

**ITALIAN IMMIGRANTS IN CONTEMPORARY BUENOS AIRES:  
THEIR RESPONSES TO CHANGING  
POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CIRCUMSTANCES**

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*Italian Immigrants in Contemporary Buenos Aires:  
their Responses to Changing Political, Economic and Social Circumstances*

**ABSTRACT**

The thesis is a study of Italians and their descendants in Buenos Aires and shows how they responded as individuals, families and groups, to changing political, economic and social situations in 20th century Argentina.

Fieldresearch focused in particular on upper middle class and upper class Italians, and chapter 1 discusses their status with regard to the class structure of Argentine society.

Italy is now among the world's top industrial nations, and Argentina, once a major immigration country, is now part of the so-called Third World. Chapters 2 and 3 provide the historical background to this 'inversion of roles' and consider its impact on Italians and their descendants.

Chapter 4 is a detailed examination of the Argentine in 1988/89, a crucial year, characterized by the first democratic succession of presidents in 60 years, as well as by chronic economic problems. Chapter 5 familiarizes the reader with the urban context, where people live, work and interact: the historically formed geographic and social subdivisions of Buenos Aires.

Chapter 6 is a study of Italian elite families and their descendants. Taking a diachronic approach, it investigates related issues of ethnic and national identity, class distinctions and political ideologies. These concerns remain consistent throughout the thesis:

Chapter 7, taking a more chronological approach, looks at the narratives of three old men who came to Argentina in the times of mass immigration. In chapter 8, the controversial nature of becoming Argentine, characterized by interrupted processes of modernization and economic decline, surfaces in a discussion between an Italian and a descendant of Italians. The young generation descendants of Italian immigrants and their particular distinctions of food, language, class and political ideologies are analyzed in chapter 9. The politics of ethnicity and ethnic leadership are scrutinized in chapter 10.

The concluding chapter 11, reflecting partly on the permutations of the image of 'America' among immigrants and descendants, develops some of the earlier issues in view of more theoretical concerns of image formation related to ethnic and national identity.

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## NOTE ON TRANSLATION AND USE OF NAMES

All translations from Spanish and Italian texts are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

Spanish terms and quotations will appear underlined, *Italian* ones will be underlined and italicized.

All quotations, and some of the ethnographic descriptions appear single-spaced. Square brackets [ ] are used to indicate my additions to quotations.

All names of persons have been changed, and where appropriate, also those of places and institutions in order to preserve the anonymity of informants.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Note that most abbreviations which occur only are explained in the main text and have not been incorporated into this list.

**AGN** Archivo General de la Nación National Archive, Buenos Aires

**CGT** Confederación General del Trabajo Argentine Confederation of Trade Unions

**CO.EM.IT.** Comitato dell'Emigrazione Italiana

Committee elected by Italian immigrants of a consular district

**DC** Democrazia Cristiana Italian Christian Democratic Party

**DGM** Dirección General de Migraciones Argentine Immigration Office

**ERP** Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo Trotskyist guerrilla group

**PCI** Partito Comunista Italiano (since 1991 PDS Partito Democratico della Sinistra),

Italian Communist Party, since 1991 Democratic Party of the Left

**PSI** Partito Socialista Italiano Italian Socialist Party

**UCeDe** Unión Centro Demócrata Argentine neo-liberal right wing party

**UCR** Unión Cívica Radical Argentine Radical Party

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Ethnographic fieldwork, its preparation and later analysis when writing a thesis, are an expensive undertaking. I am grateful to the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), whose committed support from October 1987 to December 1990 enabled me to carry out my Ph.D.- project. Thanks are also due to the ESRC for a fees scholarship from January 1990 to January 1992, to LSE's Department of Anthropology (Malinowski Memorial Fund Research Award, 1991), and to the Royal Anthropological Institute (Radcliffe-Brown Memorial Fund Award, 1991).

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

#### 1. Aim of the Study

This is a study about people in what used to be one of the world's greatest immigrant metropolises, Buenos Aires.

My interest is to bring to the foreground the lives of Italians and their descendants, showing how they responded as individuals, families and groups, to changing political, economic and social situations in the 20th century. In particular, the thesis will reveal how different large-scale economic and political developments in Argentina and Italy have impinged on the lives of immigrants and their descendants.

By 'Italians', I mean people born in Italy, and by 'descendants', I mean those who have at least one Italian ancestor. The descendants of Italians I will also refer to as Italo-Argentines. Argentines may or may not acknowledge Italian origins when they refer to themselves and others.

In the thesis I will thus employ *etic* definitions<sup>1</sup>, which in contemporary Buenos Aires

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<sup>1</sup>On *etic* (outsider) categories and *emic*, ('inside') categories of a member of a given group or community, cf. the recent discussion between linguist Kenneth Pike, who introduced these terms in the 1950s, and Marvin Harris (Headland/Pike/Harris 1990).

include Italians and descendants of Italians who declare themselves to be Italian or of Italian descent *and those who do not*.

I have chosen Italians and their descendants for two reasons.

The first concerns the pre-eminence of Italians in Argentine society. In times of mass immigration (1890-1930) they were the largest group of immigrants and, with their descendants, they form the largest group of European origin in the Argentine population<sup>2</sup>. In fact, being a 'white' Argentine in the littoral provinces most affected by immigration, implies almost of having at least one Italian ancestor. For a much longer time than the actual period of mass immigration, being an Italian in Argentina meant being an immigrant par excellence. Secondly, the research grew out of my earlier interest in Italian migration, an interest which dates back to 1978 when I first visited Danilo Dolci's research centre in Partinico, Sicily. In 1985, I carried out my first fieldwork on returned labour migrants in the mountain village of Sutera (Schneider 1990). Though transoceanic migration from Sutera was almost exclusively to the United States, I came across one man who had worked in Argentina in the 1920s. His was a single case, but further aroused my curiosity about Italian migration to Argentina.

In so far as Italians and their descendants form an integral part of the population of Buenos Aires, this study is as much a study about porteños<sup>3</sup> (the inhabitants of Buenos Aires) as about Italians. Anyone who resides in Buenos Aires, knows the dialect (lunfardo) and does not insist on being something else, can be labelled a porteño. Thus all Italians and their descendants in the city are potentially porteños, although of course not all porteños are Italians or of Italian descent.

Though advisers on my project in Europe as well as in Argentina had warned me of the difficulties of doing research on such a large and with such a diffuse group, I was

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<sup>2</sup>Spanish remained Argentina's national language, even after the massive Italian immigration. This is explained by high rates of illiteracy and a marked diversity of regional dialects spoken by Italian immigrants, who adopted Spanish as a lingua franca to communicate among themselves and with other European immigrants. Furthermore, the Argentine State enforced a deliberate policy of integration by providing free primary education for everybody born in Argentina, including the descendants of immigrants.

<sup>3</sup> from the Spanish puerto, port.

particularly intrigued by the multifaceted, ambiguous and almost elusive character of Italian ethnicity. I also felt that studying people who are intrinsically and typically part of the immigrant nation would tell me more about Argentine national identity, than concentrating on a more clearly separated group, such as a class or a political party.

Or to paraphrase the argument in the metaphorical style adopted by scholars of ethnicity: I was less interested in studying a group, like the German Argentines or the Anglo-Argentines, which had maintained a clearly demarcated boundary vis-à-vis the rest of Argentine society. Instead, I went '*inland*' to explore the vast territory of mainstream porteños, Italo-Argentines and Italians whose shifting distinguishing features would only manifest themselves occasionally.

There was little about ethnicity in most of the literature I reviewed, which added to my curiosity about what was 'out there'. Older research traditions, such as Argentine Sociology's version of the 'melting-pot' paradigm, had basically declared, without much consideration of ethnographic detail, that the fusion and amalgamation process of the different immigrant groups was a *fait accompli*. For such scholars that was the end of the matter. The new Argentina consisted henceforth only of different classes and interest groups. The general lack of interest in the historical, sociological, and anthropological study of different immigrant groups<sup>4</sup> was all the more surprising in view of the fact that Argentina's experience of mass immigration was comparable with that of the classic examples of Canada, Australia, and the United States. In fact, Argentina was second only to the United States regarding the total number of immigrants, and had received more foreigners in relation to its original population than any other country. By 1914 Buenos Aires was a city composed largely of foreigners<sup>5</sup> and was therefore unusual in the world, New York and Chicago being other notable examples.

A major aim of the thesis is to contribute to the study of contemporary urban Argentina by providing a much needed ethnographic description of European immigrants and their descendants. However, my main concern is less with the history of mass immigration than with the more turbulent recent past and present, as it was lived and perceived by the people of this study. I also show in what sense individuals may be understood to construct their identities with reference to the immigrant experience.

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<sup>4</sup>A review of the literature is part of subsection 5 and chapters 2 and 5.

<sup>5</sup>In 1914, there were 797.969 foreigners, or 50.6% of the city's population, living in the Federal District of Buenos Aires, cf. also chapter 5.

Argentina has long ceased to be a desired destination for many European emigrants. I will argue in the thesis that between the times of mass immigration and the present, the two nations, Italy and Argentina, have *reversed* positions. What was the poor emigrant nation, is now amongst the world's top industrial nations, and what was a major immigration country is now part of the so-called 'Third World'. In the chapters, 2 and 3, I provide the historical background to this changed relationship which I term the 'inversion of roles'.

In chapter 4, I will then take the reader through a detailed examination of Argentina in 1988/89, a crucial year which was marked by the first democratic presidential succession in 60 years and by chronic economic problems. Thus chapter 4 sets the scene of the political and economic circumstances in which porteños lived under during my period of fieldwork in 1988/89. Chapter 5 familiarizes the reader with the urban context where the people of my study live, work and interact, making reference to the historically formed geographical and social subdivisions of Buenos Aires.

Chapter 6 is a study of four networks of families of Italians and their descendants who now belong to the upper and upper middle classes. Taking a diachronic approach, this chapter investigates the related issues of ethnic and national identity, class distinctions and political ideologies. Whilst these concerns remain consistent throughout the thesis, the emphasis shifts with each chapter. Chapter 7, taking a seemingly more chronological approach, looks at the narratives of three old men who came to Argentina during the period of mass immigration. Each of them typifies, but by no means exhausts the different ways of becoming Argentine in this century. In chapter 8, the controversial nature of becoming Argentine, characterized by interrupted processes of modernization and economic decline, surfaces in a discussion between two informants. The younger generation descendants of Italian immigrants, along with their particular distinctions and contradistinctions in food, language, class and political ideology are analysed in chapter 9. The politics of ethnicity, the formation of ethnic idioms reflecting particular interests, and the issue of ethnic leadership are approached in chapter 10.

The concluding chapter reflects partly on the permutations of the notion of 'America' that is held among the informants. This final chapter tries to develop some of the earlier issues in view of more theoretical concerns of individual 'image formation' related to ethnic and national identity.

## 2. Porteños and Italians:

### The Issues of Class and Period of Immigration

In 1980, the *Argentine* census listed 487,000 persons as "born in Italy", whereas *Italian* statistics, referring to 1981, speak of 1,278,023 "Italians in Argentina". The higher Italian 'count' is due to the different criteria of Italian consulates reporting back to the Italian statistics office, ISTAT. Their calculations included those from the times of mass immigration whose deaths had not been reported to them, second, third and fourth generation Italo-Argentines with dual nationality<sup>6</sup>, and naturalized Argentines (cf. Favero/Biago 1985:75,82).

As I will demonstrate in the thesis, ethnic identities *do not match* juridical boundaries, but rather shift contextually with generation, historical period and social status. A person can thus be born in Italy, be Italian for the Argentine census, have Argentine nationality and describe him or herself as "Argentine". Another person, who is classified as "Argentine", may apply for an Italian passport (because his or her grandfather was Italian), take Italian language courses and is active in Italian associations. Statisticians have divided arriving immigrants up into 'periods' (cf. chapter 2), but the idea that immigrants arriving at the same time form homogeneous '*generations*' proves to be illusory<sup>7</sup>. I intend to make it clear throughout the thesis that neither the period of immigration nor the actual position of descent from immigrants is a sufficient variable for explaining differences with regard to ethnic identity, language maintenance and social status.

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<sup>6</sup>Since 1912 there has been an Italian law of dual nationality (*legge n.555*). Descendants of Italians can apply for Italian passports when they can show proof that either their mother(M), father(F), paternal grandfather(FF), or paternal great-grandfather(FFF) had Italian nationality (even when these later became naturalized Argentines).

<sup>7</sup>Kertzer (1983:127-129,141) has similarly questioned the usefulness of the concept of 'generation' for immigration research (and its more general sociological validity), because, according to its usage, it can denote kinship descent, cohort, life-stage and historical period.

Initially, I directed my field research towards those Italian immigrants who came to Argentina during the last period of European immigrations after World War II (cf. chapter 2 and 3). But it soon turned out that this categorization was artificial and arbitrary since post-World War II immigrants live and act in a complex relationship with immigrants of earlier migrations. One phenomenon frequently encountered was that of single men who had come to Argentina after World War II and then married into families of earlier Italian immigration.

The table below shows the distribution of 106 people with whom I conducted interviews. They are classified according to both 'generation' and period of immigration.

It should be emphasized that these are not *all* the persons consulted during my fieldwork in Buenos Aires. However, the data pertaining to them has been recorded in the form of individual interviews. Data on other persons appears in notes on the Italian association and in my fieldwork diary. I use 'generation' here in the restricted sense of a sociological 'cohort'<sup>8</sup> and define as first-generation immigrants, persons born in Italy, that is Italians. In the case of descendants, that is all *second and subsequent* generation immigrants, the period of immigration refers to the 'latest' immigrant in the direct maternal or paternal line. This criterion of counting descent from the last Italian ancestor with reference to ego, shows again the arbitrariness of any 'objective' periodization of the generations of immigrants. To give an example: in order to define their *own* generation of immigration, descendants of marriages between spouses of *different* generations of immigration will by no means automatically refer to the last maternal or paternal Italian ancestor in the direct line. It depends often on context, family tradition and historical period, whether or not an informant wishes to emphasize early Italian immigrants in the family or later ones (cf. chapter 8).

The following distribution of descent is therefore based on *my* criteria and does not necessarily reflect informants' views.

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<sup>8</sup>A cohort is group of persons who share a certain characteristic, for example, 'people who were born in Italy and migrated to Argentina'. From this *I do not infer any other characteristic*, for, in fact these people arrived at different historical times, at different stages of their lives and in different social and economic circumstances (cf. also Kertzer 1983:141).

Table 1:  
Persons from Interviews: Generation and Period of Immigration

Generation of Immigration	Period of Immigration		
	before WWII	between WWI and WWII	after WWII
1	2	5	52
2	3	13	12
3	2	4	
4			
5	1		

persons of non-Italian descent and Italians only temporarily living in Buenos Aires: 12

Italians and their descendants are dispersed throughout Buenos Aires (cf. chapter 5). Having been inspired by Marcus' (1983:16-45), Cohen's (1981:219-237) and McDonogh's (1986:3-14,203) recent anthropological work on elites<sup>9</sup>, my original idea was to restrict my research to a few Italian families and their descendants who are part of the Argentine upper class (clase alta), previously studied by sociologists and historians: Imaz (1965, 1968), Sábato (1988), and Lewis (1990). I wished to investigate how ideologies and practices relating to ethnic and national identity, and distinctions of status and prestige could change with relation to the recent turbulent political and economic history of Argentina. The results of that research are presented in chapter 6.

In the field, however, it proved to be very difficult to get access to elite families and to establish continuous and friendly relations with them. I decided thus to widen my approach and to include in my interviews Italians and descendants of upper middle class (clase media alta) and middle class background (clase media). I also carried out participant observation in a number of Italian associations (cf. chapter 10).

My classification of person's class status combines ascriptive and achieved criteria, rather than simply labelling them according to external criteria (such as an economist might do). And as I will show in the thesis, immigrants and their descendants perceived their class status as an achieved one through a *process* of social mobility during their lives (cf.

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<sup>9</sup>Anthropologists, building on the theoretical insights of marxist, dependency and early Italian elite theory (Mosca and Pareto) took interest in elites for two reasons. Firstly, 'peripheral' elites were seen as providing the link between the economic metropolises and the peripheries, acting as more or less cohesive interest groups who share common symbols and sometimes regionalist and nationalist ideologies. Secondly, their relatively small numbers made them particularly feasible for anthropological study, once the researcher had been accepted by them.



chapters 6 and 7).

In practical terms, I first used ascriptive categories, that is to say categories by which persons were either labelling themselves or others. The self-ascription of class status and ascription by others, including my own perception, sometimes produced contradictory results. In all cases I have tried to correlate the ascriptive criteria with external criteria (derived from the existing sociological literature), such as residence, profession, control of the means of production and, when available, additional information such as the possession of US dollar accounts abroad.

But like the ascriptive categories used by individuals, 'external' criteria, such as classifications of residence and control over means of production, require a prior knowledge of the class structure of Argentine society. Palomino (1987:31,136-148) discusses critically the difficulties of devising class categories from Argentine census data. The 1980 census, for example, divides the economically active population of Argentina into salaried (72%) and non-salaried workers (28%). The non-salaried are divided further into employers (6%; empleadores), self-employed (19%; cuentapropistas) and those working for their families (3%; familiares). Palomino distinguishes between employers with up to five employees (microempleadores) and employers with more than five employees. The latter he subdivides further (but without giving the number of employees) into small, medium and large employers (pequeños, medianos y grandes empleadores). However, class structures cut across these occupational categories: the microempleadores and a large part of the self-employed run minute businesses and are often not better off than salaried workers. And about 14% of the employers with more than five employees are listed in the census as professionals, directors, or supervisors. It is suggested by Palomino that this group of 25.000 non-salaried people, includes the 'large entrepreneurs' of Argentina (ibid.:141-145). A part of this group would thus belong to the *upper class*, but not all of the upper class consists of large entrepreneurs. Palomino recommends the categories devised by Germani in 1955 as a useful approach to the Argentine class structure. These combine the criteria of occupational status and social class. Germani distinguished between upper class (clase alta), middle class (clase media) and lower class (clase baja o clase popular). The clase alta included a small fraction of the employers (large entrepreneurs in agriculture, industry, and finance), some self-employed (like lawyers and doctors) with particular high social prestige and a high income, and some highly salaried persons with top positions in large companies. Persons who received high incomes from rents on property were also included (from Palomino

1987:145). The upper middle class, on the other hand, was composed of a part of the medium and small employers, self-employed and non-manual salaried workforce. The clase baja consisted of the manual, salaried workforce. In 1965, the main categories of Germani's scheme were used in a survey on the distribution of income in Argentina. The findings confirmed that a small fraction of the population, that is 1%, of heterogeneous occupational status (in which large entrepreneurs, landowners, self-employed and people living from rents predominated) received 25% of the national income (Palomino 1987:147).

Still, while Germani's categories allow for the existence of segments in the Argentine class structure, they too are based upon ascriptive categories such as 'social prestige'. Social prestige is not only difficult to quantify but it changes its connotations over time and requires an understanding of the specific context of Argentine society. In my usage of different categories of class in Argentine society, I will generally follow the terminology suggested by Palomino (1987:145, based on Germani 1955). I will, however, also refer to ascriptions made by informants, which suggest different points of emphasis and implication. With reference to the clase alta and clase media alta the additional criteria of residence and access to the means of production are defined as follows: the upper middle and upper class residential quarters of Buenos Aires are located in the zona norte, including the northern suburbs (cf. chapter 5). Ownership of the means of production, such as in medium or large businesses, that is to say those with employees, factories and large-scale farms (estancias), indicates upper middle and upper class status. US dollar accounts abroad (mainly in Uruguay, the USA and Switzerland) are another clear indicator of upper middle and upper class status. According to the above criteria, out of the 106 informants listed above, 31 persons are from the upper class, 53 from the upper middle class, and 22 from the middle class.

The following map shows the approximate spatial distribution of interview locations on a map of Greater Buenos Aires.







### 3. Fieldwork and the collection of ethnographic data

Given the dispersion of Italians and their descendants over an extensive city where I could not depart from notions of ethnic neighbourhoods (cf. chapter 5), I used a flexible method of doing fieldresearch in the form of interviews and participant observation with informants as unrelated individuals, members of families and associations.

I carried out 163 interviews with 106 informants over a period of 15 months (September 1988 to December 1989). Contacts varied in length and character. Approximately half of these people were interviewed only once, which I shall explain in a moment. A very few interviews consisted of just telephone conversations, whereas others implied a whole day or even, in some cases, a whole weekend spent with the people concerned. The majority of meetings, however, were prearranged, fixed interviews, often conducted in the question-answer pattern of an open interview, lasting between one to two hours. According to circumstances, different techniques of data-recording were employed, such as tape recording, note-taking during the interview and writing up from memory.

I conducted interviews both in Spanish and Italian. I began usually in Italian when I assumed that the informant would speak it. This was done in order to determine the degree to which people could speak and understand Italian. Some informants actually understood Italian but did not speak it<sup>10</sup>.

In times of mass-immigration, immigrants spoke a mixture of Italian and Spanish (cocoliche). Linguistic research has shown that in this 'pidgin'-language both Italian was hispanicized and Spanish italianized<sup>11</sup> (cf. Großmann 1926, Meo Zilio/Rossi 1970, Whinnom 1971, Acuña-Terrugi 1982, Cara-Walker 1987). By contrast, the dialect, or probably better still, 'argot' of Buenos Aires, lunfardo, includes influences from many

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<sup>10</sup>See the conversation between an immigrant and a descendant of immigrants in chapter 8, one of them speaking Spanish and the other Italian.

<sup>11</sup>Acuña-Terrugi (1982:35-82) employed the term 'linguistic confusion' to characterize the fluid boundaries of cocoliche, which would make it impossible to isolate with precision the respective influences of Spanish and Italian. Moreover, Malmberg (1950:170) argued that the Spanish spoken in 'cosmopolitan' Buenos Aires does not display fixed rules of pronunciation.

Whinnom (1971:102) has disputed altogether that cocoliche was a pidgin-language because it did not standardize its grammatical rules and vocabulary, and soon developed in the direction the target language, Argentine Spanish; a point that had already been made by Großmann (1926:148-154,159).

immigrant languages, but particularly from Genovese Italian<sup>12</sup>.

Approximately one third of the meetings took place at the home of the individuals and families, another third at their place of employment (usually an office). The remaining third consisted of informal meetings in bars, restaurants, theatres and cinemas.

During an exploratory phase of approximately three months I contacted Italian institutions (e.g. the Italian Cultural Institute) and Argentine academic institutions<sup>13</sup>. However, given the busy lives of the people I wished to meet, interviews could only be carried out at very irregular intervals, depending very much upon when it suited them.

I thus decided to employ a *double strategy* of individual interviews and participant observation, by attending the meetings of Italian associations. I attended some 70 executive committee meetings, general assemblies and social functions at the COEMIT<sup>14</sup>, FEDITALIA (umbrella organisation of Italian associations in Argentina), Círculo Italiano (Italian Club), the Italian Chamber of Commerce in Argentina, and welfare organisations such as the Patronato Italiano, the Unione e Benevolenza, and the Patronato INCA.

Apart from notes based on individual interviews and meetings at the Italian associations, I kept a diary throughout my time in the field which includes observations on daily life in Buenos Aires and notes on conversations with porteños of all classes and ethnic backgrounds.

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<sup>12</sup>Linguistic research has shown that Italian immigrants adopted Argentine Spanish as a 'lingua franca' much faster in cities than in the countryside, in order to communicate with other immigrants and Italians who spoke unintelligible dialects. This process was slower in the countryside, especially where Italians lived in ethnically homogeneous colonies (cf. Blanco et al. 1982:113). For a fuller discussion of language and ethnographic examples, see chapters 9 and 10.

<sup>13</sup>I also contacted German and German-Argentine institutions. My original research proposal aimed to compare Italians and Germans in Buenos Aires. In practical terms, this meant a further fragmentation of my ethnographic time, so I eventually abandoned this line of research.

<sup>14</sup>*Comitato dell'Emigrazione Italiana*, the elected committee of Italian immigrants in the consular district of Buenos Aires, cf. chapter 10.

My main problem of method was, that having been an anthropologist who had carried out a village study, I had now to come to terms with fieldwork in a metropolis.

Fieldwork in Buenos Aires involving individuals who do not form a visible group or are not bound by any single institution, and are only partly defined by social class and ethnic background, meant research in short meetings all over the city. There was no continuous flux of ethnographic time; rather there existed time-sets, that is time-segments spent with different persons, often with very long intervals between them. Due to their work-schedules and the rhythms of their busy lives, I saw the people I was interested in not in daily but weekly and monthly intervals.

To illustrate the spatial and temporal fragmentation intrinsic to this kind of *urban* fieldwork, which was *not* confined to the village-type boundaries of a particular neighbourhood, ethnic ghetto or kinship-based residence group, the following table shows the irregularity of meetings with members of one nuclear family, consisting of three people.

Table 2: Intervals between Contacts

Intervals between Contacts	Family Members Present	Location
	1	bar in Buenos Aires(BA)
10 days	1	telephone conversation
1 week	2	Italian Chamber of Commerce
3 weeks	3	home BA and Province of BA
1 month	1	office and restaurant BA
1 week	1	telephone conversation
2 weeks	1	Lion's club BA
2 weeks	1	2cd office BA
20 days	1	3rd office BA
10 weeks	1	telephone conversation
4 days	1	bar BA
2 weeks	3	home BA
1 week	1	factory BA
2 weeks	1	bar BA

I did not live with a particular family as there is no tradition of renting out a room among upper middle class and upper class families. I rented a flat in San Telmo, a middle class area in the South of Buenos Aires (cf. chapter 5). My neighbours in this block of flats, a woman in her fifties and her son (an art historian of my age) became close friends. Soon, I was invited for tea, lunch and dinner. The discussions and partly shared lives



with these neighbours, as well as with other middle class porteños in my neighbourhood (like the owner and the waiters of the restaurant where I used to eat frequently, the newspaper seller, and the greengrocer) were all important for familiarizing me with Buenos Aires. Living in a middle class area, and partly sharing the lives of people who were not my 'target group' in the strict sense, helped me to view my interview-group from a different angle in the wider context of porteño-society.

The telephone was an essential means of setting up appointments, and usually I went out of my flat to interview people. I had to go to them - they would not seek me out where I lived<sup>15</sup>. With a monthly scholarship of about 600US \$ per month I enjoyed the income of a person on a good salary. Working class salaries paid in the local currency, Australes, were equal to around \$100 to 150\$ per month<sup>16</sup>. It is almost assumed that Europeans are wealthier than most Argentines, and my scholarship meant that in 1989 I had an income comparable to those at the lower end of the upper middle class.

Finally, I would like to draw attention to the *different types of data* recorded during fieldwork. I had to make a virtue of the fragmentation of fieldwork and to draw my information from a variety of sources which included interviews, participant observation, personal documents of informants<sup>17</sup>, archival and pamphlet material<sup>18</sup>, as well as films and photographs. However, due to the rather reclusive attitude of my upper-class informants, I was not able to gather letters or larger collections of correspondence from them.

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<sup>15</sup>I made extensive use of Buenos Aires' dense network of public transport. The buses (colectivos) run also on minor roads, and a medium-sized underground system is in operation. The suburbs are served by trains. Eventual hazards (cf. chapter 4) included bus and train strikes, and power cuts affecting the underground. I also used taxis, which were affordable, an average journey cost about 70 pence.

<sup>16</sup>For a discussion on exchange rates, inflation and informants making calculations in US\$, see chapter 4.

<sup>17</sup>See, for example, the autobiography of an immigrant in chapter 6.

<sup>18</sup>The main sources for archival and pamphlet material were the Italian institutions and associations in Buenos Aires where I also carried out participant observation (CO.EM.IT., Italian Chamber of Commerce and FEDITALIA; cf. chapter 10), and to a lesser extent the Archivo General de la Nación and the Dirección de Migraciones, cf. chapter 3.

With regard to the period of mass immigration(1870-1930), the best collections of letters from immigrants to Argentina are the critical editions of letters by Franzina (1979) and Baily/Ramella (1980)<sup>19</sup>. Letters are important as documents of migration history because they throw a particular light on the mutual production of perceptions in the migration process. They were often the discursive medium in which the emigrants expressed their hopes, fears, and anger about the new situation. They are particularly revealing of the processes of image-formation, the selective reading and interpretation of the migration experience. Many of the characteristic features employed in the letters such as the brightening up, distortion and glorification of events as well as their pejorative tainting, all worked consciously and unconsciously to convey a particular image to the reader (a relative or a friend). They anticipate in many ways similar narratives of contemporary immigrants and descendants of immigrants recounting their migratory experience (cf.chapters 6 to 9 and 11).

Not only do these letters tell us something about the character of the writer and the addressee, they are also revealing about the wider context in which they often literally 'appeared'. Far from being the private affairs of relatives separated by an ocean, these letters were in fact often published in the local papers and circulars of the cities and villages in Italy from which the writers had originally emigrated. And, according to the ideological position of the publication, be it the 'Agricultural Herald' of the local landowners who in that particular year and region were against emigration because depopulation had already meant a severe shortage of cheap manual labour, or be it the local paper tied to interests of the emigration agencies and large ship owners in favour of emigration<sup>20</sup>, such letters were selectively published to further propagandist ends (Franzina 1979:93).

*Life-histories* were a particular kind of data obtained through interviews. These life-histories are constructed narratives: they bestow meaning to past events retrospectively. In doing so, the 'narrators' emphasize certain events, play down others, and leave some out altogether. My interest in these life-histories lay less in the factual veracity of events (though in some cases I was able to check them), than in the type of events people chose to tell me, and how and why they told them (cf. also Faraday/Plummer 1979:776, Agar

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<sup>19</sup>cf. also Ferrari (1989), Gibelli (1989) and Anderegg (1990).

<sup>20</sup>cf. chapter 2 for the debate on emigration in Italy.

1980:225). In chapter 6, I have been able to balance the accounts and life-histories of several family members with those of other members of the family. Chapter 7, on the other hand, draws completely on individual life-histories<sup>21</sup>. Other chapters, such as 4, 8, 9 and 10, are based much more on participant observation of activities shared with the people I studied.

#### 4. Fieldwork with Argentines of European descent, and Differences of perception

When I was doing earlier fieldwork in Sutura (Sicily), people were generally available to my enquiries, once I had become known in the village. I could go to the houses of most people and visit them during the socially acceptable hours of the day. Furthermore, the *piazza* (village square) provided me with the opportunity to talk regularly with men and women who were on the afternoon stroll (*passeggiata*), or men and boys who were just 'hanging around' during the daytime. Going shopping and walking all over the extensive village territory, I would also get to know married and widowed women who would only go out of the house for shopping, doing some work in the immediate vicinity or chatting with female neighbours. Even if somebody was not available at a particular time, there was always somebody else to talk to, or an incident to observe.

*By contrast*, in metropolitan Buenos Aires, I felt that I was extremely dependent on the good-will of individuals for interviews. Ethnographic data-gathering not only seemed to

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<sup>21</sup>*Life-histories* have already been used in migration research on Argentina. One example is Marsal (1969) reproducing the life history of a Spanish immigrant to Argentina. Some scattered pieces of life-histories are also found in Korn (1988). Abou (1972) provides an interesting collection of very intimately and personally narrated life-histories of second and third generation Lebanese immigrants in Argentina. In the late 1970s a group of Argentine anthropologists carried out a systematic project on the life-histories of Italian and Spanish immigrants (García et al. 1982). Based on a sample of 80 life histories, the authors observed among these immigrants a general trend towards the secularization and unification of regional and religious identities in the new urban environment. The existence of relatives and friends in Argentina seems to have been the most common incentive to migration, and it was in the second generation that descendants of immigrants acquired an 'Argentine' identity, that is to say they refused to speak Italian or an Italian dialect and professed themselves to be Argentines (ibid.:200,206,209).

be fragmented, but also fugitive and fragile. Information was often collected at one meeting which was difficult to repeated or check upon. The expanse of the city, the geographic dispersion of interviews, and the class status of people who would somehow 'grant' interview- time to me at their convenience, reinforced my initial impression that ethnographic information would only come in inimitable instalments. It was only much later, and to a greater part *after* I came back from the field, that I would perceive the *whole* time that I had spent in Buenos Aires as an evolving process of understanding, consisting of many different pieces of which the interviews were only one part.

When I began the research, and met a descendant of upper class Italians for the first time, he promised that he would introduce me to his father and indeed to the whole family for interview. He also promised that his mother would compile a list of people I could speak to. I was indeed able to carry out more interviews with his parents, who were living a very reclusive life in an upper class suburb of Buenos Aires and, with their help, I also got new interviewees. But I never managed to meet the original informant again, a man in his late 30s. For reasons I never understood, he would never answer the telephone, and sometimes his existence at that number was denied altogether. In another instance, even my credentials from LSE, the Italian Institute of Buenos Aires and upper class Italian friends, proved to be fruitless when I wanted to interview a particular Italian executive of a multinational company. And once I had finally established contact with people, it was very difficult to maintain. I continually had to follow them up and to phone for new appointments. Only after an extended period, when a certain familiarity or friendship developed between researcher and the subjects of the study, would people come back to me, and then only very irregularly. Insisting on further interviews was often a delicate matter. My basic aim was to meet people as often as possible, to share at least partly their lives. Sometimes, requests for further encounters were thus greeted with surprised reactions, such as: "I thought I had already told you everything". Most of the persons interviewed believed that I was interested in statistical and historical data about immigration, but not in their personal life-styles, life-histories or political opinions. I usually introduced myself as a student of Italian immigration who was interested in the personal experience of the informant. Most people were quite willing to meet, but often responded in very general terms on what they thought about Italian immigration in Argentina. That was interesting data, but usually it took several meetings to reach a more personal level, especially as upper class people were not interested in confiding details of their private lives to a stranger. Clearly, I had to use a variety of research methods.

I was quite used to writing up from memory, because in Sicily there is a general suspicion of a person writing down information about another person.

In Buenos Aires, I did not always explain to people that I was recording information about them. In particular those with whom I became familiar and mixed in leisure pursuits were mostly unaware that I would later record our meetings.

People I approached for interview usually reacted with a mixture of surprise and curiosity to the fact that I was a German doing research on Italians in Argentina. Not only informants, but also many academics in Argentina held what I would call 'a balkanized view of ethnic research', meaning that a German should do research on German immigrants in Argentina, an Englishman on the Anglo-Argentines and so forth. Once people realized my genuine interest, my fluency in Italian and a certain familiarity with Italian culture, I was accepted, especially among middle and upper middle class Italians and descendants. People from the upper classes often lived a very cosmopolitan life, sometimes spoke several languages, and sent their children to foreign universities in the United States and Europe.

In one particular case, however, my nationality posed a perhaps understandable obstacle. I had tried to interview former partisans who fought against Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, and emigrated after World War II to Argentina. Because I had one good initial contact, most ex-partisans responded favourably to my enquiries. But one day, the leader of one of the associations of Italian partisans in Argentina told me that I could go no further with my enquiries, that he could understand my quest for knowledge, but that I too had to understand the sensitivities of some of the ex-partisans. He explained that these sensitivities were partly to do with my curiosity about the times of the last military dictatorship (1976-1983), when Italian ex-partisans were persecuted and had to flee the country. Some partisans were also sensitive to the fact that I was German and thus represented the people they had fought against during the war.

However, being German helped me in one important way which I only realized after my initial research on German-Argentines. It helped me to look at Italians and their descendants in Argentina with a certain 'cultural' distance, precisely because I was not Italian. But it also helped me to observe and identify similar processes of identity construction, which the Italians in Argentina shared with other European immigrants. Among the German Argentines, my assumptions about my own German identity and values were challenged in a disturbing way. I had been educated after the Second World

War and in West Germany by anti-fascist parents, and had enjoyed a very liberal education at highschool. Hence I had internalized particular notions regarding German history, the Third Reich and the Holocaust in particular, which were not shared by all the German-Argentines I met<sup>22</sup>. Still, these people claimed to be German *like me*, and spoke German in a very particular hispanicized version of Belgrano-Deutsch<sup>23</sup>.

Doing some initial fieldwork with Germans in Argentina was thus an apprenticeship which helped me to see Italians and their descendants in Argentina, not simply as transplanted Europeans, but as people in their own right who had transformed old values and practices and developed new ones. Though some could say that Italians and Germans in Argentina are 'just Argentines', which many of them formally are (by having only an Argentine passport), this does not imply a consolidated national identity. Through my experience with the German-Argentines and their unsettling of my own assumptions, I could see how a visiting Italian might react to the notions of, for example, Fascism, regional differences in Italy, and politics in general upheld by Italo-Argentines.

I also became aware of the importance of a more fundamental point which immediately confronts every social scientist working on contemporary Argentina: while many European values, ideologies, and artefacts persist, their character changes and they are found in new, hitherto unprecedented contexts. Central concepts like the 'military', 'democracy', and also the perception of European nations - 'Italy', 'France', 'England' - and their representations and influences (in, for example, Argentine architecture) refer to their original designations, but suggest something else and are *not to be confounded* with their original characterization. One example of such new meaning conferred on old designations is the salient porteño-expression that 'Buenos Aires is the Paris of South America', or that parts of 'Buenos Aires are like Paris'. Such statements evoke multiple meanings pertaining to a specific historical period (the early decades of this century), certain building styles and the life-style of the upper classes (to name just a few), and

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<sup>22</sup>I remember, for example, one of my German Argentine informants driving me around the Buenos Aires suburb of Villa Ballester (which had high German immigration rates), and proudly pointing to a house where during the time of the Third Reich Germans sang the National Socialist Party anthem "Die Fahne hoch ...", commonly known as "Horst-Wessel-Lied" after its author Horst Wessel (1907-1933).

<sup>23</sup>i.e. 'Belgrano-German', after the northern district of Belgrano which had high German immigration rates.

should never be just taken for granted by the anthropologist. The reference is *not* made to Paris *per se*, but to a new complex arrangement and transformation of European influences in Buenos Aires. The European observer is, of course, susceptible at first to taking familiar terms at face-value, especially when even more 'analytical' categories, such as hybridization, syncretism, imitation and copying, all make reference to the supposed existence and validity of an original form from which meaning can be derived<sup>24</sup>.

In my opinion, the best way to handle confusions of characterization which arise from similarities of terms in different cultures, is to follow a strict ethnographic approach. It is best to assume that one does not know the finite meaning of words like 'democracy', 'Fascism', and 'Italy'. Rather, one should explore their specific meaning in the context of indigenous cultures. This approach, and the necessity of using it, will become particularly clear in chapters 4, and 6 to 9.

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<sup>24</sup>Gombrich (1966:83-88) has suggested, that subsequent stylistic categories of art (like Classic, Romanesque, Gothic) basically mask two essentialist categories; the classical and the non-classical, which were used as exclusive terms to distinguish between 'us' and 'them' (or by extension, I would argue, between tradition and innovation, originals and deviations).

## 5. The Change of Paradigms

Argentine historians are only now turning to individual sources of migration history, such as biographies, letters and interviews in the 'oral history'-fashion. This new direction of research is influenced by a critique of the older research paradigm which understood the formation of modern Argentina as a crisol de razas (melting pot of races). Using a similar framework than the North-American melting-pot paradigm<sup>25</sup>, the sociologist, Germani (1970), and the historian, Romero (1963), argued that immigrants of different origins and their descendants had given up their original identities in Argentina and were now fused together to form a new people: Argentines of European descent. This view suggested that, because mass immigration occurred on such a large and unprecedented scale<sup>26</sup>, the loss of identities was not a matter of 'assimilation' to a hypothetically dominant Argentine national identity. Rather, according to the crisol de razas-argument, the processes of identity transformation were characterized by the fusion and amalgamation of the immigrants and descendants into a *new* Argentine society. It was Germani (1955, 1962, 1970, 1975) who, inspired by the modernization theories of American social sciences, formulated most clearly a sequential scheme to understand the modernization of Argentina in the 19th and 20th centuries. According to his scheme, stage I and II were comprised of the colonial period up until 1812 and the period from Independence to consolidation of the nation in 1852. Modernization, the 'emergence of modern' society, effectively started under the regime of 'oligarchic Liberalism' and the impact of mass immigration in the late 19th century (phase III). The next important step (phase IV) consisted of the 'mobilization of the masses' under national and populist regimes (as, for example, in the 1930s after the fall of Yrigoyen; and during Peronism, 1943-55). It was also during this stage which saw renewed attempts of authoritarian (military dictatorships) and populist regimes (Peronism 1973-76), that the dissolution of ethnic identities eventually took place (Germani 1975:100-101).

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<sup>25</sup>Cf. the famous critique by Glazer/Moynihan (1970<sup>2</sup>:xxxiii, xcvi).

<sup>26</sup>For migration statistics, see chapter 2. Romero refers to this era as the 'alluvial period', when almost literally a deluge of immigrants arrived on the shores of the River Plate.



Speaking of the transformations of identities from the 1930s onwards, Germani concluded:

"Taking into account this fact [i.e. that between 1890 and 1920, foreigners accounted for 70 to 80% of the inhabitants of Buenos Aires], it is really surprising that their economic, social and cultural integration happened faster than in the United States, and without creating persistent ethnic subcultures ... .

"There were and are no Italo-Argentines, Hispano-Argentines or Polish-Argentines, in the way that there are *Italo-Americans* or *Irish-Americans* ...; nor did urban segregation persist - as it did in the *Little Italies* or *Little Spains* [of the United States] - , despite the fact that the period of European mass immigration to Argentina lasted ten years longer [till 1930] than to the United States.

"The children of the foreigners, and in most cases the foreigners themselves (especially, Spaniards and Italians who were the most numerous), assimilated themselves to the [receiving] society and its culture much faster than in the other immigration countries, particularly the United States. *But it was a culture which was very different to that which existed before mass immigration.* Because, rather than dealing with the phenomenon of assimilation in those regions where the foreigners were concentrated, one has to speak of *syncretism*. The language, the cultural models, [and] the different personalities of immigrants modified considerably the original 'Creole' society, creating a new one in which all the components were fused in a relatively short period. Hence, assimilation engendered a *mutation of identity*: while the children of the immigrants considered themselves Argentines, thereby cancelling completely their various national origins, their [new] identity continued to be different from that of 'Creole' Argentina prior to mass immigration."

(Germani 1975:103-105)

Assuming the almost total dissolution or obliteration of original identities, this new Argentine identity still posed definitional problems to the melting-pot analysts because, as Germani himself acknowledged:

"The system of stratification and many social values were sharply affected by the overwhelming mass of foreign population. The old creole stock was replaced by a new type *which has not yet been clearly defined.*"

(Germani 1970:298; my italics)

American historians, such as Baily (1981)<sup>27</sup> and Szuchman (1977; 1980:5-6,73-74,147-158; 1986:47,53), questioned the relevance of the melting-pot paradigm to the Argentine case, and argued that ethnic identities involving language, food and social solidarity were maintained much longer than had originally been assumed. Argentine scholars like Devoto have supported this critique in numerous case studies, particularly in regard to

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<sup>27</sup>See chapter 5 for a more detailed presentation of Baily's data and arguments with regard to immigration to Buenos Aires.

Italian immigration. They have focused, for example, on the 'inner' social structure of the ethnic group, the role of its elite in mutual aid societies, newspapers, and factories, language maintenance, and ethnically endogamous marriage patterns. This new approach has sometimes been called pluralismo cultural (cultural pluralism) and one article written in this fashion, posed, in its subtitle the challenging question: "Cultural pluralism or melting pot?" (Freundlich de Seefeld 1986).

A recent critique of the pluralist perspective has argued that its findings, while providing long desired knowledge of ethnic communities, focus too narrowly on the constitution of single ethnic groups in Argentina, and neglect their relation to the wider society and other ethnic groups (Sabato 1988, 1989). Moreover, Sabato argues that the new approach is largely due to the ideological orientation of its authors who favour a multicultural society. Sabato remains at a critical distance from both the melting pot paradigm and the multicultural approach, and advocates a reassessment of the role of the Argentine State in the formation of the nation<sup>28</sup>.

Reviewing these different research tendencies, it becomes clear that they are not merely different analytical tools. They are the expression of particular ideologies which comment on Argentine history. They therefore reflect very much the way that members of a society perceive themselves. The Argentine version of the melting pot paradigm, as well as being a research paradigm, was also a product of the folk conception of the immigrant society from the 1930s onwards. It therefore reflects the pervasive mood of the confident 'rich' Argentina (up until the 1950s), which emphasized its own national achievements and tried to ignore or forget the humble origins of the immigrant generation. There was no need to look for a particular European ethnic identity, when the attributes of status and prestige (mainly in the form of high social, material and educational mobility) were seen as the intrinsic products of Argentine society.

Conversely, the idea of cultural pluralism seems more attractive in a period marked by

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<sup>28</sup>While Sabato denounces the crisol de razas and the pluralismo cultural approaches as political ideologies, she does not fundamentally challenge the 'primordial' conception of ethnicity which are inherent in both, neither does the recent critique by Míguez et al. (1991:807-808).

By contrast, in the North American debate Yancey et al. (1976:391,399) argued that *both assimilationists and pluralists* emphasized the 'cultural origins' of ethnic groups (i.e. see ethnicity as a primordial feature) and based their arguments on "...untested assumptions about the importance of the portable heritage which a group brings from one generation and place to another." (ibid.:399)

the failure of national undertakings by military and civilian governments who hoped to couple strong nationalistic sentiments to economic success. Why should anyone wish to emphasize Argentina as a nation, when Argentina is now synonymous with economic decline, military dictatorship, and a fragile democracy, despite it once being an axiom for immense wealth and a paternalistic democracy? It is therefore now more appealing to turn to other forms of identity, especially when Italy and Spain, which were once regarded as poor by comparison to Argentina (and indeed once sent their poor to Argentina) are now leading industrial 'First World' powers.

From an anthropological point of view, the particular problem of the multicultural approach in both its academic and folk-versions (among academics and ethnic leaders), is that it conceives of ethnic identity as something like an unchanging, immutable characteristic which, while circumstances may change, remains basically unaltered. Another weakness of multicultural research has been its obsession with functional parameters of ethnic identity such as chain migration and rates of marriage endogamy and exogamy in ethnic groups. While it is true that these concepts have helped to explain in detail the dynamics of the migrational process, they have, at the same time, become inadequate when trying to deal with issues of ethnic identity. Multicultural research has not only, as Sabato says, overstressed the importance of *inner*-ethnic sphere as opposed to the *intra*-ethnic dimension. It has also failed to address the very problem which makes research on ethnic identities in Argentina so difficult, that is the multifaceted and highly oscillating, processual nature of ethnicity in Argentina. As I will argue, ethnic identity is displayed in compartmentalized and fragmented ways, and it cannot be reduced to single social 'institutions', like the family, or 'functions', such as marriage endogamy. Different identities co-exist at the same time, just as they also come into conflict. Although some authors of the 'multicultural approach' acknowledge that marriage patterns among ethnic groups are not the *only* indicator of their social integration, at the same time they take it for granted that, within an endogamous marriage, ethnic identity is maintained. As the following quote shows, they assume this without any further ethnohistorical research into the character of the family:

"On the other hand it is in the intimacy of the family and with the socialization of new generations that customs and ways of life are reaffirmed and transmitted. [And it is in the family] where the traditions of every ethnic community, or where - incipiently - the homogenization or fusion of different cultures takes place."

(Freundlich de Seefeld 1986:205)

A high rate of endogamy does not tell us anything about the performance of Italian,

Ligurian and Sicilian people *outside* their community. These people, especially when they worked for Argentine companies, came into contact with other immigrants and Argentines of immigrant descent. They then spoke Spanish, even with their Italian colleagues if they were not from the same region, because Spanish was adopted as the lingua franca. It therefore seems less relevant that on returning home from work, they would be engaged in *their* community, speaking the dialect, eating typical food, and going to the feast of the patron saint. Their dialect, their own food, even the relationship between the endogamous spouses was soon affected by the influences of urban life and wider Argentine society, as Minicuci (1989) has shown in a recent study on Calabrian immigrants in Buenos Aires. Thus, Szuchman (like Freundlich de Seefeld 1986; cf. above), in an otherwise perceptive study on social mobility and ethnicity in Córdoba at turn of the century, seems to have wrongly juxtaposed the issues, when discussing 'ethnicity' in relation to public and private domains:

"...very little of ethnicity was discussed in the meetings or manifested in the association's activities. On the other hand families guarded their ethnicity zealously, as evidenced in the choices of marriage partners."

(Szuchman 1980:173)

I shall argue in this thesis that a regional or local identity can very well co-exist with the broader processes of Argentine socialization. Furthermore, ethnicity cuts across different social domains such as the family (chapter 6), voluntary associations and the state (chapters 7 to 10). Chain migration and rates of endogamy should not be taken as clear indicators of the maintenance of an ethnic identity.

In order to understand the complexities of the identities of the Italians and their descendants in Buenos Aires, I propose to reconsider briefly some of the literature on ethnic identity. As we will see (particularly in chapters 8, 9 and 10), Italians in Buenos Aires, and their leaders in particular, conceive of their ethnic identity (best conveyed by the concept of 'roots', *radici*) as some essence which remains unchanged through time and goes back to an almost mythical past prior to immigration.

Frederick Barth (1969:13-14) established the idea that ethnic groups rather than being categorically seen as bearers of a specific culture, are better defined by 'categorical ascriptions', the ethnic demarcations they and others apply to them. These boundaries are social boundaries first of all, but can also have territorial equivalents. Barth insisted that the persistence of boundaries does not imply a similar continuity of the recruitment base of the social group it refers to, which can change while the boundary remains the same

(1969:21). As Epstein (1978:96) rightly emphasized, Barth's approach shifts the interest of research from the content of ethnic identity to the demarcation or boundary which it circumscribes.

Following Barth, a series of authors, particularly, Cohen (1974, 1981), see ethnic conflicts expressed by differing definitions of ethnic boundaries, as a result of the competition of various interest groups over territory, economic resources, and education. According to this view, ethnic groups are inserted into the system of social stratification as *interest groups*, competing for the distribution of resources.

But, as Williams (1989:405) recently pointed out, this approach does not take into account the ideological legitimization of the distribution of resources, and fails to make a proper distinction between ethnic groups and other, non-ethnic interest groups. Williams, following Keyes (1981), concludes that a satisfactory theory of ethnicity has to take into account the material motivations as well as the cultural formulations of ethnic identity. Consequently, a theory of ethnicity should not be based solely on the context of a social situation but should also consider the ideological readings of that situation.

Recent studies have indicated the ambiguous and oscillating character of ethnicity which finds its expression in the flexibility of the composition of ethnic groups, as well as in the elasticity of ethnic boundaries (a characteristic that was not originally envisaged by Barth who insisted on the persistence of ethnic boundaries). The ambiguity is also compounded by the fact, that ethnic boundaries are not usually accepted unanimously within the same group, nor by outsiders. They are subject to a continuous negotiating process of reformulation and redefinition (cf. Fischer 1986:173-177, Clifford 1989:277-346, Roosens 1989:17-20).

Furthermore, ethnic identities have particular symbolic representations which vary according to age, sex, generation, social class, and historical period, and can also diminish in importance for the individual altogether - as Di Leonardo (1984:134,191,231-232) shows with her research on the descendants of Italians in California. Other investigations have also provided evidence to suggest that individuals can maintain more than one ethnic identity or ethnic allegiance at the same time, as Woolard (1989) demonstrated in her discussion of the overlapping usages of Catalan and Spanish in Barcelona<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup>See her highly illustrative metaphor for ethnicity in Catalonia:  
"In this elaborate metaphor, the Spanish state and Catalonia are two pieces of cloth both

What started off as a contest between one research tradition, which emphasized the 'primordial qualities' of ethnicity, and another, which insisted on the variability and symbolic construction of ethnic identities, has meanwhile led some authors to suggest that ethnicity is [wholly] 'invented'. Conzen et al. write:

"With Werner Sollors, we view ethnicity neither as primordial (ancient, unchanging, inherent in a groups blood, soul or misty past), nor as purely instrumental (calculated and manipulated primarily for political ends). Rather, ethnicity itself is to be understood as a cultural construction accomplished over historical time. Ethnic groups in modern settings are constantly recreating themselves, and ethnicity is continuously reinvented in response to changing realities both within the group and the host society. Ethnic group boundaries, for example, must be repeatedly renegotiated, while expressive symbols of ethnicity(ethnic traditions) must be repeatedly reinterpreted. By historicizing the phenomenon, the concept of invention allows for the appearance, metamorphosis, disappearance, and reappearance of ethnicities."

(Conzen et al. 1990:38)

Persuasive in the post-modern fashion as the arguments of Conzen et al. may sound, I would argue that the term 'invention' is not sufficient for understanding ethnicity. The 'invention of tradition' has been used by Hobsbawm/Ranger (1981) to characterize very specific processes by which the English Royalty in the 18th and 19th centuries did indeed 'invent' particulars of anthems, coronation ceremonies and state funerals, which were almost installed to become traditions. Now, while some distinctive markers of ethnic identity may indeed occasionally be 'invented'<sup>30</sup>, the whole ethnic identity of a person or of a group at any given time is far more complex and cannot be subsumed or explained by the concept of 'invention'. Rather than being constantly recreated or reinvented over again, certain elements or components of ethnic identity may be reinvented in different contexts. It would be more appropriate to speak of reformulation and reinterpretation, or "formalization and ritualization" (Hobsbawm 1983:4), particularly

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delineated and bound together by the seam of ethnicity. At first glance, the seam appears as a single line differentiating Catalans and Castilians. But against the backdrop of the Spanish state, where it asserts the unity of the region in the face of external power, Catalan ethnicity shows up like a white thread. When we flip the garment over and look at the thread of ethnicity against the background of Catalan society, we find that ethnic phenomena are of an entirely different color."

(Woolard 1989:139)

<sup>30</sup>An example would be the erection of the statue of Mazzini by the Italo-Argentine community in Buenos Aires in 1879, which even later generations of ethnic leaders refer to (cf. chapter 7).

since some key concepts used by Italo-Argentines, such as 'Italy', fatherland (*patria*), and roots (*radici*), retain their wording and even symbols over time, while changing their meaning. The other issue, which seems to have been ignored in recent post-modern talk about 'invention and reinvention', is, then, the question of how, when so much time is spent emphasizing discontinuities, do we account for the obvious regularities and continuities?

While I am not advocating a return to a stress on primordial characteristics, I would nonetheless draw the attention to the mix of elements of *longer* and *shorter duration* in ethnic phenomena<sup>31</sup>. I am not arguing against the changeability or malleability of ethnic phenomena. What I am saying is quite simply, that one should take care to consider the different historical time spans of their constituent elements. Hence, one of the analytical fallacies committed by authors writing of 'invented ethnicity', is that they see invention as the opposite of tradition which it is not. For example, Clifford writes:

"The related institutions of culture and tribe are historical inventions, tendentious and changing. They do not designate stable realities that exist aboriginally 'prior to' the colonial clash of societies and powerful representations. The history of Mashpee is not of unbroken tribal institutions or cultural traditions."  
(Clifford 1988:338)

If invention is a product of historical processes, its usage becomes tautological and loses its explanatory force, for this is precisely what we are dealing with when analysing traditions and ideologies.

Rather than being 'inventions' created in single-event acts, I will argue in the thesis that the markers and symbols of ethnic identity change their meaning over time. Their interpretation among Argentines, Italo-Argentines and Italians can vary with class (chapter 6), gender, age (chapters 7, 8 and 9), and political interest (chapter 10). There

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<sup>31</sup>Maybe a framework similar to the concept of 'la longue dureé' could be developed, that is the long-term patterns underlying historical processes proposed by Fernand Braudel and the French Annales-school (cf. Burke 1989:158).

One obvious example would be the language, spoken by members of an ethnic group. Whilst I agree that languages and the communities of speakers change over time, there is still the possibility, that for example, a reasonably well-educated German speaker of the 20th century can read a text written in the 16th century. Beyond that time-frame (that is earlier than Luther's Bible translation) this is only possible with great difficulty, and requires knowledge of medieval German. The period of time to which folk-interpretations of ethnic phenomena refer, can thus be considerable.

is always a plurality of identity markers for the groups under discussion at any one point in time. The particularity of the Italians and their descendants in Argentina lies probably in the great ambiguity with which their ethnic identity is expressed. In one context they can appear more 'Argentine' and in others more 'Italian'. While the availability of different interpretations is a constant feature of 'ambiguous ethnicity' (cf. Benson 1981:141,147), the total set of symbols and the choices that groups and individuals make are by no means arbitrary.

My material supports the idea that Italo-Argentines in their expression of fragmented ethnicity, respond to larger transformations in the two societies (Italy and Argentina). By commenting on their experience of these transformations they reveal also their own part in a process, that the following two chapters will characterize as the 'inversion of roles'.



## CHAPTER 2

### The Inversion of Roles I: Argentina and Italian Mass Immigration

#### 1. Introduction

The following chapters (2 and 3) try to explain the relation between the two societies which immigrants and descendants of immigrants are dealing with, Argentina and Italy. I will argue that, from a historical perspective, this relationship is characterized by an 'inversion of roles'. This is an idea which partly becomes clear from people's own statements, but also from a wider, external look at the at the larger historical events.

Over a period of roughly one hundred years, from 1880 to the present, one society, Argentina, changed from a wealthy exporter country of beef and cereals with a strong currency and a comparatively large middle class, to a so-called 'third world' country which now has the third largest foreign debt after Brazil and Mexico<sup>1</sup>. The other country, Italy, following unification in 1861, was characterized by strong regional differences between the industrialized North and the poor, agricultural South. For a hundred years it was one of the largest net-suppliers of human labour to the Americas and industrialized Europe. Only in 1973 did more Italian labour migrants return home from abroad than new ones emigrated. Italy is now among the top ten industrial nations of the world. This has resulted chiefly from integration into the Common Market, an early boom in the 1960s, the pacification of the trade unions in the late 1970s, and a second boom in the 1980s, arising from an industrial culture based on local craftsmanship and the high-tech expertise of multinationals.

In this chapter, I shall first discuss the economic and political conditions which enabled mass immigration in Argentina in the second half of the 19th century. I shall then discuss the economic and political conditions which encouraged mass-emigration in Italy. As this thesis is primarily concerned with Italian immigrants and their descendants *in Argentina* and less with the sending society, my discussion of the latter will be briefer and more cursory than my discussion of the Argentine material. However, some of the main

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<sup>1</sup>Argentina also had a large public debt in the first decades of this century (cf. Díaz Alejandro 1970:33, Vázquez-Presedo 1979:30-40).

features of Italian mass-emigration such as its important social and regional stratification will be addressed.

I will then look at the images which were created in the encounter between European immigrants and Spanish Creole society. As the thesis is concerned with issues of class and ethnicity, particular attention will be paid to the governing elite's reaction to immigration, as well as to the formation of the rising immigrant elite's. The final section is dedicated to the debate about emigration in Italy, as reflected in the ideology of leading government circles and local elites.

My discussion of the relation between migration and Argentine and Italian political and economic history will be a selective and synthetic account. It is not intended to be a *general* review of Argentine history, although I have made use of the reference works of Crawley (1984) and Rock (1987). More particularly, I will refer to the studies of economic historians, Díaz Alejandro (1970), Vázquez-Presedo (1979) and Cortes Conde (1979). My argument will be geared primarily towards the issue of immigration, necessarily emphasizing certain periods and paying less attention to others.

For the purpose of understanding migration, Argentine history can be divided into two long periods. The first is the period of mass immigration and the formation of modern Argentina, from 1871 to 1930, the second dates from 1930 to the present day, and is characterized by alternating cycles of decline and economic growth, civilian and military governments. Historians must impose orderly patterns on the flux of events, and they often disagree about the proposed periods. However, most historians mark the year 1930 as crucial in Argentine history when for the first time since the country was given a constitution in 1853<sup>2</sup>, a democratically elected government was overthrown by a military coup. The following 'infamous decade' (1930-1943) coincided with the end of European mass immigration and is said to have marked, in a decisive way, the formation of an Argentine national identity (Rock 1987:214-261, Germani 1975:101, Bourd  1977:229, S bato 1988:246-249)<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup>There had been predecessors to the constitution in 1819 and 1826.

<sup>3</sup>A different thesis has been proposed by Waisman (1987) who argues that *the* turning point in contemporary Argentine history is in 1943 (when Per n became Labour Secretary) with the subsequent adoption of Peronist economic policies; cf. chapter 3.

The long period from 1930 to the present, is characterized by alternating civilian and military governments, political instability and phases of economic growth, stagnation and decline. The *overall* trend of this period, by comparison to the previous one, was that of near continuous economic decline -interrupted by short periods of economic growth- and repeated political turmoil. Instead of giving an overall view of this very complex recent past, I will highlight two periods: one is *Peronism* (1943-1955), and the other is the last military dictatorship 'el proceso' (1976-1983) and the subsequent return to democracy.

The reason why I have chosen to have a closer look at Peronism in chapter 3, is that most of the *immigrants and descendants of immigrants of my study* were part of the last wave of European immigrants after World War II. They left Europe, having witnessed, either as supporters or opponents, or sometimes even both, Fascist and Nazi regimes. They arrived in Argentina when it was governed by Perón, a populist leader, compared by his opponents to a Fascist leader. They thus moved from a turbulent Europe to an almost equally turbulent Argentina. Finally, the 1976 to 1989 period<sup>4</sup> is essentially that period which we might call the 'ethnographic present': that recent past which surfaced most in the people's actions and comments during the time of my fieldwork (late 1988 to 1989; cf. chapter 4).

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<sup>4</sup>One might also include here the preceding period of Peronist governments (1973-1976), which was characterized by political and economic instability and high levels of political violence (cf. chapter 3).

## 2. Mass Immigration to Argentina

The massive movement of peoples in search of a better life in the 19th and early 20th centuries was the product of specific internal factors of poor areas in Europe which could not provide subsistence for their population and repressed demands for redistribution of wealth. It was also influenced by the rising economies in the New World and reflected a more general pattern of the international division of labour.

In the international division of labour (analysed by different economists such as the Argentine Prebisch, dependency<sup>5</sup> and World Systems theorists and others), core or central nations produce industrial goods and import raw or semi-finished products from the peripheral countries (Prebisch 1950, 1980:1-2, Gunder Frank 1967, Wallerstein 1974:347-357, 1989:249-253 and Wolf 1982:21-23, 73-88, 321-323, Abel/Lewis 1985:3-5)<sup>6</sup>.

In Argentina a late colonial economy, based on the export of salted beef, hides and tallows, was replaced by productive 'cycles' of wool, cereals, beef, and later particularly chilled beef. In each of these products Argentina became a major world exporter

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<sup>5</sup>However, the core-periphery model and dependency theory in particular, cannot provide a sufficient explanation for *all* international economic relationships, for example, the booming technological and economic development of 'peripheral' countries such as Taiwan and South Korea.

<sup>6</sup>On the other hand, it has been argued that Argentina as a 'new' country of recent settlement (Goodrich 1964:70), which had a high land-labour ratio and a shortage of labour, enjoyed up until the 1940s prospects of growth which were similar to those of Canada, Australia and the American Mid-West. It was only thereafter, when Argentina's elite chose to 'change tracks', favouring industrialization in order to substitute imports of manufactured goods, instead of exporting foodstuffs to pay for imports, that its path of development was reversed (Waisman 1987:262).

(Vázquez-Preedo 1971:143-191)<sup>7</sup>.

In the period extending from Independence (1810) to the turn of the century, the Argentine agricultural economy underwent major changes. Until about 1860, the dominant export articles traded to Europe by merchants from Buenos Aires were raw materials from cattle raised on the Pampas.

By 1860, the dominant export item became wool which was exported for finishing to factories in the United States and Europe (cf. Cortes Conde/Gallo 1967:62-63, Sabato 1990:193-200). The rising demand for wool in these countries contributed to an enormous growth in Argentine sheep breeding, with livestock going up from 7 million sheep in 1852 to 67 million in 1888 (Cortes Conde 1979:277). In fact, sheep breeding and wool exporting were the domain of Basque, Scottish and Irish immigrants at this period (Korol/Sábato 1981:81-118, Rock 1987:133), some of whom turned their enterprises into substantial fortunes, became large landowners and married into the Creole upper classes. Fencing off large areas of land with barbed wire effectively marginalized and almost extinguished the originally semi-nomadic gaucho-culture. The expanding sheep-economy required new lands as pasture. This was, as Cortes Conde (1979:52-59) has argued, the main motif behind the expansion of the Argentine state into the Pampas by force through the campaña del desierto. This 'desert-campaign' of the Argentine army in the late 1870s, determined the fate of Indians in the South of the Province of Buenos Aires and Patagonia. They were killed in great numbers, subjugated and forced into marginal

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<sup>7</sup>In order to understand Argentina's changed status as an agricultural exporter, one might compare the following shares of some of Argentina's main products in the context of *total* world exports:

Products	Argentine percentage of World Exports	
	1924-33	1959-63
meat of bovine animals	57.6%	31.2%
meat of sheep and goats	24.7%	7.4%
wheat	17.7%	5.8%
maize	64.9%	16.8%
oats	34.4%	16.2%
wool	12.2%	( 9.9% greasy wool) (11.4% washed wool)

Note that decline of percentages has not been lineally regressive. For example, from 1924-33 to 1934-38, the share in world wheat exports rose from 17.7% to 23.1% (all data from Díaz Alejandro 1970:201).

reservations (Cortes Conde/Gallo 1967:50-51,55; Nardi 1981:20-24; Schindler 1973,1990; Hux 1983, Rock 1987:154). This 'colonization' of the Pampas, particularly in the Province of Santa Fe, was also accompanied by (mainly North) Italian and Swiss immigrants who settled there as sharecroppers and less often, owners of the land (Gallo 1983:63-64, Bernasconi 1988:179-184). Land under cultivation expanded from 0.58 million hectares in 1872, to 2.46 million in 1888, to 4.89 million in 1895, and to 27.20 million hectares in 1930 (Díaz Alejandro 1970:151). In the 1880s Argentina also became an important producer and exporter of cereals such as wheat, corn, oats and barley (Rock 1987:136, Solberg 1988:34). But it was only by 1900 that the presumably most famous Argentine export article predominated: *beef*. This was for two main reasons. Firstly, Argentina replaced the United States which had to satisfy a growing internal market, as an exporter of beef to Britain. Secondly, new techniques in large-scale industrial chilling and chilling ships greatly increased the potential exports and durability of beef by contrast to the older methods of salting and hazardous live-stock export (Rock 1987:131-136,169-171).

According to the historians, Cortes Conde and Gallo(1967:22ff.), Argentina's modernization, that is its transformation from a late colonial economy to a major agricultural producer, was linked to several changes in the world economy of the mid-19th century. Fast industrialization and population growth in the industrialized core countries, Britain foremost, meant a rising demand for food supplies which could not be satisfied by domestic agriculture. The displacement of agricultural production, or more accurately its extension to areas outside the industrial countries of Europe, was paralleled by exports of capital, labour migrants and manufactured goods to these areas (Cortes Conde/Gallo 1967:22-48). It was Britain, Argentina's main wool, cereal and beef importer, which established such a trade-relationship with Argentina<sup>8</sup>. Britain became

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<sup>8</sup>From 1900 onwards, Britain became Argentina's main *export* market (Vázquez-Preledo 1971:147-148), accounting for 29.6% of Argentina's merchandise exports in 1927-1929 (Díaz Alejandro 1970:20). Britain also provided the largest share of Argentina's *imports* with 31.2% in the years 1910-1914, ahead of Germany (16.8%) and the United States (14.4%). In 1925-1929, however, the United States led imports with 24.6%, Britain (19.6%) and Germany (11.5%) coming second and third (Díaz Alejandro 1970:20).

By 1925-1929 *Italy* had superseded France as the fifth largest exporter to Argentina (8.7%); and it occupied the seventh post among Argentina's export markets (6.4%) (ibid.).

Argentina's main investor and exporter of manufactured goods (Díaz Alejandro 1970:29-32)<sup>9</sup>. The most visible manifestation of this relationship were the British built railroads which radiated from Buenos Aires to the Pampas, to get livestock and cereals to the port of Buenos Aires (cf. Lewis 1983:1-3,213; 1985:217).

So a particular kind of agricultural economy and the enormous demand for its finished and semi-finished products fuelled immigration and also had a decisive impact on the occupational stratification of the immigrants. After 1870 foreign immigration to Argentina became a mass phenomenon with 80,000 to 260,000 newcomers every year. Most of the immigrants were men and went to the cities and particularly to Buenos Aires where they found work in meat-packing plants, ports, on construction sites of the railways and in the quickly rising tertiary sector (Cornblit 1967:223, Scobie 1974).

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<sup>9</sup>"The immediate pre-World War I years marked the high point of foreign influence in Argentina, with foreigners amounting to around two-fifths of the labor force and owning, directly or indirectly, a large share of fixed capital stock. One-third of foreign investments were in railroads, and 60 percent of foreign capital was British."  
(Díaz Alejandro 1970:29-30)

### 3. Italian Migration to Argentina

**Table 3: Net Immigration to Argentina by Decade, 1871-1930**

Decade	Total immigration	Italian immigration
1871-1880	85,120	37,225
1881-1890	637,670	365,570
1891-1900	319,880	201,220
1901-1910	1,120,220	452,090
1911-1920	269,090	-3,000 <sup>10</sup>
1921-1930	877,970	368,750

(from Baily/Ramella 1988:19)

**Table 4: Foreign Population in Argentina in Thousands**

	1869	1895	1914	1947	1960	1970	1980
from neighbouring countries <sup>11</sup>	41	117	208	314	467	533	753
Italians	71	493	942	786	878	637	488
Spaniards	34	199	841	749	716	515	374
French	32	94	81	33	22		10
Russians <sup>12</sup>		15	95	90	51		23
Germans	5	17	28	52	48		24
Poles				111	108		57
Total of foreigners	210	1,007	2,391	2,346	2,604	2,110	1,903

(from Nascimbene 1987:116)

As the above tables demonstrate, Italians were the largest group of immigrants. About *half* of all the immigrants between 1830 and 1950 are thought to have been Italian (Rock 1987:141).

<sup>10</sup>The negative balance for this decade is partly explained by those Italian men who were drafted into the army during World War I and remained in Europe, and also by Italians from Argentina who voluntarily joined the army in Italy.

<sup>11</sup>The countries that neighbour Argentina, are Chile, Bolivia, Paraguay, Brazil and Uruguay.

<sup>12</sup>Argentine migration statistics and census data operate with very broad categories, not specifying ethnic origins. For example, immigrants labelled 'Russians' because of their *Russian* passports, could have been Russian Jews, ethnic Germans (both established sizeable communities in Argentina), Ukrainians, Armenians, Russians proper and so forth. The same applies to distinctions between Polish and German Jews and non-Jews, which do not appear in the migration statistics.

Immigrants from the Ottoman Empire were generally labelled as *turcos* (Turks) when in fact the largest contingents were Arabs from what are now Syria and Lebanon.



Emigration from Italy was regionally and occupationally stratified. Speaking in general terms, many Northern Italians went to rural Argentina whereas South Italians tended to go to cities, particularly Buenos Aires. During the first period, from 1876 to 1895, Northern and Central Italy provided the vast majority of immigrants (74,3%). Then, from 1895 to 1914 Southern Italians accounted for 45,2% (Devoto 1984:325). Historians have argued that the higher demand for skilled labour and possibilities for social mobility in Argentina explain not only *earlier* Italian migration to the River Plate than to the United States, but also that *overall* more Northerners than Southerners came to the South American Republic (whereas the States attracted primarily South Italians) (Klein 1983:828-829, Balán 1983:330-334).

**Table 5:**  
**Italian Migration to Argentina classified by Areas of Origin<sup>13</sup>, 1876-1914**

areas	1876-1895	1896-1914	1876-1914
Northwestern Italy	47,2	28,1	34,4
Northeastern Italy	14,2	6,2	8,8
Central Italy	12,9	20,5	18,0
Southern and Insular Italy	25,7	45,2	38,8
Total (from Devoto 1984:325)	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Devoto's classification of the Italian regions into large geographical areas follows the division employed by official Italian statisticians. However, the Italian immigrants themselves, with their regional loyalties, might have drawn different subdivisions. Apart from a strong sense of local belonging (*campanilismo*), North Italians, in particular, demarcated themselves from 'South Italians' whom they regarded as inferior because of their markedly different dialects, customs, and history prior to the unification of Italy in 1861. As a North Italian explains in chapter 7, the term "South Italian" (*meridionale*), can mean for him anybody 'south of Florence', including a good part of Central Italy. Furthermore, late unification in 1861 had incorporated regional identity claims to the national territory. These often stood in striking contrast to a weak national identity. Some

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<sup>13</sup>NW-Italy: Piedmont, Liguria, Lombardy; NE-Italy: Veneto, Emilia-Romagna; Central Italy: Tuscany, Marche, Umbria, Latium, Abruzzi, Molise; Southern and Insular Italy: Campania, Apulia, Basilicata, Sicily, and Sardinia.

North Italians in provinces bordering the Austro-Hungarian Empire, well aware that being "Italian" meant being poor, had mixed allegiances towards the new Italian state, and were probably even envious of the Italian speakers across the border who could proudly boast: 'I am Austrian' (cf. Franzina 1979:114).

The overwhelming number of Italian immigrants to Argentina were peasants, agricultural day labourers, craftsmen, and artisans. Only a tiny number of 'elite' immigrants were businessmen and independent professionals. The occupational stratification at the moment of arrival varied over time. From 1876 to 1891, 92.5% of the Italian immigrants were peasants and day labourers, 2% craftsmen and artisans, and 2.2% businessmen and independent professionals. From 1925 to 1929, the percentages had changed to 68%, 25.6% and 3.7% respectively (Cacopardo/Moreno 1984:282). The change has been tentatively explained with reference to the higher share of South Italian day labourers, and the decreasing number of peasant farmers who were held back by the difficulties of getting access to land- ownership in Argentina (ibid.:283). However, categorizations of professions, drawn up by the Argentine immigration authorities at the moment of arrival, should be handled with care as they do not reflect unequivocal and mutually exclusive occupational categories. Unlike in the United States, the liberal Argentine immigration practice did not force the immigrant to pretend a different occupation at the moment of arrival. However, different activities during the agricultural year coupled with unstable employment required a variety of skills, and many immigrants who declared themselves as "artisans"<sup>14</sup> were in fact *also* day labourers, sharecroppers, and peasants (cf. also Crawley 1984:12).

One of the main incentives for emigration resulted from the marked difference of wages (even for unqualified agricultural workers) between Italy and Argentina (Vázquez-Preledo 1971:623, Cortes Conde 1979:261-267)<sup>15</sup>. In fact, wages were so much higher in

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<sup>14</sup>A category that included between 15% and 25% of all Italian immigrants, from 1907 to 1929.

