Between Brotherhood and Exceptionalism: Processes of Identification, Social Marking, and Justification in Uruguayan Immigration in Buenos Aires

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Abstract

Using a multi-sited ethnography, this article analyzes from a historical perspective the processes of identification, social marking, and justification put into play by various Uruguayan immigrants in Buenos Aires in order to distinguish their migratory paths from others'. This article examines the "discourse of brotherhood" within the interdependency of bilateral relations between Argentina and Uruguay, the activation of certain national narratives, and the development of and reasoning behind Uruguayans' migration trajectories from the middle of the 20th century to date.

Keywords: 1. social identification 2. national narratives 3. bilateral relations 4. Uruguay 5. Argentina.

Entre la hermandad y la excepción: Actos de identificación, procesos sociales de marcación y trabajos de legitimación en la inmigración uruguaya en Buenos Aires

Resumen

A partir de una etnografía multisituada, este artículo analiza en perspectiva histórica los actos de identificación, los procesos sociales de marcación y los trabajos de justificación puestos en juego por diversos inmigrantes uruguayos residentes en la ciudad de Buenos Aires, a fin de distinguir sus trayectorias migratorias de otras posibles. Para ello el artículo examina el "discurso de la hermandad" en el marco de las interdependencias entre el desarrollo de las relaciones bilaterales entre Argentina y Uruguay, la activación de determinadas narrativas nacionales y el curso y las razones de las propias trayectorias migratorias desde la segunda parte del siglo XX a la actualidad.

Palabras clave: 1. identificaciones sociales, 2. narrativas nacionales, 3. relaciones bilaterales, 4. Uruguay, 5. Argentina.

Uruguay has one of the highest rates of migration in Latin America: Currently, almost 15 percent of its citizens live outside the country. After Montevideo, Buenos Aires is the city most densely populated by Uruguayans, inside or outside Uruguay. Nevertheless, there has been little research until now about this grouping in Argentina. In line with statistical data and the contribution of the sizable number of foreign residents in the country in recent decades (Bologna, 2010), migration from other neighboring countries—Paraguay, Bolivia, and Chile—has received greater attention, particularly when it comes to registering, explaining, and reporting the multiple forms of xenophobia and discrimination these groups suffer daily in widely diverging areas of social interaction (Benencia and Karasik, 1995; Caggiano, 2005; Grimson, 1999; Gavazzo, 2011; Cerruti and Parrado, 2006; Vargas, 2005; Trpin, 2004; Halpern, 2009; Pizarro, 2009, among others).

This stigmatized construction of the "border-country immigrant" was explained in various ways: as confirmation of the existence of the "Achilles heel of `the melting pot'" (Devotee, 2004) that, based on overseas European immigration, characterized the process of construction of the nation-state and its "desirable migratory flows" (Domenech, 2005) as the emergence of successive processes of exclusion activated by hegemonic groups that conceptualize these immigrants as "a political threat to national identity" (Betrisey Nadali, 2007) or as part of the passage from "a situation of making `diversity' invisible to increasingly making the difference hyper-visible" (Grimson, 2006), particularly in the decade of the 1990s. In any case, what the literature has cited to date is that Uruguayan immigration, although it is "border-country immigration" in strictly territorial terms, breaks away from that categorization into the moral, intellectual, racial, ethnic, or class valuations brought to bear upon it through the hegemonic discourse propagated by the state, the mass media, artistic expression, and the groups in power.

The few studies about Uruguayan immigration in Argentina emphasize this specificity and agree in signaling that, from its origins toward the end of the 19th century, this immigration was

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incorporated into the "host society" in a particular way—and like no other migratory group—by virtue of its urban origin, its "educational levels and occupational insertion similar to those of the average Argentinian" (Benencia, 2007:588). Having access to public services, employment opportunities, and close contact with their country of origin also were among the factors facilitating their permanence and legal status in the country. Thus, "sociocultural similarity" (Recalde, 2002) or "de facto integration" (Bertoncello, 2001) based on the permanent interaction between Uruguay's and Argentina's populations would be among the characteristics that define the distinctiveness of this group.

