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**“SOY” GAUCHO  
NATIONALISM AND MODERNITY IN ARGENTINA**

**BY**

**Geneva M. L. Smith**

**B.A., FRENCH STUDIES, SMITH COLLEGE, 2004  
M.A., ANTHROPOLOGY, THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO, 2013**

**THESIS**

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
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**ABSTRACT**

Set in rural Argentina, debates over cultural recognition, land rights, and economic opportunity have been waged throughout the country's history. By lodging the analysis in Argentina's rural zones, this project examines the series of neoliberal economic policies that led to a widespread shift to agricultural biotechnology, the ensuing social effects including urbanization due to decreasing rural labor opportunities, and the potential for new or hybridized political economies in the form of post-neoliberalism that have emerged out of Argentina's devastating 2001 economic crisis. In recent years, there have been accelerated agronomic and demographic shifts in Argentina's rural sector as farmers turn increasingly to genetically modified soybeans, turning the country into one of the world leading exporters. Traditionally, the free-range cattle industry has been a reliable source of profit in Argentina, however the sector is in decline largely due to the increase in feedlot cattle production, imported agricultural biotechnologies whereby farmers no longer rely on the system of crop and cattle rotations, and strict governmental regulations regarding exports. As such, I investigate the affective and material co-production of historically derivative celebrations of gaucho traditions that spark contemporary sociality and the work of free-range cattle herders (gauchos) today as one example, among many possible rural labor markets made precarious by neoliberalism and agricultural biotechnology. From the persistence of gaucho labor to newly urbanized constituents organizing behind President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner against the wolfish tendencies of the landed oligarchy, we must ask: What are the possibilities for Argentina to enter this moment of modernity alongside the new Latin American left by expanding social programs that are funded by taxes garnered by deepening its ties to the global export market, which simultaneously weakens its domestic rural labor market?

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

During the 1850s, the gaucho bandit called Antonio Gil had a torrid love affair with the fiancé of a local police chief, as the story goes. Eventually, when the affair was discovered by her violent fiancé, Gil fled his love and took refuge in a small settlement known as Mercedes, Corrientes, nestled between what is now Brazil and Paraguay. His nomadic nature urging him onward, he enlisted in the war against Paraguay, but soon deserted, only to later enlist in the *Correntino* civil war.<sup>1</sup> One night a Guarani god came to the gaucho during a dream. He whispered to Gauchito Gil to end his hand in the bloody wars, and instead work for the good of his people. Acting on this divine intervention, the gaucho abandoned his army position to embark on a campaign of beneficence. Repeatedly robbing the wealthy landowners of their livestock and goods, he is still remembered as the man who stole from the rich and gave to the poor. His outlaw gaucho lifestyle couldn't last forever, and eventually local police caught up with him while he napped under a tree, where they arrested him immediately and began to cart him back to town for persecution—though the gaucho would never make it back alive. On the journey back to Mercedes, the gaucho's captors began to take justice into their own hands; they tried to shoot him to death, but he wouldn't die; they tried stringing him up a tree him to slit his throat, but still death came slowly. Just before he died, Gauchito Gil

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<sup>1</sup> The *Correntino* civil war was led by General Juan Manuel de Rosas against the rule of the Unitarian party based out of Buenos Aires.

passed along an ominous premonition to his captor—the police chief would soon receive a letter stating that his son had rare disease, and the only chance of saving the boy was for the police chief to pray to the ghost of Gauchito Gil because “the blood of the innocent serves to make miracles.” Soon after the gaucho was murdered, his prophecy was realized. The police chief’s son was stricken with a grave illness, and in his state of fatherly desperation, he prayed at the grave of Gauchito Gil. His boy was saved.

Traces of Gauchito Gil can still be glimpsed while driving down many highways outside of Argentina’s city centers. Diminutive red houses are dotted along the roadside and are at once a remembrance of lost loved ones, and a sign of respect and homage to this Argentine folk hero. Today, the death-site of Gauchito Gil hosts his shrine eight kilometers outside of Mercedes. Surrounded by farmland, there is a bustling shantytown just off the side of the road marked by piecemeal wooden stalls protruding into the road. After passing through the dimly lit stalls selling religious goods and souvenirs—plaster statues of the stoic windblown gaucho on a cross, clad in vivid red, white and blue, red t-shirts hung from the ceilings in rows, and trinkets of all sorts crowded on wooden planks—the commotion of the market settles, as people pay three pesos for a red candle, steal the flame from one already burning, and quietly layer their own thanks and hopes atop the thick, caked red wax of earlier followers. The larger-than-life gaucho is set still further back, past more stalls, standing high amidst some 50,000 commemorative placards permanently fixed to the site (Graziano 2006: 128). The steel memorial stands quietly above, immobile and enduring, offering protection and hope to his believers.

On the anniversary of the gaucho’s death in mid-January, throngs of worshipers from across South America make the long pilgrimage to give thanks for the gifts the

gaucho has given them from beyond the grave. Recently, these yearly gatherings have been growing in size and recognition, as more and more people make the trek to pay homage for gifts the gaucho has bestowed upon them. The gaucho does more than grant wishes for material goods; he is an enduring symbolic expression of a vanguard against the impunity of the Argentine landed oligarchy and the unsympathetic rule of the urban elite (Graziano 2006: 115). I begin this thesis with a vignette of Gauchito Gil's story and his expanding cult following because as Davis Guss writes "for at the heart of all traditionalizing processes is the desire to mask over real issues of power and domination" (Guss 2001: 14).

Individual actors and groups that carry out hegemonic processes often try to dismantle the material presence of socioeconomic structures that do not fit into the dominant strategy. But, whether or not a specific hegemonic process is successful in completely eliminating those entities that fall outside its progress narratives, they endure, if not in material form, then in hybridized reincarnations such as an overlooked rural underclass, shrines on the side of a road, ceremonial displays of devotion, or stories passed down through generations. As moments of modernity take root, their promise for the future is usually at the expense of a marginalized socioeconomic or political predecessor. However, the implementation and subsequent realization of a modern project will forever be shaped, partly determined, and most of all, haunted by those people and traditions that preceded and persist. This thesis project investigates the constellation of socioeconomic and political processes that have grown from regionally specific tropes of extermination, and rendered traditional gaucho forms of labor obsolete in the name of modernity in the form of agricultural biotechnology. This at once sustains

Argentina's precarious breed of neoliberal capitalism and proposes a new form of political economy by attempting to resolve historically derived contestation between rural and urban geopolitical zones and deep class divides. In other words, I am looking to explore the questions: how did neoliberal capitalism render gaucho labor<sup>2</sup> obsolete while harnessing the obfuscatory power of *gauchismo*? How did neoliberalism in Argentina arise in tandem with agricultural biotechnology? Has agricultural biotechnology laid the foundation for alternatives to the capitalist model that ushered in the era of *soyazación*?

To get at these sweeping questions, I have divided my thesis into two sections. First, I will look at the historically constituted relationship between gaucho labor<sup>3</sup> and *gauchismo*, an enduring, affective mode of cultural<sup>4</sup> organization that at once inspires unity and elides the material socioeconomic deterioration in rural zones. Specifically, I investigate the co-production, confluence, and distinctions between gaucho the laborer and gaucho the symbol in a discussion of Argentine nationalism that disputes scholarly and popular claims that working gauchos no longer exist, and left in its place is no more than cultural reproductions of gaucho aesthetics and character traits. I begin this analysis with a discussion of the generalized colonial experience in the region that became

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<sup>2</sup> The frequency of free-range cattle farms that employ modern forms of gaucho labor has been steadily decreasing due to changes in traditional crop rotation patterns that traditionally relied free-range cattle grazing to replenish soil nutrients. However, due to *siembra directa* (no-till) and RoundupReady (RR) farming technologies, allowing land to lay fallow is no longer seen as an integral step in modern farming, favoring instead double-cropped soybean cultivation, particularly on larger farms (Gianessi and Carpenter 2000; Lehmann and Pengue 2000). Additionally, while there has been significant decrease in the number of free-range cattle enterprises, it is just one industry out of many that has been slowed by the increase genetically modified soybean cultivation, such as wheat and sunflower cropping for example (Gras 2009; Pengue 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Although there are certainly stark contextual and individual differences between historical gaucho figures and laborers on cattle ranches today, I argue that there are identifiable material similarities that place contemporary laborers on cattle ranches squarely in a genealogy of gaucho types of labor. For a more detailed, ethnographic descriptions on my use of "gaucho labor" in a contemporary context, see page 30.

<sup>4</sup> When referring to culture and cultural organization, I am implying systems of meaning and social structures influenced by regimes of power (Valencia N.d.).

Argentina. By touching upon the military campaigns of extermination that led to the vanquishing of indigenous peoples, I anchor my analysis of Argentine nationalism in processes of marginalization in the name of modernity that occurred within the formation of the nation itself. This diachronically constituted complexity shaped the contours of subsequent rural/urban dichotomy that geographically brackets enduring social fissures. After establishing this ideological genealogy, I examine ways that it was complicated through *gauchesca* poetry that argued for an Argentine nationalism intrinsically tied to the rural landscape and the gaucho class that inhabited it. In a contemporary context, I highlight the imbrication and division between the act of laboring as a gaucho and the cultural genealogy that is largely divorced from labor itself (*gauchismo*) that is instead a productive generator of social cohesion through an ethnographic example from my own fieldwork.<sup>5</sup> Even though gaucho the laborer is relegated to the ideational past, men continue to work as gauchos on free-range cattle ranches in the present day, though their economic viability can be shrouded by the potential of high yield crops that have encroached on land traditionally populated by free-range cattle enterprises. Moreover, while it may be tempting to discuss *gauchismo* as an empty façade that masks socioeconomic instability of laboring gauchos, it too generates a shared sense of belonging.

Second, I turn to the GM soybean industry that has begun to supersede all other forms of agricultural production, including livestock and alternative crops. By positioning *neoliberalismo*, the emic term for neoliberalism in Argentina (Shever 2012), as the

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<sup>5</sup> I turn to knowledge gained during an interview at the Museu Gauchesco in San Antonio de Areco and archival research, and participant observation on working cattle ranches in the current period and archival research in my determination that contemporary cattle herders have shared substantive qualities with historical gaucho figures recounted in literary, historiographic, and artistic genres.

gateway for the indiscriminate proliferation agricultural biotechnology in Argentina, it provides the contours of social division between those actors deemed economically relevant (soybean farmers) and those who now inhabit an ideational past (the gaucho class).<sup>6</sup> I begin this analysis through a Foucauldian framework that seeks to investigate where social lines are drawn and why by implementing his analytic of “state racism.” I suggest that the emergence of neoliberal economic policies and embedded social legacies together inform where social lines are drawn today, affectively demarcating Argentine citizenry between neoliberal subjects. During the 1990s when *neoliberalismo* was touted as the harbinger of economic prosperity, agricultural biotechnology, particularly GM soybeans, took root, which obscured the histories and contemporary manifestations of socioeconomic hierarchies. Moreover, in many instances, Brazil for example, the implementation of agricultural biotechnology continues to be hotly contested due to its myriad environmental and social consequences. Subsequently, I deploy an ethnographic example that compares the rhetoric of President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner’s call for elevated taxes on soybean exports to theoretically funnel into social programs and assist the growing urban poor, with a representative of a local soybean farmers association who parses the industry in an effort to highlight its ability to produce jobs. In both cases that revolve around the 2008 farmer riots,<sup>7</sup> the site of contestation is post-production, effectively accepting the transformation of Argentine agribusiness from free-range cattle

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<sup>6</sup> The gaucho class is an example of one type of laborer, amongst many other types of rural labor, that is being replaced by mechanized and industrialized rural labor production, primarily by GM soybean production.

<sup>7</sup> In the spring of 2008, President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner imposed an unprecedented soybean export tax of 44%, which incited widespread protests throughout the countryside by small and large-scale soybean farmers and landowners. Many of the protesters enacted their resistance to the new soybean export taxes by adopting the role of *piqueteros*, marching in the streets and blockading roads that led to port cities, which sharply decreased soybean exports. Eventually, under immense pressure, the president put the matter before the Argentine Congress on July 16, where the measure was defeated by a margin of 1 and taxes were returned a pre-March 10<sup>th</sup> level. For further discussion, see page 65.

to GM soybeans, which was co-produced alongside neoliberalism during the 1990s. While I just begin to scratch the surface of the global, national, and regional forces at work in reconstructing Argentine agribusiness and requisite labor structures, I aim to theoretically contextualize my final question: what is the possibility and plausibility, for Argentina to enter into a post-neoliberal era while continuing to productively reorganize its political economy around a form of export agribusiness (GM soybeans) that is so intrinsically aligned with neoliberal economic policies? The 2001 economic crisis in Argentina was a pivotal moment in the country's history, and now, in the face the country's unprecedented economic growth, and its powerful geopolitical stance in global politics, we are in the midst of its own, self-generated redefinition that is firmly ensconced in the annals of its own complex political history.

In adjoining these two sections with an attention to place as the material anchor—rural Argentina itself—I query the possibilities for Argentina to legitimately position itself as a post-neoliberal nation-state. Reinvigorated social programs, which have been built largely from the profit of global soybean trade, occur simultaneously with underlying discursive and political moves that strongly encourage the widespread mechanization of rural agribusiness. These moves increasingly dislodge the free-range cattle industry of its economic relevance in the national economy and accelerate urbanization due to lack of rural job opportunities.<sup>8</sup> Gayatri Spivak's elaboration on the idea of the spectralization of the rural is a useful framework for my overarching themes (2000a). Ann Anagnost extends the idea to encompass “a form of ‘death in life’ [that] has ideological and cultural dimensions as well as purely economic ones. The countryside has

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<sup>8</sup> For a figure on the changes in crop and livestock production over time, see page 40.

become a wasteland in which young people no longer can imagine a future, while the city has become a privileged site for forming a modern subjectivity through the accumulation of body capital, cosmopolitan experience, and purchasing power” (2006: 515). While this cannot be directly grafted onto an Argentine context where the rural zones are an incredible source of economic productivity, there is a measure of applicability because Argentina’s rural agribusiness is exploding in productivity, as technological advances require fewer and fewer human laborers, in the form of free-range cattle herders and other rural laborers. The spectralization of the rural is about waning materiality; it’s about a mirage that holds together while it is affected by the forces of global capital that drain rural zones of people and jobs that constituted its image in the first place. Just as Gauchito Gil’s followers grow in numbers and passion in the midst of this most recent agricultural transformation whereby regionally specific crops and livestock have been abandoned in favor of the profit potential of GM soybeans, the specter of a traditional, rural Argentina abound with free-range cattle and the men who herd them, holds fast through cultural events and personal affective attachments, even as traditional rural industries disappear (Garces 2007). In life, Gauchito Gil stole from the rich and gave to the poor, and in death, he is a persistent reminder of the sustained socioeconomic inequity throughout rural Argentina that is hidden from view by the economic potential of pristine soybean fields.

## Chapter 2

### Labor, Ideology, and Nationalism

On my last trip to Argentina during the southern summer of 2012, I traveled north to Corrientes province. From Retiro Station in Buenos Aires, the route cuts through the outskirts of the city where “*Cristina es el pueblo*” (Cristina is the people) is painted over and over in faded blue paint on the inner walls of the highway barrier. Eventually, instead of towns built up around the sides of the road, there are neatly cultivated tracts of agricultural land. At some point in the overnight trip, those manicured fields are replaced by lines of towering thin trees with shadowy halls between each perfect row. And finally, though it is harder to tell when the last transition happens, fields of tall grasses, and scattered herds of cattle and sheep flank the road by the time the sun comes up. When I lived in the region almost eight years ago, the cattle industry seemed to be thriving and *menchos* (the name of gauchos in this region) had a noticeable presence, walking through the streets each evening as they were dropped off in town after a day in *el campo*.