<sup>15</sup>Not only were their wages substantially higher than at home, immigrants could also buy more food (especially meat, which was a particularly rare foodstuff in the Mediterranean):

Argentina, that they persuaded men to work as *seasonal* labourers (golondrinas) (Balmaceda 1981, Solberg 1987). Literally meaning 'swallows' in Spanish, the golondrinas were agricultural workers who arrived in Argentina as unaccompanied individuals, or with friends and relatives and even their families. During a single year they would work in the harvests of *both* the Northern and Southern Hemispheres<sup>16</sup>, travelling back and forth between Italy and Argentina, packed in the steerage class on ramshackle ships. Solberg writes:

"In Argentina the famous *golondrinas* ('swallows') had traditionally fulfilled much of the demand for seasonal farm labor. These workers, who were primarily Italian, used cheap steerage-class steamship fares to travel back and forth between Italy and Argentina to work in the harvests of both countries, which took place at roughly opposite times of the year. At its height during the 1908-12 period, *golondrina* migration brought between 30,000 and 35,000 laborers to Argentina annually. Mark Jefferson<sup>17</sup> compared them with European Opera singers, who also habitually sojourned in Argentina during the Northern hemisphere summer. Some *golondrinas*, he found, had made the trip seventeen times or more. A diligent seasonal worker could easily take the respectable sum of 150 Argentine gold pesos back to Italy; some netted nearly double that amount<sup>18</sup>." (Solberg 1987:95-96)

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"The relation between cost of food and wages was about 25% in Argentina, as compared with 28 in Australia, 33 in the U.S.A., 45 in England, and 60 in Italy and Spain." (Vázquez-Presedo 1971:623)

<sup>16</sup>The golondrinas left Italy after the end of the harvest in October or November and arrived in time in the provinces of Santa Fe and Córdoba for the harvest of wheat and linseed. In December or January, they went to the Province of Buenos Aires where the harvest started later, and then returned to Italy (Vázquez-Presedo 1979:102). However, many golondrinas stayed one or two years in Argentina (Scarzanella 1983:146,148).

<sup>17</sup>Solberg refers to *Jefferson, M. (1926). Peopling the Argentine Pampa, New York: American Geographical Society, p.184.*

<sup>18</sup>See also Scobie (1964:60-61):  
"Four to five months' labor in the wheat-corn harvest could bring him from forty to fifty pounds sterling -five to ten times what he could earn in his motherland- and this represented a net profit to take back to Italy or Spain in May."

High wages in Argentina were only one side of the story. On the other side lay the structural inequalities of the recently unified Italy, with its high rural unemployment and unjust tenancy systems. The highly differentiated agricultural systems of Italy, such as the *mezzadria*-sharecropping arrangements, are not the subject of this thesis<sup>19</sup>. However, in order to understand the relation between different agricultural systems and migration, I shall take an exemplary look at *Calabria* (a region which had very high outmigration to Argentina).

In an exceptionally perceptive study, Arlacchi (1983a) analyses the development of different agricultural economies in three different areas of Calabria: the peasant-economy of the *Cosentino*, the large-estates (*latifondi*) economy of the *Crotonese*, and the aggressive entrepreneurial economy of the Plain of *Gioia Tauro*. He argues that with incorporation into the all-Italian and world market the traditional arrangements of peasant family households became increasingly obsolete in the *Cosentino* and forced many people to leave. In the *Crotonese*, the brutal inequalities of land distribution were such, that landless labourers had to choose between rebellion and emigration for survival. In what Arlacchi (1983a:4) has called, the 'society of permanent transition', that is the Plain of *Gioia Tauro*, people experienced considerable upward *and* downward social mobility, including the decline of the artisan class as in other parts of the South, and many left for seasonal migration. Arlacchi gives one of the best summaries of the large-scale transformations of the *Mezzogiorno*, the Italian South, which is worth quoting at length:

"The unification of Italy in 1861 nominally created one national market. The Piedmontese, who founded the new kingdom, had nothing but the best liberal principles in mind and were determined to apply them. The Mezzogiorno was the worst possible place to try them out. Its peasant agriculture was in fragments. The individual peasant had lost the last shreds of stability. There was no organisation nor market which made sure that his family had enough to eat. He had to scramble for a living by dividing his time among a variety of activities. Some part of the time he worked as a casual salaried labourer, some part on his own postage-stamp-sized property, and, finally, some part on patches of territory leased from the great landlord either as a share-cropper or as a

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<sup>19</sup>Apart from the famous large surveys conducted at the end of the last and the beginning of this century (Damiani 1885, Franchetti/Sonnino 1925) there is now a considerable body of anthropological case studies available on Italy, which documents the regionally and even locally different patterns of agricultural production, agricultural labour, tenancy and ownership arrangements in relation to the labour market and migration (cf. Arlacchi 1983a, Bell 1979, Blok 1981, Davis 1977, Piselli 1981, Schneider/Schneider 1976, Schneider 1990, Silverman 1975).

*terratico*, i.e. one paying leases in kind.

His condition was neither that of the small, pre-capitalist peasant producer nor that of the small agrarian entrepreneur in relatively moderate circumstances (the farmer) but that of a hybrid with features of both. He was always on the search of employment. No one job was ever adequate by itself. None assured him a secure income, none was permanent or reliable. The southern-Italian peasant put on the mask of the entrepreneur, constantly on the look out for a way to turn the odd penny, but it was a grotesque mockery of the genuine entrepreneur. The peasant of the Mezzogiorno was an entrepreneur without an enterprise. After 1861 he found himself in a larger market in which he remained at once the unique producer of goods and the unique organiser of that production, yet lacked the power to influence the market in any way. As the money economy spread, he lost the pathetic residue of self-sufficiency he once had. By the late 1940s he could produce 1,000 litres of wine and get less than £20 for it, the result of five months work. Bushels of home-grown tomatoes and peppers could not buy shoes.

Unification accelerated a process which Gramsci called the 'great social disintegration'." (Arlacchi 1983a:14-16).

In Buenos Aires, Italians rapidly joined the growing urban economy and found occupational niches such as tailors, and fruit and vegetable vendors, which gave rise to later Argentine stereotypes, such as the ubiquitous *tano*<sup>20</sup>.

A detailed study by Scarzanella (1981) shows how, at the turn of the century, Italians contributed largely to the rise of manufacturing, mechanical, food-processing, textile and furniture-making industries in Buenos Aires. An urban industrial elite developed, largely of Italian origin. It maintained strong links of patronage with the local Italian working class, its workforce and consumers, through the control of numerous mutual aid associations (*società di mutuo soccorso* or *sociedades de socorros mutuos*), and Italian finance and banking (Scarzanella 1981:408-412, De Rosa 1985:256, Devoto 1984:333-337, Barbera/Felder n.d.). On an ideological level, the old Creole elite, which had itself been transformed in terms of ethnic composition and diversification of economic interests (cf. Balmori/Oppenheimer 1979:234-244), viewed the new Italian immigrant elite with suspicion. However, on a practical level they did business with them and even intermarried, as one of the case studies I shall present in chapter 6 shows.

It should be emphasized that migration statistics only give us the post facto large scale delineation of events. They tell us little about the individual's fate which is the central theme of this thesis. The drama of the individual's experience and the failures and successes of the migration project have frequently been evoked as powerful slogans in

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<sup>20</sup>*Tano* derives from *napoletano* (neapolitan) and became a shorthand in Argentine Spanish for all Italian immigrants.

popular discourse. But, as far as Italian migration to Argentina is concerned, these issues have only recently been addressed as a subject of serious study.

While migration was experienced by the individual, it was at the same time encapsulated in the dynamics of larger processes involving local and regional networks of relatives, friends, *paesani* (villagers), and people interested in the 'migration business', *padroni*<sup>21</sup> (cf. MacDonald 1964:86-88), migration agencies, and ship owners. There is more to be known about migration agencies. They may have played a part in the phenomenon of *chain migration*, one of the most fruitful ideas in recent migration studies. 'Chain migration' has become something like a research paradigm (for a critical review, cf. Baily 1988 and Devoto 1988) and was first employed by the Australian scholar, Price (1963:108-110) and later by MacDonald (1964). These authors suggested that migration rarely occurs as a single isolated act by an individual, but is tied in most cases to previous migration experiences of relatives and friends. The modern migration experience is characterized by specific 'chains of migration', communicative networks where an original pioneering group or individual 'calls', over a period of time, more relatives and friends to the place of migration:

"Chain migration can be defined as that movement in which prospective migrants learn of opportunities, are provided with transportation, and have initial accommodation and employment arranged *by means of primary social relationships with previous migrants.*" (MacDonald 1964:82)

Recently, there have been calls for refinement of the concept of chain migration. Sturino (1989) has argued that too narrow a focus on local chains of friends and relatives sometimes precludes the analysis of wider regional networks. In his study of migration networks from the Rende region of Calabria to Canada, Sturino concludes that the individual makes use, not only of local migration chains, but also of wider regional networks delineating a common regional identity<sup>22</sup>.

Baily (1980,1982) employed the chain-migration idea in his study of people who moved from Agnone and Sirolo to Buenos Aires. Furthermore, in his comparative study on Italian migration to New York and Buenos Aires, Baily demonstrated that Italians of the

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<sup>21</sup>*Padrone* is used here in the sense of 'Italian owner of a business in the Americas, who employs immigrants from his home region or village'.

<sup>22</sup>Furthermore, Moya (1988:6), in a study on Spanish immigration to Argentina, emphasized that 'chains' were often divided by social class. He also introduced the idea of 'dormant chains', that is to say networks of immigrants which were not activated in unpropitious times of economic crisis (ibid.:61).

same regional and local background not only migrated in chain patterns but also settled in geographical proximity in the New World according to regional and local origin. Gandolfo's work (1988) is the only historical study to date which throws light on the important role of the elite and its activities in such chains. Building on Baily's material on the Agnonesi and Sirolesi in Buenos Aires, Gandolfo is able to show how the *notabili* and *prominenti* of the Agnonese community effectively managed the migration business, called new *paesani*, established mutual aid societies and newspapers, and were connected to the wider Italian and Italo-Argentine business and industrial elite of Buenos Aires.

There will be more detailed discussion on the insertion of Italian immigrants into the context of urban Buenos Aires in chapter 5. At present I shall summarize the following points.

Italians arrived in Argentina as poor, unskilled or semiskilled immigrants. In most cases, apart from exceptions such as the colonies in the Province of Santa Fe, they did not get access to land titles, and if they went into agricultural occupations, worked the land foremostly as sharecroppers and seasonal labourers. Being the most numerous group of foreign immigrants to Argentina, their main contribution was to the formation of the new Argentine immigrant society in the cities of the Littoral, in particular Buenos Aires. They were an influential, and often dominant part, of the new urban working and middle classes, and the entrepreneurial elite. However, just as their access to significant landed property was blocked by the landed Creole elite, so too was their access to political power. The Argentine constitution granted many rights to foreigners, but not the right to vote. Furthermore, naturalization rates among Italians and other foreigners remained very low<sup>23</sup>. Solberg (1970:42-43) has argued that abstention from Argentine citizenship was due to two reasons. Firstly, the political system dominated by the Creole elite remained closed to foreigners and secondly, many immigrants (particularly businessmen) found it more convenient to retain their original nationality, since the Argentine constitution granted them the protection of the civil code and, in addition, they could count on the diplomatic protection of their mother country.

Faced with masses of arriving people whose 'patriotic' allegiances to Argentina were

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<sup>23</sup>"In 1914 only 33,219 Argentine immigrants, or about 2.25 per cent of the total male foreign-born population, were naturalized."  
(Solberg 1970:42)

perceived as ambiguous, if not totally lacking, the ideology of the governing elite towards mass immigration began to change from the more liberal promotion of migration in the 1870s to the call for selected immigration in the early 20th century.

#### 4. 'Expected' and 'Real' immigrants:

##### The Reaction of the Landed Elite

As Germani (1970:299) demonstrates, from 1890 onwards, immigrants took up mainly non-agricultural occupations after arrival. The process of consolidation of landed property among Creole landowners, combined with the rising prices of land, prevented immigrants buying land. In 1914, only 10% of 'landed property owners' were foreigners. Their share in the operational functioning of agricultural businesses was already significantly higher: 44% of the administrators, directors, and managers of cattle-breeding operations were foreigners (Germani 1970:301).

Cortes Conde/Gallo (1967:100-103) have also insisted that the 'modernization' of Argentina in the 19th century largely benefitted the landholding classes. The old Creole elite and those recent immigrants from Spain, England, Scotland, Ireland, France and Germany who became sheep breeders, wholesalers and financiers, formed a new and consolidated landholding class prior to mass immigration and were the main benefactors from the expansion of Argentine territory into the Indian territories of the Pampas. The case studies by Balmori/Oppenheimer (1979, 1984:129-184) give evidence on how Spanish immigrants had already come in the late 18th century to Buenos Aires, attracted by the commercial and administrative reforms of the Spanish Bourbons. The first generation of these immigrants became shopkeepers, merchants and colonial administrators. They then invested their modest fortunes from these activities in the purchase of land which was still relatively cheap. The second generation combined the activities of shop trading with cattle ranching and expanded and diversified family enterprises. In the second half of the 19th century, the third generation was still active in large-scale cattle ranching and commercial trading, but became increasingly involved in public offices, taking up important posts in the railway boards and in finance (Balmori/Oppenheimer 1979:234-237). The rise of a post-colonial landed oligarchy in 19th century Argentina was thus characterized by the shift from originally medium-sized wholesalers to large landowners with vast corporations and multiple investments, often



in industries processing agricultural products (meat packing, salting, and chilling plants). The expansion and consolidation of large landholdings (*estancias*) was facilitated by marriage alliances and geographical proximity. In the second and third generation, families made the *estancia* and the trading of products from the *estancia* the central feature of the Argentine economy. They amassed such immense fortunes (which were partly reinvested in landed property) that, by the early 20th century, it was very difficult to acquire large tracts of land in the Pampas because of the enormous rise in land prices (Balmori/Oppenheimer 1979:244)<sup>24</sup>.

Only in a few cases, such as the colonies of the province of Santa Fe, were immigrants able to get access to land titles (Gallo 1983:63-64). In most other areas immigrants worked as farm labourers or share croppers.

The original liberal idea of immigration as the colonization of the Pampas with educated and innovative peasants from Europe who would own their land, had largely failed. As early as 1826, under the presidency of Bernardino Rivadavia, there were occasional attempts to settle European immigrants on the Pampas. But it was only after the overthrow of the dictator, Juan Manuel de Rosas in 1852, that liberal politicians could write the promotion of immigration into the constitution of 1853.

"Article 25.- The Federal Government will promote European immigration. The Government cannot restrict, nor limit or burden with taxes the entry of those foreigners into the Argentine territory, who intend to work the land, to improve the industries, and to introduce and teach arts and sciences."

(Constitución de la Nación Argentina, Texto vigente, 1989:9)

In fact, for liberal writers and statesmen like Juan Bautista Alberdi (1810-1884) and Domingo F. Sarmiento (1811-1888), *immigration* meant *modernization* (cf. Halperin Donghi 1976:437) and was seen in sharp opposition to the prevalent politics of provincial war-waging leaders (*caudillos*) like Juan Facundo Quiroga (1788-1836) and the dictator, Rosas (1793-1877). Alberdi coined the programmatic slogan 'to govern is to populate' (*gobernar es poblar*)<sup>25</sup>, but it was Sarmiento who laid out the ideological

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<sup>24</sup>Between 1903 and 1913 the increase in land prices was almost fourfold (Cortes Conde 1979:172). This rise was due to a combination of factors which determined the profitability of the land and varied over time, such as access to the railroads and the particular utilization of the land (that is, whether the land was used for sheep and cattle pastures, or for the cultivation of different crops).

<sup>25</sup>This rhetoric of immigration made direct reference to the sparsely populated Pampas: In 1810, Argentina had just over 400,000 inhabitants; and 1.3 million in 1859 on a national territory of almost one million square miles or 2,77 million square

framework for immigration. The book which he wrote in 1845, criticizing federalism and the caudillos was entitled "Facundo: Civilization and Barbarism" (Facundo. *Civilización y barbarie*; Sarmiento 1970). Its title is symptomatic of the liberal thought of the time which, as Blengino (1980:332f.) points out, viewed Argentina's fate and ultimately its capacity for progress as the struggle between mutually exclusive options of civilization vs. barbarism, city vs. Pampa (desert), citizen vs. gaucho, sedentariness vs. nomadism, and constitutionalism vs. caudillismo. Cities were understood by Sarmiento as the crucial centres of progress from where 'civilization' (that is European culture) should radiate to the Pampas (Sarmiento 1970:31-48; cf. also Romero 1963:135f.).

Immigration should not simply increase the population, but engender a civilizing process *qua* europeanization. A 'regeneration of races' as Sarmiento called it (cf. Germani 1970:290), would overcome the obstacles to modernization and progress which were posed by the persisting features of colonial society. The ideal immigrant would be educated, literate and of liberal and republican political alignments; just like the industrious, farming and landowning Scottish and German colonies Sarmiento had seen in the province of Buenos Aires (ibid.:39). *Early* Italian immigrants in the 1850s seemed to resemble some of Sarmiento's ideal immigrants. Liberal and upper-class, they had fought in the wars prior to the unification of Italy in 1861 and were followers of the leaders of the movement for Italian unification (*risorgimento*), like Mazzini and Garibaldi (Blengino 1980:333). North American pioneer settlers were seen by the Argentine political elite as exemplary of rural development, and between 1853 and 1870 a considerable number of European immigrant colonies were founded through schemes supported by the Argentine government in the provinces of Corrientes, Entre Ríos, Córdoba, Santa Fe and Buenos Aires (Gallo 1983:63-70). The provincial government of Santa Fe was particularly successful in attracting colonists who eventually became farm smallholders and formed a new middle class. Outside these areas, and especially in the Province of Buenos Aires, the picture was rather different. Immigrant farmers would find it increasingly difficult to buy and own land, mainly because landowners of Creole descent and from early 19th century European immigration had concentrated and consolidated large landholdings (estancias) for extensive sheep and cattle raising.

The economic presence of immigrants became most dominant in the cities and their

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kilometres. Buenos Aires grew from 40,000 to 95,000 inhabitants in the same period (Romero 1963:163, Rock 1987:114ff.).

commercial, industrial and service sectors. It was also in these new and rising sectors that immigrants experienced the highest social and professional mobility.

The important point to emphasize, is not so much the question of numbers but rather the fact that the urban industrial elite and the middle and working classes of the Argentine Littoral were, by the end of the 19th century, largely formed by immigrants. Faced with the reality of immigrants a curious *inversion of ideas* took place among the original promoters of immigration. Following Sarmiento's and Alberdi's plans for migration, they had wished to populate Argentina and colonize the Pampas with North and Middle Europeans. Now that immigration of quite a different kind had taken place, the political ruling class of the country, (the land-based Creole elite intermarried with early European immigrants), feared for their political power, seeing it threatened by both the emerging industrial bourgeoisie of immigrant extraction (cf. Solberg 1970:47,83)<sup>26</sup> and the largely immigrant working class.

As mentioned in my earlier analysis of the composition of immigrants, by the end of the century, immigration had become a mass phenomenon involving illiterate and semi-literate peasants from Southern Europe, mainly Southern Italy and Spain. In the Creole elite's perception these newcomers were the opposite to the 'idyllic' peasants, or owner-cultivators gifted with the Anglo-Saxon work ethic that they had expected. Soon, the Creole elite propagated a racial ideology which consisted of the old Hispanic values of Creole culture, gaucho ways of life and a longing for Argentine national identity. They consequently revived the discourse of precisely those aspects of Argentine culture and society which the original liberal promoters of 'civilizing' and 'europeanizing' had rejected. As a result, stylized gaucho figures like Juan Moreira became very popular in theatre plays and pamphlets. Prieto (1988:13-22) has argued that compulsory primary schools and literacy campaigns had produced, in the 1870s, a semiliterate population of Creoles, immigrants and descendants of immigrants. The growing demand for texts by this new audience and their specific tastes, were quite different from that offered by the few upper class Argentine authors whose books were published in private editions, limited to a few hundred copies. Modelled on the successful gaucho-epic, Martín Fierro by José Hernández, the journalist, Eduardo Gutiérrez, published serial booklets

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<sup>26</sup>In 1914, 80% of Buenos Aires' commercial establishments were owned by foreigners (Solberg 1970:51).

(*folletines*) on the adventures of the gaucho, Juan Moreira. The stories, which were based loosely on the life of Juan Moreira not only idealized the gaucho way of life in the rural Pampas prior to mass immigration (like the Martín Fierro-epic), but also showed the gaucho struggling with new social forces such as immigrants in urban and semi-urban contexts.

Prieto proposes that, in a period of rapid social transformation and with the controversial encounter of different life-styles and the partial dissolution of ethnic identities, these serialized images of the gaucho could provide a new focus of identification for a mass readership. The popularized versions of Creole culture were important in the cultural mediation of the encounter between native Argentines and arriving immigrants. This applies, not only at the level of 'mediated' literary mass-consumption, but also at the level of social commensality. At least until the 1920s, numerous so-called 'Creole centres' (*centros criollos*) in Buenos Aires fostered traditions of gaucho-songs, carnivals, and grill-parties (*asados*) (Prieto 1988:13-22,90,130; cf. also Solberg 1970:143-148; Blengino 1980:345; Evans 1979:52, Abou 1981:179,184-188).

On the other hand, stereotypes of European immigrants were used in political discourse, reflected by government policies, and expounded by the press and in literature for political and propagandistic ends. As Solberg (1970:10ff.) shows, the Argentine elite had a very manifest interest in foreign mass immigration which was expected to produce a submissive and obedient working class. From 1890 to 1905 immigrants were repeatedly used as strikebreakers<sup>27</sup>.

The ideological differentiation of the working class was translated into the idiom of race: not all immigrants were equally desirable. At the top of the elite's racial classification were Anglo-Saxons and North Europeans. This type of late 19th century racist discourse assumed that Southern Europeans 'were too much like uneducated Creoles'. It was part of a wider ideology among the elite which wanted a 'regeneration of races' through immigration. A goal that could be most successfully achieved with immigrants from the North of Europe. Alberdi's 'anglomania', as Abou (1981:185) termed it, even recommended the use of English to the Argentines because Spanish was seen as incompatible with progress. At the bottom of the racial scale stood Jews, Arabs and Negroes. However, concepts of class and race constantly intermingled. In Argentina, upper class Italians, because of their elite culture, were perceived as bearers of a distinct

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<sup>27</sup>See, for example, their role in the railroad strikes of the 1890s (Solberg 1970:8-9).

cultural tradition (Solberg 1970:10-19); but, we shall see from people's statements in Chapter 6, that these Italians were still not fully acceptable as marriage partners to the familias tradicionales.

Within the wider discussion on Argentine national identity, some writers, for example novelists and dramatists like Francisco A. Sicardi, Florencio Sánchez and Manuel Gálvez, 'superelevated' their expectations for the 'new' Argentine society of Creoles and immigrants. According to these authors, this new society was destined to be formed by a 'virile race of the future' (Sicardi) of 'almost human perfection' (Sánchez) which was 'predestined in the near future to a magnificent destiny' (Gálvez). Juan Alsina, the Argentine Government's director of immigration, went even further in 1900 when he wished to 'realize the CHRISTIAN REPUBLIC, perfect and durable, long desired by philosophers' (all citations from Solberg 1970:21-26). But this meant that immigration had to be *selective*. At the time of World War I, when the first wave of mass immigration to Argentina (1874-1914) had come to an end, selective immigration was justified by the xenophobic notion of 'social defense' (defensa social). Immigrants in the mind of political essayist, Francisco Stach, had to be 'physically and mentally sane'<sup>28</sup>. Criminals, political activists, religious fanatics and sectarians, women of dubious moral conduct and, last but not least, 'inferior races' should be precluded from immigration (Armus 1985:95-104).

*Selective immigration* was advocated, and the xenophobic ideology behind it was also reflected in the Law of Residence (1902) and the Law of Social Defense (1910). The Law of Social Defense (Ley de Defensa Social), which in its first section prohibited the entry of foreign anarchists to Argentina (Panettieri 1968:147), had been drafted by the upper-class legislators of the Argentine government to counter the activities of anarchists (cf. also Solberg 1970:110-112), many of whom were working class Italians and Spaniards. The industrialization of Greater Buenos Aires had produced a substantial working class of immigrant origin which had organized itself, by the end of the 19th century, into the first trade unions and anarchist associations (Rock 1987:187)<sup>29</sup>. Prominent Italian

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<sup>28</sup>It is worth mentioning here that, in 1911, the Argentine Government temporarily halted Italian immigration because of what it perceived as unhygienic conditions on Italian ships (cf. Rosoli 1988:294f.). On conditions on Italian immigrant ships cf. Missori (1973).

<sup>29</sup>Not only the upper class feared political activities by foreigners, but also the Trade Unions were sensitive to new immigrants who might threaten the employment chances

anarchists like Enrico Malatesta<sup>30</sup> and Pietro Gori<sup>31</sup>, came to Buenos Aires. The latter helped to found the influential anarchist headorganisation Federación Obrera Argentina (FOA) in 1901<sup>32</sup> (Solberg 1970:108, Bayer 1983:531-532). For some time the anarchist movement was the most influential political group among workers. Though Anarchism had its heydays at the turn of the century, parts of it persisted until the early 1930s (ibid.:547) as some of the older immigrants I interviewed recalled<sup>33</sup>.

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of Argentine workers and foreigners already resident in Argentina. In the early 20th century, the Argentine FORA (cf. below) held joint conferences with their European counterparts, like the Italian Trade Unions, to discuss the issue. The Argentine socialist leader Alfredo Palacios addressed one such conference in 1919 (cf. Tieffenberg 1946:20,79-81).

<sup>30</sup>Malatesta came to Argentina in 1885 to avoid serving a sentence which related to a conviction he had got in Italy 1884; he stayed in Argentina till 1889 (Trento 1974:164).

<sup>31</sup>Secondary sources give different dates for the duration of Gori's stay in Argentina: Trento (1974:166) gives 1898-1902, Bayer (1983:531) 1892-1902.

<sup>32</sup>FOA was renamed FORA (Federación Obrera Regional Argentina) at its fourth congress in 1904 (Panettieri 1968:124-125).

<sup>33</sup>See Domenico Donatello's account in chapter 7. Donatello, the son of an anarchist, was distantly acquainted with Severino di Giovanni, who acquired some sad notoriety in the later phase of Anarchism in Argentina.

Severino di Giovanni was born in Italy in 1901 and came to Argentina in 1923. Rather a sensitive character, he was interested in literature, wrote poems and cultivated flowers which he sold at the market 'Mercado del Abasto' in Buenos Aires. He then became a printer and joined the anarchists. In 1925, Severino di Giovanni made headlines when he stormed with a group of like-minded the stage of the Teatro Colón. The Argentine President Marcelo T. Alvear, the Italian Ambassador (of then Fascist Italy) and many Italians had come to the opera house in order to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the accession to the throne of King Vittorio Emmanuele III. The Argentine police, aided by militant 'Blackshirts' of Italian Fascist organizations, detained him. In 1931, under the new military government of Uriburu, and after Di Giovanni's group had planted various bombs, he was brought to trial, sentenced to death and executed (cf. Bayer 1989:21-24, 293-316).

## 5. The Debate on Emigration in Italy

Not only was the arrival of immigrants in Argentina controversial, but also their departure which had caused heated debate in Italy.

In fact, the whole discussion of mass emigration in the newly unified Italy (after 1861) was dominated by conflicting political and economic interests. Far from being the spontaneous activity of single individuals, migration involved multiple interests and networks of local middlemen, recruitment and shipping agencies. The massive scale of this phenomenon provoked the interest of Parliament in Rome. As Dore (1964:42-53) has shown, the central Italian Government repeatedly tried sending out questionnaires to the Southern provinces to get a picture of the amount of migration and the practices of recruiters and their middlemen. The Southern political elite opposed such State intervention from the North and only scarce information reached the statistical office in Rome. However, it was a well established fact that, by the 1870s, numerous Italian and foreign agencies were operating through their middlemen in even the remotest parts of the Italian South (Dore 1964)<sup>34</sup>. These agencies, representing the huge shipping companies of Genoa, tried to lure emigrants into the voyage by sea by offering cheap passages to the 'New World'. Because of the conflicting interests of different sectors of the ruling classes, such as the Southern landowners who feared depopulation and the rise of rural wages as opposed to the ship owners of Genoa (and to a lesser extent Naples) who wanted to further migration, a first law on regulating recruitment practices, was only passed in 1888<sup>35</sup> (Dore 1964:56-61). It was a very liberal law which provided only limited regulations, and thus reflected the influential interests of the Italian merchant fleet and its large shipping 'trusts'. Those trusts such as the *Navigazione Generale Italiana* had been formed in Genoa. The *Navigazione Generale Italiana* had bought several other companies and now occupied something like a monopoly in the trade with migrants to South America. When foreign shipping companies, like the English Anchor Line, were brought into Naples to break up the monopoly of the *Navigazione Generale*, the latter triumphed. Once again, the Southern political elite and intelligentsia perceived itself as the victim of northern economic interests, and the migrants were prey to the speculations

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<sup>34</sup>Similarly, Argentine consulates were opened, even in minor Spanish towns, to enhance migration (Moya 1988:60).

<sup>35</sup>A first version had already been discussed in 1876.

and 'tyranny of the maritime trusts' (ibid:87).

The arguments of the political debate on emigration in late 19th century Italy were a reflection of vested economical interests. The Southern landowning class argued that emigration had to be restricted and regulated by the State, for example, by setting quotas for provinces according to the state of their agriculture, and by allowing emigration only to people who had sufficient money at their possession to survive the first months in America. The 'regulation' of emigration by the local elite became a well established pattern: they pressured local bureaucrats not to grant passports, and intimidated individual immigrants by finding out, through the local post office, about their contacts with friends and relatives in the Americas and their eventual plans to emigrate. The local agents of the shipping agencies worked with the same methods, trying to get hold of potential passengers through the lists of applications for passports in the municipalities (Dore 1964:95). From the beginning of emigration, both the refusal to let someone migrate, and the forced migration of unwanted political activists, were two means by which the local elites exercised power. Dominant political forces, the landowners, the Fascist state and the post-World War II Democrazia Cristiana<sup>36</sup> have always taken the right to regulate migration for their own ends, as Bell reveals:

"Not until after 1913, the peak year of exodus, did the Italian government use its power to refuse permission to emigrate, a policy strengthened by the closing of borders once Italy went to war. Thus the well-known fascist response to internal disorders in 1926 - withdrawal of passports - reflected a 'liberal' government policy initiated more than a decade earlier. In short, after centuries during which peasants did not have the right to move freely, a fifty-year period of unrestricted movement ended in 1914. Because Italy's industrial capitalist development was not sufficiently labor intensive to absorb population growth, the state since that time often approved rather freely requests to emigrate, but the right to refuse was always present and often exercised. Under fascism, for example, only passport applications from party members in good standing had much chance of approval."

(Bell 1979:192)

For the rising poor rural proletariat in the South of Italy, the reasons for emigrating were low wages, high rents on land, unjust tenancy arrangements (like the *mezzadria*), and the high interest rates of local money lenders. The debate on migration was, then, located

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<sup>36</sup>In 1949, The Italian Prime Minister, Alcide De Gasperi(DC), addressed unemployed day-labourers who were demonstrating for 'land and work', in the zone of large estates in the Sila mountains (Calabria), with the famous sentence: "You should learn a foreign language and go abroad!" (Cinanni 1968:207).



in a larger panorama of class conflict and individual options which were discussed in order to solve Italy's 'social' or 'Southern question' (*questione sociale* and *questione meridionale*).

Political thinking formed part of a wider debate about the assessment of Italian's role in late 19th century Imperialism and Colonialism. One side argued successfully, for Italy to join the colonial powers, with the resulting African wars and the conquest of colonies in Eritrea and Libya. Other policies were the 'internal' colonization of Italian waste land and the draining of marshlands. These plans proceeded slowly and, like attempts for agrarian reform, were blocked by the landholding class. Finally, the third policy consisted of what was called 'spontaneous colonization' (*colonizzazione spontanea*): labour migration (and *not* necessarily rural colonization) to South America (Dore 1964:71). Thirty years later, when Italian immigration was already showing its profound impact on the formation of Argentina and Buenos Aires, 'spontaneous colonization' and 'commercial colonies' (*colonie commerciali*) were seen as the particular Italian contribution to the age of Imperialism. Admittedly, for many Italian emigrants this implied an 'Imperialism of the poor' (*imperialismo dei poveri*) (ibid:203). In Italian writings of the time, the 'colonies' constituted by migrants were perceived as an opportunity for peaceful expansion towards 'a greater Italy' (*più grande Italia*) or even a 'new Italy' (*nuova Italia*) (Dore 1964:128-139).

A part of the Italian discussion saw 'commercial colonization' qua emigration as directly opposed to enforced colonialism in Africa and the earlier Spanish conquest of America. One such example is Luigi Einaudi's early description of the economic contribution of Italians to Argentina. In his work, "Un Principe Mercante", ('A merchant prince', 1899), he reviewed the Italian business man's contribution to Latin America, based on an 'ideal type', the industrialist Dell'Acqua. Einaudi's main argument was that Italians migrating in 1900, were transformed from humble peasants into entrepreneurs in the New World.

Einaudi saw this as a direct contrast to Italian colonization by force in Africa, and the colonies of the British Empire:

"And here is the evidence that beyond the Atlantic, at the banks of the River Plate, rises a 'new Italy' (*una nuova Italia*) and a new people is formed, which although it is Argentine will conserve the fundamental characters of the Italian people and will prove to the world that the imperialist ideal (*l'ideale imperialista*) is not destined to remain [exclusively] Anglo-Saxon."

(Einaudi 1899:11<sup>37</sup>, cited by Dore 1964:186)

Einaudi was using already concepts which later became common coinage among Italian industrialists in Argentina: the ideal type of a leading entrepreneur, the *capitano d'industria*, and the relation between Italy and Argentina which is perceived in the idiom of kinship with Italians being the 'brothers' (*fratelli*) of the Argentines and Argentina the 'brother people' (*popolo fratello*) of Italy. As Scarzanella (1983:10-11) has poignantly argued, both the vision of 'the greater Italy at the River Plate' by parts of the Italian ruling classes and the call for 'europeanization' by the Argentine liberal elite, were complementary ideologies to justify large-scale emigration (from Italy) and immigration

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<sup>37</sup>A reviewer of Einaudi's book wrote in the same enthusiastic and imperialist vein: "Einaudi's book comes at the right moment. In the struggle between the various races which divide among them the *empire of the world*, the *Latin race* in general, and the Italian in particular, loses more every day of its predominance in literature, science and commerce that [once] meant its glory and power. The numeric proportion of the various European nationalities is always more to Italy's disadvantage: there will be a day when the world will be foremostly inhabited by Englishmen, Germans, Russians and oriental peoples. We too must look to the *future* and persuade ourselves that only with energetic effort we can prevent ourselves from being suffocated by the other nations.

"Italy has a high birth-rate; and so her population has to emigrate to win its bread in other countries when it becomes difficult at home. But when emigrating they should *remain Italians*, if not by nationality, then at least by *race, language and sentiment*. ...

"Hence our emigration ... should be directed to places where it can prosper, without our people being absorbed by the native populations and without losing their *Italianess* (*carattere d'italianità*). These places must be in *South America* - the other parts of the world are all occupied by races which are too different from our own. It hurts to see how the Italian peasants are prompted to emigrate to the ingrate lands of Pomerania [and] to the blazing sands of Abbesinia, when in South America there are vast and fertile territories where groups of compatriots are ready to receive the newcomers."

(Tovo 1899:515-516; my italics)

(into Argentina)<sup>38</sup>.

In Argentina, however, the Italian rhetoric was not well received. Rather, nationalist and xenophobic writers (such as Ricardo Rojas) quickly seized the opportunity to denounce supposed Italian claims to 'Argentina as its colony' (Solberg 1970:136), and warned against the "italianization of Argentina"<sup>39</sup>. Such nationalist reactions, sometimes coloured with a much wider attack against 'European influences' in Argentina, foreshadowed some of the currents of nationalist ideologies which emerged in the 1920s and 1930s and even of later Peronism, which I shall discuss in the next chapter.

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<sup>38</sup>Sometimes these ideologies clashed. For example, Rosoli (1988:288-289) interprets the diplomatic dispute between Italy and Argentina over sanitary conditions on Italian immigrant ships in 1911, as an expression of contentious political views on emigration more generally.

<sup>39</sup>Such was the title of a book by Maciel (1924), who aggressively argued against non-Spanish immigration and urged a 'recasting' of the immigrant groups according to Hispanic values:

"In order to progress morally and not to pervert democracy and liberties into the instruments of her own decline, Argentina cannot continue to be (as she has been) a conglomerate of the most diverse races of the earth.

How can we avoid it? How can we recast once and for all, in one gigantic and homogeneous alloy, the incoherent social remnants which, day after day, arrive in our country and will add further to the already existing groups forearmed with their traditions and original customs?"

(Maciel 1924:33)

## CHAPTER 3

### The Inversion of Roles II:

#### An Outline of National Politics from 1930 to 1988

##### 1. From Fascism to Peronism: Argentine Nationalism

After 1930, European immigration to Argentina slowed down and changed its composition. Whereas, roughly speaking, Italian and Spanish immigration peaked before World War I, it was between the world wars that Polish and German immigration gained in relative importance. Among the contingents arriving from Europe in the 1920s and 1930s, there were people fleeing from Fascism, Franco-Spain and Nazi Germany. The Second World War itself, brought European immigration to Argentina almost to a halt and European immigration was increasingly replaced by immigration from the interior provinces and from neighbouring countries.

When, in 1947, the first Italian immigrants after the Second World War arrived at the port of Buenos Aires, they came to a country which was governed by a populist leader: Juan Domingo Perón. He had been Labour Secretary (Minister of Social Welfare) since 1943 and was elected president in 1946. His time in government as minister and president from 1943 to 1955 was marked by the development of a particular movement and ideology, known as Peronism, which, in its different versions, would influence Argentina to the present day.

In this chapter, I will first trace the ideological ancestry of Peronism, and then go on to present the political history of the 'classical' period of Peronism (1943-55). I shall then analyse the Peronist policies on new European immigration after World War II and finally, give a brief chronology of Argentine history from 1955 to the present day. I proceed in this manner in order to place the personal accounts of immigrants and their descendants (which are reported in later chapters) within the context of the highly complex recent history of Argentina. In particular, I have chosen to concentrate on ideologies rather than on historical events, because many Italians who came after World War II to Argentina, but *also* descendants of Italians who travelled to Fascist Italy between the wars, were faced with the two dominant ideologies of Italian Fascism and

Argentine Peronism<sup>1</sup>. These ideologies have been perceived in both popular discourse and scholarly literature as linked phenomena.

The accounts of immigrants and their descendants put a strong emphasis on the periodization of political history. During the economic crisis prevailing in 1988/89, the people I spoke to made constant reference to ideologies like Peronism, which as their denominations persist (such as in the presidential elections, cf. chapter 4), are still available for political labelling. And because people make statements about their perception and experience of these ideologies during their lifetimes (which are to some degree also representations of contemporary political systems), it is essential to understand their historical context. A review of Peronism and its relation to Fascism is particularly necessary for comprehending the political views taken by members of elite families in chapter 6.

Peronism is rooted in different forms of Argentine nationalism and populism of the 1920s and 1930s and partly inspired by variants of Fascism in Italy, Spain and Germany. In my analysis of the ideological ancestry of Peronism, I rely mainly on Buchrucker's (1987) recent study on Nationalism and Peronism from 1927 to 1955, but I shall also refer to other authors, including Waldmann (1974), Murmis/Portantiero (1971) and Waisman (1987).

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Argentine politics witnessed the rise of the Radical Party (Unión Cívica Radical, UCR). This was a party with a heterogeneous and complex social base (including members of the landed upper classes; cf. Rock 1975:67) which drew mainly on the newly formed Argentine middle classes of immigrant *origin* for its electoral support. I emphasize 'origin', because even after the electoral reforms of the 1912 Saenz Peña Law, only male *Argentine* citizens could vote. This by implication excluded substantial parts of the population from the elections, not only women, but also those first generation immigrants who had not been naturalized (Rock

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<sup>1</sup>See also the following observation with reference to the Italian immigrant industrialist, Torcuato Di Tella, in the 1920s and 30s:

"Many of the immigrants who had come to escape from Europe's ideological struggles were disturbed to find these movements becoming almost equally important in Argentina."

(Cochran/Reina 1962:31)

1987:189f., cf. also Solberg 1970:123).

A comprehensive assessment of Radical governments at the beginning of the century does not form part of this thesis. However, with Buchrucker (1987:27-32) we can observe that under the Radical party leader, Hipólito Yrigoyen (who became twice president of Argentina, from 1916-1922 and from 1928-1930), a particular nationalist ideology was developed. Yrigoyen's government favoured, for example, Argentine neutrality during World War I, and intended to defend Argentine economic interests, namely with the nationalization of the petroleum industry, against what was perceived as foreign 'imperialism' (that is to say, British and American investment in Argentina). This kind of nationalism within the Radical Party saw itself in opposition to the 'traditional' old Creole ruling class of the country (the familias tradicionales) who were mainly represented through the Conservative Party (Partido Conservador). The Conservative Party, reflecting the interests of its supporters, favoured a liberal, non-interventionist economic policy of agricultural exports in order to import capital and industrial goods. As mentioned before, the Radical Party relied also on upper class support. This was particularly the case with the government of Marcelo T. Alvear (President from 1922-1928) who himself came from one of the richest landed families. However, distinctions of social class were not reflected directly in party ideology. And while it is right to see the differences between personalistas (followers of Yrigoyen), and antipersonalistas (opponents of Yrigoyen, and to some degree followers of Marcelo T. Alvear), as ideological differences between a more populist and a more elitist approach to politics, these differences did not simply reflect the class background of those who held them. To a certain degree the development of a strand of nationalism by the UCR might be explained as a reaction to the previous political regimes of the upper classes. Their liberal, *laissez-faire* approach to economics had implied Argentina's close, and in the UCR's view, disadvantageous and one-sided, trading relations with Europe and the United States (cf. chapter 2). In turn, the rise of nationalist creeds in the Conservative Party developed in opposition to Radical governments, to the economic crisis in the 1920s and to what was more generally perceived as an era of economic and moral decline in comparison to the previous paternalistic regimes of the familias tradicionales. Later, around 1940, elements of various nationalisms would be selectively and eclectically used by Perón and his movement.

Buchrucker's main line of interpretation is that nationalist ideologies in the 1920s and 1930s were a reaction by parts of the *conservative* elite to a perceived threat to the old

established order from new political forces, such as the popular Radical Party but also left-wing parties, like the Socialist Party and the anarchist movement (Buchruecker 1987:27-97).

However, in contrast to Europe after the First World War, Argentina's political scene did not include right wing extremists, or conservative extremism. The developing nationalism was an offspring of certain sectors of the traditionally conservative ruling class and closely linked military circles who were both opposed to the reformed law on voting rights in 1912, rather than being the product of a frustrated petty bourgeoisie and disillusioned war-returnees.

Catholic conservatives such as the writers, Leopoldo Lugones (1874-1938), Carlos Ibarguren (1877-1956) and the brothers Rodolfo and Julio Irazusta, were angered by the 'ascension of the plebes to power', as they called compulsory and secret voting for all adult male citizens introduced by the Saenz Peña Law. They were also opposed to laicist and anticlerical policies such as the abolishment of religious instruction in state schools<sup>2</sup>, the introduction of registry offices( registros civiles), and the first social laws. The ideological response of the conservatives was inspired by Catholicism, antimodernism and a pronounced elitism which saw in the old landholding class the pre-ordained rulers of the country. It centred around notions of the family (familia), nation (nación), patria (fatherland) and private property. More importantly, however, the supporters of this line of thought questioned the validity of liberal parliamentary democracy itself and favoured authoritarian or even dictatorial rule instead.

Such statements of Social Darwinism were widespread in various forms among conservative intellectuals, and further fuelled by fears of leftist extremism, anarchism, and the huge success of the Radical Party in democratic, though still all-male, elections. *Xenophobic attitudes* played some part in this ideology as the success of the Radical party was attributed to a population which was now largely of *immigrant descent*. Leftist extremism and anarchism were seen as the sinister work of foreign agitators from Spain and Italy. Not least conservative circles feared an Argentine repetition of the Russian

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<sup>2</sup>This measure was introduced already under the government of President Roca, 1898-1904 (Buchrucker 1987:29).

Revolution of 1917<sup>3</sup>.

The declared enemies of the conservative nationalists were anarchism, trade unionism, socialism, modern reformist philosophy, the governments of the Radical Party and the Soviet Union. *Positive* values were attributed to the Nation, tradition and Catholicism which would engender order, authority and hierarchy. A nostalgic return to these traditional and rural values was propagated in the confusing metropolitan world of Buenos Aires whose drive towards modernity and progress was perceived as unstoppable secularization and moral decline<sup>4</sup>. In this Spenglerian mood one of the most famous essays on Buenos Aires was entitled 'Goliath's head' (Martínez Estrada 1983:29-40).

But, *who* could establish and then guarantee order and discipline? *Who* could be the few selected rulers, representing the high morality of catholicism and the fatherland?

It was the ideology summarized above which prevailed among the men around General José Felix Uriburu (1868-1932) who overthrew the elected President, Hipólito Yrigoyen, in the first successful military coup in Argentina on the 6th of September 1930. Called Uriburismo, after its political leader, this variant of nationalism was soon succeeded by other nationalisms in the 1930s, which became notorious as the 'infamous' decade (década infame), characterized by electoral fraud to keep the ruling conservatives in power (Buchrucker 1987:103-117, Rock 1987:214). On an ideological level, the period witnessed the further elaboration and differentiation of nationalism with two main strands developing; one which sought a neo-conservative restoration, and another more populist one. To some degrees these ideologies reflected ongoing battles in the political arena. The Radical Party, which was still winning majorities in national and provincial elections, was deprived of its victories by military intervention and subsequently, proscription (cf. Walter 1985:98-116).

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<sup>3</sup>It was the time when antisemitic ideas about a conspiracy of Jewish high finance and international socialism circulated in Europe and North America and this was readily taken up by some Argentine conservatives.

Buchrucker (1987:57-58) cites the writings of Julián Martel (*La Bolsa*), Henry Ford (*The International Jew*), and the widely reported 'Protocolos de los Sabios de Sion' as being influential among the Argentine conservative nationalists.

<sup>4</sup>See also chapter 2 for the Argentine elite's xenophobic reaction to immigration, chapter 5 on Buenos Aires as a 'modern' metropolis, and chapters 7 and 8 for the controversial notions of 'modernity' among immigrants and descendants.



The ideological response of the ruling conservatives tightened but also became more eclectic. Liberal conservatives around General Agustín P. Justo were opposed to a corporate state and wanted to restore the constitution, while condemning what they called the 'demagogy' of Yrigoyen's government. With other parties, among them Juan B. Justo's Socialist Party, they formed an alliance of parties which became known as the concordancia and with whose support Agustín P. Justo won the presidential elections of 1931 (Walter 1985:127-132, Rock 1987:216-217).

By contrast, the nationalist minority, which had led the 'revolution' of 1930, did not want, under any circumstances, a return to what they portrayed as the conflict-ridden and morally decaying years of popular democracy under the Radical Party<sup>5</sup>. They wanted the already mentioned concepts of tradition, order, hierarchy and catholic values to be reinstated and sanctioned by the State. While it identified with the economic interests of the landholding elite, this ideology defied more 'enlightened' visions of the modern liberal state as it had been envisaged by Sarmiento and Alberdi in the 19th century, and later by the thinkers and statesmen of the 'generation of the 80s' (of the 1880s, la generación del 80). *Values of the past*, as Buchrucker (1987:125) has called them, were held in high regard. Historical periods served as idealized models, in particular what was understood as the hierarchical order of society during the Middle Ages, the state imposed-Catholicism in Spain after the Reconquest, and the Spanish colonial order in Argentina. Linked to this were 'hispanic' values<sup>6</sup> of fatherland (patria), faith (fe), family (familia), blood (sangre), tradition (tradición) and race (raza). The intention was to build a 'Christian State', since the conservatives were strongly opposed to secular ideas of progress and modernity. Their *nostalgic* and *xenophobic* attitude was also directed against immigrants who were seen by Lugones and others as damaging to the established order (Buchruecker 1987:137-38). The envisaged State should be a corporate and hierarchical representation of interests giving a fixed, almost eternal order to society as opposed to democracy, the 'tyranny of the plebes'. But, foreshadowing later Peronist doctrines, it

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<sup>5</sup>The conservatives were especially referring to Yrigoyen's second term (1928-1930), cf. Rock (1987:210-213).

<sup>6</sup>cf. also Nimni's observation:

"Clericalist terms such as *La Hispanidad* coined by the Spanish falangist ideologue José Primo de Rivera, and its more localized version, the concept of *La Argentinidad*, began to denote in the right-wing nationalist discourse ... alleged metaphysical attributes of legendary pastoral Argentina ..."

(Nimni 1990:141)

was also suggested that a strong State with a military structure should care about social justice (Justicia Social), and some conservatives also argued for an independent industrialization of Argentina as opposed to the import of foreign manufactured goods and closer cooperation with other Latin American states (ibid.:152-158).

## 2. The Influence of Fascism on Argentine Nationalism in the 1930s

The development of the above described Argentine nationalism in the mid 1930s was closely inspired by European Fascism, particularly the Action Française, Italian Fascism and Franco's Falange in Spain<sup>7</sup>. *Italian Fascism* in particular

"... proved, between 1932 and 1936, [to be] a decisive factor in the evolution of the nationalist restoration (nacionalismo restaurador)."  
(Buchrucker 1987:174)

Before I go further, I must emphasize, however, that Italian Fascism, like Peronism or other ideologies, is not perceived here as a monolithic bloc of beliefs. Rather, Fascism in Italy and elsewhere was an ideological conglomerate of many varied *Fascisms*; a point recently highlighted by Zunino (1985:374) who argued that Fascism in Italy played the role of a very flexible, *inclusive* ideology.

In Argentina, Conservative papers welcomed the African wars of Mussolini and admired the corporatist structure of the Fascist State. Some hailed the Italian dictator as the 'greatest political figure of the 20th century' and regarded the 'totalitarian conception of the State, the corporate system ..., the heroic vision of life and the restoration of hierarchy, responsibility and authority' as the most important elements to be adopted in Argentina (cf. Buchrucker 1987:177<sup>8</sup>).

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<sup>7</sup>Buchrucker (1987:163) lists the European authors who received most attention by Argentine nationalists: Charles Maurras (1868-1952), Joseph Hilaire Belloc (1870-1953), Oswald Spengler (1880-1936), Nicolai Berdiaeff (1847-1948) and Ramiro de Maeztu (1875-1936).

<sup>8</sup>"Standing before the roads to chose, between the Russia of the Czars and the Italy of the Caesars, our sight must be firmly fixed on Rome, today as yesterday the sign of light for the world."

(E. Valento Ferri, *Que quieren ...*; cited by Buchrucker 1987:176)

"Yesterday ... Benito Mussolini inaugurated the first session of the national council of the 22 corporations ... The creator of the fascist regime ... has reached the coronation of his prodigious work."

(The paper *Crisol* in its editorial of November 11th 1934)

Italian Fascist leaders travelled to South America, particularly to Brazil and Argentina, delivering speeches which were well received by the majority of the numerous Italian immigrants. The Fascist party paper *Gerarchia* not only reported on the cheers, "long live the King and Emperor and the *Duce!*" and the fascist songs which welcomed the orators from the 'new' Italy<sup>9</sup> in Buenos Aires' *Teatro Opera*, but also acknowledged that the children of immigrants had become Argentines and that fascist propaganda would eventually need to address the issue of a naturalized audience (cf. Buchrucker 1987:175).

There has not yet been any research into the adoption of Fascism by Italian associations in Argentina after 1924 and its deliberate fostering and imposition from above, by the Italian Embassy, consular services and other Italian institutions (but cf. Ostuni 1990). Outside the 'narrow' environment of Italian associations, there were circles, like the "*Amigos del Italia*" (Friends of Italy) had among its members the Governor of the Province of Buenos Aires, Manuel Fresco, who openly supported Fascist ideas (cf. Walter 1985:153-154). There were also short-lived attempts by H. Bianchetti to create an Argentine Fascist Party, the *Partido Fascista Argentino* (PFA) in *Avellaneda*, a working-class suburb in the South of Greater Buenos Aires (Buchrucker 1987:176).

Its militant Catholicism made the *Spanish Falange* movement of Francisco Franco especially appealing to the Argentine nationalists<sup>10</sup>. During the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), Franco and Falangism embodied, for the Argentine nationalists, the fight of good

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"In fact we have to recognize that [Italian] Fascism ... is to date the only movement which was put to practice in concrete terms [and] which has restored the traditional principles of the political economy.

Its violence is justified if one looks at this moment [of history] which is a moment of violence. ... If violence does not impose order, then violence will impose disorder."

(J. Meinevielle, "Integración y ...", *Arx*, 2, 1934,309-310)

"Fascism developed in Italy as a solution for society defending itself from the attacks of the dissolving groups [in society]."

(Matías Sánchez Sorondo, "Represión del Comunismo...", from a speech in Parliament).

All citations from Buchrucker (1987:177-179).

<sup>9</sup>"...*la nuova luce viene da Roma*", 'the new light comes from Rome', as one of the travellers, Federzoni, emphatically claimed to his South American audience (L.Federzoni(1938:12), *Parole fasciste al Sud-America*, Bologna; from Buchrucker 1987:175).

<sup>10</sup>*Italian* Fascism reconciled itself only after the Lateran Treaties (1929) with the Church.

against evil, of Catholicism and tradition against democracy, Socialism and the loosening of morals.

On a practical level, the contacts of conservative Argentine politicians with Nazi *Germany* and the partial attempts by the Third Reich to infiltrate Argentine politics were considerable but very far from establishing a fifth column, as was presumed by American and British intelligence<sup>11</sup>. On an ideological level, it were members of Argentina's armed forces who found Nazi Germany most congenial. The traditions of order and discipline within the German Army and the success of the German economy appealed more, however, than the 'nordic' version of antisemitism which propagated an Aryan master race and had anti-Christian and national-*socialist* overtones. According to Buchrucker (1987:186), these latter elements appeared to be less attractive to the Argentine population, composed largely of people of Italian and Spanish extraction, than was the propaganda of Fascists and Falangists.

European Fascisms were adopted selectively by the conservative nationalists who felt themselves very close to these European movements:

"... the majority of us nationalists are to a greater or lesser degree philo-fascists (filofascistas)."  
(E.Palacio in 1941; from Buchrucker 1987:179)

Buchrucker (1987:200) comes to the conclusion that the importance of fascist models for the evolution of Argentine conservative nationalism cannot be underestimated<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup>This issue, however, is not covered by this thesis and the reader is advised to turn to Newton (1976, 1982, 1984), Jackisch (1989) and Buchrucker (1987:184-205) for recent critical studies on the subject.

<sup>12</sup>He lists the following reasons:

"1) The filofascistas constituted a very important sector of Argentine nationalism not only 'to the mid 30s' but until 1945, and in many cases quite some time thereafter.

2) Italian Fascism, National Socialism and Franco-Falangism were interpreted by the conservative nationalists as politically related phenomena, and in accordance with that view judged positively. The ideological impact of these European 'models' was surprisingly homogenous ...

3) The popularity of the Fascist leaders in nationalist circles would ... rise during the 30s, reaching its climax between 1940 and 1943. The war against the Soviet Union destroyed the objections many had against the neo-pagan 'traits' (rasgos) of the Third Reich."

(Buchrucker 1987:200)

Argentine conservatism can be viewed as an Argentine version of Fascism which, while influenced by European models, still managed to conceive of itself as an autonomous and original creation<sup>13</sup>.

Yet, while the conservative nationalists had addressed some of the basic tensions of Argentine society in the mid 1930s, they failed to resolve them convincingly. Conflicts persisted between Catholicism and secularism, the rich provinces of the Littoral and poorer and more traditional Creole provinces of the interior. There were also wide gaps in the social distribution of national wealth, the exclusion of the masses from politics through fraudulent and paternalistically manipulated elections, and the criminalization of what was left of the Radical Party.

So, in response to these tensions, and in opposition to the more dominant conservative or restorative nationalisms, a second strand developed; *populist nationalism*. It was centred mainly around FORJA (Fuerza de Orientación Radical de la Joven Argentina), a group of nationalist Radicals, among whom were the writers, Arturo Jauretche and Raúl Scalabrini Ortiz. They held the firm belief that many of Argentina's problems stemmed from foreign, and particularly British, 'imperialist' domination. Accordingly, they developed a strong 'anti-imperialist' ideology, which favoured and vindicated the nationalization of resources like petroleum which had taken place under the last Radical government. Against the elitism of conservatives and nationalists, they venerated the 'people' (pueblo). The glorification of the Middle Ages by right-wing nationalists was countered with a nostalgic look to Argentina's gaucho-past and its caudillos (Juan Manuel de Rosas in particular) - some of whom had favoured a federation of Argentine provinces rather than a centralized State. FORJA-nationalism also opted for a corporate representation of interest groups in society, but with a strong emphasis on the 'people'

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<sup>13</sup>This assertion should, however, be qualified. While it is true that Argentine conservative nationalists copied, imitated and partly reformulated European Fascisms they did, on the other hand, omit some important elements. The Argentine movement never developed armed sections on a scale comparable to the Italian and German experience; also in the South American context there was no concept of "vital space" (*Lebensraum*) and considerably less military expansionism. Finally, the social base of the movement differed in so far from its European contemporaries in so far, as it was largely constituted by the middle and upper classes, and not by an economically frustrated lower middle class (Buchrucker 1987:230-234).

and 'social justice'. Finally, the integration of the gringo, the foreign immigrant to Argentine society, was a more prominent theme than the conspiracy theories advanced by their political opponents about international Jewish finance.

### 3. Peronism, 1943-1955

The advent of Perón and later endurance of Peronism constitute a very complex subject that I do not pretend to treat exhaustively here. My chief interest lies with the ideological ancestry of Peronism rather than with its political chronology. Arguably, what makes Peronism so difficult to define is that it cuts across divisions of Fascism, Socialism, Nationalism, left- and right wing political ideologies and movements.

The political *heterogeneity* of Peronism is apparent on two distinct but nevertheless related levels: on the level of practical political alliances and the level of political ideology. Evidence for the first point is, for example the presidential election of 1946, when Perón grouped together an alliance containing a faction of the Radical Party, the UCR Junta Renovadora, the Partido Laborista<sup>14</sup> and the Centros Cívicos Coronel Perón, his base committees. FORJA had already been collaborating with Perón since 1943. The opposing groups in the presidential campaign were also linked in rather novel ways under the Unión Democrática by aligning together the greater part of the UCR, conservatives, socialists and communists.

The ideology developed by Perón and his followers, henceforth *Peronism*, was highly eclectic and incorporated and mixed elements of previous nationalisms. One of its main concepts, however, (which had been employed already by some conservative nationalists and emphasized by FORJA), was Social Justice (Justicia Social). Often the movement, the party and the doctrine got the epithet justicialista, and it has remained a Peronist keyword to the present day. Perón's Justicialismo mixed, almost indiscriminately, nationalism, social catholicism, military authoritarianism and trade union corporatism.

Perón argued:

"First of all we are not sectarians .... We act according to the facts ... . If there is something in communism we can adopt, we will adopt it, we are not intimidated by political labels. If Fascism, Anarchism or Communism have something good to offer, we will take it."

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<sup>14</sup> The PL was allied to the trade union movement which supported Perón (Murmis/Portantiero 1971:96).

(Perón, cited by Buchrucker 1987:325)

The influence of Fascism on Peronism is certain, but its precise importance is a controversial subject in the literature. The accusation came first from the political opposition to Perón at the time:

"Under the influence of European Social Democracy, Soviet Stalinism, and Argentine Liberalism, both parties[i.e. the Argentine Socialist and Communist parties], once the Nazis had invaded the USSR, characterized the Second World War as one between democracy and Fascism; then faced with the authoritarian methods of the 1943-6 regime and its refusal to enter the Allied camp until the Axis powers were doomed, Peronism, in part an offshoot of that regime, came to be branded by the traditional left as a fascist movement. This was despite the fact that Perón as Labour Secretary, had bestowed unquestionable material favour upon the growing working class ... .

Under these circumstances for the left to dismiss Perón's supporters; including the mass of the workers as *peronazis* was not only unjust but also politically suicidal."

(Gillespie 1982:9-10)

Most authors, analysing the phenomenon in retrospect (Waldmann 1974:271-280, Rock 1975:185, Laclau 1979:176ff., Gillespie 1982, Buchrucker 1987, Nimni 1990:146), agree that the term Fascism does *not* accurately describe Peronism. Buchrucker (1987:392-395) gives the main reasons why Peronism *cannot* be characterized as a variant of Fascism: Firstly, it developed in the early and mid 1940s during a period of economic growth. Unlike Italian Fascism and German Nazism which developed at a time of economic crisis Secondly, the year 1943, when Perón became Labour Secretary and started to implement the first elements of Justicialismo, did not mark the end of democracy (as in 1922's Italy and 1933's Germany). Rather, Perón succeeded the década infame, which had already seen prolonged military rule and authoritarian conservative governments, thinly legitimized by fraudulent elections.

Thirdly, with regard to its class structure, Peronism was based primarily on the urban and, through migration, urbanized rural working class. Conversely, while it later embraced larger parts of society, the initial appeal of Italian Fascism and German Nazism was to the middle and lower middle classes, who were disillusioned with a lost World War I and economic crisis.

Finally, as Buchrucker observes (1987:392), at first sight there seems to be a superficial similarity between Italy, Germany, and Argentina in so far as certain sectors of each society perceived a threat from communism. However, while both Italy and Germany had

strong left-wing movements and parties, Argentina, at the time that Peronism originated, *had not*. The moderate Socialist Party<sup>15</sup>, though operating shifting alliances, was in opposition, and anarchists who had played some role in the Trade Union movement of the 1920s had long been suppressed and ceased to play any tangible role<sup>16</sup>. The working class, and the new urban poor (*descamisados*)<sup>17</sup>, were without a real organizational 'voice'.

It was Perón who skilfully exploited this vacuum of class consciousness and class representation. He portrayed (to the governing elites, the military and the middle class) the increasing problems of the working class as a potentially communist threat to the established order and, at the same time, became the advocate of the working classes by channelling their needs into powerful organizational structures, such as the (state-dependent) Trade Unions. It was this later evolving corporatism which borrowed heavily from Italian Fascism. Similar, too, was the emphasis on a glorified leader, a 'conductor' who interpreted the will of his people. Fascism, Nazism and Peronism were all characterized by political polarization; yet, the alliances formed by Peronism stood in stark contrast to the former. The prime adversaries of working-class based Peronism were the majority of the middle class Radical party, and the traditional landholding elite. Peronism also lacked the same kind of totalitarian rule which was characteristic of Italy and Germany. Although members of the opposition were persecuted and there was censorship of the media, and Peronists occupied all important posts of government, Argentina never became a one-party State. Also, occasional violence from the ALN (Alianza Libertadora Nacional) was rather a fringe activity, compared with the organized violence of Italian *squadristi* or the brownshirts of the German SA (Buchrucker 1987:395). And although Perón's search for a 'third position', independent of the US, Europe and the Soviet Union, aimed to locate Argentina at the centre of Latin American politics and in the non-aligned movement more generally, the virulent geographical expansionism typical of Italy and Germany was practically absent.

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<sup>15</sup>See chapter 6 for the memoirs of Umberto Tuzzi who was for some time a militant of the Socialist Party.

<sup>16</sup>cf. chapter 7 for Domenico Donatello's comments on this period.

<sup>17</sup>Descamisados means literally 'shirtless' (and was used for the working class followers of Perón).



According to Buchrucker(1987:395), Peronism can best be described as *authoritarian populism*. Waldmann(1974:271-280, 307f.) also insists that Peronism *cannot* be treated as a variant of Fascism because it was an authoritarian, not a totalitarian political system.

The *heterogeneity* of Peronism is underscored by the great diversity with which Italian immigrants and their descendants evaluated the period. Immigrants who were opposed to Fascism in Italy, usually, opposed Peronism as well, although as industrialists and entrepreneurs, they pragmatically benefitted from Peronist industrialization policies. There is no such clear sequence of political allegiances for people who had been Fascists in Italy. They either saw Perón as a political charlatan and 'bad copy of Mussolini', or valued him positively because of strong leadership (cf. also chapters 6 ,7, 8 and 10).

The difficulties of defining Peronism, of attempting to do justice not only to the 1943-1955 period, but also to later developments such as the 'peronization' of new sectors (of students and intellectuals), Perón's 18-year exile and eventual return to power in 1973, become clear in the following quote from Gillespie:

"Looked at it generically it is most useful and least misleading to regard Peronism as simply a multi-sectoral, national-popular movement whose social integrants have varied in accordance with how different classes, social sectors, and institutions have perceived their interests in relation to a national-popular line in different, evolving, political and economic circumstances."

(Gillespie 1982:25)

To summarize the Peronist ideology for our purpose, one could say, that it added to the nationalism of the FORJA populist movement the element of the strong national leader, a genius-like conductor who interpreted the will of his people and gave it direction. This was, of course, Perón himself, and to some extent his wife, Evita. The other elements were already available; namely a strong populist emphasis on the people against the ruling oligarchy and an anti-imperialist rhetoric advocating economic independence from foreign powers, like Britain and the US. It was this particular combination of nationalist ingredients and, for the first time in Argentine history, the positive valorization of the rural and urban working class, coupled with *real* benefits and improved living standards, which made Peronism a convincing alternative to earlier regimes and ideologies. Peronism therefore appealed to a class spectrum encompassing not only the working class

and the lower middle class, but also parts of the middle class proper and 'national' industrialists who feared foreign competition.

The ideology of Peronism, Justicialismo, proposed 'social justice' to create internal order. The resolving of class struggles was to be achieved through the cooperation of the formerly opposed sectors of 'capital' and 'labour' in a State controlled system of corporate groups.

With regard to foreign economic and political policies, Perón argued for the necessity of a third way for Argentina, somewhere between the two blocs of Capitalism and Socialism, then represented by the United States and the Soviet Union respectively. Political independence should be complemented by economic independence from foreign interests. Perón thus favoured the substitution of imports in his economic programme, a policy already initiated by conservative military governments in the late 1930s and early 1940s<sup>18</sup>. It meant that nationally manufactured goods should replace foreign imports and was intended to overcome the earlier pattern of Argentina as an exporter of raw materials and importer of manufactured goods. According to Peralta-Ramos (1978:24-113) the period, from 1946-1955, saw deliberate attempts to develop a national industry, create a consumer market through increasing wages and to adopt import substitution, while neglecting agricultural production. According to most analysts, Perón did in fact increase the dependent labourforce's share of the national income from broadly 45% to 55% percent, and, in the early 1950s, Argentine workers earned more than their European contemporaries (cf. also Dabat/Lorenzano 1983:23).

Argentina also increased the share of manufacturing and light industries, and sustained at 3.8% a slightly higher annual growth rate than between 1935 and 1944. More precisely, the early Peronist governments of the 'golden' years from 1946 to 1949<sup>19</sup>,

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<sup>18</sup>Murmis/Portantiero (1971:6,11,22) argued that, in the 1930s, an alliance of interests between the agrarian sector (the traditional elite) and the industrial sector, both opposed to the working class, introduced import substitution and subsequently benefited from it.

<sup>19</sup>which has been referred to as a 'boom' period (Díaz Alejandro 1970:111); cf. also the following quote:  
"... the 'golden' Peronist years of the late 1940s coincided with British needs to cut her losses abroad following a costly war and preceded the successful effort by US-based and other multinational corporations to acquire a decisive presence in the more dynamic sectors of the country's economy."  
(Gillespie 1982:15)

could benefit from a growing gross domestic product and high monetary reserves<sup>20</sup> (though sometimes blocked abroad as it occurred with Argentina's Sterling reserves) (cf. Rock 1987:276).

For many people I spoke to this period acquired almost 'mythical' qualities, and, looking back on the times, some told me, 'that the floors of the Central Bank were full of gold'. According to the political emphasis of those speaking (depending on whether they were Peronist or anti-Peronists), Perón was either considered to have invested these assets wisely, or to have squandered them in a costly welfare programme and the acquisition of the British-owned railways.

The early 1950s were already marked by increased economic difficulties, when industrial production fell back to the level of 1946 (Rock 1975:190). Furthermore, the decline of Argentina's export earnings from agriculture was accentuated by severe droughts, but also, more generally, by an economic policy which had favoured import substitution, furthering manufacturing and local consumption<sup>21</sup>, and neglected the rural export sector. The Peronist government had thus created, what an economic historian called an 'exchange bottleneck' (Díaz Alejandro 1970:114), "...because import substitution had not released enough exchange to finance imports required by a 5% growth rate" (ibid.). In addition, Perón also came under increasing pressure from internal opposition and had to contend with the eroding class base of his support (Buchrucker 1987:366, Gillespie 1982:19-22).

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<sup>20</sup>Between 1945 and 1948 the Argentina's GDP grew by almost 30% (Díaz Alejandro 1970:110).

"At the end of 1946 net reserves of gold and foreign exchange were estimated at \$1.687 million." (ibid.:107)

<sup>21</sup>Local consumption was also stimulated by real wage rises and a massive welfare programme (Díaz Alejandro 1970:117).

## 5. Peronist Policies on Immigration

In order to 'modernize' and 'develop' the country, the Perón Government supported the development of a proper heavy industry. Following from that, the government also regarded it as necessary to attract *European immigrants* with technical skills to Argentina.

There has been little research into the attitudes of the Peronist Government towards immigration. However, from various presidential decrees which an official of the Dirección de Migraciones made available to me, some conclusions can be drawn. In 1946, the presidential decree no.20.707 implemented the policy of recruiting immigrants in Europe by establishing Argentine Immigration Offices in Spain and Italy (the two countries who had sent most immigrants to Argentina, and were regarded somehow as 'natural affines')<sup>22</sup>. Furthermore, the Presidential Decree 10.534 of 14th of May 1949, ordered the installation of a training centre in Rome where prospective immigrants could acquire the necessary professional and technical skills. And Presidential Decree 18.471 (27/6/1947) is particularly revealing about the broader task of the Immigration Delegations:

"The Executive has sent to Europe commissions of functionaries who are instructed to organize the migration of citizens of that continent in the direction of the Argentine Republic, and in doing so put into practice the plan [which was] devised to incorporate into the Nation, *four million foreigners* during the quinquennium 1947-1951." (my italics)

So, the Peronist government hoped to attract at least four million Europeans, who would have amounted to almost two thirds of the immigrants during the times of mass

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<sup>22</sup>"THE PRESIDENT OF THE ARGENTINE NATION IN GENERAL ACCORDANCE

WITH THE MINISTERS DECREES:

article 1: to constitute the Argentine delegation of immigration in Europe , with headquarters in Italy and Spain. ...

article 3: the delegation has to convene, organize, ... promote and carry out everything which is related to immigration to Argentina according to the draft bill (proyecto de ley) on immigration and colonization of the Government Plan(...)." (Presidential Decree 20.707, 2/12/1946)

(Presidential Decree 20.707, 2/12/1946)

State institutions, like the Central Bank (Banco Central) and the Argentine Institute for the Promotion of Foreign Trade (IAPI) and the Commission for the Reception and Guidance of Immigrants (Comisión de Recepción y Encauzamiento de la Inmigración), had to coordinate the implementation of these decrees.

immigration<sup>23</sup>. Italians in Buenos Aires were also of the opinion that future Argentine progress was tied to new Italian immigration, and sought a bilateral treaty on migration<sup>24</sup>. Over the next decade, actual rates of European immigration were to be much lower, despite some commentators hoping the 'golden years' of Argentine mass immigration and thriving affluence would be repeated<sup>25</sup>. However, whilst in retrospect, these expectations seem to have been exaggerated, they were not so at the time when some European countries after the Second World War faced serious problems of poverty, homelessness, hunger and refugees. The booming Argentine economy of the late 1940s could therefore hold out the promise of a better future. People with whom I spoke, who arrived from Italy at that time, repeatedly stressed that they imagined and perceived Argentina as 'a super country', very wealthy, full of natural resources, and abundant in affordable food supplies<sup>26</sup>. In fact, the figures on arriving immigrants in the early years of that last wave of European immigration to Argentina, remain impressive. Between 1947 and 1957 about 840,000 Europeans came. 610,000 stayed permanently, and of them 388,000 were Italians. The highest immigration levels were recorded during the Peronist boom years of the late forties. Already by 1952, numbers were falling again and by 1960, *and from then onwards*, return migration outnumbered new immigration (Roncelli 1987:113-115, Nascimbene 1987:104).

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<sup>23</sup>One contemporary economic analyst hinted at the possible funding of this venture coming from the American 'Marshall Plan':

"Gifts and loans under the 'Marshall Plan' include ships to be used in transporting Italian emigrants to South America and Australia. It is said that some ten million Italians may be compelled to find homes in foreign lands. See Congressional Record, April 5, 1949, pp.3939-40 and April 13, 1949, p.4632."  
(Rippy 1949:37)

<sup>24</sup>See, for example, Pasquali (1946:60).

<sup>25</sup>See the following remark by an Argentine journalist:

"Hopefully, our good fortune as a Promised Land (in this very month of July [1947] when the immigration flow starts and the first thousands of Italian immigrants will arrive ...), will mean the return to our good years of immigration ... ."  
(Nicora 1947:9)

<sup>26</sup>cf. chapter 6.

Little is known about the actual practice on the official side in handling immigrants and 'incorporating them into the Argentine Republic'. In 1947, in line with the new immigration programme, the government department responsible for immigration (the Dirección General de Migraciones)<sup>27</sup> revived the famous Hotel de Inmigrantes (situated at the port of Buenos Aires) where immigrants had already found initial shelter during the times of mass immigration (cf. chapter 5). Apparently, there was also a 'National Ethnic Institute' (Instituto Étnico Nacional), its bulletin mentioned in a footnote by Germani (1970:329), and its name inscribed on an office plate on the wall of a house which appears on one of the Peronist propaganda films to promote immigration<sup>28</sup>.

Despite the problems of access to primary sources<sup>29</sup> and the absence of published analyses of Peronist immigration policies, some insights into the ideology connected with these policies can be gained from propaganda films which I located in the National Archive's (Archivo General de la Nación) Audiovisual Department. Such films generally would depict immigration to Argentina in glorified terms. In the film Inmigración, immigrants are the 'travellers of hope' (viajeros de esperanza) who brought from 'overpopulated countries' (paises sobrepoblados) the 'new blood the country is waiting for' (sangre nueva que el país espera). Later in the film, the children of immigrants are shown, dressed in white school uniforms, and the commentary emphasizes that now the 'work of adaptation is complete and the immigrants have been absorbed into the [new]

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<sup>27</sup>the DGM had resumed its activities in 1947 and set the following objectives for 'selective' migration:

"Once peace was declared by the belligerent countries [i.e. the end to World War II], our government was the first to consider the possibility of attracting once more that flow of foreigners which had helped for almost a century to enlarge the country. ...

