developed in order to integrate into the creole culture. Those strategies did not univocally involve submissive or acritical appropriations but instead relied on multiple ways of negotiation, (re)presentation through difference, and differentiation from the other. Likewise, these examples show the spaces of resistance and the effects that this inescapable cultural exchange had on both creoles and Italians.

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839446676-008 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

By way of conclusion

As we have tried to show, the Italian diasporic identity developed by the extensive mass of immigrants that arrived in the transnational space of Buenos Aires city at the turn of the 19th century was neither homogeneous nor responsive to lineal and unequivocal processes of construction. Heterogeneous social actors managed their own inclusion and differentiation strategies in diverse discursive spheres. Thus, a small but significant Italian intellectual elite tried to construct, from the rostrum of their own specialized magazines, a distinctive erudite identity. Such an identity was basically built through difference when presenting the Italians as an "other" organically integrated into local culture from a paternalistic position of superiority. To develop this identity, the Italian elite strategically appropriated some aspects of the receiving culture and created an alternative narrative which positioned them as a fundamental influence in the development of Argentine culture. The ambitious and carefully designed product of that construction served to define only a very specific social sector of the Italian immigrants in Argentina. Even so, its analysis is relevant not only in terms of understanding the Argentina's complex cultural amalgam but also insofar as it highlights the unavoidable tensions that occur within the same socio-cultural group.

Simultaneously, the greater mass of Italian immigrants who remained outside this identity definition have developed their own processes of integration. In their case, popular arts and music expressions were the preferred symbolic arena where they could dispute and (re)build their own diasporic identity. In these expressions, Italians were almost obsessively represented. In some cases, they were characterized as a subordinate alterity, in other cases as a challenging one; sometimes mockingly, sometimes not. According to the examples analyzed here and to the other songbooks that constitute the corpus, this large sector of Italian immigrants seems to have managed different strategies to integrate into the creole culture. Even though it was not always in a submissive or uncritical way, the appropriation of strategic elements appears as a constant. The atypical use of the traditional attire of the "gaucho", the reference to patriots or to relevant historical events in Argentina, the mention of their "payador" skills, the use of the guitar and even the self-denomination as a creole, are some of the appropriations repeatedly mentioned in these documents. Besides, the refusal to completely adopt Spanish, represented in the permanent use of the "cocoliche", can be consid-

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839446676-008 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

ered as a strategy of resistance, not in the sense of rejection but of permanent autodefinition and (re)negotiation.

Both the elite and the broader sectors of the diasporic Italian society worked on the construction of their identity in relation to an "other"—ambiguous and potentially changing over time. In order to carry out these constructions, they adopted different strategies of appropriation and resistance that they put into play in specific discursive spheres. Through the enactment of their identities, the Italians in the diaspora produced and reproduced themselves, stressed their relations with otherness, recognized themselves in difference, and also redefined and integrated—sometimes more, sometimes less conflictingly—into the receiving culture.

Bibliography

Ang, Ien (2003): "Together-in-Difference: Beyond Diaspora, into Hybridity." In: Asian Studies Review 27/2, pp. 141-154. doi: 10.1080/10357820308713372.

Bohlman, Philip (1997): "Music, Myth, and History in the Mediterranean: Diaspora and the Return to Modernity." In: Ethnomusicology OnLine 3.

Bohlman, Philip (2002): World Music. A very short introduction, New York: Oxford University Press.

Blacking, John (1973): How Musical is Man?, Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Cara-Walker, Ana (1987): "Cocoliche: The Art of Assimilation and Dissimulation among Italians and Argentines." In: Latin American Research Review 22/3, pp. 37-67.

Casas, Matías E (2015): "Los gauchos de Perón. El Círculo Criollo El Rodeo, tradicionalistas y peronistas (1945-1955)." In: Prácticas de oficio. Investigación y reflexión en ciencias sociales 15.

Clifford, James (1994): "Diasporas." In: Cultural Anthropology 9/3, pp. 302-338.

Devoto, Fernando (2006): Historia de los italianos en Argentina, Buenos Aires: Biblos.

Feld, Steven (1994): "From Schizophonia to Schismogenesis: On the Discourses and Commodification Practices of 'World Music' and 'World Beat'." In: Charles Keil/Steven Feld (eds.), Music Grooves, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, pp. 257-289.