Just before heading out to “meet their *menchos*,” my contact with whom I had already spoken extensively, waved me closer. With a lowered voice, and a half smile, he leaned in and said: “don’t kiss the *menchos*.” He did not mean romantically, but rather was referring to the standard two-cheek greeting kisses performed upon meeting people in Corrientes. While Corrientes is one of the more economically depressed provinces in which the free-range cattle industry continues to employ *mencho* labor, it seemed he was

indicating that the *menchos* themselves are separate and apart from the region's normal standards of polite conduct. While this is clearly the advice of one man, it is an evocative exchange that points to attitudes toward this group of working class men. The Argentine free-range cattle industry is still relevant; men, who self-identify as gauchos or *menchos*, continue to make their living by herding free-range cattle, but I argue that this recognizable yet diverse group has been relegated to the ideational past. Existing literature makes clear that soybeans have come to represent the economic future of Argentina, arguably having catapulted the country out of economic collapse over this past decade, the social and economic relevance of gauchos (*menchos*) have become marginalized.

This section is devoted to exploring the history, quality, and potential of *gauchismo* in Argentina in relation to the material conditions of gaucho labor. Kathryn Lehman argues, “even though scholars calmly assert that the gaucho no longer exists, rural Argentinean communities still identify passionately with his independent stance, proclaiming themselves inheritors” (Lehman 2005: 150). What she neglects to include in her defense of persisting *gauchismo*, are the men who continue to work as gauchos, in daily work out in *el campo*, herding and treating cattle primarily on horseback. In order to more fully develop the importance of gauchos and *gauchismo* for Argentina and Argentines, I begin this section by looking back to the colonial period, when Argentina was known as Río de la Plata, in order to establish pre-national processes that worked to initiate the rural-urban divide. From there, I move to the early construction of nationalism that set the stage for subsequent historical contestations. Gauchos and their cultural legacy came to symbolize the vacant, rural landscape of the country. This image was

constructed in contrast to the European cosmopolitanism of the urban Buenos Aires. These mutually constitutive regional signifiers emerged as reactions to one another and in tandem with each other. After establishing the specific Argentine socio-geographic caesura, I will focus on the how *gauchismo* spread beyond the rural and worked as a homogenizing force that began to symbolically unify the disparate nation through *gauchesca* poetry. Finally, I will pose an ethnographic example as a synthetic event that evokes the affective importance of passing on gaucho tradition, the contours of distinction between and within *gauchismo* and gaucho labor—what it means “to be gaucho” in an era when gaucho labor is positioned as something past that needs to be remembered, and *gauchismo* as the enduring quality that can be genealogically transmitted.

Henry Giroux’s new biopolitics of disposability is an apt framework to explore these rural reconfigurations. “The state no longer protects its own disadvantaged citizens—they are already seen as dead within a transnational economic and political framework. Specific populations now occupy a globalized space of ruthless politics in which the categories of ‘citizen’ and ‘democratic representation,’ once integral to national politics, are no longer recognized” (Giroux 2006: 182). My goal is to explore ways that gauchos, *menchos*, or Argentine cattle herders in general, and *gauchismo* continue to survive—and by “survive,” I mean both how they actually inhabit their daily lives and are understood as useful economic members of society (or not) through the lens of national discursive practices. To do so, I pose a number of general questions that I will return to and weave throughout the section: Has the emergence of *gauchismo* obscured the existence of persistent forms of free-range cattle herding? Why does *gauchismo*

persist as a modicum of a nationalist project? How has *gauchismo* evolved into an affective quality experienced at the level of the individual? As neoliberal economic policies have encouraged a widespread shift from free-range cattle to genetically modified soy, the opportunities afforded gauchos have been pushed to the economically depressed regions where soil is unsuitable for soy cultivation and ranch owners cannot gain access to the immense capital needed to begin growing soybeans. I argue that this process has pushed gauchos to the margins of visibility, while *gauchismo*, an enduring, transmittable, and affective system of meaning, is a productive social force that remains applicable in a contemporary Argentine context.

### Before Argentina

*Thus God Almighty graciously gave us the victory, and allowed us to take possession of their place.*  
Ulderico Schmidt 1554

*And I say that between colonization and civilization there is an infinite distance; that out of all the colonial expeditions that have been undertaken, out of all the colonial statues that have been drawn up, out of all the memoranda that have been dispatched by all the ministries, there could not come a single human value.*  
Aimé Césaire 1955

In order to rightly begin a discussion of Argentine nationhood and its constitutive elements, I will briefly explore the constellation of relevant pressures that were exerted on the region as its status as a colony of the Spanish Empire drew to a close and processes of national formation began to emerge. After almost 300 years of Spanish rule, “separation from Spain was in a sense imposed by events from without” (Shumway 1993: 3). More specifically, the process of Argentine independence began as the Spanish monarchy collapsed following Napoleon’s invasion of the Iberian Peninsula in 1808 (Moreno and Belgrano cited in Shumway; Nouzeilles and Montaldo 2009: 43). In the

wake of the colonial order's demise, the outright failure of the Spaniards' project to homogenize the peoples of the Southern cone by way of religious conversion and exposure to European values came into high relief. The Spanish administration had ruled through centralized political and ecclesiastical posts filled with appointees from Spain who had limited reach throughout the expansive territory known as the Argentine. The region's perceived lack of value justified and ensured Spain's porous sovereignty, whereby the crown's authority was generally recognized, but sparingly heeded (Shumway 1993). In the juridical void of the vast and disparate colony, multiple groups emerged, solidified, and contested one another. The most visible were the *criollos* (colonists and their descendants) who inhabited urbanizing Buenos Aires, the rural and disparate realms of *caudillos* (charismatic rural leaders), who represented the interests of their respective locales, comprised largely of *campesinos* and *gauchos* (whose history I will return to shortly), and indigenous peoples who "mostly retreated South toward the Strait of Magellan for fear of being suppressed by the Spaniards, to whom they in no way want to submit" (Father Strobel cited in Nouzeilles and Montaldo 2009: 34). Following Spain's retreat from the region, bloody, sustained conflicts took hold between oppositional groups in battles to define independence.

Fernando Coronil writes that "what is forgotten screens what is remembered. The persuasiveness of a historical account, like that of a magical performance, depends on rendering invisible the artifice of its production" (Coronil 1997: 3). From what I gather through the relevant literature and by speaking with numerous Argentines, the dominant discursive strategies used to describe what it means to be Argentine can be summed up as one of two possible value sets: that of urban porteño elites or rural *caudillos*. While this

simplistic dichotomy certainly elides the enormous complexity of Argentine citizenry since the country's inception to the current period, including a growing urban and rural poor and wealthy *latifundistas* (large ranch owners), it also obscures the existence of, campaigns of extermination against, and resistance to indigenous peoples in the Argentine pre-colonial and colonial territories, and nation-state. The historiographies that intentionally ignored this segment of Argentine history are then necessarily an influential force in the formation of nationalist narratives; for example indigenous presence is highlighted through discursive constructions of absence. The impetus behind early Argentine wars of position between the primary political groups, Unitarians and Federalists, and the sustained regional antinomy, are predicated upon and shaped by the state-sponsored vanquishing of indigenous peoples (Renan cited in Goebel 2011; Lazzari 2003). "The invisibilization of indigenous groups did not totally erase them from national imaginings; rather, it turned them into a non-visible, vanishing yet culturally productive presence" (Gordillo and Hirsch 2003: 5) The guiding fictions of Argentine nationalism have been at once fiercely contested and are a singular rejection of *el desierto*<sup>9</sup> (Gordillo 2003: 9; Dodds 1993).

Military campaigns in *el desierto*, as well as later periods of intense European immigration in the early twentieth century, position Argentina amongst settler colonial creations such as the US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. As Patrick Wolfe argues, "territoriality is settler colonialism's specific, irreducible element" (Wolfe 2006: 387). The attempted elimination of indigenous peoples in the region was cast as a necessary phase of modernization, allowing for "white" or "European" nation to emerge in its

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<sup>9</sup> *El desierto* refers literally to the physically barren frontier with a perceived limited potential for productivity, as well as land inhabited by indigenous peoples (Gordillo 2003).

wake. By the 1880s, the Argentine nation claimed sovereignty over the lands extending south to the Colorado river, later pushing further into Patagonia in which the state eventually (1950s) set up reservations to house indigenous survivors (Salvatore 2008). This was the first of many nation building projects that saw “subaltern and sociabilities as potentially corrosive of national progress” and sought to constitute Argentina as a white, European nation (Salvatore 2008: 778).

The withdrawal of direct Spanish rule in the Argentine region initiated ideological wars between multiple actors as the nation-state came into being. In this pivotal period of modernity or “rupture in social life”—the birth of the Argentine nation-state—the dominant discourses fomented and continue to color conceptions of national identity (Buck-Morss 2009: 6; Gellner and Breuilly 2008). “An enlightened elite of intellectuals and politicians purposely founded a nation modeled after Europe and the United States on the vast and fertile plains of the Southern Cone, relegating to the past the rebellious gauchos and nomadic Amerindians that until then had traversed the land (Nouzeilles and Montaldo 2009: 1). The subsequent and diachronic persistence of these two primary modes of nationalism—urban and rural—pose questions about how and why they have endured, gathered followings, and contributed so much to Argentine arts, culture, politics, and sociality. Before turning to the qualities and disputes that shape the opposing rural and urban systems of meaning, we must look instead to the pre-colonial and colonial conditions that laid the foundation for these ideological antinomies to flourish.

Scholars argue that modernity and coloniality are two sides of the same coin—with the sordid complexity implicit in coloniality representative of multifarious silenced histories. In other words, visions of an independent Argentina are necessarily infused

with shadows of the colonial past, despite attempts to disguise them (Escobar 2008b; Faulk 2012; Mignolo 2005; Quijano 2007). “‘Coloniality,’ according to Walter Mignolo, is on the one hand, ‘what the project of modernity needs to rule out and roll over in order to implant itself as modernity and—on the other hand—the site of enunciation where the blindness of the modern project is revealed, and concomitantly also the site where new projects begin to unfold’” (Mignolo cited in Escobar 2008a). Whereas Western epistemologies suppose modernity to be tied to the foundation of the nation-state, instead we see that there can be no modernity without coloniality, which precedes the nation-state. An independent Argentina did not move forward despite its colonial past, but because of its specific colonial circumstances: indigenous peoples were conquered, rural mestizo settlers and gauchos were painted as barbarous, and urban *criollo* elites were cast as the harbingers of civilization. Extending beyond the European colonial era, Michel-Rolph Trouillot argues “what needs to be analyzed further, better, and differently is the relation between the geography of management and the geography of imagination that together underpinned the development of world capitalism and the legitimacy of the West as the universal unmarked” (Trouillot 2003: 45). Trouillot’s “geography of management” refers to the capitalistic mode of organizing place through institutions of control, otherwise known as modernization; whereas the “geography of imagination” is the theoretically unlimited potential of modernity to temporally reach beyond the limits of place in order to embed and extend a Westernized vision of history. While Western modernity sustains itself through the continual creation of the Other and Elsewhere, modernization via world capitalism functionally maintains the theoretical divides that

grew out of colonial expansion in the first place (2003). Modernity both created the Other, and needs it to remain relevant.

Despite contemporary Argentina's disavowal of its colonial genealogy and until recently Western anthropology's relative disinterest in the country due to a perceived lack of indigenous populations, indigenous histories of the land and their subsequent silencing by colonial intervention were fundamental contributors to early and sustained Argentine conceptions of nationalism. The region that extended from the Straits of Magellan to Asunción in Paraguay and from the Atlantic coast of Uruguay to the Andes was an extension of the viceroyalty of Peru that was a relatively marginal area only minimally

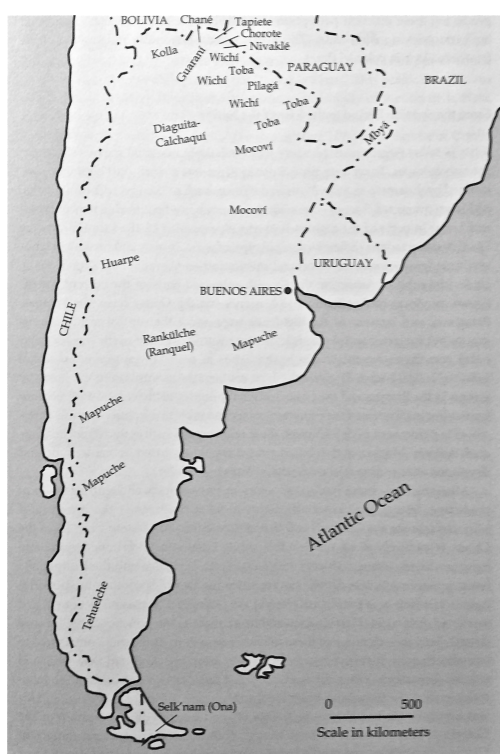


Figure 1: Distribution of indigenous groups during the colonial period.

Source: Gaston Gordillo, pg. 7

tapped for natural resources and spices (Gordillo 2003; Nouzeilles and Montaldo 2009). Gaston Gordillo describes indigenous populations as falling into three categories: those subject to missionization, those who performed labor servitude labor servitude, and those groups of politically autonomous peoples who resisted Spanish rule and primarily resided in the Gran Chaco, the Pampas, Patagonia and sections of the highlands. The indigenous groups of the Rio de la Plata were largely nomadic, and as such were notoriously resistant to processes of Spanish hegemony. While under Spanish

rule, indigenous peoples were given limited rights, though often abused, during the protracted struggles for independence, policies of inclusivity dissipated (Gordillo 2003:

Shumway 1991). “The post- Independence societies abandoned colonial legal and economic structures in favor of new theories of private property and free trade. In so doing, they unleashed forces of greed and rapacity that led to supported by guiding fictions that denied the Indians a place in the emerging community” (Shumway 1993: 61). As they became enduring symbols of “barbarism”<sup>10</sup> in the midst of a nascent country yearning to mimic European nationhood, indigenous groups were relegated to the increasingly distant geographic margins and were being wiped from the potential nationalist memory through either extermination or assimilation. As the period of civil wars drew to a close in the 1870s and the Argentine government was centralized in Buenos Aires, extensive military raids known as the *campaña al desierto* was launched and sealed the fate of the resistant Mapuche and Ranquel groups (Gordillo 2003). Localized versions of these campaigns of violence that had been waged to rid the countryside of all traces of its indigenous past were largely carried out by gaucho armies and led to a massive campaign of extermination. This period of Argentine history is a pivotal moment of modernity marked by a state sponsored attempt to violently erase the new country’s indigenous past in order to “purify” the land and ready it for a European style nation-state.

Tropes of extermination are enduring and repeated through the country’s historiography. I am not arguing a deterministic perspective that “every version of

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<sup>10</sup> The idea of barbarism in Argentina should be read through the legacy of Domingo Faustino Sarmiento’s highly controversial and pivotal text *Civilización y Barbarie - Vida de Juan Facundo Quiroga* (1845). It is at once an analysis of Argentine life and politics, and a very personal and impassioned cautionary tale for the urban elites of Argentina to reject the *caudillo* leader Juan Manuel de Rosas. Written in exile, the text draws on European scholarly traditions that trace the essence of Argentina’s national character back to the land itself and the deleterious social effects of those who subsist off of it. Running throughout the text is the division between urban, educated residents (civilization) and brutality of the disparate rural peoples (barbarism), which is translated into the idea of a united republic based on European models, and the backwards pull of the gaucho riddled countryside (Celarent 2011).

historicism expresses the feeling of being swept into the future by irresistible forces” (Popper 2006: 149). Rather, the systematic military and discursive project to marginalize the indigenous presence during this period of modernity has had lingering effects in the formation of Argentine national identity, and subsequent debates between barbarism and civilization. The campaigns of extermination in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century often deployed gaucho soldiers to rid the Argentine nation-state from the living relics of its pre-colonial past. While the imagined homogenizing effects of nationalist projects in general seem to require the elision of social difference, the campaigns of extermination were inconclusive: gauchos and indigenous people survived the campaigns. Today, cattle herders with identifiable similarities to portrayals of historical gaucho figures continue to live and work, as do indigenous peoples, while campaigns of neoliberal economic progress in the global market deny their sustained relevance.