"The Dirección General de Migraciones becomes that part of the State which is the custodian of its population: it *selects* the immigrants according to the government's plan; it *prohibits* the entry of the *undesirable* [immigrant] who could be a danger to the internal order; it does not allow the entry of the ill and handicapped who could become a burden for the State or benevolent institutions; it seeks the best immigrants, the young elements willing to work, technicians, skilled workers, scientists, industrialists, etc. ."

(Dirección General de Migraciones 1948:5; my italics).

<sup>28</sup>The film Inmigración (Immigration) was made by the government in the late 1940s or early 1950s; AGN, audiovisual archive.

<sup>29</sup>While officials were friendly and helpful, the files at the Buenos Aires office of the UN agency which promoted European immigration, the Comité Intergubernamental para las Migraciones (CIM), were incomplete for the 1940s and 50s. Similarly, while the Dirección de Migraciones made its library available to me, I could not get access to unpublished files.

fatherland through the melting pot of peoples' (la obra de adaptación se completa y los inmigrantes son absorbidas por la patria en el crisol de pueblos), (all quotes from Inmigración).

Such propaganda films clearly show the intention of the Peronist government to attract new immigrants from Europe and to assimilate them to a new Argentine national identity. Although more research is needed, I would tentatively suggest that, with the implementation of decrees and the establishments of particular institutions, (such as the Dirección General de Migraciones, the Hotel de Inmigrantes, the Ethnic Institute and the labour offices abroad), the Peronist Government tried to devise a 'social technology' which would mould immigration in particular, and the population at large according to the ideal of a 'new Argentine man'. Hence, ultimately, through these policies and institutions, a kind of 'social modernity'<sup>30</sup> for the whole of society was to be achieved.

In order to attract immigrants, the Peronist government and its Dirección General de Migraciones also cooperated with United Nation agencies, such as the Intergovernmental Committee for Migration (Comité Intergubernamental para las Migraciones, CIM) with headquarters in Geneva. The CIM operated specific programmes to reunite families, to enhance qualified workers' immigration and to help political refugees and, in the early 1950s an Argentine Branch was opened in Buenos Aires.

I interviewed several retired Italian officials who had worked for the CIM in the 1950s.

One told me:

"The procedure was the following. The Italian immigrant who had family in Italy - and who after World War II might not have seen them for 20 years - came to us. We filled in forms, taking details of the composition of the family, and gave a list of those relatives the immigrant wanted to bring from Italy, to Argentine Immigration Bureau (Dirección de Migraciones). They issued a passenger list and sent the documentation to the CIM headquarters in Geneva and to the Argentine Immigration Offices (DAIE) in Europe. Before embarkation, the immigrants were examined by doctors. When the departure was fixed, we received a list of passengers - usually a fortnight before arrival- allowing us to give notice to the relative in Buenos Aires.

"The CIM regulations required that 50% European ships and 50% Argentine ships should be used. The ships from Italy were Eugenio C, Giulio Cesare, Anna C, and Federico C; from France, Bretagne and Provence, and from Spain, Capo San Roque. The

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<sup>30</sup>A term which Rabinow (1989:9) employed in the different context of French 'Modern', colonial architecture in Morocco.

Argentines had Salta, Corrientes, Yapayé, Liberty and Santa Fe. So, we had lists of the immigrants when the ships arrived at the harbour.

"Wonderful scenes occurred which could make you cry. Many relatives did not recognize each other at first. They looked at each other, saying 'Dad, is that you...?'; and then the kissing and embracing, hugging so strong that it squeezed the bones together.

I had more than 700 records, I had bought them in order to bring them to the port and played songs like L'emigrante, Caro, Quanti ricordi to welcome the immigrants.

"And there were the brides (sposine): the arranged marriages by proxy (matrimoni per procura), where bridegroom and bride had not seen each other before, and also the 'bogus' marriages to get permission to enter the country. With the arranged marriages it sometimes happened that the man did not want his bride any more ... Also, there were always about 20 girls of loose morals on board whom we had to repatriate. There were crooks on board who had 'bought' emigrant passports in order to carry illegal merchandise, because under CIM-regulations the immigrants were allowed to bring their removal goods.

"More than 900 people came with each ship. The European ships went to Montevideo [Uruguay] first, and the Argentine ships had to anchor at high sea and were then visited by a medical commission.

I received more than 150,000 immigrants: Italians, Greeks, Spaniards and later Koreans and Taiwanese."

(retired CIM official, 1953-1961)

Another official told me:

"There was an Italian immigrant who had come before the war [World War II] and left his wife and children in Italy. He now lived with an Argentine woman. His brother-in-law, who had migrated to Argentina, said one day: 'Okay, if he doesn't want to bring his wife and kids over, I'll do it' and made an application at the CIM.

Once they were in Buenos Aires, he arranged a meeting with his brother-in-law under some pretext. When they saw each other, tears and hugs followed, the children crying 'father' etc. He then left Buenos Aires and his Argentine woman, to live with his wife and his children in Córdoba."

(retired CIM official, 1953-1983)

Pictures<sup>31</sup> on following pages:

1. CIM Officials and Argentine Journalists

on Board of a Ship with Newly Arrived Immigrants (n.d., probably 1955)

2. and 3. CIM Officials disembark with Immigrants

(n.d., probably 1955)

4. and 5. CIM Officials and Italian Immigrants in CIM offices,

Buenos Aires (1953)

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<sup>31</sup>The pictures were given to me by courtesy of an ex-CIM official.

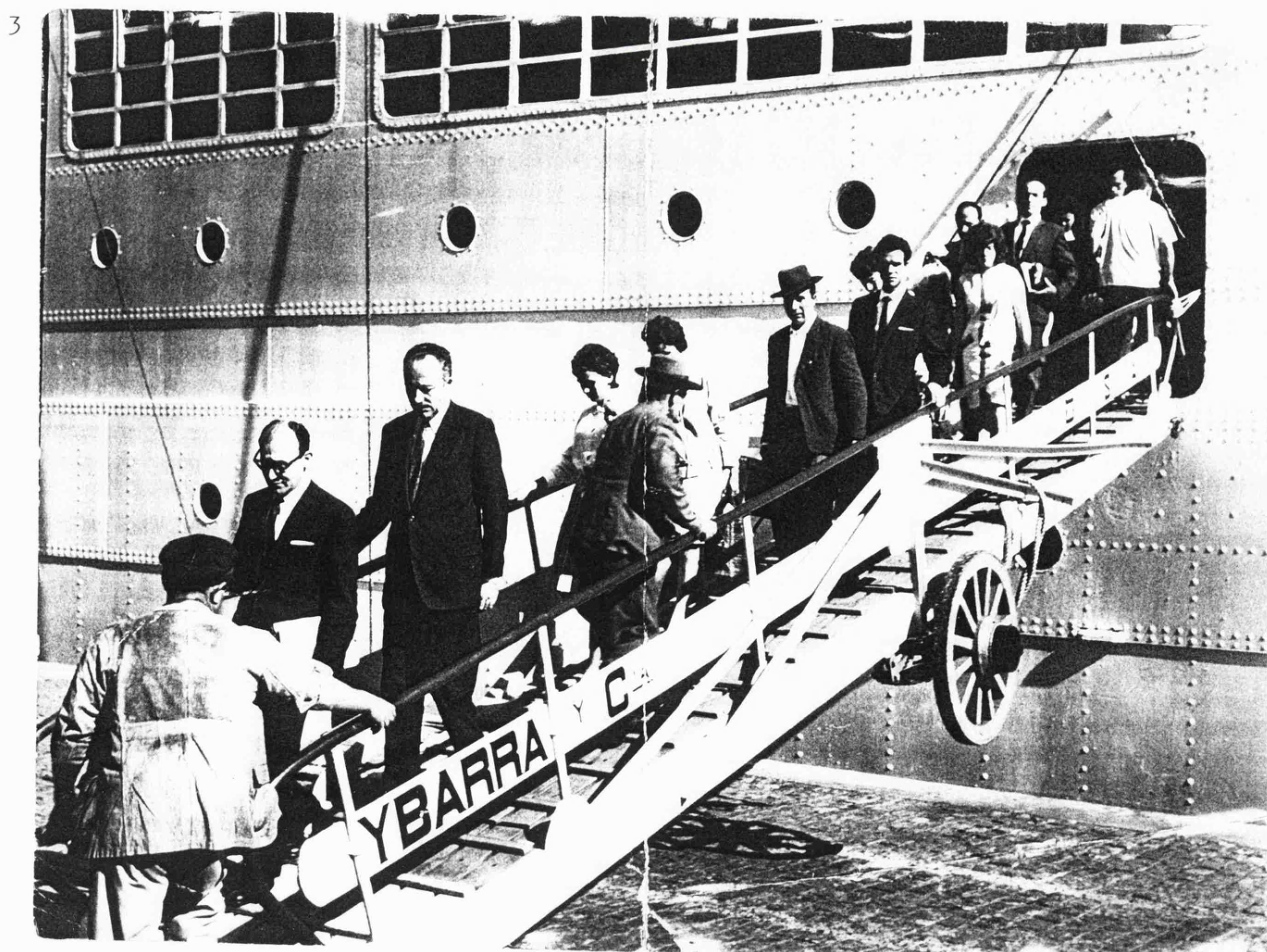
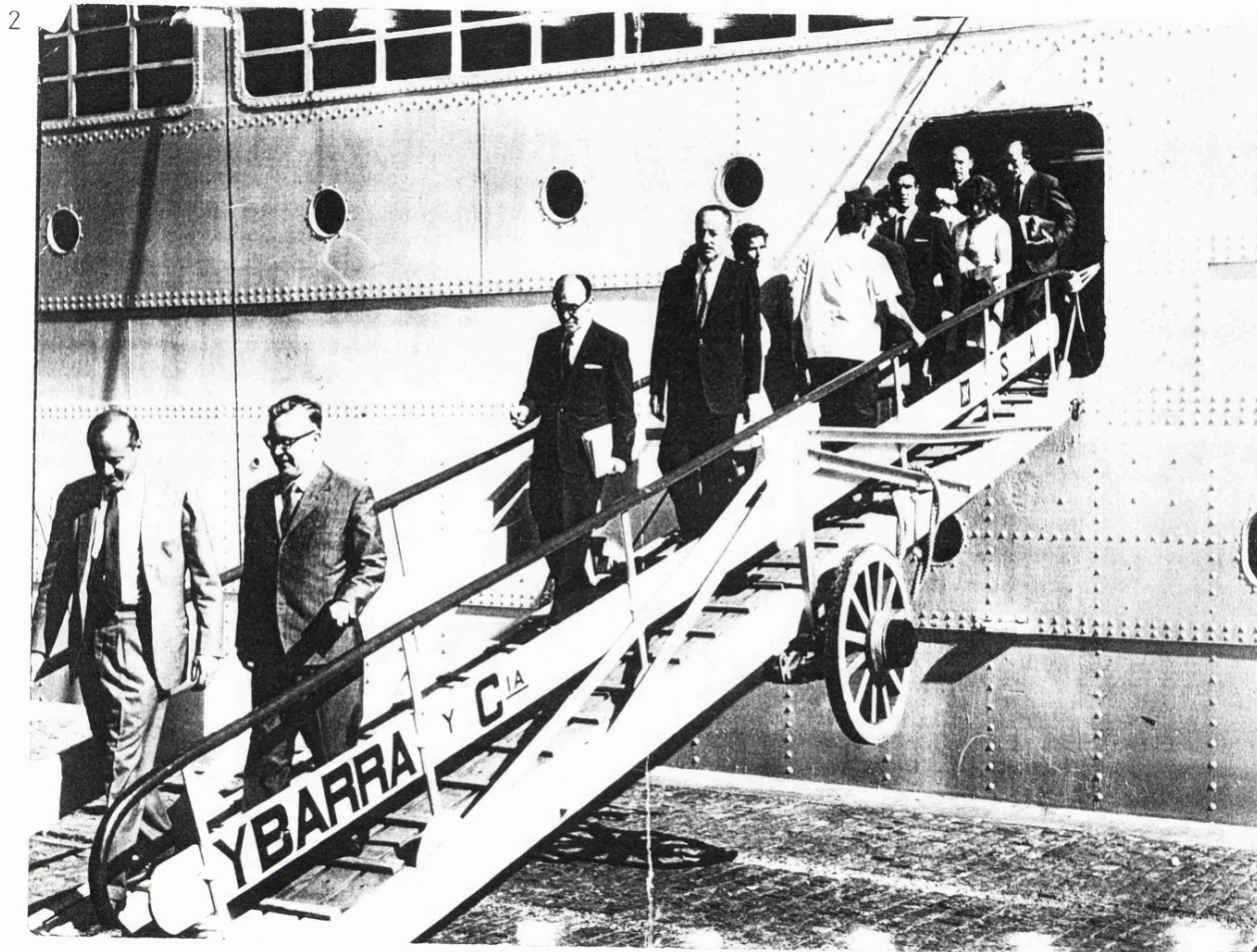
















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The CIM also provided initial shelter for the immigrants in the Hotel de Inmigrantes or other hostels in Buenos Aires. While, statistically speaking, post-World War II Italian immigration peaked in 1949 and declined significantly after 1954 (Roncelli 1987:112), the Argentine Government tried as late as 1958 to attract skilled labourers from Italy, as the circulars sent by the *Italian* migration offices to South Italian villages testify<sup>32</sup>.

## 9. Argentine History, 1955-1988

Although the people of this study sometimes made different sub-divisions (cf. chapters 6,7,8,9 and 11), often reflecting more the fluctuations of the Argentine economy than political events, I will adopt for my overview Rock's (1987) periodization, starting with the fall of Perón in 1955. Arguably, one of the main characteristics of contemporary Argentine politics is, as I have mentioned earlier, the *persistence* of heterogeneous Peronist ideologies and movements after the fall of Perón. However, I will not explore this theme to the extent that I have analysed affinities between Nationalism, Fascism and early Peronism, but will give a rather brief, mainly political chronology.

Rock divides Argentine history after the fall of Perón in 1955 into three main periods. The first, from 1955 to 1966, was characterized by both military and civilian anti-Peronist governments.

In this period, which starts with General Lonardi's coup d'état against Perón in 1955, the civilian government of Arturo Frondizi (1958-1962) deserves some particular mention. Frondizi's Government is a recurrent theme in entrepreneurs' and businessmen's accounts, where it is generally counterposed to the years of Peronism (1943-1955). Arturo Frondizi, a lawyer and the son of Italian immigrants, was elected President as candidate of the 'intransigent' wing of the Radical Party (UCRI) and by a silent pact which had secured him votes from the Peronists (Rock 1987:337). In the first two years of government, his economic team designed an economic strategy, 'developmentalism' (desarrollismo). The Argentine industry was to be 'developed' by combined measures of attracting foreign capital to key industries such as the oil refineries, the car and steel

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<sup>32</sup>For example, in 1958, an "Informative leaflet for prospective labourers to emigrate to Argentina", advertised free ship passages for mechanics, car mechanics, electricians, carpenters, tilers, and bricklayers (Foglio Informativo ....; Ufficio Collocamento, Comune di Sutera, Sicily).



industry. During its first two years desarrollismo proved to be successful and augmented production in 'dynamic' sectors such as the car, steel and petrochemical industry, which experienced real investment. On the other hand, Frondizi's policies showed very sparse results with respect to shipbuilding and the paper-processing industry, that is those sectors which Schvarzer (1980:8) calls 'vegetative', implying that they showed no signs of new investments, and went on to use old installations. Entrepreneurs and industrialists whom I interviewed, were generally emphatic about the Frondizi Government. They stressed the Italian origin of the President, and furthermore, contrasted his (and Perón's) industrialization programmes which benefitted their own companies, with a more recent period of 'deindustrialization' which resulted from the adoption of free-market policies and the partial abolition of state subsidies under Martínez de Hoz<sup>33</sup> (cf. below and chapter 6).

Frondizi, who had initially supported a populist, pro-trade union policy, later changed his attitudes, when he had to carry out a stabilization programme, including price and wage controls. Still, he refused the military's pressure to annul provincial elections in 1962, which were won in most of the constituencies by Peronists. The military saw their programme of keeping the Peronists out of power, in danger and consequently undertook a coup d'état against Frondizi in 1962. The short-lived government of Guido gave way in 1963 to democratically elected President Illia, of the Radical Party (UCR).

The second period in Rock's scheme, extends from the coup d'état against democratically elected President Illia in 1966 to the end of Isabel Estela Perón's government in 1976. This period witnessed increased conflict between the authoritarian military governments of Onganía (1966-1970), Levingston (1970-1971) and Lanusse (1971-1973) and a rising neo-Peronist movement, now supported by left-wing students and intellectuals. A part of this latter movement went underground and took up armed struggle. The most prominent of these guerrilla groups were the Peronist Montoneros, and the non-Peronist ERP (Ejército Revolucionario Popular), a trotskyist formation. After the violent suppression of strikes and protests by workers and students in the city of Córdoba in 1969 (later known as the cordobazo), there were ever more frequent violent guerilla attacks, kidnappings and murders and counter attacks by right wing murder squadrons such as the Triple A (AAA) and military and police personnel.

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<sup>33</sup>Minister of Trade and Commerce, 1976-1981.

Gillespie (1982) has meticulously traced the rise and fall of the Montonero guerrillas. Inspired by a glorified image of Perón *absent* in exile, and a combination of socialist ideas and violent catholic struggle in the fashion of Camillo Torres (the Colombian guerrilla priest), they first targeted political figures, such as General Aramburu<sup>34</sup>, but also foreign and national top executives of multinationals, whom they kidnapped and sometimes released after the exaction of high ransoms. In 1973, the military government of General Alejandro Augustín Lanusse came under increased pressure from popular protest and Peronist 'special formations' (guerilla groups). He tried to solve the crisis by calling an election (Gillespie 1982:114) in which the Peronist candidate, Héctor Campora won a landslide victory. Perón himself was officially banned from election and only in June 1973, was he allowed to return from his exile in Madrid. On his return at Buenos Aires' international airport, Ezeiza, violent fighting broke out between right wing and left wing Peronist groups, leaving probably dozens dead and several hundred wounded. Campora, the stalking horse for Perón's presidency, resigned in July 1973. In September, new elections were held which Perón won overwhelmingly, and on the 12th of October 1973 he was inaugurated President of Argentina for the third time, after 18 years of exile. While in exile, he had given his arms-length blessing which had served to mobilize young voters for him and to destabilize the Lanusse regime. But, once in government, Perón dissociated himself from the Montoneros and their armed struggle. This estrangement between Perón (who adopted right-wing positions) and his 'special formations', whose political wing, the 'Peronist Youth', had assembled the majority of young voters for the President, drove the guerrillas underground again.

After Perón's natural death on 1st of July 1974, his third wife and running mate in the 1973 elections, 'Isabel' Perón (Maria Estela Martínez), took office. During her government she completely lost control of political authority and was surrounded by sinister advisers such as the 'sorcerer' (el brujo), López Rega, Welfare Minister since 1973, who started to form the death squad Triple A. During her time in office, the military and secret services came ever more to the forefront by attacking, abducting and assassinating guerrillas and numerous guerrilla 'suspects' and 'sympathizers'.

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<sup>34</sup>Aramburu was the successor to Lonardi after the 1955 coup against Perón, and carried out the dismantling of Peronist organizations.

In 1976 the military carried out yet another coup this time led by Jorge Videla, and initiated what it called the 'process of national reorganization' (el proceso de la reorganización nacional) which consisted foremostly of a 'dirty war' (guerra sucia), designed to wipe out the guerrillas and their supporters. Ruthless, illegal methods were used. Thousands of people were abducted, held in detention centres without trial and then murdered without leaving any trace. These missing people, many of whom were under the age of eighteen and highschool students, became tragically known to the world (through the publicity work of human rights organizations) as the 'disappeared people' (los desaparecidos). Estimates put their number between 10,000 and 20,000 (Nunca Más 1986, Guest 1990). With regard to interior politics, el proceso was a period of terrorist and totalitarian rule by the military, with the strict surveillance and censorship of universities, the press, trade unions and the prohibition of political parties. Many Argentines were forced to leave the country and go into exile in order to forestall persecution, detention and death.

In economic terms, the governments of the generals Videla and Viola (1976-1981), were marked by the policies of the economy minister Martínez de Hoz. He adopted a neo-liberal market policy, opening the market to foreign competitors and investors, and abolishing many trade and tariff protections and subsidies for Argentine industry. In *people's accounts* this period is also known as the years of la plata dulce ('sweet money'). A free and unified exchange rate with the US\$ then permitted many middle and upper class Argentines to convert their overvalued pesos at very favourable rates, which enabled them to buy imported consumer goods and to travel to the US (cf. also Rock 1987:373). This policy also implied the collapse of many long established Argentine industries which had grown up under state protection and, among the 100 leading companies, a further process of concentration and the establishment of trusts took place (Schvarzer 1983:414-417). In fact, the years from 1976 to 1981 have been called a period of 'deindustrialization'<sup>35</sup>, referring to the devastating effects that Martínez de Hoz' policies had on Argentine industry (Chudnovsky 1989:109). Industrialists who since the late 1930s had been accustomed to programmes of industrial promotion, state subsidies, relatively secure tenders and protective price policies, were suddenly faced with 'open'

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<sup>35</sup>There has been no anthropological research on the process of 'deindustrialization' in Argentina, but for the United States cf. the interesting studies by Di Leonardo (1985) Lamphere (1985), Nash (1985) and Newman (1985); also Newman's recent monograph 'Falling from Grace' (1988).

competition, often coming from foreign companies. Many could not compete and in fact went bankrupt. Enrique Gerardi in chapter 6 is one such example. With regard to economic parameters, such as the fall in income per capita, declining wages and high inflation, one economic analyst has characterized the years from 1976 to 1979 as the worst four year period since the early 1930s (Ferrer 1980:134f.).

In 1982, the military government of Galtieri thought to overcome unpopularity at home by reviving an old issue of national sovereignty: the dispute with Great Britain over the Falklands or Malvinas Islands. The course of events is widely known and can be read elsewhere (Rock 1987:374-383, Dabat/Lorenzano 1984:92-102). In April 1982 Argentine troops took the islands by force and later, *contrary* to Argentine expectations, Britain sent its fleet and retook the islands in June 1983. Although initially a wide spectrum -even of left-wing opponents of the military regime- had supported the 'national cause' of the Malvinas, after the army's defeat, Galtieri and later the Bignone Government lost their support, and the population called for an election in 1983.

Arguably, the years of the last military dictatorship (el proceso) and the period immediately preceding it, were the most conflictual and traumatic time for Argentines in their recent history, and ideological cleavages (even among members of the same family) resulting from this period are revealed by accounts in chapters 4,6,9, and 10.

It was Raúl Alfonsín, a lawyer and candidate for the Radical Party, who campaigned for the full restoration of democracy and promised to bring the people responsible for the dirty war and the disappeared people to trial. He won the election on the 30th of October, 1983. The initial euphoria surrounding his government, and the belief of many Argentines that, after years of military suppression, a period of true democracy with full constitutional rights would follow, are well described in Burn's report on 'the land that lost its heroes'(1987). However, Alfonsín inherited the problem of how to try the military regime for its crimes, as well as how to clear a foreign debt, amounting to over 40 billion US\$, contracted during Martínez de Hoz' years as Minister of the Economy. Thus handicapped economically from the outset, Alfonsín (who lacked a coherent economic strategy) had to make several adjustments, the most famous being his Plan Austral in 1985, which devalued the Argentine Peso and introduced the new currency of the Austral. He also had to make concessions to the military. What should have been a full-scale investigation into the violation of human rights during the el proceso years, (and

was partly undertaken in the voluminous work by the Argentine Commission on Human Rights chaired by the writer Ernesto Sábato), had, when it came to the point of trying those responsible to be scaled down. Eventually, only top government personnel was brought to justice, that is to say 'those who gave the orders', leaving many mercenaries, death squads and professional killers, unprosecuted (the laws of punto final in 1986, and obediencia debida in 1987; cf. Rock 1987:401 and *Página 12* 30.6.89).

It is difficult to summarize the tormented history of post-1955 Argentina. However, it emerges from the overview given that, after attempts to incorporate working class interests into a national policy failed under Peronism, sectoral interests groups (landed oligarchy, industrialists, Trade Unions and military) fought violently over economic interests and political power. In these struggles which resulted in 'sectoral clashes' (Merkx 1969, cf. also Smith 1974:88-113), the military saw its own role as a legitimate 'saviour', always present and ready to intervene. And the military was also perceived in such a role by civilian politicians, since conflicts in civilian society seemed to be insoluble.

#### 4. Italy and Argentina in the 1980s

At the end of this overview of Argentine contemporary history, it seems appropriate to look again at Argentina's economic relationship with Italy in the present. Argentines in general now have an image of Italy as a powerful country in the world economy, In popular discourse, they make reference to its fashion, food and successful industries (cf. chapters 8 and 9), while persisting structural inequalities, such as the Italian North-South divide, and a past history as a poor emigration country are usually not mentioned (cf. chapter 11). Moreover, Italian immigrants and their descendants are fully aware of the fact that the economic policies of wealthy Italy can have a direct influence on them, through development programmes with Argentina, or more specifically, through benefits for poor Italians mediated by the Italian associations (cf. chapter 10).

The 'inversion' of economic roles between the two societies is clearly indicated from the 1960s onwards by two parameters: migration and per capita income. Since 1960, return migration to Italy from Argentina is higher than out migration from Italy to Argentina

(Roncelli 1987:112)<sup>36</sup>. More generally, in the 1955 to 1984 period, Argentina's migration statistics show the net emigration of its citizens for almost every year, and reveal despite some variations, that the trend is on the increase (Bertoncello/Lattes 1987:26). It was estimated that in 1984 about half a million Argentines lived abroad<sup>37</sup>, approximately 70,000 of them in the United States. Many of these expatriates have high educational and professional qualifications and left Argentina in times of economic and political crisis (Schkolnik 1987:42-53, and Lattes 1987:122 for a critique of Argentine and foreign census data).

Furthermore, economic statistics reveal very clearly the 'inversion of roles' between the two countries. In the decade from 1960 to 1970, Italy's GNP per capita rose above that of Argentina (Organización Techint 1979:5). Italy, after a first economic boom in the 1960s<sup>38</sup>, experienced a time of economic instability in the 1970s, but in the 1980s joined the ten wealthiest nations of the world. This second Italian boom was mainly initiated by small and medium-sized, and by highly specialized companies which could operate more flexibly than the large oligopolic companies like FIAT or state companies in the oil or chemical sector. Economic analysts have emphasized that Italy still remains an exception among the highly industrialized nations. Its most profitable industries are in traditional manufacturing (food, furniture, clothes, fashion, leather and shoes), which are mostly small and medium sized-industries. The sector of large companies is dominated by a few oligarchical private (most prominently FIAT) and state companies (Alberti 1989:145-148, Viesti 1989:257-259, Mariotti 1989: 359-365).

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<sup>36</sup>Yet there are some regional variations. Between 1966 and 1970, more people emigrated from Southern Italy to Argentina than returned from Argentina to Southern Italy. However, while people emigrated in their thousands in the 1950s, the migration movement to and from Argentina since 1963 can be counted in hundreds (cf. von Delhaes-Guenther 1984:152, and statistics p.273).

<sup>37</sup>Schkolnik(1987:43) has pointed to some of the difficulties when calculating figures of Argentines abroad, particularly when Argentines adopt the nationality of the host country - which is facilitated by treaties of double-nationality with Italy and Spain.

<sup>38</sup>Between 1958 and 1964 the booming Italian economy, euphemistically called the *miracolo economico*, even reached full employment (von Delhaes-Guenther 1984:204).

## CHAPTER 4

Fifteen Months in 1988/89:

the Transition of Power, Economic Crisis and Violent Clashes of Interest Groups

### 1. Introduction

In this chapter I will give a more detailed account of Argentine economic and political events as they occurred during the time of *my fieldwork*, from September 1988 to December 1989. I do not attempt to 'reconstruct' objectively and authoritatively the events of late 1988 and 1989, a task which can be left to future political historians. My account is necessarily a more subjective one and is influenced by my own living experience in Buenos Aires (cf. chapter 1).

My sources for this chapter are my own diary entries, newspaper reports, and yearbooks.

After the detailed introductory narrative of contemporary Argentine history, this chapter intends to scale down larger events and so help the reader to see, in closer detail, themes which have so far been portrayed as part of a rather broad canvas. But I also have a more general objective in mind which concerns the relationship between effective time spent in the field, ethnographic note-taking (here used in the wider sense of gathering 'data') and later anthropological writing. In many cases, anthropological writing - unless it is concerned directly with the study of political conflict<sup>1</sup> - does not give us a detailed account of national history (and sometimes even local history) as it unfolds *during the time spent in the field*. Instead we get, and rarely in a chronological order, some remarks on local events which are usually inserted in a chapter on fieldwork methodology. Similarly, it is assumed that national history is too remote and develops in such lengthy time-spans that it does not affect one or two years of the local community studied, but can be compressed into a general introductory chapter on the history of the area, where the concern is with *centuries* and *decades* rather than with months. We therefore often get the feeling that despite the more general historical location provided, the ethnographic evidence is somehow frozen in time or cut-out of time, belonging to a particular period or epoch, perhaps, but showing no real movement of time itself. This is, of course, all the more true, when the people, community, group or individuals studied appear to be

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<sup>1</sup>as for example Loizos 1975, 1981, 1988.

unaffected by the development of national politics and economics during the time of fieldwork. One can then more easily fall into the belief that these 'larger' events may have very little impact on them at all. In my case, the insistence on a chronological narrative of events seems all the more justified because my neighbours, that is those nearest in terms of residence and daily contact, and my interviewees lived in the *centre* of political and economic decisions, in Buenos Aires, the *capital* of a society which has experienced a particularly traumatic recent history (cf. chapter 3). They were affected by, and commented immediately upon events, as relative 'insiders'.

The following account is, then, also intended as something like a filter through which people's accounts and participant observation are linked to what has been described in the previous two chapters as Argentina's *past*. People's statements and observed actions are made in and become only meaningful in the context of a particular, 'ethnographic' *present*, which itself has now become part of the past. This past has, however, a particular status, different to that narrated in the previous chapters, because it was accompanied by a relationship of dialogue between the people of this study and the anthropologist.

## 2. Alfonsín and the Failure of Economic Policies

When I entered the field in late September 1988, President Raúl Alfonsín had ruled for almost five years. His term of office was coming to an end, and under the constitution, he could not stand for re-election. While the Western media and initially the majority of the electorate had hailed Alfonsín's coming to power in 1983 as the beginning of a new democratic era, increasing parts of the population were now, if not openly discontent, at least disillusioned with his government. Con la democracia no se come, 'with democracy one cannot eat' was a comment made by my neighbours in San Telmo who explicitly linked the form of government to economic crisis. Towards the end of his presidency, Alfonsín had lost credibility over his economic policies<sup>2</sup>. Large sections of the population, who had initially supported him with high political and economic expectations were now disillusioned. The early support for Alfonsín had come in the aftermath of the fall of the last military dictatorship and the disastrous political and economic policies

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<sup>2</sup>Especially after the Plan Austral had failed, cf. chapter 3.



connected with it (cf. chapter 3).

Yet, in the May 1989 presidential elections the candidate of the *Radical Party*, Eduardo Angeloz, still carried 32.4% of the vote. However, this was less an indication of his economically successful governorship of the province of Córdoba, but more an indication of protest ('voting for the smaller evil') from people who did not want the return of Peronism to power.

Between December 1983 and February 1989, inflation rose to 130.915% and those people dependent on fixed salaries had lost substantial portions of their real income; worst hit were school and university teachers, construction workers and old age pensioners (data by CELSA, from *Página 12* 4.3.89 and 6.4.89). In 1988, foreign debts (which were largely a continuation of the foreign debt inherited from the last military government) amounted to 56.5 billion US\$ plus 4.9 billion US\$ outstanding debt-service. An estimate of income according to social group suggested that the poorest sections of the population now enjoyed a yearly income comparable to Indonesia's GNP per capita at 485US\$ and the middle class that of Tunisia at 1164US\$. The wealthier classes could compare themselves to Portugal's and Greece's statistical average GNP of 2788US\$ and 3976US\$ respectively, while the richest 10%, who had 36% of the total income, enjoyed a per capita income comparable to that of the UK at 8727US\$<sup>3</sup>. An article in Buenos Aires' German newspaper, the *Argentinisches Tageblatt (AT)*, estimated the amount of 'flight' capital, that is Argentine savings abroad, at about 35 billion US\$<sup>4</sup>.

Highly valued consumer goods such as cars, washing machines, fridges, TV- and stereo-sets were unobtainable for the majority of the population in the short-term because of their high prices. To get access to these goods, one had to enter the informal system of the círculo cerrado (closed circle). In the círculo cerrado, customers pay monthly instalments and the item is allocated to them according to a short-list drawn by lots. Here is a description by one middle-class man:

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<sup>3</sup>Data from German-Argentine chamber of Commerce in Buenos Aires, Federal Office for Foreign Commerce, Cologne, and Worldbank; cited by *FAZ* 2.10.89 and *Página 12* 26.11.89.

<sup>4</sup>data from Fundación de Investigaciones Económicas Latinoamericanas (FIEL) and World Bank, cited by *AT* 17.12.1988.

"When I worked in 1984 for the municipal library, we decided among 10 employees to form a círculo cerrado to buy a 'Sharp' colour TV-set with a remote control function. At the beginning of every month everybody of us had to contribute one tenth of the price in US\$ in cash and we drew a lot, and the winner got the first TV set. The whole thing went on for ten months and worked perfectly.

[But, what happens if one of the participants drops out, for example, for personal financial difficulties?]

Oh, this wouldn't happen - and if it happens, you will always find somebody to fill in the position. - The círculo cerrado is not only run among friends and colleagues, but also organized by big car-companies such as Volkswagen and Autolatina for 50 or more people to buy a car.

The círculo cerrado is a way of maintaining spending power in times of high inflation and *high interest rates*. But these days it is going out of fashion because people simply don't have the money any more."

Thus, in times of accelerated inflation people participating in these saving circles come under severe stress, and they are unable to pay their 'instalments, as the following extract suggests:

"THE CIRCLES WHICH DO NOT CLOSE.

The increase of more than 250% in the prices of electrical goods and cars which the saver [of the saving circles] dreams of buying have been translated into a proportional nightmare with regard to his monthly instalments. In view of this situation, many companies which administer saving circles introduced emergency plans, sharing out the increases over various months.

Although this alternative relieves momentarily the finances of the saver, in the short-term, with new increases expected, financial difficulties will reappear ... ."

(*Página 12* 13.7.89; my capital letters in headline)<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>See also the extract from the following detailed newspaper report:

"NUMEROUS SUBSCRIBERS TO CAR-SAVINGS (autoahorros) IN A CRITICAL SITUATION.

The sharp increase in prices of cars during the last months threatens to crack the system of the so-called 'car savings'. With respect to April, the increase of installments has been over 200% ... . Those who paid 10.000 australes last month, now face a bill of 32.000 australes.

"Probably those who will suffer most from these increases are the taxi drivers for whom the car is a indispensable.

'If I had participated in any of these saving plans today I would be going mad', confessed Osvaldo Guadalupe to LA NACIÓN while he was taking petrol ... . Rubén Toloza, waiting for his turn at the same place, said that he participated in a plan to buy a Renault 12. He emphasized, that while he still has to pay 15 installments, his last installments augmented first from 4400 to 7000 australes, and now from 7000 to 22.000. He added: 'I know that the instalment for July will be 52.000 australes."

(*La Nación* 8.6.89; my capital letters in headline)

In May 1986 an unskilled worker had to work 36.284 hours/or 4535 days (per 8 hours) for a small car and 1447 hours or 180 days for a fridge and almost one hour for 1kg of ordinary bread<sup>6</sup>.

In the eyes of most porteños I talked to, Alfonsín had failed to reverse or even halt the decline of the economy. Most of the people I spoke to maintained that they were worse off than five years ago when Alfonsín had come to power. As an example, I give the case of an University lecturer who said that he earned 120US\$/month and his wife 50US\$ for teaching at a German school on a local contract. On this combined salary they could hardly support the family, consisting of two children attending primary school. Fortunately, they had been able to pay off the mortgage of their modest house in a middle class residential suburb in Greater Buenos Aires, when, due to a different exchange rate in the early 1980s, the lecturer had earned between 800US\$ and 1200US\$ per month. It has to be emphasized that Argentines make calculations in US\$ on the basis of *local currency salaries*. Hence people '*think*' in dollars because they see it as the only valid parameter to measure the 'value' of their money, when local currency denominations for prices and salaries are nominally rising due to inflation<sup>7</sup> but are, in fact losing purchasing power.

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<sup>6</sup>Data from Universidad Argentina de la Empresa (UADE), cited by *La Nación* 22.6.89.

<sup>7</sup>Economists have explained the 'oscillatory character' of Argentine inflation as a structural feature of the Argentine economy:

"This fact [i.e. the oscillation of inflation] is connected with the kind of structural distortions induced by the development of an import-substituting ... oligopolistic industrial sector and an equally oligopsonistic labor movement. Under such conditions growth induces imports and higher demand for food, reduces agricultural exports, and inevitably brings about balance of payments crises followed by recurrent devaluations, which are required to change relative prices. This reduces the level of activity, drives down wages, and shifts resources out of industry and into primary production, obtaining a new external equilibrium. This new solution is strongly resisted and gives rise to strong inter- and even intrasectoral fights between oligopolistic contenders to go back to some previous fair level of relative prices, reversing the original change brought about by devaluation. This alternating process gives Argentina's inflation its oscillatory character ..."

(Cavanese/Di Tella 1988:168)

In late 1988, the acceleration of inflation (which almost turned to hyperinflation in June 1989) had not yet started, and President Alfonsín faced more immediate political problems which challenged democratic institutions at large.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December 1988 two army batallions of right-wing rebel forces, the carapintadas (those with 'painted'/camouflaged faces), under the command of Major Muhammed Alí Seineldín, staged a mutiny at Villa Martelli and Campo de Mayo (the largest army barracks in Greater Buenos Aires), surrendering only on the evening of Sunday, the 4<sup>th</sup> of December. President Alfonsín had ordered the suppression of the rebellion in a televised Address to the Nation one day earlier and the CGT (Trade Union Confederation) *and* the employers' confederation had both called for a general strike on Monday, the 5<sup>th</sup> of December. In his presidential address, Alfonsín had called upon the Argentines to hoist Argentine flags outside their houses and apartments to show their support for democracy. And indeed, at least in my quarter of San Telmo, I could observe quite a few flags fluttering in the otherwise deserted streets.

The whole episode hinted at the still unresolved power struggle between the army on the one hand, and the democratically elected Alfonsín administration and civil society in general on the other. Parts of the military (though not the High command which remained loyal to Alfonsín) perceived themselves as humiliated by the laws of the Alfonsín administration, which had brought to trial some of those responsible for the violation of human rights during the 1976-1983 military dictatorship. During and after the rebellion of December 1988, they demanded what they called the restoration of the 'dignity' of the army and a 'recognition' of their role in defeating and extinguishing terrorism and ultimately repelling the threat to transform Argentina into a communist society. This view was shared by those of the population who had supported the military dictatorship, but also, to some extent, by much wider sections of the population who advocated the idea of a 'reconciliation' of military and civil society. Basically, this latter more widespread position would imply a generalized pardon for the already sentenced military personnel and the relinquishment of further trials. The rebels regarded the military institution as one of the foremost pressure groups in society and tried repeatedly to increase its bargaining position (they had also demanded higher wages and an increased defense budget) with a future government. The rebels did so by flexing their muscles. That is to say that right-wing, marginal sections would stage small rebellions, rather than top generals and command a full-scale coup d'état.

In his presidential address to Congress on the 21st of December 1988, Alfonsín clearly rejected the demands by the military for an amnesty and official recognition of their 'honourable' participation in the 'dirty war'. Instead, he confirmed once more that State Terrorism was not to be permitted again:

"We have to reorder our ideas. The military transition cannot be invoked as a discussion on the dignity and the honour of the Army, and neither as a struggle for power between civilians and the military. The honour of the military is not under discussion. ...

"When the vindication of the sacrifices of the armed forces and the security forces is demanded, this is what is already within the spirit of the Government and the immense majority of the people. But neither the Government nor the people are willing to grant the vindication of State Terrorism."

*(La Nación 22.12.88)*

Among my middle class neighbours from San Telmo I encountered widely varying attitudes to the military. Although most people supported democracy in principle, they were increasingly discontented by the fact that it had brought them so little in economic terms. Linked to the experience of economic stagnation and decline, were general complaints about rising criminality and dirt on streets. In particular, those aged about 45 or older, who had *not* lost relatives or friends during the dictatorship, viewed the military as a guarantor of order, discipline and tidiness.

At the turn of the year 1988/1989 it seemed that conflicts in Argentine society became more violent yet again, and people even feared a repetition of the 1973 to 1977 period. In retrospect, their fears appear to have been exaggerated since only small sections of the army and left-wing guerrillas were involved, and not larger political movements or whole parts of the population.

On the 23rd of January 1989, a group of about 50 armed activists, largely drawn from the left-wing fringe group MTP (Movimiento Todos por la Patria), some of whom were known guerillas (like the ERP-leader Enrique Gorriarán P.Merlo), others of whom were engaged for the first time in violent actions, attacked and captured an army barack in La Tablada, a western suburb of Greater Buenos Aires. Alfonsín ordered the repression of the attack which was carried out by the army with some alleged brutality. The fighting, which went on for 30 hours and left 38 people dead, 29 of whom were guerrillas, and 63 wounded. Some left-wing Argentine media representatives, foreign reports and Amnesty International later suggested that some of the killed 'terrorists' had, in fact, already surrendered and then probably been executed, and that tanks rolled over wounded terrorists (*HAZ* 25.1.89 and 26.1.89, *Keesing's Record of World Events* 1989:36394,

1990:37499). The guerrilla-attack was condemned across the spectrum of Argentine party politics. It is, however, ironic that the Peronist candidate and later president, Menem (who would eventually pardon the generals in 1989-1991) accused the Radical government of

"...complicity in the La Tablada incident and of arranging the outcome so as to improve its relations with the military. This followed accusations that the State Intelligence Secretariat (SIDE) had infiltrated the MTP, feeding it false information about a coup attempt, in order to provoke the armed attack and thereby to show that the threat to democracy came from the left and not from the military."

(*Keesing's* 1989:36394)

Politicians from left-wing fringe parties, like MAS (Movimiento al Socialismo), as well as the surviving attackers at their trial, suggested that the guerrillas wanted to carry out a pre-emptive strike on what they thought might be an imminent coup d'état-threat by the army (*Southern Cone Report* 9.3.89:1-3, *Keesing's* 1990:37499); but their allegations could never be proved.

### 3. The Presidential Elections and Economic crisis

The months from February to May 1989 were overshadowed by the presidential campaign, which was now in full swing. The designated candidate of the Radical Party (UCR), Eduardo Angeloz, had to face his Peronist opponent, Carlos Saúl Menem, governor of the remote and poor interior Province of La Rioja. Menem had unexpectedly won the Peronist primaries in July 1988 against the governor of the Province of Buenos Aires, Antonio Cafiero, a long established populist leader. Menem, who typified for many the political leader of an interior province (caudillo), deliberately supported and furthered this 'popular' image by touring extensively the interior provinces and the rural parts of the littoral provinces, and even sometimes dressing in gaucho costumes.

A bookseller with whom I discussed Menem, argued that, as a son of Lebanese-Syrian *immigrants* who had made it to the top of Argentine society, Menem was a success story.

He could therefore easily allude to national symbols such as the rural gaucho:

"Look, Menem is the son of first-generation Arab immigrants, but he is a caudillo: he dresses like a gaucho and he rides horses."

During the election campaign, Menem attacked the failed economic policy of the Alfonsín government, but he also skilfully tried to develop some room for later manoeuvre with

the military hinting at a possible amnesty<sup>8</sup>. During the first part of the presidential campaign, Menem gave the impression of being an extremely populist leader in true Peronist fashion: he cooperated with the CGT-unions, who repeatedly went on strike against Alfonsín, and he promised price freezes and wage rises once he would be in government. Later on in the campaign, however, he put continuous emphasis on what he called the revolución productiva (productive revolution), his intended economic reconstruction of the country. He initiated talks with the other small, but politically influential, opposition party: the right wing neo-liberal UCeDe, led by former ambassador and minister, Álvaro Alsogaray (who, after the election, would eventually become Menem's economic adviser).

The run-up to the elections on 14th of May 1989, was characterized by further economic crisis which was severely felt by the population. Already in December 1988, the Alfonsín government had to introduce cuts in the supply of electrical power, because some of the nuclear and conventional power stations broke down and hydroelectric power stations could not provide sufficient energy owing to the unusually low water levels of Uruguay and Paraná rivers (cf. also *Latin American Weekly Report* 12/1/1989:1). This was directly felt by residents, companies and businesses in Buenos Aires, where the municipality set up an hourly rota between municipal districts for power supply. In practical terms, this not only meant that lights were repeatedly cut off, but also fridges, fans and air-conditioning during a hot summer, as well as water pumps which are essential in high storey buildings. While underground trains were still running, stations were less than sparsely illuminated, and the Calle Corrientes, famous for its theatres, cinemas and neon lights looked almost as if hiding from an aerial attack. When I interviewed business people in high rising office blocks in downtown Buenos Aires, elevators got unexpectedly blocked and emergency staircases, which now had to be used, were eerily illuminated by candle light. These power cuts, which extended for several months, gave a general impression of the Government's economic and administrative incapacities, an impression which was shared by Argentines of all social classes. A man of German descent commented to me: "It is ironic, that while my grandfather emigrated here to build generators at the power

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<sup>8</sup>Later, as elected president, Menem did carry out the amnesty in several steps, the latest of these being the pardon he granted in 1990/91 to Generals Videla and Viola.

station, CHADE (Compañía Hispano-Americana de Electricidad)<sup>9</sup>, now these generators do not work any more, due to a lack of maintenance."

In Argentina, the president has to be voted by an electoral college (similar to the procedure in the United States). On the presidential elections of May 14th, Menem and his running mate, Eudardo Duhaldo, got 47.3% of the Vote, and 306 delegates out of the 600 total of the electoral college. His opponent, the Radical Party candidate, Eduardo Angeloz, lost with 32.4% and 211 delegates. In the chamber of deputies (Congreso), Menem's Frente Justicialista Popular (Frejupo) got 44.7% of the vote and 124 congressmen, and Angeloz' Unión Cívica Radical (UCR) 30.9% and 93 of a total of 254 seats. Although they had won the presidential elections, the Peronists had failed to obtain the absolute majority in Parliament. The deciding factor for forming a government became the Unión del Centro Democrático (Ucede). Menem entered coalition talks, and agreed to adopt a neoliberal economic programme, including the large-scale privatizations of state companies. This u-turn in policies was contrary to the expectations of the vast majority of his voters who wanted a redistributive policy similar to that of Perón 30 years earlier. The unexpected alliance with the Ucede leader, Álvaro Alsogaray, surprised even some of Menem's staunchest opponents, among them the traditionally anti-Peronist upper and upper middle classes of Buenos Aires. They had feared he would become a 'second Perón', a populist leader who would rule in close alliance with the influential Trade Unions (CGT). What surprised me most was not only how fast political parties could change their direction but also how fast the perceptions of the voters could change.

I spent election day first visiting a friend who was on duty as a polling officer (suplente) at a polling station in the lower middle class district of Constitución. The ground floor of the polling station, a converted school, was reserved for women voters and the first floor for men. In Argentina voting is obligatory, and voters arrived continuously that morning to present their identity cards (cartas de identidad) to the suplente who then checked their entry in the voters' register. Voters then had to proceed to the polling booth where they voted in secret. They did so, not by marking with a cross candidates and

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<sup>9</sup>CHADE was originally German owned, called Transatlántica Alemana, and had a largely German immigrant workforce (Bourdé 1977:110).



parties on one singular sheet of paper (the procedure in Germany, Italy and other European countries), but actually selecting one of the printed sheets of paper in front of them, each of which represented a different list, party, or candidate. These ballot sheets could also be cut in pieces to allow for any combination of presidential, senatorial and congressional candidates. Voting at this polling station went on in a very orderly and calm manner. I was not even able to hear comments by people on the eventual outcome of the elections. Later, my friend told me that the majority of voters at his polling station had voted for Menem.

I then went to Buenos Aires' most wealthy district, Recoleta, to spend the day with an upper class family who had a cattle farm (estancia) in the Province of Buenos Aires. When I arrived, a young man, Eduardo, aged 22, started to make jokes about Menem's home in the Calle Posadas just a few streets further on. Eduardo was a strong supporter of the right-wing liberal party Ucedé, and almost got angry when I told him that this was a minority party which did not stand any serious chance in the elections. He responded: "People are ignorant, they are 'Indians' (indios<sup>10</sup>). They are all going to vote for Menem."

Similar were his mother's complaints which linked the Radical government with left wing politics, economic failure and hostility to agricultural production:

"I voted for the Radicals in 1983. I didn't know that they are Marxists. Now I am going to vote Ucedé. This Radical government penalizes the [agricultural] producer. The minister of Agriculture has never visited a farm."

The grown-up family members had voted early in the morning so we went for a walk in the gardens of Palermo, another upper middle class district, in the afternoon. On our way we took the bus and had to pass Retiro station to change buses. Passing Retiro, we could see a villa miseria (shantytown), and the 14 and 16 year old children asked me jokingly whether I had ever seen a villa miseria before.

"All these people do not work, have no education and they are going to vote for Menem", they said.

My companions were a little surprised when I told them that the Radical government of Alfonsín had actually been awarded a prize by UNESCO for their successful literacy campaign. When we came back home, the television was switched on immediately and we heard the first announcements of a Peronist victory. This was bad news for my guests, who looked depressed. Once the news was confirmed, the television

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<sup>10</sup>Ethnic labelling will be discussed in chapters 5 and 8.

was switched off, Eduardo and his mother went to evening mass, and I made my way home.

In the evening I went out again to see the Peronist supporters celebrating their victory in the city centre. The central Avenida 9 de Julio was closed to motor traffic at the junction with Avenida Belgrano about five hundred metres from the Obelisco<sup>11</sup>. All kinds of buses and cars, engaged in a jubilant clacson concert, were arriving, mainly from the working class suburbs through the fast-access motorway which ends at Plaza Constitución. After leaving their rickety vehicles, people unfurled Peronist banners. Some groups banged on huge drums, and I heard cheerful exclamations of "¡Perón, Perón!" and the Peronist 'anthem' Somos los muchachos peronistas. Contrary to the warnings made by my middle and upper class anti-Peronist friends, it was a very joyful and peaceful demonstration so that the victory-cap, which I had bought a few days earlier at a Peronist campaign stall, in order to pretend partisanship, was probably unnecessary. The central congregation of the 'victorious Peronist masses' was near the Teatro General San Martín in Corrientes where a few impromptu victory speeches were made.

The next day, in San Telmo, I heard different opinions on the outcome of the elections:

"I was surprised that the Radicals did not lose more. You can't vote for a government which has left the country bankrupt."  
(shopowner)

"I did not expect such a huge Peronist victory"  
(young man living in my block of flats, anti-Peronist)

"I am happy: the best candidate won the elections."  
(woman in her 60s, in my block of flats, Peronist)

"I am satisfied, but let's see what happens in the future."  
(greengrocer, Peronist)

"It was a very orderly celebration of victory. Menem is less overbearing (prepotente) than Cafiero<sup>12</sup>, who has stolen I don't know how much money during his time in office; just like Alfonsín who built himself a nice villa in Spain. The [Spanish] magazine ¡Hola!, after reporting these facts had to stop its sales in Argentina. - Menem has been elected three times as governor of his province, La Rioja. He is not corrupt. I have been to La Rioja. He is loved by the people there."  
(woman in her 60s and her son, aged 30; both traditionally anti-Peronists)

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<sup>11</sup>The obelisco (obelisque) stands in the middle of the Avenida 9 de Julio at the junction with Corrientes.

<sup>12</sup>Antonio Cafiero, is governor of the Province of Buenos Aires and had been Menem's opponent in the 1988 Peronist primaries.

One woman, who was working for an Italian charity, and depended on the good will of top functionaries of the government in power (cf. chapter 10), for the administrative work of paying out Argentine and Italian pensions, said:

"First I went to cry with my Radical friends and then I went out to celebrate with the Peronists."

And one upper class man, a staunch conservative businessman in his 40s who had voted for the UCeDe, commented:

"Yes, Menem has been elected with a great majority. But now we have to see what will happen when the State has no money to distribute, and the infrastructure, railways etc. are falling apart... After the war [World War II], we had plenty of gold reserves in Argentina. They are finished."

This selection of opinions on and after the election, which covers a class spectrum from the middle to the upper class, shows that many people were discontented with the Radical government for economic reasons and wanted a change, though not necessarily a Peronist government which they feared would repeat the violent years of 1973-76, and the even more violent military dictatorship which followed. I could find few open supporters of the Radical party. One of my friends was a campaign organizer for a Radical congressman, but, speaking as an advertising man he told me that he would have no problems running a campaign for a Peronist candidate if he was properly paid. One of my Jewish friends supported the Radical government basically out of a fear of growing anti-semitism and a looming military coup d'état if the Peronists took power<sup>13</sup>:

"My father always has the passports ready [in order to leave the country] if things come to the worst."

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<sup>13</sup>This fear has to be seen against the background of alleged anti-semitism during the last military dictatorship.

#### 4. Political Transition, Looting and Economic speculation

The 'worst', particularly in economic terms, was still to come in the weeks following the presidential election. What is a short and regular procedure in Western democracies was perceived by many Argentines as a moment of uncertainty. A democratic change of president who had completed his term in office had not happened for 60 years, and the Argentine constitution of 1853, (which unlike the American constitution on which it was modelled had never been reformed in this respect), prescribes a rather long period of six months between the election and the instalment of the new president. After the elections in 1989, the outgoing president with his team of economic advisers, was still in office while the incoming president, although he had the popular mandate, was not yet installed. According to the constitution, the president has to serve for six years and there is no provision for shortening the mandate (*Southern Cone Report 29.6.89:1*). Hence Menem should have waited until the 10th of December before assuming office.

However, immediately after his victory, he began to declare that he was at the disposal of the nation, and would take responsibility whenever that was necessary and asked of him. Many people, particularly his supporters during the election, saw this as a legitimate position. In their opinion, Eduardo Angeloz losing the election meant that the Alfonsín administration had also lost the popular mandate and legitimacy to rule the country. This belief was shared by other sections of the population who had not voted for Menem, but who were now fed up with the devastated economy and looked, in a mixture of curiosity and hope, to the new man. It was only a small minority of the people I met, or newspaper articles and other media reports I came across, that insisted on the constitutional termination of Alfonsín's term of office on the 10th of December 1989.

Financial markets both fuelled and reflected this growing speculation and uncertainty. The dollar reached its highest level at an exchange rate of 200 Australes, and on the week of the 22nd of May, Alfonsín declared a closure of foreign exchanges (*feriado cambiario*) until further notice. Because prices, not only for imported goods but even for many nationally produced goods, were indexed to the dollar, Argentines immediately felt the steep rises in consumer prices. The only way to escape the pressure of overnight rising prices in the national currency, was to convert constantly earnings in Australes into dollars on the black market and to safeguard these abroad. Saving accounts in dollars are not always permitted in Argentina and are the first to be closed by a government

adopting emergency measures against the flight of capital. Still, even the simple conversion of Australes to dollars bears risks in itself as the exchange rate can go up and down unexpectedly. Many middle class families, however, do not have dollar savings and cannot risk losing their hard earned money, unless they spend considerable time following the financial markets and probably employing professional currency dealers who operate on the black market. I remember discussions in a middle class family at the time of high price rises at the end of May 1989. Husband and wife both worked hard for a combined income which had now fallen below \$200 per month and said they could not afford the time to be constantly running to the casas de cambio in order to change their dollars. Just as I was witnessing a quite fierce argument between them, a beggar knocked on the door of their modest detached house in a Buenos Aires suburb and asked for some food. The husband's immediate response was to give him a few apples, but his wife angrily retorted that he should not give them away since they had become very expensive, and she did not know how she could afford to feed the children (they had two, both going to school). In these weeks, the husband also received a pair of unworn shoes from his rich aunt. They were warmly welcomed, because he could not afford to buy new ones.

In a television address to the nation on the 23th of May, Alfonsín defended his decision to stay in power until the 10th of December and announced emergency measures of a 'war economy' (economía de guerra) to be implemented the following week. Details of this were outlined in another television address just a week later, on the 28th of May (*La Nación* 24.5.89 and 29.5.89, *Southern Cone Report* 29.6.89:2-3). The main measure consisted of the introduction of a 'unified' exchange rate, which was a novelty for Argentina which had so far known only differential exchange rates to the dollar for industrial exporters, agricultural producers and importers. This had led to the over- and under-invoicing (sub/sobrefacturación) of imports and exports. From the remaining differential sums to the black market exchange rate, the importers and exporters were making huge profits. The main target of the 'unified' exchange rate was the black market which had prospered under a system of different exchange rates.

Decisive responses were urgently requested before the economic problem became an uncontrollable political one. In the night from the 29th to 30th of May, gangs and individuals looted shops, supermarkets and delivery trucks in Rosario (Province of Santa Fe) and in the poorer suburbs of Buenos Aires. Shops and supermarkets were attacked. 14 people died, 120 were wounded and 2000 jailed during these saqueos, which lasted

for several days and prompted the government to declare a state of siege for 30 days on the 30th of May (*Il Messaggero* 4.6.89). Observers on the right were quick to accuse left-wing parties, like MAS and Izquierda Unida, of having started the hunger riots. But more moderate and reflective observers agreed that the riots and violent shop lifting were probably not centrally organized but rather, sprang up spontaneously from small groups and individuals in the shantytowns (villas miserias) (cf. *El Cronista Comercial* 2.6.89). Many of my middle and upper class informants feared that rioting and looting would spread to the central and wealthy parts of the capital. On the evening of the 30th of May, I went to attend a meeting of the Italian immigrants' council, COEMIT<sup>14</sup>. The meeting had to be suspended because one of the councillors was telephoned by his anxious wife who, giving the impression of an invading army rather than of a mob of shop lifters, cried:

"The mob has now reached Flores (a middle class district in the west of the capital)."  
When I walked back from the meeting I passed Recoleta, the wealthiest district of Buenos Aires. The streets were almost deserted and the few people walking around were whispering about the expected assault of the 'mob', which according to their opinion and perception was of course incited by Peronist activists - very much like the attacks on upper class property and institutions in the 1950s. However, fears of wide-spread rioting and looting in the capital were unfounded. Nevertheless, in the areas affected the situation was tense. One woman from the suburb, San Miguel, where looting took place, told me:  
"Shopowners and other middle class inhabitants of my area have set up councils and 'count' their arms to defend themselves. One of the men expected his shop to be looted and proposed to throw molotow-cocktails from the roof-top. Our *barrio* is very near the Campo de Mayo army barracks and the military prison where Rico [Aldo Rico] and Seineldín [Muhammed Alí Seineldín] are kept and a lot of fascios [fascists] live in the area who support them. They would be only happy to have a pretext for military action, but this time the military will stay away."

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<sup>14</sup>on the COEMIT cf. chapter 10.

## 5. The New President

The military 'stayed away', but amidst this worsening economic and political situation, Alfonsín came under increased pressure to concede an early transfer of the presidency to Menem. In an address to the Nation on the 12th of June, Alfonsín announced his resignation at the end of the month and agreed to hand over the presidency to Menem on the 8th of July (*La Nación* 13.6.89). The inauguration ceremony of Menem was assisted by a huge crowd and reported on television. Many Peronist supporters, however, became sceptical about the face of Menem's 'productive revolution' (revolución productiva) which now entailed new programmes of liberal economy and privatization.

I watched the inauguration day in television with a young Peronist middle class family and the wife commented sarcastically:

"Well, at least some in the crowd sing the peronist 'anthem' somos los muchachos peronistas<sup>15</sup>, otherwise we wouldn't even know that Menem is a Peronist."

And in fact, the new President did not wait long to introduce his new measures. The very next day, customers were faced with a huge rise in prices for public services in transport, communications and energy. There seemed to be some success of Menem's economic policies: inflation fell to 37% in August, and most of my hitherto staunch anti-Peronist middle and upper class informants agreed that Menem was going in the right direction, agreeing on financial restraints for government spending and privatizations. Menem actually took unprecedented steps to secure the backing of the agro-industrial sector. His first two finance ministers, Roig and Rapanelli, were directly recruited from the Argentine-European multinational company, Bunge y Born (agricultural products)<sup>16</sup>; which somehow supported the policies of the new government.

But Menem was not only controversial with regard to economic policies, where he effectively confronted the interests of the powerful Trade Unions CGT, which eventually split in August into a pro-Menem and an anti-Menem wing. He also took on another very

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<sup>15</sup>Literally, 'We are the Peronist lads' The melody of the song was also recorded on souvenir key rings sold during the campaign.

<sup>16</sup>For a detailed study on the economic power of the multinational company, Bunge y Born, see Green/Laurent (1988).

controversial issue, namely the amnesty or pardon of military personnel involved in human rights violations during the 1976-83 dictatorship, and others who participated in military rebellions during the Alfonsín government. He was following a consensus shared by the moderate right to the extreme right which recognised the necessity for a 'reconciliation' between the army and civil society, if further revolts by the army were to be prevented. In early October, he pardoned 210 members of the military and also "... 64 former guerrillas and five civilians who had participated in a military mutiny. The largest number of pardoned military men(174) were those taking part in the two mutinies of 1987, led by Lieutenant-Colonel Aldo Rico, and the one in 1989, headed by Colonel Mohamed Alf Seineldín. The second-largest group was of officers convicted or facing trial for human rights abuses in the 1970s." (*Southern Cone Report* 16.11.89:1). The pardon (indulto) not only provoked large demonstrations of trade unions, the opposition UCR, left-wing parties and parts of the Peronist reform wing, renovador, but also stirred up discussion in the juridical environment. The pressure grew for prominent prosecutor generals, like Luis Moreno Ocampo, who had sentenced generals in leading cases, to resign from the Federal Tribunal of Buenos Aires (*Página 12* 4.7.89 and 20.9.89). Some sections of the juridical powers resisted those pressures, and ruled the pardon unconstitutional, as did, for example, the Prosecutor General of the Federal Tribunal of Bahía Blanca, the port city in the south of the Province of Buenos Aires. The Federal Tribunal of Bahía Blanca had already opposed the obediencia debida law of the Alfonsín government in 1987 (*Página 12* .12.89.). Yet, this ruling was without any practical effect, and it has been Menem's policy ever since to pardon those involved, as the recent releases of Generals Videla and Viola in early 1991 showed.

Arguably, instead of reconciling society, the pardon did the opposite and by dividing society further, leaving many people without the hope of justice eventually being done. I felt this divide particularly among people who had been personally affected by the military dictatorship through the 'disappearance' of relatives or friends. Others, who had supported the military government, wanted the pardon but were against the pardon for ex-guerrillas. Already, on the 20th of June, the newspaper *La Nación*, had published a declaration, accompanied by three pages of several hundred signatures, mainly from people of military and upper class extraction:

"GRATITUDE AND SOLIDARITY

We express our gratitude and solidarity to all of the Armed, Security and Police Forces



who defended the Nation in the war unleashed by subversive aggression, and who defeated the terrorist organizations who sought to impose a marxist regime on us." (*La Nación* 20.6.89)

There was probably a much larger category of people who cared neither one way or the other (especially young people<sup>17</sup>). They showed a kind of amnesia and just wanted to forget the military dictatorship or were too young even to remember it. It was this 'grey and silent majority' which allowed Menem to carry out the pardon without running the risk of large scale and prolonged civil unrest and opposition.

Although Menem had announced his measures of privatization in August with great publicity, and inflation had come down, the economy did not really take off. And in the last quarter of the year, Argentina was still in a period of economic difficulty. The greengrocer in San Telmo whose shop I frequented, commented on inflation:

"How can I make a living when today I buy oranges for 100 Australes at the Central Market? I have to sell them for 80 Australes. It means I sell five boxes to buy two next Monday."

After having secured with populist rhetoric an electoral victory, and with neo-liberal policies the alliance of the Ucede party, Menem also succeeded in checking temporarily the power of the Peronist Trade Unions (CGT). On the 11th of October, 1989, the powerful union leader, Saúl Ubaldini, walked out of the negotiations between the pro and anti Menem fractions, and CGT effectively was split (*Página 12* .10.89). One result of this split were unofficial strikes of public transport workers in December 1989 which were, in part, supported by the anti-Menem wing of the CGT.

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<sup>17</sup>cf. chapter 9.

Economic crisis, devaluation, high inflation are now almost endemic to Argentina and return cyclically. To give an idea of the general economic situation after I had left the field on 21 December 1989, I cite from *Keesing's*:

"Banks were closed from Dec.29,1989, to Jan.4,1990, during which time the austral, which had closed on Dec.28 at US\$1.00=2000australs, fell by over 30 per cent in value. In a move to freeze about two-thirds of all the money in circulation, short term seven-day banking deposits worth about \$2,000 million were frozen on Jan.1, and the amount which investors could withdraw in cash was limited to 1,000,000 australs, the option being to accept repayment of savings in 10-year dollar bonds. Interest rates had risen in recent months as high as an annualized rate of 1,200 per cent as banks struggled to retain their funds, and the move initially froze the savings of thousands of Argentinians and also affected major corporations. This caused the austral to deteriorate still further as dollars were purchased, trading on February at over \$1.00=4,000 australs and falling on Feb.25 to a record low of \$1.00=5,600 australs. Inflation continued to spiral throughout January and February."

(*Keesing's* 1990:37500)

The account of events people's reactions to them highlight how a particular period, the *present* of 1988/89, is intertwined with Argentina's recent *past*, characterized since the early 1950s by political and economic instability. This political and economic context, and the influence it has on people's daily lives, should be kept in mind when reading, for example, life histories which imply value judgements about historical periods. Yet before carrying out the detailed presentation and analysis of these and other accounts in the central chapters of the thesis, it seems appropriate to familiarize the reader in the next chapter with the urban environment of the people of this study, the city of Buenos Aires itself.

## CHAPTER 5

### The Rise of Buenos Aires as an Immigrant Metropolis: Ethnicity, Class and Modernism

#### 1. From the 'Great Village' to Metropolis

In this chapter I shall first describe Buenos Aires' rise as an immigrant metropolis at the beginning of the century. I shall then look at some case studies of ethnic groups, focusing particularly on Italians. Finally, I shall analyse the present ethnic composition and social stratification of the city. In order to comprehend the complexity of *contemporary* Buenos Aires, it is essential to have some understanding of the transformation that the city underwent between the 1870s and the early 20th century. What, in the 1850s, was already the main trading post and commercial centre of an independent but not yet consolidated nation, was, by the beginning of the 20th century one of the biggest, most quickly rising, cosmopolitan cities in the world. Scobie (1974) and Bourd  (1977) have compellingly analysed this incredibly fast-moving process by which the 'large village' (gran aldea) became an immigrant metropolis.

The grid-iron partition of streets with house blocks' sides (cuadras) 100 metres long, stems from the colonial foundation of the city in 1580<sup>1</sup> when Juan de Garay allocated lots to sixty-four original settlers. The city was laid out according to the pattern of Spanish colonial cities: the main square (plaza or plaza de armas) was flanked by the government house, the municipal council (cabildo), and the church.

By the late 18th century, Buenos Aires, now numbering about 25,000 inhabitants, had become the most important trading centre of vice-royal Argentina, exporting hides, tallows and salted beef and importing European manufactured goods. After independence in 1816, more foreign merchants; English, French, German, Italian and Spanish<sup>2</sup>, settled in Buenos Aires and profited from the port's role as a commercial broker between agricultural products from the Pampas and interior provinces, and imported goods from

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<sup>1</sup>A first attempt to settle at the estuary of the River Plate in 1536 lasted only five years.

<sup>2</sup>including Basques and Catalans.

abroad. Argentina was by this time already an independent nation, but Buenos Aires had not yet imposed itself as federal capital of Argentina. This would happen only as late as 1880, almost 30 years after the fall of dictator Rosas and the adoption of a constitution in 1853. From the 1860s, until the city was federalized in 1880, it served as the capital of the Province of Buenos Aires and Argentina by licence of the provincial government. The provinces finally agreed on Buenos Aires as the capital and Congress eventually passed a law which turned the city of Buenos Aires into the federal district, keeping Greater Buenos Aires as part of the Province of Buenos Aires ordering the construction of a new city, La Plata, as capital of the province. According to Scobie(1974:70,104f.), the federalization of Buenos Aires had a decisive impact on its further development, as had the construction of the port and railways. Becoming the capital of Argentina meant political recognition of economic and social dominance already gained earlier, and established Buenos Aires' definitive pre-eminence among other Argentine cities and provinces.

While Buenos Aires' population had grown to 100,000 inhabitants by 1857, its surface area remained only double that of the original design 300 years earlier (Bourd  1977:14). Low one or two-storey Spanish colonial-style houses still dominated the scenery. Residence patterns reflected social stratification: upper class families lived in large houses built around an inner courtyard (patio) in the quarters south of the Plaza de Mayo (what are today the downtown districts of San Telmo and Montserrat). They had weekend and summer residences (quintas) on the outskirts of the city. The docklands of La Boca, at the mouth (boca) of the Riachuelo River, served for overseas shipping, as well as for the important interfluvial transport up the Paran  and Uruguay rivers and across the River Plate to Montevideo. From the 1830s onwards, Dalmatians, Ligurians and other Italians emigrated in increasing numbers to La Boca to work in the docks, shipping, transport and commerce (Devoto 1987, Scarzanella 1983:26-30).

The changing face and sheer volume of Argentina's export economy, its rise from a small-scale economy based on cattle rearing, to a large-scale economy based on shepherding, fenced cattle ranching (estancias) and cereal production, required an export centre and sufficient manpower to run it. While immigration was intended by the ruling classes to people and to work the pampas, as many as *one in three immigrants* did in fact remain in the city of Buenos Aires. Due to the combined factors of foreign immigration, rural-urban migration and the declining mortality rate, the rise of the population











between 1869 and 1936 was spectacular: it *doubled* almost every twenty years. From 1947 to the present day, the population of the Federal District or City of Buenos Aires has remained at about 3 million, but Greater Buenos Aires which includes the suburbs, rose to 12 million.

Table 6:  
Population of the City of Buenos Aires (Federal District)

Year	inhabitants (total)	Italians	Spaniards	French	Russians	Poles
1869	177.787	44.233	14.609	14.180		
1887	433.375	138.166	39.582	20.031	0.188	
1895	663.854	181.693	80.352	33.185	1.217	
1904	950.891	228.556	105.206	27.574	3.208	
1909	1.231.698	277.041	174.292	25.751	13.714	
1914	1.575.814	312.267	306.850	27.923	28.846	
1936	2.415.142	298.664	324.650	15.192	31.368	46.519
1947	2.978.029					
1960	2.966.634					
1970	2.972.413					
1980	2.922.829					

(Bourd  1977:156-157, Rep blica Argentina 1980:1, Walter 1982:76)

The most recent census of 1980 still reveals the impact of mass immigration on the composition of the city. A considerable proportion of those people over the age of 50, were in fact born in Europe. Of those who were 20 years and older at the end of the period of mass immigration in 1930, the proportion born in Europe averages around 50%.

Table 7:  
Percentages of those born Abroad (from non-neighbouring countries),  
Buenos Aires (Federal District), 1980

Age	total population	males	females
50-54	12.9	14.3	11.8
55-54	18.0	20.5	16.5
60-64	15.3	17.5	13.8
65-69	20.3	22.5	18.7
70-74	34.0	39.7	30.4
75-79	44.5	53.0	39.6
80-84	45.3	55.2	40.6
>85	50.3	64.2	44.7

(from: República Argentina 1980:8-9)

Arriving immigrants faced the immediate problem of finding accommodation. Many immigrants arrived in Buenos Aires through the informal 'channels' of chain migration (cf. chapter 2) and had the expectation that relatives or friends would put them up for a while. These promised re-encounters, often after years of separation, did not always take place, either because people did not turn up, directions were incorrect, or the ship's arrival and disembarkation were delayed. Such 'lost' immigrants and the many others who had no personal contacts in Buenos Aires, could find temporary accommodation and food at the Hotel de Inmigrantes, founded in 1876 and situated next to the Immigration Bureau (Dirección General de Inmigración) at the port's northern dock (Dársena Norte). The Hotel de Inmigrantes and the Immigration Bureau were once more busy in the 1940s and 50s, receiving the last wave of European Immigrants after World War II (cf. chapter 3).

During the times of mass-immigration, that is to say the period up to the 1930s, many immigrant families or several individual immigrants together, started their 'housing career' in Buenos Aires by renting a single room (sic!) in one of the infamous conventillos (tenement houses). The conventillos were basically one to three-storey houses built around patios in the South of Buenos Aires. They had either been given up by upper middle and upper class inhabitants when they moved to the northern quarters of Palermo, or were newly built by landlords who wanted to rent them out. In the late 19th and early

20th centuries about 30% of the population of the inner city districts of central Buenos Aires lived in conventillos.

The upward social mobility of immigrants meant an improvement in individual housing standards (Scobie 1974:264). The number of conventillos decreased slightly from 877 in 1887 to 647 in 1904 (ibid.), and more importantly, the percentages of *owners* of urban property increased from 14% (owners of real estate in the population over the age of 22) in 1887, to 20% in 1914 (Korn/de la Torre 1985:251). Interestingly, it was the Italians who, amongst the foreign population, attained the highest percentages of urban property; higher, for example, than the Spaniards, who were a group of roughly similar size.

Table 8:  
Owners of Real Estate, classified according to Nationality

Years	Argentines %	Italians %	Spaniards %	Total of Owners
1887	44	35	8	34.695
1895	42	36	6	45.823
1904	43	35	10	83.813
1909	40	36	13	112.383
1914	40	32	17	173.334

(from Korn/de la Torre 1985:254)

One possible explanation for this drive towards urban property is that many Italians emigrated from areas in Southern Italy where ownership of a house for the nuclear family was considered important (cf. Piselli 1981:42,135,180; Schneider 1990:31-53). In such areas, the nuclear family, and especially the male head of the family could only gain full social status within the local community once they owned a house. Detailed case studies on the volume of construction activities demonstrate the rise of property ownership among absentee-emigrants, relatives of emigrants and returned emigrants at their places of origin (ibid.). One of the original incentives for migration was the economic impossibility of acquiring ownership of urban real estate. The remittances, that is the savings which the emigrants sent home, were invested foremostly in local urban property. This is not a phenomenon restricted to the Italian migration after World War II, but was

already in force with the transoceanic migrations to the United States and Argentina at the turn of the century. Once immigration became more permanent and immigrants called their families to the Americas, the aspirations of the immigrant to acquire property, or 'to build a house' (*farsi la casa*), could also be realized abroad or, if economically feasible, on both sides of the Atlantic. This meant building or buying a house both at home and in the country of immigration (cf. Minicuci 1989:81).