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839446676-008 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Fernández Latour de Botas, Olga (2006): "El cancionero como expresión de las creencias populares." In: Signos Universitarios 25/3, pp. 149-164.
Frith, Simon (2006): "La industria de la música popular." In: Simon Frith/Will Straw/John Street (eds.), La otra historia del rock, Barcelona: Robinbook, pp. 53-85.
Frith, Simon (1998): Performing Rites. On the Value of Popular Music, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
Galvez, Manuel (1943 [1913]): El solar de la raza, Buenos Aires: Poblet.
Garavaglia, Juan Carlos (2003): "Gauchos: identidad, identidades." In: Cahiers du CRICCAL 30/1, pp. 143-15. doi: 10.3406/ameri.2003.1615.
García, Miguel Ángel/Chicote, Gloria (2008): Voces de tinta. Estudio preliminar y antología comentada de 'Folklore Argentino' (1905) de Robert Lehmann-Nitsche, Buenos Aires: Edulp.
García, Miguel Ángel/Chicote, Gloria (2009): "La cultura de los márgenes devenida en objeto de la ciencia. Robert Lehmann-Nitsche en la Argentina." In: Iberoamericana. América Latina- España- Portugal 9/33, pp. 103-119. doi: 10.18441/ibam.9.2009.33.103-119.
Glick Schiller, Nina/Levitt, Peggy (2004): "Conceptualizing Simultaneity: A Transnational Social Field Perspective on Society." In: International Migration Review 38/3, pp. 1002-1039. doi: 10.1111/j.1747-7379.2004.tb00227.x.
Gordon, Edmund/Anderson, Mark (1999): "The African Diaspora: Toward an Ethnography of Diasporic Identification." In: The Journal of American Folklore 112/445, pp. 282-296. doi: 10.2307/541363.
Gorelik, Adrián (2016 [1998]): La grilla y el parque. Espacio público y cultura urbana en Buenos Aires, 1887-1936, Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes.
Hall, Stuart (2000): "The Multicultural Question." In: Un/settled multiculturalisms: diasporas, entanglements, London: Zed Books, pp. 209-241.
Halperín Donghi, Tulio (1982): Una nación para el desierto argentino, Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina.
Kartomi, Margareth (1981): "The Processes and Results of Musical Culture Contact: A Discussion of Terminology and Concepts." In: Ethnomusicology 25/2, pp. 224-249.
Ludmer, Josefina (2012 [1988]): El género gauchesco. Un tratado sobre la patria, Buenos Aires: Eterna cadencia.

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839446676-008 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Meintjes, Louise (1990): "Paul Simon's Graceland, South Africa, and the Mediation of Musical Meaning." In: Ethnomusicology 33, pp. 37-73. doi: 10.2307/852356.

Modolo, Vanina Edit (2016): "Análisis histórico-demográfico de la inmigración en la Argentina del Centenario al Bicentenario." In: Papeles de población 89, pp. 201-222.

Napoli-Vita, Vincenzo di (1906): "Teatri e artisti italiani (1813-1900)." In: Camera di Commercio ed Arti, pp. 357-400.

Nettl, Bruno (1980): "Trasplantaciones de músicas, confrontaciones de sistemas y mecanismos de rechazo." In: Revista Musical Chilena 34, pp. 5-17.

Oszlak, Oscar (1997 [1982]): La formación del Estado argentino. Orden, progreso y organización nacional, Buenos Aires: Planeta.

Pelinski, Ramón (2000): "El tango nómade." In: Ramón Pelinski, Invitación a la etnomusicología. Quince fragmentos y un tango, Madrid: Akal, pp. 201-238.

Pelinski, Ramón (2009): "Tango nómade. Una metáfora de la globalización." In: Enrique Cámara de Landa (ed.), Escritos sobre tango en el Río de la Plata y en la diáspora, Buenos Aires: Centro feca, pp. 65-129.

Podestá, José (2003 [1930]): Medio siglo de farándula: memorias de José J. Podestá, Buenos Aires: Galerna.

Prieto, Adolfo (1988): El discurso criollista en la formación de la Argentina moderna, Buenos Aires: Sudamericana.

Restrepo, Eduardo (2007): "Identidades: planteamientos teóricos y sugerencias metodológicas para su estudio." In: Jangwa Pana 5, pp. 24-35. doi: 10.21676/16574923.442.

Romero, José Luis (2004 [1965]): Breve historia de la Argentina, Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

Rogers, Richard (2006): "From Cultural Exchange to Transculturation: A Review and Reconceptualization of Cultural Appropriation." In: Communication Theory 16, pp. 474-503. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-2885.2006.00277.x.

Rubione, Alfredo (2004): "Aportes para el deslinde de algunas categorías críticas de literatura argentina." In: Hologramática 10/5, pp. 37-60.

Sánchez, Santiago Javier (2011): "Hispanofobia e hispanofilia en la Argentina." In: Tinkuy. Boletín de investigación y debate 16, pp. 93-106.

Seibel, Beatriz (1993): Historia del circo, Argentina: Colihue.

Slobin, Mark (1994): "Music in Diaspora: The View from Euro-America." In: Diaspora 3/3, pp. 243-251. doi: 10.1353/dsp.1994.0012.

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839446676-008 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Solomon, Thomas (2015): "Theorizing Diaspora and Music." In: Lidé Města. Urban People 17, pp. 201-219.
Turino, Thomas/Lea, James (2004): Identity and the Arts in Diaspora Communities, Warren: Harmonie Park Press.
Vega, Carlos (2010 [1981]): Apuntes para la historia del movimiento tradicionalista argentino, Buenos Aires: Instituto Nacional de Musicología.
Walsh, Catherine (2012): "Interculturalidad y (de)colonialidad: Perspectivas críticas y políticas." In: Visão Global 15/1-2, pp. 61-74.
Weber, José Ignacio (2011): "Hacia una sociología de los críticos italianos inmigrantes como mediadores y traductores en la Buenos Aires de fin de siglo." In: AdVersus 21, pp. 101-124.
Weber, José Ignacio (2016): Modelos de interacción de las culturas en las publicaciones artístico-culturales italianas de Buenos Aires (1890-1910), Buenos Aires: unpublished doctoral thesis.
Wimmer, Andreas/Glick Schiller, Nina (2002): "Methodological nationalism and beyond: nation-state building, migration and the social sciences." In: Global Networks 2/4, pp. 301-334. doi: 10.1111/1471-0374.00043.

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839446676-008 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839446676-008 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - [CC BY]