### “The Post-colonial Dilemma”

*The here and now is no longer a mere link in an earthly chain of events, it is simultaneously something which has always been, and will be fulfilled in the future; and strictly, in the eyes of God, it is something eternal, something omnitemporal, something already consummated in the realm of fragmentary earthly events.*

Walter Benjamin 1968

I turn now to early constructions of Argentine national identity, which are based on obscured colonial “barbarisms” that serve as the foundations for sustained articulations of difference between Argentines. The identities sown in this first century of nationhood, based on both political ideologies and economic realities, continue to resurface as productive forces, however transformed and reconstructed through historical processes. Modernity “constitutes a new way of belonging in time and space, one that

differentiates between past, present, and future (linear time and History), and that is tied to the spatiality of the nation-state above all” (Escobar 2008b: 165). With my previous discussion in mind whereby there can be no modernity without coloniality, the creation of an Argentine nation-state was marked by the imbrication of multiple subjectivities that both recall and reject the European conceptions of progress (modernity itself). I agree with Michael Goebels in his recent historiography that “this division should be understood as a matrix of interpretation rather than a divide between two clearly identifiable political traditions” (Goebel 2011: 18). By invoking relevant theorists of nationalism (Anderson 1983) and ideology (Gramsci 1970; Marx 1963; Williams 1978), I will explore the birth of Argentina as a social rupture, truncating and continuing from the colonial period to nationhood, and as an era rife with an oppositional citizenry that defined an Argentine totality through processes of contradiction.

Throughout most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, successive and simultaneous wars were fought to carve out the borders of the new country and articulate a cohesive strategy for socioeconomic and cultural success. I will briefly trace prominent political movements and actors that highlight the ideological polemics between urban elites who sought to replicate European conceptions of nationalism and cultural characteristics, and rural settlers and gauchos, who believed theirs, should be an autonomous existence. Despite my inchoate historical narrative, I look rather to the construction of a series of binaries—urban/rural, intellectual elite/laboring class, creole/mestizo, state/civil society—that remain relevant as “guiding fictions” throughout Argentine history (Burdick 1995; Caballero 2008; Shumway 1991). My goal is to address the significant historical moments by beginning with the ideological projects of intellectuals from both urban and

rural zones and then juxtapose their top-down nationalist projects with the ideological implications of gauchos' labor as material force.

To frame my discussion of “guiding fictions,” I couple a Marxian attention to ideology with Benedict Anderson’s foundational text on nationalism. Popular conceptions of national identity often mask bids for power, as well as the vertical inequalities that occur simultaneously with superficial claims of sameness based on citizenship. In his reformulation of nationalism, Anderson argues that a nation “is imagined as a *community* because regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (1983: 7). Anderson positions nationalism as an ideological project relatively divorced from the material conditions of life. The portrait of an “imagined community” divides the national project from the localized experiences of its citizens in order to draw attention to their incongruity. On the other hand, a Marxian interpretation works to expose ways that ideologies are bound up with materiality. Gramsci writes, “material forces are the content and ideologies are the form, a merely didactic distinction of form and content, because material forces could not possibly be historically conceived without form, and ideologies would be individual whims without material forms” (Gramsci cited in Williams 1977: 151). While Anderson’s vision of the “imagined community” separates the ideological national project from the vertical inequalities within the nation, Gramsci helps us to reintegrate the ideological and material worlds affected by power that Anderson highlights through distinction. In the case of Argentina, the nationalist project worked to obscure the vertical inequalities by disguising the population’s heterogeneity. Yet, if we take the lineage of the country’s ideological projects that have both created and concealed

social difference, we can make room for alternative historical narratives and contemporary experiences, such as that of gauchos' genealogical positionality.

During the first quarter of the century, wars were fought on multiple fronts to secure independence from the Spanish, and for certain groups, to establish themselves as the appropriate leaders of the new Argentina. "Despite the political instability...most Argentines *porteños* and provincials alike, were united in pursuing three major goals: to maintain the viceroyalty boundaries, to expel the Spanish not just from the viceroyalty but also from the entire continent, and to select a form of government everyone could live with" (Shumway 1991: 50). While none of these objectives was accomplished immediately, political allegiances formed, with groups often falling in line behind an outspoken figurehead aligned with specific regional objectives. Two of the most notable were José Artigas, who was aligned with Federalist *caudillos* on the side of provincial autonomy, and Bernardino Rivadavia, of the Buenos Aires Triumvirate, who led the Unitarians by championing the idea that power and resources should be centralized and controlled by the *porteño* elite.

The Rivadavians began their attempt to organize the new country beginning in 1820. As a group of *porteño* Unitarians, their vision was firmly anchored to the region's European ties and worked to extend Liberal notions of state and civil society (Dodds 1993). With a certain degree of success, particularly regarding the establishment of European style educational systems, they sought to impose their vision of a "Paris in the Pampas," though their project has been retrospectively found wanting: "literary societies produced no memorable literature, and their academies of science, except predated their scientists... The Happy Experience [the proliferation of European High Culture] in some

sense was little more than theater, complete with empty sets and actors who tried to sound European” (Shumway 1991: 109). This particular perspective, often referred to as “superficial and secondary,” a mere copy of European culture, has had lasting sociocultural and political repercussions such as a European style education system (Galvez 1910: 102).

The Federalists, led by Artigas, established themselves as the oppositional political party. Artigas cemented the party’s position when he submitted a document to the General Constitutional Assembly in Buenos Aires, where he demanded “absolute independence,” arguing for a federation of equal provinces to hedge against the kind of abuses found under the monarchy (Artigas 1813 cited in Shumway 1991). “For the interior and Littoral provinces, Federalism meant resisting attempts to concentrate power in the port city and, at its best, defending the rights of the poor and the low-born” (1991: 48). Building off the foundations of Artigas’ Federalism, though departing from it toward despotism, General Manuel de Rosas held office as Governor of Buenos Aires on and off from 1837-1852. Despite being a wealthy landowner, Rosas came to symbolize the objectives of rural constituents. He “enjoyed the support of the poor, seduced by his carefully cultivated political persona that was at once imperial, populist, and paternalistic. Rosas could ride and talk like a gaucho, but he also knew how to affect the airs of royalty” (Shumway 1991: 119). Ultimately, his anemic support for the urban and rural poor led to the emergence of a landed oligarchy,<sup>11</sup> and the institutionalized marginalization of gauchos and indigenous groups.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> While land was privatized in multiple ways over a significant period of time, during Rosas’ time in office, he allowed previously land lease agreements to lapse into private ownership ultimately constituting one of the more widespread instances of land privatization (Shumway 1991).

<sup>12</sup> For further discussion on the demarcation of land, see page 26.

It was not until Rosas' exile that the period known as "national organization" began, whereby the expansive country was to be organized and made legible through cartographic, military, and political projects (Goebel 2011; Dodds 1993). In 1845 Domingo Sarmiento, amongst many others in his cohort known as the Generation of 1837, became incensed by Rosas' tactics and wrote his infamous treatise that hailed Argentina's colonial past as a necessary step toward the country's survival through modernization. The exterior provinces were positioned as chaotic havens where barbarism festered, unimpeded by Western cultural influence. His proposed solution was to impose widespread educational practices that inculcated the nationalist project, and culture via European immigration.

Two distinct, rival, and incompatible forms of society, two differing kinds of civilization existed in the Argentine Republic: one being Spanish, European, and cultivated, the other barbarous American, and almost wholly of native growth. The revolution which occurred in the cities acted only as the cause, the impulse, which set these distinct forms of national existence face to face, and gave occasion for a contest between them to be ended, after lasting many years, by the absorption of one into the other. (Sarmiento 1868: 54)

In his impassioned diatribe, he viewed the ways of life in the vast countryside, which he described in elaborate and highly subjective detail, as originating from the vastness of the land itself. The sheer amount of space becomes a tyrannical force that can only be quelled by the imposition of European socioeconomic structures and cultural traditions. As the trade hub for the country, Buenos Aires had the strongest ties to Europe, though *porteños* were often trading in the country's agricultural goods, grown in the provinces. Whereas Sarmiento hailed Buenos Aires as the natural arbiter of civilization, its provincial counterpart represented by the *caudillos*, blamed their economic poverty on the capital city's stranglehold on resources.

The caudillos were created by the ambition of Buenos Aires...[They] rose in every province as the fatal result of Buenos Aires' confiscation of their fortune...What were the

caudillos but the governors of provinces abandoned to their fate, spurred on by hunger and worry about the future? [They were] local governors without resources without the limits of law, without the immediate responsibility to create and order institutions. (Andrade 1866: 56-58 cited in Shumway).

Despite the *caudillos* tenacity, the economic reality was that most foreign entities traded with and through Buenos Aires, leaving the provinces, and their leaders, in necessary contact (1991; 2002). While their ideologies set the sides in stark contrast, their mutual success depended upon their ability to find functional and stable economic, if not cultural, interrelationships.

While the intellectual and political leaders of the time waged conceptual wars, arguing their points from the pulpit, the rural agricultural zones were the actual economic engines giving the politicians something to argue about. In order to secure stable access to resources, the land and its inhabitants needed to be “tamed.” Prior to the wars of independence, when gauchos were conscripted to fight against the Spanish, they were largely nomadic mestizos, living on the fringes of colonialism.

There is high enjoyment in the independence of the Gaucho life—to be able at any moment to pull up your horse, and say, ‘Here we will pass the night.’ The deathlike stillness of the plain, the dogs keeping watch, the gipsy-group of Gauchos making their beds round the fire, have left in my mind a strongly-marked picture of this first night, which will never be forgotten. (Darwin 1831: 63)

Though they were generally viewed as operating outside of Spanish control and civil society, due to respected service during the wars of independence, “the colonial stigma of contraband hunter and vagabond gave way to an aura of bravery and patriotism” (Slatta 1992: 11). As the gauchos themselves pushed back the frontier by fighting off indigenous groups, the amount of grazing area and the number of ranches increased exponentially. The Argentine government sold and leased enormous tracts of land, which morphed into ownership during Rosas’ reign. This newly incorporated land was treated as political rewards, instead of areas for progressive settlement and population diffusion (Shumway

1991; Slatta 1992). While this move could be viewed as clientelism, the implications for the young country's legibility cannot be overlooked. James Scott adopts a Foucauldian perspective in his treatise on the organization of nation-states. "Legibility implies a viewer whose place is central and whose vision is synoptic... This privileged vantage point is typical of all institutional settings where command and control of complex human activities is paramount" (Scott 1999: 79). As utopian as it may appear, state-sponsored planning and the process of turning "nature" into "natural resources" is a state directed project to reorganize daily lives, and create access to natural resources and access for military control. As the Argentine government distributed private property and created a ranching elite, gauchos, "itinerant pampean horsemen, [who] evolved as a social class during the seventh century, hunting wild cattle and slaying them for their hides" (Slatta 1980),<sup>13</sup> no longer fit the formalized territorial grid that was demarcated by property lines.

The contours of what it meant to be gaucho were restricted by imposed demarcations of private property and the quality of work shifted correspondingly. "As ranch work became more diverse and specialized, the administrative hierarchy sharpened, with lines between peon, foreman, manager, and owner more clearly delineated" (1992: 46). This laid the foundation for continued *latifundism*, which has quite significantly shaped the quality of contemporary agro-industry whereby the ranching elite control the land and the manner in which resources are extracted. Marx's discussion regarding the power of production in the "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844", appositely describes the process of "civilizing" the gaucho: "The worker becomes an even cheaper

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<sup>13</sup> Slatta citing Madaline Wallis Nichols 1953 and Ricardo E. Rodríguez Molas 1982.

commodity the more commodities he creates. With the *increasing value* of the world of things proceeds in direct proportion the *devaluation* of the world of men. Labour produces not only commodities; it produces itself and the worker as a commodity” (Marx and Engels 1978: 71). With the demarcation of land through property titles and fencing, the quality of labor changed correspondingly, the quantity of available ranching jobs for gauchos fell markedly due to fences, and the brief esteem associated with gauchos soon diminished as the wars came to a close (1992).

The figure of the gaucho was used as fodder on both sides of the ideological divide. For Sarmiento’s project, the gaucho represented the subject to be civilized through education and contact with European immigrants. The Federalists, on the other hand, employed the figure of the gaucho to symbolize the ingenuity and valor of the rural provinces that needed to be protected from porteño abuses.<sup>14</sup>

### The Spread of *Gauchismo*

*I have tried...to present a type who personifies the character of our gauchos, concentrating in his way of being, feeling, thinking and expressing all that is peculiar to them; giving him the array of images and color that fills his imagination; the impetuosity of his pride, excessive to the point of crime; and all the drive and tumult found in the children of nature who remain unpolished and unrefined by education.*  
José Hernandez 1872

How did gauchos go from living on the margins of Argentine society with only brief periods of social acceptance to being the symbol of a unified nation-state, while still being pushed to the economic margins? In the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a new highly

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<sup>14</sup> It is important to note that deployments of the figure of the gaucho, and the historiographical material that recount gauchos are decidedly masculinized, which are an essential factor in constructions of nationalism (Archetti 2007; Gelb 2011; Lehman 2005; Radcliffe 1993). While this is certainly worthy of further investigation, it is outside the scope of my analysis in this project.

effective agent of national identity began to take shape: *gauchesca* poetry. It transformed gauchos from rural laborer and sometimes soldier to an aspirational and symbolic figure at least partly divorced from the materiality of gaucho labor. Similarly to Les Field's argument in regards to Nicaragua, the intellectual elite of the period who wrote in the stylized *gauchesca* poetry used their "authority to elegantly and comprehensively reify the dominant interpretations" of literary projects in constructions of national identity (Field 1999: 42). This section looks at the important historical role of the *gauchesca* in configuring contemporary forms of sociality based around experiences of *gauchismo*<sup>15</sup>.

Eric Hobsbawm proposes that "the history which became part of the fund of knowledge or the ideology of the nation, state, or movement is not what has actually been preserved in popular memory, but what has been selected, written, pictured, popularized and institutionalized by those whose function it is to do so" (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992: 13). Written by intellectual elites sympathetic to gauchos' causes, the *gauchesca* drew from an imagined style of gaucho poetry that proposed the potentiality of progress in the form of social cohesion based on the uniqueness of the rural zones and their inhabitants. It was a top-down transformation of *gauchismo* (though often masked as derivative of "the people") as an affective description of the rural gaucho laborers, eventually deployed as a mechanism to unify the disparate nation via newspapers and print media. "Print-capitalism...made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways"

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<sup>15</sup> My descriptions of gaucho lifestyle and livelihood across time are based on several historiographies that trace and cite early accounts of men who subsisted off of feral cattle commonly thought of as vagrants and thieves living on the margins of society, as well as those who labored on large cattle ranchers for land barons either permanently or seasonally (Baretta and Markoff 1978; Delaney 1996; Lehman 2005; Huberman 2011; Nichols 1953; Nouzeilles and Montaldo 2009; Rodríguez Molas 1982; Slatta 1980, 1985, 1992; Shumway 1993).

(Anderson 1983: 36). The expansion of print media created new space-time relationships, whereby people with strikingly different daily lives could experience newspapers' identical content simultaneously. This process worked to reorient relationships with the nation-state from verticality, reminiscent of colonial or monarchical structures of power, to horizontal experiences of similarity amongst constituents deepening perceptions of democracy. Moreover, the *gauchesca* was a literary form, preserved for posterity through its materiality. "The written document has properties reminiscent of a ceramic pot, with spatial portability and temporal durability... Replication is crucial to the movement of such 'ceramicized objects precisely because the objects were coming to be a form of personal property" (Urban 2001: 70). Because of the literature's materiality and reproducibility, it could easily be distributed across both time and space, and experienced in different contexts. Doris Somers highlights the affective similitude that newspapers produce, as "print communities were being consolidated because everyone who read the paper was either laughing or (usually) panting and crying over the same installment of the serialized novel" (Sommer 1993: 40). *Gauchesca* poetry initiated a shared platform of affective and material reality that united the disparate Argentine citizenry.

The *gauchesca* announced "a new social signifier, the patriot gaucho" by anthropomorphizing the humanist agenda of the Federalists (Ludmer 1988: 27). In 1872, José Hernandez, who had fought alongside Federalist *caudillos* in wars against Unitarian oppression, began to publish *El Gaucho Martín Fierro* in newspaper installments (Slatta 1983: 187). This epic poem is in many ways Argentina's literary anthem. Typical of the style's authors, Hernandez was an urban intellectual with a staunchly humanist ideology,

which emerged in both the style and content of *Martin Fierro*. Though Hernandez was part of an educated elite, he wrote with a sort of studied folksiness that evoked the imagined style of gaucho dialect. For example, the *gauchesca* poetry was mostly written in sextilla verse, whereas the gaucho poetry was sung by *payadors* with guitar accompaniment in decimal verse. Raymond Williams offers an important insight into the nature of this genre of fiction. “In the country writing, it is not only the reality of the rural community; it is the observer’s position in and towards it; a position which is part of the community being known”(Williams 1975: 165). Whereas gaucho poetry was written from within the “community being known,” the *gauchesca* was projecting an imagined reality of gauchos’ lifestyles and livelihoods. By sifting through identifiable gaucho traits and actions, the *gauchesca* writers focused on select qualities that could best serve their political and military purposes.