The conventillo has often been portrayed as the germ cell of the Argentine immigrant nation where, in the smallest possible space, members of different cultures would intermingle<sup>3</sup>. The more recent research trend of cultural pluralism (cf. chapter 1 and below) has emphasized, that despite living together with members of other nationalities in one house, patterns of *chain migration* (cf. chapter 2) prevailed among the individual groups, and relatives and friends of one nationality would live in proximity. Scobie, after giving a vivid picture of the squalid living conditions and mixed ethnic composition of Buenos Aires' tenement houses, warns against seeing the conventillo as the place of indiscriminate intermarriage which would eventually lead to the 'melting pot of races'<sup>4</sup>:

"More frequently, although one nationality might predominate, the conventillo housed a number of nationalities. In these cases, however, each individual room inhabited either by a family or by a group of single men represented a single nationality, with all the residents born in France, in Germany, or in Italy. One can surmise that such persons also came from the same region and perhaps even the same town. Likewise, little marriage occurred between nationalities. French tended to marry French, Italians married Italians." (Scobie 1974:152)

In section 5.4. I shall discuss the issue of ethnicity more fully. First, however, it is necessary to gain some understanding of the city's changing class structure and its forms of urban communications.

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<sup>3</sup>In popular one-act plays (*sainetes*) the courtyard (*patio*) of the conventillo was the dramatic stage for ethnic and character types, such as the Italian vegetable vendor (*tano*), the Spanish Galician store clerk (*gallego*), the Jewish or Turkish (*turco*) barrow boy, and the Creole veteran (*criollo*) (Evans 1979:52).

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Korn's emphatic statement about the growth of Buenos Aires: "Buenos Aires[is the city] where at every corner one encounters words from every language, people of every colour, any size and any profession. And there are always more languages, more people, more neighbourhoods; and in the neighbourhoods are the conventillos, and in the conventillos are yet more languages[spoken], and [eventually] a thousand races become one." (Korn 1989:87)

## 2. Social and Urban Mobility

During the times of mass immigration, the ecological distribution of social classes in Buenos Aires changed. Furthermore, changing architectural styles and street sceneries transformed the individual's perception of the city as a whole.

Scobie (1974:123,135) pointed out that Buenos Aires' residence patterns were related to the city centre around the Plaza de Mayo, the important political and economical centre of the nation. Initially, elite families tended to live near this centre to the south, while arriving immigrants tried to find accommodation within reasonable distance of the centre in order to save on transport costs. When, from the 1870s, onwards (encouraged partly by the advent of a yellow fever epidemic in 1871), increasing numbers of elite families moved out of their residences, south of the Plaza de Mayo, to the green and sparsely inhabited northern side along the river, this process initiated the socio-spatial restructuring of Buenos Aires. Throughout the 20th century, the barrio norte, or northern zone of the city has remained the preferential residential area of the upper middle and upper classes. In a study carried out in the early 1960s, Imaz confirmed that 52.8% of the upper class(upper class) had their residence in Recoleta, with 40% and 12.% living around the parish churches of Socorro and Pilar respectively, and about another 20% in the northern barrios of Barrio Parque, Palermo and Belgrano (Imaz 1965:15-18). Imaz' research demonstrated that, contrary to popular belief, the majority of upper class people had their residences in just two parishes and showed rather low rates of residence in the northern suburbs of Buenos Aires which were (and still are) inhabited primarily by the upper middle classes and foreigners.

In times of mass immigration, the arriving immigrants settled in the patio-houses, abandoned by the upper classes, which were then rented out as conventillos. The northern river-sides developed into burgeoning residential areas where the lavish luxuries of the *nouveaux riches* were displayed in Italian and French style façades and interiors. Living in central Buenos Aires, even in a conventillo, was extremely expensive, and, whenever immigrants and Argentines could afford it they tried to buy or build houses. This was only possible by moving further out. Census data elaborated by Bourdé (1977:87-91; 171-175) shows that, by 1914, large sectors of the Italian and Argentine population had moved to the *outer barrios* of Flores and Villa Devoto. This great outward move was

possible and conceivable for the inner-urban population, not only because of the lower and nevertheless rising property prices in outer Buenos Aires, but was also owing to the new possibilities of transport and communications (cf. also Scobie 1974:178-180, Walter 1982:69). Sociologically, the move to the west coincided with the formation of the Argentine middle class, which now settled between the upper classes in the north and the working class in the south of the city (Sebreli 1964:67, cf. Germani 1955:201-224, 1968:252-263, 1975:85,109-112 on the formation of the Argentine middle class)<sup>5</sup>.

Contemporary Buenos Aires is divided into municipal districts (cf. map 2). However, while the names of the districts are often identical with the barrios (neighbourhood) recognized by porteños, notions of barrio boundaries are residentially and socially stratified and may not coincide with the official ones (cf. also chapters 6 and 9). Furthermore, porteños label areas of the city as barrios which comprise several districts (for example, the barrio norte), and they also subdivide districts further (for example, Palermo into Palermo chico and Palermo viejo). Official statistics on Buenos Aires also apply different criteria, when using school districts and voting districts (which have different boundaries)<sup>6</sup> as units for their calculations.

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<sup>5</sup>"After 1900, the mass of the porteños began to benefit from the availability of small individual lots and homes. Workingmen could now afford this new 'luxury' because of the greatly reduced fare and the improved service of the streetcar, as well as the cheap lands and credit facilities offered by auctioneers and building companies. ... "During the boom years from 1905 to 1912 acquisition of a small lot and a modest house came within the reach of the skilled laborer, artisan or white-collar worker in Buenos Aires. Lots thirty feet by 120 feet sold for the equivalent of 200 to 500 gold pesos, and a one-room house could be built for another 200 gold pesos. If all conditions could be met - frugality, good health, full employment, and, above all, a wife and teen-aged children who worked - a savings of five or six gold pesos a month could put lot and house in a man's hand within six to ten years. Some took advantage of auctioneer offers and occupied their plots immediately after the down payment. They then laboriously set to work, on Sundays and holidays, building a one-room shack - a procedure always fraught with the danger of losing everything if payments on the lot could not be met. Others saved until they could buy the lot outright. Many, of course, satisfied themselves with rental, assured that even by that step they had improved their status over their conventillo days."  
(Scobie 1974:178-179)

<sup>6</sup>For example, Walter's (1982) statistics are based on municipal and national census data using voting districts, whereas the 1980 census uses school districts.

### 3. Communications and the Development of a Cosmopolitan Identity

By the 1870s the great railway lines, mainly British-owned, had established themselves in Buenos Aires, bringing cattle and cereals for export to the port-city, as well as settlers and transitory farmhands (golondrinas, cf. chapter 2) to the Pampas. Maps showing the spread of the railway-lines typically depict a network radiating from Buenos Aires with few intersecting lines, underlining the port's primordial role in the rising export economy. But in order to cope with the enormous tasks of an export/import trading centre, Buenos Aires needed a more adequately equipped port. Till the 1880s, ships of high tonnage had to anchor in the relatively shallow waters of the River Plate and then land their goods by smaller vessels. The need for a comprehensive scheme to extend the port was clearly recognized by the local authorities. From the late 1860s onwards, several proposals for major dockworks were put forward. The one envisaged by the businessman, Eduardo Madero, finally won political support in 1882. His plans were carried out in the 1890s, giving the port of Buenos Aires its present form. The port consists of several large docks (dársenas) which run parallel to the waterfront of the River Plate from the Riachuelo estuary in the South. In 1925, an extension was completed, the puerto nuevo, which reached the Retiro Station in the North (Scobie 1974:70ff.; Bourdé 1974:46-51). In the late 19th century horse-drawn street cars were introduced, and from 1896 onwards, were gradually replaced by electric tramways. Initially, most people could not afford the high and often non-transferrable fares of competing tramway lines, so there was not so much passenger traffic. Passengers were confined, mainly to the upper middle classes who put pressure on the municipal council not to lower the fares, thereby keeping working class people and conventillo inhabitants out of the posh neighbourhoods of the barrio norte. It was only in 1908 that the tramways became more popular with the introduction a standardized fare of 10 centavos, representing only 2% of a skilled construction worker's daily earnings and 4% of a day labourer's wage (Scobie 1974:167-177, Bourdé 1977:103-107).

In 1911 construction on the first subway system in South America began. The biggest challenge to the tramways was, however, the buses colectivos. Introduced in the 1920s and 1930s, these operated on standardized fares and could even run on most of the smaller one-way traffic streets.

Construction was big business and, in 1914, over 80% of all bricklayers, foremen and carpenters were *foreigners*, the great majority of them *Italians*. Most of the property was privately owned, and the few state-initiated programmes for council-housing failed or were too few to really cope with the immense demand for cheap accommodation.

It would not have been possible for any individual city dweller to perceive the over-all growth and expansion of the city, except perhaps from an imaginary bird's eye perspective. Porteños were clearly fascinated and obsessed with the rapid expansion of the city, and a vocabulary of unquestioned *modernity* and *progress* abounds in the few documentary films made on Buenos Aires in the early 20th century, such as 'Buenos Aires' (n.d., 1920s or 1930s; AGN) and 'Correos y Telégrafos' (1930, AGN), which dwell on aerial and roof-top camera pans over Buenos Aires. In the latter film a map is shown which should demonstrate that Buenos Aires supersedes the expanse of the European capitals of Rome, Madrid and Berlin and is on a par with Paris and London. Frequently, such films of the 20s and 30s would depict impressive historical sights, like the government house (Casa Rosada), Congress, the Avenida de Mayo and the banking houses in the financial district, the 'City' of Buenos Aires. But at the same time vivid street scenes would be inserted, showing fast moving traffic, traffic jams, motor cars, tramway passengers, cyclists and the occasional fruit vendor with his horse-drawn cart.

Immigrants, commenting on their first days in Buenos Aires after arrival from Italy, often emphasized in our conversations that they were impressed by the expanse of the city, the traffic and the hustle of the city centre. For some of them (coming from rural parts of Italy), it was for the first time they had taken a tramway or underground. Yet, while the 'modern metropolis' seemed at first confusing, its systematic layout in an iron-grid pattern of rectangular streets (cuadras) offered help with orientation. It eased immigrants' experience of urban socialization and the cuadra became the shorthand for fixing one's bearings in the city. When asked about directions, the porteños usually give a junction of two cuadras to indicate the location, and streets are counted by blocks in relation to other streets. This way of orienting oneself, and thinking of the city as rectangular blocks, is very different from the process of orientation in the meandering and winding streets of Italian towns and villages, as one man's parable-like story reveals. He told me:



"I knew a blind man from my father's village who visited us very often. He was excellent in orienting himself by the cuadras and he knew every streetcorner. Once I visited our village in Italy at the same time as he did. You can't imagine what a sad picture that was. He stood, completely helpless on the piazza, embraced me in desperation and said: 'Carlo, Carlo. Help me!'. He was at the total mercy of the winding streets of his native village."

Reflecting the modernist spirit of the times, the documentary films made by the Argentine Government paid particular attention to urban centres of communication, such as the new central Post office (correo central) and the building and printing centre of the newspaper, La Prensa (which had some of the most modern equipment available at the time; cf. also Prieto 1988:40). As one film puts it:

"Today, the Argentine people can be proud to have a city which is plainly flourishing and actively *developing*: Buenos Aires is on a par with her sisters in the Americas and has the *universal* rhythm characteristic of all *modern* cities."  
(Buenos Aires, n.d. 1920s or 1930s, AGN; my italics)

Another film tells us:

"The *feverish rhythms* and *glorious destiny* [of Buenos Aires] reflect one of the most visible aspects of the powerful life of this nation. In the *development* of the peoples [of the earth], the postal and telegraph services fulfil a very important mission, and it would not be exaggerating to say that they do in fact constitute the basis of their *progress*. ... This building [the Buenos Aires General Post and Telegraph Office] is an admirable piece of *modern* construction work."  
(Correos y telégrafos, 1930, AGN; my italics)

However, even leaving aside the rare glimpses of a bird's eye view (as seen in aerial cinematography and photography), the construction work was clearly visible to most porteños at major building sites such as the port, Government buildings, subway and tramway constructions. Not only did people *see* construction work, but their *lives* were actually affected by it. Many of the immigrants did, as we have seen, work in the construction business, and it was certainly the aspiration of most immigrants to possess their own modest house or flat.

By the early 20th century, the façades and architectural appearance of Buenos Aires had undergone major changes. The patio-style low storey house of the Spanish colonial and early independence era survived in some parts of the south side, but more in the city centre and in the northern barrios, there developed first, Italian neo-renaissance style façades and then later, French fin-de-siècle and belle époque patrician houses, the so

called 'petit hotels' (Scobie 1974:113, Gutierrez 1978:2, Documentos 1988:102-103). One historian, José Luis Romero, even went so far as to speak of the 'Haussmanization'<sup>7</sup> of the 'great village' (Morse 1985:52). The upper and upper middle classes of Buenos Aires not only cultivated French tastes, but also travelled and sojourned in France. The rich Argentine who squandered his fortunes from his cattle estancias, became a familiar and stereotyped figure in Paris from the turn of the century to the 1930s (King 1986:32). And in the perception of the upper classes, of foreign travellers and the more general public, including the middle classes, Buenos Aires acquired almost mythical properties as the 'Paris of South America.' to the present day, this idealized self-identification is frequently conveyed by porteños of European descent from the middle class upwards. Labelling it as the 'Paris of South America', meant to stamp on it all at once the thriving cultural life of the cosmopolitan city. It was a time, when opera celebrities were imported as well as French fashion designers, a branch store of 'Harrods' was opened, German engineers were employed in the power stations, and Buenos Aires became for some time the major publishing centre of the Spanish-speaking world. In a more restricted sense, the upper classes behaved as if they were indeed in Paris. Like for the German and Eastern European aristocracies of the 18th century, French was often their first language and writers like Victoria Ocampo and Delfina Bunge started writing in French (Sebreli 1964:38, King 1986:32). The eclectic mix of European architectural styles, became visible, not only in the large representative public buildings of central Buenos Aires and the francophile upper-class barrio of Recoleta, but also in the yet more hybrid and syncretic residential upper middle class Zona Norte (which includes all the suburbs to the Tigre Delta). Here, the countless villas, chalets and little palaces combined influences of Italian neo-renaissance palazzos, Swiss chalets, Basque peasant houses, and English country mansion. These new manifestations of economic wealth seemed sometimes vulgar to Europeans. Some historians of Architecture have called this combination of styles the 'picturesque' style (Documentos 1988:171-174).

Buenos Aires could never become a 'planned modernist' city in the way Brazil's capital Brasília became<sup>8</sup>, but, since the 1920s, there were plans by modern avantgarde architects like Le Corbusier (1967:220, cf. also chapter 7) to change Buenos Aires. And although a grand modernist master plan for Buenos Aires was never devised in detail, let alone put

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<sup>7</sup>After the city planner of 19th century Paris, Georges Eugène Haussman.

<sup>8</sup>cf. Holston's recent anthropological study (1989:31-58).

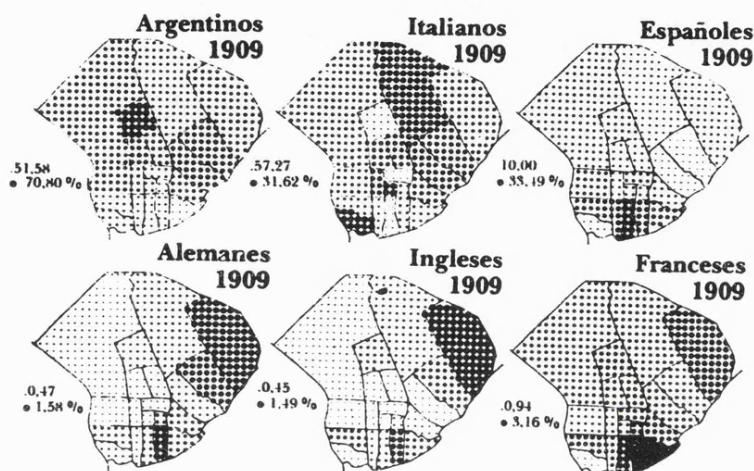
into practice, there were a few blocks of flats, hospitals and most prominently the Edificio Kavanagh at the Plaza San Martín that were built in a modernist fashion (Borghini et al. 1987).

In the middle-class suburbs to the west, and wherever building space was affordable, small and indistinguishable one-storey houses were built, often superelevated later with another storey. These were the so-called *Pompeian* houses (Bourdé 1977:92-100), named after similar constructions in ancient Pompeii. They were popular with Italian immigrants and their descendants who moved out of the centre in large numbers during this period. The particular layout of Buenos Aires' blocks (manzanas) meant that these houses had rather narrow front facing the street, but were deep, stretching out like a tunnels behind.

Building styles therefore reflected the tastes of the European immigrants. Apart from the innumerable small 'Pompeian houses,' inhabited by the working classes and middle classes, building styles were dominated by the powerful urban elite who devised the majority of public buildings and upper class residential buildings.

#### 4. Ethnic Diversity and the Melting Pot

**Map 3:**  
Distribution of nationalities in Buenos Aires C.F., 1909



(note: the 'density of dots' indicates the density of foreign residence in each neighbourhood. The numbers and percentages refer to the neighbourhoods with the highest density for any nationality; for example, in 1909, 51,580 Argentines represented 70.08% of the total population of Flores, and 57,270 Italians 31.62% of La Boca's population; from Bourd  1977:172)

By the beginning of the 20th century, Buenos Aires, now with a population of well over one million inhabitants, had become an overwhelmingly cosmopolitan city.

As many as half of its inhabitants were foreign-born and if one includes the second generation immigrants in the calculation, then probably 80% of its citizens were foreigners or of foreign descent (Baily 1980:45-46). Italians made up just less than half of the foreign population and 20% of the total population. Italian residence was spread fairly evenly over the city, averaging around 20% to 25%. In La Boca, the district with the highest percentage of Italians in 1904, 32.7% of the population was Italian which accounted for 8.7% of all Italians in Buenos Aires. But already in 1914, the great 'move out' of the centre was beginning to show in the census data. While La Boca (district 4)

still yielded the highest percentage of Italians, with 29.2% of the total population of the *barrio*, its proportion among all the Italians of Buenos Aires fell to 7.1%; third now in the ranking after the large district San Bernardo (district 15) in the west of the capital. More than 8% of all Italians now lived in this district which previously had accounted for only 2% of the Italian population. District 18, Las Heras, in the fashionable upper middle class barrio norte had also surpassed La Boca, and was now home to 7.6% percent of all Italians. And like District 15, the extensive district 1, Velez Sarsfield, which comprised new middle-class barrios like Floresta, but also the cattle market of Liniers and the huge abattoirs and meat packing and refrigeration plants (frigoríficos) of Mataderos, was beginning to surpass La Boca, having increased its share among the Italian population from 1.9% to 6.8% (Baily 1985:18). Moves from one residential area to another were influenced by a number of factors, including upward social mobility and cheaper land values. Such moves were often engineered through 'secondary chains', that is friends and relatives who had already moved. Baily, who has applied the concept of chain migration<sup>9</sup> to the Italian migration to Argentina, demonstrates how an initial move of people from Sirolo in the Marche-region of Central Italy to La Boca, was followed by a second move to the southern working-class suburb of Quilmes in Greater Buenos Aires.

To illustrate what is meant by 'primary' and 'secondary' chains I will give an example from my own field-data.

Camillo Castronuovo was born in 1917 on the island of Filicudi<sup>10</sup>. On the 19th of November 1948, "at 7 o'clock p.m.", according to his account, he arrived in Buenos Aires - because he had been 'called' by his sister-in-law, who had emigrated to Argentina in 1930. He first lived in the same locality as other immigrants from the Aeolian Islands, in La Boca, where he buys a house in 1959. In that year he was also joined by his wife and four of his children [primary chain]. The eldest daughter, Amalia emigrated with her husband to Australia in 1953. *Three* of the children living in Argentina, moved to their own houses in the southwestern suburb of Lanus [secondary chain] following their respective marriages.

From another location in Italy, Agnone in the Abruzzi, a whole network of chains was in 'operation' in the late 19th and the early 20th centuries. Local newspapers reported exactly who emigrated, and agencies, run by Agnesi in Agnone and in Buenos Aires,

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<sup>9</sup>For a definition of 'chain migration' cf. chapter 2.

<sup>10</sup>Filicudi is one of the islands of the Aeolian or Liparian Archipelago, off the Northern Sicilian coast (Province of Messina).

provided the paesani with information and sold them tickets for the ships (Baily 1982:80-82, Douglass 1984:82-121). In Buenos Aires, Agnonesi settled in clusters, living in close proximity in a few blocks near the junctions of the streets Avenida Córdoba and Montevideo, and also near Avenida Córdoba and Florida (Baily 1982:84).

Furthermore, Gandolfo (1988) has shown how members of the landed and wealthy upper class of Agnone established themselves in Buenos Aires, ran shipping and work placement agencies, and offered general help and 'protection' to the Agnonesi paesani. They were ethnic leaders, occupying top position in the local associations of the Agnonesi in Buenos Aires<sup>11</sup>. They even tried to participate in Argentine politics, but were to some extent discriminated against by the Argentine political elite<sup>12</sup>.

Research by Baily and others has shown that, in times of mass immigration, Italians settled all over Buenos Aires and did not form segregated ethnic neighbourhoods like their compatriots in the 'Little Italies' of New York (cf. Baily 1985) and Chicago. Although Italian migration to Buenos Aires resulted eventually in a fairly even distribution of all Italians through the metropolis, this was in no way a haphazard development. The moves from Italy to Buenos Aires, and later within the city, were made largely through networks of relatives, friends, and patrons from the same area of origin.

Baily, like Scobie, has also challenged the popular assumption (and the conclusions of Argentine scholars such as Romero and Germani, cf. chapter 2) that Italians, and indeed Spaniards, would intermarry, mix, and thus in a demographic sense 'assimilate' with the Argentines and immediately form a new segment of the population. As early as 1919, the eminent American scholar of Italian migration, Robert F. Foerster (who in the same year published his famous book "The Italian migration of our times"), made a contention which later Argentine research ignored (or wilfully glossed over because it did not fit the crisol de razas -argument).

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<sup>11</sup>For an analysis of contemporary ethnic leadership, see chapter 10.

<sup>12</sup>The elite's xenophobic ideology, which has been referred to in chapter 2, was perhaps one of the reasons behind their successful attempt to remove the nomination of one Agnonese candidate for the party of General Bartolomé Mitre in 1896, because he showed 'insufficient knowledge' of Spanish (Gandolfo 1988:174-175).

Foerster pointed out:

"It must, however, be added that while the unions of Spanish men and Argentine women have fluctuated little about 4.5. per cent. since 1882, Italian marriages with Argentine women have of late years been nearer 11 than 9 per cent. These figures seem to indicate *that immigrant intermarriage with old Argentine stock is, and probably has been rare.* Since Spaniards speak the same language as the old Argentines, their intermarriages would naturally be at greater rate than those of Italians and Argentines. The conclusion seems appropriate that *in Italo-Argentine marriages the bride is the native daughter of an Italian.*"

(Foerster 1919:357; my italics)

Baily's research, carried out 60 years later and based on census data, confirms relatively high rates of homogamy among Italians and suggests that such inter-marrying even occurred in the second generation as preferential marriage among descendants of Italians (Baily 1980:44-47). There has been more research since to demonstrate high rates of ethnic 'endogamy' in Buenos Aires in the times of mass immigration (cf. Freundlich de Seefeld 1986, Pagano/Oporto 1988).

Yet, I would argue that this still does not entirely contradict the idea of the formation of new identities with regard to the cultural value system (cf. also chapter 1). To infer a kind of 'cultural endogamy' from demographic endogamy, seems reasonable only if one can demonstrate that in *all* Italian couples mixed exclusively with Italians from their home region in all spheres of life, including leisure *and* work. There is some data to suggest that leisure activities, such as religious and secular feasts, were indeed often celebrated with relatives, friends and neighbours of the barrio. There was also a high formal degree of registration with the Italian associations (cf. Bourd  1977:216). It is, however, much more difficult to prove a kind of ethnic uniformity in the work place. It was there, as well as on other occasions (such as when travelling across the metropolis) that Italians inevitably came in contact with Italians from other regions, who spoke what was possible an unintelligible dialect. In such circumstances and when speaking to Argentines and other foreigners, Italians adopted Spanish (or its italianized pidgin cocoliche) as a lingua franca (cf. Halperin Donghi 1975:229). The exception to this was probably La Boca, where for some time, even foreigners adopted the Genoese dialect (xeneize) to communicate with each other.

Because the Argentine state and large and labour-intensive private companies, like the British-owned rail- and tramways did not close their institutions to foreigners, Italians could find work as clerks in Argentine ministries, as engineers and draughtsmen at the

port construction works (cf. chapters 6 and 7), and as builders of railway lines. And whether Italian immigrants were married to other Italians or not, their children went to Argentine state schools which were free and obligatory, providing school meals, and teaching in Spanish (cf. chapter 7). Furthermore, the urban institutions and facilities, the very experience of living in a metropolis - its traffic, movement, and leisure activities - surely helped to socialize people who came often from a rural background in southern Europe. They became part of a more general urban porteño culture, which coexisted well with the particularities of different ethnic origins. So, while Korn's impressionistic picture of the conventillo and other parts of Buenos Aires as the indiscriminate whirlpool of races and cultures is probably exaggerated (cf. footnote 4), one can nonetheless imagine that Italians maintained for considerable time local loyalties, expressed in the choice of marriage partners, if possible residence and even dialect maintenance. At the *same time* they became 'Argentines': that is to say they incorporated themselves actively into the Argentine institutions, as pupils, users of urban services and employees. Hence, it is my contention that, at a time when migration occurred on such a vast scale, the experience of immigration was probably perceived as a 'common' fate and destiny that would unite people rather than divide them.

## 5. From the 1930s to the Present Day

From the 1930s onwards the 'nationalization' of Buenos Aires took place. Overseas immigration on a large scale came to an end, being briefly resumed after World War II, and rural immigrants from the interior provinces<sup>13</sup> and the Province of Buenos Aires moved to the capital. The percentage of people born in the provinces and living in Buenos Aires rose from 10% in 1914, to 32% in 1947 and to almost 50% in 1960. The primary factor in the growth of Buenos Aires since the 1930s was rural-urban migration, the impact of which was far greater than the rising birth rate (Recchini de Lattes 1973:879-881).

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<sup>13</sup>The main provinces concerned were Entre Ríos, Corrientes, Santa Fe, Córdoba and Santiago del Estero (Bourdé 1977:232).



Internal migration to Greater Buenos Aires and the subsequent urban proletarianization of rural immigrants have been considered by some social scientists as the *main explanations* for the rise of Peronism. Some theorists of Argentine society, like Germani (1975:127-138), argued that rural immigrants, not only became the social base of the Peronist movement, but also contributed the main features of its style of political action. Others, for example, Murmis/Portantiero (1971:59-68), Halperin Donghi (1975), and Little (1975:163), have vehemently disputed this view and have placed the proletarianization of the rural population (though not necessarily urbanization) about half a century earlier, with the great transformations of capitalist agriculture in the Pampas (cf. chapters 2 and 3). From the 1920s, the proportion of foreigners in the Argentine population decreased steadily.

**Table 9: Percentages of Foreigners among the Total Population**

	1914	1947	1960	1970
Federal District	49.4	27.5	22.9	17.8
the eighteen districts of Greater Buenos Aires (excluding Federal District)	41.9	24.7	21.0	14.5
Argentina	30.0	15.3	13.0	9.3

(from Bourd  1977:231)

Alongside the overall declining number of foreigners there was an increasing number of non-European immigrants from neighbouring countries (cf. chapter 2). Immigrants from the provinces, and those from neighbouring Chile, Bolivia, Paraguay and Uruguay are called by porte os of European descent cabecitas negras, a derogatory term meaning literally 'little black heads'. The term cabecita negra denotes a person of darker skin and hair colour than oneself, and is used to describe people of the criollo-population of Spanish colonial, black slave and Indian descent. Generally speaking, the use of the term cabecita negra is part of the widely diffused ideology of being a white porte o of immigrant descent. Argentines who want to appear of European descent will always emphasize that Argentina has no 'race-problem' and there are no ethnic ghettos as in North America; nor is there any 'promiscuous' mixing of races of different colour, as in Brazil.

Since this ideology is generally shared by *the people of my study*, I will take the opportunity to extend this discussion. It is important to realize that whilst immigration affected the ethnic and social stratification of Buenos Aires, the *perception* of the new immigrant society has never been static, but changed over time.

One revealing and well documented example of this is the changing status of Black Africans in porteño society.

As Andrews (1980) points out in his study of the Afro-Argentine population of Buenos Aires, the 'white-washing' myth of the porteños is a recent and ideological construct of the immigrant society. In late colonial and early independent times, Buenos Aires was home to approximately 7500 to 15,000 people of African descent, that is between 20% and 30% of the city's population (Andrews 1980:66)<sup>14</sup>. These were slaves (until the abolition of the slave trade in 1813), soldiers, servants, maids, and washerwomen who lived in the port area. Some of the families became respectable to the 'white' middle and upper middle classes and there were also Afro-Argentine lawyers, businessmen and army officials. The black population lived mainly in the South of Buenos Aires, in the barrios of Montserrat, San Telmo, Barracas and La Boca. The population declined around the 1850s, owing to high infant mortality, high death rates of the male population due to their enlistment for the wars between 1810 and 1870, and due to intermarriage with whites, particularly Italians. The census of 1887 counted 8000 Afro-Argentines. In the 1970s, they were estimated at 3000 to 4000.

However, as Andrews (1980:64-112) has argued, the decline was *relative* in relation to the mass of European immigrants arriving in the 1870s, who pushed into the poor neighbourhoods of the Afro-Argentines and took over many of their trades. In the newly formed immigrant society the porteño population had a vested interest in appearing 'white', and there was just no conceptual space (except on the margins of society) for the *non-European*, that is those of Indian, black or Creole descent. It was then the combination of a 'natural' decline of the black population, their underenumeration in census statistics, deliberately racist attitudes and the increasing development of an European immigrant population in Buenos Aires, which made the black population 'disappear' in the perception of the porteño.

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<sup>14</sup>The real number was probably higher since black people were underenumerated in the censuses.

In a process by which low-class groups replaced each other and ethnic labels changed, racism persisted in porteño society vis-à-vis those perceived to be at the bottom of the social ladder. What were once the negroes and mulattoes (morenos and pardos) and poor Italian immigrants (tanos), are now the cabecitas negras. During the nineteenth century, black people and anybody who was perceived to have a dark skin (including Southern Europeans) were called trigueños ('wheat-coloured') to avoid the term negro (negro) in public. Nowadays, with few Afro-Argentines left, they have become negros<sup>15</sup> again.

The overall changes of Buenos Aires from an immigrant metropolis to the city of the present day, which will eventually house more than one third of Argentina's population can be *exemplified* with reference to the barrio of La Boca at the port. Until the 1930s and 1940s, La Boca was a predominantly working class neighbourhood of Europeans and Argentines of European descent: Italians (mainly from Liguria), Dalmatians, French, Germans and Polish and Russian Jews. It was home to numerous local ethnic associations on the basis of national, but more often regional, local and professional affiliation (sometimes combining ethnic and professional affiliation, such as the 'Italian' Voluntary Fire Brigade of La Boca Sociedad Italiana Scocorros Mutuos Bomberos Voluntarios de La Boca), carnival societies and religious brotherhoods organizing feasts of the Patron Saint. Furthermore, La Boca was known for its political activities. In a mixture of freemasonry and carnival spirit, the Libre República de la Boca was established. Like neighbouring Barracas with its large factories La Boca was also notable for the activities of anarchists, and Alfredo Palacios, the first Socialist MP, was elected from his constituency in La Boca in 1904 (Rock 1987:188).

Although real ethnic composition was more diverse, La Boca, during the times of mass immigration up until the 1940s, was perceived as *the Italian neighbourhood* of Buenos

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<sup>15</sup>According to Andrews (1980:211), negro is a derogatory and racist term which was originally used when speaking about black people in their absence. It is now used for blacks and cabecitas negras.

While Andrews is right in his observation about the derogatory meaning of morochó for dark-skinned people, he fails to portray the *ambiguity* of the term negro in the context of contemporary porteño usage. According to my observations, negro can denote a dark-skinned person, but is much more frequently used for any person with whom the speaker has a relationship of chummy familiarity, and usually means 'man', 'guy' or 'mate' (synonymous with tipo) in Buenos Aires' dialect lunfardo.

Aires. That it still carries this reputation to some degree was reflected in the fact that many people assumed that my research focused on La Boca *because* it dealt with Italians.

From the mid-19th century, immigrants from the coastal towns of Liguria had established themselves on this part of banks of the River Plate. They worked in all conceivable trades of maritime commerce, overseas shipping, and the important interfluvial trade up the Paraná and Uruguay rivers and across the River Plate estuary to Montevideo (Scarzanella 1983:26-30). Xeineize, the Genovese dialect, was widely spoken and even adopted by others for communication and for conducting business with Ligurian immigrants. However, while throughout the period of mass immigration La Boca remained the initial point of orientation for many of the newly arrived, its population started to change. I have already referred to the great move 'out' from the inner city barrios to the outer districts and suburbs of Buenos Aires. And during the period of the 'nationalization' of Buenos Aires' population, more general institutions than the particularistic associations mentioned above, gained influence. These included the soccer club Boca Juniors (founded in 1905<sup>16</sup>; soccer fans among the readers will know that this was Maradona's first club) and political parties. For some of my local informants, the great 'move out' coincided almost with the 'invasion' of immigrants from the provinces. They would seek cheap accommodation in La Boca, often in the same houses of corrugated iron, sheet-zinc, and planks painted with ship colours, which had been built by European immigrants 50 years earlier (cf. Spini/Vaggi 1988). As one Italian-born resident told me:

"La Boca is not what it was before. In the old days there weren't any Paraguayans or Uruguayans. They were all tanos (Italians): people from Genua and Piedmont. There was more family-life and more celebrations (fiestas) for Christmas, New year, Carnival and Easter. The carnival of La Boca was famous. Most of the people spoke Spanish but you could hear some Genoese dialect." (Camillo Castronuovo who came to La Boca in 1948)

"Until the outside invasion (sic!)<sup>17</sup> arrived, La Boca was a conglomerate of people who all knew each other; we knew where we came from, and where we would go to. There was no room for telling lies in a place where all were of the same foreign origin through our parents, grandparents or great grandparents.

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<sup>16</sup>Despite its English name, commentators have stressed that the club consisted largely of Italians and their descendants (García Jiménez 1976:106).

<sup>17</sup>The statement reveals the changed meaning of in- and outsiders in La Boca, or, in other words, of *earlier* immigrants (who with their descendants were then perceived as 'natives') and *later* immigrants.

Afterwards, with this artificial industrialization [i.e. Perón's industrialization programme which attracted many people to the bright lights of the city], La Boca lost its charisma as a little Italo-Argentine and Galician-Argentine [from Spanish Galicia] colony, where we all knew each other; since Perón inhabitants of other areas moved in."

(interview to Dr. Lorenzo Ferro, from Redondo 1988:282)

Argentines of European descent and immigrants from the interior lived for sometime in the same barrio but, from the 1960s and 1970s the 'de-Europeanization' starts, with provincial immigrants and their descendants and foreign immigrants, particularly Uruguayans, becoming more dominant. La Boca has always been a relatively poor working class area but, according to Census data from 1984, it is now the poorest district in the capital (Federal District) (Redondo 1988:289-290).

Yet, some of the old ethnic association and Mutual Aid Societies in La Boca, having lost their local function of providing social commensality and material help for the immigrants, have acquired *new* symbolic and practical meaning for Italians and their descendants living outside the barrio. The leader of a Ligurian association based in the centre of Buenos Aires, explained to me that after decades of decline, the old Asociación Ligure de Socorros Mutuos(\*1885), has now *increased* membership applications: this is because the association disposes traditionally of a pantheon in Buenos Aires' largest cemetery Chacarita, and while cemetery ground is extremely scarce in Buenos Aires, membership entitles a dead person to be buried for five years on such a 'Ligurian' lot. Though further research is needed on the subject, one might suggest that for a minority of members the burial on the Ligurian site has primarily symbolical meaning as a prolongation of their identification with the Italian association, while for the majority it is only practically convenient<sup>18</sup>.

Yet, it would be misleading to conclude from the above that ethnicity is 'dead' and survives only on the burial ground. The remainder of the thesis will further demonstrate how Italians and descendants of different social classes and generations define themselves in different historical periods.

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<sup>18</sup>One should perhaps add here, that again other Italians prefer their corpses to be repatriated. One surgeon at the Italian Hospital told me that he had to issue quite a few certificates for the repatriation of corpses, but I was unable to obtain exact numbers from him.

## CHAPTER 6

### The 'Other' Migration: Four Family Networks

#### 1. Introduction

This chapter is about four networks of Italian immigrant families and their descendants in contemporary Buenos Aires. Besides sharing common Italian origins, these families belong to the *upper middle* and *upper class* in Argentina<sup>1</sup>. They are elite families in the sense that they did not share the precarious material conditions and educational background of hundreds of thousands of poor, unskilled and illiterate immigrants upon arrival. On the contrary, members of these families came to Argentina mostly from upper middle or upper class backgrounds in Italy, often with a high professional qualification. Some came with capital; others with secure job prospects; and yet others with the technical know-how to set up their own companies. This is not to say that there was no risk involved in setting out for a new country, but rather that their structural position in Argentina was different from that of poor immigrants from the very start. Coming from upper middle or upper class backgrounds in Italy, these families wanted not only to reproduce their social position but also, if possible to improve it.

The examples I will discuss in this chapter are not representative in a statistical sense. Rather they are of an indicative nature in what is largely an unexplored universe of social class and ethnic groups in contemporary *porteño* society. I intend to show how people linked through kinship relate to different phases in their life histories and in Argentine and Italian national histories, and how they express individual and collective ideologies. Ideologies are not understood as coherent and monolithic belief-systems. Rather, they are seen as fragmentary and individual interpretations of larger currents of thought which are interspersed with daily discourse and which become meaningful for people contextually. The political ideologies and the representations of status, including taste, style and decorum, to which these families make reference were formed and reinterpreted in specific historic processes in Italy and Argentina.

Migration involves dislocations in the life-experiences of the individual, yet fragments

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<sup>1</sup>on class cf. chapter 1.

from earlier experiences are carried over to the new place. It is in this process of interrupted constitutions of meaning, that boundary demarcating concepts of 'imagined communities' (Anderson 1983:15) like 'Italy', 'Argentina', 'Genoa' or 'Buenos Aires' change their connotations over time while retaining their formal labelling. In this chapter, I intend to demonstrate how traditions and ideologies are acquired, negotiated and reinterpreted by individuals during the migratory process.

One particular form of the transmission and transformation of 'tradition' takes place via marriage. Each of the four family networks employed different strategies in this respect. In the case of the Pardi-network a tradition of being *landholders* was shaped through the combined processes of social mobility, marriage and inheritance.

The Ambrosetti/Nelli-network, who in Italy had been landholders and politicians, developed a new tradition as *industrialists* in Argentina.

The Devoto/Zanone-network placed a particular emphasis on women as actual leaders of a family enterprise.

And finally, the three nuclear families, Silvani, Dellepiane and LaTorre, had no prior migration experience. The men were contracted from Italy as highly qualified engineers after World War II. The children of these immigrants, now in their 40s and with their biographies encapsulated in the recent political history of Argentina, felt estranged from any particular national identity.

## 2. From Wholesalers to Landowners: the Pardi

I met Gianni Pardi for the first time in his office in the business district of Buenos Aires. Pardi, then in his late 70s, is a public accountant (contador público) and runs in association with his son, Marco Pardi, one of the largest accountancy firms in Buenos Aires' downtown financial district. Their large office flat is situated on the first floor of a modern building. The receptionist directed me to the end of the corridor, where Gianni Pardi's personal secretary received me. While waiting I leafed through a book on coffee growing in Colombia, which had a personal dedication to Pardi by the president of the association for Colombian coffee growers<sup>2</sup>. When Pardi was coming out of his office, I got up, we greeted each other, and he offered me a seat in front of his desk. The office was of medium size, and there were some bookshelves with old engravings of Rome and Florence on the walls.

Born in 1910 in Alessandria (Piedmont), Gianni Pardi took a degree in accountancy at Turin university. In the 1930s he met his wife to be who was staying temporarily in Italy. She was the daughter of an Italo-Argentine import/export-wholesaler<sup>3</sup> and landowner, who in 1888 had come to Argentina from Padua (Region of Veneto) at the age of eleven. Gianni Pardi recalled:

"I first came to Argentina in 1938 to see the country of my wife. During this journey I literally fell in love with Argentina. It was still a virgin and rich country. I liked it in comparison to Italy which was struck by poverty and fascism<sup>4</sup>. I will tell you an anecdote. I had been invited to Mendoza, the capital of the wine-growing province. The president of the wine-growing company said to me: 'Your country, Italy, passed from agriculture to industry. This will happen also in Argentina. You have to help us in this direction. We need professional and qualified men like you.' So I became the auditor of the company."

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<sup>2</sup>This is an indication of Pardi's wide ranging contacts with an international and upper class business clientele. The FEDCAFE is among the most powerful organizations of Colombia.

<sup>3</sup> Pardi's WF started his business career with a general store (almacén de ramos generales).

<sup>4</sup> Gianni Pardi was not an antifascist, but he was hinting at the eve of the Second World War and the dawning destruction of a social order; a recurrent theme in the accounts of other informants.



Pardi's view of Argentina as a 'rich and virgin' country where one's future could be invested, was common among informants talking about the period from 1930s to the early 1950s<sup>5</sup> (cf. chapters 7 and 8). However, Gianni Pardi qualified his statement and added that even at the time when he thought Argentina was rich compared to Italy, he could already observe bad administration, mismanagement and poverty. By contrast, he found a diligent work ethic among European immigrants: North Italians, Piedmontese like himself, who worked as wine-growers in Mendoza, and farmers and entrepreneurs in Santa Fe. He encouraged me to read a travel account of the Italian journalist Bevione<sup>6</sup> with whose findings he very much agreed.

Commenting on Italian migration to Argentina, Pardi employed a *three-generational* model: the first generation were the arriving Italian immigrants, their children formed the second generation who repudiated their origins and Italian culture. The third generation, he emphasized, consisted of the "sons of the sons" (*figli dei figli*), some of whom re-developed an interest in Italy, others of whom lost interest completely. Pardi's statement about ethnic identity is similar to three-generational models often employed by members of family firms in complex societies to explain the 'rise and fall' of family businesses. Such models include the founding grandfathers, the sons who consolidate the firm, and the eventual dispersion and decline of family fortunes among the grandsons<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup>when Argentina entered a phase of economic stagnation and decline which has characterized its economy to the present (cf. chapters 3 and 4).

<sup>6</sup>The following quotation is an example of Bevione's eulogy on the immigrants from Northern Italy who became peasant farmers in Argentina:

"The North Italian [immigrant] goes to the interior [of Argentina]. He is not afraid of the desert and not discouraged by adversities. He works from sunrise to sunset, eating and drinking well; calm and invincible, - as long as he remains convinced by the only dream he is fighting for: the purchase of the land [he is] cultivating."

(Bevione 1911:129)

I have explained in chapter 2 the difficulties faced by immigrants who wanted to become landowners.

<sup>7</sup>For an example of this, see McDonogh on the 'law of three generations' among elite families of Barcelona: "This historical paradigm traces a family from a founding grandfather, through the sons who expand the business, to the grandsons who ruin or abandon it." (McDonogh 1986:60); similarly the silk industrialists of Como in Italy say: "*Il nonno fondò, i figli sviluppano, i nipoti distruggono*" (the grandfather founded [the firm], the sons develop it, and the grandsons destroy it)." (Yanagisako 1991:321).

After our conversation we met Pardi's son, Marco Pardi. He was born in 1940, graduated in accountancy from Buenos Aires university, and works in his father's accountancy firm. He speaks fluent Italian, which he learnt at home as a child, although with some hispanicisms. Marco Pardi owns a farm, an estancia (cf. below), colloquially called campo, where he raises cattle and grows maize, wheat, alfalfa and barley.

I asked both men about the importance of the traditional Creole landowning families (familias tradicionales)<sup>8</sup>. Marco Pardi replied that such families had lost influence due to the inheritance system which meant that equal shares were given to all heirs, and thus a kind of 'landreform' occurred without intervention from the state. He emphasized that although the Pardi's were not part of the old oligarchy, they and other upper class Italians were now very respected by the familias tradicionales<sup>9</sup>.

Marco Pardi wanted to invite me to his campo. However, *several months* passed by before I had the chance to see Marco Pardi again<sup>10</sup> and fix an appointment.

In 1988/89, Marco Pardi had two sources of income (at least to my knowledge). Firstly, he worked as a public accountant in his father's office. The degree of his participation was unclear, whether he acted as a simple associate, partner, or in some other capacity. Secondly, he owned a farm (estancia) in the Province of Buenos Aires, 250kms westwards of the capital, where he raised cattle, bred bulls, and grew maize, soya, wheat, alfalfa and barley. He sold the agricultural products in his import/export agricultural company, situated just opposite the accountancy studio in Buenos Aires. The estancia covered an area of 1446ha<sup>11</sup>, divided into plots of 20 to 120ha. In 1960 Marco

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<sup>8</sup>See chapter 2 on the historical relationship between the familias tradicionales and the rising immigrant bourgeoisie.

<sup>9</sup>Marco Pardi stressed that this was not always the case. In the 1960s, when he started courting his later wife, Isabel Bodas (of the familias tradicionales), Isabel's mother once remarked to her daughter: "Well, if that Italian is enough for you, you can go on seeing him".

<sup>10</sup>in the Circolo Italiano, the upper class Italian club of Buenos Aires.

<sup>11</sup>According to Llovet (1988:276), the estancia of the Pardi's can be classified as a medium-large size enterprise (empresa mediana-grande). Llovet demonstrates, that while the number of very large landholdings (over 5000ha) has declined after World War II, the medium-large size rural estates (400ha-5000ha) increased their share.

Strickon's (1962) classification, which succinctly summarizes the main features of estancia landownership in relation to the Argentine class structure, allows us also to rank Pardi among the "lower upper class":

"The estancias are generally absentee-owned and professionally managed. ... a basic division within the large landowner group can be discerned. Roughly speaking, those whose ranches fall below 5,000 acres [1ha equals 2,47 acres, A.S.] in size derive their money in this or preceding generations from commerce, industry or the professions. They are the children and grandchildren of Italian, Basque, recent Spanish, German, English,

inherited 951ha, and his brother 1040ha from their maternal grandfather who bought the original 1991ha in 1942. In 1982 Marco bought another 495ha and in 1988 his brother sold his 1040ha outside the family.

Though in Buenos Aires Marco would probably be recognized primarily as an accountant, he identified strongly with role of a landowner who had inherited his property through the family. He would have liked to purchase the land from his brother who did not consult him when he sold it. "I like the land, and in any case inherited land should not be sold", he once remarked. On the land register map he demonstrated how the property of his own family and that of other families had been divided, thus giving weight to his earlier point made in the accountancy firm, that the "land reform occurs by itself"<sup>12</sup>. He contrasted the division of property with the example of a family which has maintained and enlarged its property over several generations, and whose 16 adult members met regularly in a 'family council'<sup>13</sup>

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and Irish immigrants. In terms of the national status hierarchy they can be called a 'lower-upper' class.

Those individuals and families who are associated with *estancias* of more than 5,000 acres represent Argentina's 'upper-upper' class, the national elite."  
(Strickon 1962:503)

<sup>12</sup>This does not actually accord with the facts. Rather than the break up of individual, family-bound properties, there is a trend towards the concentration of property in large consortia. These consortia appear anonymous through their names but in fact belong to individuals.

Other strategies to counter the effects of divisible inheritance have been the relinquishment of all but one of the heirs to their rights (usually against a compensation in money or other property), and the incorporation of new property into a family by marriage.

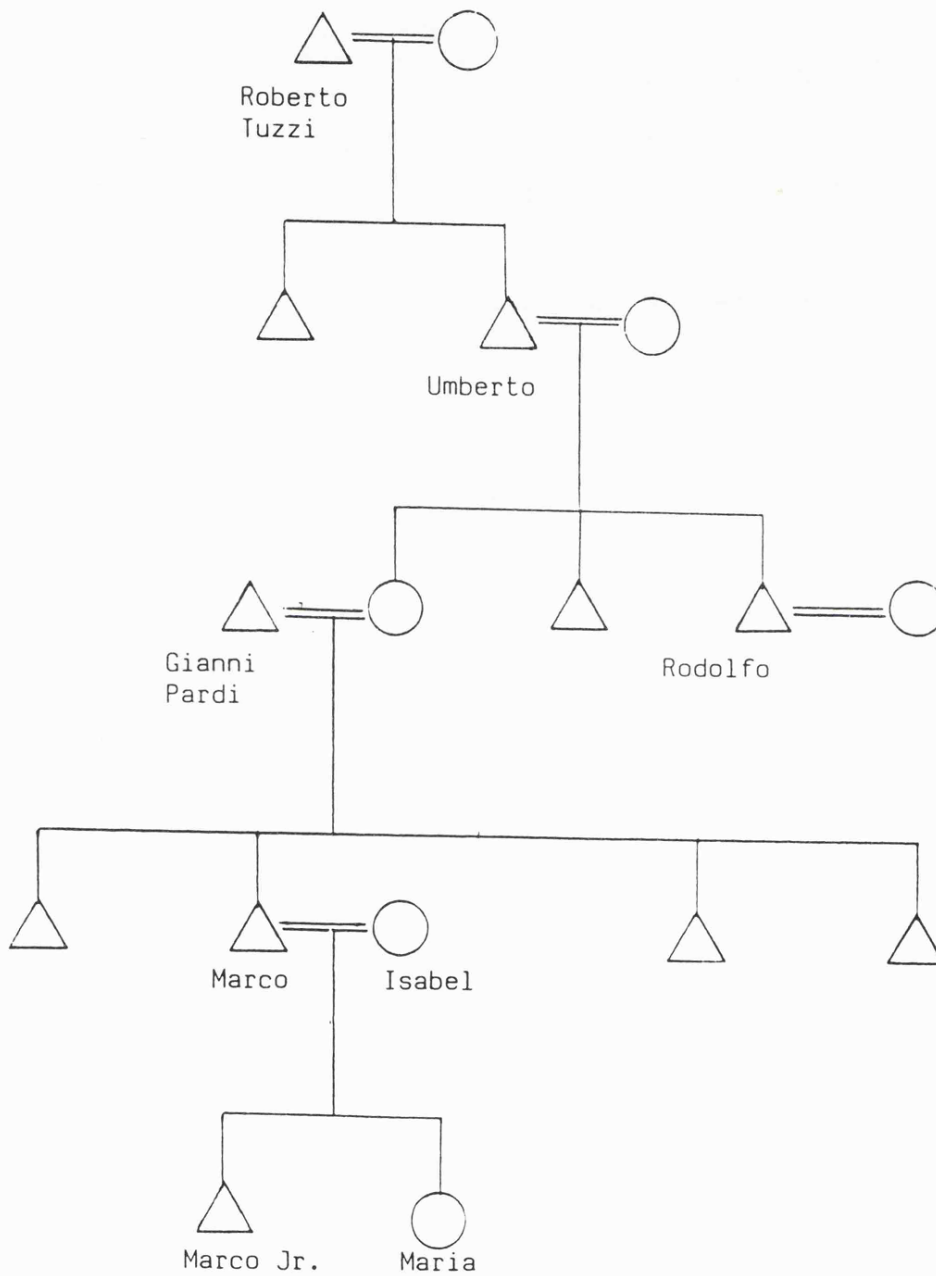
Similarly, Strickon (1962:511) has written on inheritance in the Pampas:

"In order to prevent the ultimate fragmentation of the land into economically and socially insignificant units, two methods have been adopted. The first is to defer probate of the parents' will, so that the ranch or ranches may continue to operate as a unit from which the potential heirs draw an income.

"The other alternative is legally to incorporate the *estancias* and other properties. Under either arrangement a senior member of the family (usually but not necessarily a male) sits as chairman of the board, while other members sit on the board or are, at least, stockholders. In effect, the incorporation of the family's properties provides the family with a legal, corporate identity."

<sup>13</sup>He did not give further details of this family.

Diagram 1: Tuzzi/Pardi Families



As the above kinship diagram demonstrates, there is no automatic succession of property in the male line. The rural estate, acquired by Marco's maternal grandfather towards the end of his life, is divided between his two sons and one daughter, and subsequently between his four grandchildren. In Marco's nuclear family, it was his daughter, Maria, aged 22, who was most interested in the farm activities. The son, Marco jr., aged 24,

studied accountancy, following his father and paternal grandfather. Maria was already involved in quite a few rural activities, for example, competitions on the identification and judging of animal stock in the Sociedad Rural Argentina<sup>14</sup> and the Aberdeen Angus breeders organization. Although eventually the actual Pardi-estate will pass to both children, one may speculate as to whether Marco jr. will relinquish his property rights in favour of his sister. This would actually prevent the rural estate from being split up further.

To summarize, *three* main strategies have been employed by the Pardi kinship network with regard to landed property. Firstly, male immigrants with capital but initially no land (in our case: Gianni Pardi) married into families who had immigrated earlier, and had already bought land (Umberto Tuzzi's family), and later went on to add to this land. Secondly, landed property, while remaining within the family, has been divided among various members of the family (for example, Marco Pardi and Marco's brother). And thirdly, it is in the interest of Marco's nuclear family to prevent further division of the property by eventually passing it on to Maria. The latter practice in particular, contradicts Marco's ideological statement that land reform would occur by itself through the division of property which results from inheritance.

### 3. The Representation of Social mobility in the Grandfather's Memoirs

Perceptions of the acquisition of wealth and status in the 'new society' change according to generation, location in the migratory process of the family, position in life-cycle and the broader historical context.

I will support this assertion with data from the Pardi family which spans five generations; three generations of living informants and the written memoirs of Umberto Tuzzi (Marco Pardi's maternal grandfather [MF]). These memoirs were published in 1945 in a private edition of eight copies. They are entitled Charlas con mis nietos (Chats with my grandchildren), and something must be said about their status. Addressed to the grandchildren, they are a deliberate attempt to establish a familial tradition and to inscribe it in the memory of generations to come.

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<sup>14</sup>the traditional association of Argentine landowners, cf. de Palomino (1988).

In Charlas con mis nietos Umberto Tuzzi gives an unsystematic and episodic account of his life in Argentina (1889 - 1923 and 1938 to 1946) and in Italy (1878 to 1889 and 1923 to 1938).

*Two contrasting principles* guide his narrative, but they are not coherently employed. Firstly, he emphasizes throughout the memoirs that unpredictable events in his working life, such as frequent job-changing, cheating by his business partners, and company bankruptcies, made him unscrupulous in pursuit of his economic interests. On the other hand, he cites examples of his own sense of *social justice*<sup>15</sup>. Before departure from Genoa in 1889, he had read Emile Zola's "Germinal". Later in Buenos Aires, he gave up one job where *he* cheated clients because, I quote, "it did not accord with my principles". As a successful wholesaler he sold the shares of his company to his employees. He also became a member of the Socialist Party.

Similar to his father, who was a horse trader and hotelier in the Veneto region and later a trader of imported goods in Buenos Aires (1888 to 1914), Umberto experienced great spatial and professional mobility. He began as an apprentice in the office of a civil engineer who was planning the new port of Buenos Aires. After a few months, his parents removed him from this position, realizing that he could probably make a rewarding career in engineering after a period of arduous study. He then worked as a coffee roaster and delivery boy in his father's small coffee factory. After the "revolution" and financial crisis of 1890<sup>16</sup>, his father had to change business, and Umberto collected money from clients for a private Gas company, where he earned like a "good worker". At the age of thirteen, he was yet again removed by his parents, because the job did not provide him with a formal education. He therefore became an apprentice in a large chemist store where he worked with enthusiasm and earned 60 Pesos a month, at a time when long term staff received 100 Pesos<sup>17</sup>. Yet he suffered a set-back because a

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<sup>15</sup>Umberto Tuzzi sympathized with Fascism during his stay in Italy. And though his idea of 'social justice' alludes to the Peronist doctrine of the same name (i.e. Justicia Social, cf. chapter 3), there is no direct mention of it in the memoirs. I do not know the political affiliation of the Tuzzis in 1945. Umberto's son, Rodolfo, who is not a supporter of contemporary Peronism, valued *positively* the anticommunism of the first Peronist governments (1945-1955).

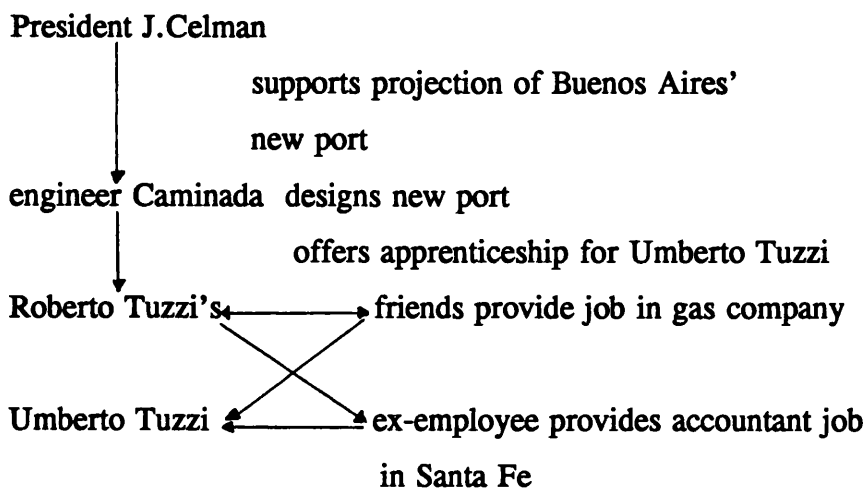
<sup>16</sup>The Revolución del Noventa, which after rebellions by opposition groups brought about the resignation of President Juárez Celman. The economic depression of 1890/91 (the so-called *Baring Crisis*) started when the Baring Brothers of London failed to attract subscribers for a loan to Argentina. The economic crisis was reflected by a downturn in immigration: in 1889 Argentina had a net immigration of 220 000 people, which went down to 30 000 in 1890; and in 1891, 30 000 people *emigrated from Argentina* (Díaz Alejandro 1970:9,22; Rock 1987:158-159).

<sup>17</sup>In the 1890s the average salary of unskilled workers was 47.50 Pesos per month (Cortes Conde 1979:226).

'foreign'<sup>18</sup> chemist was employed who considered a boy of his age inappropriate for such a responsible position which involved the packing and selling of drugs. The chemist wanted him to cut soap in the laboratory instead. However, Umberto insisted on his job and remained in the position. He then started night classes in accountancy and worked in several chemist shops as an accountant.

Parental pressure, coupled with the insistence on formal education and professional training, suggest that these were regarded as necessary for upward mobility by immigrant families. Umberto's father's personal relations and 'connections' with persons of influence and high social standing also played an important role. Umberto's apprenticeships and employment were both gained through the mediation of his father. For example, his father "accepted an offer by engineer Pietro Caminada, who planned the new port of Buenos Aires, supported by the government of Juárez Celman [1886 to 1890]". Here, social verticality is perceived as patronage from the top: the President gave work to the engineer, who knew Umberto's father and offered him the apprenticeship. The job of collecting money for a gas company was obtained "through some friends of my father", an expression which designates a horizontal social relationship. Umberto Tuzzi decided that Argentina's future lay with its agriculture, and someone who was formerly dependent on his father, an ex-employee from Milan who had moved to in Argentina, got him a job in a general store<sup>19</sup> in the Italian colonies of the Province of Santa Fe.

**Diagram 2: Vertical Social Relationships in Tuzzi's Memoirs**



<sup>18</sup>He does not specify the nationality.

<sup>19</sup>usually almacén de ramos generales, here gran casa de comercio.

It is particularly revealing of the different quality of social relationships that Italian immigrants had in the Argentine host society, that claims on reciprocity and obligations could be made not only on *present* but also on *past* and *geographically distant* relationships (as in the case of the ex-employee from Milan). Buenos Aires' complex and rapidly changing urban society was temporarily disturbed by economic and political crisis at the beginning of the 1890s (the Revolución del Noventa and the Baring Crisis, cf. footnote 16), but then continued to show the signs of a burgeoning economy<sup>20</sup>. While there are no other records at hand than the memoirs of Umberto Tuzzi, it can be suggested that his father belonged to an extremely mobile immigrant middle strata of traders, salesman and entrepreneurs in the expanding metropolis (cf. chapter 5). By the late 19th century the industries of Buenos Aires were largely run by foreigners, many of them Italians, who in 1906 constituted the majority of owners in mechanical (56,6%), food processing (57%) and construction industries (78,6%) (Scarzanella 1981:375). Between the arrival in Argentina and the foundation of the first company after a period of 'primitive accumulation' a medium period of 8 years elapsed (ibid.).

Soon Umberto Tuzzi found himself in a position where *he* had others working for him. Coming back from Santa Fe where he had been disillusioned about the immediate prospects of his career in agriculture "sitting behind a writing desk", he found the chemist store bankrupt and got his first big chance as an accountant carrying out the liquidation. He then worked in another wholesale firm, importing goods from Italy, especially olive oil. His task as an accountant included writing in Italian to his Italian trade partners. He later became a partner of the wholesale company, Bernasconi Cia.<sup>21</sup> He increased the volume of his business just before World War I, when eventually he had to substitute Argentine products for imported ones. Imported products were no longer available and he labelled them as Argentine, unlike his competitors who labelled them as imported. This was another demonstration of 'social justice', which payed off at the end of the war when he came back to his customers with imported Italian goods. His business increased again, and so did his workload. The result was a nervous breakdown with the doctors recommending him "to change his lifestyle". In 1923 he decided to leave the company and to go to Italy, taking with him his whole family.

It is noteworthy that Umberto Tuzzi uses expressions of physical condition and illness in order to justify his departure to Italy, just as he emphasizes his robustness (robustez física) in the early errand jobs. Progress and success in his life are portrayed in very

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<sup>20</sup> While the 1890s showed still signs of uncertainty, possibilities for economic stability and growth were further enhanced in 1899 by the introduction of convertibility of the Argentine peso into gold (cf. Ortiz 1955:300-306, Ferns 1973:73-115).

<sup>21</sup>Name of company not given in the text but in interview with his son.



general terms such as "increase of business", or "extraordinary results". These are *contrasted* to the failures of others, for example, the dishonesty of partners, the bankruptcy of other companies, and the financial and political crisis of Argentina in 1890. He was able to exploit such occasions effectively by being clever and shrewd, and even cheating clients.

The 'real' volume of his economic operations is not mentioned. Only once he states that in the early days he earned 60 pesos. Neither does he make reference to the acquisition of shares in 1928, as mentioned by his son, or the land acquired in 1942, mentioned by his grandson. His son maintained that his father lost shares in the Wall Street Crash in 1929 and that he bought 3600ha land afterwards. However, that does not correspond with the grandson's statement concerning the acquisition of 1991ha in 1942. One explanation might be that we are dealing with two different acquisitions, and that the 1991ha inherited by two grandsons in 1960 at the death of Umberto Tuzzi's wife, Marta, never formed part of the original 3600ha.

It is interesting to note that Tuzzi's later social mobility from wholesaler to landowner somehow parallels the rise of the familias tradicionales in the 18th and 19th century, where capital accumulated outside agriculture was reinvested in landed property (cf. chapter 2, and Balmori/Oppenheimer 1979, Balmori et. al. 1984:129-184).

#### 4. Representations of Status:

##### Style, Authority and Political Ideologies

Marco Pardi's nuclear family, consisting of his wife, daughter and son, formerly lived in a house in Martínez, an upper middle class suburb of Buenos Aires. In 1988/89 they occupied a two-level flat in the central Buenos Aires upper class district of Recoleta. They were very conscious about the class status of the neighbourhood. When I once doubted whether their home really belonged to the Recoleta district, Maria emphasized: "Of course it does belong to Recoleta. It is Recoleta, at the border of Once<sup>22</sup>." In terms

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<sup>22</sup>'Once' is the popular denomination for a middle class area around the station of 11 de setiembre (spelled 'once de setiembre') in the municipal district of Balvanera, originally populated by Jewish immigrants. However, while Maria belonged to a very Catholic family, one should not read into her statement some underlying antisemitism. She perceived the boundaries between Recoleta and Once in terms of social class, not

of municipal boundaries, she was right to distinguish between her flat in the Recoleta district and the area of Once in the Balvanera district. Yet, not everybody in Buenos Aires would perceive her residence as being part of Recoleta, but rather more generally belonging to the Barrio Norte<sup>23</sup>. The flat (of which I saw the living room, dining room and bathroom<sup>24</sup>) was split in two levels connected by a staircase which leads to the upper rooms, including the children's rooms. The interior decoration consisted of modern, matt white painted furniture. There were some 'modern', inconspicuous paintings on the wall. On the glass table in the sitting room lay some books on French castles and Persian art. One wall of the dining room was covered with a huge Flemish style tapestry. A visit to the Pardis at home on formal arrangement always proceeded in the same manner. First, the guest would be received in the sitting room, offered a drink and then, after a while, the mucama (maid) would appear to announce that tea or dinner was ready. We would then proceed to the dining room<sup>25</sup>. Most of the upper middle and upper class families of Buenos Aires employ one or more maids and this practice is a clear indicator of class status. The middle and working class cannot afford to employ house servants. Some servants 'live in', whilst others come just for the day or for certain hours of the day. Salaries in 1988/89 were equivalent to approximately US\$ 100 per month and agencies specialized in placing maids. Orders given to the maid waiting at table were expressed in a formal, rather abrupt, but not unfriendly way without saying

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ethnic group.

<sup>23</sup>For socially perceived boundaries and 'objective' municipal boundaries, see chapter 5.

<sup>24</sup>This is of course the area designated to guests and, as with several other encounters with upper class families in Buenos Aires, no attempt was made to 'show me the house'. The division of flats or houses into 'public' and 'private' space is probably a more general feature of urban elites. Sjögren-De Beauchaine (1988:105-141), for example, has emphasized the changing importance of the 'dining room' as opposed to the 'kitchen' as the appropriate place to have one's meals, for the Parisian upper middle classes (*bourgeoisie*).

<sup>25</sup>Sjögren-De Beauchaine (1988:168f.; cf. also LeWita 1988:84-89) describes an almost identical pattern of ritualized formality when families of the Parisian 'bourgeoisie' receive their guests. However, Sjögren-De Beauchaine (*ibid.*:10) also contends that, "The Meal is not only a ritual. Part of the communication generated around the table and through the food is spontaneous and informal". At the same time Sjögren-De Beauchaine admits that more formalized behaviour (or less relaxed) was to some extent due to *her* presence: "However warm and relaxed the atmosphere, I remain a stranger and the ritual of the meal bears the mark of my admission to it". (*ibid.*:132)

"please" or "thank you". The Pardi's maid was addressed by her first name and addressed Marco and his wife Isabel with "Señor" (Mister) and "Señora" (Mrs). Their son and daughter were addressed either as "Señor" and "Señorita" (Miss) or by their first names. Mrs.Pardi pointed out that one of the differences she perceived between women of the Argentine upper class and European women, was that in Argentina a woman had more freedom and a more enjoyable life than in Europe where she could not afford house servants.

Parental authority over the children was also strongly emphasized in the Pardi family. It would be unthinkable for the children to leave home until they were married. A steady boy or girlfriend was expected to be presented to the parents.

*Paternal* authority in particular, is expressed in present social relations and evoked from the past at all generational levels. In his memoirs, Umberto Tuzzi dedicated a chapter to his father. His son, Rodolfo Tuzzi, speaks of the merits of his father, as does his grandson, Marco Pardi, who also would sometimes cite his father. Marco Pardi's son, named Marco junior after his father, is no exception to this. The emphasis on paternal authority hints to the establishment of a line of paternal tradition which is observable in principle among the Pardis. However, this kind of recognition of paternal and patriarchal authority is based on a bilateral, not a patrilineal principle. It can take males of the paternal and maternal line into account, like, for example, Marco Pardi's maternal grandfather.

The role that *women* have in the 'transaction' of traditions in the Pardi family is interesting to note. Already, in charlas con mis nietos Umberto Tuzzi dedicates a chapter to his wife entitled Vuestra Abuela (your grandmother). She is described as a delicate and sensitive person, and Umberto apologizes for not having dedicated more time to her during his lifetime. With regard to their religious practices the pattern reported for his father and mother is almost repeated: Umberto Tuzzi takes an anticlerical attitude and does not believe in the church as an institution, and nor does his wife. They marry in a civil ceremony and their children are not baptized. But on the sudden death of their son, Franco, Umberto's wife regrets this and Umberto agrees to have the other children baptized, but is not asked to participate in the ceremony. However, the anticlerical tradition was not carried on by Marco Pardi and his wife. Not only had they had both of their children baptized and went to mess regularly, but they also were strong believers

in the Catholic Church as an institution<sup>26</sup>. Maria Pardi was a member of an upper class Catholic youth association which organized social gatherings and travels, and one of her paternal uncles (FB) was said to be a member of *Opus Dei*<sup>27</sup>, but I could not confirm this or interview him.

On two important occasions, which were the marriage of Gianni Pardi to Clara Tuzzi and the marriage of Marco Pardi to Isabel Bodas, particular *traditions* and *social status* were 'acquired' by the men from the women. When, in 1938, Gianni Pardi married a woman from a well established family of the Italo-Argentine industrial and mercantile bourgeoisie, this actually persuaded him move to Argentina and he soon established himself as an accountant. On the other hand, Marco Pardi's upward mobility went even further than that of his father, when he married Isabel Bodas from one of the familias tradicionales of Buenos Aires.

In the Pardi nuclear family economic success is attributed to F and FF, but the standards of style, decorum and social conduct are set by Isabel Pardi (née Bodas) for her daughter. This surfaced in discussions on the way formal balls and parties were organized by the familias tradicionales. When Isabel Pardi was a girl in the 1950s, balls were organized in private homes, where other young people of social standing, preferably of the familias tradicionales, were formally invited. Dress was formal. Young men had to wear suits and ties, and the girls long ball dresses. Young women started to frequent the balls at about the age of 17<sup>28</sup>. It was a 'small group'. Everyone used to know each other. Times have

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<sup>26</sup>More research is needed, but the anticlerical allegiances of socialist and fascist colourings of the immigrant generation changing in favour of catholic allegiances in the generation of the 'grandchildren', could be yet another indicator of a new ideology of landholders who married into the familias tradicionales.

<sup>27</sup>*Opus Dei* is an elitist catholic organization founded in Spain in 1928, consisting mainly of lay members in 80 countries. *Opus Dei* became politically influential from 1956 onwards when its members assisted Franco to implement a programme of economic development.

<sup>28</sup>Sjögren-De Beauchaine writes of a similar institution among the Parisian 'bourgeoisie':

"There is a dangerous passage. It is late adolescence when values and attitudes still fluctuate. Modern life confronts the young with many streams of ideas, peoples and opportunities. A system of regular dancing parties, called *rallies* can be the answer to this threat. During a few years, usually between the age of 14-15 until 18-19, groups of young people meet regularly to dance and amuse themselves. The initiative to form such a group is taken by a few mothers of 14 year old girls, well connected with each other."

changed with Maria's generation: the most important occasion of the young elite women is now the fiesta de los 15 años, which marks the passage from a girl to a young woman at the age of fifteen. But Maria mourned for the old times and the disappearance of 'proper' behaviour:

"I organized a ball when I was 15 and wanted all the men to come dressed in suit and tie. But instead they wanted to come in jeans. Why then, should I organize a ball? If they do not want a formal thing, there is no reason to organize a ball."

She perceived organized social events among the young as becoming less formal. The very event of a ball was being put into question by vandalizing youth of upper class background, who would appear at events, get drunk, and cause damage. They did this in a rather 'carnival-like' way of pouring Coca Cola into the swimming pool, mixing soft drinks with alcohol (which was forbidden) and tying up all the cloth they could find in the drawers. Maria continued:

"One group is called 'Mickey Mouse', and everybody knows who they are but they are not denounced because people fear that they will destroy everything. They always get the message that there is a party. I stopped organizing parties."

As the imposition and recognition of parental authority has changed over time, so, too, acceptance of political ideologies varies among the Pardis and other elite families. Political ideologies are not understood by them as coherent, monolithic belief-systems. Rather, they are more general sets of ideas which people interpret in fragmentary and arbitrary ways. The choices they make reflect their changing interests, class position and generation. Ideologies which change their 'content' over time are made explicit in situations of conflict and crisis, when they are challenged. Most confusing to the European observer is the fact that in Argentina, political ideologies of European origin, like Socialism and Fascism, change their meaning and enter unprecedented combinations while retaining some of their formal labelling.

The fluidity of ideological affiliations comes out in charlas con mis nietos where Umberto Tuzzi explicitly dedicates two chapters (Algo de política and Las dos guerras - B.Mussolini) to his early political activity with Juan B. Justo, the founder of the Argentine

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(Sjögren-De Beauchaine 1988:42; cf. also LeWita 1988:90-92)

Socialist Party, and his later admiration for Benito Mussolini's fascism while he was in Italy (1923-1938/39). Political ideologies and discourse are not displayed coherently by Umberto Tuzzi, but are linked and mediated through his economic interests, activities in ethnic institutions and shifting national identity, as the following examples reveal. On one occasion, his business partners viewed with disapproval his activities in the Socialist party and feared he might become a 'revolutionary'. Many years later, as a councillor of the Italian Chamber of Commerce, Tuzzi helped his staunchest critic from the early days, who had contravened the 'black list' of Italian and German companies, set up by the Allies during World War II. Umberto Tuzzi also mentions that his decision to take on Argentine citizenship was directly influenced by the teachings of Juan B. Justo who had urged that all foreigners should take advantage of the generous Argentine legislation (which exempts naturalized foreigners from military service):

"Given my state of mind, my affection for this country (*tierra*) and the always brotherly relations between Argentina and Italy, the indications of the 'Maestro' (that is Juan B. Justo) proved decisive for me: I applied for and obtained Argentine citizenship." (Tuzzi 1945:75).

Finally, during his stay in Italy, Umberto Tuzzi was warned that his criticism of the persecution of political opponents by the fascists had provoked the curiosity of the Fascist Party. Yet, he was assured at the same time that his Argentine citizenship would help him to evade any difficulties like, for example, detainment.

Just as in the account of his commercial life, where he contrasts his 'moral principles' with the cruel and chaotic economical reality which forced him to compromise and become unscrupulous, so in the political sphere, he holds the highest admiration for *hombres puros* (literally 'pure men', men of integrity) like Juan B. Justo. Umberto Tuzzi later justifies fascist rule in Italy on the grounds that it would "*purify* Italian politics" [my italics]. It is no coincidence that this quest for order and purity appears during a life where he perceives the social order as being continually threatened. Referring to his early days as a socialist, he gives vivid descriptions of the 1st of May demonstrations and political assemblies where anarchists tried "to disrupt the solidarity of the workers". Later in his memoirs, he regrets that Mussolini could not carry out fully his initially well planned project of Fascism.