Hernandez’s first-person narrative style maneuvers through the fictional circumstances of an imagined pampas evoking a romanticized version; nevertheless, it was a successfully designed political message that spoke to its audience (the rural poor) in their own words. The literary movement made “gaucho” synonymous with authenticity based on a constellation of labor and sociality that was uniquely Argentine. The political message is only thinly veiled in Hernandez’s *Martin Fierro*. For example, the political rhetoric can be seen in this stanza:

*Yo no sé por qué el Gobierno  
nos manda aquí a la frontera  
gringada que ni siquiera  
se sabe atracar un pingo.  
¡Si crerá al mandar un gringo  
que nos manda alguna fiera!*  
(Lines 889-894).

I don’t know why the government  
sends to the frontier  
a bunch of gringos that don’t even  
know how to come to a horse.  
They’d have you think that by  
sending a gringo  
they’re sending something extra  
special.

By giving the rural poor a position of social and political importance, Hernandez was suggesting that gauchos, not those who rather associate with their European roots, are the natural defenders of their land. The *porteños* could offer nothing, and more often would impede the work of the gaucho.

While there are certainly political implications for the *gauchesca* and its rapacity, it is more than a tool for political manipulation. Rather, it can be seen as a social system of cultural production. Abril Trigo argues that *gauchesca* poetry “is, in a word, a cultural field of struggle for the hegemony between contending national projects in a fractured and colonial society traversed by multiple antagonisms; a peculiar mode of transculturation whose political success would end up determining its ultimate ethical failure: the modern nations would be built over the remains of a defeated ethno-culture” (2008: 263). The genre mediates the heterogeneous actors of the era: from the intellectual elite taking up the project of civilization and progress, to a rural and gaucho audience, and to the political relevance of gauchos themselves. In doing so, the genre simultaneously incorporated the broad rural audience, while coopting the materiality of rurally produced forms of labor and sociocultural particularities. *Martin Fierro* and its sequel *La Vuelta de Martin Fierro* condemned the campaigns of extermination in *el desierto*, whereby gaucho soldiers were sent to push back the frontier by killing indigenous groups (who conversely fought back in campaigns of resistance killing gaucho soldiers), and called for the inculcation of good Catholic gauchos into mainstream society (1983; 1991; 2008). While the literature pushed *gauchismo* into the nationalist discourse, it simultaneously worked to further distance the labor and life of gauchos as they existed in that period from the political projects of the groups vying for the right to

weave together the disparate population and opposing politics into a seamless nation-state. The *gauchesca* was not a transformative art form for the rural underclass, transcending the economic pressures that they faced (Marcuse 1978). Rather, it achieved transformative capacity through the dynamic incorporation of the Argentine population at regional and socioeconomic levels, that in the sense that it was a central homogenizing force effectively establishing the Argentine “imagined community.”

### “Ser Gaucho” Today

*I remember him (I scarcely have the right to use ghostly verb; only one man on earth deserved the right, and he is dead), I remember him with a dark passionflower in his hand, looking at it as no one has ever looked at such a flower, though they might look from the twilight of day until the twilight of night, for a whole life long. I remember him, his face immobile and Indian-like, and singularly remote, behind his cigarette.*

Jorge Luis Borges 1942

Over the course of Argentine history, the materiality of gaucho labor has been repeatedly reinvented due to contextual circumstances, and socioeconomic and political projects. It is nearly impossible to entirely rely on historiographical accounts of gaucho labor, as much of it has been written through the ideological and romanticized filter of *gauchesca* poetry. However, after lengthy discussions with the curator at the Museo Gauchesco<sup>16</sup> in San Antonio de Areco, the material similarities between equipment and daily work routines from then and now are striking. I will briefly describe typical labor of free-range cattle herders, whom I refer to as gauchos, acknowledging this genealogy, as

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<sup>16</sup> The museum houses an archive of written works from the novelist and *gauchesca* poet Ricardo Güiraldes, as well as an extensive collection of traditional gaucho attire, early photographs of gauchos, numerous display cases filled with gear from the turn of the twentieth century.

well as the stark distinctions between free-range cattle herders of today and those from the turn of the last century as presented through the curatorial work at the museum staff.<sup>17</sup>

From my first hand experience, as well as by speaking with residents of Mercedes, Corrientes, today men who work on free-range cattle ranches typically labor arduously, ten to twelve hour days both mounted and on foot. While mounted, gauchos divide up into smaller groups riding the selected herd of *criollo* horses for the week, divided by color, roans in one group, chestnuts in another, pintos again in another, etc., allowing the other groups of horses to graze freely when not in use. Often, in these small groups, they ride along fence lines, repair breaches in the fence between properties and roadsides, and locate herds of cattle that graze in separate groups, generally divided into cows, heifers, bulls and steers of similar age groups. Once the group of gauchos has found the herd of cattle, the men often weave through the herd, selecting individual animals that may need to be separated for treatment, which is noted, to be returned to later with the specific medicine; or if the medicine is on hand, the cow is lassoed and flipped on its side, while one gaucho holds it down and another quickly administers the treatment. If they find a cow that has an untreatable disease, a gaucho may slit its throat with one of their often many *falcones* (knives), which is then skinned on site, whereby the fresh cowhide is returned to the ranch area and strung up in a wooden frame to dry for several days.

The hide may be sold at market by the ranch owner, or may be given to workers whom I have seen weave elaborate multi-strand braids of thin strips of newly dried

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<sup>17</sup> While the curator and curatorial staff are likely well informed about romanticized visions of the gaucho translated through *gauchesca* poetry, I focus primarily on the materiality of equipment that was displayed in a fairly straightforward manner. The displays were comprised of hand-woven leather bridles, halters, *bolos*, and lassos, as well as spurs, sheepskin saddles, and hand-woven woolen blankets.

leather to use in herding and treating cattle. Other typical activities may include, searching the tall grasses for newly born calves laying in the grasses, whom gauchos may help to stand to nurse if they are so far unable on their own; or if they find a cow in labor in need of assistance, they may help to deliver the calf. At some point, small herds of young bulls, once they have been separated from their mothers, are brought into the ranching area, where the gauchos once again use their *falcones* to neuter them.<sup>18</sup> There are occasions when potential buyers come to a ranch to discuss buying or selling head of cattle, in which case gauchos may locate the small group the night before or early in the morning and herd them back into the ranch, where they are counted as they pass through the gate and held until the prospective buyer can examine the lot. Another instance when cattle may be brought in is for treatments such as anti-insect baths, whereby each animal is prodded into jumping into a bath of sorts by getting poked in the back with sticks by gauchos standing alongside on benches outside of the chute. If the grasses become too high, they conduct controlled burns to make traversing the extensive property safer for both their horses, as well as cattle. They also burn the corpses of dead horses, if they are attacked by a predator or if they simply die of old age. The number of gauchos on a specific ranch differs usually depending on the total acreage and number of head of cattle owned. Generally, the workers will spend the week living on the ranch, due to early start times and late end times, returning home only on the weekends.

After emailing nearly all of the *Agrupaciones Gaucha*<sup>19</sup> on the route from Jujuy to Buenos Aires, I finally received a response from a young member of a group in a northwestern province. He invited myself and a friend to an event celebrating the

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<sup>18</sup> Often, the recently removed testicles are part of the daily *asado* (barbecue), ensuring no part of the animal goes to waste.

<sup>19</sup> There are numerous groups across Argentina that celebrate and carry on gaucho traditions.

indigenous icon, *pachamama*. “Sería un gusto mostrarles nuestras tradiciones que amo, este domingo le podría hacer mostrar el monumento al gaucho y el ritual de la *apacheta* que pertenece a la *pachamama* cultura indígena que es muy nuestro.” (It would be a pleasure to show you our traditions that we love, this Sunday, you can see the gaucho monument and the ritual of the *apacheta* that is about the indigenous culture of mother earth that is very much ours). We waited at a gas station early on a Sunday morning, not exactly knowing for whom we were waiting, but I figured we would stand out as the only two young women carrying a bulky, yellow camera case, in a sea of older men having breakfast at the café within. A small group of men—some seemed in their mid to late twenties, while others were much older, all dressed handsomely in neatly pressed, for lack of a better description, gaucho attire—did in fact recognize us and approached us warmly. After introductions and brief small talk, we drove together out of the city center, past sugar fields to a nearby suburb. The celebration was attended by about 50 people, perhaps more, including men, some similarly dressed in gaucho attire and others not, women of all ages, and children. Soon after arriving, most of the group clustered around two very elderly women, who were seated next to an empty hole in the ground, toward the edge of a dirt-packed yard, flowing out of a covered picnic area. The onlookers still talked amongst themselves, but the tone soon became hushed. The ceremony began. An older man took the microphone, speaking to the group in his deep baritone at a slow rhythmic pace, mostly staring into the hole by his feet, only looking up during his pregnant pauses. He wore the well tailored traditional gaucho attire of the region, loose-fitting khaki pants, pleated on top, tapered at the bottom, a well pressed collared shirt, a long silk handkerchief tied around his neck, a thick woven poncho draped over his

shoulder, a wide-flat brimmed hat, and a *rastra carpincho* (gaucho belt made from *carpincho* leather adorned with silver coins and chains). After he wrapped up his short speech, one of the elderly women who sat beside the hole in a folding chair, facing the speaker, began to beat a wide, shallow drum with a single baton in the slow methodical pace of their presenter. The women sang together in their high shaky voices. As the inner circle stared into the hole and began placing offerings of the Dionysian sort, a bottle of red wine was being passed to each person in the small crowd, who took a sip and passed it along.

While the ceremony itself is rife with implications that merit further exploration, my primary purpose in bringing up this gathering are the relatively brief and informal interviews I conducted with individuals set apart from the rest of the group. I spoke separately with four men, for periods between five to 15 minutes.

Interview 1:

*Es un estilo de vida.*

*Yo tengo mi profesión. Mucho lo que que tratamos de transmitir es esta tradición nuestra. Tenemos ya nuestra profesión, nuestra vida propia.*

*No es exactamente lo de aquel gaucho que lassaba un caballo, cuidaba a la vaca, al caballo, que vivía en el campo.*

*La mayoría de nosotros ven realidad vivimos honestamente en la Capital y tratamos con este modo de vida de transmitir a los demás la tradición de nuestras ancestras.*

*Personalmente lo que yo soy tratando de transmitir a mis hijos, acá la chica que me acerca, es la tradición, la historia, la historia del gaucho, de donde viene el gaucho, porque es la razón que nosotros hablamos de la historia, porque sin cultura no existe razón de ciudad, ni de provincia, ni de ningún ligado.*

*Primera la cultura, la tradición, y después el pueblo.*

(It's a style of life

I have my profession. Much of what we attempt to convey is this tradition of ours. We

already have our own profession, our real life.

It is not exactly that of that gaucho who lassoed his horse, took care of his cows and his horse, who lived in the countryside.

Honestly, most of us live in the Capital and try, with this way of life, to pass on the traditions of our ancestors to the rest of the population.

Personally, what I am trying to pass on to my children, such as the young girl that is standing next to me, is the tradition and history of the gaucho, where the gaucho comes from and why we talk about this history because without culture there is no reason for the city or the provinces, nor for any binding ties, to exist.

First culture and tradition and then the people.)

Interview 2:

*Yo creo que uno esta sembrando lo que no se pierde nunca.*

(I believe that we are sowing the seeds so that nothing is lost.)

Interview 3:

*Son digamos diferencias de vestimentas, cada una tiene sus costumbres. Los sentimientos son los mismos.*

*Amarlo nuestro. Amarla a la pachamama, en este caso que estamos festejando, de que venimos de la tierra. Donde la pachamama nos recibe.*

*De polvo son de polvo nos convertimos, como es la frase esa, ahí vamos, ahí de nuevo a la tierra.*

(Let's say there are differences in the way they dress, each region has its customs; the feelings are the same.

To love that which is ours, to love the pachamama, who in this case we are celebrating. We come from the earth where the pachamana receives us. We come from dust and we turn into dust, as they say, we come, we go back to the earth once again.)

Interview 4:

*Van aprendiendo .Es mejor enseñarles eso que las cosas que están pasando en el mundo, sacarles de eso y ponerles en la parte sane que es ser gaucho. Siempre estoy compartiendo, como te dijo, vengo del raíces de padre, mi padre era un tipo que trabajaba...es muy lindo eso*

*Que no se pierda nunca.*

*El sentimiento muy grande es ser gaucho. El gaucho hay sido para ser gauchera.*

*Para que te necesite te presente y la solución de los problemas. Eso es el gaucho.*

*Siempre buscar lo mejor para lo demás sin maldad, para que prospere, siempre acompañarlo.*

*Darle los consejos que son sanos para que esa persona siga adelante. Esa persona pasara a otra estos consejos y así va seguir la tradición. Este tiene que seguir,*

*Eso no se pierde nunca.*

*Si yo tengo chiquito nietos que tienen dos o tres años ya les voy a montar al caballo y ellos quieren andar*

(They are always learning.

It is better to teach them about this than the things that are going on out in the world, take them away from that and put them in the healthy part which is to be gaucho. I'm always sharing, as I said. I come from roots on my father's side--my father was a guy who worked along with his father that is very beautiful.

I hope that it is never lost.

The biggest sentiment is to be gaucho. The gaucho has existed to act like a gaucho. In order to be needed, to be present, to solve the problems; that's what a gaucho is.

Always to search for the best thing for others without ill feeling, so that they prosper, always to accompany them. To give healthy advice so that the other person gets ahead in life, that person will pass advice on to others and thus the tradition will continue.

It will continue. It will never be lost. If I have little grandchildren 2 or 3 years old I'll put them on a horse and they want to ride.)

David Guss argues for the complexity of cultural and ritualistic traditions.

“Whose reality is it that is being reflected? As such, cultural performances will remain both contentious and ambiguous” (Guss 2001: 9). As one man stated: “honestly, most of us live in the capital,” which is indicative of the fact that these men dressed as gauchos, transmitting the knowledge and value sets attributed to gauchos are not themselves working as free-range cattle herders. Instead, it seems that these repeated references to

the transmission of tradition in the form of symbolic gaucho traits, is predicated on the pervasive notion that *gauchismo* is the enduring trace of an allegedly extinct gaucho class of rural laborers constructed and promulgated through *gauchesca* poetry. Regarding Gaúcho traditionalism in Brazil, Ruben Oliven argues that its upsurge in popularity particularly in urban zones was due to a “nostalgia for rural life...[that] suggests that the concepts of tradition and modernity should be understood, not as a local dichotomy, but as a mix of past and present elements” (Oliven 2000: 142). This is applicable to the Argentine case in that these urban residents indicated the desire to pass along the values of rural life to the next generation, despite the fact that the majority of their livelihood and lifestyles are tied primarily to urban zones. Urbanity that is often attributed to a sense of modernity is thus actually not distinct from the affective values associated with the rural, but rather infused with affective attachments to an ideologically constructed rural past.

Raymond Williams provides an important first step in theoretically complicating this dynamic within Argentina.