Political positions *appear* to be more consolidated in the generation of Umberto Tuzzi's grandchildren. Marco Pardi and his wife were firm supporters of the military dictatorship, "*el proceso*" (1976-1983, cf. chapter 3) and in democratic Argentina of

1988/89, they supported the centre-right party, UCeDe (Unión Centro Democrática), of the former economy minister and ambassador to the United States, Álvaro Alsogaray, who advocated free market liberal politics and privatization of state industries. Like the majority of upper class families, Marco and his wife saw the first two governments of Perón(1943-1955) as *the* turning point in contemporary Argentine history. Isabel Pardi argued:

"My family was strongly anti-Peronist. I can still remember when Perón said: 'For one of us [Peronists] five will die of them [anti-Peronists].' It was Perón who sowed hatred and envy against the upper classes."

In our conversations, Marco Pardi portrayed the last military dictatorship as the inevitable last consequence, arising from the inability of the democratic state to deal with guerrillas in the early 1970s (cf. chapter 3), when the country was "almost at civil war and the army had to fight a proper war against the guerrillas in the Province of Tucumán."

Within the grandchildren's generation, that is to say Marco Pardi and his wife, political ideologies have become more pronounced. This is probably a defensive attitude to perceived threats to their already established upper class position. They have not experienced the kind of social mobility Umberto Tuzzi reports in his memoirs. Marco jr. and Maria in particular, have not yet formed such a consolidated view of politics. Although Maria repeated her parents' views in many ways, she would sometimes express a different opinion. In June 1989, inhabitants from the villas miserias (shantytowns) of Rosario (Province of Santa Fe) and Buenos Aires looted and plundered shops. Parts of the right-wing press and public opinion blamed groups of the non-Peronist left, like MAS (Movimiento al Socialismo, for having organized the 'trouble' (cf. chapter 4). However, Maria stressed that

"...these students from MAS, you know, those who are against everything: Alfonsín and Menem alike, did not agitate in the shantytowns. No, the reason was the fury of the shantytown-dwellers towards the shopkeepers who put the prizes up and held back the goods. You could buy sugar cheaper here in Recoleta than in the villa."

## 5. Becoming Industrialists in Argentina:

### The Ambrosettis and the Nellis

Armando Ambrosetti and his wife Grazia live in the suburb San Isidro. As outlined in chapter 5, Recoleta in central Buenos Aires (Federal District) and San Isidro in the Province of Buenos Aires are regarded by porteños as the most exclusive upper class quarters of Greater Buenos Aires. In the wealthy part of San Isidro, towards the River Plate, houses are often concealed by high walls and hedges. Signs warning of dogs, and video installations are not uncommon.

The house of the Ambrosettis has only a narrow front facing the street and is thus partly hidden from view. Completed in 1988, it is built in the style of a *Tuscan* mansion. Other homes in the area range from one storey flat roof bungalows to large buildings designed in imitation of Swiss and German chalets and English country houses. Many estates have garages and swimming pools. At the Ambrosettis' house one has to ring a bell on the outside wall and to talk through an intercom. The maid opens the door and accompanies the visitor around the house where Grazia Ambrosetti is waiting to receive her guest on the steps of a staircase leading to the entrance and overlooking a park-like garden.

On a low antique table in the sitting room lie some silver objects: an ashtray and a cigarette box which is engraved with Armando Ambrosetti's initials. The furniture is Spanish colonial and French "prior to the revolution" (of 1789, sic!), according to Ambrosetti. Paintings of late 19th and early 20th century Italian painters like De Nittis<sup>29</sup> and Michetti<sup>30</sup> are on the walls, and Ambrosetti is proud to point out "that it is hard to find a De Nittis like this in the museum of modern art in Rome." Not only is one of the pictures 'a De Nittis' but it also depicts a countryside near Rome where the *ancestors of Ambrosetti's wife*, a family of wealthy liberal politicians at the turn of the century, possessed land<sup>31</sup>. Another object on the wall is a framed letter addressed to Grazia's great grandfather (FFWF), the politician, and signed by Vittorio Emmanuele III (King of Italy 1900-1946)<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup>Giuseppe De Nittis, Italian painter, (1846-1884).

<sup>30</sup>Francesco Paolo Michetti, Italian painter, (1851-1923).

<sup>31</sup>Schnapper (1971), in her study of the *upper class of Bologna*, found that upper class families had amassed a considerable amount of works of art, particularly old paintings. In what Schnapper defined as the most traditional faction of the elite (where the family-heads had occupations as landowners, lawyers and doctors), families possessed on average 22 paintings (ibid.:104). Schnapper argued on the basis of her findings that the idea of *museums* as a *public space* for the contemplation of art, was practically absent among the upper class of Bologna. Family homes and churches, on the other hand, were regarded as the proper places for the display of works of art (which, of course, had often been commissioned by the ancestors of elite families) (ibid.:104-109).

<sup>32</sup>Lomnitz/Perez-Lizaur(1987:59) in their study of Mexican elite families also observed the display of objects which provide a link to royalty(in their case to Mexican

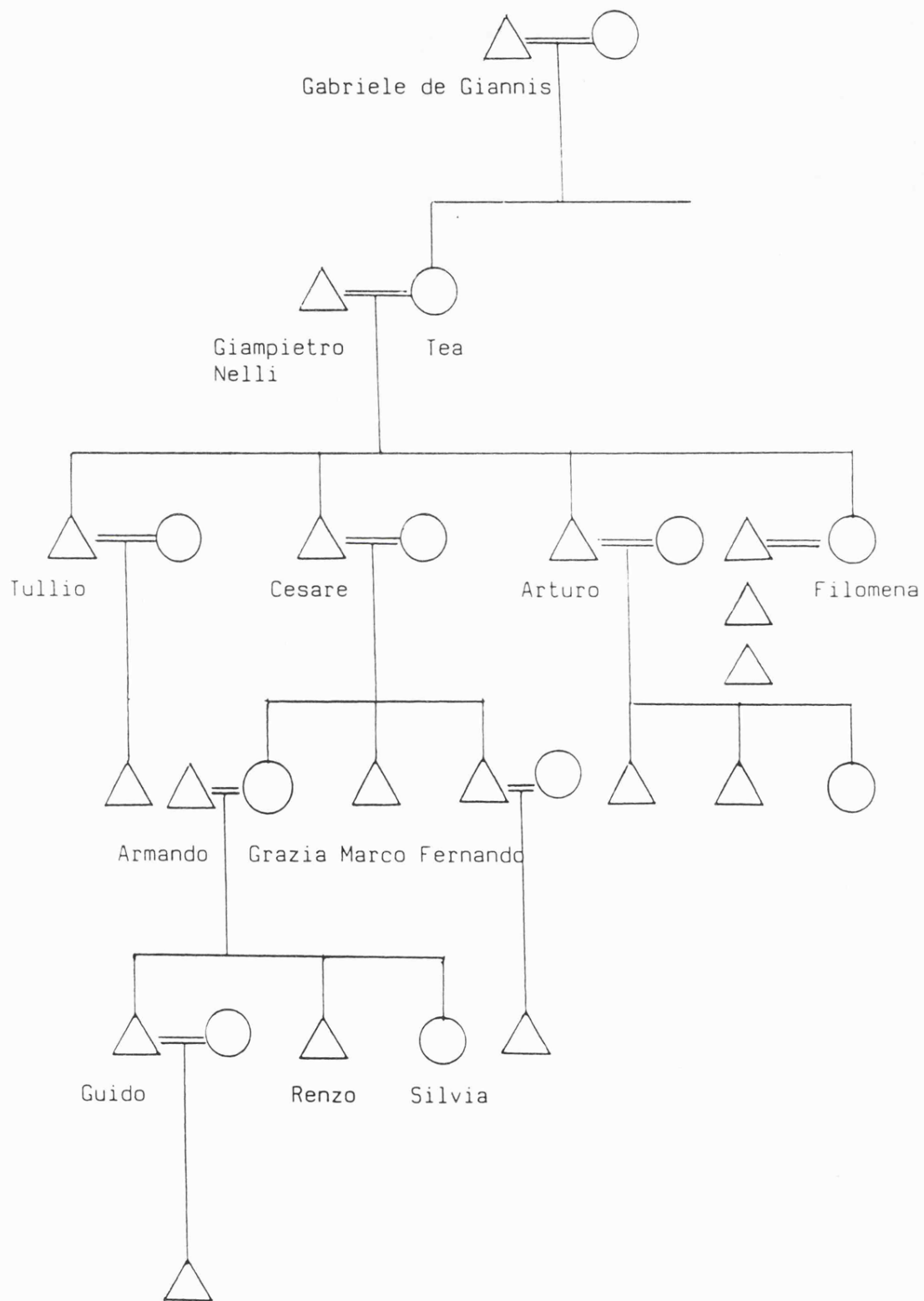


The furniture, pictures and silver objects on the table point to different traditions. The furniture is typical of the taste of the familias tradicionales who claim Spanish colonial ancestry. The pictures, and more specifically the letter from Vittorio Emanuele, symbolize the specific tradition of the Italian upper class liberal ancestors of Grazia Ambrosetti, whilst the engraved silver works are typical of the *nouveaux riches* who wish to fix their names in time. Armando Ambrosetti acquired these 'traditions' (indicators of status and prestige) by his marriage to Grazia Nelli and with his rise in Argentine society. Coming from a family of medium-scale landowners in Piedmont, he went to an agricultural college, fought in World War II on the Russian front and as a partisan in Italy. In 1947 he went to Argentina with the prospect of working for the burgeoning Italo-Argentine TECHINT company and for FIAT. In our conversations, he made a distinction of class and ethnicity between himself and the thousands of poor labour migrants arriving at the time: "I was not an emigrant. I arrived first class on a ship", and, "most of the immigrants came from the *South* of Italy." He carried out market research for FIAT and afterwards set up a tractor factory, where he remained managing director for 15 years. In 1949 he married Grazia Nelli, who had been born in Buenos Aires. Her liberal family had opposed the fascist government and, in 1929, had decided to emigrate to Argentina, as she said, for political reasons and because they could not pursue their economic interests in Italy.

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Emperor Maximilian, 1832-1867).

Diagram 3: Nelli/Ambrosetti families





As Grazia Nelli told me, her grandfather, Giampietro Nelli (FF) was already a wealthy man before his departure to Argentina. In Italy, he owned land on the outskirts of Rome near today's airport Fiumicino. He made his first journey to Buenos Aires in 1928<sup>33</sup> to explore business prospects. He already had contacts to Argentine companies, and through his wife, Tea de Giannis (daughter of an Italian government minister at the turn of the century) he obtained contacts at "high level"<sup>34</sup>. In 1929 Giampietro Nelli came back to Argentina with his wife, their daughter Filomena, and sons Tullio, Cesare and Arturo. Giampietro Nelli had brought some capital<sup>35</sup> with him to Argentina and, with his sons, he set up a little factory producing iron shutters and metal tubes. They first lived in Flores, a middle class mixed residential and industrial area, still in the Federal District, which at the turn of the century, became the residential quarter for the second generation immigrants (cf. Bourd  1977:171-173, and chapter 5). The factory and the foundry were situated in the same quarter.

Grazia Ambrosetti recalled that a certain division of labour evolved: Giampietro was the director of the company, Cesare did drawing and planning, Arturo was occupied with a rural estate they had bought later, and Tullio became politically active in Argentina's cooperative movement<sup>36</sup>. In the opinion of Grazia Ambrosetti, daughter to Cesare Nelli, her family arrived in Argentina at a difficult time; "just on the eve of the world economic crisis"(1929). Drawing a comparison to her present day high standard of living, she added, "then, life was much more restricted. We lived more modestly than today."

When telling me the 'history' of her kin-network, Grazia Nelli emphasized the importance of her own father, Cesare, and grandfather, Giampietro, as the purveyors of the *new family tradition of industrialists* (beginning with running the iron shutter factory). By contrast, Tullio and Arturo were placed on the side lines of her account, having dedicated themselves to activities which were not central to the new family business in Argentina, but which somehow continued the older family traditions of politics and landownership. Though these traditions were symbolically important to the Ambrosettis (cf. the interior of their house) they were devalued in conversation: "Tullio was basically having fun, travelling to Europe", Grazia said. And her son Guido (now one of the three directors of the factory) commented on his great-uncle: "Of the three brothers, he lived

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<sup>33</sup>Grazia Nelli emphasized that her grandfather had to leave Italy because he opposed the Fascist regime *and* because he could not pursue his economic activities. But Giampietro Nelli must have found the situation in Italy suitable enough for him to remain for there throughout first six years of Fascism (1922-1928).

I was unable to obtain information about his activities in this period.

<sup>34</sup>"*Ad alto livello*" was the expression used by Grazia Ambrosetti, and it can mean high finance, government and upper class connections in general.

<sup>35</sup>It was not possible to find out the origin or the amount of capital he brought to Argentina. One possibility is that he sold some of his land near Rome.

<sup>36</sup> For example, Tullio participated in the Hogar Obrero. He also wrote books about cooperativism and a biography of his maternal grand father.

longest because he did not work."

At the death of Giampietro in 1945, his sons took over the factory, forming a triumvirate of directors. The years around 1948-50 were remembered by Roberto González (born in 1924 and personnel manager since 1946) as particularly profitable for the company. The factory and foundry then had about 200 workers and employees with production being run on three shifts<sup>37</sup>. During this period, the range of products changed from metal curtains and fire extinguishers to valves in founded iron and tube and pipe accessories for the state petroleum company YPF (Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales). In 1954 the old premises in Flores were abandoned, and factory and foundry moved to José Suárez in the Province of Buenos Aires. In 1963 Cesare died and the directorate of the factory was continued by Tullio and Arturo.

The company got into financial difficulties and a decisive turning point came in 1964/65, when Armando Ambrosetti persuaded Cesare and Arturo each to sell *him* their 33% of the shares, which meant that, including the 11% owned by his wife, he would then hold 77% (or two thirds) of the total shares. The remaining third was owned by Grazia's brothers, Marco and Fernando. Marco renounced the right to his shares in 1968, so the only one left of the Nellis to have a stake in the company in 1988/89 was Fernando - one of the three chairmen (the others being Armando's sons, Guido Ambrosetti and Renzo Ambrosetti).

With the acquisition of the shares, Armando Ambrosetti became top director of the company. He was economically successful and, in 1988/89, the company was one of the leading suppliers of valves to Argentine State companies like YPF and Obras Sanitarias (Waterworks). According to Ambrosetti's explanation, he "saved" the factory from bankruptcy by "modernizing"<sup>38</sup> it, replacing obsolete machinery and rehabilitating its finance. Financial austerity ranks highest in his economic ethic, as can be seen from the

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<sup>37</sup>1948 to 1950 were years of economic growth (cf. chapter 3). I could not establish how far the company profited from the Peronist Governments' incentives to industrialize.

<sup>38</sup>I will extend my discussion of the concept of 'modernity' and the 'modernization process' in chapters 7 to 9. For Ambrosetti, 'modernization' here is synonymous with rationality, efficiency, and productivity. As far as ethnic categories and Argentine migration history are concerned, European immigrants (particularly North Italians) are perceived by Ambrosetti as the modernizing, rational industrialists, as opposed to the 'lazy' Southern Italian labourers, and Spanish Creole landowners who get their revenue from extensive, 'unproductive' agriculture.

In chapter 2 we have seen how the Argentine liberal elite developed a similar ideology of 'civilization' versus 'barbarism', in order to justify European immigration.

following statement:

"A millionaire, even if he has 10 million dollars should only spend one million and save nine million. Also a labourer who earns 10 dollars should only spend nine - if not, capital cannot be formed. You should always spend less than you produce."

This ethos essentially denies the difference between the upper class and working class with regard to their ability to form capital.

Ambrosetti's step to independence, from employed director of the FIAT tractor company to self-employed majority owner of a factory, was accompanied by residential independence.

In 1949, Tullio Nelli bought 4ha in a middle class area of Martínez<sup>39</sup>, known as Édison. The families of Tullio, Cesare, and later in 1956, Fernando, lived there in separate houses. When Armando Ambrosetti married Grazia Nelli in 1949, they began by living on the same estate but also in a separate house. The estate had a common entrance as Armando's son Guido Ambrosetti remembers, drawing attention to social distinctions and making reference to upper class Argentine imagery as well:

"It was like a little estancia, there were lots of South Italian immigrants<sup>40</sup> living in the area and we were rather the aristocrats of the neighbourhood."

In 1964, and almost coinciding with his acquisition of the Nelli factory, Ambrosetti and his family moved to an exclusive part of San Isidro where they built a large house with a swimming pool. As already mentioned, in 1988, Armando and Grazia Ambrosetti moved on from there to the new 'smaller' home, the 'Tuscan' mansion. This partly coincided with the semi-retirement of Armando Ambrosetti who in 1988/89 attended the factory's office for only four hours a day. Their original home in San Isidro is now inhabited by their son Guido Ambrosetti and his family<sup>41</sup>.

Social mobility, symbolic imagery and discourse have indicated the shifts of the Nelli/Ambrosetti kin-group towards a new core tradition as industrialists. In the first phase, emigration to Argentina required the Nellis to assume a new role as small scale

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<sup>39</sup>Martínez belongs to the northern suburb of San Isidro in Greater Buenos Aires.

<sup>40</sup>The children of Armando and Grazia Ambrosetti were reluctant to speak Italian at home, because the maids employed spoke in their South Italian dialect to them, which was regarded as inferior by their parents who spoke High Italian.

<sup>41</sup>cf. Lomnitz/Perez-Lizaur's statement on similar patterns of residential moves among Mexican elite families:

"When a Gómez grandfamily decided to move it was usually because of urban deterioration, rising status of the family, or the availability of real estate transmitted through the inheritance of an in-law, usually a spouse."(1987:131)

industrialists. Economic growth was accompanied by residential mobility when in 1949, a part of the kin-group moved to San Isidro and in 1954, the factory was moved to the Province of Buenos Aires. And at a critical point in 1965, Ambrosetti stepped in with capital and the ownership structure was changed completely. Yet, in Grazia Ambrosetti's (née Nelli) perception, it was precisely this move by an 'affine' which reassured ultimately the *raison d'être* of her family as having become industrialists in Argentina.

## 6. Women, Charities and the Perception of Social Inequality

Defining her own work in charities, Grazia Ambrosetti invoked her paternal grandmother, Tea de Giannis, who was an active patroness of many charities (*opere di beneficenza*) in Rome at the beginning of the century and supported the reform schools of Maria Montessori:

"In a different time she would have been a politician".

This reference to her grandmother explicitly assigns a political status to the activities of women governing charities who, by contrast, were virtually excluded from the male dominated political institutions such as parliament and government. The positive acknowledgement of the political nature of charitable activity is part of the reinterpretation of family history through women. Tea de Giannis' activities not only paralleled and complemented the men's world of politics, but she herself is actually perceived by her granddaughter almost as a male 'politician' who continued the tradition of her father (Grazia Ambrosetti's great grandfather, FMF), Gabriele de Giannis, the Cabinet Minister early this century.

Grazia devalues the political role of the men of her family in Argentina. In her perception of family history, Tullio Nelli's activities in the cooperative movement are seen as marginal, whereas the enterprise of Giampietro and Cesare Nelli become the central focus. It should be added that non-naturalized immigrants could not participate actively in Argentine politics. In contrast, women retained their 'political' role as patronesses and board members of charities.

To understand these successive sets of complementary functions, male politician - female benefactress/patroness and male entrepreneurs - female benefactress/patroness, we have to look at the Nellis' ideas of the state and public welfare. *Qua lo stato fa niente* (here the state does nothing) is how Grazia Ambrosetti accounts for her work at the Hospital

of San Isidro and her charity work.

She sees the unequal distribution of wealth in society as problematic. But she feels that whilst the *state* is made responsible for the social problems, it is incapable as the bureaucratic agent of the polity to overcome them. Instead, this can be done more effectively by the voluntary acts of economically powerful individuals. In this individualistic or 'liberal' understanding of social responsibility, women's activities in charities are seen as complementary to men's actions in economics. Women are not expiating the guilt of acquired wealth by men or women (as a reading from the perspective of the catholic social doctrine might suggest)<sup>42</sup>, but are active as individuals in society fighting the shortcomings of an all-embracing state<sup>43</sup>. As can be seen from Grazia Ambrosetti's account, women's quasi-political activities are modelled on male role models in politics and *not* on an autonomous female tradition of political involvement. Those women who do assume roles other than 'wife of a politician/entrepreneur and active benefactor' (like those men who are not politicians or entrepreneurs, for example, Tullio who was a 'politician' at a time when he should have been an entrepreneur), move to the margins of the family tradition and can be evoked as negative counter models. This was the case with Filomena (FZ to Grazia), who was born in 1905, and is said by Grazia to have had three marriages and lived a bohemian life style as a painter. She was never interested in the family business and to my knowledge did not hold shares in the company. Though her moral conduct was not disapproved of by Grazia, remaining here faithful to her liberal-antifascist tradition, she was challenged on economic grounds, as she had not furthered the family enterprise. Similarly, Grazia's daughter Silvia, aged 36, might be portrayed in a marginal position. She has three children from a broken marriage, lived for an extended period in Venice and is now a news-journalist in Buenos Aires. She thus stays 'outside' the core of the family tradition of her mother and brothers, Guido and Renzo, who are executive directors of the company.

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<sup>42</sup>Caplan (1985:225), in her study of upper class women's organizations in Madras, also excludes *guilt* as a motive, as the opportunity to charitable work depends on unequal social structures in the first place.

<sup>43</sup>This view of the 'economically powerful *individual* who supports charitable work' contrasts with the understanding *Indian* upper class women have of their work in charities in Madras:

"Those who join social welfare organizations genuinely feel that they are helping to alleviate some of the problems they see around them: 'As an *individual* I can't do any charity but as a *group* we can achieve something'." (Caplan 1985:157; my italics)



In the next section we will see how in the account of another daughter of upper middle class immigrants, women acquire the role of powerful decision-makers in their private lives and in the family business.

## 7. "Putting an Ocean between them": the Account of Marta Zanone

"My grandmother had to struggle with these seven children to get on in a difficult situation, when life was expensive and especially at a time when it was not yet the custom for women to work. The woman had to stay in the house, the man had to work, to go outside to earn a living, winning the bread. And my mother had already become a young woman (*señorita*) and who had the strongest character of all [siblings]. She suffered a lot because my uncle, Giuseppe Lombardo, didn't want to know anything about women who went out to work. He had the mentality of almost all men at the time, very Victorian (*victoriana*). He felt that the woman should stay at home, doing needlework, washing, ironing, and cooking. Instead, the man should work outside. My mother who was a person who did not like to stay at home, but wanted to work, had to argue a lot with her brother. Because when my grandfather died, there was no man in the house. Her eldest brother became something like the 'father' to the others, or in other words, the one who commanded, who 'conducted the orchestra'. And with my mother he did not get on at all, because my mother had a very strong character, like himself.

"Just because my mother was a woman, it was very difficult for her to get her own way (*imponerse*). Nevertheless, she found a job in Genoa at the Telephone company and so she worked as an office clerk. My mother only went to primary school, but she had the mental capacity of one who had gone to university. She was very much a self-taught person. As time went by my mother felt suffocated or oppressed in the environment of the family which was too closed for her. The lack of freedom, the impossibility of having male and female friends and going dancing. My uncle did not want her [to go dancing] and that was the custom of the time. Thus the situation in the family became very difficult for my mother, because my grandmother tried to defend her when they argued [with my uncle]. For example, when my mother liked to go dancing on Saturday or Sunday, my uncle waited for her at the exit of the ballroom and dragged her home like a sheep.

"As the situation got worse, she started thinking about emigrating; (although she was still very young), she was only 22 years old when she emigrated. Unbeknown to my uncle, she started to fill in immigration forms because she had some relatives living in Argentina. She had some cousins and uncles in Argentina, but I do not know from which side. They lived in the *barrio* of *La Boca*<sup>44</sup>, where all the *genovesi* live, but I do not know where exactly. Hence she started writing to these relatives. And these relatives answered her that, yes, she should come to Argentina, that here she could start a new life, that she could have a more interesting future and that overall she could move away from the influence of the brother.

I often asked my mother: why, instead of coming here to Argentina, didn't you go to Milan, to Rome, or to Austria? But she thought that her brother would have had 'long arms' to hold her back, since she was still a minor of 20 or 21 years old. On the other hand, *by putting an ocean in between* [them], it would be more difficult. Thus, quietly she started to fill in the immigration forms, with the hidden approval of my grandmother and my other uncles and aunts. All knew that she would go, except Giuseppe Lombardo. He didn't know anything. And thus my mother went from Italy with a suitcase as small

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<sup>44</sup>cf. chapter 5.

as this [makes a gesture with her hands]. Just a few things, so that my uncle couldn't find out.

"Not only did my uncle not find out till the last moment, but he only found out after the ship had departed. It was all part of the plot. I don't know exactly which year that was, but it is certain that my mother suffered tremendously when she had to say good-bye to her mother and her brothers, without knowing if she would ever see them again. She was all on her own, travelling to such a far away country. Nowadays it's different going by plane: one arrives in 12 or 13 hours. Then, it was a month by ship without knowing what she would find over here or what kind of people.

My mother just had incredible courage for the times. Nowadays, a young woman travels rapidly to the US, England, France or anywhere. but bear in mind that my mother travelled with very little money, just the little bit she had been able to save. From the moment she decided to emigrate, she started saving money, also with the help of her other brothers and sisters. But she did everything hidden from Giuseppe Lombardo, the application at the Argentine consulate, medical tests etc. . There were many bureaucratic prerequisites, but she did everything silently. Even her uncles and aunts in Genoa didn't know anything.

"Eventually, she embarked on the ship, which was a real drama, because my grandmother could not even come to say good-bye, because she didn't want to arouse my uncle's suspicion.

So my mother came of age on the ship. She had her 21st birthday on the ship. When, that night, my uncle came home and found out that my mother had left, you can imagine what a confusion started. He sent a telegram to the captain of the ship - I can't remember which ship it was -, saying that he should force my mother to disembark in Barcelona [Spain], which was the first port of call. What happened? My mother had thought about everything: she just departed at the right moment, coming of age on the ship. Thus the captain sent another telegram to my uncle: 'Miss Lombardo cannot be made to disembark, because she is already of age'<sup>45</sup>

You understand? So my uncle had to stay [in Genoa] and couldn't do anything to get my mother back.

It seems that God helped my mother. Because on the same ship she got to know my father, who was returning from business travel. My father was 11 years older than my mother. On the ship, they got to know each other and it was love at first sight. They liked each other immediately.

And my father, who was about 31 or 32 years was already a 'self-made' man (hombre hecho), returning from a business visit to Italy. And during the whole crossing, he had the opportunity to get to know my mother, make friends and sympathize with her. So that when the ship reached Buenos Aires, they were already engaged. And he promised to help her, and do everything so that she would feel comfortable here.

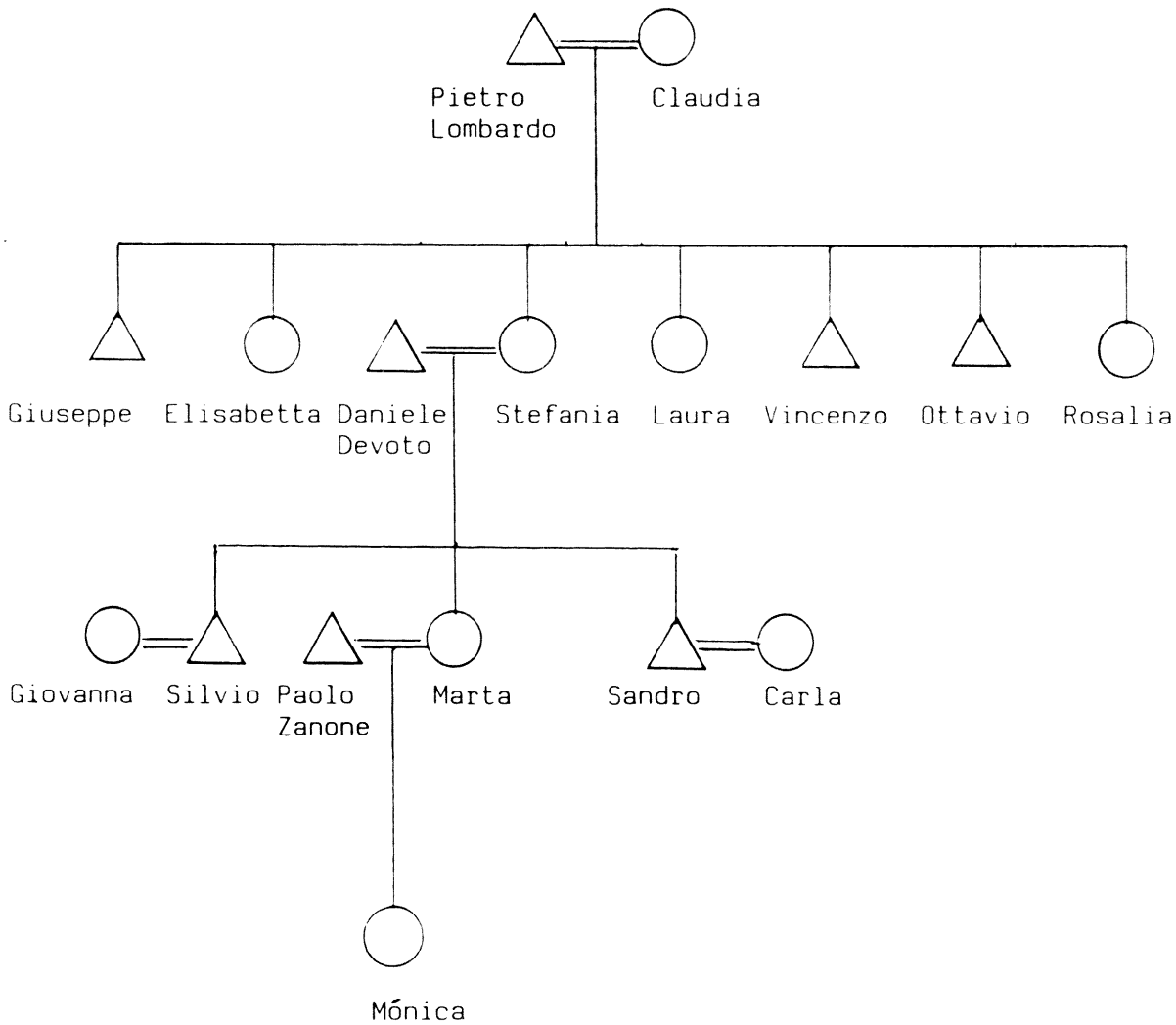
And when she arrived, she first stayed with her relatives in La Boca. But my father immediately tried to get a better place for her in a more central location. And after a few

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<sup>45</sup> Laughing at this stage, Marta Zanone, gave the telegram text in Italian, in what was otherwise a Spanish account: "La signorina Lombardo non poteva essere sbarcata perché già maggiorenne."

months they married. I think, it must have been in 1925."<sup>46</sup>

Diagram 4: Devoto/Zanone Families



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<sup>46</sup>It was extremely difficult to obtain an accurate chronology for these events for Marta had a very bad memory for dates. I tried to ask her about the birth and death dates of her mother and uncles and the dates of marriages and migrations. At the end of the account she eventually came up with 1925 as the marriage date of her parents.

Marta Zanone's account of the immigration history of her family (which is primarily concerned with her mother) reveals *three* basic themes.

Firstly, for Marta's mother living as a woman at the turn of the century in Genoa meant that she could not work independently. She also sought liberation from her oppressive brother. Hence she emigrated to Argentina. However, her period of rebellion, young and unmarried, travelling on a ship far away from her family, was short-lived. The phrase, "It seems that God helped my mother", introduced the next part of the story, where her mother fell in love with an Italo-Argentine businessman. Soon after arrival they married, and order (for the narrator) was restored. Stefania Devoto was incorporated into the new society and assigned a respectable position as wife.

One could speculate at this point, whether Stefania's first rebellion could have been the beginning of a later 'unconventional' life in Argentina (for example, as an unmarried, independent woman artist, writer or trade unionist). Yet, while leading a rather 'conventional' life in Argentina, she remained the central character Marta Zanone's further account. Stefania married a man who later set up one of the first asbestos factories in the country, which later became a successful medium-sized industry. According to Marta Zanone, the marriage was a 'happy' one, and Stefania Devoto kept her strong argumentative character. She remained a life-long supporter of Fascism and Mussolini and donated her golden jewellery<sup>47</sup> to Fascist Italy in the 1930s (and kept a picture of Mussolini at home). She supported Fascist Italy outspokenly against her husband with whom she had heated discussions on the subject over the dinner table<sup>48</sup>. In Daniele Devoto's view, Mussolini was a political charlatan, just like the General and later President of Argentina, Juan Domingo Perón, whom he considered to have been a rough copy of Mussolini.

A few years after arrival, Stefania Devoto persuaded her whole family to emigrate to Argentina since their life had become economically very difficult in Genoa. They all came: first her two brothers, Vincenzo and Ottavio, later her sisters Elisabetta and Laura, followed by her sister Rosalia and her mother, and eventually her brother Giuseppe with whom she was reconciled in Argentina. All of the male family members

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<sup>47</sup>The donation included her wedding ring. She wore an imitation wedding ring since and the golden one was never remade.

<sup>48</sup>The remaining family in Genoa were all fascists, especially the eldest brother, Giuseppe. One of her aunts was attacked by partisans towards the end of World War II.

found employment owing to her intervention in her husband's asbestos factory. But, as Marta Zanone says, Uncle Giuseppe could not adapt to the Argentine way of life even though his brother-in-law bought him a house. He returned to Italy in 1948.

It seems then, that through the reconstitution of the family on the other side of the Atlantic, the old familial order was re-established. But the relatives were now all indebted to Stefania. Her leading role in the family might also have been the reason for Giuseppe's return to Italy, rather than his not adapting to Argentina.

In a peculiar way, Stefania Zanone once again predominated Marta's account of the family history. When her husband, Daniele Devoto, died unexpectedly in 1949, she took full charge of the company, remaining director until her death in 1988. Marta Zanone(\*1930) grew up in an anti-Peronist household of medium-sized entrepreneurs. She strongly supported the anti-Peronist opposition and was once almost caught with her brother, when they wrote anti-Peronist slogans on walls. She said that her father and later her mother had difficulties importing raw asbestos during the Perón governments (1943-1955). Marta described her mother as having had an absolutely diligent and self-denying work ethic, going to the factory every day for forty years. Paolo Zanone, who married Marta in 1952, gave a revealing example:

"My wife's mother would come here at 7 a.m. when we were still in bed, sit at the end of the matrimonial bed and talk about accounting and the day's agenda. She was in charge of the factory, but she had her experts. Her sons, Silvio and Sandro were directors of sales and production, whereas my mother-in-law would do the accountancy. But she never treated them as directors, always as sons. It was a monolithic (*struttura monolitica*) family structure."

In 1989, the board of directors consisted of three women and one man. Marta Zanone's two sisters-in-law took over the respective positions after the deaths of their husbands in 1976 and 1985. Marta Zanone was on the board as well but only occasionally attended meetings. Appointing the three women as directors, rather than bringing in outside management, can be seen as a strategic decision to keep the company under the family's control. Paolo Zanone eventually became the technical director. He was eager to point out that being a graduate in chemistry from Pisa University (Italy), he became technical director as early as 1952 when his mother-in-law, Stefania Devoto, got him a place in the company. The three women who led the company after the deaths of their husbands (Stefania, Giovanna and Carla Devoto), did not so much choose to join as feel an obligation and duty to the family business. However, as Paolo Zanone insisted, as *women* they had no technical training and lacked the necessary knowledge of asbestos production.

The women had to acquire administrative and financial skills while they were working at the company. The sisters Giovanna and Carla had some training, having qualified from commercial high school (perito mercantil). The only 'really' qualified person who was left was Paolo Zanone, who had a degree in chemistry from Italy. In Paolo Zanone's account of his immigration experience in Argentina the 'learning on the job' knowledge of the three women was inferior to his own formal training at university.

Paolo Zanone, born in 1919 in Belluno (Veneto), emigrated to Argentina in 1947. His father had stayed in Argentina between 1905 and 1915, doing seasonal work. The elder brothers of Paolo were born in Argentina, before the family returned home in 1919. When Paolo grew up, Argentina remained a powerful image in the accounts of his relatives:

"I always had this *idea of Argentina*<sup>49</sup>, but first I had to finish my studies and then the war [World War II] broke out."

His father's brother who had stayed on in Argentina wrote, telling him of good job prospects, and eventually in 1947, he made the decision to emigrate. Initially he stayed with that uncle and then began working as a chemical engineer in the sugar industry in the north-western province of Tucumán.

In 1950 he met his wife, Marta Devoto, in the seaside resort, Necochea. They married in 1952, the same year that he became a technical director in the Devoto factory.

## 8. Residence and Style: Petite Bourgeoisie or Industrialists?

In 1988/89, the Zanone nuclear family, which included Paolo, Marta, their daughter Mónica (\*1966) and also their maid, Alicia Rodriguez, lived in a medium-sized patrician house. The house had been built in 1940 by Danile Devoto in what they said had later become a declining, impoverished middle class area. They stressed that their barrio, Parque Patricios, had once been more affluent. The house was now split in two flats,

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<sup>49</sup>I will discuss the image of 'America' among immigrants in the conclusion (chapter 11). The idea of America which foreshadowed the real event (that is migration), surfaces also very powerfully in the life-history of a Spanish immigrant to Argentina:

"One day I asked the widow [a woman who had talked to him about Argentina, A.S.] if I had chances of finding work in Argentina, of establishing myself over there and later calling my wife. [The widow's description] *painted everything in the rosiest colours.*" (Marsal 1969:126; my italics)

with Marta's sister-in-law, Giovanna and her daughter Inés living in the lower flat. There was frequent contact among the relatives and Mónica was often to be found downstairs chatting with her cousin.

The interior decoration of the Zanone flat had the junky atmosphere of the petite bourgeoisie and not that of the self-conscious industrialists. Cheap reproductions of Florence and Venice were on the walls. Everything looked old and dusty. There was no furniture or object in the sittingroom or hall which was designed particularly to impress the visitor. A glass cabinet contained some porcelain, a souvenir gondola from Venice, a few family photos and some of Paolo Zanone's decoration medals of the last war. His study was equipped with an old writing desk and dusty bookshelves and did not have any *new* furniture and gave a similar impression of past times. No particular consideration had been given to equip the flat with distinctive *antique* furniture, nor was there any coherent arrangement of the actual furniture with other objects in the room. The careful attention directed towards interior decoration as observed in the Pardi and Ambrosetti families was absent in the Zanones' house. There was no intention to display 'something' to the visitor. A kind of 'petty bourgeoisie' spirit was revealed in the way that some furniture is protected from dust by plastic and textile covers. There was nothing comparable to the discreet, matt white 'aristocratic' decoration of the Pardi's flat or the ostentatious *nouveau riche* antiques of the Ambrosetti's<sup>50</sup>. The dining room was an assembly of cheap kitchen furniture, the most recent acquisition being a colour television.

The Zanone, who jointly owned with their in-laws a factory with a workforce of 120 workers, had three cars: one new Ford Sierra (which apart from the Peugeot 506, was considered to be the most expensive and fashionable car produced in Argentina), an older Ford and a small Peugeot, the latter being driven by Mónica. They owned an apartment in Punta del Este (Uruguay), the exclusive seaside resort of the Argentine and Uruguayan upper classes. Marta Zanone was a great admirer of the opera (during some of our meetings opera music was playing in the background) and so the Zanones had a season

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<sup>50</sup>Taken together, the interior decoration of the Pardi and Ambrosetti's matches Sjögren-De Beauchaine's description of the home of one of the families of the Parisian 'bourgeoisie':

"With great care they transformed it into the typical French bourgeois interior, with some antique furniture from their respective families mixed with some light modern pieces." (1988:68)



ticket to the Teatro Colón<sup>51</sup>.

The Zanone also differed from the Pardi and Ambrosetti families in their eating habits. The Pardi had adopted the eating style of the familias tradicionales, being served by their maids an international haute cuisine of French and Spanish influence which incorporated plenty of meat. The Ambrosetti ate the refined dishes of the upper middle class of Northern Italy. But Paolo Zanone had acquired the habits of his wife who preferred a broad middle class Argentine cuisine, with large supplies of beef, and for dessert, dulce de batata (a thick jelly of sweet potato) or dulce de membrillo (thick quince jelly) on top of a massive slice of cheese. Unlike the Pardi and the Ambrosetti, the Zanones did not distinguish themselves from middle class Argentines in their eating habits (and to a lesser extent with regard to the interior decoration of their home)<sup>52</sup>.

Conspicuous consumption was not a feature of the Zanone's life style. One reason for this was that their economic abilities ranked lower than those of the upper class Pardi and Ambrosetti families. The other reason might have been an 'ascetic' family tradition as suggested by Paolo Zanone, when he spoke of his mother-in-law, Stefania Devoto:

"In a way she had this genovese mentality. Her first thought was to make savings, to fear asking for credit at the banks, and to show consistent, straightforward behaviour and not to give way to salesmen. Thus she has given Devoto CIA, the image of a serious and genuine company, but probably [by doing this] she has not allowed the kind of development that more farsighted people achieve when they obtain very high offers (prevenda) and large sums of money without working too much. Instead Devoto CIA, has always worked hard and maintained its structure."

During the time of my fieldwork, Mónica Zanone studied Economics at the private university, Universidad de la Empresa. Her aspiration was to become an entrepreneur herself and to set up her own company, probably in a sector that has links with Italy, perhaps the fashion industry. She realized some of the difficulties involved in trade relations between a third and a first world country.

"Once we tried with a group of friends to export leather to Italy. But it was a complete failure. The leather manufacturers over there wanted only spotless, immaculate leather, which we couldn't provide."

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<sup>51</sup>The Teatro Colón is one of the largest opera houses in the world and, during the first part of this century, was fully incorporated into the international touring circuit of European opera companies.

However, during my time in the field, it was partly closed due to lack of funds.

<sup>52</sup>On eating habits and social distinctions, see also chapter 9.

When discussing with her father<sup>53</sup>, she emphasized the point that even though there has been a treaty of Argentine - Italian cooperation since 1985 (cf. chapter 10), there is still very little money available for Italo-Argentine medium-sized companies; by which she implied, of course, some kind of cooperation with Italy which would enhance the prospects of their own 'medium-sized' factory. Regarding economic policies within Argentina, Mónica advocated a kind of neo-liberal free-market policy : little state intervention in economics; the simplification of bureaucratic procedures, and the liberation of the exchange rate of the Australes to the US\$. These policies are normally associated with the Ucedé (cf. chapter 4), the party which most of my informants from the entrepreneurial sector supported. This free-market ideology is often accompanied by a positive evaluation of the last military dictatorship (1976-1983) which, for its part, is in favour of a general amnesty for military personnel convicted for the violation of human rights (cf. chapter 4).

Mónica, while otherwise reflecting her father's views and those of her class more generally, was not in favour of the amnesty and instead wanted trials. Once when we were driving in a car, she had a fierce argument with her father.

Mónica: "You know well that I detest the terrorists [guerrillas, 1973-1976, Montoneros and ERP] but the military should have put them in prison, like they did in Italy [with the Red Brigades] and not exterminate them. There will always be somebody left over."

Paolo Zanone: "But who started the violence?"

Mónica: "Well, I'm not doubting that, but they the military should have used other means of persecution."

Mónica by no means sympathized with the guerrillas, but at the same time she condemned the military's action and was implicitly against the amnesty. She said that at the time of the military government when she was 10 to 17 years old, she did not know anything of the violation of human rights. She remembered, however, that before the military coup in 1976, she was protected by a body guard when coming back from school after one of her girlfriends, the daughter of an Italian entrepreneur, was kidnapped and released only after a high ransom was paid. Mónica could not say whether civil liberties were repressed at the time, but remembered that 'cultural imports' like English pop music arrived very late. During the time of my fieldwork Mónica worked part-time at the Italian Chamber of Commerce. She was also active in a group of young Italo-Argentines who ran a 'regional' Italian association Gioventù Veneta and edited a bilingual newspaper,

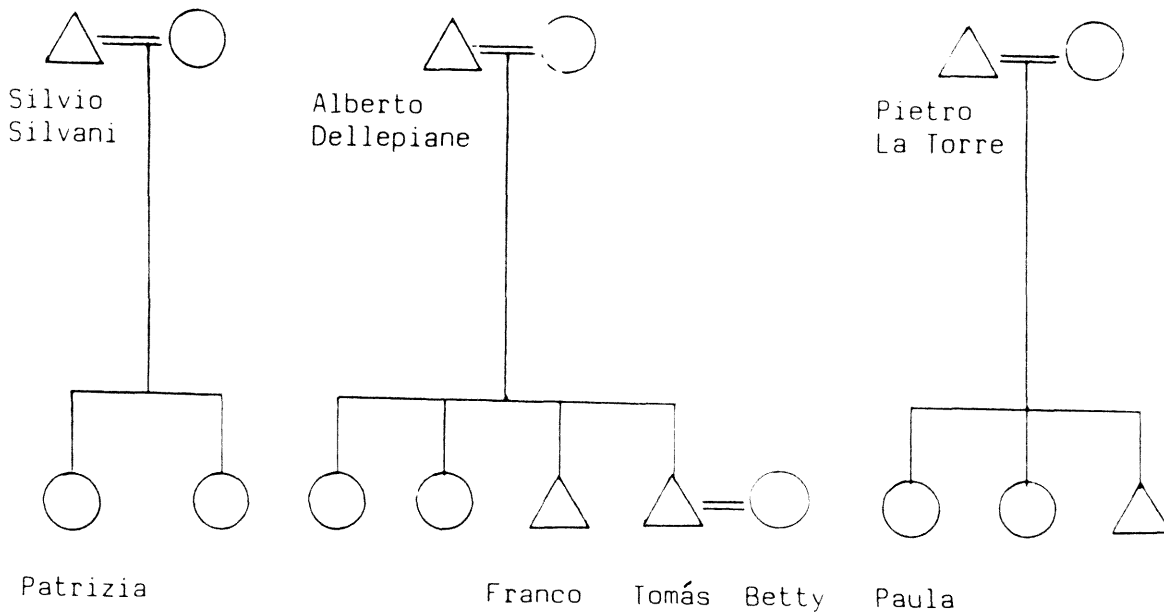
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<sup>53</sup>who is a consultant for one of the Italian regions and director of an institute for the cooperation between that region and Argentina; cf. chapter 10 on ethnic leadership.

*L'aria veneta*. Monica was thus part of a small faction of young Italo-Argentines who were active in ethnic associations (cf. also chapters 9 and 10).

9. From Engineers' Construction to Political Disillusion:  
the Families of Silvani, Dellepiane and La Torre

Diagram 5: Families of Silvani, Dellepiane and La Torre



This section is about three families. It differs from the other examples in that here, the three male immigrants did not come on to Argentina on their own. They already had established families in Italy which they brought over after they had explored business prospects and employment opportunities in Buenos Aires.

Structurally, these men are part of the immigration of highly qualified Italian technicians and engineers who were recruited by Argentine and Italian companies, such as TECHINT and FIAT after World War II (cf. Roncelli 1987:103,119). For a period of almost 20 years, these three families formed ties of friendship and social contacts amongst themselves. These were considered by the family members interviewed as being particular to these three families. Leisure activities were often shared, such as vacations every year to the seaside resort of Miramar. Their children became close friends among

them and referred to each other's parents as "uncles and aunts". The togetherness of the three families was described by them in terms of exclusive social relations, different to those relations with others who were not part of the families. As they said, the families were "very closed" (muy cerrado) to outsiders.

A privileged network of social relations among these three families was also one of the reasons for their non- or low-key engagement in Italian institutions. Another reason was political. Having been critical of fascism in Italy, they did not wish to mix with the fascists who ran the Italian associations shortly after the war. Members from various generations of the families repeatedly stressed this *antifascist* tradition (which I had no means of proving or verifying). Non-involvement in the Italian associations in Argentina was also a matter of social class and "high Italian culture", which Alberto Dellepiane said he could hardly find amongst the Italians living in Argentina. According to Paula La Torre, the daughter of Pietro La Torre, friends outside the families were regarded as secondary and peripheral (amici periferici).

Between 1947 and 1949, the three engineers Silvio Silvani, Alberto Dellepiane and Pietro La Torre emigrated to Argentina. They came independently of one another and at different times: Silvio Silvani in June 1948, contracted by an Italian company which built power stations and wanted to expand its business in Argentina; Alberto Dellepiane arriving with a specific project for the young Italo-Argentine steel company TECHINT in 1947, and Pietro La Torre coming early in 1949 to set up a concrete factory. Dellepiane and La Torre, both from Turin, had studied at university together but in 1939, when the war broke out they lost sight of each other.

All three were *contracted* to Argentina. Their technical expertise was sought in the rising industry of the early Perón years. They already had experience at top executive level in Italy where they had carried out projects in railway building and electrification before, during and after the Second World War. They said that their attitude to the Fascist regime was one of 'silent opposition'. Dellepiane worked in the railway workshops of Turin, and Silvani mentioned that in Italy he had an "antifascist education", but he did not offer any further details of this.

Alberto Dellepiane arrived in June 1947 after a three-day-flight (Zurich - Amsterdam - Rio de Janeiro - Buenos Aires), and stayed in a hotel. Travelling by plane was very unusual at the time and, like Armando Ambrosetti's first class passage on the ship, it was a clear indication of the upper class character of this type of migration.

After 6 months, during which he established his position in one of TECHINT's new plants in Campana (Province of Buenos Aires), his wife and four young children arrived. The Dellepiane rented a flat in the upper middle class district of Palermo. Later they

were able to buy the apartment "...at a very favourable price, due to Perón's rent laws, which meant rents were frozen at the time", as Tomás Dellepiane, the son of Alberto explained to me. He did not specify the exact purchase sum at the time. One day in 1949, Dellepiane came across a man who, to his great surprise, turned out to be his friend from university, Pietro La Torre. On his arrival, he had rented accommodation in the same block of flats. They revived their friendship and their wives also became friends. La Torre started his business in Argentina with a company for the construction of concrete pylons for high tension lines. In 1947 he got to know Silvio Silvani who had come to build power stations.

Silvio Silvani and Alberto Dellepiane both regarded Argentina as a country with plentiful natural resources and great potential for development when they first arrived:

"Argentina at that time was an *European super-country*. It seemed to be full of money and destined to become the fourth or fifth economic power of the world."(Alberto Dellepiane)

"Then Argentina appeared to be a country with an infrastructure and rich resources."(Silvio Silvani)

This framing (in 1988/89) of the Argentine reality of the late 1940s should not be interpreted simply against the background of the effectively more affluent Argentine society (compared to the Argentina of today and Italy of the time), but also of the life experience of these men during the war and reconstruction after the war. Though they came from the Italian bourgeoisie and had not experienced extreme deprivation themselves, they had witnessed it. Dellepiane, for example, had served as an official at the Stalingrad front. They had seen a war being lost and the *destruction* (as opposed to engineer's *construction*) of industrial plants, and the slow reconstruction after World War II.

In Argentina Perón was pursuing a policy of import substituting-industrialization (cf. chapter 3) and state companies responded favourably to subcontracting Italian industrialists from Italy at the time (cf. Offedu 1984:177ff. on the TECHINT steel company). Though Silvani, Dellepiane and La Torre were, according to their statements, critical of Peronism as a political ideology and movement (which in Silvio Silvani's words was a 'rough copy of fascism'), in practical terms, they reacted positively *to* and profited *from* Perón's industrialization programme(cf. chapter 3), even though it was dismissed 40 years later, "as badly planned and carried out." (Silvio Silvani)

## 10. The Multiplicity of Identity Claims among the 'Children'

Those children of the three families whom I interviewed were all professionals in their forties. Patrizia Silvani, Tomás Dellepiane and Paula La Torre were all born in Italy and had retained their citizenship. Their life-histories, however, show the specific imprint of Argentine political history.

Patrizia Silvani(\*1946) attended a private primary school run by nuns which had to close in 1955, when supporters of Perón set fire to the churches (cf. Rock 1987:316). She then went to a state school and later (in 1964), on the insistence of her father (whom she described as anglophile), to the private bilingual Belgrano Girls School where she obtained the Cambridge Certificate. She also took an exam in French at the Alliance Française. From 1964 to 1973 she studied medicine at the University of Buenos Aires. In 1989 she practised as a psychoanalyst both in a hospital and privately. She flatly denied the existence of an Argentine national identity:

"There is no national identity. The 'national being/essence' (ser nacional)<sup>54</sup> was never consolidated. The arriving immigrants were only motivated to make money and then leave [i.e. return]. Professionals did not come [to Argentina] as they did to the United States.

I never took on Argentine citizenship. Culturally I don't feel Argentine, although all my life, my struggles and work have been here. I would like to get Italian passports for the children."

Paula LaTorre(\*1945) is also a psychoanalyst. She was educated at both a private French High School and a State High School. At the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 70s she became political and was probably active in the Peronist student movement. She was very reluctant to speak about this period. When the military took power in 1976, she had to go into exile because she feared persecution. She lived in Mexico for the next ten years. In 1989 she felt estranged from several traditions:

"I am *Italian*. I was 4 years old when my father came in 1949. ... I don't feel that I am Italian.

[Ah, then you *are Argentine?*, A.S.]

"No, not at all. I haven't been living here for 10 years. My parents didn't integrate me.

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<sup>54</sup>Ser nacional is a central concept evoked in any discussion on 'national identity' and the literature abounds in attempts and speculations to define its content (for example, Massuh 1982:111).

We, the children of the three families that go on being friends, have discussed that with our parents. The parents didn't do anything to integrate us; they didn't integrate themselves and they didn't integrate us.

In Mexico, yes. The Mexicans have a national consciousness, an identity and an autochthonous culture. Here they don't. They killed the Indians. The national identity is a myth."

Tomás Dellepiane (\*1944) is a nuclear physicist. His parents, who did not want him to be excluded from the wider Argentine society, made the deliberate choice of sending him to state schools and not to private schools which would have been more appropriate to his upper class status.

He studied Physics at Buenos Aires University from 1960-1965, during the Frondizi and Illia governments (cf. chapter 3), which, in retrospect he considers to have been the best years for political stability, civil liberties, study and research. From 1967 to 1974 he did a PhD in Physics in the United States. In the States he met his American wife, Betty. When they returned in 1974, they sympathized broadly with Peronist populist politics and, in our conversations recalled, that political rallies seemed to be like football matches. Tomás' brother, Franco, was working at the time in an agricultural cooperative in the northwestern province of Tucumán. He was arrested by the police, and spent 6 months in prison. Tomás Dellepiane remembered:

"We were still dealing with police at that time [not yet with the military] so we got him out and he went to Italy".

Franco, and another sister, Rafaela, who also went into exile, still live and work in Italy. Tomás Dellepiane, meanwhile, went into what he calls 'inner exile'. Whilst he was working on a research project he realized that people 'disappeared' but he kept quiet, on the grounds that speaking about it would have meant 'suicide'. At international conferences he had the chance to communicate with exiled Argentines.

In 1989 he made references to different traditions in his life history and did not wish to be confined to a single 'national identity':

"I have several allegiances, to the US as well as to Italy, and less so to Argentina."



## 11. Conclusions

While the final section, focusing on the three families of post-World War II immigration might have left the impression that national identities have dissolved, I would like to stress the ideological continuities which have also emerged in this chapter. A strong emphasis on the *periodization* of political history is clearly visible in the accounts of all informants. Regarding the Pardi, Ambrosetti and Zanone families it can be said that they all professed to have been anti-Peronists at the time of the first governments of Perón (1946-1955). This comes as no great surprise: the maternal lines of those three families (Tuzzi, Nelli, Lombardo/Devoto) had been of Italian immigration prior to the Second World War, and by the time of Perón's rise to power, had been established as upper class and upper middle class families. It were precisely these classes which were most opposed to Perón. In the case of the Nellis (the affines of Giorgio Ambrosetti) anti-Peronism was also reinforced by their allegiances to Italian Liberalism at the turn of the century and subsequent 'conservative' antifascism which had opposed corporate economics in Italy (cf. Zunino 1985:257). Giorgio Ambrosetti himself, a post-World War II immigrant, occupied a more ambiguous position. On the one hand, he had been a partisan in Italy. On the other, he engaged in industrial activities after his arrival in Argentina which made him ultimately profit from the Peronist promotion of industry. His position is very similar to that of the three Italian engineers and industrialists described in the last section. In retrospect they criticize Peronism, but pragmatically they profited from the industrialization policies of the time.

I have already stressed the importance women in the negotiation of traditions, especially with regard to class status, style and decorum. Making a more general point, it can be suggested that when single men migrated to prosperous Argentina for work, women of already established business families of immigrant descent could offer a kind of 'hypergamy'<sup>55</sup> to them. This could both benefit men's financial interests and raise their status in the new society. The women, on the other hand, could enhance their influence in the family enterprise as well (cf. examples of the Ambrosettis and the Zanones), and occupy a more influential position compared to what they would have had in a traditional

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<sup>55</sup>Hypergamy is used here in the extended sense of immigrant men marrying women who had more capital and status in Argentina, but were not necessarily of a higher social class - because the men already came from upper middle class and upper class families in Italy.

Italian family firm<sup>56</sup>.

It is in the second and third generation of immigrants that political and national allegiances become more fluid (mainly because political ideologies appear less convincing), a theme which I will discuss also in chapter 9. However, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the processes of identity-formation among different generations of immigrants with regard to Argentine history, I propose to examine, in the next chapter, the lives of three immigrants who came to Argentina at the times of mass immigration.

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<sup>56</sup>As it has been described for example by Yanagisako (1991:332-339) for the silk industry in Como, where fathers and sons are expected to lead companies, daughters and sisters 'marry out', and wives and daughters-in-law care for the family but take no direct interest in the family business.



## CHAPTER 7

### "Making it" in Argentina

#### 1. Introduction

The following chapters 7, 8 and 9, investigate the relationship between the life-histories of Italian immigrants and their descendants and particular phases of contemporary Argentine history. They are essentially concerned with the process by which people make sense of their time and place. I will show how in a controversial and fragmented way immigrants 'become' Argentine; how they acquire sense from and give sense to the new place. In my exploration of the relationship between 'time' and 'generation'<sup>1</sup>, I shall first present the life histories of three men who arrived in Argentina at the beginning of this century. This will be followed in chapter 8 by a discussion between a descendant of early immigrants and another immigrant who came after World War II. Finally, in chapter 9, I shall conclude with an analysis of young descendants of Italians in Buenos Aires.

While the material is arranged chronologically, I do not intend to treat different generations of immigrants as separate groups. On the contrary, it will become clear that the period of immigration and the position of descent from immigrants are not sufficient factors to explain differences with regard to ethnic identity, language maintenance or social status. While it is true that more global factors, such as the period of immigration, do have a bearing on the life histories of the immigrants, it is by no means clear that they prove determinant. To separate immigrants according to their period of arrival in Argentina is important with regard to the volume of migration and its relation to phases of Argentine economic and political history, and also with regard to the perceived economical status of the country. However, being classified according to a certain period of immigration, or equally, according to generational group, does not tell us anything in itself, except for revealing a person's relationship to a particular statistical group.

As will become clear throughout these chapters, ethnic identity, as seen through notions

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<sup>1</sup>As I have explained in chapter 1, I use the term 'generation' here to refer a sociological 'cohort' of people who share certain characteristics (for example, age and time of immigration to Argentina).

of Italy, language maintenance and distinction markers of food and style, only becomes meaningful in the wider historical context of class, kinship and culture. It would be misleading to presume that 'Italianess', 'being Italian', and an 'Italian identity' corresponded to clear-cut and unanimously accepted definitions at the beginning of the century, only later fading out and becoming more ambiguous. Rather, the conceptualization of Italy and the related issue of ethnic identity, changed and acquired different meanings and connotations which were employable more in certain periods and less in others.

This is not to say that 'periods' of immigration are the construct of statisticians only. Indeed, immigrants and their descendants are very conscious about various periods of immigration. However, as I will argue in the following chapters, it is not so much the numerical input of immigrants and their distribution over time which is perceived, but rather the conflict surrounding how people are *categorized* differently: Europeans vs. South Americans, North Italians vs. South Italians, rich vs. poor immigrants, and educated vs. illiterate immigrants. These categorizations draw people together or keep them apart, irrespective of whether or not they are grouped together in other ways. In short, they allow persons to identify themselves with others and above divisions of time, place and generation.

Furthermore, in this particular chapter, an attempt is made to explain the experience of modernity in the lives of the immigrants. It thus investigates the meaning of such key-notions as progress, modernity and development, and the meaning that these assume in the life histories of individuals. While the experience of modernity is assessed individually, it is at the same time set against the specific Argentine version of modernity that was current at the end of the last century and in the first decades of this. Though termed a 'peripheral' modernity by some (cf. Sarlo 1988:13-29), it should nonetheless be understood in its own right.

While the rise of Buenos Aires as an immigrant metropolis is dealt with in chapter 5, and the social class and symbolic universe of some immigrant families have been discussed in chapter 6, *here* the main focus is on the individual construction and deconstruction of those meanings associated with place and historical period. Migration is a particularly suitable field in which to explore these processes, as it involves multiple ruptures, new starts, and discontinuities in individual biographies. This often implies major changes in the constitution of the self, as psychologists and psychoanalysts have shown (Dellarossa

1978:37f., Frigessi Castelnuovo/Risso 1981, Grinberg/Grinberg 1984:21-27). This chapter is more specifically concerned with the cultural meaning attributed to these discontinuities.

Through presenting the life-histories of three particular immigrants, I address the questions: How, at specific times of their lives, do they construct their identity? To which groups and classes do they belong? And from which social groups are they demarcating themselves?

## 2. The setting for 'Modernity' and 'Progress':

### Buenos Aires at the Beginning of the 20th Century

In the first decades of this century, Buenos Aires was considered by most observers to be a 'modern' city in the sense that the term had then acquired: a fast rising population, a cosmopolitan culture and enormous urban growth and infrastructure, all hinged upon a notion of further progress and future advancement (see also chapter 5). This perception of the city is revealed in the following quotations from Clifford and Scobie:

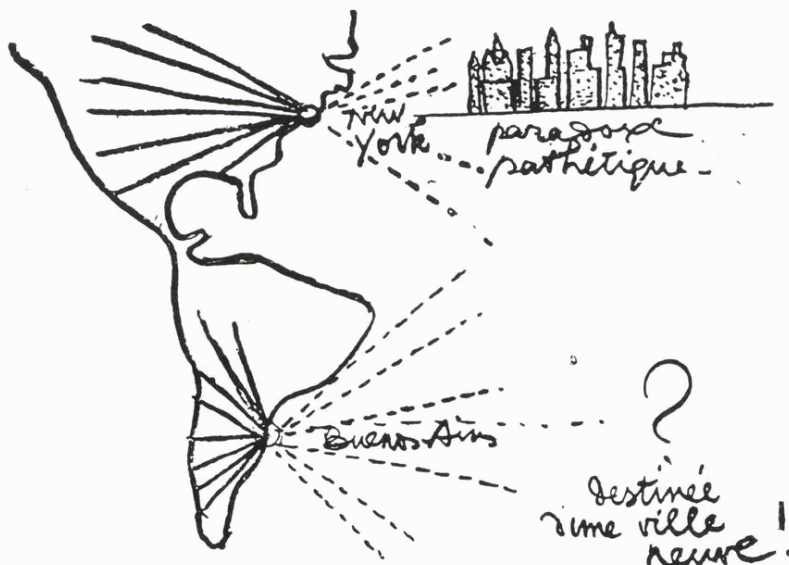
"By the 1920s a truly global space of cultural connections and dissolutions has become imaginable: local authenticities meet and merge in transient urban and suburban settings - settings that will include the immigrant neighbourhoods of New Jersey, multicultural sprawls like Buenos Aires, the townships of Johannesburg."  
(Clifford 1988:4)

"The city's increasing wealth and cosmopolitan air had also put Buenos Aires on the schedule of many touring celebrities. Demands for lectures and consultations resulted in visits ranging from several days to two or three months for Joseph Antoine Bouvard, the Paris city planner; Georges Clemenceau, later the Premier of France; Enrico Ferri, the Italian criminologist and socialist leader; Jean Jaurès, the French socialist; Rafael Altamira, the Spanish historian; and such men of letters as Anatole France, Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, Ramón del Valle Inclán, and Guglielmo Ferrero. Those who were interviewed by the press often compared the new avenues, chic shops, and ornate public buildings with those of Paris - a recognition eagerly sought by porteños. Others left much longer impressions of their visits in books published after their return home. From the reports of these travellers, as well as from Argentine literature, contemporary newspapers, maps, census reports and photographs, there emerges a composite view of a city highly European in construction, citizenry, and culture. The metropolis of 1910 contrasted sharply with the Buenos Aires of 1870, which was affectionately known as the *gran aldea*, or large village."  
(Scobie 1974:13-14)

To give an example of how foreign visitors imagined Buenos Aires as a city of progress and modernity at the time, it is useful to turn to the architect, Le Corbusier. In 1929 he went on a lecture tour to Buenos Aires, invited by the municipality. He thought of Buenos Aires as a kind of "New York in the Southern Hemisphere"<sup>2</sup>, whose destiny and future were not yet defined (cf. illustration 2).

Illustration 2:

Le Corbusier's drawing of Buenos Aires and New York  
(from Le Corbusier 1967:220<sup>3</sup>)



The whole experience of migration itself was a metaphor for modernity as it seemed to embody the promises of progress and upward mobility in a dislocated time (the *future*) and space (*America* or in this case, Argentina). The individual plans for material and moral progress inscribed in the very process of emigration were also collective ones;

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<sup>2</sup>A woman in Abou's collection of life histories of Lebanese immigrants in Argentina, also mentions that for her mother Buenos Aires represented a 'New York of the South' at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century (Abou 1972:437).

<sup>3</sup>The drawing originally appeared in the publication *Précisions, Collection d l'Esprit Noveau, Paris, 1930*.

political ideologies, reflecting multiple class interests, competed for individual adherences and interpretations. The imaginative appeal of migration must have been great in those times when it could promise, in real terms, access to 'limited goods' such as land, money, wealth and status. How, then, did people live this drive towards progress? How did they experience this momentum of modernity? And how was their dream broken up in individual splinters and fragments?

For a tentative answer, I turn to the testimonies of three men who arrived in Argentina in 1906, 1912 and 1927. From them, we can get a sense of how people experience and perceive their own lives, and how they give meaning to events retrospectively. The informants' accounts are selective, highlighting certain themes and leaving out others. As will be seen further on, the temporal structure of their narratives already tells us something about the status of the speakers: the first account is characterized by an immense movement *forward* in time; the second represents a nostalgic look *backwards*, while the third evolves steadily in a rather *chronological* fashion<sup>4</sup>. The accounts are also dialogues: they respond not only to the anthropologist's questions, but also to an 'inner' topical structuring of the narration (what Agar has called the 'story structure' 1980:227,229).

### Three Immigrants

Enrique Gerardi, the first of the three immigrants, tells the story of a self-made man, very much in the mythical fashion of the immigrants to the New World. Not from dishwasher to millionaire, but from bread dispatcher to factory owner. The retrospective account is centred around the enormous social mobility he experienced during his life. The narrative also lays strong emphasis on his own achievement, self-determination and ability to determine his own destiny.

By being present during some of the country's phases of economic growth, he became rich. But conversely, he later lost part of his wealth because his factory could not adapt to the economic policies of the military dictatorship, 'el proceso' (1976-1983). Having emigrated from Italy as a young boy, he did not feel 'Italian' in Argentina. Rather than

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<sup>4</sup>I will discuss the relation between time, narrative and nostalgia more extensively in the concluding chapter.



a national and patriotic sentiment, he developed a kind of regionalist and place-bound sense of belonging to his home-region, Piedmont. This was also furthered by working arrangements with other *Piemontesi* during the early part of his working life. One essential feature of his existence in Argentina was the fact that he made certain class-specific steps of social demarcation at exactly the same time as other Argentines and sons of immigrants. He took his first holiday, when the sea resort, Mar del Plata, was prospering, due to thousands of other middle and upper middle class aspirants investing their surplus in leisure (cf. Sebrelli 1970<sup>2</sup>:85-88). And he acquired Argentine citizenship at a time when many others also became naturalized, and when the 'sons of immigrants', the new middle classes, were forming the backbone of the Radical Party. He thus typified in many ways a particular kind of upwardly mobile Argentine middle class.

Domenico Donatello seemed from our conversations to be a nostalgic dreamer and loner, who tried to make sense of his life by recounting it selectively. The central figure in his narrative was his father, an anarchist at the turn of the century who travelled back and forth between Italy and Argentina. The strong emphasis on his father 'anticipated' the story of his own life as a free thinker and music lover. Somehow his own life was modelled on that of his father, but seemed to contain an unfulfilled prophecy which he could not live up to. To the listener, it seemed almost as if he was dying his father's life.

The third man, Leone Marinetti, is a leader of various Italian associations. His account reveals that being Italian or Argentine, should not be regarded as exclusive options. In his case, one identity was allocated to his activities within the associations and the other, to his activities outside them. It was possible to maintain both identities in different degrees at the same time. But in specific historical circumstances, like the Peronist government of 1973-1976, it was opportune to appear Argentine and eventually to take on Argentine citizenship (cf. his account).

### 3. Enrique Gerardi or becoming Argentine

Enrique Gerardi came to Argentina on October 26th, 1906, at the age of five. With him was his father, his mother, a brother and two sisters. One of his mother's brothers had come to Buenos Aires in 1899. When Enrique Gerardi first arrived with his parents, they stayed at his uncle's house in Vicente Lopez<sup>5</sup>. Enrique recalled:

"I can still remember the crossing. The steamer took the route, Genoa-Dakar-Buenos Aires. In Dakar, I remember the young black kids who swam near the boat where the passengers threw them coins. One of them smashed his head [on the ship]. - When we arrived at Buenos Aires we had to disembark in a small vessel because the port lacked [sufficient] depth."

Enrique's father, Fabrizio Gerardi, worked for the next 30 years as a gardener in Olivos<sup>6</sup>, near the site of today's presidential residence. Enrique Gerardi left elementary school in 1912, having not yet finished the fourth form, and began delivering bread with a horse-drawn cart. He remembers that, in the suburbs some of the large avenues, like Avenida Maipú in Olivos, were not yet paved. He continued:

"The bakery was run by Spaniards. At home I used to speak Piemontese [the dialect of Piedmont] with my mother who died in 1968. And at school we used to speak Spanish. When I was 18, by which time I had worked for 9 years, I wanted to give my life a new direction and I went on a campo [farm] to work for 3 months.

Then I worked in the Electrical Company CADE (Compañía Argentina de Electricidad). I used to study at evening classes and received a diploma in book-keeping (tenedor de libros).

I then worked (as a book-keeper) in the meat packing plant (frigorífico), 'Sánchez Tellería', but after a short time I left.

A friend of my brother-in-law had a mechanical workshop (taller mecánico) where I became the book-keeper, mechanic and virtual owner because the actual owner, Alberto Pellegrini from Turin, used to visit Italy for a longer period each year.

I earned 1000 Pesos a month which was a fortune at a time when the US\$ was worth at 2 to 3 Pesos.

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<sup>5</sup>Vicente Lopez is a northern suburb in Greater Buenos Aires.

<sup>6</sup>Olivos is a northern suburb in Greater Buenos Aires.

We had 10 labourers who earned 80 centavos to 1 Peso per hour<sup>7</sup>. We started repairing cars and later we built spare parts ourselves. I worked there from 1921 to 1933. I had an argument with the owner and eventually I left."

Gerardi's account so far concentrates largely on his working life. His father and paternal relatives had been golondrinas, agricultural workers travelling back and forth between the Italian and Argentine harvests.

Gerardi's work at the bottom of the social scale, as an unskilled school leaver and bread delivery man serve as an introduction to emphasize his later social mobility and the key turning points in life. Note the phrase: "I had to give my life a new direction". Enrique Gerardi operated in several contexts, each requiring different linguistic social skills: speaking Piemontese at home, and speaking Spanish at school and in the bakery with Spanish-speaking clients. Work was found near Gerardis' home in Olivos, and through kinship contacts. Speaking Piemontese was confined to the family, whereas Spanish was spoken outside. But even that should not be regarded as a static division. The relationship between the Italian spoken at home, and the Spanish spoken outside was dialectical, with each language or dialect producing gradual changes in the each other. Just as the very porteño/lunfardo variant of Spanish spoken in Buenos Aires was influenced by European immigrant languages, so in turn it influenced the Italian dialects, as can still be heard from the type of Calabrese spoken by immigrants from Calabria after the Second World War (Cara-Walker 1987, Minicuci 1989:48,98).

In terms of upward social mobility, Gerardi made an enormous step entering the mechanical workshop, a transition that was preceded by hard times and study. A

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<sup>7</sup>Gerardi's testimony is confirmed by Díaz Alejandro's statistical evidence on wage rates per hour/paper pesos:

	1904	1909-14	1920-21	1935-40
Skilled workers	0.40	0.55	0.74	0.97
Unskilled worker	0.24	0.35	0.49	0.54
Minors		0.13		0.32
Adult male workers in manufacturing, transport and construction		0.45		0.78

(after Díaz Alejandro 1970:42)

recurrent theme, and one much emphasized by immigrants, was the importance of 'educational capital' (cf. Bourdieu's term, 1987:32,143-150). In many cases this became essential to the immigrant's perception of his or her own achievements. This 'educational capital' was invested in the next generation (as will be seen with Gerardi's university educated children) and became at once a theme and desideratum of modern Argentina as a whole (cf. chapter 2). When commenting on immigrant history, Argentines would frequently stress stereotypical cases of poor immigrants whose sons had become professionals and academics. This is of course a leitmotif of social mobility amongst the immigrant nation and is still current in popular discourse.

In 1923, Gerardi took Argentine citizenship because he felt it was "convenient" in order for avoiding army service in Italy and would allow him to participate in local politics. In 1925/26, during the presidency of Marcelo T. de Alvear, he became a member of the Radical Party, the same party as the President. He has been a member of the party ever since and was once<sup>8</sup> a member of the comisión política (local party committee) of Vicente Lopez<sup>9</sup> district in Greater Buenos Aires. The Radical party was *the* party of the middle classes of immigrant origin (cf. chapter 3), and Gerardi's move to become an active member was opportune at a time when the party could grant real benefits to its clientele. As Rock has pointed out:

"In return for a vote in municipal, congressional and presidential elections the party, organized on a geographical basis in local committees, provided government patronage usually in the form of positions in the administration, or local charity activities. On many occasions and in many areas the party would provide cheap foodstuffs and systems of free medical and legal advice."

(Rock 1975:74-75)

During his life, Gerardi was *not* active in Italian associations, but he said he liked to remain friends with other Italians and to speak Italian with them in informal contexts, but not official ones. Retrospectively, Gerardi's tale is that of a self-made man: from bread-dispatcher to factory owner<sup>10</sup>. After the long 'liminal' phase as 'almost the owner' of

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<sup>8</sup>He did not specify the date.

<sup>9</sup>which is in electoral section 108(Walter 1985:26-27).

<sup>10</sup>The drive to make money, to succeed in the immigrant society and to discipline one's life according to a strict work ethic, is a typical ingredient of immigrants' success-stories. "To make [it in] America" (Hacer América in Spanish, or Fare l'America in Italian), often acquired these connotations in the New World, especially in the United States and Argentina.

the mechanical workshop, he eventually set up his *own* business in 1933.

Enrique recalled:

"On the 24th of November 1933 I set up a mechanical workshop with 5000 Pesos [own capital] in Loria 342 [street] in the barrio of Once (Federal District). In 1938 I bought other premises at Virrey Liniers 446-450 in Once which was auctioned by the Banco Hipotecario.

I put in 10% of my own capital and got 90% credit from the bank. We had 20 workers and the workshop was 70 meters long. We repaired motors and then worked for YPF (State Petrol Company) and Gas del Estado (State Gas Company). We were the only ones who had a machine to rebore tubes. We worked very well during the war [World War II] and employed 30 to 40 workers."

After 1933 Gerardi bought 15 apartments which he sold in the first years of the Perón Government when rents were frozen. In 1945, 1948, 1950 and 1953 he bought apartments which were for his children, "when they marry". In 1956 the factory moved to San Martín (Greater Buenos Aires) specializing now in gas appliances and gas valves. According to Gerardi they employed 125 people and did business worth of 500.000 US\$ per month. Gerardi was unequivocal about attributing the blame for the final bankruptcy of his company:

"Martínez de Hoz<sup>11</sup> made everyone bankrupt. We could not compete any more. In 1980 we had to liquidate the factory. The military government is also responsible for the foreign debt. Under all the other governments I could work. But with Martínez de Hoz we could not get the primary resources. And other countries like Brazil could produce at a cheaper rate."

Upward mobility and acquired social status are intended to be transmitted to, and to be consolidated in the next generation. Enrique Gerardi proudly emphasized the apartments he had bought for his children, 'when they will marry' and the capital he had invested

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Orsi (1985:155-156) writes of one of his interviewees who started from humble beginnings, later to become a comparatively wealthy owner of a hat and shoe repair shop in New York's financial district:

"He began our conversation by emphasizing the economic difficulties of his early years in New York City: 'I never stopped looking for a job. If I lose a job, right away I look for another one.' This established the necessary context for the main theme of his autobiography, 'I made money'. He used this phrase more than twenty times in an interview that lasted less than two hours. It was clear throughout our conversation that his determination to succeed in America had demanded a controlled and disciplined life that left little room for anything else." (Orsi 1985:156)

<sup>11</sup>Minister of Trade and Commerce 1976-1981, cf. chapter 3.

in giving them access to higher education. All the three sons and one daughter had degrees from technical highschools or universities. They had studied engineering and law, subjects which reflect an aspiration for practical knowledge rather than humanistic vocations. Gerardi saw himself as the *generational link* between the poor first generation and the successful second generation of descendants. He argued:

"My parents did not have the possibility of studying [his father was a peasant]. I gave my children what my parents could not give me. My children were luckier than I was. Although I only went to elementary school, I did manage to make progress and obtained engineering knowledge."

Upward social mobility is expressed, not only in education, but also in other status symbols: vacations, cars and the 'modern' equipment of the factory. In 1935, Gerardi took his first holiday in Mar del Plata, the fast rising seaside resort of the Argentine middle class (cf. Sebrelli 1970:85-88). In 1949, he sold some apartments and made his first journey to his home village in Piedmont, of which he remarks only that it was destroyed during the war. This was followed by a second visit in 1961. In 1972, and again in 1974, he travelled around the world. He proudly points out that the journey was 72 000 kms long. Recounting his life, Gerardi was obviously proud of his achievements, and even the eventual closure of his factory was seen retrospectively in positive terms:

"I said to myself: I don't have to be a millionaire, but only to live well. And finally I gained in health [that is when the factory closed and he did not start another business]."

Central to Gerardi's account remain the notion of work as *individual effort* (trabajo). It is the absence of individual effort that, according to Gerardi, explains the *collective failure* (despite the potential resources) of the Argentine economy, when compared with the rather recent success of Germany and Italy. he concluded:

"I have provided foreign exchange (devisas) and employment with my factory. In Argentina the people do not collaborate. But this is a rich country which has a future. Germany and Italy rose [after World War II] through hard work."

Gerardi's liking for precision and detail is also expressed in his accurate memory of workshop addresses and his statement: "I always liked numbers[counting]".

#### 4. Domenico Donatello or the Quiet Rebellion

In Domenico Donatello's narrative it is his *father*, an anarchist who lived in Italy and Argentina at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, who assumes the role of a 'modern' figure rebelling against the customs of the times. Donatello recalled:

"You could see him in our village, always without a hat. In those days, walking without a hat meant being a revolutionary. He was a strange character. He wanted others to improve on their mediocrity, which really has not changed much to the present day. My father was already classified [by the authorities] as having advanced ideas. He was independent, liked the theatre. He was always considered an enemy of the privileges of any government."

Somehow, Donatello's father anticipated his son's own approach to life. The 'agnostic' negation of dominant institutions like the church and the Italian monarchy by the father, was later paralleled by the son's solitary life as music lover in his leisure time, when he was a state employee in the waterworks Obras Sanitarias. The quest for change and the quiet revolt against the tide of history are recurrent themes in Donatello's account. However, his own life was not characterized by militant rebellion against the dominant, oppressive order, which had inspired his father to become an anarchist. Rather, a subtle but insistent critique is voiced from the standpoint of an observer, apparently withdrawn from the events of everyday life.

In Donatello's life history, the flow of time is sometimes marked by events of insurgence and oppression, as exemplified by Donatello's remarks on his father's return from Argentina to Italy in 1900:

"...the year Gaetano Bresci murdered King Umberto I of Italy, because he had ordered canons to shoot striking workers in the streets of Milan. So the motive existed. He killed him at Monza with a weapon, hidden in a bunch of flowers. That was Bresci, who had stayed in North America.

"So my father, who was 27 at the time, said:

'I want to see what is happening in Europe, after this regicide, to observe developments a little at close quarters'<sup>12</sup>.

But he went with the intention of returning, because he left a company at the port here.

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<sup>12</sup>The assassination of Umberto I was widely publicized in Buenos Aires, not least because of the strong Italian immigrant presence. According to the weekly magazine, Caras y Caretas, about 100 000 Italians marched through Buenos Aires expressing their grief (Solberg 1970:135). The magazine published 72.000 copies, twice the usual publication number, and was sold out very quickly. Caras y Caretas not only covered the assassination but also gave a background to the history of anarchism in Argentina (Prieto 1988:39-40).

But then he stayed for good.

"My father was an active anti-militarist who did not want to do military service in Italy and so went to live in Switzerland.

From time to time he would visit Italy where he had relatives. We are from the north, 70kms from the border. He got to know my mother, fell in love with her, and brought her to Switzerland where they married.

"I was born there in 1906.

Here [in Argentina], I am always considered Swiss. But I am not Swiss: I am an Italian born in Switzerland.

[But you have *Swiss* nationality?, A.S.]

No, I have both: here I am Swiss, but in Italy I am Italian. But *I am Italian*, I did military service in Italy. This was because my father eventually returned to Italy when he no longer feared persecution for not having done military service. He had some property, and his sisters and all our relatives were there, so we went to live in Italy. I continued to go to school in Italy and, when I was 20, I came here [to Buenos Aires].

"And because my father was already classified [by the authorities] as having 'advanced ideas' [we had difficulties again in Italy]. ...

"My father was well known [to the authorities] and was considered an enemy of any regime, be it monarchical, clerical or any other. Because he was an enemy of 'privilege' the rich were against him and the poor also, as they were ignorant and dominated by the priests. So he was considered something like the enemy of the people, like the title of Ibsen's play, "An enemy of the people", which my father put on stage.

He did not form part of a [political] group though. He wanted to be independent. He liked the theatre and organized plays, recitals, concerts and showed films in the little village theatre. These were all things of general culture: he wanted the people to study and become educated. He played the guitar, and he was a lover of music and travel. He did not smoke or drink."

Donatello opened his account with an assessment of his father's role during his early life.

The paternal grandfather (FF), Gaetano Donatello, had gone to Argentina in the mid 19th century to work in the northwestern province of Salta - where at the beginning of the 20th century he was also buried. His son, Romeo Donatello, Domenico's father, went to Argentina in 1886 at the age of 14, and later started a small company at the port of Buenos Aires. On his return to Italy in 1900, he left the business behind in Buenos Aires. As we have heard from Domenico's account, Romeo Donatello was an anarchist in a small village in Piedmont near the Swiss border, and he frequently had to cross the borders to escape persecution. Because of his father's political activities, which marked him out as an outsider in the village, Domenico Donatello had difficulty finding a job. For a short time he worked with an engineer in Messina, Sicily, but could not carry out a project for the company in Egypt because he fell ill. And again later, in Paris, where



he was offered work with a construction company, he could not obtain a visa or work permit. Eventually, he got in touch with relatives of his grandfather's second wife in Buenos Aires<sup>13</sup>, but again he was impeded from travelling by practical formalities. A letter in Spanish from his father to the Argentine consul<sup>14</sup> eventually helped him to get the visa. He left Italy in 1927:

"I embarked in Genoa on a French ship, the 'Formose' of the 'Lloyd Latino' based in Marseilles. And [by chance] I witnessed the sinking of the 'Principessa Mafalda'. We were near the Brazilian coast and eating on the lower deck. When we came up on deck, the sun, which had been on one side of the ship was on the other. So I thought that the ship must have turned around. And in fact it had got a message to help the shipwrecked from the 'Principessa Mafalda' and we took almost 200 of the shipwrecked to Brazil. I got my suitcase stolen by them. Some came on life boats and some just swam [to our ship] and they went to sleep in the cabins wherever they could find a place. I did not travel first class, but in the 'ordinary' class. I was lucky to have some things stored in the hold.

"[In Buenos Aires] I disembarked and spent the night in the 'Immigrant Hotel' (Hotel de los Inmigrantes)<sup>15</sup> and then went to the city centre. I could not get in touch with the relatives of my grandfather because they lived far away, up north in the provinces of Tucumán and Salta."

Donatello then found work for almost a year in a construction company, Francesco Martignoli from Milan, which specialized in reinforced concrete and the installation of heating. But he did not get on with a foreman (capataz), and during the economic crisis of 1929/1930, when it was very difficult to find work in Buenos Aires, he got a job as administrator and accountant (tenedor de libros) with a company running sawmills and maté-plantations (yerba mate) near Posadas, in the northeastern National Territory of Misiones<sup>16</sup>.

He returned in the early 1930s to Buenos Aires. He states that in the late 20s early 30s

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<sup>13</sup>Contacting relatives was a very frequent strategy among prospective emigrants (cf. chapters 2 and 5 on 'chain migration').

<sup>14</sup>consular district unknown.

<sup>15</sup>cf. chapter 5.

<sup>16</sup>In the 1920s the maté-boom began, attracting not only casual labourers to Misiones, but also settlers from Europe, for example, Polish Ukrainians and Galitzians. From 1881 to 1954, Misiones had the status of a National Territory, after which it became a province (cf. Bartolomé 1990:3,94,129).

Klemp (1985:114-117) has emphasized the division of labour between Buenos Aires as a manufacturing and export centre and the Northern interior provinces as producers of vegetables, fruits, tobacco, maté, cotton and quebracho-wood.

he could rent a furnished room in the centre of Buenos Aires for 15 pesos a month, eat a meal for 1 peso per day plus 10 centavos for the tip. As he recalls, these expenditures and the lack of inflation allowed him to make savings:

"The salary was 6 pesos per day. I already earned a peso extra because I knew how to draw construction plans, but the basic pay was 5 pesos<sup>17</sup>. And with that you had to live: buy clothing, buy tramway tickets and drink coffee at a bar; everything was counted. There was no centavo left. But all right, if you saved 10 centavos, you would always have 10 centavos: there was no inflation in those days.

"In 1932 there was a terrible economic crisis and I was still working some months here and some months there, doing clerical work in offices."

In 1933 Domenico Donatello passed exams for an advertised job with the State Waterworks OSN (Obras Sanitarias de la Nación), and entered the company as an engineering draughtsman (constructor de 1ª categoría) for domestic sanitary installations<sup>18</sup>, where he remained to until retirement in 1960.

Donatello's cultural interests included the reading of late 19th century and early 20th century authors, such as Anatole France and Charles Baudelaire (whom he read in French), and philosophers like Schopenhauer. More importantly, however, he profited from the wide range of cultural activities offered in central Buenos Aires in the 1920s and 30s. He became a regular theatre and opera-goer:

"I like music. I went regularly to the Teatro Colón. I went to sit in the gallery because it was cheaper. I was a frequent member of the audience during the opera season (stagione lirica) at the Teatro Colón. In those days there was also the Teatro Marconi, the L'Opera and the Politeama. They always had opera and operetta seasons. I liked the city more in those days.

"I had many friends who were musicians and enjoyed going to their gatherings. I was a good friend of Sorbelli, the flute player of the Teatro Colón, and I knew Luis Walter Pratesi, a great Tuscan violoncello player, very well.

When famous Italian musicians came, like Respighi<sup>19</sup>, Tito Schipa<sup>20</sup>, and Galliano Masini, the Tuscan tenor, I always had invitations to their concerts. We always had free tickets: so they had their secure 'claque' to applaud them. We did not miss one show.

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<sup>17</sup>cf. footnote 7.

<sup>18</sup>Domenico Donatello's work history in 1932-1933 reflects more general tendencies of the Argentine economy in those years. Díaz Alejandro (1970:94-99) has argued that after 1934 there "was no serious unemployment" (ibid.:94) and that the turning year for the Argentine economy after the 'great depression' was 1933, when the Argentine GDP "expanded every year until 1940" (ibid.:94).

<sup>19</sup>Ottorino Respighi, Italian composer, 1879-1936.

<sup>20</sup>Tito Schipa(1889-?), Italian Opera singer, who toured frequently to South America.

That I really enjoyed, but let's forget about the Italian associations.

"I had only Italian friends. Italians like me. We spoke in Italian. We did not speak Spanish amongst ourselves. I felt comfortable with them. We had the same tastes with regard to theatre, Niccodemi<sup>21</sup>, for example.

"More recently, this activity [meaning that of theatre companies visiting from abroad] stopped. The war [World War II] destroyed everything and did a lot of damage. It is not as it was before. One does not find the harmony as before."

It seems that the combination of interest in early 20th century cultural movements and urban forms of cultural consumption, such as his interest in and sentimental attachment to music and theatre, dominated the leisure side of Donatello's life. It was this aspect of urban culture, that was affordable by the rising middle class, in which he participated. His list of opera houses and theatres, many of which are now closed down or demolished, is by no means exhaustive and refers to different times and places in the Buenos Aires of the 1930s. Nevertheless, even without there being an in-depth study of 'popular' culture available<sup>22</sup>, it is safe to assume the existence of a thriving cultural life at the time<sup>23</sup>.

Culture was produced and consumed in Buenos Aires, but much of it was imported from abroad. The opera genre in particular relied on frequent visits from foreign, namely Italian and French companies, and many artists chose Buenos Aires as their temporary or permanent place of work.

The enjoyment of foreign culture, though received and mediated locally, characterizes the middle class eclecticism of men like Domenico Donatello, and surfaces also in accounts

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<sup>21</sup>Dario Niccodemi, Italian playwright, 1874-1934.

<sup>22</sup>See, however, King (1986) and Sarlo (1988) on literature, and for the 1950s Goldar (1980).

<sup>23</sup>cf. Díaz Alejandro's (1970:57) general judgement:

"By 1929 Buenos Aires had become one of the great cultural centers of the Spanish-speaking world; its newspapers and publishers often were the first to print the work of leading cultural figures. Several important essays of Miguel de Unamuno, first appeared in *La Nación*."

On theatre, see the interview with the actor Homero Carpena, concerning comedy-style of the *sainete*, which was particularly popular in the 1920s and 30s (*Página 12*, 13.12.1989).

of immigrants of other ethnic origins<sup>24</sup>. His life-style as the political free-thinker and consumer of culture made the comparatively narrow environment of the Italian associations less attractive to him. Furthermore, the emphasis on his North Italian, origins distanced him from South Italians. Donatello stated:

"I never liked to be in contact with the Italian associations. I did not feel comfortable with them. Italian immigration here consisted almost entirely of South Italians (meridionali). [In the 1930s ?] Oh, yes that was the first immigration, we [that is to say the North Italians] who had a bit of cultural education, came later."

Historically speaking, Donatello is wrong here: as outlined in chapter 2, North Italians, mainly from Liguria, Piedmont, the Veneto and Friuli dominated in the early years of mass-immigration and were only later superseded by Calabrians and Sicilians. Leaving out this early wave of northern immigration, and emphasizing only the recent southern wave, shows a vested personal interest. Donatello was wishing to differentiate his own life-history, in terms of cultural and ethnic categories, from the mass of other immigrants. He continued:

"They were not our enemies, but we considered those from the South of Italy to be somewhat unrefined. And I found that here [in the associations] the majority were Southerners. And I cannot get on with them. I prefer those from Northern Italy. People from Milan, Piedmont, down to Florence; I admire those from Tuscany, but after Florence [Southern Italy begins]."

When asked, if there was any political motive behind this,

Donatello replied:

"No! Politics had already disappeared. [And Fascism? A.S.] Oh, yes that is true there were also Fascists. I did not feel comfortable for that reason either. Can you imagine, me, brought up by my father? The whole thing about obeying, the fatherland (patria), the King, the House of Savoy etc. I could not stand it.

"I was a rebel, a quiet rebel so to speak, not active - but inside myself I really could not do it [i.e. go to the associations].

I always stayed on my own, alone. I like solitude. I like music."

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<sup>24</sup>"Buenos Aires was the 'ecumenically' most cultured city of the Spanish speaking world; not so much for its production but for its reception of [other] cultures. In my time, a young man could see Pavlova and Nijinski dance, Siegfried Wagner conducting the works of his father, go to exhibitions of French impressionists, to lectures given by Clemenceau and Ortega [Ortega y Gasset], see theatre plays in five languages, including Yiddish..."

(The Spanish immigrant and writer Eduardo Blanco Amor; cited by Rodriguez 1989:24).

It seems that in Donatello's narrative there is a recurrent sentiment or feeling of 'losing sense'. While it is true that the most central experiences of his life refer to epochs earlier in this century in Italy, and the two or three decades after his arrival in Argentina, it is also true that even this period was already redolent of earlier times which had been 'lost' and which he could only recapture nostalgically. His heightened sensitivity for the passing of time surfaces also very clearly in the following passages. Asked whether he tried to get in contact with anarchists after his arrival in 1927, he replied melancholically:

"Oh no, that environment [i.e. of the anarchists] was already gone. I did not find anything any more."

As with other immigrants, it was for Donatello the Second World War which cut him off in practical terms from social and cultural communication with Europe<sup>25</sup>. Theatre and music companies ceased not come to Argentina, European intellectuals sought exile in Buenos Aires, and visits to see relatives in Europe were postponed. When, eventually in 1960, and again in 1965 he visited the places of his youth in Northern Italy and Switzerland, there was little left for him to reminisce about and again he felt estranged:

"In 1960 I returned for the first time after 33 years. I went to Switzerland to see my mother's brother and his wife who lived in Lausanne. I went to Italy where I had a brother who died three years ago [i.e. 1986]. My father had died in 1948.

"I returned again in 1965 to find that I still had some relatives. Others had died meanwhile, such as my uncle in Switzerland. I still remember seeing him for the last time in Lausanne. Then I went to Montreux and to Ormont where I was born. I went to stay with a family where people still remembered my father. They said he was a person you could not forget. He was a Bohemian, an artist and an anarchist. But a 'good' anarchist.

"When [during Fascism] the King visited a wool factory in my village, the police got an order beforehand to arrest my father. However, a fascist official, though politically totally opposed to my father, insisted that the order should not be carried out, and said: 'If we have to arrest Romeo Donatello, we would have to arrest the whole population of Italy.'

But that does not exist any more, I did not find anything."

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<sup>25</sup>Although Donatello did not mention specifically whether or not he wanted to return during this period, the Second World War would have made the return to Europe impossible; cf. the statement of a Greek immigrant in La Plata, the capital of the Province of Buenos Aires:

"I did not feel much about leaving, because I thought I would be gone for just two or three years and would then return to my country. We Greeks love that piece of land [i.e. Greece], but then the war came, and we ... became accustomed in Argentina."  
(Lahitte 1987:284)

## 5. Leone Marinetti and the 'Italian' Tradition

Leone Marinetti was born in 1910 in Milan, in a street with the ironic name, 'Corso Buenos Aires'. He was the son of a cabinetmaker who had emigrated to Milan from the Emilia-Romagna region. In 1912, the Marinettis, composed of Leone, his three brothers, his mother and his father, emigrated to Buenos Aires. His father, Paolo Marinetti, was a militant member and leader of the Republican Party in Italy. At a political rally in Ravenna he once met Mussolini who was a "Socialista Massimalista" at the time.

In Buenos Aires, Paolo Marinetti became a leader of the Centro Republicano, an the association of Italian Republicans. Leone frequently accompanied his father to the meetings and rallies of the Centro Republicano and also to those of the associations of his home-region, Emilia-Romagna. Thus at a very early age, he became involved in the associational life of the Italian community in Buenos Aires, with all its political and regional factions and divisions. This was to place him in opposition first to monarchist and later, to fascist associations.

Leone Marinetti *never returned* to Italy. His identity as an Italian in Buenos Aires was and is shaped<sup>26</sup> by his commitment to a particular Italian political tradition, that is Republicanism and its representation in Argentina. His political affiliation to the Republicans placed him in a marginal and oppositional position to various phases of Italian and Argentine political history, such as Italian Fascism(1922-1943), and the Argentine military and authoritarian governments after the first coup d'état in 1930. Reflecting on his political life, he finds that his Republican credo was compatible only with a few brief periods of contemporary Argentine history: the early governments of the Argentine Radical Party (UCR, Unión Cívica Radical), and the governments of Arturo Frondizi(1962-63), and Radical Presidents, Arturo Illia(1963-1966) and Raúl Alfonsín(1983-1989). On the other hand, the positive image of Italy embodied for him the democratic and Republican tradition, as opposed to Fascism in Italy and totalitarian regimes in Latin America.

The organization of and participation in celebrations of Italian patriotic holidays were the main events of the year which marked and redefined the boundaries of that part of the

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<sup>26</sup>He is still active in Italian associations and a board member of FEDITALIA; cf. chapter 10.

Italian community which was organized in associations, externally vis-à-vis Argentine society and internally vis-à-vis its own subdivisions. Symbolic imagery and gestures expressed by active members and leaders of the Italian community, included the erection of statues and monuments to honour the heroes of the Italian Risorgimento and the Italian Republic<sup>27</sup>, of whom some, like Garibaldi, played an important part in the politics of the young republics, Argentina and Uruguay.

Marinetti discussed his relationship to Italy, as follows:

"I never had the possibility of returning to Italy, but I always kept up the contact. My father was a great patriot who remained Italian throughout his life. And he went with us children to all the Italian events (manifestazioni italiane). I remember the commemoration of the anniversary of the martyrdom of Guglielmo Oberdan, a republican hero<sup>28</sup>. The Centro Repubblicano organized popular gatherings every year to celebrate the 8th of February, the anniversary of the Roman Republic; the 10th of March, the death of Mazzini and the 20th of September, the day of true and complete union of Italy, the destruction of temporary papal authority and the proclamation of Rome as the capital of Italy.

"My father was a member of the Centro Repubblicano which was situated where the street Montevideo intersects with Corrientes. The centre had to suspend its activities in the first years of the Perón-government [1943-1955], because Perón represented the interests of the Axis, of Nazism. That is why he prohibited democratic activities. For example, the celebration of the second of June, the anniversary of the Italian Republic, had to take place in secrete and without permission from the police at Italia Libera, another [antifascist] committee to which my father belonged. Italia Libera was the union of Italian democrats who did not adhere to the politics of the Axis powers, and who were supported by the Roosevelt Government. So thanks to the Roosevelt government, the Italians in Latin America were not considered enemies, which meant they made a distinction with regard to the Germans, whose properties were expropriated and the Italians whose properties were respected. And that thanks to the Italia Libera movement. One of its principal founders was the engineer, Torcuato di Tella<sup>29</sup>.

"The Centro Repubblicano suspended its activities because the dictatorship of Perón did

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<sup>27</sup>Marinetti was proud of his Republican 'ancestors' in Argentina whose activities even predated the Italian Republicans. He recalled: "...and after the 1850s, a large number of Republican immigrants came from Italy. In 1879 the first monument of Mazzini was inaugurated here in Buenos Aires, in the Plaza Roma. It was made by a famous Italian sculptor, Monteverde. That was eight years before the first monument of Mazzini was inaugurated in Italy! The avantgarde of the [Italian] Republicans stayed here [in Buenos Aires]."

<sup>28</sup>Guglielmo Oberdan, born 1858, fought for the independence of Triest and Istria from Austria. He was executed by the Austrian authorities in 1882.

<sup>29</sup>Torcuato Di Tella was a leading Italo-Argentine industrialist, who had emigrated in the early 20th century to Argentina (cf. Cochran/Reina 1962).

not allow certain democratic doctrines. Perón followed the directives of von Therman, Hitler's ambassador in Argentina.

Perón was enthusiastic about Italian fascists and helped them. And if you were not a fascist, you had no freedom of action. For example, when Paris was liberated by the French, we could not celebrate it in Buenos Aires.

[Perón's regime] was clearly fascist. Eventually, when the Axis powers were losing the war, he aligned himself with the Allies, the United States and England. He played a double game."

As Marinetti's account reveals, Italian political and cultural activities in Argentina acquire a dynamic of their own. They are not simply transplanted traditions. They enter into complex relationships and alliances with the politics of the Italian associations in Argentina, which can be very different from those in Italy, and with Argentine politics. For Marinetti and other Italian leaders, Argentine history and politics do not exist in their own right, but are always understood and interpreted in relation to the specific politics of Italians in Argentina. In cases like Marinetti's, where the immigrant Italian has virtually never lived in Italy, the claim of *being Italian* is substantiated in various ways: through the practice of the Republican Italian associational life; through the maintenance of the Italian language and, to a lesser degree, through the consumption of Italian food. The first is a strong ideological claim whose ancestry goes back to the unification of Italy in 1861 and the foundation of the Italian Republic in 1870. By linking his own political development in Argentina with the 'foundation myth' of the Italian Republic, Marinetti can uphold his 'Italian' identity, even in times when the 'real' Italians of Argentina (that is people born in Italy) were becoming less and less<sup>30</sup>. Unlike Donatello who, in his solitary approach to life is not tied to Italian associations, Marinetti is active in the antifascist associations of the Italian community. The claim to be Italian, to identify strongly with certain parts of Italian history and to oppose others, has its Republican beginnings, its Fascist intermezzo, and the Post-WWII Italian Republican phase. It is on these grounds that Marinetti's political practice and interpretation bestows *continuity* on a *discontinuous* history. The continuity is stressed, because it is more compatible with the contemporary history of the Italian Republic after the Second World War. It is a continuity of its own kind though, established to serve the particular interests Italians in Argentina, and reflecting specific divisions within the Italian community. Republican

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<sup>30</sup>In fact, numbers were decreasing once mass-immigration had stopped (apart from the comparatively small contingent of post-World War II immigrants); cf. chapters 2 and 3.



politicians from Italy maintained only sporadic relations with 'Republicans' in Argentina.

It was only as late as 1970 that the Republican Senator, Ugo LaMalfa, visited Buenos Aires for the 100th anniversary of the 20th September 1870 when the Centro Republicano restarted its activities.

In Marinetti's interpretation, the various sequences of Italian and Argentine history are linked to different degrees of progress and advancement of society. The theme of progress surfaces most powerfully in his account of his youth and schooldays:

"At home we spoke in romagnolo [the dialect of Emilia-Romagna region], My father, my mother, my brothers [born in Italy] and also my Argentine brothers and sisters [i.e. the two brothers and one sister born in Argentina] all spoke romagnolo. But they remained Italians by speaking Italian. I learned Italian just by going to the Italian associations with my father and speaking Italian very often in the family. I studied at Argentine state schools and at University, but I always strived to remain Italian.

As children we helped our mother to make cappelletti [type of pasta from Emilia-Romagna]. And we had gatherings with other romagnoli where we always ate cappelletti.

"Quite the contrary: there was no prejudice against Italians in Argentine State Schools. I went to the commercial highschool, Carlos Pellegrini, which was part of the Faculty of Economics of the University of Buenos Aires. And one of the teachers in History was Dr. Cesar Alberto Ruiz. I knew him because he was part of the committee, for the erection of the statue of General Belgrano<sup>31</sup> in Genoa [Italy]. I was working as an office employee during the day, so I would go to highschool in the evening. One evening, this teacher said:

'Marinetti, you will give the next lesson on Greek culture and civilization in Italian'. He was a great admirer of Italy and the Italian immigration.

"I always felt comfortable (comodo) remaining Italian in an Argentine environment. For example, under the Peronist government of Italo Luder in 1975<sup>32</sup>, I was to be appointed to a public office in the Ministry of Welfare. I was to represent the Mutual Aid Societies of all Argentina. I was chosen from a list of three candidates (terna). The board consisted of three members of the Argentine State and three members of the private sector, among them the Mutual Aid Societies. They are very important for Italians, as most associations were originally founded under this legal arrangement. I was appointed to public office without having Argentine citizenship. Because I never wanted to be a civil servant, I always wanted to remain Italian. But the minister said: 'We'll appoint him anyway, and give him time to take on Argentine citizenship.'

After a few months I was able to take advantage of the treaty on double-citizenship,

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<sup>31</sup> Manuel Belgrano (1770- 1820), the son of a merchant from Liguria and later member of the city government(cabildo), was a main leader of the independence movement from Spain.

<sup>32</sup>Italo Luder was the interim chief executive of the Government in 1975 when Isabel Perón took sick leave from the presidency (Rock 1987:388); cf. also chapter 3.

which prevented me from losing my original Italian nationality. But [after the coup d'état] in March 1976, the [military] Government of Videla sacked all the civil servants of the previous government, without giving any motive."

Leone Marinetti idealized the time before the first coup d'état in 1930:

"Here in Argentina the system was a very democratic system. Private schools did not exist. All the schools were provided free by the State. So the children of the immigrants, whether rich or poor, were all considered the same in State Schools. They all wore white school uniforms. This was the great educational achievement of Sarmiento<sup>33</sup>. And the schools had magnificent buildings in Buenos Aires. They provided a cup of milk free for each student.

"When I went to Highschool there were more Jewish students than Italians. But that did not make any difference. I was active in politics. We had created the Student Centre which printed pamphlets. It was without party political orientation, but we defended democracy. We fought against the shortcomings of the late Yrigoyen government [1928-1930]<sup>34</sup>. But we did not agree with the military government of General Uriburu<sup>35</sup>. And the students staged a great campaign against the government of Uriburu. We went into the streets shouting: '¡Libros sí, botas no!' (books yes, [soldiers'] boots no!). The demonstration was forbidden, so we were sent for to prison for two days. ...

"The best president during my lifetime in Argentina was Marcelo T. de Alvear (1922-1928)<sup>36</sup>. Alvear belonged to one of the richest families in Argentina. But he had trouble with his family because he had married an Italian opera singer, Regina Pacini, which at the time was a considered a scandal by the local 'aristocracy'. She was born in Portugal, where her father was an Italian consul. She was a great lady. She did not interfere in politics like other Presidents' wives [he is referring here to Eva Perón]. The best government was that of Alvear. The city of Buenos Aires was the cleanest in the world. It was the city with the most economical fares in public transport. The public services worked well. You put a letter in the letter box and the next day it was in the hands of the addressee. There were no strikes. There were no political persecutions. Argentina occupied the sixth place among the economies of the world and was a leading exporter. Villas miserias(shantytowns) did not exist.

"And there was a special treatment provided for the immigrants: when the immigrants arrived here without work, they were housed in the Hotel de los Inmigrantes, like my father and I [when we arrived]. They were given free food, until they found employment. And then those immigrants who did not have much of a professional qualification were employed in the [English] Railways, and the Tramway[of Buenos Aires]. The main

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<sup>33</sup>cf. chapter 2.

<sup>34</sup>cf. chapter 3.

<sup>35</sup>General José Felix Uriburu, Argentine President from 1930 - 1932, following the first military coup in Argentine history, cf. chapter 3.

<sup>36</sup>Marcelo T. de Alvear, Argentine President, 1922-1928.

representative of the railways was an Italian, the engineer, Pedriali<sup>37</sup>. So, when an unemployed Italian immigrant was recommended to him, Pedriali would employ him immediately."

During his lifetime which, apart from the first two years, he spent entirely in Argentina, Marinetti carefully avoided adopting Argentine citizenship because he did not want to become a civil servant in the Argentine administration. While he did not want to compromise his ideals, it is probably too simplistic to explain his Italian Republican ideology as a defensive strategy against Argentine institutions. Whilst criticizing the Argentine State, he did, at the same time, acknowledge its achievements of the early years, personified for him in the figure of D.F. Sarmiento and his quest for education and modernization.

The expression of ethnic identity came into conflict with the Argentine State, particularly when linked to class conflict, such as the labour unrest and strikes of the early 20th century in Buenos Aires (cf. Solberg 1970) and the strikes of farmworkers and sharecroppers in the Pampas (cf. Gallo 1983, cf. also chapter 2). It has often been argued that the process of unifying the immigrants and thus 'building' the modern Argentine State, was carried out largely by the second generation of immigrants who went first to the schools<sup>38</sup>, which were both obligatory and free, and then on to higher education and subsequent professional jobs (cf. Germani 1975:59). At the beginning of the century, State education was deliberately used by the nationalist devisers of the curriculum in order to create a patriotic sentiment (cf. Solberg 1970:145f.). But even though the State institutions were pursuing this massive task of secondary socialization, they must have allowed for some diversity at the time. For it seems, what Marinetti's account reveals, is that at times different ethnic identities could be expressed relatively freely without necessarily getting into conflict with the State ideology.

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<sup>37</sup>José Pedriali, 1867 - 1932, was engineer and administrator of the Anglo-Argentina tramway. The company later bought seven other lines. Parts of the extension were financed by the Banco de Italia y Río de la Plata (cf. Petriella 1976:520, and Mercadante 1976:71).

What Marinetti actually describes seems to resemble the *padrone* system in the United States and Canada, where Italian entrepreneurs, mediators and foremen employed mainly their fellow countrymen. To my knowledge there has been no research on this phenomenon in Argentina.

<sup>38</sup>In 1906, the Principal of one of the most renowned highschools, the Colegio Nacional de Buenos Aires, demanded the authorities to "*argentinize* our education", in order to assimilate the children of the immigrants (Babero/Devoto 1983:20; my italics).

The success of the unification process had to allow for actual differences. Marinetti's admittedly singular case makes this very clear: not only did he never feel uncomfortable being Italian in school, but he was even positively encouraged by his teacher to give a lesson in Italian. On the other hand, activities related to the Italian associations, and to the expression of a collective identity, were far from being exclusive to Italians and their descendants. A man like Ruiz, Marinetti's highschool teacher of non-Italian descent, could participate in Italian events once he had shown an interest. Italian feasts, celebrations, and associational life as a whole were accessible to non-Italians. The criteria for participation were defined by activity and practice rather than by descent<sup>39</sup>. This means that the boundary of ethnic demarcation was permeable in both directions (cf. Cohen 1989:12-15, 116-118; Woolard 1989:6-11, 41-60), and that definitions of the ethnic community were constantly reformulated.

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<sup>39</sup>Compare this, on the other hand, with the example of an Argentine who despite of his English surname was perceived by other Italians and Italo-Argentines in the association of San Martín as 'Italian', because his mother came from Friuli (cf. chapter 10).

## 6. Comparisons

The accounts of these three men show how Italian immigrants developed different strategies in responding to changing historical situations in Argentina.

Comparing the narratives, it becomes evident that they do not share any generalized notion of Italy and Italianess. Instead, each makes reference to very particular notions of Italy. The images and understandings of Italy are shaped by the particular life-histories of the three men in Argentina and by their regional affiliations in Italy.

For Enrique Gerardi, first-hand experience of life in Italy is remote and refers only to a very early stage in his life. However, there is no mention of a *national* sense of belonging (i.e. being Italian). What is important for him is that he belongs to a specific region (Piedmont) and comes from a particular village. In the realm of the family, language, the Piedmontese dialect, regional food and a local sense of belonging, *campanilismo* continues to be important in Buenos Aires. It seems that these regional 'Italian' characteristics become less important after primary socialization in the family, and are augmented and altered by secondary socialization in the school and in working life. Enrique Gerardi continued to have contact with his fellow-regionals and the boss of the taller mecánico which eventually he took over, was a man from Turin (Piedmont). While this was not indispensable for Gerardi's career, neither was it accidental and it helped to create a favourable working situation for him, as, for example, when the owner went on frequent visits to Italy leaving Gerardi in charge.

This example shows that regional and local identities, mainly in their expression of kinship-ties and friendship-networks, continued to have meaning in the immigrant society. It is pointless to speculate whether a regional sense of belonging was expressed with regard to dialect or food, which in many cases it may not have been, or whether it was 'reduced' to a common minimal denominator such as the mere fact of coming from the same region. Even if these Piemontese relatives and friends did not speak only Piemontese themselves, but also cocoliche, lunfardo and other local porteño dialects, it was their social interaction that remained decisive for the integration of Enrique Gerardi into Argentine society.

While the individual experiences of the three men are clearly different, they illuminate at the same time more general processes of ethnicity in Argentina. I have argued in the introduction that ethnicity is a process (Fischer 1987:176) and involves the facility of boundary drawing (Barth 1969), that is to say demarcation in relation to others. It is a

process of symbolic group-constitution. In Argentina ethnicity can be expressed in many ways. Different claims to identity, such as the question of being Italian or being Argentine, seldom come into conflict with each other. This is best illustrated by the case of Leone Marinetti. He has a formidable record as a life-long activist and leader of Italian associations. Yet this does not set him in opposition to Argentine institutions, in which he simultaneously participated both in his education and in his working life, when he was employed by Argentine companies. He represents thus very much the 'ideal' foreigner of the 1853 Argentine constitution which granted every foreigner the right to work and live in the Argentine.

Although there are no formal obstacles to full participation in the social and economic life of Argentina, Marinetti set his own distinct borderline. He did not want to become a civil servant. His political allegiances clearly lay with his Republican Italians, which as we have seen placed him in a certain opposition to some Argentine governments and in a tacit alliance with others.

He interprets contemporary Argentine history from this particular point of view. But even maintaining ideologically this life-long attitude of an expatriate, which in practical terms found its expression in the refusal of Argentine citizenship, he eventually was employed by the Argentine State. He became the representative of the Mutual Aid Societies in the Welfare Ministry. Furthermore, the treaty on double nationality allowed him (like many other 'Italians') to legalize a status, which he had been enjoying throughout his life. In other words, he would become Argentine, whilst at the same time maintaining his Italian identity and symbolizing it through the retention of citizenship.

Marinetti told us that he never returns to Italy. But in a way, one might say: there is no need to return. *His 'Italy' and 'Italian' tradition were and still are created in Argentina*, with specific Argentine connotations, built and shaped in the Argentine context.

Domenico Donatello presents us with a case which at the outset appears quite different, but on closer analysis, displays similar features. Donatello is *not* active in Italian associations for three reasons: he does not like associational life in general and prefers lone activities; his North Italian ethnocentric view prevents him from mixing with Southerners, whom he finds dominate the associations, and he opposes Fascism. Still, he insists that he is Italian and *not* Swiss. And he finds himself in a very nostalgic mood when he speaks about his home village to which he returned only twice. His not taking Argentine citizenship did not pose any obstacle to his becoming a life-long employee of

the State Waterworks. His claim to be Italian is ultimately linked to a prolongation of the lyrical anarchist tradition of his father: gatherings of friends and musicians with whom he speaks Italian (though not exclusively), and the enjoyment of music and literature. In the latter Donatello is of course very typical of the eclectic middle classes of Buenos Aires in general.

As I have demonstrated in this chapter, facets of ethnicity, of being Italian in Buenos Aires, are not exclusively defined by institutionalized forms of ethnic expression. The Italian associations allowed their active members to be Argentine in outside contexts. In fact, being part of an ethnic association in a certain period of history was perfectly compatible with being Argentine. It did not mark a person off from the rest of Argentine society (Germani 1970:321, Korn 1989<sup>2</sup>:159-160). Similarly, failure to participate in ethnic associations did not make a person 'less' Italian.

## CHAPTER 8

### 'Modernity' and 'Progress' as Argument: A Case Study

#### 1. Introduction

The last chapter depicted a variety of ways of becoming Argentine in this century. As the argument was based on the life-histories of three unrelated informants, it might have given the impression that these ways existed harmoniously side by side. This chapter will present a slightly different perspective and stress the controversial nature of the process by which Italian immigrants and their descendants become Argentine.

I will develop the argument from a discussion which took place between a first generation immigrant and a descendant of immigrants concerning changing gender roles and European influences in Argentina. The discussion, which I shall reproduce, is part of a more general perception among Italian immigrants and their descendants (and porteños more generally) of what I have described in chapters 2 and 3 as the 'inversion of roles' between Italy and Argentina. It is therefore crucial to my concern to demonstrate the interplay between informants' perception and historical periods. Moreover, the arguments put forward by the immigrant and the descendant are not only to be seen against what is perceived as failed modernization and development, but reflect also the interests of various social classes of immigrant origin who participated in it.

#### 2. The Discourse of Modernity and Progress

As analysis of the discussion will demonstrate, different notions of 'modernity' and 'progress' are embodied in the individual's perception of personal achievement during his or her lifetime. In Buenos Aires such notions are part of a wider discourse on the European contribution to the development of Argentine society. Depending upon the context and the standpoint of the speaker, Europe is viewed, either as a modernizing, progressive force, or as an oppressive, imperialist power.

The *first* position gained prominence with the writings of Argentina's President, D.F. Sarmiento (1811-1888), who viewed Argentina's potential for progress and modernization as caught between such exclusive options as: civilization vs. barbarism, city vs. pampa,



citizen vs. gaucho, sedentarism vs. nomadism, and constitutionalism vs. caudillismo. The *second* goes back to the caudillos, provincial warlords who opposed the central government in Buenos Aires and the dominating role of the city in exporting agricultural products, and importing immigrants and European capital. Later, part of this attitude was incorporated into Peronism with its rhetoric of an independent way to develop Argentina (cf. chapters 2 and 3).

In contemporary Buenos Aires, views of modernity and progress are used in arbitrary ways and may be regarded as facets of ideological battles between various social classes in Argentina. As Taylor (1979, 1981) has shown in her work on the controversial yet complementary myths about Eva Perón, which were created by both the working class and the upper class of Buenos Aires, each group reads events in its own way<sup>1</sup>. Of course, not every discourse in contemporary Buenos Aires reflects ideological frictions. Frequently, the recurrent theme of European mass immigration is cast in terms of ethnicity. Furthermore, in times of economic crisis, arguments which locate progress and development often become circular and repetitive. Supposedly accomplished phases of modernity and progress are located in a different *time* and *space*, that is to say in Argentina's past 30 and more years ago, and elsewhere, in Europe and North America. Different versions evaluating modern history are contested by immigrants of different periods and different 'generational' positions as descendants of immigrants<sup>2</sup>. Immigrants to Argentina are always spoken about in relation to earlier and later immigrants and their descendants. Although Argentina has ceased to be a society of mass immigration for more than 50 years, the problematic and conflict-ridden formation of modern Argentina through immigration is still present in everyday discourse. Similarly,

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<sup>1</sup>Taylor contrasts different interpretations of Eva Perón's life-history which she calls 'myths'. 'The Lady of Hope' which synthesized a glorious image of the benefactress of the poor and the working class was put forward by Eva's Peronist middle class followers. The upper class, and more generally, anti-Peronist version is described by Taylor as the 'woman of the black myth', where Eva Perón is portrayed as the child of a brothel and later, as the President's wife squandering Argentina's fortune on expensive furs and dresses from Paris to impress the poor (Taylor 1979:72-111; 1981:119-138,229-233).

<sup>2</sup>see chapter 1 for a discussion of generation and period of immigration. One pattern I encountered frequently, were single men who came to Argentina after World War II and then married into families of earlier Italian immigration. In this chapter, Giovanni Petrarca, who married an Argentine woman of Italian descent, represents such a case (cf. chapter 6 for more examples).

in Italian associations (cf. also chapter 10), where immigrants and descendants of different immigration periods mix, one will find mutually contested versions on the history of Italy and Argentina. The remaining Italian associations are now run largely by first generation immigrants who came in the last period of immigration after World War II, but there are also second and subsequent generation descendants among the membership. The discourse on the European immigrant's contribution to the formation of Argentina at the end of the last and beginning of this century is accessible to all generations. However, the *emphasis* will shift according to interest, life and family history of the speaker.

### 3. The Participants

The following example illuminates the above point by focusing on the discussion between a descendant of immigrants and a first generation immigrant. Each of them invokes his or her version of Argentine and Italian history. Their opinions are very much linked to the selective reading of their own immigrant histories.

Juana Asti is the fourth generation descendant of wealthy Genovese traders and bankers, who arrived in the 1850s<sup>3</sup> to establish an Italian bank, the Banco de Italia y Río de la Plata<sup>4</sup>, in Montevideo and Buenos Aires. She remembers that, in her family, only her

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<sup>3</sup>Juana Asti could not provide the date of birth of her FFF nor of his arrival in Buenos Aires. Petriella (1976:613), in his biographical sketches of Italo-Argentines, also remains vague: he gives Genoa as the birthplace and states that Juana Asti's FFF was part of a commission to build the Italian Hospital in 1858. The birth of a son to FFF in Buenos Aires (FFB to Juana Asti) is also mentioned for 1858. Emigration to Buenos Aires must, then, have begun before 1858.

<sup>4</sup>In 1987 the Argentine Central Bank authorized the takeover of the Banco de Italia y Río de La Plata by the Italian bank, Banca Nazionale del Lavoro (Del Bello 1989:443). The take-over of the bank shows yet again, how much times have changed, and the economic positions of Argentina and Italy have been reversed.

One of the thriving forces behind the foundation of the bank was Fernando Devoto, with whom Juana Asti's forefathers entered a partnership. Devoto's elite status and enormous wealth is neatly summarized by Rock:

"Among those [of the Argentine elite] of Italian ancestry was Antonio Devoto, the founder and patron of Villa Devoto, an expanding middle-class neighbourhood in the western part of the city. In a way typical of the elites as a whole, Devoto had multiple interests in land, banking, trade, public works, and manufacturing. Among his

grandmother spoke the Genovese dialect (xeneixe<sup>5</sup>) and cooked pesto, the Ligurian basil sauce for pasta dishes. Although she comes from a branch of the family which - she says - belongs to the middle class (clase media), she still retains the customs of the rising immigrant bourgeoisie at the turn of the century-period (cf. Scarzanella 1981). With other relatives, she commemorates the death of prominent family members at masses celebrated each year in the Church, Iglesia del Pilar<sup>6</sup> in the upper class barrio of Recoleta, and she is proud to point out that she is 'an Asti by birth'. Her great grandfather(FFF) was one of the co-founders of the Banco, and a grand uncle(FFB) was an influential painter in Buenos Aires and co-founder of the Museum for Fine Arts.

Her opponent in the discussion is Giovanni Petrarca. Born in a small town on the Ligurian coast in 1927, he became a director with a multinational company in Milan. He married an Argentine woman whose parents had emigrated from his home town in Liguria. In 1964 he decided to move to Argentina. He is now the president of the Istituto per la Cultura Ligure (Ligurian Cultural Institute). Founded in 1986, the institute profited from the new interest that the Italian regions were showing in their emigrants abroad (cf. chapter 10). These institutes, which now exist with different regional affiliations (like Veneto, Liguria), have access to funds from the home region, and their presidents operate as middlemen, allocating resources to members in the form of travel scholarships and language courses. Their proposed aim is to further the understanding of the Italian home region in Argentina and, to this end, lectures on the history and culture of the home region and exchanges of students are organized. The Istituto per la Cultura Ligure allocates travel scholarships, granted by the Italian Region of Liguria, to young Argentines of Ligurian and Italian descent who want to study Italian language and, in particular, Ligurian culture and history in short summer courses in Genoa.

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landholdings in 1910 were 80,000 hectares and seven *estancias* in the province of Buenos Aires, 26,000 hectares in Santa Fe on two *estancias*, another 75, 000 hectares in Córdoba among four, and 30, 000 on one *estancia* in the more remote La Pampa territory. Devoto also possessed extensive urban property in central Buenos Aires and was founder and president of the Banco de Italia y Rio de la Plata." (Rock 1987:173)

<sup>5</sup>Alternative spellings are: xeneise, yeneise, geneize, geneise, zeneise (Meo Zilio/Rossi 1970:83).

<sup>6</sup>The churches of Pilar, Basilica del SS. Sacramento and Socorro are among the traditional upper-class churches of Buenos Aires.

Since 1986, Juana has worked for the institute on a voluntary basis, an activity which establishes for her a link with her forefathers who came from Italy. A re-negotiation of tradition takes place within her perception: the 'patrimony' of the ancestors is somehow enlivened with new meaning through her own activity. It is as if she is continuing their project with other means:

"I don't get any salary at the institute. I work here out of love for my ancestors (ancestros): to give back to them a little bit of what they have given to Argentina. And to give back to Liguria, what my ancestors have given to me."

#### 4. The argument

In the following discussion<sup>7</sup>, Giovanni Petrarca sets the pace by opposing what he sees as his European values of order, progress and individualism to Argentine disorder, authoritarianism and an Indian and Spanish colonial past.

Throughout the discussion Giovanni Petrarca speaks Italian and Juana Asti Spanish<sup>8</sup>.

Giovanni Petrarca:

"When I arrived in 1964, Argentina was a great disappointment to me. In Italy I had worked with a German multinational company and got my professional training in Germany. I could not integrate myself, not even now with the family of my father-in-law. My father-in-law had a local education. And that's why there were always frictions.

"I come from a system which emphasizes rigidity, order and foresight. The Ligurians are very foresighted and the South Americans are exactly the opposite. Whereas I could integrate with German society after six months, I cannot integrate here, even after 25 years and even though I took on Argentine citizenship.

"Although there are some Ligurian associations, they all have the same defect: they do not give the children of their members the kind of cultural incentive which could produce the desire to know their origins and history. So it's the children of these members of Italian associations in general who integrate themselves mentally into Argentine society, and forget their origins.

They are people who have a fatherland (*patria*), but no ancestors (*antenati*). They do not have history. Therefore they are spineless, without willpower. They have become totally South American (*sudamericanizzati*).

"My children speak Italian. But they have the advantage that I can afford to pay for their travels to Italy from time to time. So they get an idea of Italian conditions. And although they realize that they are South Americans ...they locate themselves more over there than

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<sup>7</sup>The discussion came about when I wanted to interview Giovanni. Juana Asti who was also present, started to argue with him. With the agreement of both I left the tape-recorder running.

<sup>8</sup>Juana Asti learns Italian at the cultural institute of the Italian community, the Asociación Dante Aligheri.

Since Italian, by comparison to English, French and German, was never considered a language of social distinction in Argentina, it was rarely taught in formal education. There are differences with regard to the social class of immigrants and descendants but, generally speaking, the active usage of Italian or an Italian dialect has been abandoned by the second generation. However, fairly recently it has become fashionable and a matter of distinction in the Italian associations to speak Italian (cf. also chapters 9 and 10).

here. I took on the responsibility so that they would not lose the spirit, the conscience, and the desire to know about their roots (*radici*).

"My children are more fully-developed as individuals [than their Argentine contemporaries], because they have their own history. When Garibaldi or the Italian wars of Independence are mentioned, it is *their* history. But it does not mean anything to the grandsons and great grandsons of the Italian immigrants [who came during the period of mass immigration]. They only know that their great grandfathers were born in Italy, nothing else. The concept of Italy, with her history, monuments, culture, and arts has disappeared.

"The model of the family here [in Argentina] is very different from that of the European. The classical model is the patriarchal family: the father does everything and has the means to give work to the children. But the children are very dependent on their father. The mother has lost her role of participating equally in the education of the children. In Europe, the mother is very near to the father. They stand at the same level. Here, I got the impression from my mother-in-law, for example, that she is much more an employee of the household: someone, who gives birth to the children, but is much less responsible for their education which is received from their father. And that is where the idea of the *caudillo* comes from: the patriarch to whom all others are subjugated. The woman has an inferior role compared with the European mother: she is the object of her husband. It's the whole idea of the *macho*."

Juana Asti: "Where?"

Giovanni: "Well, here in Argentina, of course."

Juana: "But the women of my generation, 40 to 50 years old, broke with that model. You will still find it among people with little education, of the lower middle and the working classes. But from the middle classes upwards, you will not find it."

Giovanni: "I do not agree. My in-laws are upper middle class and I always had an impression of my mother-in-law, not as a slave, but as a object of her husband."

Juana: "That is the previous generation, not my generation. My generation went to university and to work. And this led to much more professional specialization among women than among men."

Giovanni: "Slight changes occurred, but not of the magnitude in Italy from the First World War onwards.

Women emancipated themselves very much. Here [in Argentina] women emancipated themselves more slowly."

Juana: "Here, emancipation started in the 1960s. And the next generation will go even further. I can see this with my daughter. Women here improve themselves much more than men. It costs them a lot but they do it."

Giovanni: "But look, Juana, this process started much earlier in Italy, because here [in Argentina] there weren't any wars.

In Italy they have already got emancipation. The speed of transformation was much higher in Italy than in Argentina. The best proof is the kind of governments you still get

here."

Juana: "Leave the governments aside for a moment. They don't allow space for personal development.

But it is the female MPs and senators who propose reforms and bills in Parliament, not the male senators who, during their whole term of office, haven't even opened their mouths."

Giovanni: "In South America, women should have been more advantaged with regard to emancipation because there weren't any wars like in Europe<sup>9</sup>, but still you find political institutions, such as dictatorships, for example, which have long disappeared in Europe. It's a typical hang-over of the patriarchal model, the caudillo. And it persists in the mentality of the people. Menem<sup>10</sup> is still a caudillo, although he says he wants to liberalize and democratize things.

Juana: "But they are only very few."

Giovanni: "In Italy they have disappeared."

Juana: "The caudillos here died out with Perón. Thank God! He was the last one. Menem is a caudillo in his province but not for the whole nation."

Giovanni: "Oh, it still exists. You [Argentines] didn't have the time to assimilate democracy, or freedom of the individual. Here, the people think of themselves as numbers. Take any peasant here [and he will follow caudillo-politics]. You are very much behind."

Juana: "But you have to allow time for this. The next generation is just 25-30 years old. They will receive the fruits of our labour."

Giovanni: "I know both systems: Fascism and democracy. I was a balilla<sup>11</sup>. But when Fascism was over, I integrated myself. I became a democrat with extreme ease, because I had already the [educational] foundations for desiring freedom. I could see the transformation from a dictatorial system to democracy and realized the supremacy of democracy. I am conscious of the importance of my vote but you can't teach an Argentine campesino that his vote counts as much as that of Alfonsín<sup>12</sup>.

"You don't have to be literate in order to vote consciously [in the elections]. The South Americans have it in their blood, this sense of submissiveness and fatalism which produces the search for a leader, the caudillo. They need it, they are born sheep."

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<sup>9</sup>Note that Giovanni actually contradicts his earlier assertion that emancipation started *later* in Argentina because there were *no* wars.

<sup>10</sup> Carlos Saúl Menem, Argentine President, 1989f. (cf. chapter 4).

<sup>11</sup>A balilla was a member of the Fascist youth organizations in Italy (Germani 1975:260).

<sup>12</sup>Raúl Alfonsín, Argentine President, 1983 - 1989 (cf. chapter 4).

Juana: "However, they introduced very early democracy and social laws in Uruguay. Much earlier than in Argentina."

Giovanni: "Yes, but the young still have it, this fatalism, this 'mind your own business' (no te metas) attitude .

"It's a problem which the South Americans had for centuries, starting with the Spaniards. The Spaniards came here to colonize, to educate and to proselytize: to educate the Indian (indio). But it was the Indian (indio) who educated the Spaniard and the descendants of the Spaniards. Here the indio is still present in modern society."

## 5. Two Visions of Europe and Argentina

Two visions of Argentina are revealed in this discussion which represent different approaches to the understanding of recent Argentine history. Giovanni Petrarca's view is widespread amongst immigrants who came after World War II. As I argued earlier, they came to an affluent and still promising Argentina, compared to Italy at that time. Whether or not they personally experienced success or failure during their stay in Argentina, they witnessed stagnation, decline, and economic and political instability. In the early 1950s, Argentina was still a place to invest one's personal future, but it has become less so ever since. In the face of the difficulties of present times in this conflict-ridden society, people must imagine other, better ways of living, or recall more satisfactory former times. Someone like Juana Asti glorifies a successful and prosperous family past, and emphasizes the modernizing and progressive role that her family has played in the finance and trade of Buenos Aires and Montevideo:

"I am very different from what you, Giovanni, are saying. And I am trying to change things.

"My forefathers came with a totally different culture, a European culture, typically Italian, which they brought to Argentina. And they fought to impose this kind of culture. At least my grand-uncle was fortunate that the government of the day wanted to open education and culture to European influences, and allowed him to do everything. They sent him to Europe to bring back works of art, and supported his efforts to create the Museum of Fine Arts (Museo de Bellas Artes).

"All the French and Italian architecture in Buenos Aires dates from this period. This great cultural movement which occurred here, in Buenos Aires. All right, today they say it was all imported. But there was nothing before that!

"That was at the beginning of the century, when Argentina was very rich. At the time the land and the cattle produced wealth, so that culture could be imported. And now, since we have become very poor, they come from Europe to look for works of art, books, paintings and sculptures from that period. They even carry furniture away! In a



well-to-do house, the furniture was French and English and the works of art Italian."

With few exceptions, such as the writers, Silvina and Victoria Ocampo (cf. King 1986:31-33), upper class women were confined to the strict roles of daughters, mothers and benefactresses of charities<sup>13</sup>, as I will show later. Juana Asti maintains that this model changed only as late as the 1950s, and apart from her own testimony she cites an interview with the writer and friend of Jorge Luis Borges, Alicia Jurada:

"In the 50s the social structure and education changed here and all over the world. The most remarkable thing was the tremendous progress of women. I was one of the first to go to university and for my father it was a scandal.

"In 1945 the students occupied the universities. It was a new experience. I was just married. We all went to prison. This were the years of 'alpargatas sí, libros no'<sup>14</sup>.

"Yes, and customs changed. They never let me go out with a man before I got married. I was already engaged and had the marriage banns put up in the church, and still they did not let me go out with my fiancée.

You could not go to the cinema with a male friend from university, but only to have a coffee in El Querandí [a coffee bar] which was in front [of the university]."

(Alicia Jurado, *La Nación*, 3.12.1989)

The rising immigrant bourgeoisie modelled themselves on the upper classes of Buenos Aires and, in part, merged with them through marriage. A page in the 1929 edition of the magazine, *El Hogar* (The Home) portrays women of four generations of Juana Asti's family. The article gives insight into the upper class perception of the ideal kind of women according to marital status and generation. Juana Asti showed me this page during our discussions in order to support her claim that she was a descendant of once wealthy upper class families in Buenos Aires and Montevideo who were purveyors of European culture in Argentina and Uruguay.

Under the heading, "The Old Argentine Homes", the page shows photographs of a reunion of women of four generations in the house of the great grandmother (cf. the following page for a reproduction).

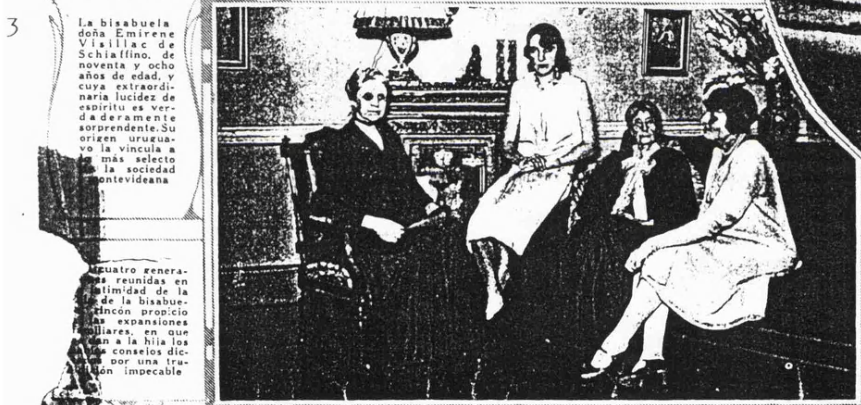
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<sup>13</sup>In chapter 6, Grazia Nelli commented on women and charities in the Italian upper class.

<sup>14</sup> This meant literally, "Espadrilles(traditional rope-soled shoes worn by the gauchos) yes! Books no!". It was supposedly a militant slogan of the deprived working classes of Buenos Aires (descamisados), which symbolized for the anti-Peronist upper classes, ignorance and a violent attack on European education.

*El Hogar*  
**Los viejos hogares argentinos** 2

Febrero 1º de 1929



La bisabuela, doña Emirene Schiaffino, de noventa y ocho años de edad, y cuya extraordinaria lucidez de espíritu es verdaderamente sorprendente. Su origen uruguayo la vincula a la más selecta de la sociedad Montevideana.

Cuatro generaciones reunidas en la intimidad de la casa de la bisabuela. El ambiente propicio a las expansiones familiares, en que se dan a la hija los consejos de la experiencia impecable.

La abuela, doña Emirene Schiaffino de Ramos Mejía. Su acendrado amor al prójimo es proverbial en la alta sociedad porteña, y ha llevado a ocupar altos cargos en las instituciones benéficas.

FOTOS DE M. A. LOUJAN



La madre, doña María Ramos Mejía de Viale, esposa de don Salvador Viale, es uno de los elementos más destacados de nuestra "haute".

La hija, señorita María Ramos Mejía Viale, que ya es una figura de relieve en nuestros círculos sociales.



El rancio abolengo, la fina cultura, la sociabilidad, el "savoir faire", todo lo distinguido, en una palabra, está cifrado en este hogar, cuyas cuatro generaciones presentamos. De la venerable vejez de la bisabuela a la grácil juventud de la hija se tiende el hilo firme y sutil del honor y de la belleza: base y esencia de los hogares porteños, que perdura a través del tiempo, y que es el mejor y más preciado adorno de nuestro alto mundo social.



Photograph 1: The great grandmother, dressed in black, sits on a finely turned armchair. Behind her is a luxurious wardrobe and to her right, an empty armchair. The caption reads:

"The great grandmother doña<sup>15</sup> ... at ninety-eight years. Her extraordinary clarity of mind is really surprising. Her Uruguayan origin links her to the most distinguished parts of the High Society of Montevideo."

Photograph 2: An oval photograph in the portrait style, shows a tall woman, dressed in black, sitting on a chair. No other parts of the room are visible. Below is written:

"The grandmother, doña ... Her unblemished love for her neighbours is proverbial in the High Society of Buenos Aires (la alta sociedad porteña). She has occupied high posts in charities."

Photograph 3: In the same room as in photograph 1, sit from left to right: the grandmother, daughter, great grandmother, and mother. Mother and daughter are dressed in white and wear the bobbed hair style of the 1920s. Great grandmother and grandmother are dressed in black, which indicates that they are in mourning out of respect for their deceased husbands. The caption reads:

"The four generations joining together in the intimacy of the living room of the great grandmother. This is the propitious retreat for relaxed family gatherings where judicious advice is given to the daughter, based on an impeccable tradition."

Photograph 4: Next to a little wardrobe sits the mother, dressed in white, slumped in a chair. We are told:

"The mother, doña ..., wife of ..., is one of the most distinguished elements of our 'haute' [High Society, a French loan word]."

Photograph 5: The daughter sits crosslegged on a chair, reading a large format magazine. She wears a white dress which leaves her arms free and just covers her knees. We read:

"The daughter, señorita ..., who is already a figure of high standing in our social circles."

At the bottom of the page, a small paragraph concludes:

"The ancient ancestry (abolengo), the refined culture, the sociability, the 'savoir faire' [French in original], to say it with one word: everything that is inscribed in this family home (hogar), whose four generations are presented here, is of particular distinction. From the venerable old age of the great grandmother to the graceful youth of the daughter, stretches the firm and subtle bond of honour (honor) and beauty: the basis and essence of porteño homes, which endures through time and which is the best and most valuable adornment of our High Society (alto mundo social)."

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<sup>15</sup>formal address for married woman of established family standing.

Through the way in which the women are portrayed in the photographs and the way in which captions and commentary are written, the particulars of the early 20th century upper class way of life are revealed. There is a strong emphasis on generational authority of grandmothers over mothers, mothers over daughters, and the great grandmother over them all. It is the great grandmother, a living ancestor, who is regarded as the centre of the family tradition. Great grandmother, grandmother and mother set examples of correct moral conduct for the youngest generation of daughters<sup>16</sup>.

The page in *El Hogar* is the self-conscious portrait of a wealthy family who, in the 1920s, was part of the upper classes of Montevideo and Buenos Aires. The upper classes partly imitated the perceived life style of the European upper classes and, at the time, had the money to import the necessary paraphernalia. They imported furniture, food and fashion, and employed architects to build their houses and private tutors to educate their children. Interestingly, in this article, no direct mention is made of the Italian origin of the family. The only reference to Europe are the French loan-words which hint at how - almost stereotypically - the Uruguayan and Argentine upper classes adopted French customs. That Italian origins are not mentioned is hardly surprising. Although in this particular case the family were descendants of wealthy Genovese bankers (but who had married into the Argentine upper class as some of the surnames reveal<sup>17</sup>), Italians in general were not regarded as being of particular distinction. The article, rather, depicts the proud posture of the new rich who had made money in America and could now import European culture.

Giovanni Petrarca takes a different view on this imported 'Europeanization'. In common with other Italians (particularly the middle and upper classes of post-World War II immigration), he draws an opposition between Italy/Europe/democracy as opposed to Argentina/South America/caudillismo/Spaniards/Indians. By turning the descendants of Europeans in Argentina into Indians, he is framing what he sees as the failure of Europeanization within the folk idiom of 'race', and thereby puts the descendants of Europeans into an inferior social category.

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<sup>16</sup>see also chapter 6 for a discussion on kinship, family and generational authority.

<sup>17</sup>The *Ramos Mejía*, for example, are an upper class Creole family (familia tradicional). *Visillac* de Schiaffino is, on the other hand, a French name. However, since I met Juana Asti at the end of my stay in Buenos Aires, I could not find out more details about the women mentioned on the photographs.



As the following very blunt remark from Giovanni Petrarca shows, his racist discourse enables him to mark earlier immigrants off from 'Italians' like himself, or other Europeans who did not become 'Indians':

"But this is impossible: if I am in Cameroon and the people are all blacks, and I take Louis XV furniture with me I still won't turn them into Frenchmen."

Giovanni's general conviction is that Italy made superior progress and modernized faster than Argentina and this view is confirmed in his contradiction of Juana's views on the emancipation of women and changing gender roles in Buenos Aires. Giovanni Petrarca is not particularly interested in the emancipation of women (female volunteers say he runs the institute very autocratically), but he disagrees to underline his more general point of European advancement as opposed to Argentine backwardness. By equating Argentines with Indians and by turning Argentines into Indians - which is the synthesis of his discourse - he effectively strips them of their European connections. Those descended from immigrants who have lost touch with ancestral history are treated as if they never had any history at all. They are reduced to the condition of the local Indians and Creoles, treated as indistinguishable, mere numbers. They thus lack political willpower and become an easy prey to the political seductions of the caudillo, in contrast to the self-conscious and politically aware individuals who are endowed with Italian traditions. Denial of history is a familiar strategy in the European encounter with 'the other'. By denying history to other peoples, Europeans not only highlight the difference of others, but also justify their subjugation (Wolf 1982:5-7, Fabian 1983:25-30).

Equally, Juana Asti's presentation of her position forms part of a wider discourse common among South American descendants of Europeans. This self-conscious posture emphasizes the general achievements of Argentina and other Latin Americans by comparison to Europe. Early independence, enormous wealth, urban growth, cultural production and consumption<sup>18</sup>, periods of peace and stable democracy in the early decades of this century are all listed when it comes to demonstrating the high stage in the modernization process reached by Argentina and Uruguay. Europe is appraised for its cultural traditions which were, at the time, readily available for cash. Yet, these upper

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<sup>18</sup>This culminated in the proud statement by porteños, that "Buenos Aires is the Paris of South America".

class South Americans of European reject any attempt by Europeans to patronize issues which are regarded constituents of their own, 'Latin American' identity, such as language and family customs. With respect to language there is long tradition of Latin American intellectuals defending the existing difference between Latin American variants Spanish and the 'purer' Spanish favoured by the Spanish Academy (Real Academia).

One of Juan Asti's relatives wrote polemically in 1926 on the 'legend of purity':

"Spain gave us the language. But it could not give us liberty, because this is not a favour which is granted, but a precious thing which is conquered.

"From there originated the discussion between the [two] peoples. One argued in the name of the past; the other in the name of the future. [The argument] between Americans and Spaniards was about the language which was common [to both] and did not cease to be so, because the Spaniards wanted to treat it as a dead language which we were obliged to use, but which we could not modify or enrich."

(Damiano 1926:303-304)

And prominent writers, such as the Cuban novelist and essayist, Alejo Carpentier (1980:71), have always ridiculed any attempts, made by the Academy, to establish set rules of purity.

In the discussion with Juana, Giovanni invokes certain key concepts to emphasize his line of argument: radici/raizes, patria, caudillo, macho, no te metas, and indio.

It is striking that all these stereotypes are brought into the discussion by Giovanni. His intention to appear more European is revealed as is his aim to draw a strict borderline between what he defines as 'European' and 'Argentine'. Juana does not use any of these stereotypes and is surprised to hear that caudillos and machos should still exist in Argentina. It is also a reflection of how the discussion is actually conducted: Giovanni brings forward his argument in a very forceful almost dominating way, and Juana is left with the option of reacting to it. Rather than comparing Argentina with Italy, she maps her family's past against the development of contemporary Argentina, intending to demonstrate the success of 'European' modernization. Raizes, or should I say, radici (since Petrarca spoke Italian throughout the discussion), refer to a place of belonging and supposed origin. Tengo mis raizes acá (I have my roots here), is often said about the place of belonging, which is not necessarily the birthplace<sup>19</sup>. Conversely, birthplace and

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<sup>19</sup>For example, someone who was born in Rosario, but lived for a long time in Buenos Aires, said: soy de Rosario, pero tengo mis raizes acá (I am from Rosario but I have my roots here).

long residence are not sufficient by themselves constitute raizes. It is a sentimental expression, and somebody from Buenos Aires who is alienated from it for personal or political reasons might say: no tengo raizes acá (I have no roots here). Ethnic leaders, on the other hand, like to conceive of 'roots' as something essential, somehow unconsciously embodied in the immigrants and their descendants, which overcome the time-bound restrictions of birthplace and residence<sup>20</sup>; something which they can lose touch with, but also rediscover and revive. To rediscover one's roots is to regain identity (ricuperare l'identità): it is a regaining of the past or re-establishment of bonds with the past. It presupposes that the essence of identity, the roots, remain basically unchanged. This understanding of roots, and more generally ethnic identity, tries to establish a direct link with the past and thus lifts it out of history which, by definition, implies change. The recourse to raizes therefore involves making specific choices of interpretations of the past. Hence Raizes/radici can refer to a variety of things: a particular family tradition and a place of common ancestry. Furthermore, the individual can also relate him or herself to the wider pantheon of Italian history and culture. Various levels, not necessarily hierarchically ordered, can coexist: Garibaldi, the wars of independence *and* the personal family history as well as the place of origin can all be invoked for raizes.

Patria (*native country*) refers in Giovanni Petrarca's statement to Argentina, the native country of the Argentine-born descendants of immigrants. It is a minimal residual category here, perceived as the automatic result of one's birth in a particular country. But for a person born in a country *without* ancestors (like a descendant of an immigrant), the concept of patria remains abstract and impersonal. And although Giovanni Petrarca does not extend this idea here, he might wish to argue (as indeed other Italians and Europeans in Argentina do) that patria without ancestors has to be created as a sentiment from *above*, as, for example, by Peronism and other national ideologies. This kind of patria, created from above, is of course diametrically opposed to the other notion of patria as the *original* fatherland<sup>21</sup> to which one is bound by sentiment because one's roots are there. Argentina, the place where one lives and works most of one's life, and where one

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<sup>20</sup>See also chapter 10 for an analysis of the concept of 'roots' in the political context of Italian associations.

<sup>21</sup>Patria, as a concept of nationalist ideologies, is also opposed to notions of the native village (paese) and home region.



is likely to die and to be buried, is often called *la seconda patria* (the second fatherland) or *la nuova patria* (the new fatherland); the 'first' being Italy. A metaphor frequently invoked by leaders of the Italian community in Argentina puts the relationship between the two *patria* into the idiom of kinship:

To the immigrants "... Italy was the mother, sometimes the stepmother, and Argentina the wife." (Rocca 1985: no pagenumber)

Caudillo, named by Giovanni Petracca in connection with the patriarchal family, has two great traditions in Argentine political thought. On the one hand, the caudillo is perceived as the evil, authoritarian warlord leader, personified by Facundo Quiroga, as he was depicted by the reformer and statesman, D.F. Sarmiento, in his book, 'Facundo: Civilización y Barbarie' (cf. chapter 2, also Rock 1987:80). This ancestry can be brought *forward* to the present to include any populist or provincial leader who relies on the rural population for his following as opposed to the educated, civilized and enlightened Europeans and their descendants in the capital. J.D. Perón, in particular, is framed by non-Peronists in the light of this caudillo-tradition (cf. chapters 3 and 4). More generally, anyone in politics who employs a patriarchal and authoritarian style to command a following might be called a caudillo (cf. Walter 1985:18).

The other view is taken by the opposite strand in Argentine political history: federal, populist and Peronist movements which emphasize the role of the countryside, the provinces, and Argentine rural traditions such as the gaucho, as opposed to European influences and economic domination represented by the capital city, Buenos Aires. The caudillo is seen here a positive figure, a strong leader and liberator of his people. More recently such images were evoked by Carlos Saúl Menem during his presidential campaign (cf. chapter 4).

Linked to the caudillo is the idea of the macho. Nowadays a highly over-used term, it was originally attributed to strong, manly and virile behaviour; and can also be used for women too (cf. Gooch 1987:306, Taylor 1981). However, in Giovanni Petrarca's mind, it is already the re-imported European stereotype of the macho which he applies to Argentina<sup>22</sup>.

Finally, no te metas (don't get involved/mind your own business) is an Argentine

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<sup>22</sup>Further exploration of gender roles in porteño society could be a theme for future research.

idiomatic expression to describe a spectator's attitude, one of denying responsibility and involvement in wider society. Giovanni Petracca deliberately uses this phrase to blame Argentines for fatalist and unreflective behaviour in elections which, according to him, is opposed to the enlightened attitudes and behaviour of European voters with their civic consciousness.