It is significant, for example, that the common image of the country is now an image of the past, and the common image of the city an image of the future. That leaves, if we isolate them, an undefined present. The pull of the idea of the country is towards old ways, human ways, natural ways. The pull of the idea of the city is towards progress, modernization, development. In what is then a tension, a present experienced as tension, we use the contrast of country and city to ratify an unresolved division and conflict of impulses, which it might be better to face in its own terms. (Williams 1975: 297)

The effects of a century of a guiding national fiction that have romanticized the rural landscape and residents, and technological advances that have industrialized rural zones and accelerated processes of urbanization, has been that the idea of “the city” is materially and meaningfully constructed alongside visions of “the country,” and vice versa. Whereas in Sarmiento’s analysis, urban was equated with progress, there is now a

steady notional movement between pastoral and cosmopolitan: past and future. There is rather the emergence of a dialectical relationship between the “identities” of these areas. Jameson describes the dialectic as “each side of the articulation unavoidably disclosing its other face, the human suffering at one with technological productivity, the impressive scientific and technological progress emerging from the waste of lives” (Jameson 2011: 127). While this formulation does take on a catastrophic tone, the theoretical components provide a useful framework in the context of contemporary Argentina. The “city,” a metaphor for progress, emerges from the collapse of traditional farming technologies that favor rotational cropping between grain and oilseeds for half the year and free-range cattle herding on the same land for the other half. Williams’ “undefined present” assumes a dialectical form in the movement of technological innovations that have infused economic “progress” with the erosion of rural labor opportunities including, but not limited to free-range cattle herding. Finally, events such as this are performative mediations of this dialectical relationship, at once providing a sense of community that references nostalgia for rural life, as well as being a problematized euphemism for agronomic changes based on farmers’ crop choices<sup>20</sup> that have decreased rural labor opportunities for multiple rural sector farming industries.

Are these spaces where *gauchismo* and the virtues of being gaucho are championed and transmitted, conducive to alternative publics, resistant to the market logic of neoliberalism? Or, are they sites and situations that normalize the continued socioeconomic marginalization of men who find their work in the free-range cattle industry? I am not arguing for an economic determinism; that the remains of gaucho

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<sup>20</sup> Again, it is important to note that farmers’ choices to switch from regionally specific crops and crop rotation patterns, to GM soybeans and double-cropping are directly and indirectly tied to political projects at the levels of province, nation-state, and transnationally.

culture are necessarily produced by and tied to traditional forms of gaucho labor. Instead, I suggest that the current agronomic flux whereby GM soy has begun to supersede many other forms of agricultural production, thus transforming the rural labor force, adds a dynamic complexity to *gauchismo*'s social implications: "For at the heart of all traditionalizing processes is the desire to mask over real issues of power and domination" (Guss 2001: 14). While I do not know enough about each of the men I interviewed to even suggest that they partake in their *Agrupacion Gaucho*'s activities to affectively mediate economic hardships, or as a specific remediation for their rural nostalgia, I do suggest that the *pachamama* event serves as a venue to perform interpreted representation of gauchos' roles in a controlled and manufactured setting, creating an atemporal moment when the changes (economic or otherwise) of the countryside can be overlooked, focusing instead on the mythologized past that serves a contemporary purpose to produce sociality and community.

Beyond being a type of labor or a recognizable group of people, "*ser gaucho*" or to be gaucho, engenders a constructed, disseminated, and protracted philosophy, one that marks Argentine "identity" since its inception. But, "dispossession is not a historical event, but an ongoing process" (Povinelli 2011: 35). While being gaucho, or *gauchismo*, remains a productive force and a rich source of sociality and community, it becomes ever more separate and distinct from being *a gaucho*. Whereas with this *Agrupacion Gaucho* in a northwestern province prides itself on being able to uphold traditions and transmit value sets to younger generations who may be pulled away from the values of *gauchismo*, their lives may often be constituted by other activities, economic and other activities. A *mencho* whom I know in Corrientes, where free-range cattle still has economic relevance,

recently lamented to me how hard it has become to find a job, seemingly less concerned with passing on what it means to be gaucho and more occupied with finding opportunities to work on a free-range cattle farm. My point is merely to draw attention to the distinction between the enduring and static social value of *gauchismo* that seems resistant to the external socioeconomic pressures, and the increasingly precarious position of the free-range cattle industry and those who herd free-range cattle in a contemporary Argentine context. Free-range cattle farms are being pushed to marginalized borderlands of Argentina, leaving *gauchismo* to mitigate the effects of the agronomic transformation.

### Conclusion

*Muslims and Indians have been relegated to the shelf of 'traditions' in the rhetoric of modernity, in order to justify their repression or suppression. But today—surprise!—Indians are alive and well, and so are Muslims.*

Walter Dignolo 2008

The Argentine intellectual elites' cooptation and reimagining of "the gaucho" through the *gauchesca* poetry, was the process whereby gauchos' labor became distinct from gauchos' affective constitution. Gaucho the laborer has been increasingly marginalized and ever changing in response to hegemonic exercises of national and international political economy. Alternatively, gaucho the symbol has been a stable, enduring, and homogenizing force deployed by hegemonic processes from the top-down, and also experienced on the individual level in ways that are at once ethically aspirational and an affective shield that obscures the degradation of economic opportunities in rural regions. Due to the technological advances of RoundupReady (RR) seeds, the alternating rotation patterns demanding cropping and cattle have become increasingly out of favor,

allowing instead for double cropping whereby soybeans could be grown constantly throughout the year, or rotated with other grains or oilseeds. Since the 1980s, expanding soybean cultivation has moved in and replaced traditional farming systems that favored crop and cattle grazing rotation, and allowed land to lay fallow and replenish soil nutrients (Pengue 2005; Penna and Lema 2002). Exacerbating by the increasing popularity of feedlots, less land is now devoted to cattle raising, which the government subsidizes that encourage feedlot cattle production (Leguizamón n.d.; Teubal 2008). Together, these shifts have caused a marked decline in the number of jobs available in the free-range cattle industry.

In response to Anderson's explanation of nationalism, Elizabeth Povinelli argues "the problem is that Anderson doesn't account for a division that emerged internal to the otherwise homogenous space-time of nationalism. When we look at these differential

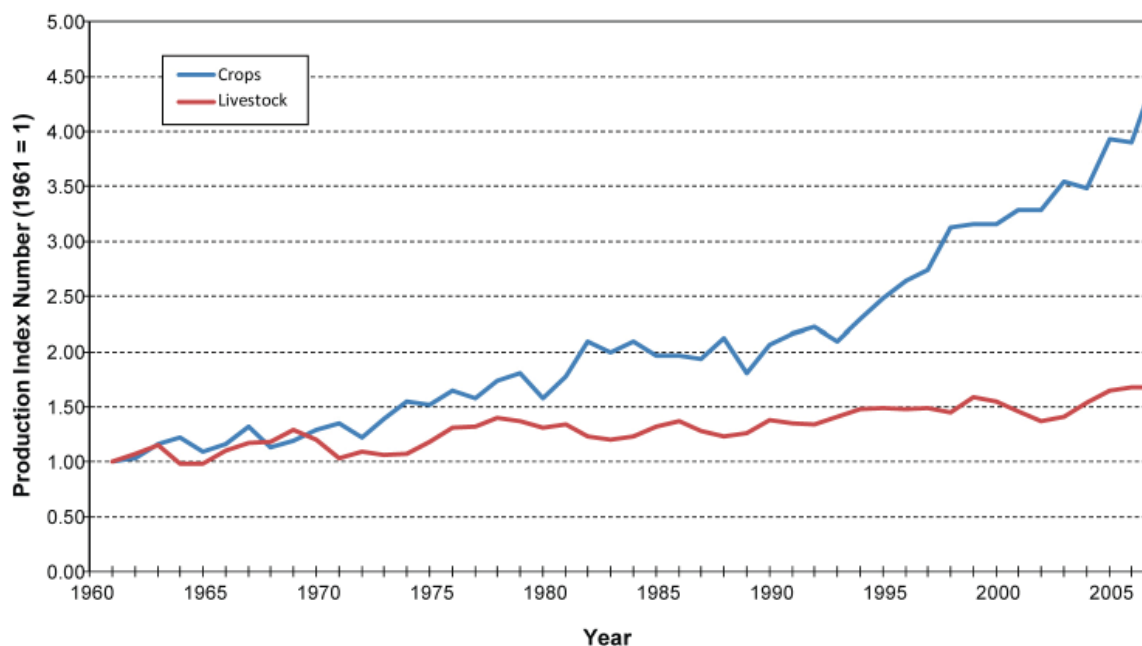


Figure 2. Production index numbers for agricultural production in Argentina, 1961-2007.

Source: Prepared using data from FAOSTAT cited in Lence 2010.

Notes: Production indexes are the sum of price-weighted quantities of different agricultural commodities relative to the year 1961. The prices used for weighing the production quantities of each commodity are the average international commodity prices over 1999-2001.

narrative structures, we find that although all people may belong to nationalism, not all people occupy the same tense of nationalism” (Povinelli 2011: 37). In her intriguing exegesis of the mechanisms of social difference that separate space and time, Argentine citizens may occupy the space of Argentina, but those with economic potential are relegated to an aspirational tense, the future anterior (gaucho the symbol of national unity), whereas those, such as gaucho the laborer, whose solvency is uncertain or anti-modern (cattle herding) are pushed to the past perfect—this is all despite the fact that both actually exist simultaneously in the present moment within Argentine borders. To recall Lehman’s claim that the work of gauchos has disappeared, this is not actually the case. Below is a chart demonstrating the relatively constant levels of cattle production.<sup>21</sup> It persists, but is pushed further away from the high yield economic activity zones toward the rural periphery of the country’s borders, out of a direct line of sight.

While it does seem tempting to regard the gaucho as a symbol of national identity that is a coercive tool deployed through state ideological apparatuses, I do not believe this to be entirely the case. At the *pachamama* event, to be gaucho, to possess the “ethical substance” as Povinelli puts it, endures as a social tool that promotes unity, continuity, and social cohesion at the local level. Together, these families used the symbol of the gaucho to come together, be social, enjoy each others company, show reverence for their elders, and pass along the *gauchera* to the next generation. I am altogether unclear about what it really means to experience being gaucho, the depth of familial attachment or which historical moment this generalized gaucho is meant to evoke (nomadic cattle herders, farm workers, or the contemporary free-range cattle herders), but it is very

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<sup>21</sup> While the levels of overall cattle production have remained relatively stable, this does not take the explosion of feedlot cattle production into account whereby significant tracts of land are made available for other types of cropping (Lence 2010).

clearly profound and meaningful for those who identify with, aspire to be, or pass down what it means to be gaucho regardless of its role within the political projects of nationalism in Argentina.

Over the past twenty years, *latifundistas*, as well as small scale and family farmers have responded to global economic opportunities by selling off their cattle and planting soy (Gras 2009). While I have generally been referring to gaucho the laborer with respect to those who herd free-range cattle, there is a renewed gaucho the laborer: the tourist attraction. This renewed gaucho the laborer as a complex amalgam of *gauchismo* is oriented toward the international community, coming to “experience” Argentina. Does this dissipate the significance of gaucho the symbol in the context of national unity and homogenization? Now that the figure of the gaucho is itself a commodity directed outside of national borders, instead of the purveyors products he was able to produce through his labor as a gaucho, what is his relevance for projects of nationalism? In the neoliberal context where urban economic activity zones are given positions of primacy, is the gaucho as national symbol an antiquated nationalist project? Is the gaucho still relevant in Argentina for Argentines or is it another layer in the country’s complex sociopolitical history, perhaps to be accessed in the future for a new and unforeseen nationalist project?

## Chapter 3

### Biotechnology, Agribusiness, and (Post)Neoliberalism

Since the Argentine Ministry of Agriculture approved the use of genetically modified soybeans 15 years ago, the crop has come to cover more than 50 percent of the country's agricultural surface. Arguably, the rapacity of "super-soya" resurrected the Argentine economy after the 2001 economic crisis and instigated a marked degradation of rural labor opportunities, spurring accelerated processes of urbanization. In many countries where genetically modified crops have proliferated, there has been widespread social resistance to the deleterious environmental and social effects of this breed of biotechnology. However, in Argentina the primary sites of contestation have been post-production, specifically with respect to questions of taxation and the (re)distribution of soybean generated wealth. The economic benefits of agricultural biotechnology is infrequently criticized because of its export potential that ties landowners and soy farmers to the international economy because of the social programs that soy export taxes help to generate, but therein lies the primary dispute. As numerous scholars have aptly theorized, biotechnology domestically stratifies a population because its economic value obfuscates historical and contemporary socioeconomic divisions (Cooper 2008; Newell 2009a; Newell 2009b; Stone 2010; Ticktin 2011). This section examines the simultaneous emergence of agricultural biotechnology and neoliberalism, their ideological promises compared to how they have actually manifested, and what future they might have for a

country trying to distance itself from the economic instability it experienced due to their neoliberal economic policies of the 1990s.

Robust with hope and potential, both neoliberalism and agricultural biotechnology have proven to possess the capacity for unprecedented economic success (Rajan 2006; Rose and Novas 2004), but at what cost? Propping up the massive international capital accumulation that both of these processes have produced is the socioeconomic restructuring of lower class and agricultural sectors. Miriam Ticktin insightfully argues that “while biology and the evidence it is seen to provide fuels hope for a better life whatever the context, it simultaneously provides a means for stratifying populations and maintaining discriminations that derive from colonial and imperial histories, by rendering those histories invisible” (Ticktin 2011: 141-2). In other countries, agricultural biotechnology is often contested on the grounds that the aggressive form of agriculture itself is an environmental or job threat. However, in Argentina, the contestation is post-production. Agricultural biotechnology is generally accepted; it is the tax revenue generated by soybean exports (post-production) that is up for grabs.

My goal in this section is to reveal the co-production of ascendant neoliberalism and agricultural biotechnology in the context of Argentina during the 1990s, in order to query the 2001 economic crisis in Marxian terms: was the 2001 crisis partial, in that it re-inscribed and fortified neoliberal economic policies (as the latest form of capitalism) or rather, did it constitute the beginning of a post-neoliberal Argentina? Since the 2001 economic crisis, agricultural biotechnology in the material form of genetically modified soybeans has rooted more deeply in the Argentine economy, developing alongside *Kirchnerism*, which increasingly seeks to align itself with the new Latin American left.

What are the possibilities of post-neoliberalism in a country whose economy continues to be deeply entrenched in export-oriented agro-industry, and where the processes of post-production contestation obscure the marked loss of rural labor opportunities?

This section builds off of the previous one by exploring the socioeconomic and geopolitical mechanics that created the conditions for the loss of traditional rural labor opportunities and the generalized obfuscation of the diminished gaucho class in nationalist discourse. Specifically, I argue that the emergence of agricultural biotechnology encouraged by the neoliberal economic policies of the 1990s created an alternative and thriving rural sector, thereby relegating gaucho labor and its requisite social structures to the ideational past. The economic value of agricultural biotechnology has obfuscated the histories of socioeconomic hierarchies in Argentina and their contemporary manifestations mediated by entrenched neoliberal ideologies. Moreover, the post-production disputes occur along the historically significant rural/urban fracture, even though these groups are newly constituted due to expansive processes of urbanization. The transnational processes that I discuss operate on a global scale, so rather than drawing conclusions, I am making propositions about possible ways to move the narrative forward from neoliberal determinism.

By offering a reading of Foucault's use of "race" that emphasizes the analytic potential of the concept, while forgiving its myriad shortcomings, I aim to expose how the geographic and socioeconomic lines that have been drawn in Argentina today are at once derivative of historical affiliations and are uniquely complex. I will argue that ideological tenets of neoliberalism inform where and how social lines are drawn today between economically productive neoliberal subjects (soybean farmers) and those who

are not (rural and urban poor) (Duggan 2003; Ellner 2004; Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Harvey 2005; Harvey 2007; Inda and Rosaldo 2007; Kingstone 2006; Ong 2006). Then, I will shift to look at the interface between neoliberal projects prescribed by multilateral organizations and Argentine regional complexities to show ways that they encouraged the inculcation of agricultural biotechnology and the subsequent discursive erasure of socioeconomic inequality (Brenner and Theodore 2002; Brenner and Theodore 2007; Cieza 2008, Newell 2007a; Newell 2007b). Lastly, I will counter-pose selections from Kirchner's<sup>22</sup> speech responding to the 2008 farmer riots against a discussion that I had with a soybean farmer four years after the protests had passed. This final discussion brings up questions about the sustained relevance of overt and embedded neoliberalism, and how it has both shifted and maintained historical geographic and cultural schisms. (Marx and Engels 1978; Foucault 1990, 2003; Harvey 2011; Lemke, Casper, and Moore 2011). If the newly urbanized constituents, who are recently divorced from their own rural labor practices, align with a state that claims that the increased soybean export taxes will be redistributed to the lower classes, can we frame this specific example as the Argentine state itself advocating for an alternative to neoliberalism by reviving the dream of welfare state redistribution based on a 21<sup>st</sup> century export economy? Or, does biotechnology agribusiness—typically positioned as the motor of economic progress by the state and soybean farmers—more firmly entrench the country as a whole in neoliberal capitalism, by erasing the processes of rural economic devastation and loss of jobs that led to processes of urbanization in the first place?