## 6. Conclusions

Analysis of the discussion between Giovanni Petrarca and Juana Asti has brought to the surface more general ideological categories which refer to the formation of modern Argentina.

Though European immigration has long stopped, the ex-participants of the venture and their descendants are still embroiled in defining and re-defining its importance. These attempts to categorize past experiences, which ultimately try to define a proper identity, become more accentuated in times of economic crisis. It has become clear how social class, and upper class descent in particular, is referred to as a means of distinction.

The two people presented here are engaged in an argument to define their identity with regard to Argentine immigrant society. It turns out to be a tricky enterprise for them, especially as the connotations of their respective frameworks have changed over time. Juana Asti can make reference to *her* upper class European origin, only as a remote tradition. She *now* belongs to an 'impoverished' branch of the family and effectively lives the life of a middle class inhabitant of Buenos Aires. It is probably because Argentine ideological and material frameworks do not work any more (for her, and indeed for other descendants of immigrants as I will show in chapter 9), that she turns to the activities of the *Istituto per la Cultura Ligure*. This step would have been inconceivable for earlier generations of her family, since they were satisfied and secure with their acquired wealth and made only selective use of 'high' imported Italian culture.

Giovanni Petrarca, on the other hand, can speak with a perception of a different Italy which now possesses powerful symbols<sup>23</sup> of its new economic power. Agencies like the

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<sup>23</sup>For example, cars, design products, fashion, and cooking; cf. also chapter 9.

Ligurian Institute help<sup>24</sup> to make these symbols available to descendants of Italians, as a new means of identifying with Italy in Argentina.

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<sup>24</sup>For example, by organizing slide shows on Italy, language courses and travel scholarships.

## CHAPTER 9

### The young and the contemporary city

#### 1. Introduction

In this chapter I shall argue that the discourse about the *new* Italy, ostentatiously represented by Giovanni Petrarca in the last chapter, is only partially relevant for young descendants of Italians in Buenos Aires. To support this argument I shall present case studies of people who were between twenty and forty years old at the time of my fieldwork<sup>1</sup>. They do not form a group in the sociological sense and their class backgrounds range from the middle to the upper class, but they are all of Italian descent. As I will show, the life styles of these Italo-Argentines *do not* differ significantly from those of contemporaries of other ethnic backgrounds. Their particular characteristics in terms of residence, education and profession are class-specific. And while forms of consumption appear to be fairly heterogeneous, these are, to a large extent, determined by income - their own and their parents.

The political ideologies of these young Italo-Argentines are to be understood in relation to life history, family tradition and class position. Social practices with a strong ethnic flavour, such as the casual participation in Italian associations and the occasional usage of the Italian language at home, are not seen by these young Italo-Argentines as being of *primary* importance in the constitution of their identity. The consumption of Italian and Italian style food serves even less as a marker of ethnic distinction, since, owing to Italian mass immigration early this century, the eating of such foods is widely practised in porteño culture. I will argue that ethnicity is simply one among other means of distinction, such as patterns of consumption, political ideologies, the choice of peer-groups and the evaluation of social status.

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<sup>1</sup>Other 'young' Italo-Argentines have already been discussed in chapter 6 where the emphasis was on their role in family networks.

The setting for the following paragraphs, is the city of Buenos Aires in the 1980s. Greater Buenos Aires (Gran Buenos Aires) has a population of about 12 million people and it is estimated that about one third of it lives below the poverty line (cf. INDEC 1989), and more than one million people live in shantytowns (villas miserias or villas de emergencia)<sup>2</sup>. Adding to what has been said in chapter 5, I would like to emphasize here the great economic and social disparities of the contemporary city. Buenos Aires has lost its image as a thriving immigrant metropolis, and while the influences of European architectural styles<sup>3</sup> are still visible, it is now the wealthy neighbourhoods of the zona norte, with their detached houses, swimming pools and video-guarded walls, which contrast with the central areas of the city, which show obvious signs of economic decline, such as broken pavements, dilapidated house fronts and neglected parks.

## 2. Residence

Among young porteños residence patterns are class-specific but also depend on marital status and profession. Generally speaking, they remain at home until their marriage, thereby staying longer with their parents person stays longer with his parents than North Europeans and North Americans. However, in 1988/89 rents for a flat (departamento) were at the equivalent of US\$70 to US\$150 per month and the minimum wage was about US\$100 per month. It was therefore impossible for most young people to rent their own flat. This was even true for young professionals who earned salaries equivalent to about 200 to 300 US\$ per month. It therefore happens that, among the upper middle and upper classes who live in the northern city districts<sup>4</sup>, *parents* will often rent or buy flats for their children.

This practice reflects more generally the fact that the present 20 to 40 year-olds live on

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<sup>2</sup>1.5 million were estimated in 1970 (Rock 1987:320,331).

<sup>3</sup>See chapter 5, Scobie (1974:127-135) and Documentos (1988:67-104) on successive and eclectically coexisting 'fashions' inspired, for example, by Italian Neo-Classicism and Haussman's Parisian boulevards.

<sup>4</sup>The northern city district is commonly known as zona norte, and includes the residential quarters of the capital and Greater Buenos Aires which stretch out from the Retiro railway station: they are Recoleta, Palermo, (Barrio Norte), Belgrano, Olivos, La Lucila, Martínez, Acassuso, San Isidro, and Beccar.

the capital acquired in the previous generation, generally that of their parents. Even if they are professionals earning a comparatively good salary, they cannot afford to rent or buy a flat with the capital accumulated solely from their personal incomes. This prolonged staying at home for economic reasons, or receiving substantial economic support from parents (even after marriage) is now perceived as a sign of downward mobility<sup>5</sup>. This is particularly observable among the declining middle and working classes of Buenos Aires<sup>6</sup>. If wages and salaries fall in real terms over an extended period of time<sup>7</sup>, it means that grown up children of working and middle class parents (assuming that they remain in working and middle class occupations, i.e. are not upwardly mobile) would now earn *less* than their parents did. Calculations carried out in 1989 by an economic research institute and the National Census Bureau (INDEC), came to the conclusion that over a five year period, from 1983 to 1989, the losses in real income with regard to inflation were 137% for teachers and university lecturers, 126% for construction workers, about 100% for commercial and bank employees and 28.9% for military personnel<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup>This contrasts sharply with the upwardly mobile segment of the North American middle class:

"Though a heavy burden, supporting one's children well into their twenties is an expression of a distinctive American trait: the tendency to turn upward mobility into a multigenerational project."  
(Newman 1988:105)

<sup>6</sup>In her interesting study of downward mobility among the middle classes in the United States, Newman(1988:20) distinguishes between *intra-* and *intergenerational* downward mobility. Newman is particularly interested in the effects which downward mobility has within *one* generation(i.e. intragenerational). Conversely, the Argentine situation seems to suggest large-scale intergenerational downward mobility(while intragenerational downward mobility also occurs).

<sup>7</sup>As Ferrer (1980:134-147) demonstrates for the decade, 1970 to 1980, and Peralta Ramos (1978:119f.) argues more generally for the period from 1955 to 1970; cf. also chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>8</sup>Data from Centro de Estudios de la Sociedad Argentina (CELSA) and INDEC; cited by *Página 12*, 4.3.89 and 6.4.89.

Me gustaría tener mi depto, 'I would like to have my (own) flat', is the frequently heard aspiration of young porteños. To have their own depto<sup>9</sup> would also make them more independent of their parents. This reason is especially mentioned by young women who feel too much controlled by their parents.

Upper and upper middle class families typically live in the northern city districts in detached houses and have one or more flats downtown. These they rent out or keep for family members, including sometimes the children. Unlike in certain other periods of Argentine history, in 1988/89 flats were not bought as speculation objects since there was no increase in value in sight. Depending on the location, the prices of one bedroom flats started at about 10,000 US\$. As an informant from the upper class once explained to me, it did not make much sense for him to invest money in real estate in Buenos Aires, so he preferred to buy in London or the United States where he felt prices were rising.

The social ecology of districts outside the upper class zona norte<sup>10</sup>, is more complex. According to informants, typical middle class areas included Flores, Caballito, Villa Crespo, Boedo, Almagro, Parque Patricios, San Cristóbal, Balvanera, Constitución, Monserrat, and San Telmo (cf. also chapter 5; and Walter 1982:111). It has become very difficult for the 20 to 40 year old members of the middle classes to get access to property, if this has not been done successfully in their parents' generation. Even after marriage, when the financial efforts of two families can be combined, it is difficult for young couples to find affordable accommodation.

Upper and upper middle class parents are probably also denying their 20 to 40 year old children access to wealth in order to exercise social control over them. In entrepreneurial families particularly, a high value is placed on the financial discipline of children. The ideal of financial austerity for unmarried children is sometimes combined with a Catholic view of the ideal family, where unmarried children, and unmarried daughters in

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<sup>9</sup>Depto is the colloquial shorthand for departamento, which means flat in Argentine Spanish.

<sup>10</sup>The zona norte itself is socially stratified. In the federal district, large parts of Palermo, and what is commonly called barrio norte are inhabited by upper middle class residents. And in the adjoining province of Buenos Aires, Acassuso, San Isidro and Beccar are the most exclusive upper class suburbs. Social contrasts can be sharp: villas miserias(shantytowns) exist in San Isidro near to upper class residential areas.

particular, should remain with their parents until marriage (cf. Family Zanone in chapter 6)<sup>11</sup>.

### 3. Education and Profession

Most families of the upper and upper middle classes tend to send their children to private schools where teaching is bilingual, in Spanish and another European language (English, French, German or Italian). Some of the schools are the old, prestigious institutions of immigrant communities, like St Andrews, St George's and the Lincoln American School, whereas others are more recent creations like the Italian Highschool Cristoforo Colombo. Comparatively high school fees must be paid which confines access to the upper and upper middle classes, though scholarships are sometimes available<sup>12</sup>.

After highschool, porteños from the middle to the upper classes go to University. Among the upper classes it is a matter of distinction sending children to a foreign university, preferably in the United States or in Europe. In Buenos Aires, the state-run Universidad de Buenos Aires (UBA) faces the competition of several private universities, among them the Universidad Católica de Buenos Aires (UCA), the Catholic Universidad del Salvador, the Universidad de Belgrano, the Universidad di Tella and the Universidad de la Empresa. Often children are sent to these private universities for ideological reasons. Upper class parents fear political indoctrination at the UBA and refer to the Peronist student movements in the seventies.

I was once taken by an upper class 25-year old man on a car ride to show me the wealthy northern districts. We were passing the campus of the University of Buenos Aires

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<sup>11</sup>More research is needed on the construction of gender roles in Buenos Aires. The 'Catholic view' described above comprises only very general notions about, for example, premarital virginity. Such ideals are very differently recognized (ideologically and practically) in urban Buenos Aires which allows a higher degree of anonymity, than, for example, in rural parts of Sicily.

<sup>12</sup>The elitist status of these highschools is clearly perceived by the ethnic communities and often a matter of controversy. In 1989, members of the council of the Unione e Benevolenza, the oldest Italian association in Buenos Aires, engaged in a heated debate on the allocation of scholarships in the schools of the Italian community.



(Ciudad Universitaria). My companion pointed to the huge blocks of the Faculty of Architecture as if they were embodiments of evil, saying: "I think they are on strike at the moment". Yet sometimes even people from the upper class would acknowledge that certain subjects, such as Architecture and Law, were better taught at the State University than at private ones.

Young people from the middle classes usually cannot afford to go to the private universities and therefore enrol at the UBA. Often they work part or even full-time, attending evening classes because their parents cannot fully support them.

It seemed to me that it is the aspiration of most young people to work as self-employed professionals after their degrees, but only few manage to become totally independent as so called cuentapropistas<sup>13</sup>. More recently, the term yuppie (young urban professional) has also entered the language usage of Buenos Aires. But if it is already difficult to find stable and adequately paid employment for lawyers, accountants and doctors, then it is even more difficult to open one's own studio. The situation is worse with professionals who graduated in the humanities. Historians, social scientists and artists have to work at several different institutions at a time in order to make a living, and even take on odd jobs as taxi-drivers and waiters while waiting for new opportunities.

The constraints of an unstable employment situation are, of course, felt least by members of the upper and upper middle classes. Studying at university and pursuing a profession are not economic necessities but are done rather for intellectual satisfaction and personal gratification.

#### 4. Life-styles and Urban Consumption

Young people in Buenos Aires in the mid to late 1980s live a variety of life-styles. From a European point of view, different phases of European and North American fashion and music are acquired 'anachronistically', without necessarily making reference to the specific historical context. For example, some 16 to 20 year old porteños, who are still sometimes referred to as hippies, listen enthusiastically to rock groups of the 70s such

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<sup>13</sup>Cuentapropista is used here in the widest possible sense for somebody working self-employed (Palomino 1987:29,148-151).

as 'Pink Floyd' and 'Yes', but also to Argentine Rock musicians who began in the 70s like Charly García. Class divisions in musical tastes are not clear cut, but some people say stereotypically, that the hippies are to be found among the middle classes and are sympathetic to Peronist or Radical politics. Instead, los hijos de bien, (literally 'children of the well-to-do'), the children of upper and upper middle class families, favour the liberal right-wing party UCeDe, and dress in expensive jeans, wearing brand names like Lacoste and Benetton, and follow the latest trends of American and English pop music so far as they are able.

Similarly, there is a great variety of places where young people can hang out. The expression ir a tomar un café is used both in the literal sense 'to have a coffee[at a bar]', but also in the more general sense to make appointments and to go out. The choice where to go, depends on both taste and finances. For a spontaneous break during the day, any bar in central Buenos Aires would do. For dating, making appointment, or going out with a group of friends (salida), a place known and liked by the participants is chosen. An upper middle class woman in her thirties, commented on the bar 'Bolivia' which became fashionable among young porteños in 1989:

"Bolivia is a very nice bar. I like it very much. A wide range of people between the ages of 20 to 30 go there. The other day there were 'hippies' dressed in the style of the 60s, punks (punkis) and 'normal' people (gente normal) who had no particular way of distinguishing themselves."

Another woman, aged 26 and from a middle class family, drew a distinction between different fashions, urban areas and implicit class divisions. She stated that young women walking in the Avenida Santa Fe, a shopping street in upper middle class barrio norte, would typically dress in miniskirts and 'tops'. By contrast, on the central Avenida Corrientes<sup>14</sup> one would find more 'hippies', while punkis and 'new romantics', "you know, those with the pale faces who always dress in black", would frequent a concert-hall called Cemento (literally meaning 'concrete') in the middle class area of

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<sup>14</sup>From the beginning of the century the Avenida Corrientes was *the* street for leisure activities, amusements, nightlife, cinema, and theatre in Buenos Aires. For an impressionistic description of its subdivisions in the early 20th century, see Arlt (1976:149-152).

It is not accidental that the woman referred to 'hippies' in the Avenida Corrientes. The café 'La Paz' is situated there. 'La Paz' is sometimes referred to as the café of the 'pseudo intellectuals' (bar de los pseudo-intelectuales) and has a traditional clientele of left wing-intellectuals, writers and students, who are rather dressed according to the woman's understanding of hippies, in casual wear and jeans, rather than the clothes worn by the young people in the barrio norte.

## Constitución.

In 1989 a monthly fringe magazine, *ESTACION 90*, published a small report on the culture, taste, and fashion of upper class youngsters in Buenos Aires. Though the article does not mention individual informants, the text gives a detailed account of the cultural attributes of this sub-section of the upper class. This is an extract from the account:

### "THE FASHIONABLES (CONCHETOS)

They are called Pía, Soledad, Catalina, Jorgelina, Lorena, Joaquín, Matías or Sebastián. If they do not have a double-barrelled surname they add their mother's maiden name<sup>15</sup>. They call themselves Kitty, Tuni, Cata, Santi, Pili, Pipo, Ken and - even if you do not believe it - Mingo.

Age group: the girls are between 15 and 23, the boys between 18 and 25. The kids [pendex, from pendejo meaning kid] are the *Skaters* who are destined to inherit membership of the group.

Social background: upper class and upper middle class with aspirations (clase alta y media alta con aspiraciones).

Their territory: Belgrano R, Palermo Chico, Recoleta, Barrio Norte, La Lucila, Martínez, and San Isidro.

House-types: two-storey or large one-storey. Own room with walkman, TV for personal use, video recorder, computer and film-camera. The preferred brand-names are: Panasonic, Sony, RCA and JVC.

"Highschools: the girls go to Malinckrodt (Barrio Norte), St. Catherine and St. Margaret (in Belgrano). The boys go to Champagnat, La Salle, San José and El Salvador (in the centre), San Pablo (Barrio Norte) and St. Brendans and Juan XXIII (in Belgrano). Mixed highschools which are the most popular: Buenos Aires English High School, Belgrano Day School, San Cirano (where the few members of the group who come from Flores gather) and St. Nicholas (Olivos).

University careers: Architecture, Graphic Design, Economics, Public Relations and Law. The girls are more into languages than the boys. The favourite is English, then French.

"Work: only to earn a bit of pocket money because they usually live with their parents. The jobs most sought after are teachers in private sports clubs, administrative jobs and working in chic pubs.

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<sup>15</sup>The Spanish custom of having a paternal *and* maternal surname is adopted in Buenos Aires only by the familias tradicionales who perceive themselves as having descended from Spanish families of colonial times.

The boys' outfit: very short hair, a short "poney tail" (colita) may be permitted. A well-worked body indicates a discreet shrewdness (chuequera). Those who do not have beautiful faces try with gestures: they hold their chin and touch their incipient beard. Their clothes always seem newly ironed. Classic Jeans, jumpers with round necks or V-necks, jogging trousers and sport shoes. Dark leather jackets or jeans jackets. Only accessory: a watch (must be a brand-name), partly golden.

"The girls' outfit: controlled bodies (never an extra gram of fat), poney-tails, combed as 'jopo soufflé' [like a brushed tail] and buckles. Jeans in the fashionable sizes known as 'brother' or 'fiancée' narrow-waisted with belts, linen jumpers and sweaters, cotton T-shirts, cowboy-style boots or training shoes. At night: mini skirts, slimfit dresses, short jackets, broad-brimmed hats and little suitcases as handbags. Jewellery: narrow bracelets, massive rings (many on the same finger), necklaces with large silver links.

"Language: they put "re" as a prefix to every adjective<sup>16</sup>. When it comes to attacking the other verbally: the girls say "tarao<sup>17</sup>" [from tarado, stupid] and the boys say "bolúo" [from boludo, stupid, but also wanker in slang].

They substitute the "ll" with something similar to a double "s" and the "ch" with a "ts". An example: "Fui por Cassao[Callao] y volví por Cotsabamba[Cochabamba], fumando un cigarisso[cigarillo]..."

(I went on Callao Street and came back on Cochabamba Street, smoking a cigarette). Frequent use of English: many bye, sorry, please, call me or forget it.

"The night is not a night without a car. The car-stereo is a *Deck* (brand name). Frequently used eulogies are "divino" (divine) and "divertido" (amusing).

"Going out: it's almost obligatory to appear at night in pubs and discos. They dance in Change, X'Press, Bull dog, New York City and Pilar Ranch - never at Highschool parties.

"Picking up girls (or boys): never in street encounters. They only conquer after they have been presented. If they are going out in couples, it is the young man (caballero) who pays, although *not* in discos because here they have V.I.P.-cards [i.e. invitations].

"Music: divided tastes. The older ones are into James Taylor, Super Tramp, Stix and UB40. The others prefer Tracy Chapman and George Michael. Among the national groups Banana Puyerrredón, Virus and a bit of Soda Stéreo are prominent. The group which is just becoming popular and promises "the most" in their eyes, is The Doors ...

"Cars: for their personal use they buy imported Suzuki and Daihatsu Cuore and the home-produced Fiat Spazio.

With their parents [papis, from papa, informal address for father] they ride about in a Renault 18, Peugeot 505 and a Ford Sierra.

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<sup>16</sup>re is used as a superlative prefix before adjectives, for example, re bueno (very good).

<sup>17</sup>The pronunciation of endings in -ado as ao is also typical of the landed upper classes, who imitate the Creole population of the Pampas. Among the many examples in Argentine literature where direct speech shows this loss of consonants is Ricardo Güiraldes' novel, 'Don Segundo Sombra'(1973).

"Money: is important and much of it. They usually dispose of not less than 20,000 Australes for a weekend (this includes petrol and going out as a couple).

"Politics: they do not go to rallies or party offices. They are inclined towards the Ucede. [In the presidential elections] the majority voted for Alsogaray and Angeloz.

If they choose alcohol it would be beer, whisky and cola and gin and tonic. Soft drinks at any time. Very few drugs, a joint very occasionally and practically no cocaine."

(*ESTACION 90*, 1989:54-55)

During my fieldwork I had relatively little contact with this sub-section of the Argentine upper class. The cars, video machines, institutes of higher education and consumption patterns are clearly indicative of the upper class status of the people on which the article is based. Later, I shall present the case study of Silvia Lorenzo who, by class background and access to financial means, could be part of the group described in the article. However, she belongs to an upper middle class subculture, to the art scene in Buenos Aires rather than to the highly (north)americanized subculture discussed in the article. There are many ways for upper class youngsters to distinguish themselves from others, and the 'subculture' described above is not uncontested by others of the same class status<sup>18</sup>. In chapter 6, for example, I have revealed how Maria Pardi imitated the style and tastes of her mother from the familias tradicionales, rather than participating in the 'rebellious' behaviour of some upper class youth.

## 5. Distinctions of Food, Language and Class

The lives of the young Italians and descendants of Italians, that I shall discuss below have been moulded in Argentina where they raised and educated. Some of them had experience abroad: in the United States, England, and to a lesser extent in Italy. For most of them any direct relation that they have with Italy is a private affair within the family domain: parents and grandparents who sometimes speak Italian and occasionally eat Italian food, and relatives from Italy who come to visit them after long intervals of time.

The important point here is that these private bonds with Italy, do not mark them as

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<sup>18</sup>One man in his early 30s, for example, gave me a different list of posh high schools, which included St. George's, St. Andrew's, Colegio Nacional de Buenos Aires (State High School), Carlos Pellegrini (State High School), San Marin, and Cardinal Newman.

substantially different from other parts of porteño society. As I have pointed out in chapter 1, being a 'white' porteño, an inhabitant of contemporary Buenos Aires, almost always means having immigrants among grandparents and great grandparents<sup>19</sup>. And many people who define themselves simply as Argentines (argentinos), would reckon on having one or more Italians among their ancestors.

In being Italian or of Italian descent there is no need to maintain a symbolic boundary. However, the *absence* of a well-defined boundary can also be problematic for the constitution of a person's or group's identity. And this is why some Italo-Argentines revert to new distinction markers of 'Italianess'. It is difficult to maintain a particular 'Italian' style in Buenos Aires since the porteño-middle and upper class culture bears Italian and European influences. Furthermore, perceptions of what is to be regarded as distinctively Italian can be very different from those of expatriate and visiting Italians. I would like to illustrate this point with the example of Italian *foods*, like fideos (pasta), fideos frescos (fresh pasta) and pizza which became popular in Buenos Aires during times of mass immigration. This type of food, available everywhere in Buenos Aires<sup>20</sup> is widely recognized as being of Italian origin. It does not matter to the porteño that, as in North America, the food underwent changes over time, And if this is recognized at all, is regarded more or less as a matter of pride. For example, people are proud of having a greater variety of pizza toppings than in Italy, including such exotic (to visiting Italians) ones as pizza with palm hearts (palmitos). Nobody, except perhaps for a tiny minority

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<sup>19</sup>This is also recognized by immigrants of non-Italian or non-Spanish descent, as can be seen from the following statement of a *Polish* immigrant:

"An Italian who arrives here adapts himself immediately because he finds the same people. Furthermore, there are more Italians here than pillars on the street. But if a Polish, an Ukrainian, a Russian, a Yugoslav or a Chinese person comes here, the country will be completely different to him. I had a hard time with the way of life in Argentina, the language ..."

(Lahitte 1987:284)

<sup>20</sup>Just how typical pasta became in Argentine *immigrant* society, is evident from the autobiography of a Spanish immigrant who nostalgically recalled a dish of tallarines (Spaghetti):

"In this moment, whilst I am writing [after returning to Spain, A.S.] it is Sunday, 10 a.m., and my mouth is watering when I think of the *tallarines*."

(Marsal 1969:273; my italics)

*Meat*, by contrast, was perceived as typical Creole food:

"For her[a woman he knew] brother she prepared the food that *he* liked -based on meat-because as a Creole (criollo), what he most liked was meat."

(ibid.:311; my italics)

of first generation Italians immigrants, is interested in a doctrine of pure food.

Whether the pasta is cooked al dente (cooked half tender) as in Italy, or soft as in Argentina, or whether it is made predominantly from semolina wheat (Argentina), or from durum wheat (Italy), does not matter to the porteño. Nor does the substitution of olive oil by vegetable oils, the essential component of many Italian dishes, cause any concern. Though olives (aceitunas) are grown in Argentina and are widely available at affordable prices, the production of olive oil is minimal and its price almost equal to imported European olive oil. Historically, this might be explained by trade patterns at the beginning of the century, when olive oil was almost entirely imported and therefore initially impeded the development of a proper industry<sup>21</sup>.

As this example of patterns of food consumption shows, one has not only to compare the different perceptions of distinction markers which can demarcate an ethnic boundary, but also to take into consideration gaps of time and space between the two societies in question. Over the last 70 or a hundred years, patterns of consumption and living standards changed considerably both in Italy and Argentina. At the outset of the thesis, I have referred to these processes of change as the 'inversion of roles', particularly with regard to the economic performance of the two countries. Still, not everything can be explained by reference to the presently 'rich' Italy vs. 'poor' Argentina dichotomy. Another important variable in the cultural contact between the two societies is the intensity of communication between them. Linked to the overall pattern of the inversion of roles, now not only the types and the quantity of the information exchanged between the two societies have changed, but also their contents and criteria for selection. While on the one hand the Italian language papers and magazines have diminished<sup>22</sup>, there are, on the other hand, Italian radio stations. And those who are able to afford the installation

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<sup>21</sup> On the changing pattern of oil production in the 1920s and 30s, Díaz Alejandro(1970:306) writes:

"The lowering of duties on imported olive oil in 1923 retarded the growth of the local edible oils industry, which boomed after 1930 thanks to greater protection. Domestic production supplied 39 percent of total consumption of edible oils in 1915-19, 33 percent in 1925-29 and 91 percent by 1939."

<sup>22</sup>There were numerous Italian language publications during the times of mass immigration. Important papers included La patria degli Italiani (1876-1931) and Corriere degli Italiani (\*1949, which later became biweekly journal). More recently, Tribuna Italiana and L'Eco d'Italia have been published (cf. also Mercadante 1974:271, Bourd  1977:216, Petriella 1988:70-71).

costs can also receive satellite television from Italy.

In Argentina, due to the particularities of Italian immigration and its perception, notions of Italy are often very regionalist. Specific characteristics or stereotypes are attributed to Neapolitans, Sicilians, and Piedmontese. Stereotypes include broad references to Italian food, such as pasta and pizza, and also 'typical' Italian music: the opera, the bel canto, and the melodramatic songs of Italian singers in the 50s and early 60s. The regionally less differentiated image of Italy as a successful exporter of 'high-tech' and designer-styled products only recently arrived in Argentina and clashes with older perceptions. On the Argentine side, the boundary is more permeable: differences in the consumption of food from Italy are not perceived as significant, and not treated as a problem of any kind. Instead, the boundary is drawn by expatriate and visiting Italians from Italy, representatives of Italian companies and embassy personnel. Visiting Italians would immediately point out differences and note them as essential for disqualifying Italo-Argentines from being 'Italians' at all. Comments by mainland Italians on Italo-Argentine habits include:

*Ma questi sono già argentini, della pasta hanno fatto una schifezza* (but they have become Argentines, they made pasta into something horrible).

An upper class businessman of Catalan, i.e. non-Italian descent remarked on a visit of Italian businessmen:

"The Italians felt comfortable (comodo) here. I always took them to an Italian restaurant called 'La Strega'. At first they refused to eat the kind of pizza made here, but later they began to like it."

Compare this with the statement: "This is a very Italian family" (Esto es una familia reitaliana)", said by Argentines of non-Italian descent about a family of second and third generation Italian descendants. The statement referred to the 'unity of the family', which was considered particularly Italian, and also to the father's orthodox views on his daughter's sexual conduct in relationships. She was expected to abstain from premarital sex. For the Argentine commentators 'Italian' here meant 'backward' with regard to gender relations.

Argentines and Italo-Argentines who have travelled to Italy find there is a greater preoccupation with style, categories and formalized behaviour in Italy than in Argentina. Underlying these statements is the notion that Buenos Aires is a city which, even in times of economic crisis, is a thriving and cosmopolitan metropolis compared to the parochial



environment of medium-sized European cities.

Teresa Sarto, aged 29, was born in Italy and came at the age of two to Buenos Aires. Recently, she spent a year in Bologna in the north of Italy. She observed:

"Europe is much more uniform [than Buenos Aires]. Here there is more liberty. Everyone can do what she wants. There is always something going on. You can go to the bar until 4 o'clock in the morning. Over there [in Italy], everything is formal: everybody eats at 8 p.m. and goes to bed at 12 p.m. . They know nothing else than *la passeggiata* (the stroll) and the family."

Although things may have changed in Bologna too, Teresa's impressions resemble Schnapper's (1971) observations of the *upper classes of Bologna* in the 1960s. Schnapper's main argument was that while northern Italian cities, such as Bologna, showed signs of 'modernity' (like high industrialization, an influential communist party in local politics, and decreasing influence of the church), at the same time, social life, behaviour and distinctions of food, dress, and house interiors showed a striking *uniformity* within any specific social class, but particularly among the upper class (ibid.:58). During her fieldwork, Schnapper was particularly struck by the uniformity women's clothes, their regular visits to the hairdresser, the maintenance of a pause after lunch (*siesta*) even in winter, and the almost ritual afternoon stroll (*passeggiata*) on the central streets and the *piazza* (ibid.: 28,39,48,57). She interpreted this emphasis on uniform symbols and practices of distinctions as a reflection of largely impermeable social classes with well-defined social roles and status hierarchies (Schnapper 1971:149).

By contrast, in Buenos Aires there is a strong emphasis on social mobility and particularly upward mobility. The formation of a middle class (*clase media*) is considered by *porteños* to be synonymous with the formation of the immigrant nation, and consequently markers of Italian identity, such as food, dress and language, do not define a sharp boundary to other Argentines.

The loss of Italian traditions, of 'Italianess' is then much more a problem for the visitor or expatriate from Italy than for the descendant of Italians in Buenos Aires. However, with the changing of economic roles, distinction markers once regarded as obsolete, can be re-acquired and new ones created. Not only do young Italo-Argentines now want an Italian passport and to travel to Italy, but some of them are also proud of their Italian descent. In most cases, practices and usages relating to Italy remain confined to the family sphere. And there is no need to demarcate them clearly outside, since they are perceived as part of the wider *porteño* culture anyway (in so far as it was influenced by

Italian mass immigration)<sup>23</sup>.

Older first and second generation Italian immigrants state that, 40 years ago, "Italian was still spoken on the streets" (cf. Redondo 1986:277f.). And even nowadays, if two people speak Italian in public, on a bus (*colectivo*) for example, it does not cause the slightest surprise to other *porteños*: no one would turn around or pay particular attention (cf. also Germani 1970:322). However, when Teresa Sarto spoke with her mother in Italian, her friends commented: "*hablan en tano*" (they are speaking in Italian)<sup>24</sup>. Many *porteños* understand Italian to a certain degree and are able to say a few words or sentences, but only a tiny minority speak and write it correctly.

In Buenos Aires, being of Italian descent has no particular significance on its own. Being Italian, that is displaying some kind of Italian identity, occurs in *combination* with other markers of distinction. Ethnicity thus becomes meaningful within a context and relevant markers are invoked and used in particular situations.

The following example will show, how certain Italian traditions hint at an upper middle class background, its education and style, and particular emphasis on decorum.

Italian can mean different things at different times and in situations. If, for example, an immigrant with comparatively little education speaks *cocoliche*<sup>25</sup> or his or her home dialect, the humble origin will be noted and ridiculed. This is different from upper or upper middle class Italians who serve their friends refined dishes. A third possibility is the *ironic* use of ethnic distinction markers.

At a party given by an upper class man in his early thirties, one of the guests was a doctor, the son of an Italian immigrant. When he entered the room, his host (who is of non-Italian descent) started to speak and joke in Italian and the guest smiled.

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<sup>23</sup>The problem of establishing a specific tradition, when 'Italian' status symbols are widely available, has been pointed out by Vecoli (1985:106) in the context of North American Italo-Americans:

"The problem of establishing an Italian identity through consumption is that everyone can drive a FIAT, wear Gucci, and sip Martini and Rossi. And, of course, now everyone cooks pasta. One can even take courses on 'How to be an Italian'."

<sup>24</sup>*Tano*, is a *lunfardo*-term (argot of Buenos Aires) deriving from *napoletano* (neapolitan) and is used to denominate Italians/Italian in general.

<sup>25</sup>*Cocoliche* was the pidgin Spanish spoken by Italian immigrants during the times of mass immigration (cf. Cara Walker 1987). The term can still be used for someone who speaks Spanish with a strong Italian accent and uses Italianisms.

The more general social background to this episode is that the guest, in many ways, personified the educated son of the originally poor, but eventually economically successful immigrant. His father's father had been a golondrina, a poor farm-hand travelling back and forth between the Italian and Argentine harvests at the beginning of the century. His father, Enrique Gerardi (whom we met in Chapter 7) started as a bread-delivery man and made it to factory owner. The son (the guest in our episode) studied and became a doctor. He thus personified the aspiration of many immigrants who wanted to invest educational capital in their children, to let their "sons become doctors"<sup>26</sup>. In the above host-guest situation then, the guest was reminded *ironically* of his humble descent by being addressed in Italian, a language which was never held in high esteem by members of the Argentine upper class, because of its association with millions of poor and uneducated immigrants.

To elucidate the issue of ethnic distinction markers which occur in combination with class-specific distinction markers, I will give the following example. Roberto Chiarivari, aged 37 is the son of immigrants from Northern Italy who came after the Second World War to Argentina. He is a free-lance art critic and also runs a small restaurant in the upper middle class district of Palermo. The interior of the restaurant is painted in light grey with some geometric forms, triangles and circles in primary colours on the walls. Compared to the rather heavy cooking, based on beef and pasta dishes, in other bars and restaurants, the dishes at Chiarivari's are rather light and more refined, combining the influences of nouvelle cuisine with its attention to small portions of separately and delicately cooked vegetables, *and* mainland Italian cooking. The kitchen is run by Roberto's aunt, and a cousin. Roberto helps as a cook and waiter.

When I visited Roberto Chiarivari and his wife at home for dinner, they had also invited a public relations manager, a lawyer, and a painter. The Chiarivaris live in the northern district of Colegiales, on the edge to the more upper class suburb of Belgrano. They had redecorated the bedroom and the living room, giving them a deliberately 'post-modern' atmosphere: the walls were painted with blurred spots and illuminated by lights in the form of half bowls, which threw an indirect light on the walls, like torches. Roberto Chiarivari proudly pointed out that the flat had once been nominated to be photographed

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<sup>26</sup>Pride at having a son who has a title is demonstrated by the proverbial expression, mi hijo el doctor (my son, the doctor), cf. also Pérez Amuchástegui (1988:154).

for an interior design magazine.

On this evening he served his guests a spring roll as a starter, then pasta, cooked *al dente* with a creamy mushroom sauce, and salad. The guests commented favourably on his cooking, and also on the excellent cooking of his mother. One said: "that's where he gets his Italian tradition from". It did not really matter that his mother was actually Argentine, for it is presumed that knowledge on cooking is acquired from the mother. This reflects a more generally held view by *porteños*, that regional traditions and styles are preserved in the family, especially through the women. We have already seen in chapters 7 and 8, how people, recalling their childhood, often mention how their mothers prepared the *salsa* (tomato sauce), *pesto* (basil sauce from Genoa) and special types of *pasta fresca* (fresh pasta), like *cappelletti* and *gnocchi* (Italian) or *ñoquis* (Spanish).

Yet, Roberto Chiarivari's Italianess can only be understood in a wider set of social distinctions that transcend his family background. Italian dishes are served in the context of post-modern interior design of his house in an upper-middle class neighbourhood to friends from the upper middle classes. In addition, Chiarivari is from the upper middle classes (but of immigrant descent) and has married a woman from the *familias tradicionales*<sup>27</sup>. On another occasion, I went with Roberto Chiarivari and his wife to a newly opened Italian restaurant, which had a modern interior design and served very much the same dishes which Roberto prepared at home. Preparing refined Italian dishes at home in highly stylized surroundings, and eating similar food in similar surroundings, reflect the attitude of members of a class segment who want to meet their 'affines' with regard to taste and style, while at the same time wishing to distinguish themselves from others<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup>*Familias tradicionales* (traditional families) is the term used for upper class families who claim Spanish Creole origin prior to mass immigration. The term *clase alta* is more generally used for the upper class, and includes people of immigrant descent as well (cf. also chapters 2,3 and 5).

<sup>28</sup>Bourdieu, in his seminal work on distinctions in French society, has emphasized the difference between *luxurious* and *necessary* tastes with regard to food consumption. At the same time, he stressed *elective affinities* for tastes between people of the same class (Bourdieu 1987: 290,298, 370-378). However, while Bourdieu's categories are persuasive, it remains difficult to apply them to *porteño* society (and indeed other urban societies). For example, it would be misleading to argue that Roberto Chiarivari's preference for Italian cooking represents 'luxurious' taste as it would in Paris (ibid.: 301). Given the overall Italian influences in *porteño* cuisine, it would be more appropriate to say that Italian influences are socially stratified, and in Roberto Chiarivari's case they represent 'luxurious' tastes, while in a *porteño* bar they would denote 'necessary' taste.

## 6. Three Young Italians

Three examples of young descendants of Italians, two second generation and one third generation, will show further, how the perception and constitution of ethnic identity are linked to class background, life history, and to the wider political and economic history of Argentina.

Armanda Capone, aged 27, lives in a two-room apartment just two blocks from the 9 de Julio, the large avenue in the centre of Buenos Aires. The apartment is owned by her parents, who came from Italy in 1949. Armanda is in the final year of her law-degree at the private Catholic University of Buenos Aires (Universidad Católica de Buenos Aires). Like many of her generation, she does not want to stay in Argentina. She speaks scornfully about the military, whom she holds responsible for the disappearance of thousands of persons during the last military dictatorship (1976-1983). But she also criticizes the economic failure of the democratic government of Radical President Raúl Alfonsín (1983-1989). She says that after her degree she could work in a law-firm and probably earn \$ 200 - 300 per month. Yet she considers work in Europe financially more attractive and thinks of contacting her relatives in Milan. She would like to do a course in International Law in Italy, but without a scholarship, she cannot afford to do so.

Armanda's parents originally owned a medium-sized textile-factory and are now retired, living in a middle-class suburb in Greater Buenos Aires. At home the Capones speak Italian with Venetian and Roman accents, and the type of Spanish spoken in Buenos Aires. Armanda states:

"I have incorporated my father's history. These are my roots (raizes). I think that the war [World War II] was traumatic for his generation. My father could not speak about it for 15 years."

It is central to Armanda's identity to emphasize the achievements of her immigrant parents. Of particular importance to her is the life history of her father who was a partisan during World War II, then emigrated to Argentina and, after humble beginnings, established a textile industry. Linked to the fate of her father is that of her mother who had hidden him from the Germans and later married him. He emigrated to Argentina in 1949. The ticket was paid for by his mother who had gone immediately after the war to rejoin her husband; an antifascist who went to Argentina from French exile in 1937. Then in 1952, Silvio Capone paid the ticket for his wife who had remained in Italy. In

Argentina she helped him to set up the textile industry.

The achievements and social mobility experienced by Armanda's parents in Argentina centre around the notion of hard work and industriousness. This is set against the current Argentine situation of instability and unpredictability which justifies, for example, the depositing of savings in US-dollars in foreign bank accounts. Hard work and personal achievements are specifically assigned to her parents and other North Italians to distinguish them from supposedly lazier South Italians, Argentines in general and cabecitas negras<sup>29</sup> in particular.

Silvia Lorenzo, aged 22, studies Fine Arts (Bellas Artes) at Buenos Aires University. She lives in a huge apartment which overlooks part of the city and the River Plate. The apartment in the upper class district of Recoleta is owned by her father, who came in 1949 to Argentina and is now a top manager of an Italo-Argentine multinational company. Before entering university, Silvia Lorenzo went through private education in a boarding school in the province of Buenos Aires. Her brother went to the prestigious private Highschool St Andrew's in Buenos Aires. Not only residence and education characterize Silvia's upper class background but also her attitudes to money and material wealth in general. Almost every year she visits her relatives in a city of central Italy, where her father owns a house and an apartment. When asked about the flight fares to Europe, she did not seem to understand the question, since money was never a problem for her. She is practically unaffected by the worsening economic situation in Argentina and remains indifferent when discussing the subject. She mixes with a group of friends in their 20's and early 30's: art students, students of humanities, artists, art-dealers and musicians. Their class-backgrounds range from the middle to the upper-class. It is not a fixed group of friends, and not all the people know each other. Often, a group of four or five go out for the evening. Silvia's apartment is the meeting place, where friends would arrive between nine and ten p.m.. Nightlife in Buenos Aires starts very late; some

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<sup>29</sup>Cabecitas negras, as I have already mentioned in chapter 5, means literally 'little black heads'. It is used as a pejorative social category for Argentines who are supposed by the speaker *not* to be of 'white' immigrant descent. It is particularly used by the middle and upper classes of Buenos Aires to refer to 'internal' immigrants who came in the 1940s to Buenos Aires from the province of Buenos Aires and provinces of the interior of Argentina.

discos and music shows begin only after midnight<sup>30</sup>. The friends travel by public transport and, since money is not a problem to them, often by taxi. One particularly fashionable place was the bar Bolivia which opened in the second half of 1989 on México, a street in the Southern Buenos Aires district of San Telmo. Bolivia, which opens late at 11 p.m. and stays open to the early morning hours, combines a relaxed pub atmosphere with plush sofas and 'New Wave' music. So, despite the Latin American name, the intention is to give an European image.

With regard to their ethnic background, these young Argentines are as mixed as any group of friends in Buenos Aires can be: Italians, and descendants of Italians, Spaniards, Russian Jews and Germans. They speak Argentine Spanish amongst themselves and when I occasionally spoke Italian to Silvia, or German to Hermann Kaiser, it was noticed but no matter of particular surprise to the others.

Silvia Lorenzo speaks fluent Italian, although with some hispanicisms. She learnt Italian at home and still speaks it with her father. But here again, their Italianess seems to be largely confined to the private sphere of the home. Her father is a member of the upper class Italian club, the Circolo Italiano, but he never goes to its meetings. Silvia says that she sometimes has contacts with Italian institutions in Buenos Aires, for example the Fundación Coliseo, which supports the arts and run a theatre in the centre of Buenos Aires. On the premises of the Teatro Coliseo she once organized a show of young Italo-Argentine artists. But when she has to choose between an Argentine identity and the kind of identity offered by Italian institutions in Buenos Aires, it becomes clear with whom she aligns herself:

"I am Argentine. They once asked me to go to an association of the Emilia-Romagna [region in central Italy]. But they have a wrong idea of Italy. In Italy the regions do not exist like this."

She was making reference here to the strong regional fragmentation of Italian associations in Buenos Aires<sup>31</sup>, a theme which will be expanded in chapter 10. For Silvia then, there was no material need 'to play the Italian card', to queue at the Italian consulate for a passport, or to emigrate to work in Italy. As an upper-class child, she has basically

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<sup>30</sup>On cultural life after the end of the military dictatorship in 1983, see also Burns (1987:136-155).

<sup>31</sup>I heard a similar comment from a mainland Italian woman visiting Buenos Aires: "Qua hanno una idea esagerata delle regioni. Questo in Italia non c'è più" (Here they have an exaggerated idea of the regions. This does not exist any more in Italy).

everything in Buenos Aires, and sufficient money to travel to Europe whenever she wants. It might be interesting for her to appear Italian in certain contexts, to speak Italian, and to point out that she had upper class ancestors in Italy, among them renowned painters. But if she makes the link with Italy, it is not for material interests, but to demonstrate status and prestige. However, she does not seem to be particularly interested in establishing or continuing a family tradition. Her present life-style is determined by the fact that she can afford almost any kind of cultural and material consumption in Buenos Aires. Consequently, the parochial Italian associations are not the kind of institutions to which she feels particularly attracted. Her friends in general share the same view, although some of them do not have the same class background. Indeed, a middle class friend of hers once told me of an incident where Silvia was buying expensive perfume, paying without hesitation in US-dollars. On this and on Silvia's conspicuous shopping in a supermarket she commented:

"She is from the upper classes (de clase alta) and very rich. She doesn't care about money and has no ideas what things cost. She thinks in dollars. Sometimes I get angry about this."

Silvia Lorenzo is indifferent to money; she can *afford* to 'think' in dollars because she is wealthy. Other people *have to* 'think' in dollars because it is the only valuable indicator of their comparatively poor resources (cf. chapter 4). She is also vague about politics; amidst the general economic problems, she is happy with the actual democratic order, but she cannot really tell the difference from the previous military government. It was during that time when she went to a private highschool, quite protected from the outside world.

This generally indifferent, apolitical attitude is shared by most of her friends. The older ones are disillusioned about various forms of government and do not give credibility to any kind of regime. The younger ones say they cannot really tell the difference between military and democratic governments from their own experience. These are of course ideologically skewed statements. Experiences of youngsters and adolescents under the military dictatorship 'el proceso' varied greatly with class background and individual fate. Coming from an upper class family would mean being given a body-guard on the way to a private school. But irrespective of class background, elder brothers and sisters could well have been politically active and have been abducted by the military, and so could friends or relatives. Among some of the art and antique-dealers in Silvia's circle of friends, there is a common idea that the economic situation in Argentina can only worsen,



and therefore one should take advantage of situations now and make as much money as possible.

A woman with strong political opinions is Carmela Mastrosimone, aged 26, and a student of history at the University of Buenos Aires (Universidad de Buenos Aires). She comes from a middle class family. Her father is a general practitioner, the son of an Italian immigrant who had come in the 1930s because, as an antifascist, he could not get work in Italy. Carmela's sister Roberta (who was a highschool student and, like many people at the time, politically active with Peronist student groups) got abducted by the military in 1976 and 'disappeared'. In the guerra sucia, the 'dirty war' which the military carried out against suspected terrorists and opponents of the dictatorship in general, between 8,000 to 20,000 people disappeared (desaparecidos): they were abducted, tortured and eventually murdered (cf. chapters 3 and 4, and *Nunca Más* 1986:xi-xvi).

The disappearance of Roberta left its mark on the family. While the parents tried for years through various lawyers and even the Italian embassy to find out something about Roberta's fate, they are now resigned and do not mention the subject any more. On the other hand, Carmela and her two brothers still insist that the military should be tried for the crimes it committed during the military dictatorship, and they are outraged about government legislation exempting the persons responsible on the ground that they were just obeying orders; or even pardoning them (cf. chapters 3 and 4). Differences of opinion divide the Mastrosimones and their relatives. One uncle of Carmela is an Army officer himself and justifies the military's action at that time on the grounds of the need to defeat terrorism. At family reunions the subject is not mentioned.

Outside observers and distant relatives of the family see even the strict surveillance of Carmela by her parents, so far as premarital relationships are concerned, as linked to the loss of Roberta. They say that the already strict 'Italian tradition' (tradición italiana) with regard to gender, which restricts the freedom of unmarried girls, has been further tightened for the only surviving daughter.

Carmela would like to live a more independent life and not to hide her boy-friends from her parents. She wants to rent a small apartment but just cannot afford it. She takes classes in Italian at the cultural institute of the Italian community in Buenos Aires, the Asociación Dante Alighieri. The only person in the family who still speaks Italian is Carmela's grandmother (MF), called by everybody la nona.

Nonā derives from the Italian nonna, grandmother, and in Argentine Spanish the term,

los nonos (grandparents), is sometimes generally used to refer to the first generation of Italian immigrants. Sometimes people would say, "she is a real Italian grandmother" (es una verdadera nona italiana), referring to Carmela's grandmother's mixed language of Italian and Spanish and her black mourning dress worn since the death her husband. Carmela explained to me that she goes to the Dante Alighieri, because on the one hand she feels her 'roots' (raizes) as a descendant of Italians and wants to know the language and culture. On the other hand, due to the loss of her sister, she feels totally alienated from the political context of Argentina. She cannot identify with its governments and feels very uncomfortable in Buenos Aires, "where the people already forget what happened a few years ago and get excited about the next World Cup soccer season."

## 7. Conclusions

The examples presented above reveal the different meanings that 'Italian' can assume among young descendants of Italians in Buenos Aires, and how these are encapsulated in and partly shaped by the national histories of Italy and Argentina.

For *Roberto Chiarivari* being Italian, and speaking an impeccable High Italian and cooking refined Italian dishes, is part of a wider set of distinctions as a member of the upper middle classes in Buenos Aires.

*Teresa Sarto* works at an Italian institution, the highschool *Cristofero Colombo* and is very conscious about the fact that she came at the age of two and was raised in Argentina. She comments, almost laconically, 'They brought me here as a child' (me trajeron acá de chica). Living recently for a year in Italy has convinced her that she is more Argentine than Italian. In the medium-sized Italian city she was staying, she found the way of life to rigid in comparison to Buenos Aires. She feels emotionally very involved when her relatives visit from Italy.

*Armanda Capone's* identity is centred around the immigrant-history of her parents, particularly that of her father. Her relatives in Italy can be used as a strategic asset if she wants to look for a job there.

In *Silvia Lorenzo's* daily life, being of Italian descent does not matter to her; she rather values the carefree life of an upper class child. Only occasionally does she invoke her 'Italian' side, usually when she needs to approach Italian institutions in Buenos Aires, like

the Fundación Coliseo or the Italian Chamber of Commerce. Apart from general statements on the natural beauty of Italy and its monuments, she does not appear to feel any particular or more private sentimental attachment to it.

*Carmela Mastro Simone's* relationship to Italy and an Italian identity is much more problematic. Argentina's last military dictatorship has deprived her of her sister and she therefore feels no identification with her country of birth. She is looking for new inspiration and turns to the country of her forefathers.

More generally, the material presented in this and the preceding two chapters, shows that the individual perception of the immigrant experience and its location in time is made in terms of *generation*. It thus makes an explicit statement about the relationship between an individual experience and that of the wider society.

In the porteño variant of Argentine Spanish, the terms nono (grandfather), nona (grandmother) and nonos (grandparents)<sup>32</sup> designate the kinship relations of FF, MF, FM, MM to Ego. Deriving from the respective Italian *nonno*, *nonna*, and *nonni*, they are particularly used for grandparents who have emigrated from Italy, or from Europe in general<sup>33</sup>. This terminology, however, is used for *older European immigrants in general*: once they have stayed a long time in Argentina they become nonos. The distance from the period of immigration is put in generational terms. Not only is time perceived generationally, but also as part of a wider discourse of the descendent generations, who refer to themselves as nosotros, los nietos de inmigrantes (we, the grandchildren of the immigrants).

In popular discourse, Enrique Gerardi, Domenico Donatello and Leone Marinetti (the first generation immigrants presented in chapter 7) would have become nonos, 'classificatory' grandparents. The distance from the period of immigration is perceived through the idiom of kinship. It does not really matter whether a person of the nono-

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<sup>32</sup>Meo Zilio/Rossi (1970:33) mention the diminutive forms nonono and nonino, from the Italian *nonnone* and *nonnino*. A Tango by Astor Piazzola is also entitled 'Nonino'. A theatre play by Roberto Cossa is entitled, 'Nona', and in October 1991 was screened in an English version by the BBC. Set in Buenos Aires in recent times of economic crisis, it depicts a 100-year-old 'grandmother' who, with her insatiable appetite, drives her family into poverty (cf. *The Guardian* 17.10.1991).

<sup>33</sup>The standard Spanish terms are abuelo, abuela, abuelos.

generation is really a grandparent or not, but that he has immigrated a long time ago and could have had grandchildren in Argentina.

The transformative process of mass immigration in Argentine society was individually experienced as family history. This is true, both literally, in the sense that families or parts of families emigrated to Argentina, but also in the more extended sense of the retrospective view taken by the descendants, whose parents' and grandparents' generation had emigrated.

The nono-terminology thus transcends the boundary of a descriptive kinship term and reflects, in its more generalize 'classificatory'<sup>34</sup> form, the societal processes in modern Argentina.

By using the label nono, not only is the wider experience of migration put into an individual kinship term, but also the specific historical experience of migration is encapsulated and, to vary the metaphor, frozen in time. A linear historical event is translated into a generational and thereby transformed into a structural relationship which is always available, as there always will be grandparents. The real distance from the events, that is to the period of mass immigration, or even to the last period of European immigration after World War II, gets longer every year. But with the nono-terminology, society's meta-discourse is such that ego's distance from the events of migration remains invariable. It is always a distance of two generations, going back to ego's grandparents. The allusion to the nono-generation, or more general abuelo-generation of immigrants, is also used in political discourse in times of economic crisis. In the 1988/89 presidential campaign the right-wing Liberal Party (Ucede) said on one of its adverts (cf. Illustration 4: Party Political Advert of the Ucede):

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<sup>34</sup>Classificatory (as opposed to a descriptive kinship term) in the extended sense, that not only nono can be applied to a person of two or more kinship categories (to ego) (Schusky 1965:74), but to anybody who came as an immigrant from Europe.

"WE BROUGHT YOUR GRANDFATHER OVER HERE. LET'S AVOID YOUR SON HAVING TO LEAVE.

"The liberals who governed Argentina at the end of the last century and at the beginning of this, opened the doors to immigration. That is how our grandfathers arrived. They were attracted by the prospects of one of the most flourishing countries on earth.

"...[now] our country is the victim of the saddest of all exports: the export of its sons.

Very soon you will vote.

"Think of it: for whom would *he* [i.e. your grandfather] have voted? And if *you* are uncertain, ask your son."

(*Ambito Financero* 20.10.1988; my italics and capital letters)

On the following page:

Illustration 4: Party political advert of the UCEDE, 1988



## LOS QUE TRAJIMOS A SU ABUELO VAMOS A EVITAR QUE SU HIJO SE VAYA.

Los liberales, que gobernaban la Argentina a fines del siglo pasado y a principios de este, abrieron las puertas a la inmigración. Así llegaron nuestros abuelos.

Atraídos por la esperanza de uno de los países más florecientes de la Tierra.

Pero el liberalismo, también, creía en la democracia.

Y fue una propuesta liberal, la Ley Saenz Peña, la que, sin restricciones de ninguna clase, permitió que nuestros padres pudieran elegir y ser elegidos. Acertar en el gobierno. O equivocarse.

Lamentablemente, esto fue lo que ocurrió. Durante muchos años.

Con elecciones o sin ellas, de civil o de

uniforme, los gobiernos argentinos aplicaron una política contraria a aquella que había hecho, de nuestro país, una de las más prósperas naciones de la Tierra.

Cubriendo sus fracasos con frases tan absurdas como "liberación o dependencia" y empujando a la Argentina hacia el llamado Tercer Mundo. Que es, como su nombre lo indica, el último de la humanidad.

Por eso, hoy, nuestros hijos se quieren ir. Pero no emigran a los países de ese Tercer Mundo. Se van a los Estados Unidos, al Canadá, a Italia, Australia o España.

Países que, aún con gobiernos de distinto nombre, aplican una política similar

a la que la Argentina, jamás, debió abandonar.

Por eso, hoy, nuestro país es víctima de la más triste de las exportaciones: la de sus hijos.

Muy pronto, usted va a votar. Si está indeciso, no se deje manejar por falsas opciones.

No importa tanto quien rompe más vidrieras sino quien crea más fuentes de trabajo. Y esos seguimos siendo nosotros. Los que nunca traicionamos los sueños de su abuelo.

Piense: por quién hubiera votado él? Y, si no está seguro, pregúntele a su hijo.

**Alsogaray-Natale**

# ALIANZA DE CENTRO

**UCEDE**



**Demócrata Progresista**



**Concentración Demócrata**



**PARTIDO LIBERAL**



**PARTIDO AUTONOMISTA**





## CHAPTER 10

### Leadership, and Negotiation of Boundaries in Italian Associations

#### 1. Introduction

In the previous chapters I have taken families (chapter 6) and individuals (chapters 7,8 and 9) as units of analysis. In this chapter I will shift the perspective to the institutionalized representation of Italians and Italo-Argentines in Buenos Aires. I will thus be concerned with a *specific fraction* of Italians and their descendants: those who are organized in ethnic associations.

In particular, I will analyse the role of leaders who claim to represent the interests of members of the Italian associations and, more generally, of Italians in Argentina. Playing the politics of institutionalized representation in times of economic crisis, the leaders act as brokers, allocating funds from the Italian Government and the Italian regions to now impoverished immigrants. They thus operate at a specific junction in the relationship between the two countries, now characterized by inverted economic roles. In order to gain more influence in this process of brokerage and to legitimize their role as representatives, leaders have to increase their clientele. On the level of practical politics, ethnic leaders have been aided in their task of popular legitimization by the recent installation of councils elected by Italian passport holders (*CO.EM.IT.*; henceforth COEMIT). On a rhetorical level, leaders are engaged in a process of defining and negotiating ethnic boundaries.

Based on fieldwork among leaders, this chapter analyses the changing features of Italian ethnic representation in the 1980s, paying attention to the inherently ideological nature of the boundaries of ethnic identities and the politically controversial role of leaders as mediators between different clienteles and interest groups. I will focus upon institutionally organized Italians in Argentina, on the representatives of the Italian State in Argentina, and on politicians in Italy.



## 2. Ethnic Leaders and the Structure of Ethnic Representation

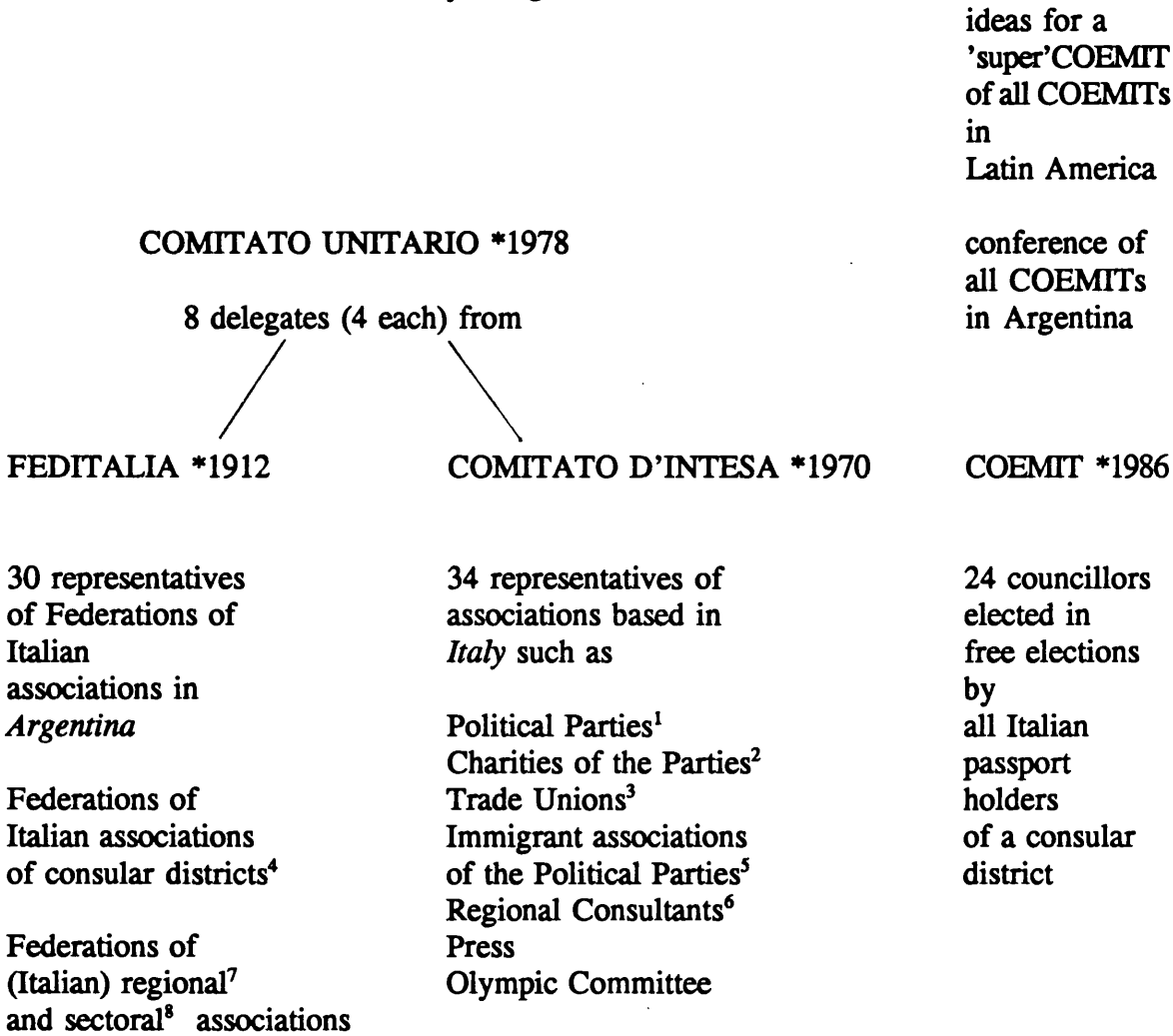
In the late 1980s, leaders of Italian associations in Buenos Aires had to accommodate two developments: the creation of the COEMIT councils by the Italian Government, and the increasing activity of *mainland Italian parties* among Italian emigrants. I shall first show how one such leader, Giovanni Gambino, operates at different levels of the changing framework of ethnic institutions.

Dr. Giovanni Gambino is a very busy man. He divides his time between the Hospital Italiano (Italian Hospital) where he works as a surgeon, the day-clinic of the Italian consulate where he serves as a doctor, and his manifold activities within the Italian associations. Born in 1936 in Buenos Aires, the son of an employee of the Italian consulate, he accompanied his father at an early age to the meetings and social gatherings of the Circolo Trentino, the association of his father's home town, Trento. Periodically recurring celebrations were important in his socialization with the 'circolo'. He recalls the balli della gioventù (young people's dances), feste della primavera (spring parties) and pranzi della domenica (Sunday lunches). Since the mid 1970s he has been the president of the Circolo Trentino. In 1986 he stood as a candidate in the elections to the CO.EM.IT. (Comitato dell'Emigrazione Italiana), the committee of Italian emigrants abroad.

COEMITs are the creation of recent(1985) Italian legislation on emigrants which responded finally to earlier demands by Italian emigrants in Europe and overseas to have their representatives democratically elected. COEMIT councils function now in 21 countries, including Britain, and all Italian passport holders of a consular district have the right to elect councillors. Giovanni Gambino got elected to the COEMIT of Buenos Aires as a candidate of the Lista Unitaria nel Pluralismo (the united pluralist list). The Lista Unitaria was set up by leaders of FEDITALIA and the Comitato Nazionale d'Intesa, two earlier bodies whose functions of representing Italian immigrants vis-à-vis the Italian (embassy and consulate) and the Argentine authorities were now officially replaced by the COEMIT.

Diagram 3: Political Organization of Italians in Buenos Aires

Since 1986 Italian authorities only recognize the COEMIT



<sup>1</sup>i.e. DC, PCI, PSI, PSDI, PRI.

<sup>2</sup>or of the Trade Unions INCA, ACLI, F.SANTI.

<sup>3</sup>i.e. CISL, UIL, CGIL.

<sup>4</sup>of the six Italian consular districts in Argentina: Buenos Aires, La Plata, Córdoba, Rosario, Mendoza and Bahía Blanca.

<sup>5</sup>ANFE, FILEF, and of the Catholic Church CSER, UCEI.

<sup>6</sup>in 1989 for the following Italian regions: Trentino-Alto Adige, Veneto, Friuli, Marche, Campania, Calabria, and Sardinia.

<sup>7</sup>e.g. Federación Asociaciones "Piemontesi" (FAPA).

<sup>8</sup>e.g. Federación Asociaciones "Ex Combattenti" Italianos "Legion Valiente".



Since the 1970s, Italian associations based in Argentina (FEDITALIA) and the branch-offices of institutions based in Italy (Comitato Nazionale d'Intesa) have each sent four delegates to a joint 'united' committee (Comitato Unitario). The executive committees of FEDITALIA and the Comitato Nazionale d'Intesa make policy recommendations concerning Italian immigrants, which have to be agreed by the Comitato Unitario, before it presents them to the Italian authorities in Argentina, such as Consulates and Embassy, and, less often, to the Argentine authorities dealing with immigrants (such as the Dirección de Migraciones). Till the mid-1980s, the Comitato Unitario was the official interlocutor of the Italian immigrants for the representatives of the Italian and Argentine state.

Even before the creation of COEMITs by the Italian bureaucracy, the active members of the Italian associations perceived an *opposition* between the associations affiliated to FEDITALIA, seen as the autonomous creation of the Italian immigrants (*associazioni cresciute organicamente*<sup>10</sup>), and the Italian-based institutions represented by the Comitato Nazionale d'Intesa, commonly known as *i romani* (the Romans, i.e. those from Rome). The irony is, however, that in the last 10 to 20 years it were *i romani* who have had more access to resources and could count on a growing power and increased membership basis from their Buenos Aires clientele. Until recently then, FEDITALIA, founded in 1912, was thought to be *the genuine* institutionalized representation of Italian immigrants in Argentina.

In view of the new reality of the COEMIT councils, there is now growing discussion among the leaders and active members of the associations as to what future role should be assigned to the associations (FEDITALIA), and, to some extent, the "romani" branch institutions (Comitato Nazionale d'Intesa). Some younger ethnic leaders, like Giovanni Gambino, who are influential on the COEMIT council, emphasize the COEMIT's role as the only officially designated interlocutor towards the Italian authorities. This shift of power from FEDITALIA to the COEMIT is not entirely a conflict of old versus new leaders, and corporatist associations versus elected committees. Some of the 'old' ethnic leaders are elected members in the 'new' COEMIT-council, and the associations had also mobilized *their* members for the elections.

The terminology employed by ethnic leaders in this conflict reflects political changes in

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<sup>10</sup>literally "organically developed associations."

Argentina and how they are ideologically framed: labelling the old associations (like FEDITALIA) as 'corporatist', *now* has derogatory implications, because it alludes to the corporate organization of societal sectors in the past, under the totalitarian regimes of Fascism in *Italy*, and Peronism and military dictatorships in *Argentina*. Such 'corporatism' is now perceived as being the opposite of the current pluralistic representation of interest groups in the late 1980s. To summarize, both FEDITALIA and COEMIT styles of leadership when dealing with Italian and Argentine institutions can be characterized as 'leaderships of accommodation', rather than 'leaderships of protest' which would be in opposition to the state of the host society (cf. Higham 1979:3).

A closer look at the COEMIT council and the key issues discussed in 1989 will help us to understand this new form of representation among Italian immigrants.

Every Tuesday Giovanni Gambino attends the meeting of the COEMIT *executive committee* which is formed by 8 councillors<sup>11</sup> out of 24. In 1986, 80.748 Italian passport holders voted in the first COEMIT elections. Gambino was a candidate for the Lista Unitario-ticket and got elected with 3730 votes<sup>12</sup>; later he became vice-president of the COEMIT. Lista Unitaria won 13 seats altogether and thus the absolute majority in the new COEMIT council<sup>13</sup>.

While officially representing *all* Italian passport holders, the COEMIT council got elected only by a minority. However, the Italian newspaper, *Tribuna Italiana* (26.11.1986), expected an even lower turn-out and reckoned that many of the voters were *descendants of Italian immigrants* who had Italian passports. And because most of the COEMIT councillors have been recruited from the Italian associations, it comes as no surprise, that the composition of the council reflects the more general feature of Italian associations in which the vast majority of second, third and fourth generation immigrants are *not* actively involved. In fact, Gambino is the *only councillor born in Argentina* and is, in this

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<sup>11</sup>The executive committee consists of President, Vice-president, Secretary, Vice-Secretary, Treasurer, Vice-Treasurer and two more councillors.

<sup>12</sup>cf. Decreto Consolare 11.12.1986

<sup>13</sup>Election results (according to *Tribuna Italiana* 10.12.1986)

list	votes	seats
1) Ispirazione Cristiana	17.697	6
2) Independente	10.737	4
3) San Nicolás, Prov. Bs.As.	3.067	0
4) Tricolore	3.991	1
5) Lista Unitaria nel Pluralismo	42.518	13
(50% of the candidates from FEDITALIA 50% of the candidates from Comitato Nazionale d'Intesa)		

respect, unlike other councillors, most of whom migrated to Argentina during the last period of immigration after World War II<sup>14</sup>.

The only two women councillors hold strategic positions on the executive committee. Clara Torino is the secretary and Laura Pacini the vice-secretary of the COEMIT.

But even though the COEMIT represents only a minority of Italian passport holders, its decisions could eventually affect a much wider clientele. While the COEMIT itself has no funds to distribute, it makes recommendations to the Italian authorities concerning grants to Italian institutions and to individuals living in poverty. In a time of economic crisis and *grossly inverted economic roles* between Argentina and Italy, an institution like the COEMIT gains in importance because it forms the only representation of Italian passport holders recognized by the wealthy motherland.

In 1988 and 1989, Giovanni Gambino and other councillors dealt mainly with the allocation of aid from Italy. They were also occupied with the assessment and creation of new bureaucratic structures, such as a federation of all Argentine COEMIT councils, in order to obtain and mediate economic resources. The following were the main topics on the agenda: firstly, the discussion of credit from Italy to the Argentine Government, and more specifically, the request for a social benefit payable to poor Italians and linked to the registration of Italians in Buenos Aires (*anagrafe*) and a full-scale census (*censimento*); and secondly, discussion of the results of the II. National Conference on Emigration in Rome in 1988 and a post-conference in Mar del Plata (Argentina) in April 1989.

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<sup>14</sup> 22 of the 24 councillors came to Argentina after the Second World War; some of them as very young children. One councillor was born in Argentina and another came in the 1920s.

A reduced sample of 18 councillors who responded to a questionnaire, shows the following distribution of professions:

5 skilled labourers and employees, 6 professionals (3 doctors, 2 teachers, 1 actor) and 8 small and medium scale entrepreneurs. All but one have previously been active in ethnic associations, and at least 7 were also represented on the *FEDITALIA* and *Comitato Nazionale d'Intesa* boards.

## Social Benefits

The councillors called the social benefit *sacchi di povertà*, literally 'sacks of poverty', referring to the hand-outs in kind of food and clothes at the Italian Consulate in Buenos Aires. Argentina's ongoing economic decline (cf. chapter 4) had meant for many Italian labourers and self-employed immigrants a real loss of income; just as the crisis had affected the rest of the Argentine population. In particular, old-aged pensioners who received only the Argentine minimum pension of 20,000 Australes now lacked the means for survival, since living costs amounted to at least the monthly minimum wage of 70,000 Australes (approximately \$ 100 in autumn 1989). The Italian consular network (whose General Consulate in the centre of Buenos Aires was originally designed to attend to 60,000 people) was totally overburdened with work and its few social workers could not possibly cope with the growing numbers of Italian citizens falling below the poverty line, whom they were supposed to visit at home in order to assess their needs. These 'registered' poor could then collect food and clothes from the *Patronato Italiano*<sup>15</sup>, a charity for Italian immigrants.

Many Italians, particularly the leaders, saw this as a degrading practice and urged for a general social benefit (*assegno sociale*) of about \$100 per month, instead of giving people a few packets of pasta and canned tomatoes. The Italian Government did not react promptly to the problem. It wanted to know *how many Italians really lived in Buenos Aires*. Then it could assess a case, the precise number of poor people who were in need of assistance. However, in mid-1989, the attaché for social affairs at the Italian embassy indicated to the COEMIT executive committee the possibility of an emergency grant from Italy; COEMIT councillors should bring him lists of people in need, which he would then send on to Rome. COEMIT councillors had a vested political interest in the registration of poor Italians, as only those who were registered could vote in the next COEMIT election. The next election, which was due in November 1989, had to be postponed precisely because the registration had not been concluded. A full-scale census of Italians

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<sup>15</sup>When the first great period of Italian immigration with its dynamics of seasonal and return migration came to an end in the 1920s with the restrictive emigration laws of fascism, this was reflected in the changing function of many associations and charities which dealt with repatriation as well as with the tutelage of immigrants.

The Patronato Italiano, founded in 1877, changed its name in 1941 from *Società di Patronato e Rimpatrio per gli Immigranti Italiani* (Society for the patronage and repatriation of Italian Immigrants) to *Patronato Italiano di Protezione agli Emigranti* (Italian Charity for the Protection of Emigrants) (cf. Patronato Italiano 1941:5).

in Greater Buenos Aires and the whole of Argentina was planned for 1991 to coincide with the Italian general census. It is quite a demanding task in a city of 12 million people, with an estimated 'Italian' population of more than 700,000 (Italian passport holders, including people who were not born in Italy; cf. chapter 1).

The enumeration of Italians in Argentina has become an overtly *political issue* for the COEMIT and the Italian government. The COEMIT councils want to increase their power base and are thus interested in registering as many Italian passport holders as possible, since these will be potential voters. The Italian bureaucracy, on the other hand, fears that it will have to cope with an unending stream of people from the Argentine population demanding economic assistance: hundreds of thousands of Argentines might qualify for an Italian passport, which can be granted on the grounds of direct descentance from Italians in the male line for up to three generations (as far as the great-grandfather), or one generation in the female line<sup>16</sup>.

In such a situation, the success of the COEMIT and the Italian associations in augmenting their clientele depends very much on their ability to transform a principally economic issue into an ethnic one. In the current economic crisis, many porteños apply for Italian passports anyway in order to get the possibility of travelling to Europe. Ethnic leaders frequently speak of the 'regaining of ethnic identity', and the 'rediscovery of roots', claiming that 'half of Argentina is Italian'. Clearly, such 'revivalist' rhetoric (which we have already heard from Giovanni Petrarca in chapter 8) has to be seen as an attempt to make inroads into a vast human reservoir, that is the Argentine population, which the leaders think is susceptible to new forms of ethnic identification.

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<sup>16</sup>That is to say, descendants from Italian M, F,FF, and FFF are eligible to apply for an Italian passports.



## Credits from Italy

In a general assembly of the COEMIT council in November 1989, COEMIT leaders were outraged over the little attention given in the Argentine media to Italian credits for social and medical assistance worth US\$ 150 Mill. to Argentina<sup>17</sup>.