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<sup>22</sup> In this section, all references to President Kirchner refer to President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner whose presidency succeeded that of her late husband, President Nestor Kirchner.

## The Ways and Means

*For millennia, man [sic] remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for a political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics place his existence as a living being in question.*

Michel Foucault, 1976

By focusing on the concurrent development of agricultural biotechnology and neoliberalism in Argentina, I am extending Foucault's foundational discussions on biopolitics that explore the nexus between politics and life—in this case neoliberalism is the relevant form of political economy and agricultural biotechnology references access to life. My primary purpose for implementing this analytic is to ethnographically expose the constellation of forces exerted by neoliberalism as an “art of governance” and agricultural biotechnology as a remediation of socioeconomic “life” in a contemporary Argentine context. This section is designed to be a framework for understanding my later historical contextualization and ethnographic discussions. Taking up my previous discussion on nationalism, I explore where contemporary social lines are drawn within a national context and what affective components initiate and perpetuate these demarcations. I suggest that neoliberal ideology supplies the substance that fuels economic restructuring, and agricultural biotechnology provides the economic capital to take up neoliberalism's consequent social divisions. Additionally, my goal for this paper is to make suggestions about the possibilities beyond neoliberalism, which has so saturated transnational political economies and academia, and for this reason, much of this section traces (albeit in broad strokes), the philosophical evolution of neoliberalism and touches on scholarly interpretations of its effects.

With respect to agricultural biotechnology and genetically modified crops, the two dominant narratives are oppositional teleologies. First, is a catastrophic forecast of a

future constituted by agricultural biotechnology and monocultures. Nobel Laureate James Watson described the proliferation of genetically modified organisms as a “dangerous religion” (Kwiecinski 2009). On the other hand, there is the camp that touts agricultural biotechnology’s potential to save lives. Kenyan biotechnologist Florence Wambagu writes that “the great potential of biotechnology to increase the agriculture in Africa lies in its ‘packaged technology in the seed,’ which ensures technology benefits without changing local cultural practices (Stone 2010: 389). In the case of Argentina, the state

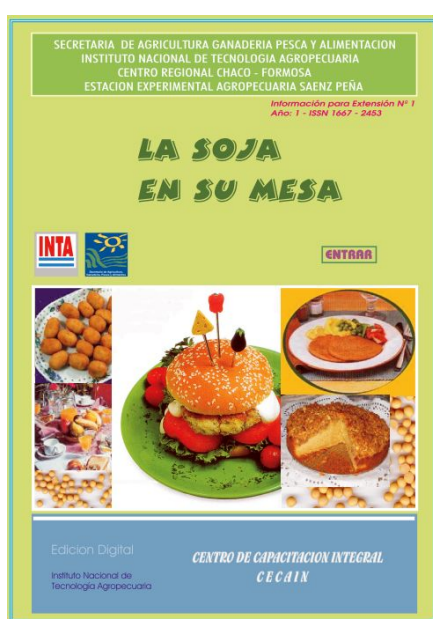


Figure 3: Government issued soybean recipe book.  
Source: INTA

has been promoting its potential since the 1970s—in a country where the average citizen consumes close to the weight of a cow in meat a year, Instituto Nacional de Tecnología Agropecuaria (INTA) promoted consumption of soy early on with materials such as a soy recipe book. There has been comparatively little resistance to agricultural biotechnology in Argentina due to the fact that the majority of GM soybean production is for animal feed abroad, not human consumption domestically

people have not offered much resistance to agricultural biotechnology itself in terms of consumption and production practices at the level of life itself,<sup>23</sup> they have been at the forefront of international legal battles concerning patent laws, emerging as the world leader against Monsanto’s predatory practices by contesting the validity of international

<sup>23</sup> Scholars have attributed this is to the fact that the majority of agricultural biotechnology products are not for human nor domestic consumption.

seed patents (Newell 2009). However, as with most progress narratives, there are those subjects who are not included in the designated future. As Ticktin argues, we must “face how biology can offer hope while also keeping strict limits on its actualization” (2011: 149). The acceptance of agricultural biotechnology itself domestically stratifies the Argentine population as it carries out the specific class caesuras. The economic potential of agricultural biotechnology obfuscates the histories of socioeconomic hierarchies and their contemporary manifestations mediated by entrenched neoliberal ideologies.

Central to the study of biopolitics is the biologization of race: the crux of politics and living beings. For Foucault, race “is primarily a way of introducing a break into the domain of life that is under power’s control: the break between what must live and what must die” (Foucault 2003: 254). Beyond simply dividing the population along racial lines, Foucault also speaks to the productive capacity of racism, or in other words, through the lens of a racist state, by making some die, others are allowed to live (2003). Later scholars have criticized Foucault’s treatment of racism by drawing attention to historical contexts that shape the quality and pervasiveness of contemporary racisms that Foucault appears to overlook. According to Lemke, “Foucault’s analysis of racism has been rightly criticized as being limited and selective... Foucault neither recognizes the interrelationship of nation, citizenship, and racism, nor is he interested in the sexual component of race discourse” (2011: 43). While Foucault did not ground his formulations in historical fact or the intersectionality of multiple marginalities, his analytic is nonetheless a useful tool in exploring socially constructed divisions within contemporary contexts. I suggest that the value in Foucault’s use of “state racisms” requires a conscious detachment from scholarly debates about racism and experiences of race itself. Instead, it

may be better used as a metaphor for the mechanics of where social lines are drawn, by whom, and for what purpose. On the level of ideological neoliberalism (different from “actually existing neoliberalism” in specific regional contexts), social schisms are deeply intertwined with and informed by processes of privatization, deregulation, and decentralization: citizens with economic potential are made to live, while those who fall outside of an envisioned economic future are “let die.” The ideological tenets of neoliberalism provide the substantive definitions of which sorts of citizens are to be valued, and which sorts should be relegated to the periphery.

What began in earnest as an economic experiment to revitalize the Chilean economy in the 1970s, neoliberalism has since become a dominant discourse internationally, infiltrating politics and social lives at all levels. In the midst of the international leftist and socialist movements of the 1960s, neoliberalism was imagined as a counterpoint that began to firm up weakening class divides through processes at the state level. Advocates of neoliberal policies, who began to reconfigure the state as the facilitator of a free-market global economy, presented this project as a way of bolstering individual freedoms. I will discuss the central tenets of neoliberalism and briefly trace the historical context that ushered it forward as an international economic force (Ellner 2004; Harvey 2005, 2007; Kingstone 2006; Ong 2006). In addition to the complex and multifaceted outgrowths of neoliberal economic theory are the ways in which it has been translated and disseminated into social values (Harvey 2005 and 2007; Ong 2006; Inda and Rosaldo 2007; Appadurai 1996). Current processes of neoliberal hegemony began unevenly and with varying success, but have since developed into one of the foremost guiding principles of contemporary global politics.

Neoliberalism, though hard to discretely define, is generally associated with deregulation, privatization, and open trade routes. David Harvey describes it as being “in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade” (Harvey 2005: 2). This orientation marks the reconfiguration of the state into a neoliberal state, so that entrepreneurial and individual initiative can be realized without maneuvering around imagined barriers imposed by government. Instead, neoliberal theory supposes that a free market, one that is unencumbered by regulations and the cost of social programs will more successfully increase capital accumulation. “State intervention in markets (once created) must be kept to a bare minimum because the state cannot possibly possess enough information to second-guess market signals (prices) and because powerful interests will inevitably distort and bias state interventions (particularly in democracies) for their own benefit” (Harvey 2007: 23). The state is articulated as an obstacle to economic growth and as such, the free-market emerges as the only way to ensure individual liberties and freedom. Thus, what is undeniably a utopian vision, neoliberalism is alleged to be at once the key to increasing capital accumulation and deepening democracy.

The constitutive genealogy of neoliberalism began to take shape post-World War II in order to prevent a return to the conditions that led to the economic depressions of the 1930s. The eventual dominance of neoliberalism originally arose in reaction to the institutional establishment Keynesian economic policies, dubbed “embedded liberalism,” which advocated for government investment in infrastructure and the reduction of interest

rates—though the two political economies eventually overlap and operate in tandem. Keynesian economics were purported to prevent further inter-state conflicts, which had led to World War II, by advocating state intervention during times of crisis. In response to the failures of both capitalism and communism, many experts believed that the right combination of state, market and democratic institutions would increase stability and capital accumulation, and promote peace (Harvey 2007). While there have clearly been multiple interpretations of this goal, the post-World War II political and economic climate allowed for a “new orthodoxy” to foment, and for the development of multilateral organizations during the Bretton Woods agreements. Unprecedented supranational organizations were established to ensure the success of new economic philosophies, and continue to be the executors of neoliberal projects today. Unlike the proponents of Keynesian economics who supported strong government, an innovative perspective began to take shape that saw governmental intervention as a primary obstacle toward overall economic growth and social equality, at least in theory. By the 1960s, the multiple international incarnations of embedded liberalism proved inadequate as unemployment and inflation grew internationally. In response, the Chicago School’s Milton Friedman and Gary Becker, drew upon the classic figure of *homo economicus* to help make a causal link between individuals’ maximizing their own self-interest and generalized market growth (Ong 2006). In the nineties, neoliberalism “came to be understood by a new generation of economists...as the inevitable endpoint in the evolution of market economy” (Ong 2006: 11). Neoliberalism became synonymous with democracy: the market ruled economy should operate outside of politics and be divorced from social

hierarchies, ultimately allowing for a more egalitarian access to economic success (Kingstone 2006).

Neoliberalism and globalization are mutually constitutive phenomenon that shape and strengthen the impact of one another. It is unclear whether globalization ushered in transnational neoliberalism, or vice versa; however, I will briefly discuss how these two processes intermingle. Rosaldo and Inda describe globalization as the “intensification of global interconnectedness, suggesting a world full of movement and mixture, contact and linkages, and persistent cultural interaction and exchange” (Kingstone 2006). These mechanisms facilitate cultural ethics’ growing momentum as they instantaneously traverse spatial divides, collapsing traditionally understood cultural boundaries in favor of global mobility (Inda and Rosaldo 2007). Underlying cultural flows are the economic factors that initiate growing interconnectivity. “*Globalization* came to mean an endorsement of international free trade and the outlawing of protected or public domestic economies” (Chomsky cited in Tsing 2000: 331). Therefore, the mechanics of globalization are simultaneously perpetuated by the economic conditions of neoliberalism, as well as serving to convey the tenets of neoliberalism to a broader global audience.

“Neoliberalism is a *transnational political project* aiming to remake the nexus of market, state, and citizenship from above. This project is carried out by a new global ruling class in the making, composed of the heads and senior executives of transnational firms, high-ranking politicians, state managers and top officials of multinational organizations” (Wacquant 2009: 306). Multilateral organizations operate as supranational entities that adjudicate global economic policies (Harvey 2007). Endowed with the ability

to override a government's sovereignty, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Trade Organization (WTO) perpetuate and regulate neoliberal economic policies from above. Conversely, NGOs are supposed to operate from below, representing the interests of local peoples. However, they are not subject to democratic processes, nor do citizens of the countries where they operate usually direct them. Instead, NGOs thrive in the vacuum that emerges from the withdrawal of the state (Harvey 2005).

Together, these types of organizations problematize traditional conceptions of state verticality that position the state at the top and private citizens at the bottom. Extending Foucault's concept of governmentality, Ferguson and Gupta characterize increasingly normalized contestations of traditional structures of state power as transnational governmentality (Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Foucault 1991). Recently, theorists have applied the concept of governmentality to describe the mechanisms by which neoliberalism has been diachronically internalized, following a center-to-periphery model. However, Ferguson and Gupta question the euro-centric limitations of this approach, and propose a theoretical re-spatialization that can more accurately account for the influence of supranational organizations. "The increasing salience of such processes [the work of multilaterals and NGOs], ought to bring into question the taken-for-granted spatial and scalar frames of sovereign states" (Ferguson and Gupta 2002: 990). They move beyond simply stretching more traditional descriptions of a state's spatiality, such as verticality and encompassment, to include the multi-scalar pressures exerted by multilaterals and NGOs. In doing so, they call for a re-theorization that envisages globally operating neoliberal organizations working as "horizontal contemporaries as states: operating on the same level, and in the same global space" (Ferguson and Gupta

2002: 994). By rejecting the rigidity of obsolete spatial conceptions, the authors make room for more complex analyses of supranational organizations' impacts that manifest on all levels, from national government policies to individual experiences.

Globalization is bolstered by neoliberal economic philosophy, but it also perpetuates the spread of neoliberalism across a wide geographical breadth. The central tenets that I have previously discussed, such as the relationship between deregulation and individual freedoms speak to how neoliberalism infiltrates all levels of social and political life: from state to individual. David Harvey tackles this by invoking Gramsci's use of common sense that fortifies over time as consent is evoked, coercion applied, or a combination of the two.

Powerful ideological influences circulated through corporations, the media, and the numerous institutions that constitute civil society. The 'long march' of neoliberal ideas through these institutions...create a climate of opinion in support of neoliberalism of the exclusive guarantor of freedom. These movements were later consolidated through the capture of political parties and, ultimately state power. (Harvey 2005: 40)

The core of the argument is that common sense—experienced as cultural or social values, not as “good sense” that is critical of politics and power structures—is materially grounded. Therefore, across the geographic breadth that neoliberalism spans (communicated through processes of globalization as previously discussed), neoliberal common sense is integrated unevenly and experienced in vastly different ways. As individuals and communities adopt neoliberal common sense in its myriad forms, neoliberal common sense works to ensure the growing power of what Harvey calls the neoliberal state that while theoretically democratizing, actually deepens socioeconomic divides.

Neoliberalism has been encouraged by globalization, which has in turn pushed neoliberal economic and social policies into diverse regional contexts. It has become

more than just an economic model that increases and cements the class divide; its tenets have been institutionalized, translated into propaganda, and infused into the daily lives. I have extended Foucault's concept of "state racisms" that divides sociality, while embedded neoliberal ideologies and practices inform where those social and geographic lines are drawn. To recall my discussion of Povinelli from the previous section, those individuals designated to have economic potential come to embody visions of a gilded future, whereas comparatively, those people who are not seen as agents of their own economic transformation into productive neoliberal subjects are thus relegated to an ideational past. However, the implications of structural obstacles and personal economic pressures have not disappeared simply because neoliberal restructuring projects promise it—rather, they are more firmly entrenched by affective expectations for economic growth.

### *Neoliberalismo and Agricultural Biotechnology*

*Soyización moves forward because other landscapes withdraw.*  
Eduardo Molinari, 2012

Governing bodies that operate within the reach of neoliberalism must mediate between its foundational tenets and actually occurring sociopolitical contexts. Often, multilateral organizations have moved in to replace shrinking governments, forcing us to reconsider a now more dynamic power structure between states and individuals. As I will show, when some governing bodies attempt to operationalize projects prescribed by global banking institutions, they are undoubtedly confronted by current and historical sociopolitical contexts. "Neoliberalism does not engender identical (economic, political

or spatial) outcomes in each context in which it is imposed. Rather, as place-, territory-, and scale-specific neoliberal projects collide with inherited regulatory landscapes, contextually specific pathways of institutional reorganization crystallize that reflect the legacies of earlier modes of regulation and forms of contestation” (Brenner and Theodore 2007: 154). The interface between the ideological tenets of neoliberalism and “actually existing neoliberalism” produce unexpected consequences. In this section, I will trace ways that neoliberal ideology has been filtered through Argentine socioeconomic and political contexts, and created conditions that have allowed for the proliferation of agricultural biotechnology, processes of urbanization, and reconfiguring social structures.