Laura Pacini, the vice-secretary of the COEMIT council and chairman of a charity of the Italian Communist trade Union CGIL, argued vehemently (first in Italian and then in Spanish which she speaks more fluently) that even with the creation of COEMIT council the Italian Government spends very little direct money on Italian associations, the real representatives of Italians in Argentina. On the other hand, treaties of preferential Italian-Argentine cooperation were signed<sup>18</sup>, involving large sums of money. However, like other councillors she claimed that these bilateral agreements helped only multinational big businesses and would not affect medium and small enterprises, the traditional backbone of the Argentine industrial culture, largely created by Italian immigrants. Instead, large credits for social assistance would reach the Argentine government where they would get blocked in a corrupt bureaucracy and never get to their destination. And on top of it, the Argentines did not even properly thank the Italians for their generous help.

During an emotional exchange of arguments the Italian consular official present at the meeting simply remarked:

"Well, if it is correct that 10 to 15% of the population are Italian and another 60% descendants, then surely some of the money will also help the Italians."

The discussion then turned to the practical problem of the emergency social benefit Rome might give to poor Italians in Argentina. The consular official asked for better controls of the lists of people the COEMIT was supposed to hand in to the Embassy. COEMIT-councillors and social workers were requested to visit applicants in order to assess their situation. To exclude any collusion of interest, the consulate would indicate to each councillor 5 to 10 individuals councillor, who are not members of his or her association. "Now we need to give our brothers the hand, we have to help our co-nationals (*connazionali*), we do not need clientelism", the consular official said. He gave the example of a man with a house and two cars applying for the social benefit. "Maybe", he went on to say, "many do not know that this is intended for the absolute needy and it is not a 100 \$ per month general benefit from the Vatican as many naïvely thought

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<sup>17</sup>They were referring to a small article at the bottom of page 12 of the daily *Clarín* (12.12.1989) which reported laconically that the Secretary of Health, Matilde Menéndez, will collect 50tons of medicaments worth US\$ 3 million at Ezeiza-airport.

<sup>18</sup>On 10 December 1987, a treaty for 'the creation of a particular association' between Argentina and Italy was signed (Tratado entre la República Argentina y la República Italiana para la creación de una relación asociativa particular).

Most significantly, the treaty aimed for the establishment of 'joint-ventures' between Italian companies and Argentine small and medium-sized companies. Such joint ventures would be financed one third by direct investments from the Argentine company, one third by the Italian company, and one third by credits from Italy (Del Bello 1989:443).

During the time of my fieldwork there was much talk of this new treaty in the Italo-Argentine business community, and the topic was frequently discussed at the Italian chamber of Commerce. However, it seemed to me that by the end of 1989 very few projects had been realized under the terms of the treaty.

queuing up recently at Italian parish churches."

The different positions of official Italian visitors and leaders of Italian immigrants in Argentina surfaced also in a visit from an Italian bishop who addressed Sicilian leaders in Buenos Aires:

"If it is true that half of this country is Italian by descent, then get these people to work, to be creative. Attract the young to your associations. Do not teach them old fashioned folklore and long gone traditions, but modern Italian corporate thinking. You have a great responsibility. This is your country, you are at home here and your children will have to make a living here!"

Italian leaders would have liked to have the social benefit paid directly to their clients, the Italians organized in associations, and not through the Argentine bureaucracy which they feared was too slow and over which they do not have much influence. Also, as the large majority of Italian passport holders in Argentina were not organized in ethnic associations, and because the consular services could not possibly cope with hundreds of thousands of applicants, in the event of a more general social benefit the associations might have to be used for bureaucratic help as they in fact already were. That on the other hand would enhance their chances for revitalization and new membership.

#### The Second National Conference on Emigration

With the installation of the COEMIT councils and the new possibilities of trade and travel for expatriate leaders opened up by the Italian regions, a new phase in the bureaucratization of immigrant representation was initiated. The preparations and repercussions of the second national conference on emigration is a good example with which to illustrate this point.

From November 28th to December 3rd 1988, the Second National Conference on Emigration took place in *Rome*; the first had been in 1975. Delegations of Italian immigrants from all over the world were invited. For the COEMIT councils, elected in 1986, it was the first time they had made their voices heard in Italy. The COEMIT of Buenos Aires, representing the majority of Italians in Argentina, prepared a document for the conference which was intended to provide information about Italians in Buenos Aires. It had sections on cultural identity, schooling, the recent work of the COEMIT and a random survey of the main social features of the Italian community (cf. CO.EM.IT. 1988).

Apart from the COEMIT councillors, many representatives of the Italian based institutions (who were thus represented in the Comitato Nazionale d'Intesa) got invitations and flight tickets to Italy. Yet it shocked and angered the 'genuine' FEDITALIA leaders that they were not invited to represent Italians officially, as this role was now conferred

on the COEMIT. Still, quite a few FEDITALIA leaders went to Rome in their second, third or other positions as representatives of institutions based in Italy. Back home, the COEMIT leaders called a post-conference meeting to discuss the results. During the course of this conference held in Mar del Plata in April 1989, deep political rifts among COEMIT councillors from all over Argentina became apparent. One faction, which was eventually successful in having motions passed, pressed for a further differentiation and hierarchization of immigrant politics, when arguing for a permanent presidency of all Argentine COEMIT councils. Eventually, it was decided that a 'super'-COEMIT presiding over all Italian immigrants in Latin America should be created<sup>19</sup> (cf. also diagram 3). The other faction saw this as merely a manoeuvre of the COEMIT councillors to create new structures and hierarchies for themselves and eventually get access to funds and funded posts, while the 'real' issue, the neglect by Rome of tens of thousands now impoverished Italian immigrants had not been addressed.

### 3. The COEMIT goes Public

By the middle of 1989, members of the COEMIT council became aware that the council was operating on a very fragile power base and probably lacking sufficient legitimization among its target group. An announcer from an Italian radio station in Buenos Aires was invited to one of the executive meetings and confirmed the low profile of the COEMIT among Italians:

"The Italians think the COEMIT is a waste of time and money. The councillors don't do anything for the *collettività* (community)".

The councillors thus decided to give a series of informative talks at some of the most important remaining Italian associations: the *Unione e Benevolenza*(\*1859) in the centre of Buenos Aires, the Italian Soccer Club *Sportivo Italiano*(\*1955), which once played in Argentina's First Division, and the Italian Mutual Aid Society of *San Martín*(\*1871), a residential suburb in Greater Buenos Aires.

Participation, except at the *Unione e Benevolenza* which was organized by the Italian newspaper *L'Eco d'Italia*<sup>20</sup>, was low. On average 30 to 60 people came to the conferences. Two thirds of the audience were male old-aged pensioners who made

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<sup>19</sup>Other countries in Latin America with a considerable number of Italian immigrants are Venezuela, Brazil, and Uruguay.

<sup>20</sup>In 1988/89 there were two Italian language newspapers on sale in Buenos Aires. The biweekly *Tribuna Italiana* has a centre-right/Italian Christian Democrat orientation, whereas the weekly *L'Eco d'Italia* is moderate left wing (Italian Communists and Socialists).

enquiries about their pensions, their entitlement to apply for a pension<sup>21</sup>, free treatment at the Italian Hospital<sup>22</sup>, and the possibilities of returning to Italy.

The first conference at the Unione e Benevolenza had been organized by a broad left-wing coalition of Italian associations in Greater Buenos Aires, "to defend the democratic rights of Italian workers in Argentina". Basically, the organizers wanted to press for a general social benefit from Italy, to get pensions paid out more quickly and on a less rigidly defined basis.

On the platform sat the editor of *L'Eco d'Italia*, a university professor from Italy, the leader of the Buenos Aires section of the Italian Communist Party (*PCI*<sup>23</sup>) and four councillors of the COEMIT. Other COEMIT councillors stayed in the side entrances of the large festive hall of Unione e Benevolenza.

The COEMIT did not organize the event but had been invited. Initially, councillors were reluctant to go at all, but eventually the chairman decided they should go, "in case they ask us to justify our politics".

The editor of *L'Eco d'Italia* and chairman of the panel opened his speech by accusing Italy of not helping Italian immigrants in Argentina. He compared the actual misery of Italian labour migrants who came during the last immigration period (1946-1952) to *natural disasters*. He emphasized that Italians from Argentina were always among the first to help Italy's earthquake victims in the 1950s and 60s. And nobody should forget the remittances of Italians from Argentina, who helped considerably to reconstruct Italy after World War II. He got stormy applause.

Never had I seen the Unione e Benevolenza great festive hall so full from front to back. Many people stood in the remaining space between the last row and the back wall. People also stood in the side entrances and were lined up along the walls. Their faces were reflected in huge mirrors which hung on the walls. Although the hall was lit electrically, the whole scene was bathed in a dimmer light by the chandeliers hanging from the ceiling. The late 19th century decoration and huge velvet hangings drawn to the sides of the platform reinforced the atmosphere of past glory. The impression of morbid decadence was matched by the audience's age composition. Few out of 500 or so attending were younger than 60. Many came from the South of Italy, which contributed the majority of immigrants after the Second World War. Only a few women were present, and almost no young people.

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<sup>21</sup>According to one Italian, who works in a charity dealing with Italian immigrants, more than 20,000 pensions are blocked in the Argentine social security administration, which has to pay out the Argentine share to people who have worked in Argentina. A person has to have served at least 52 weeks military service during World War II in order to qualify for a war-pension from Italy. The other way of getting a pension, is to have worked in Italy and to have paid into a pension fund from one's salary.

<sup>22</sup>The first Hospital Italiano was built in 1860 and inaugurated in 1872. The actual one replaced it in 1895 (inauguration 1901), (Mercadante 1974:8, Bourd  1977:216, Korn 1981:65-68).

<sup>23</sup>In 1991, the *PCI* was renamed Partito Democratico della Sinistra (PDS), Democratic Party of the Left.

The chairman of the PCI was the second speaker. He, too, stressed the catastrophic state of the Argentine economy and argued for a fully agreed programme for all Italian forces in Argentina to press for emergency help in Rome.

Then it was question time for the public. Numerous persons were on a list to speak to the panel. They then came forward to speak from the space remaining between the first row and the platform. This created a curious situation. The leader of the Italian workers association from Buenos Aires' suburb Villa Bosch, took full advantage of the space granted to him, turned his back to the elevated platform, and addressed the audience directly and they enthusiastically watched him. He effectively took over the lead of the discussion from the speakers on the platform. At once there was a lively atmosphere whereas before speeches had been delivered in a traditional and rather boring pattern from the platform (above) to the audience (below). Later on, COEMIT councillors, who had been standing at the side entrances of the hall, took advantage of this when they addressed the audience. Some of them were more cautious than others, warning that the event should not be exploited for political purposes. Instead, people should recognize the work already done by the COEMIT for the community and turn out in greater numbers for the next elections. Another councillor complained bitterly that, although invited, nobody had come from the Italian consulate. He went on to say with polemical verve, that Susanna Agnelli, Undersecretary of State and sister of FIAT-boss Gianni Agnelli, had no interest in the lives of poor Italian immigrants when she visited Argentina and she would only be looking for big business deals for the multinational FIAT company. The audience cheered and applauded at this point.

Apart from those who wanted to make speeches to the audiences, there were individual members of the public who asked the panel about very specific individual problems, concerning their status with regard to war-pensions, Italian nationality (many of them had given up Italian nationality and acquired the Argentine) and the eventual social benefit. Many of them made their enquiries in the dialect of their Calabrian or Sicilian home town, mixed with Spanish words, or Spanish with a South Italian accent.

For the people present at the meeting it made an essential difference whether they get a \$ 300 war-pension or had to rely exclusively on the Argentine \$ 20 pension. Some of the pension seekers had had their applications blocked for years because of slow bureaucracy in the provincial Italian Social Security Institutes. Others had only done one week less than the required 52 week minimum period of military service. They now complained bitterly that "rich" Italy would not entitle them to a war pension. One of them began his very emotional statements with saying:

"I have to excuse myself that I speak Spanish, but I fought in Italy during the war, and I have worked here for more than 30 years. Now I hear that people who own a house should be excluded from the social benefit. But what do they want? The house was the only thing we could build, in spite of inflation and decreasing wages during all these years!"

Laura Pacini, the vice-secretary of the COEMIT and chairman of the Charity backed by the Italian Communist Trade Union CGIL, answered every question in great detail. She then turned to the more general political issues of the relationship between Italy and its far away immigrants in Argentina. She said, delegates had obtained practically nothing at the Second National Conference on Emigration in Rome. She wanted Italian immigrants to become more united and militant eventually staging a demonstration in front of the Consulate to get themselves heard.

From the description of the meeting held in the time-honoured surroundings of the *Unione e Benevolenza*, it is evident that the Italian immigrants came with expectations of obtaining help. The *history* of the individual's *Italian past* is of little practical importance in the routines of daily life. The claims to aid from Italy are made by invoking a specific Italian past in the *present* situation of economic need. Indeed, some people from the audience almost acknowledged their *present insufficient performance as Italians*, when they apologized for not speaking Italian any more. The leaders of the Italian associations, and the COEMIT councillors in particular, could see the potential benefit of getting support from this inarticulate group of people. If they could get them to register at the consulate, then they could increase their votes in the next COEMIT elections, and if the COEMIT could channel their demands into an ethnic idiom, then these demands would be more easily recognized by the Italian Government and would also seem more justifiable to the public in Italy.

It is to this conjunction of a *past history as Italians* in Italy and a yet outstanding present and future as Italians in Argentina, that the rhetoric and discourse of ethnic leaders are directed. Examples of these are found in the numerous references to the Italian origins of 'great men' in Argentine history (Belgrano, Alberdi, and Pellegrini are frequently cited), to mass immigration, and to the 'Italian origin' of the Argentine population as a whole. It is not real numbers and statistics that count in this rhetoric but a more general assertion that "we are half of the country's (population)" (siamo la metà del paese). If we reconsider immigration statistics over the whole period of migrations and remember Baily's observation (cf. chapter 2), then that claim at first sight seems to make sense. But of course what the statement does is to turn a broad statistical category, which diachronically includes all Italians and their descendants over a period of more than 100 years, into a *homogeneous* and *synchronic* ethnic group.

The following extract from the COEMIT's document, presented at the Second Emigration Conference in Rome, is characteristic of how claims to Italian aid are based on the premise of the cultural unity of the Argentine immigrant population of Italian descent.

"The historical responsibility for the process of the loss of cultural identity amongst the Italian community in Argentina is a heavy weight if we consider that here live millions of Italians and their descendants, and that, furthermore, their number represents more than 60% of the country's population. ...

"This means that in this country the Italian language should have an importance at least equal to that of Spanish, because we are not dealing here with an ETHNIC MINORITY BUT WITH AN ETHNIC MAJORITY. " ... (through assimilation and absence of Italian

language teaching) an annulment of the personality (of the immigrants) was produced which led the country (of which they are the principal constituent) to a real collective schizophrenia. In fact, assimilation constitutes a split personality, of which the true 'half' is latent and put to sleep, ... .

"The clear break with Italian culture which was carried out by the generations of immigrants arriving on the shores of the River Plate during the first wave of immigration, has produced a traumatic split. ...

"It is a historic responsibility of Italy to help ... because Argentina is almost a prolongation of Italy and cannot solve its own crisis - which is a deep crisis of identity - until it has acquired the conscience of the necessary transmission and conservation of certain cultural models, which are [ultimately] rooted in the Mediterranean."

(from COEMIT 1988:5-6; capital letters in original)

The COEMIT faced the Italian immigrants again in the Buenos Aires suburb of San Martín. The event was hosted by the mutual aid society Sociedad Italiana de Socorros Mutuos, founded in 1871. "That was only six years after the foundation of the town. *It's the beginning of history here*", a member of the society emphatically remarked to me. Active members of associations frequently stress the *pioneering* role of Italians as founders of civic institutions, in the times when the Argentine State expanded into the Pampas during the second half of the 19th century. Some leaders would give a whole Italian "mapping" of the late 19th century, listing villages founded by Italians in the Pampas (Provinces of Buenos Aires, Santa Fé and La Pampa). In their perception, the colonial-Spanish pattern of newly founded towns (consisting of the square plaza de armas with town hall and church), was *complemented* by the building of the Italian mutual aid society, which became the first general social club for the local population.

However, the suburban environs of San Martín left little to enable people to reminisce about the 'Argentine' or 'Italian' conquest of the Pampas. The Italian immigrants were eager to hear from their representatives the latest developments on eventual social benefits.

It was 10 a.m. on a Sunday morning and the new auditorium was three quarters full. Most of the people were men over 60 years old. The President of the society opened the meeting welcoming everybody in Spanish. He announced in particular the COEMIT-Vicepresident and a councillor of San Martín city council; the latter had been part of a delegation which had agreed a twinship with the town of Pordenone (Friuli, Italy). The other members of the COEMIT present were the Secretary, Clara Torino, two members of the executive committee, Laura Pacini, Chairwoman of the Italian Communist Trade

Union (*CGIL*) charity *INCA*, and a councillor specializing on education<sup>24</sup>.

Giovanni Gambino, the Vice-President of the COEMIT, standing in for the absent president, reported in Italian from the II. National Emigration Conference in Rome. He positively valued the formal acknowledgement of Italians abroad by the Rome Parliament. The COEMIT (committees of Italian emigrants), he reported to the audience, would soon become *COMITES* (committees of Italians abroad). It would now be crucial to press for the full right to vote of Italians abroad. Whereas in Argentina Italians could vote in municipal elections, though in a different ballot box reserved for foreigners<sup>25</sup>, they still had to wait for their right to vote in Italy.

Laura Pacini then spoke on social assistance and the eventual emergency social benefit for poor Italians. Like in the *Unione e Benevolenza*, she started her speech in Italian but then switched to Spanish which she speaks more fluently. She emphasized that there would be no indiscriminate general pension (*pensione minima*) of \$ 150 per month for old-aged Italians. She said:

"I am from the *opposition*<sup>26</sup> but I have to acknowledge when the [Italian] Government does good things. Now a \$ 150 Million credit has been issued to the Argentine Government, and we have heard from the embassy that some of the money is destined for Italians."

She thus backed down from her former hard stand on organizing protest among Italians and criticizing the Italian government in the COEMIT assemblies and the earlier meeting at the *Unione e Benevolenza*. She urged people to make their applications only with recognized charities which had to deal with them without charging fees by law. Apparently, there had been cases of private 'brokers' (*mediatori*) who were charging fees for doing translations, filling in forms and promising good contacts with the Italian Regions dealing with the applications.

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<sup>24</sup>From the organized part of the Italians in Buenos Aires there is now growing pressure for the introduction of Italian at Argentine State schools, and the expansion of Italian schools in Argentina. The allocation of scholarships from the Italian Government for people to study at these schools has been a controversial subject. In the 1980s special committees (*COASCIT*), similar to the COEMIT, but dealing only with education among Italian emigrants were set up in many countries.

<sup>25</sup>The Argentine constitution grants resident foreigners almost the same rights and obligations as Argentine citizens; though not the right to vote (cf. Art. 20,21; Constitución de la Nación Argentina, Texto Vigente 1989:8).

Former Senator Fernando de la Rúa (*Partido Radical*, Radical Party) and the governor of the Province of Mendoza, J.O. Bordón (*Partido Justicialista*, Peronist Party), have both presented projects to grant Italians and Spaniards, the two largest groups of European foreigners, the right to vote.

<sup>26</sup>She is representing the Communist's Trade Union (*CGIL*) welfare institute *INCA* and thus in political opposition to the Italian Government led by Christian Democrats and Socialists.



The COEMIT Secretary, Clara Torino, then spoke on the issue of Italian language teaching in Argentine state schools and in Italian schools. She blamed low performance in both areas for "the loss of identity" and said, "we must teach Italian to our children to regain our identity" (*per recuperare la nostra identità*). But she added that there was some sign of hope as negotiations were under way to set up an Italian Teachers College and to send 1200 new teachers to Argentina.

The councillor of the San Martín city council then reported in Spanish on the successful establishment of a twinship with the city of Pordenone in Italy (Friuli Region). He said that the Argentine delegation had been warmly welcomed in Italy because all of them had Italian surnames, and the Mayor of San Martín, Mr. *Smith* [name changed, but English surname in original], was really to be considered Italian, too, as his mother came from the Friuli Region. He explained that the Italians had an economic interest "to help the sons of their emigrants": they wanted to import shoes from San Martín's medium and small-scale shoe factories (up to 50 workers), but: "the Italians will provide the prototypes".

Such 'terms of trade' were criticized in other meetings by left-wing leaders, who accused Italy of using its immigrants abroad only as conveyors of an image of goods 'Made in Italy' and wilful consumers of Italian industrial goods and fashion<sup>27</sup>.

In the discussion at the San Martín-meeting people were less concerned with the right to vote and the school question, than with their immediate economic problems.

As the descriptions of these meetings reveal, ethnic leaders can skilfully play on the discrepancies which exist between them and their clientele, regarding gender-generational and social stratification, economic interests, and language performance<sup>28</sup>. Ethnic leaders come from a middle or upper middle class background and are often entrepreneurs and professionals. They are interested in business relations with Italy and also see the chance to travel to Italy more often on paid flights, whereas the pensioners attending the meetings had immediate problems of survival. Yet, ethnic leaders and the Italian poor in Argentina need each other in this relationship where welfare is channelled through ethnic institutions. The leaders need the immigrants in order to justify their claims in front of

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<sup>27</sup>Ironically, however, it is exactly this kind of trade relationship, involving the sectors of Italian economy which are internationally most successful (furniture, fashion, shoes and leather), which is seen by some economic analysts as offering the best prospects to both sides (Del Bello 1989:450).

<sup>28</sup>Caplan (1985:186-207), partly following Bloch (1975:16), has emphasized the highly ritualised nature of functions and celebrations in South Indian women's organization which find their expression in a fixed sitting order and a particularly formalized style of oratory, distancing the speakers on the platform from their audience. However, this 'dramaturgical technique' is not always successful: it was in the meeting at the Unione e Benevolenza that speakers from the audience not only took over the discussion, but also ignored the speakers on the platform (cf. above).

the Italian authorities that they are still representing a numerous though decreasing clientele, and the poor Italian immigrants need the brokerage of their leaders in order to get access to resources (pensions, social benefit, scholarships). Language is important in this context, as it is used by leaders as a symbolic marker of the community which legitimizes identity claims. Introducing more Italian in schools would raise the number of Italian speakers among the second (and subsequent) generation of Italo-Argentines, and potentially enlarge the community which, in turn, would strengthen the power bases of ethnic leaders. However, strong as claims to identity via language may be, they are relatively weak in the Argentine case, if they refer to standard Italian (as opposed to its dialectal or hispanicized variants), which only a minority of the Italians and Italo-Argentines speak and write properly.

The following description on the use of Italian in COEMIT council meetings, shows that speaking Italian has become a new instrument for consolidating political power; and similar to the examples provided on the upper-class Italians and descendants in chapters 6,7,8 and 9, Italian can now serve as a distinction marker vis-à-vis other Italians and descendants who do not speak it<sup>29</sup>.

Italian is the language spoken at the COEMIT executive and general assemblies. The minutes are kept in Italian and sent at the end of the year to Rome.

The command and use of Italian in debates varies widely according to speaker and situation. All of the councillors except one were born in Italy. For example, Giovanni Gambino who comes from an upper middle class family from the north of Italy and whose father was a consular official in Argentina learnt High Italian at home. At the meetings he always speaks Italian, displaying considerable range of vocabulary, although he might fall occasionally into ungrammatical Italian and the use of Argentine Spanish idiomatic expressions in Italian. He also drafts proposals to the COEMIT in Italian.

The Secretary, Clara Torino, has the best command of Italian among the councillors. She came to Argentina in 1957 from an upper class family in Central Italy. She is currently the president of the federation of the Dante Aligheri cultural associations in Argentina, the FEDERDANTE, and thus a board-member of FEDITALIA. In the COEMIT council she is responsible for drafting letters and is regarded as the ultimate authority for matters on language and style. In debates, people would turn to her to ask about the correct use of words. Clara Torino also urges people to speak in Italian. "Speak in Italian!" (*Parla in italiano!*), she reminds the councillors, when they start speaking Spanish. She is the most reluctant of all to speak Spanish in the council and will continue to speak Italian if

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<sup>29</sup>Cf. Caplan (1985:29) on the role of English as a means of class and caste distinction in women's organizations in Madras, India.

someone speaks to her in Spanish<sup>30</sup>.

There are a few other councillors who also have a good command of Italian. Some of them are active in the ethnic press, others in cultural institutions and charities. Among these 'literati'- councillors, as opposed to those of a more humble educational background, there was once a fierce argument concerning how well or badly the booklet which the COEMIT had prepared for the Second National Conference on Emigration in Rome was written. Some said it was written in very bad Italian (*pessimo Italiano*), whereas others maintained that the councillor who edited it had done his best to ensure a clean edition. However, tempers rose high and in one meeting it came to a brief personal fight between the editor and another councillor who accused him of having turned his contribution in the booklet into bad Italian.

The majority of councillors, however, have to make an *effort* to speak Italian. They come from the Southern Italian regions of Calabria and Basilicata and did not speak or write standard Italian even at the time when they migrated to Argentina. Rather, they could speak the local dialects. Some councillors, who were very young when they came to Argentina, have only a passive understanding of Italian and have to speak Spanish in council meetings.

Speaking Spanish in the council does not imply they will be discriminated against. However, comments are made on the usage of language and people are positively encouraged to speak Italian. The councillors who occupy the most powerful positions of president, vice-president, secretary, are very eloquent speakers of Italian. It is often they who take the lead in discussions and who effectively have the final say in debates.

More militant leaders, such as Clara Torino, want to carry the language issue even further, and see increased language teaching as the critical route to 'regaining ethnic identity'. I cite a draft document which Clara Torino prepared for the Argentine National Paedagogic Congress:

"...[this paper] demands that the obligatory teaching of Italian should be included in the curriculum of secondary schools. ...

"... it is possible to find an authentic link between 'what we are' and 'why we are, what we are', that is between us and other peoples.

"The study of the Italian language and culture is fundamental for establishing this link between the new Argentine man and his cultural roots, achieving consciousness of his own identity, which will enable him to use all the human reserves and to progress generally. ...

"... the reforms which the National Paedagogic Congress will discuss, should consider the reintroduction of obligatory teaching of Italian culture and language in Argentine secondary schools; not only as a matter of affection, but rather as a necessity for the

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<sup>30</sup>The positive encouragement, if not enforcement, to speak proper Italian finds its counterpart in the deliberate intention of the Argentine State to use Spanish as one of the means of unifying the heterogenous immigrant experience. In the late 1940s, Malmberg (1950:22) would still find leaflets at newsagents in Buenos Aires with titles like 'Let's speak correctly' (*Hablemos correctamente*), which encouraged the correct use of Spanish.

identity of the 'national character'<sup>31</sup>, which in no way can be dissociated from the powerful Latin roots by which it is nourished."  
(Clara Torino, draft document to the "Congreso Pedagógico 'Cabildo Abierto'", 1987)

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<sup>31</sup>The Italian text uses *essere nazionale*, literally 'national being', which is a direct takeover from the frequently used ser nacional (Spanish), which in Argentine political discourse comprises almost mystically the 'national character or 'soul' of its population.

#### 4. The Politics of Ethnic Leadership

Both the recent installation of the COEMIT and the growing activity of mainland Italian parties reflect an increasing institutionalization of Italian immigrant politics globally. This last section will analyse the specific manoeuvres of mainland Italian parties in Buenos Aires.

Until recently, the political parties did not function openly because of persecution during the last military dictatorship (1976-1983). Interior ministers of the following democratic governments have subsequently been keen to maintain a low profile for the COEMIT-council. The leaders of the Italian parties in Buenos Aires use their private business offices as party bureaus. According to some party leaders, party politics began in 1982, shortly before the return to democracy with the election of president Raúl Alfonsín in 1983. The period of military dictatorship is still a controversial period in immigrant politics, mainly for two reasons: firstly, because 304 Italian nationals are among the disappeared (Guest 1990:465), and secondly because of the Falklands/Malvinas-War. Both themes merit further research, but I will mention here in passing that during the Falklands/Malvinas War, the Italian associations formed a committee for a 'just peace' (*comitato della giusta pace*), sending four eminent leaders of the community to Rome to persuade the Italian Government to take a more pro-Argentine view in the conflict because of the many descendants of Italians involved (cf. *Tribuna Italiana* 1982). In the current political debate some left-wing politicians still accuse these leaders of having kept silent with regard to the atrocities of the military dictatorship in which many Italians disappeared, but having been quick to take sides in the Falklands/Malvinas conflict. Some place the first activities of Italian political parties in Argentina as late as 1985. Several members of the Italian Communist Party (*PCI*) and ex-Italian WWII partisans had to leave the country during the military dictatorship (1976-1983) because of allegations of contacts with the *Montonero* and *ERP* guerrillas<sup>32</sup> (cf. also chapter 3).

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<sup>32</sup>One man told me:

"We were asked by the Montoneros' political wing to talk about the Italian partisan war (1943-45). However, when they asked us to provide logistical advice, we said we would never take up arms again. Also, the situation in Argentina in 1973-76 was *different*. This was not a popular guerrilla movement, but a small elitist group of students at university. It never had the popular support the partisan war in Italy had. For me it was better to go to Italy for a while, and the embassy got me out in 197x. I returned in 198x." Another

Leaders hold multiple positions within the framework of Italian institutions in Buenos Aires. Most leaders hold executive positions at the same time in FEDITALIA, COEMIT, political parties, and charities all at the same time (cf. the example of Giovanni Gambino). This allows them to cut across divisions of interest which exist between different institutions. An example of this would be someone who combines a professional base as a doctor, (preferably at the Italian Hospital<sup>33</sup>), lawyer, industrial entrepreneur or travel-agent, with a high position in FEDITALIA or the Comitato d'Intesa and as a councillor of COEMIT. He also would have a 'home-base' in a local or regional association, like *Napoletani nel Mondo*.

In recent years it has become of primary importance for leaders to be affiliated to an Italian party. The main reason is that by doing so, leaders expect to get preferential hearing and perhaps more influence in Rome. The dominant position in Buenos Aires' Italian community is held by the *Democrazia Cristiana (DC)*, the Italian Christian Democrat Party. Next in strategic importance comes the Socialist Party (*PSI*), followed by the Communist Party (*PCI* till 1991, cf. footnote 23). During 1989, the *DC* became ever more open in its activities to attract new members. At least 10 councillors of the COEMIT have *DC* membership, 5 of them holding executive functions. Indeed, the *DC* created new posts. From press officer, education coordinator to 'director for the creation of new party sections', there was something for everybody. One cannot yet say what a future *DC*, which attracts the large majority of ethnic leaders, would look like, but it might reproduce the old non-pluralistic, hierarchical structure of FEDITALIA.

However, in public speeches party politics is rhetorically played down. Instead, leaders make reference to all-embracing concepts, stressing unity against friction. They encourage people "to work for the community and the unity of Italians" (*lavorare per la collettività e l'unità degli italiani*) because "we are not united" (*noi non siamo uniti*). In their perception of the history of Italians in Argentina, leaders blame the numerous subdivisions of the Italian associations, like the conflict between fascists and antifascists,

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man said: "I studied at Buenos Aires University at the time. Everyone was in student groups, sympathizing with the guerrilla's armed struggle. The military took me to prison in 197x, where I stayed without a trial until I got out in 197x, because of the embassy. I then went to Italy and returned in 198x."

[note: reference to exact dates has been deliberately avoided in order to preserve the anonymity of the speakers]

<sup>33</sup>At the hospital, patients would provide a good 'pool' for a personal political following.

for the lack of unity and hence declining influence of Italians. Had they been united as the Spaniards in Argentina apparently were<sup>34</sup>, Italians could have got much more public recognition in Argentine society<sup>35</sup>.

For the 1986 COEMIT elections the representatives of FEDITALIA and the Comitato Nazionale d'Intesa agreed to present a list 'uniting' different political factions and parties (Lista Unitaria nel Pluralismo; L.U.P. hence forward). FEDITALIA and Comitato Nazionale d'Intesa would each contribute 50% of the candidates. It was an attempt to legitimize the old power structure of ethnic representation by the electorate, while allowing for some new people on the candidates' list. A part of the DC was not happy having a common list with socialists (PSI) and communists (PCI). The representatives of the Italian based Catholic Workers' charity ACLI (member of Comitato Nazionale d'Intesa) and the Federation of Catholic Italian associations in Argentina (FACCIA; member of FEDITALIA) created their own list of 'Christian inspiration' (lista d'ispirazione cristiana), which eventually won 6 seats. However, parts of the left argued that what seemed to be a split of DC-forces in fact allowed them to win more seats. Also, some leaders of the associations, though not from the uppermost echelons of FEDITALIA, felt that they had been excluded from the 'United List in Pluralism', and eventually created their own 'independent' list (lista indipendente, 4 seats). There were rumours that they might have counted on support from one of the leading Italian entrepreneurs in Buenos Aires, who was reported to have a personal rivalry with another entrepreneur, the latter being a high rank member of the Italian Chamber of Commerce, FEDITALIA and the DC. The leaders of the Italian community were well aware that they had an image of running the affairs of the community autocratically. The three to four top-leaders (representing different political and associational factions) thus decided not to stand personally for election but 'to leave the place to younger ones'. The actual candidates then were not necessarily younger, but were less known, and for a great part had the blessing of the four leaders.

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<sup>34</sup>There is some indication, that Spaniards in Buenos Aires have indeed been more 'united' than Italians. Devoto (1990:136-137,144-145) argues that a much smaller number of Spanish associations and a relatively high number of members in 1914, suggests less political fragmentation and higher social cohesion than among the Italian 'community'.

<sup>35</sup>For example, Italian language teaching would still be obligatory in Argentine secondary schools.

The Lista Unitaria intended to get different political factions together as a working group. However, in the course of two years and during 1989 nearing the next COEMIT elections, it became clear that there was no political will to work together any longer. The carrozzone (goods truck), as the united list was termed, had the effect "of getting everybody in", rather than enabling cooperation across party divisions. The DC in particular, had no interest in continuing the carrozzone and wanted open political contest in the forthcoming elections to measure the forces. At first inconspicuously, but then more openly, the DC began to realign its forces in the COEMIT council and to count its men across the formal divisions between the United, Catholic and Independent lists. Increasingly, in COEMIT general assemblies, these councillors from originally different lists would vote in line and by implication isolate the left. In an internal meeting of DC leaders a COEMIT councillor reported on how the voting behaviour had changed and also on how certain councillors -though DC members- could not be persuaded to a coherent voting discipline, because they had personal friendships with the left and stronger regional allegiances (for example, to their Tuscan or Sicilian associations) than loyalties to the DC as a political party. The internal consolidation and external expansion of the DC into most areas of immigrant politics was not completed during the time of my fieldwork but was becoming very apparent. However, although the DC might get the majority of votes in future elections it would hardly win support among immigrants if it was presented only as a political party.

The institutionally organized part of the Italian community in Buenos Aires is *not* organized on the basis of political parties but on the basis of sectoral, regional and local associations and their federations. The largest by membership - and hence most influential in the elections - is the Calabrian Federation, reflecting the fact that Calabrians were the largest Italian immigrant group to Argentina after World War II<sup>36</sup>. Indeed, the President of the Federation of Calabrian Associations in Argentina (thus FEDITALIA board member) and regional consultant for the Italian region of Calabria (thus Comitato Nazionale d'Intesa member) is also a member of the DC. But he has repeatedly made it clear that his first loyalty lies with his Calabrian fellow-folk and not with the DC. The leaders of the left (PCI, PSI and communist and socialist trade union charities) are all, except two, Calabrians and have executive positions in the Calabrian Federation's

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<sup>36</sup>Calabrians accounted for 28,6% of the Italians emigrating to Argentina between 1950 and 1960 (Roncelli 1987:122).



directive council and the *Centro Calabrese*, the largest Calabrian association in Buenos Aires. At least 9 out of 24 COEMIT councillors are from Calabria, including the chairman and a member of the executive committee<sup>37</sup>.

In the internal *DC* meeting mentioned above, the issue of political as opposed regional loyalties was a major preoccupation. In fact, a part of the *DC*-leadership feared an all-Calabrian list in the next elections, thus including a strong left wing. For the *DC* this meant the reintroduction of the '*carrozzone*'-model of the original "united pluralist list". However hard some *DC*-leaders were pressing for a *DC*-only list, it came out in the discussion that the immigrants would not entirely identify with party politics and preferred recognizable leaders of their regional and local associations. One of the ideas put forward was to make one list with the *DC*-logo<sup>38</sup> and a second with pro-*DC* candidates but with a general name. Some of the politicians attending the meeting argued in favour of the *DC*-list: "...because then we would be more recognizable in dealing with Italy. In Italy politics mean party politics. To get something you must belong to a party." But someone objected: "Your programme is alright for Italy, but here people think in terms of individual leaders and their regional associations. Italian parties do not mean anything to them. It is better to have a list with a harmless general name like *pane e lavoro* (bread and work), but with strong *puntadores* (Spanish, 'intermediaries') who can attract lots of votes."

Some people maintained that in the last elections the Roman headquarters of the *Democrazia Cristiana* did not find the time ripe to present a *DC*-only list in Buenos Aires' COEMIT elections, and gave their blessing to the *Lista Unitaria*.

The manoeuvres of the *DC*, and indeed of the other parties in Buenos Aires, must be seen against the background of a growing institutionalization of Italian immigrant politics globally. Until recently Rome has rather neglected its citizens abroad and De Gasperi's (Prime minister 1945-1953) cynical dictum "You should learn a foreign language and go abroad" (cited by Cinanni 1968:207; cf. also Renda 1963:86) scarred Italian politics long into the 1950s and 60s. The first national immigration conference was only held in 1975, but immigrants still lacked constitutionally acknowledged representation. Only in 1986 were the COEMITs created, functioning now in 21 countries, including Britain. There are plans for a Council for Italians abroad (*Consiglio degli Italiani all'Estero*) adjacent to Parliament in Rome. Eventually MPs might be elected among Italians abroad. The last issue is, of course, the most delicate one and has the greatest impact on the strategy

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<sup>37</sup>Sometimes, Calabrian COEMIT councillors and other Calabrian leaders who attend the council meetings, go for a drink after the meeting and talk politics in a mixture of Argentine Spanish, Calabrese dialect and Italian with Calabrese accent.

<sup>38</sup>Red cross on white ground bearing the inscription "libertas"(liberty, Latin).

planning of political leaders in Buenos Aires.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to evaluate the Italian parties' position (in Italy) on the election of MPs abroad, but it is clear from my Buenos Aires references that the positions in the Italian Parliament are far from being unanimous. At present it is not possible to vote by post in Italian national elections. Voters must be registered and resident at the place where they vote in person<sup>39</sup>. Granting Italians abroad the direct and indirect right to vote, would add more than 4 to 5 million new voters to the electorate. Apart from the question of whether people (even if they are first generation, and many with double-citizenship are not) who have been overseas for more than 40 years, could really know the realities of Italian politics, it is a delicate issue in Rome which puts into question the very power balance between the parties. There is good reason to believe that, especially in the large Italian overseas communities (Argentina, Brazil, United States, Canada and Australia), the overwhelming majority is conservative and would vote *DC*, or some of the smaller parties like *PLI*, *PRI*, *PSDI*<sup>40</sup> and probably even *PSI* (depending on the affiliation of leaders). But it would be extremely difficult for the second largest party, the Communist *PCI* (since 1991 Democratic Party of the Left), to get a share of the vote which reflects its weight in Italian politics. The *PCI* is therefore understandably less in favour granting Italians abroad the right to vote (*voto degli italiani all'estero*).

In Buenos Aires, the right of Italians abroad to vote was a frequently discussed issue, which was not missing from any of the public events organized by the COEMIT. Political differences became clear in a meeting of the *Comitato Nazionale d'Intesa*, its chair currently taken by the *DC*-leader. At that meeting, the *DC* leader said the right to vote must come first on the agenda of any document produced by the representatives of Italians in Buenos Aires. He argued that the right to vote was the crucial issue, and that everything else would follow from it, including the controversial social benefit: "Once

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<sup>39</sup>The Italian State pays the train fares of its emigrants from the borders to enable them to vote. In many South Italian villages where half or more of the population have emigrated, trains full of emigrants arrive for the municipal elections. Consequently, the emigrants' vote (who have often been absent for prolonged periods) weighs very high in the election and is subject to considerable controversy; for a description and analysis of local elections in a Sicilian village cf. Schneider (1990:129-136).

<sup>40</sup>Liberal, Republican and Social Democratic Party.

we have MPs from Argentina we could press harder in Rome, but at the moment nobody takes any notice of us". On the other hand, the PCI in that same session did not entirely deny the importance of the right to vote but rather, wanted it embedded in a whole charter of social rights and benefits. The socialist PSI-representative argued that given the structure of the Italian community in Argentina as consisting mainly of permanent overseas migrants, it would make much more sense to fight for the right to vote in Argentina (so far only possible on a limited scale in municipal elections) than for the right to vote in Italy.

## 5. Conclusions

In this chapter I have shown how one type of representation of immigrants, the FEDITALIA central organisation of Italo-Argentine associations, has been officially replaced by the COEMIT council. However, official replacement did not simply change the old power structure but led to the accommodation of old leaders within the new structures. Whereas previous decades after World War II were characterized by the lack of interest shown by mainland Italian politicians towards their emigrants in Argentina, there seems now to be a period of growing Italian involvement in immigrant politics. Mainly because of the economic crises in Argentina, this is accompanied by the growing interest of emigrant leaders in getting access to resources and political connections in Italy. It thereby reflects more generally the inversion of roles between the two countries. Conflicts between the different power bases of FEDITALIA, Comitato d'Intesa, and COEMIT are, then, mitigated by ethnic leaders. To exploit the shift of power from old umbrella organizations like FEDITALIA to the COEMIT, ethnic leaders have to put their political rhetoric into a regional idiom which is recognizable and acceptable to their clientele. Different styles of language employed in this battle vary according to context and are not only used to address different target groups, (for example, ethnic leaders who speak high Italian to consular officials, but in dialect to immigrants), but also express different power relations between Italians in Argentina and Italians from Italy.

## CHAPTER 11

### The Shifting Boundaries of Ethnic Expression

#### 1. Introduction

My concern throughout this thesis was to show how individuals and families have made sense of a historical process which I describe as the 'inversion of roles' between two societies, Italy and Argentina. In the penultimate chapter I have also analysed the political interest groups of Italians and their descendants. Through interpretative narratives, such as life- and family-histories, and social practices involving, for example, food, language and politics, Italian immigrants and their descendants link their own experience to these larger historical processes.

In this final chapter, rather than presenting summary conclusions, I would like to develop several arguments, which on the one hand, will return the reader to the theme of the opening chapter ('the inversion of roles'), while on the other hand, are relating back to other chapters in the thesis. Like other chapters (7,8, and 9 in particular), this concluding chapter will convey the controversial nature of the of the Italian immigrant experience in Argentina.

I shall deal with ideological expressions of changing attitudes to migration, the discontinuities of ethnic and national identities, and the contradicting perceptions of Italy and Argentina.

#### 2. The Repatriation of America

At the turn of the century emigrants went out 'making America' (*fare l'America* in Italian, or *hacer la América* in Spanish), by which they meant to make a better life through emigration. This was an enterprise that involved multiple physical and psychological displacements over time, but in which individuals nevertheless projected themselves ahead and looked to the future. In the last 40 years or so, at the end of a cycle of European migrations to Argentina (which for some people who experienced the great immigration coincides also with the late part of their own life-cycle, cf. chapter 7),

the dream of a better life implied by the term 'America' has been projected 'back' onto Europe.

"America was made over there [in Europe]" (La América si hizo allá); "Italy made America" (Italia hizo la América): that is how porteños now invert the famous phrase. And note also the bitter irony in the following conversation which took place at a greengrocer's shop between a man who had come as a child after World War II from Naples to Buenos Aires, and a 70 year old woman from Calabria who arrived in Buenos Aires in the 1930s:

He: "So, you have made America?" (Ma Lei ha fatto l'America?)

She: "What America? The lice made America, I don't even have those!" (Che America? Los piojos hanno fatto l'America, ní estos tengo)<sup>1</sup>

On the two to three week journey to Argentina immigrants often became infested with lice. In fact lice were seen as stereotypically characteristic of the poor immigrants, many of whom continued to stay poor and were probably infested with lice in Buenos Aires' squalid tenement houses (conventillos, cf. chapter 5). Of course everybody sought to leave behind such conditions, including the lice. What the woman was really saying was that she could not even preserve that most demeaning characteristic of the immigrant who arrived to 'make America'. In other words, the original immigrants, poor and lice-infested as they were, had at least a dream of making a better life in Argentina: now, the lice had gone and the dream with them<sup>2</sup>.

What distinguishes today from the era of mass immigration, is that while the dream of a better life 'returns' to Europe, most of the people cannot. Attaining a standard of living comparable to that in most European countries remains, for the Italo-Argentines as for other Argentines, a dream which in Argentina is only realized by the upper and upper middle class few. Many intend to return to Europe, a fact which is sometimes desperately expressed by the younger generation of descendants who queue for a passport at the

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<sup>1</sup>Note that this phrase is a typical example of cocoliche, which mixes Spanish (simple underlined) and Italian (underlined and italics).

<sup>2</sup>The vicissitudes of the economy had an almost immediate impact on the idea and feasibility of 'making it in America'.

When in 1890 the Argentine economy entered a recession (the so-called Baring-Crisis, cf. chapter 2), immigration became, statistically speaking, *negative*: there was a net outflow of emigrants from Argentina in 1891, and Italian immigrants are reported to have said about their gloomy prospects, that "one doesn't make America any more" (Non si fa più l'America) (Scarzanella 1983:83).

consulates of their parents' (or grandparents') countries<sup>3</sup>, often not knowing that in Europe in the short-term they would most likely join the unemployed rather than the well-paid workforce.

While the phenomenon of mass immigration originally embodied the idea of physical departure, material progress and the emergence of a brighter future, these notions were not experienced unchallenged. According to one woman who came as a child from Calabria in the late 1940s, there were songs and proverbs among Calabrians which expressed a kind of anti-modern critique of the 'technological' progress which had stimulated migration.

"If there hadn't been trains [in the first place] we would not have had to emigrate."

In Argentina, this is turned into a 'critique' of the European discovery of America and its later implications for immigration:

"If there hadn't been Columbus [in the first place], we would not have had to emigrate to Argentina".<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Viñas (1981:25) has characterized contemporary Argentina (which was once a country of *immigration*) as a country of "*des-immigration*" (French).

<sup>4</sup>The idea of blaming 'Columbus' for their disillusion with 'America', was not uncommon among Italian immigrants. An Italian-Canadian friend told me that his mother would exclaim "Managgia, Cristofero Colombo che hai scoperto l'America!" (Damm you Christopher Columbus that you discovered America!).

The Italo-Argentine woman did not tell me to *which* Calabrian folk-songs *she* was making reference. Columbus, however, is invoked in one of the Calabrian songs, Cristofiru Culumbu, chi facisti? (Christopher Columbus, what did you do?), recorded in a collection of Italian emigrant songs. I will reproduce it here, giving in alternating lines, first the Calabrian dialect version and then my English translation.

Cristofiru Culumbu, chi facisti?

Christopher Columbus, what did you do?

La megghiu giuvintù tu rruvinasti.

You have ruined the best of the young.

Ed eu chi vinni, mi passu lu mari

And I arrived, crossing the sea

cu chiddu lignu niru di vapuri.

in that black (piece) of wood and steam.

L'America ch'è ricca di danari

America which is full ['rich'] of money

è giriata di paddi e canuni.

is surrounded by balls and canons,

e li mugghieri di li mericani

and the wives of the Americans [i.e. the Italian immigrants]

chianginu forti che rristaru soli.

## 2. Migration, Daydreams and Nostalgia

Migration to the Americas and in our case to Buenos Aires in particular, was the opposite of a planned and devised social utopia: it was the massive and makeshift accumulation of innumerable individual daydreams, of people who projected themselves into the future<sup>5</sup>.

The work of German philosopher Ernst Bloch (1959:86-128, 101; English ed. 1986:67-113) is helpful here. In his view daydreams are not conceived of as diffuse wishful thinking separated from reality. Rather, Bloch insisted (contrary to Freud's view) that daydreams or projections are made from the background of a very concrete reality which is experienced as materially and emotionally unsatisfactory. Research in the social sciences (e.g. Galtung 1971) has also shown that people with some education, political experience, and creativity rank highest among those who want to emigrate and manage to do so. Galtung's attempts to define this mobile group of 'sensates and movers' (Galtung 1971:179-220, 240) are now somewhat dated<sup>6</sup>. Historically and analytically, however, there is a direct relationship between the individual projection towards a better life embodied in the eventual decision to leave and emigrate, and the postponement of

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weep bitterly because they stayed alone.

(from Savona/Straniero 1976:154; cf. also same page for Italian translation)

<sup>5</sup>In his controversial travelogue 'America', Baudrillard (1989) has characterized the United States polemically as an 'achieved utopia' of Europeans:

"For the European, even today, America, represents something akin to exile, a fantasy of emigration and, therefore, a form of interiorization of his or her own culture. At the same time, it corresponds to a violent extraversion and therefore to the zero degree of that same culture. No other country embodies to the same extent both this function of disincarnation and, at the same time, the functions of exacerbation and radicalization of the elements of our European cultures ...

"Colonization was, in this sense, a world-scale *coup de théâtre* which leaves deep, nostalgic traces everywhere, even when it collapses [as in the case of *Argentina* one might add; A.S.].

For the Old World, it represents the unique experience of an idealized substitution of values, ... , a substitution which at a stroke short-circuited the destiny of these values in their countries of origin. The emergence of these societies at the margins deprives the historical societies of their destinies."

(Baudrillard 1989:75-78)

<sup>6</sup>Galtung tried to correlate the now antiquated theories of Sorokin on cultural change, Lerner on modernization and Banfield on amoral familism, in order to devise his categories of 'sensates, movers and familists'.

social unrest or solving local conflict.

In his comparative history of the migrations of families from Austria, Brazil and West Africa, Spitzer concluded:

"And yet, it was in the very nature of emigrations to distance individuals from direct engagement in the situations that they had left behind. In that sense, the emigrations were paradoxical. They provided hope for a better future in a new setting. In circumstances of extreme persecution, they offered a chance, sometimes the only one for survival and renewal. But in removing the emigrants from their home ground, they also removed potential challengers to the status quo."  
(Spitzer 1989:181)

Massive migration functioned as a 'safety valve' to social problems (Cinanni 1968:206) and in fact had the role of a 'missed revolution' (Galtung; from Frigessi Castelnovo/Risso 1982:186). In this restricted sense it has not only been positively valued by the ruling classes of the Italian South<sup>7</sup>, and lamented by the organizers of class resistance, but has also been perceived by the inhabitants of the now semi-abandoned villages where almost proverbially 'one half left, so that the other half can work' (for example, in Sutera, Sicily; cf. Schneider 1990:149-150).

While the individual project to emigrate is often characterized by material motivations (as most of the first-generation immigrants of this study testify), it is, at the same time, a major act of creativity and projection which points beyond a local situation to 'a [new] horizon of expectations', and which is not only located in a different *time* (future) but also in a different *place* (that is to say 'America', and in our case, Argentina). But while daydreams and plans to emigrate both point to the future and a different place, conversely *nostalgia*, like grief, being an inevitable byproduct of permanent displacement and psychological 'loss' (Marris 1986:85,92), points to the *past*, to a 'set horizon of memories' which for its part points to an 'unreal future'<sup>8</sup> (endnote<sup>1</sup>).

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<sup>7</sup>On the one hand, emigration postponed class struggle and hence was seen as the 'minor evil' by landowners. Yet, on the other hand, landowners opposed large-scale emigration, because it diminished the locally available casual labour force and threatened the system of great estates (*latifondi*); cf. Arlacchi (1983a:166-176).

<sup>8</sup>Bloch does not deal specifically with migration or nostalgia, but for him, any form of forward-directed human action can grow out of daydreams. I developed my ideas from a passage where Bloch, attacking Husserl, differentiates between *expectant emotions* as part of daydreams which anticipate the future as opposed to fully *filled expectations* of memories which point to an unreal 'future', the past (cf. Bloch 1986:108-109; for German edition see Bloch 1959:122-123; for a full quotation of Bloch, I refer the reader to the following endnote number 1).



experiences of loss with tireless productivity (as in Enrique Gerardo's life).

I am interested here in the nostalgia of *individuals*, yet the devisers of Argentine migration policies in the 19th century, like Sarmiento, perceived the massive occurrence of nostalgia among immigrants and their descendants as a dangerous, *collective* 'neurosis' and threat to the construction of a new society (Halperín Donghi 1976:464).

### 3. Discontinuities of Tradition and National Identity

Looking again at the process of the transformation of ethnic identities in Argentina from 1900 to the present, it becomes clear that the discontinuities of tradition are located in *different periods* than in European history. Whereas Germany and Italy, and also some other countries, had their main break of tradition at the end of the Second World War in the ideological dismantlement of Fascist and Nazi regimes; Argentina seemed to strengthen materially and initially also ideologically from both world wars. Its disruptions of tradition were of a different kind: early Peronism attempted to represent the working class (cf. chapter 3) and promoted a last period of European migration. Later, economic decline and stagnation challenged the whole idea of 'making it in *America*' and of Argentina as a national enterprise. One of the more explicit disillusionings with national euphoria came after the end of the last military dictatorship el proceso (1976-1983) and the Malvinas War.

As I have shown, for Italians in Argentina and those who reckon themselves to be descendants of Italians, the road to a politically devised, 'monolithic' Argentine identity is impeded (cf. particularly the young generation in chapter 9). There is no brighter future in sight, and for them the dream of 'America' has evaporated and been repatriated in Europe (cf. above). In other words, Europe (and to some degree North America) now assumes the ideological function that Argentina once assumed for the emigrants. Italians and their descendants identify with Argentina not with reference to its history and

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of conscious atonement experienced by Germans in order to digest their feelings of guilt after World War II.

Nostalgia, then is the opposite of daydreams and *not* of emigration which does involve real movement in space and time. While in nostalgic thinking and projection, the journey is made again - 'wandering' this time *back* from America (Argentina) to Europe- this can only be done in the imagination of the human mind and backwards in time and space. And that is precisely where the melodramatic qualities and the ideological nature of nostalgia lie. While daydreams can potentially be fulfilled and engender projects of human action like, for example, migration, *nostalgia* carries expectations of a better life which must 'logically' remain unfulfilled because they are located in the past<sup>9</sup>.

However, it would be too empiricist to reduce nostalgia to its surface appearance in immigrants' accounts, such as Domenico Donatello's life-history in chapter 7<sup>10</sup>. Equally, it could be argued that in Enrique Gerardi's account of his life in the same chapter, nostalgia is repressed or subsumed by the success-story of bread-dispatcher to millionaire. Manifestations of nostalgia do then probably take a more ambivalent path than Bloch originally suggested. Nostalgia may well lead to and surface most clearly in a contemplative and melancholic lifestyle (like Domenico Donatello's), but it may also appear as a kind of individual and partly unconscious *Trauerarbeit*<sup>11</sup>, overcoming earlier

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Husserl's idea has been concisely summarized by Hobson:

"Husserl develops then a view of history which could be called a network of *return calls*: movement *back* to reactivate discoveries which in their time had been a movement *forward*, a project for sense." (Hobson 1987:111; my italics)

In Anthropology, Munn (1990:1,2,7,14) has recently tried to apply Husserl's conception of time, in order to analyse the impact of temporally and spatially distant *meaning horizons* on 'event-histories' related to the Kula-exchange in Melanesia.

<sup>9</sup>On the ideological nature of nostalgia as 'travelling back in time', and the construction of nostalgia as a mental illness see the superb study of Frigessi Castelnovo/Risso (1982:40).

<sup>10</sup>where he tells his recollections of his father's life as an anarchist at the beginning of the century; and about his own solitary life-style as music lover, theatre goer and reader of early 20th century literature.

Cf. also the statement of a Greek immigrant to La Plata:

"I feel a great nostalgia, more for the village where I was born and grew up, than for the country. The life in those villages was very intimate." (Lahitte 1987:279)

<sup>11</sup>*Trauerarbeit* means literally 'work of mourning'. The term was used by Freud in his essay "Mourning and Melancholia" (1957:246), and later employed by psychoanalysts Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich (1980:9,78) to describe the necessary processes

politics, which are disregarded after the failure of military and civilian 'experiments' this century, but rather with reference to its physical space and geographical territory where they have found work and established families. It is in this sense Argentina becomes the 'second fatherland' (*la seconda patria*, cf. also chapter 8) for Italo-Argentines. And if Argentine history is acknowledged at all, it is through a specific reading of the Italian contribution to it: the Italian ancestors of Belgrano, Garibaldi's participation in wars of the River Plate states, and the first erection of a monument to commemorate Mazzini. On the other hand, an Italo-Argentine identity which was characterized by overrated notions of pre-eminence in *porteño*-society until the 1950s, is no longer viable. There can be no return to the days when Toscanini conducted at the *Teatro Colón*, or to the *Duce* demanding jewels from the expatriates to sustain the war effort, to Perón addressing *in Italian* (sic!) the Congress of *FEDITALIA* in 1954<sup>12</sup>, to manifestations of Italo-Argentine grandeur on the *Plaza de Mayo* when, in 1924, the multitude received the Crown Prince of Italy, the future Umberto II.

Instead, Italy has a new look: a selected image of a high-tech European nation, among the world leaders. All admire it, though few can immediately benefit from it. Still, most of the Italo-Argentines are eager and some of them literally hungry to get a slice of the cake by evoking old blood ties. And some get a share, for example, through war pensions which yield dollars much-sought-after in a high-inflation economy. Immigration (and its tradition in Argentine society) has thus become a meta-discourse which serves at once to justify complaints about the *present* ("This country is in shambles because the Galicians and Neapolitans messed it up"), explain *former progress* ("this country was built by

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<sup>12</sup>A leader of an Italian association and board member of *FEDITALIA* in 1954, proudly told me how he was 'summoned' to the *Casa Rosada* (the presidential palace at the *Plaza de Mayo*) by Perón who disclosed to him:

"I have a message for you, I will speak at the congress of *FEDITALIA* in *Italian*."

Perón did indeed inaugurate the congress of *FEDITALIA* in Italian. The reaction of his audience must have been frenetic according to the special edition of *FEDITALIA*'s bulletin:

"Perón began to speak, just when he had pronounced the first sentence it was clear he was speaking in Italian; it was a delirium, a trembling of enthusiasm, a fever of emotions, a thunder of applause, *Viva Italia!* and *Viva Argentina!* from all sides; and the name of Perón shouted till hoarseness ..."

(Congresso Generale 1954:3) In his speech, Perón stressed the contribution of the Italian immigrants, the common Latin culture, and Rome's 'immortality'(cf. Congresso Generale 1954:3-4).

immigrants") and more recently, to invoke *new pride* in being Italian ("I am the son of Italians"). This shows a certain similarity, if not complementarity to discourse in the depopulated villages of Southern Italy, where the tradition of migration as ideology justifies not only the problems of the present but also has to account for the relative progress of the remaining population (cf. Schneider 1990:148ff.).

The discourse of Argentines as descendants of Europeans is different in so far as the *success story* of having "made it in America" is now located irretrievably in the past<sup>13</sup>. One of the problems facing any deliberate attempts to form and consolidate an Argentine national identity (cf. chapter 2), is that while a more general ideology of a society formed by immigrants who were assimilated or fused in a melting-pot of races was propagated and widely accepted, this did not offer the individual an anchorage for his or her identity in a specific tradition. Instead, specific traditions were provided from the imagery of the pre-immigration pantheon of Argentine independence at the beginning of the 19th century. Now while certainly the upper classes of Spanish colonial and foreign descent prior to mass-immigration wanted to identify with ancestors in Spanish colonial times and the wars of independence in order to legitimize their class status, this offered little to the masses of immigrants who arrived in the later part of the 19th century. While the Argentine state tried to overcome the particularities of immigrant cultures by offering a standardized idea of Argentina through education, it failed to do this convincingly by omitting almost totally the individual traditions of immigrants, apart from generally acknowledging that "we are all immigrants from Europe".

While, *on the one hand*, Argentine high-culture set distinctions differently than in Europe, and adopted in eclectic and syncretic ways French, German, Italian and Spanish influences (which, although eclectic and syncretic were still meant to be recognized), *on the other*, no such elements of distinction were provided for the working and middle classes of immigrant origin which formed the bulk of the population. In this sense, the ideology of the Argentine middle classes seems to be almost the reverse of Bourdieu's (1987) highly differentiated universe of 'distinctions' within French society. The Argentine state thus probably failed to conceive some of the simple working mechanisms

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<sup>13</sup>It has to be mentioned here that immigrants who actually 'made it', such as rich industrialists among the elite, like to disguise their present wealth by locating their economic success in the past, 'when it was still possible to make money in Argentina.' (cf. chapter 6).

of successful national ideologies (which are convincing to a majority) which consist of the combination of general and particular features. That is to say that while European nation-states, like England or France have pronounced national ideologies, these consist also of regional and local elements which allow them to be rationalized and identified locally. Of course, national ideologies are not smoothly working clockworks, and they are not pre-constructed master plans either. Rather they consist of a series of elements, which in historical processes, attain a temporarily and socially stratified validity and distribution in a given society. It seems to me that the devisers of the great migration to Argentina (Sarmiento, Alberdi, and their successors, cf. chapter 2), and later government propaganda and policies have failed in their principal objective forming a consolidated Argentine identity. Their failure lay in the fact that they stripped Argentina of local traditions and identities or did not allow for their existence in the first place<sup>14</sup>. By making local and foreign identity claims at times illegal but mostly illegitimate, the task of identity construction was left to those shaping the ideologies in the ethnic association and its power centres of ethnic leadership (cf. chapter 10). From the point of view of Argentine politicians, however, the formation of ethnic identities in the ethnic associations developed in opposition rather than in complementary addition to an overall Argentine identity and was thus marginalized in Argentine society. On the other hand, as we have seen in chapter 10, Italian ethnic leaders 'accommodated' themselves with the Argentine state and society, not least through encompassing metaphors, such as "we are half of the country's population".

## 5. Reverse Image Formations, or Where has America Gone?

In this final section of the thesis, rather than offering ready-made conclusions, I would like to confront the reader with material which should make him or her think about the presently existing contradictory images of Italy and Argentina among Italians in Argentina.

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<sup>14</sup>More research is needed on the legitimization process of ethnic identity claims vis-à-vis the Argentine State. Besides the overall pattern of the imposition of a national identity, there must have been also some room (even in state institutions) for expressing ethnic identities (cf. the example of Leone Marinetti in chapter 7).

Until the 1950s, in the massive move of people across the Atlantic Ocean in search of a better life, Argentina represented the 'rich' receiving country and Italy the 'poor' sending country. Because of the difference in time and space experienced and perceived by the emigrants and the people who stayed at home, the two countries developed into mutually distant 'realities', filled with projects(ions) and expectations (such as 'making it in America', deciding to emigrate/return, nostalgia), which framed the perception of the 'other' reality, *lying in front* or *left behind*. In the discourse of immigrants reviewed in this thesis, the assumptions made by each group of the other seem to develop independently of and unchallenged by the 'real' representatives of such places the actual inhabitants of Italy and Argentina<sup>15</sup>. Rarely do the authors of such assertions meet their counterparts: and even when they do, their mutually reversed assumptions about each other remain unmitigated and irreconcilable.

The following example shows, how each side -Calabrians in Argentina and Calabrians from Italy- transpose their images, hopes and expectations to the 'other' reality.

The scene is a meeting of the executive committee of the COEMIT-council, the elected body of the Italian immigrants in Greater Buenos Aires (cf. chapter 10).

Six councillors and one guest, a woman of Calabrian descent, attend the meeting. The meeting has various points on the agenda: a letter from the Foreign Ministry in Rome which shares the preoccupation [of COEMIT councils worldwide] with the necessity of Italian schools abroad, and a forthcoming public meeting of the COEMIT in one of the Italian associations.

The chairman of the COEMIT also announces the visit of the Mayor of a small Calabrian town, who is touring the overseas communities of his municipality in Canada, Argentina and Australia.

At 8 p.m. the Mayor of Capomanfredo, Province of Reggio Calabria, enters the conference room. He is accompanied by three followers, all *paesani* from his village, including his cousin whose guest he is in Argentina. The Mayor is of stocky stature, bald-headed and wears black sunglasses but, most remarkably, the way he dresses distinguishes him from his Italo-Argentine hosts (some of them in casual wear, others in unpretentious suits). Under a black jacket he wears an impeccably white shirt, dark tie and grey trousers.

He is welcomed by the chairman, himself a Calabrian who emigrated with his parents in the late 1940s. The two men kiss each other on both cheeks, different from the Argentine custom which COEMIT councillors follow among themselves where only women are kissed and only on one cheek. All eyes are directed towards the Mayor, when he starts to speak in Italian with the slightly nasal tone typical of the accent of his home region.

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<sup>15</sup>Exceptions which have been referred to, are letters written by emigrants back (cf. chapter 2) and visits of relatives in Argentina (cf. chapter 9).

He emphasizes that he has come to Argentina to learn about the situation of his *paesani* and then goes on:

"You can be tranquil. From what I have seen here you have a healthy youth. This is a sane country. There are no drugs here. In Italy they have reached even the remotest village. The young are generally disinterested and decadent, they have lost their sense of the family and of morals, the women are all dressed in miniskirts."

He then extends the 'report' on his native Calabria by describing the extent to which the region and particular parts of it, such as Plain of Gioia Tauro (*Piana di Gioia Tauro*) in the Province of Reggio Calabria, have been overtaken by crimes and corruption related to organized crime - although he does not mention by name the particular Calabrian version '*ndrangheta*' (as opposed to Sicilian *Mafia* and Neapolitan *Camorra*).

At this point of the account, the Argentine woman of Calabrian descent asks the mayor about the situation in the home-town of her father (which is part of the Plain of *Gioia Tauro*). Although she has never been back, she mentions a few names of friends of her father who emigrated in the 1940s. The mayor understands the question put to him in Spanish and answers slowly in Italian about the families in question: "*hanno una faida aperta*", (They have an open blood feud [amongst them]). The woman, does not understand, and now the chairman of the COEMIT helps by 'translating' into Spanish - not literally but quite correctly with regard to the content- : "*se matan entre ellos*", (they kill each other). Tension and astonishment rise among the attendants of the meeting, and one of the COEMIT councillors who came from Northern Italy after World War II, shakes his head in disbelief when the mayor goes on to say that the homicide rate in Calabria is "400 per year, more than in the Lebanese Civil war".

The mayor goes on to stun his audience by clarifying his political allegiances:

"You see, I am left-wing and a member of the Socialist Party (*PSI*), but from the left wing of the *PSI* which is in favour of a coalition with the communists (*PCI*). [Otherwise] the *PSI* is even more corrupted by the Mafia than the Christian Democrats (*DC*)."

He then tells of the case of a corrupt DC-Senator who could not be brought to trial. It is at this stage that one of the *paesani* he has brought with him protests:

"I have lived in the United States, and I am from the right-wing faction of the *PSI*, and I insist that the bomb at Bologna railway station in 1980<sup>16</sup> was planted by the communists".

The mayor responds calmly that the investigations have now conclusively proven that the bomb was planted by the Italian secret services and neofascists.

He then turns to more practical issues of helping emigrants abroad, and while admitting that now there should be better working conditions than in the past, his overall views are still tainted by the epic picture of corruption:

"The regional government of Calabria now consists of a coalition of Socialists (*PSI*) and Communists (*PCI*), but the Christian Democrats (*DC*) block us wherever they can. I will, however, try to talk to x, who is the Vice-President of the Region and amongst other things my friend."

When the meeting was over, most of the Argentine and Italo-Argentine participants left

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<sup>16</sup>In June 1980, Bologna railway station was the scene for one of the worst bloodbaths in recent Italian history, when a bomb killed about 60 people.

with a feeling of bewildered astonishment. The Mayor had spoken to them about a Calabria which had little to do with the imagined place which is usually evoked in their conversations and conveyed in some of the emigrant-journals they receive from their home region. While, in the memories of childhood, it was the place of poverty and honesty characterized by a simple meatless cereal-based diet, occasional famine, close-knit social relations, and a tradition of emigration (cf. Piselli 1981, Minicuci 1989), Calabria has *now* become a region where people can buy their houses, afford to eat meat, travel, and enjoy a stable currency. While they appreciate that Calabria is still in the South of Italy, life seems to be much better there than in the chaos- and conflict-ridden Argentina of the late 20th century.

Certainly, the mayor holds a model image of 'America' in this episode as well, when he speaks of Argentina as the place where families live in harmony, morals are followed and drugs are unknown.

Sometimes, when speaking about their home-region, Calabrians and their descendants in Argentina are also proud of the distant achievements and emphasize that the success is for a good part due to their *own* contribution. They argue that without migration which reduced unemployment, and remittances which they were able to send to Italy in the early days of emigration (now *they* receive money from their relatives and war pension funds), people would still live in misery. The concept of 'sacrifice' (*sacrificio*) is most widely used to explain the nature of this relationship with the home region, its abandonment through emigration, which eventually helped it to develop. But unlike their companions in Europe, North America, and Australia, the 'sacrifice' of the Calabrians in Argentina has not been rewarded. Emphasizing the progress of the place which one has left, then, at least makes sense of the loss experienced through abandonment, and rewards 'at a distance' for the sacrifice of living and working abroad.

The imagined progress and development of Calabria, and Southern Italy and Italy more generally, is also a matter of renewed pride among Italians and descendants in Argentina, when being Italian in Argentina was for decades synonymous with being backward, illiterate and poor.

And then somebody like the Mayor comes and tells of "unimaginable" levels of



corruption and violence<sup>17</sup>. Unimaginable in Calabria, of course, because in Argentina the Calabrians have witnessed guerrilla attacks in the 1970s and the disappearance of more than 20,000 people under a military dictatorship. But that is Argentina, Latin America, 'where things are different and Europeans cannot understand them', not the *new* Italy. Was then migration worth it? And where has America gone?

1.

(Endnote)

"The intention in all *expectant emotions* is one that points ahead, the temporal environment of its content is future. ...

"The intentional contents of the *filled emotions* lie, as Husserl wrongly says of all emotions, in a 'set horizon', the horizon of *memory* ... as opposed to that of *hope* ..., the forward-reaching, i.e. real imagination, and the possible 'real' future of its Object. At the same time there is always of course, even in ... *remembering* ..., qua intention, an expectation at work, and Husserl himself states, quite unexpectedly: 'Every originally constituting process is animated by protentions which emptily constitute and collect what is coming as such' (Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewußtseins, 1928, p.410). However, these 'protentions' have in memory and in the emotions 'founded' by it already received what is theirs, they only have a 'horizon directed towards the future of what is re-remembered', which, with its unreal future, is in fact 'set horizon'. Whereas the *expectant emotions*, and the real imaginative idea which shows them their Object in space, at the same time possess this space as decided temporal space, that is, with the unweakened temporal material in time that is called real future. Accordingly, every *expectant emotion*, even if it should only intend unreal future in the foreground, becomes capable of a rapport with the objectively New. This is the life which the *expectant emotion* implicitly communicates to the thus anticipatory waking dreams." (Bloch 1986:108-109, my italics; for German edition see Bloch 1959:122-123).

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<sup>17</sup>I would like to remind the reader that the overall picture given by the Mayor on his village, which is part of the Plain of Gioia Tauro, is by no means exaggerated. For the development of adventurous capitalism and the *'ndrangheta* version of the Mafia in this area, see Arlacchi (1983a:67-121, 1983b:103-139, 189-212, engl. ed. 1986).

## GLOSSARY

Note that most terms which occur only once are explained in the main text and have not been incorporated into the glossary

Spanish terms are underlined

Italian terms are underlined and italicized

ancestros/antenati "ancestors", forefathers

asado grilled meat; barbecue

Austral Argentine currency unit between 1985 and 1991

La Boca working class district in Southern Buenos Aires at the "mouth" (boca) of the Riachuelo River; known for its strong Italian (mainly Genovese) immigrant presence till the 1940s

barrio norte "northern neighbourhood/district", generic term for upper and upper middle class districts in Buenos Aires (Federal District)

campo colloquial expression for landed estate

círculo cerrado informal system of saving in times of high inflation

caudillo provincial warlord in 19th century Argentina; male politician who commands a large personal following

clase alta upper class

clase media middle class

cocoliche non-standardized 'pidgin' Spanish spoken by Italian immigrants

Comitato Nazionale d'Intesa "National Committee of Understanding", committee of representatives from Argentine

branches of Italian organizations, parties and trade unions

Comitato Unitario joint committee of representatives of the associations of Italians in Argentina (FEDITALIA) and representatives of the Comitato d'Intesa

consultatore regionale "regional consultant", ethnic leader representing Italian immigrants vis-à-vis their home region

conventillo tenement house in Buenos Aires inhabited by immigrants during the times of mass immigration

criollo Creole; person claiming descent from Spaniards born in Argentina

crisol de razas melting pot of races

cuadra a block, usually 100m, alongside a row of houses

desaparecidos "disappeared people"; persons who have been abducted and often murdered during the last military dictatorship (1976-1983)

estancia large estate, cattle farm

familias tradicionales "traditional families", who claim Spanish Creole descent prior to mass immigration

fare l'America/hacer la América "Making America"

fideos pasta

genoves , genovese and 'xeneize' (in Genovese dialect and in lunfardo)

from Genoa, inhabitant of Genoa; descendant of Genovese, Genovese dialect

golondrina "swallow"; agricultural worker, often Italian, who, at the turn of the century, was working in both the Italian and Argentine harvests

gringo European immigrant; antonym to criollo

justicia social "social justice", Peronist social doctrine

justicialismo generic term for Peronism, derived from its social doctrine justicia social

lunfardo argot of Buenos Aires; shows influences from Genovese Italian, Yiddish and Portuguese

manzana block of houses

meridionale Southern; here: South Italian

nonno/a grandfather/grandmother (in lunfardo), derived from nonno/a grandfather/grandmother

Palermo upper middle class district in Buenos Aires (Federal District)

patria fatherland

passeggiata afternoon stroll in Italian towns

nuova patria, seconda patria concepts used by ethnic leaders to refer to Argentina the "new fatherland" or "second fatherland" of Italians

Once middle and lower middle class neighbourhood in Buenos Aires (Federal District)

Peso Argentine currency unit before 1985, and again, since 1992

porteño adjective of Buenos Aires; inhabitant of Buenos Aires

el proceso shorthand for the last military dictatorship (1976-1983) and its programme of "national reorganization" (el proceso de la reorganización nacional)

radici/raizes "roots"; concept evoked by ethnic leaders, immigrants and descendants referring to ethnic origins

Recoleta upper class district in central Buenos Aires (Federal District)

San Telmo middle and lower middle class district in Southern Buenos Aires (Federal District)

società di mutuo soccorso/sociedad de socorros mutuos

Mutual Aid Society (of Italian immigrants)

tallarines spaghetti

tano from napoletano "Neapolitan"; shorthand for Italians in Argentina

villa miseria shantytown

zona norte generic term for upper and upper middle class districts along the railway line from the Retiro station in the Federal District of Buenos Aires to the Tigre station in Greater Buenos Aires (Province of Buenos Aires).



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