After decades of cycling between military dictatorships and weak civilian governments, Argentina returned to democracy in 1983 with the election of Raúl Alfonsín. His administration was plagued by hyperinflation and enormous pressure from foreign creditors and international lending institutions largely due to the abhorrent economic conditions left by the preceding military junta (Cieza 2008; Faulk 2012). Alfonsín left office before his term ended, and was succeeded by Carlos Menem. Although some deregulatory processes can be traced back to the last military junta, President Menem’s reimagined Peronism ushered in the neoliberal restructuring projects that reshaped socioeconomic life in Argentina during the 1990s (Nouzeilles and Montaldo 2009). Up until the 2001 crisis itself, Argentina was held up as the standard for global neoliberal restructuring projects advocated for by the Washington Consensus and multilateral banking institutions (Cieza 2008: 189; Kingstone 2008). As a Peronist, Menem was able to draw on the protectionist, redistributionist, and statist policies of his political party’s lineage, while simultaneously undertaking drastic austerity programs,

privatization of state held industries, and general deregulation. “Instead of the classic oppositions between Peronists and anti-Peronists and between nationalism and liberalism, he proposed a choice between change and decay” (Palermo and Novaro 1996 in Nouzeilles and Montaldo: 493). *Menemismo* became synonymous with *neoliberalismo*, which promised progress and economic prosperity through a free-market economy, strongly tied to the global export market (Shever 2012).

While the effects of *neoliberalismo* were widespread and protracted, I will briefly discuss (in very broad strokes) the maneuvers that Menem’s administration undertook that substantially changed the political and economic makeup of the Peronist movement and the Argentine nation-state. Scholars agree that the 1991 Convertibility Law marks the transition, by pegging the Argentine peso to the U.S. dollar in an effort to curb the hyperinflation that had plagued the previous administration. As the peso became devalued, foreign imports increased and a period of deindustrialization ensued because domestic industry often could not compete with low-priced foreign goods (Cieza 2008; Teubal 2004). Following this unprecedented move, through a conflict riddled process and with the backing of foreign financial institutions, Menem privatized nearly all of the state held industries (Shever 2012). Secondly, processes of economic deregulation worked to dismantle the long-standing regulatory agencies and controls, which allowed for foreign investors: “The presence of speculative capital reinforced the creation of an investment ‘bubble.’ No controls or limits were placed on the Argentine business sector’s capital flight or the multinationals’ repatriation of profits” (Cieza 2008: 191). And lastly, social services such as education, health and financial assistance were decentralized, relegating management of these essential services to the provinces leading to an overall decrease in

public spending—although it was is worth noting that Argentine scholar Miguel Teubal characterized this period as a move toward more centralized power (Cieza 2008; Teubal 2004). During Menem’s administration multilateral institutions, foreign investors, and the Argentine state championed neoliberal policies.

“Neoliberal reform is both a cause of environmental change and a product of changes in the way we interact with the environment” (Heynen 2007: 11). Geopolitical contexts necessarily shape the deployment of neoliberal projects, and in Argentina this meant sweeping changes to the agricultural sector’s structure. Neoliberal economic policies were touted as the harbingers of socioeconomic success and global trades in agricultural biotechnology became the mechanisms to accomplish Menem’s lofty objectives (Cieza 2008: 193). During the 1990s, Argentina’s soybean production nearly doubled due to the large-scale structural changes (Newell 2008: 347). “Agriculture experienced the reduction of state interventionism, which in turn led to a friendly environment for private investments, targeted to increase the sector’s competitiveness” (De Sousa and Vieira 2008: 240). In order for Argentina to engage in the global market at the level that Menem’s administration intended, agribusiness was expanding and shifted primarily to the cultivation of genetically modified soybeans (Newell 2009). According to a representative of the INTA, the technologies imported to create genetically modified soybean expansion were the technologies of RoundupReady (RR) seeds, direct planting, better management of industry, and fertilizer technology. As you can see from the chart provided to me by this same representative, the accelerated pace of soybean cultivation was concomitant with the Menem administration’s deregulation, markedly shifting trajectory in 1996. Agricultural biotechnology became a core economic engine that

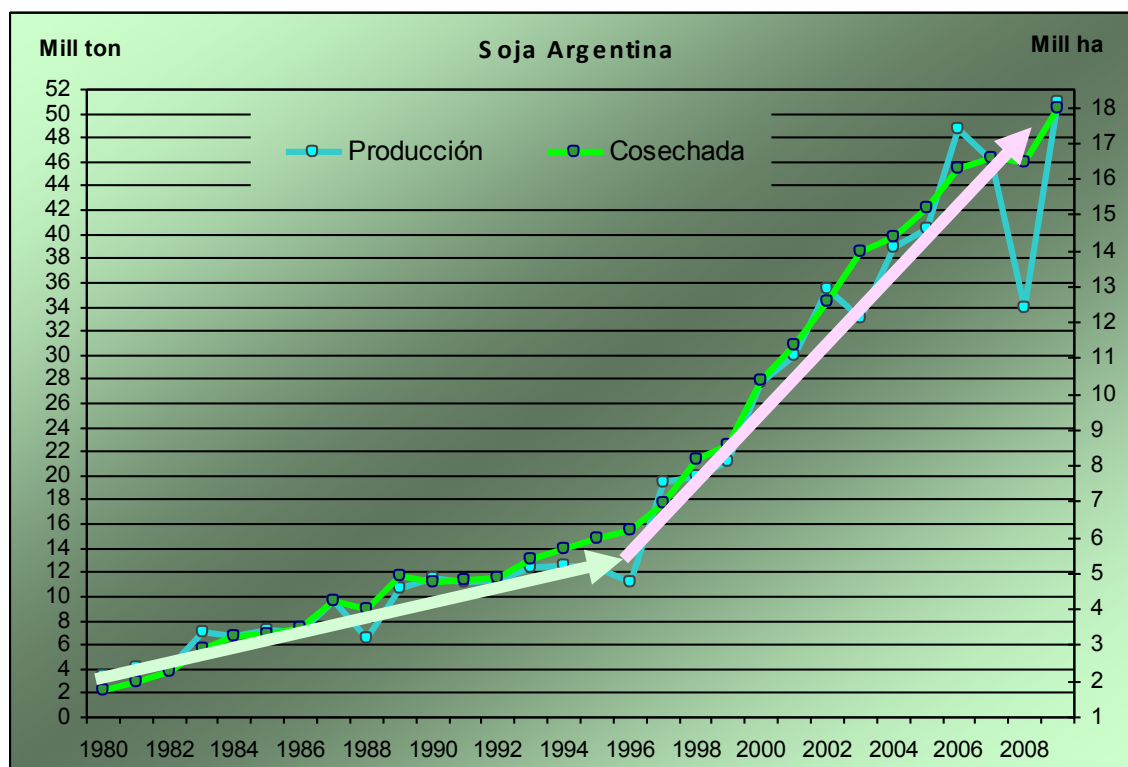


Figure 4. *Soja: Evolucion de la superficie y causas de su expansion*  
 (Soybeans: Evolution of agricultural surface and causes of its expansion)  
 Source: Ramirez et al, 2008

allowed for protracted engagement with foreign investors and the global market. If neoliberalism, locally known in Argentina as *neoliberalismo*, provided the goals and methods for Argentina's economic solvency, the profits from agricultural biotechnology provided the means to achieve those goals.

Argentina's *soyización* has greater implications than just the increased production of genetically modified soybeans. As Fernando Coronil writes, "commodities have thus become profoundly charged symbols, social things that carry their world life inscribed in them...commodities express hierarchies among cultures, not just magnitudes of value" (Coronil 1997: 37). During the 1990s, soybeans became a beacon of economic hope,

spurring the reconfiguration of the Argentine agricultural landscape from regionally specific agricultural zones, to a contagious monoculture; wherever soybeans could be grown, soybeans would be grown. While soybeans have contributed greatly to Argentina's overall economic recovery, the deleterious social effects are severe. According to a report by the World Bank, "social impacts include loss of livelihood security and limited employment opportunities" (Verner 2005: 13). In search of livable wages, the recently unemployed rural laborers began migrating toward urban centers. While this process began initially after World War II, it peaked in the 1990s after the culmination of a protracted period of neoliberal policies (Morello, Matteucci, and Rodríguez 2003: 126). These processes of urbanization are particularly significant because as previously rural constituents move to urban centers, the historically significant geopolitical divide between urban and rural remains; the constitutive residents have changed, complicating and dissipating previously held allegiances.

The December 2001 economic crisis is a pivotal historical moment whereby a new and powerful leftist government was able to rise out of the chaos. The crisis began just after President de la Rúa's attempted to stabilize the precarious political climate during which widespread looting had occurred over the previous summer, by declaring a state of emergency. Seen generally as a rejection of the neoliberal economic policies of the 1990s, the social upheaval saw the Argentine middle class join up with other dissatisfied sectors. The crisis itself saw the rapid succession of five different presidents in just two weeks, and record levels of unemployment reaching over fifty percent in some places, with two years of marked political and economic turmoil. In 2003, the newly

elected Néstor Kirchner from the province of Santa Cruz took office, quickly gaining national popularity and support for his left leaning government (Faulk 2012).

*“Piquetes de la Abundancia”*

*The IMF should be very happy with us. Without agribusiness and oil, Argentina would never meet the surplus they are demanding.*

Chief Executive of Cresud (Argentine agricultural trader)

During the summer of 2008, black smoke often billowed from burning truck tires and military police donned riot gear to violently displace the long protesting farmers from what are otherwise well-travelled trade routes. The protesters had taken to the streets three months earlier, but there had been no sign that Kirchner’s government would lower the 44% tax rate on soy exports. With the social upheaval and economic instability of 2001 barely behind them, the Argentine government was still implementing emergency stopgap measures to spur growth, while Argentine citizens remained on the verge of civil unrest. Even though the farming sector is frequently credited with helping the country recover from the 2001 economic crisis, the industry was hit with large export taxes, cutting into profits for both large and small-scale farmers. Domestic violence was mounting, the president’s support was waning, and the global prices for commodities like soybeans, wheat, and corn were rising. Over the past twenty years, the process of *soyización* has catalyzed demographic shifts as genetically modified soy overwhelmed the Argentine agricultural landscape. During this period of heightened political activity, the most outspoken political actors rose to the surface: Kirchner’s administration and the rural associations of soy farmers. I will trace the constellation of involvement and

interaction between them. This section will investigate the evolution and repercussions of Argentina's *soyización* by examining the perspectives and motivations of multiple actors. The 2008 farmer riots are a prime site to explore these contestations because as Wendy Wolford argues, "attentions to norms and tradition means that history is important: histories of land use allocation help to explain how and why people organize in the present" (Wolford 2010: 8).

On March 26, 2008 President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner addressed the country regarding the recently renewed farmer protests. Below are selections from her speech that I believe highlight her central claims that this series of protests diverged from the famous protest movements earlier in the decade; the earlier protests represented the interests of disenfranchised citizens who lost their savings and jobs during the 2001 economic crisis. She instead presented this new round of protesters as the *piquetes de la abundancia* (demonstrations of abundance).

*Recuerdo esa Argentina de los años 2003, 2002, 2001, miles de argentinos en piquetes, cortando calles, rutas porque les faltaba trabajo, porque hace años que habían perdido su trabajo o, tal vez, en el 2001, porque se habían apropiado de los depósitos de pequeños ahorristas de la clase media, Eran los piquetes de la miseria y la tragedia de los argentinos.*

*Este último fin de semana largo nos toca ver la contracara, lo que yo denomino los piquetes de la abundancia, los piquetes de los sectores de mayor rentabilidad.*

*La Argentina ha cambiado, se ha transformado de aquella tragedia a esto que parece casi un paso de comedia.*

*Hay una rara conducta, muchas veces es como que cuando hay perdidas la sociedad deberá absorberlas.*

*La huelga me parece que se la están haciendo a los argentinos, porque las exportaciones siguen viento en popa. Los pedidos de embarque entre el 5 de marzo y creo 18 de marzo, van por 2.900.000 toneladas de granos.*

*Así como les digo y los llamo a la reflexión, también les digo que no me voy a someter a*

*ninguna extorsión.*

(I remember Argentina in the years 2003, 2002, 2001, when thousands of Argentines were demonstrating, blocking roads, highways, because it had been years since they lost their jobs; or perhaps, in 2001, because the government had appropriated the deposits of the middle class. Those were the demonstrators of misery and the tragedy of the Argentines.

This past long weekend we have seen the other side, what I call the demonstrations of abundance, protests from the most profitable sectors.

Argentina has changed, from that tragedy to this one, which seems almost more like a comedy act.

There is strange behavior, as is often the case when there are losses, society must absorb them.

It seems to me that they are striking against the Argentines, because exports are booming. Orders shipping between March 5 and March 18 I think, are for 2.9 million tons of grain.

This, upon reflection, is how I say it and call it. I also tell you that I will not submit to any extortion.)

In Argentina, neoliberalism has become synonymous with the 2001 economic crisis (Shever 2012). In this speech, we can see that Kirchner distanced herself from the rural elites and in doing so, she designated the protesters as neoliberal subjects, who have excelled in the global market and refused to share their increasing wealth with Argentine underclass. Simultaneously, she distanced herself from the failed models of *neoliberalismo* that led to the 2001 crisis. To recall Foucault's treatment of racism, it "is an expression of a schism within society that is provoked by the biopolitical idea of an ongoing and always incomplete cleansing of the social body" (Lemke 2011: 43). She asserted that these *piquetes de la abundancia* are fundamentally different from those of 2001 who galvanized the country and created change: "This past weekend we have seen the other side." She simultaneously drew on the historically significant rural/urban dichotomy, and created a context for new political discussions about the profits from

soybean generated wealth. The recent processes of urbanization, spurred by the loss of rural labor opportunities, contribute to the reconstitution of the rural and urban categories, while they continue to occupy the same historically informed and divided spaces.

Kirchner evoked an historically derived ideological argument by blaming rural land barons for urban poverty.

Now, I will turn to the implications of a conversation that I had with a representative of a local farmers organization in San Antonio de Areco, Buenos Aires. Even though he owns a comparatively small parcel of land (only about 100 hectares), he is an advocate for larger landholders and agribusiness in general. In Argentina, there is a long history of a landed oligarchy, which has maintained powerful connections today, especially with the *Sociedad Rural* (Rural Society) which represents the largest landholders and the *Federacion Agraria* (Agrarian Federation) that represents smaller landholders (Fishlow 2013). This legacy has significantly influenced the structure of soybean cultivation in the region. According to the representative from INTA, the typical structure is that the absentee landholder leases land to individuals or groups who own the necessary and very costly machinery to cultivate soybeans, who at times need to gather groups of local investors in order to collect sufficient startup capital. Below is a selection from my lengthy conversation with the representative from the local farmers organization regarding soy farmers in general and the 2008 farmer riots. We spoke in the local office of the organization, in the more formal conference room. Each time I visited the office, there was only one other woman working the front desk, and the rest of the office was empty.

*Entonces mucho veces ese concepto de monocultivo, estamos sojizando la producción, vamos a traer dinero nada mas, son mentiras son ataques que se les hacen al sector, infundados,*

*Porque realmente el productor, que es verdad productor todavía, tiene muchísimo para dar, para crecer, para producir mas, solamente esta frenado por esta política, de este gobierno, que en algún momento cambiara, como para alentarlo,*

*La agricultura ha evolucionado tanto para que no pares un comentario fuera del contexto, como cualquier otra cosa, la electrónica.*

*Nadie se da cuenta de que lo producido del campo no es por el trabajo que da el campo. Antes 30-40 personas para*

*Hoy hay maquinas enormes donde vos se siente manejar, eso lo maneja con un joystick con una sola persona, quizás con otra esta recibiendo el cereal que tiene que cargar.*

*Pero hoy atrás de esta semillas que vos plantaste hay un montón de científicos que trabajan para lograr eso mejoramiento biogenéticas.*

*Todo es una cadena, hay un montón de agencias de publicidad que dan empleo para ser publicidad de esa nueva semilla, si?*

*Ahora vamos a retroceder. Ese cartel de la bolsa que yo compre hizo trabajar a una agencia de publicidad por mis semilla. Si?*

*Es muy conceptual. Estamos ginebras.*

*Pero en la desarrollo de la cadena doy muchísima trabajo porque de hecho, el que investigo.*

*De muchas veces trabaja entre 5 y 10 anos, y a veces mas...*

*El biólogo que tuvo trabajando, el empresa de publicidad que tuvo trabajando, el transporte y logística para que esta semilla que se llega al productor, yo tengo uno empleo nada mas, le doy trabajo al transporte, sea del camión sea del ferro carril.*

*(Often the ideas of monoculture, that soy is monopolizing production, that we are only doing it for the money, are unfounded lies and attacks that are made against this sector.*

*Because in reality the producer, who really is still a producer, has a lot to give and can produce even more, but is slowed down by the politics, this government which at any moment could change, could encourage it...*

Agriculture has evolved so much that an out of context commentary never stops, like in any other area, such as electronics.

Nobody takes into account that the product of the countryside is not the result of the work of the countryside.

Before it took 30 or 40 people to do this work.

Today there are enormous machines where you sit driving on top of a platform, one person with a joystick, maybe someone else receiving (the product).

But today in addition to these seeds that you planted there are a lot of scientists who work in order to achieve improvement in biogenetics.

Everything is a chain, there are a lot of public relations agencies which provide jobs in order to publicize this new seed, right?

Now, let's go backwards. This stock that I bought gave work to a public relations agency for my seeds, right?

It's very conceptual. It's like a game of cards--we are gamblers.

But in the development of the chain it creates a lot of work because in fact the person who does the research creates many times that amount of work, between 5 and 10 years of work, sometimes more.

The biologist that was working on it, the public relations firm that was working on it, the transport and logistics so that the seed arrived at the producers. I have one employee only. I give work to the transporter, whether it is by truck or by rail.)

In *Capital, Volume One*, Marx writes:

A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as objective character stamped upon the product of labour; because the relation of the procedures to the sum total of their own labour is present to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour. This is the reason why the products of labour become commodities, social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses. (Marx and Engels 1978: 320)

For Marx, the commodity itself obscures the processes of production and the social relations that constitute it. What is superficially attributed to use-value, is actually the sum of social and labor relations that went into producing a commodity, putting the appearance of use-value at odds with the commodity's concealed social composition

(Bottomore et al. 1983). Typically, the analytic of commodity fetishism is used to dismantle the capitalist's own account of relations of production, one which assumes capital itself as the source of profit, instead of surplus value. Marx's theory of commodity fetishism sheds light on the sociality of the proletariat labor class that is obscured by exchange at the level of commodities. In this case, the analytic is turned on its head. The representative positioned the Kirchner government as the predatory actor who saw soybeans and soybean producers solely in terms of the wealth that they can produce. Moreover, he claims that the state is reifying<sup>24</sup> the soybeans and erasing the complex labor and trade structure that underlies this wealth-producing bean. However, in reality much of this scientific labor, the industrialized machine manufacturing value is likely not completed in rural Argentina, or in Argentina at all for that matter, but more likely in other countries. He counters that the image of the wealth producing, reified images of soybean production, is in reality a whole system of interrelated producers and social actors. Even though GM soybean production starkly contrasts with more typical images of rural labor in Argentina—images of gauchos working in the fields, to laboratories, truck drives, etc.—it nonetheless does create jobs (though not locally), and a different structure of social, labor relations. In describing this new form of labor and economic structure that is in place to invent, produce, and distribute GM soybeans in such high quantity, he erases the rural restructuring of labor types whereby rural laborers and farmers had to lose their jobs in order for this new industrialized market economy to emerge. The representative deploys an unintentional Marxian analysis of commodity fetishism to advocate against the left-leaning state's redistributionist policies, in favor of

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<sup>24</sup> I employ the term “reify” with the Lukácsian totality-reification dialectic in mind (Lukács 1971).

the transnational marketplace that provides economic stability. Instead, the obscured social and production structure becomes a reason that soybean farmers should not have to relinquish such high percentages of their profit—a stalwart of free-market capitalism.

This debate between the Kirchner administration and large and small-scale soybean farmers and landholders is particularly salient because it is predicated on the acceptance and implementation of agricultural biotechnology. However, what underlies and historically precedes this new era of agricultural biotechnology? In other countries, such as Brazil, with long histories of resource extraction for export markets, there has been contestation at the level of production. In other words, the transition from traditional agricultural methods to agricultural biotechnology has been aggressively disputed. In Argentina, however, agricultural biotechnology has fluidly taken over the agricultural landscape without much contestation (Newell 2009). In his multiple and insightful analyses of agricultural biotechnology in Argentina and Latin America, Peter Newell deploys the idea of “bio-hegemony” to describe the sociopolitical processes underfoot. “Creating valid zones of conflict in public debate is indeed part of the construction of hegemony, of ensuring that challenges to the technology are manageable within existing structures of bureaucratic and political power” (Newell 2009: 53). That the protest exists in a post-production space, renders opaque the historical processes that restructured rural landscapes during the neoliberal restructuring projects of the 1990s that welcomed and incentivized agricultural biotechnology. The 2008 protests were not centered on the fact that four out of five rural laborers had lost their jobs because of *soyización*, or that the state had originally predicted and recorded that the onset of agricultural biotechnology would cause the loss of 200,000 rural jobs (Joensen et al, cited in Newell 2009). Not only

were jobs lost but historically based human experience and knowledge systems were replaced by new biotechnological structures of knowledge. To add complexity to the situation, the Kirchner administration's position that soy farmers were involved in the *piquetes de la abundancia*, obfuscates the contemporary, albeit largely transformed, structures of agribusiness. As the representative said, the labor processes have moved out of the rural zones, and come to include scientists, factory workers, fertilizer and pesticide machinery operators.

The oppositional parties in this contemporary context echo the rural urban divide that is woven throughout Argentine history. While the constitutive elements contrast starkly from the early sociogeographic signifiers, whereby the urban was associated with European high culture and the rural meant the land and its gaucho laborers, there continues to be a historically derivative divide between urban and rural citizens. However, "democratization and urbanization are deeply related transformations" if not contradictory because although urban spaces have historically been championed as sites for democratization, the close proximity of multiple and marginal citizens often create volatile living conditions (Holston 2009: 246). The Kirchner administration's actions are illustrative of this point as they openly represent the interests of the increasingly restive urban underclass, who although they reside in the expanding urban centers, continue to be "manifestations of the periphery" (2009: 246). The current rendition of this culturally significant geographic divide remains as an enduring relic, the loss of rural labor opportunities and the concomitant restructuring of agribusiness are further hidden from public discourse. The conversation continues to be about rural interests versus urban interests, but it seems as if those have changed because the constituencies have. The

obscured transformations raise many questions: how have the recently urbanized lower classes mediated personal allegiances to rural or perhaps familial interests? Is this an opportunity for the legacy of the landed oligarchy to be contested by the rural labor class that has found a voice as urban supporters of the Kirchner administration? Is it appropriate to even assume that the recently urbanized populations ally with Kirchner just because, theoretically, they would benefit from her proposed social policies the most?

### Conclusion

As the dynamic effects of the neoliberal economic policies of the 1990s recede into the history, questions of their endurance and the continued relevancy of neoliberalism, as both a set of economic policies and social restructuring, emerge. In reference to *Chavismo* in Venezuela, Sujatha Fernandes writes that “while Chavez’s administration has been broadly described as anti-neoliberal, I suggest rather that it is a post-neoliberal order, one where neoliberalism is no longer the dominant guiding policy, although it continues to surface in a range of conflicting rationalities and policies that are brought into an uneasy coexistence” (Fernandes 2010: 19). Alternatively, Cristóbal Valencia Ramírez critiques the glut of scholarship concerning the new Latin American left, which largely seeks to empirically classify regime type as democratic or undemocratic.<sup>25</sup> He departs from these analyses by deploying ethnographic examples that not only confront and confound Western prescriptions for the delivery of the neoliberal variety of top-down democracy, but demonstrate ways Bolivarian activists contest

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<sup>25</sup> For a further analysis of the relationship between neoliberalism and democracy, see Peter Kingstone’s 2006 article, “After the Washington Consensus: Limits to Democratization and Development in Latin America.”

quotidian manifestations of neoliberal capitalism through everyday resistances (2008). By shifting the lens of analysis to what constitutes democracy, we can begin see the possibilities for anti-neoliberal alliances that require the mutual empowerment of the state and the popular sector.

More than being strictly applicable to the Argentine context, these articulations of multiple negotiations with transnational neoliberal policies are provocative analytics. In what ways does the Argentine version of *neoliberalismo* endure as a structuring and driving force in contemporary political economy and sociality? And how does the emergent rhetoric of anti-neoliberalism create alternatives to neoliberal capitalism? Numerous scholars are beginning to engage with questions of post-neoliberalism in an Argentine context (Faulk 2012; Gago and Sztulwark 2009; Grugel and Riggirozzi 2012; Kaltwasser 2011). “Is it fair to speak of Argentina as being now in a post-neoliberal moment? In many ways there has been a drastic change both in what Argentine governments since 2001 can say and do. In this way, we are in a post-neoliberal moment in Argentina, in the messy process of reconstruction in its aftermath, and holding vigil at its deathbed” (Faulk 2012: 13). In what is primarily a discussion of human rights and citizenship, Faulk does propose a post-neoliberal exit from the dominant neoliberal policies of the 1990s, marked by the 2001 economic collapse.

Academic analyses querying the relevance of a post-neoliberal Argentina are optimistic and do hold true potential. The consecutive Kirchner administrations have already made moves in this direction.<sup>26</sup> I illustrated the contestation imbued within post-neoliberalism in the rural, agricultural sector whereby both the administration and

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<sup>26</sup> One particularly salient example is Argentina’s payback of IMF debt after the 2001 crisis, whereby the transitional governments had refused the payment schedule and rate that the IMF had established, instead waiting until 2005 to repay the debt in full.

soybean producers support the continued growth in the soybean export production and cultivation, but they diverge post-production: President Kirchner's administration has been advocating for raising export taxes on soybeans to funnel back into domestic social programs, which is a decidedly leftist move, whereas soybean producers become the latest incarnation of neoliberal subjects by fighting to keep taxes low so that they may collect as much profit as possible from the international soybean trade. However, discussions of post-neoliberalism must be mediated beyond simply saying that there are concurrent neoliberal and anti-neoliberal policies afoot. This negotiation between the strict implementation of neoliberal policies of the 1990s and the more multifaceted manifestations that we see today evokes questions along the lines of Marx's description of the crisis of capitalism. While Marx and his scholarly descendants predicted the end to capitalism—"What the bourgeoisie, therefore, produces, above all, is its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable" (Marx and Engels 1978: 483)—they also reveled in capitalism's potential to constantly reinvent itself and become more deeply entrenched. "Capitalism has so far survived in the face of many predictions of its imminent demise. This record suggests that it has sufficient fluidity and flexibility to overcome all limits, though not, as the history of periodic crises also demonstrates, without violent corrections" (Harvey 2011: 47). It seems that neoliberalism in Argentina will either be reinscribed and more deeply embedded, or severed to create an opening for a truly unique political economy. Is there the possibility for both?

The broader political stance adopted by the sequential Kirchner administrations has been a pointed effort to ally with the new Latin American left and the lower and middle class social movements that are at once reminiscent of early manifestations of

*Peronismo*, and forecasts a new, more egalitarian economic future for the country.

However, to return to the 2008 farmer riots and the uncontested adoption of agricultural biotechnology that firmly connects the Argentine economy with global export markets (with particularly strong connections to China) we can see that the anti-neoliberal efforts of the Kirchner administration are founded upon the trade relations and foreign policies that *neoliberalismo* in the 1990s established. In other words, hopes for post-neoliberalism rely not only on the historical period of rampant neoliberal policies, but continued and nurtured transnational neoliberalism. The sites of contestation are at the level of post-production in agribusiness, which implicitly offers a generalized acceptance of agricultural biotechnology and its repercussions. What seems to be entirely overlooked in this re-imagined Argentine political stance is the fact that in order for agricultural biotechnology to produce the tax revenue needed for enhanced social programs for lower classes it is emptying out the countryside. The gaucho class that at one point had deep social ties and economic significance, visible at all levels through cultural reproductions and actual labor production, are silently moving out of the rural zones to the urban periphery because free-range cattle ranches are not only diminishing in quantity, but also in social value, and are being pushed to the persistent past.

## Chapter 4

### Conclusion

Set in rural Argentina, battles over cultural recognition, land rights, and economic opportunities have been waged across time resulting in diverse outcomes. While the players have changed, groups have reconstituted, and new actors have become formidable forces, the country's fecundity has promised wealth worth fighting for. In taking up Escobar's call for a "corrective theory that neutralizes this erasure of place," I have lodged my analysis firmly in Argentina's rural zones (Escobar 2008b). In my roughly chronological discussion of cultural experiences, persistent and innovative labor practices, and sweeping responses to the pressures of global capitalism, I have explored the diachronic constellation of cultural and economic forces exerted upon the land itself and subsequent socioeconomic consequences. Repeatedly, a new image of modernity rises to the surface, relegating seemingly antiquated modes of social and economic production to the realm of inconsequentiality. Perhaps the predictable response is for counter-hegemonic social resistances to congeal and resist the economic engines of modernity. In Argentina however, social resistance to changing agricultural projects are expressed in unexpected and subtle ways, complicating more typical projections of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic processes.

Traditionally, Gramscian interpretations of hegemony view the state as an apparatus of the ruling class, while resistance or counter-hegemony is exercised within

critical factions of civil society. However, this equation is disrupted when the analysis spans international borders to include multilateral organizations and private enterprises. National governing bodies may be pushed into counter-hegemonic positions relative to corporations and multilateral entities seeking to encroach on domestic sovereignty (Ferguson and Gupta 2002). Drawing on ethnographic work in Venezuela, Valencia argues that processes of hegemony in the twenty-first century are far more dynamic than Gramsci originally posited. “The Venezuelan case should lead us to consider that the state can in fact be a force allied with resistance movements...[and] this alliance requires that we consider a second process of hegemony at work within the counterhegemonic movement itself” (Valencia Ramírez 2005: 95). Hegemonic dynamics are in constant flux, whereby governing or civic entities may simultaneously occupy both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic spaces contingent on the context, and be contending with internally fluctuating hegemonic processes as well.

In the age of a globalizing economy, hegemonic processes in Argentina are perpetually in transition and subject to multiple bids for power. The Argentine state is at once counterhegemonic in relation to multilateral and supranational organizations as it advocates for its own political autonomy<sup>27</sup> and domestically in its support for social programs that attempt to assist a growing urban poor. This dynamic is further complicated because the Argentine state simultaneously occupies a hegemonic space as it asserts its international authority in agricultural markets. Moreover, it must ally partially with the industrial agricultural sector because the sequential Kirchner administrations’

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<sup>27</sup> Specifically in reference to IMF repayment and ongoing legal battles over international patent laws (Monsanto).

successful political projects rely heavily on the tax revenue from soybean and agricultural exports.

From the persistence of gaucho labor to newly urbanized constituents organizing behind the President against the wolfish tendencies of the landed oligarchy, visions of the future for Argentines are not uniform, but are rather manipulable products of local cultures affected by domestic and international exercises of powers. More than dominance and resistance to it, the totality of Argentine history and the nuance of regional, class, and social alliances confound theoretical platitudes.

By beginning with a discussion of the imbrications and distinctions of gaucho the laborer and gaucho the symbol, I sought to ground my analysis in ways that show how the affective model of gaucho character productively endures despite a general dismissal of gaucho labor in this newly reconstituted rural work force. The emergence of agricultural biotechnology is colored by increasingly precarious socioeconomic conditions as GM soybean agribusiness has proliferated throughout rural Argentina. Because the political economy of the 1990s created a welcoming habitat for agricultural biotechnology via *neoliberalismo*'s policies of deregulation and privatization, the contestation surrounding agricultural biotechnology continues to center on what to do with all the new wealth: should producers keep higher percentages and grow wealthier, or should taxation increase for redistribution to the growing number of urban and rural poor. This tension is particularly salient because the country's leadership seeks at least in part to ideologically ally with the new Latin American left. What are the possibilities for Argentina to enter into a new moment of modernity that seems to be sweeping Latin America, while still operating within the political economy of its recent past? Once again,

as we saw with the formation of the nation-state itself, the promise of the future is forever bound up with those people, traditions, and jobs it seeks to leave behind; the contours of modernity are still imbued with the sordid complexity of its own past.

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