In native terms, the above-mentioned considerations are synthesized and justified by recurrent and insistent references to the "Río de la Plata brotherhood." Although we will not be able to delve into the extensive history of this expression, which goes back to the 18th century and the creation of the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata, we can say that it has to do with a native category that has identifying power based on a long list of shared, distinctive characteristics. This takes into account the territorial proximity between Buenos Aires and Montevideo, the similarities in their customs, tastes, and cultural interests, that they speak Spanish in the same manner, and a stereotyped, phenotypic similarity related to "the mainly white" characteristic of the inhabitants of both banks of the Río de la Plata. These, among other characteristics, allow Uruguayans of both sexes in Buenos Aires to affirm that, unlike others, they "pass by unnoticed," "blend in," or "are camouflaged" easily among the native population.

Nevertheless, to interpret the references to the "Río de la Plata brotherhood" and the just-mentioned findings as part of a developing identification strategy—among other things—to elude the stigma that falls on the "border-country immigrant" does not exclude what in fact is the product of much more complex historical and social process. We hold that such processes of identification are possible to the extent that they adjust to certain social markings that, if they widely transcend the group in question, still turn out to be crucial to understanding it. In the case in question,

these markings appear as the result of the interdependence between *1)* the interpretive framework provided by a bilateral relationship that has experienced moments of extreme tension, *2)* the activation of certain national narratives, and *3)* the course of and the reasoning behind the personal trajectories of those making up various generations of migrants.

The article that follows approaches the processes of identification, social marking, and justification that Uruguayans of both sexes who arrived in Buenos Aires—in different historical circumstances and for different reasons, belonging to different generations and social classes—as supporting the distinctions we have been pointing out. To do so, the text that follows is structured in five sections. The first and second synthesize, respectively, the main conceptual and historical references on which we based the analysis of the empirical data presented in sections three and four. In the fifth section, we propose some keys for understanding the bonds between the discourse of brotherhood, the methods of marking and justifying distinctions, and the previously mentioned interdependencies.

The empirical material, as well as the secondary and primary sources on which this article is based, are the product of an investigation that began in 2010. This investigation seeks to combine anthropological field work and the historical reconstruction of the migratory context for the Uruguayan grouping in Buenos Aires. First, the multi-sited ethnographic approach (Marcus, 1995) addresses the interaction of Uruguayan men and women residing in the city from the end of the 1940s to the present, with diverse sociodemographic insertions and adherence to different generations and political affiliations. Thirty-four in-depth interviews took place. Various public and semi-public gatherings, such as political party events, electoral campaigns, commemorations of national events, cultural events, family celebrations, etc., were attended. Attendance at these collective gatherings using the technique of observer-participant, as well as interviews, was complemented and contextualized with a chronology of "critical events" (Das, 1997) that took place in the bilateral relationship; the chronology was

put together with information obtained in the historical archives of the chancelleries of Argentina and Uruguay.

Theoretical and Conceptual Approaches

At the beginning of the 1980s, various investigations analyzing the borders of the Southern Cone have shown the enormous expressive power that "the discourse of brotherhood" (Grimson, 2003) has on its inhabitants. Like a synonym of a "shared culture," this discourse emphasizes the absence of conflicts, as well as the existence of a total "integration from below," of timeless character, that would circumvent state practices and policies that lead in the opposite direction (Grimson, 2011). Nevertheless, as we have indicated on other occasions, the homogenizing objective of the essentialization involved in the "brotherhood" is not free of fissures that seem to work as a limit, when locating the symbolic border inside each nation-state, in relation to other sectors of the population or social actors (Merenson, 2007).

In the case in point, a special feature of the "Río de la Plata brotherhood" is that, at least in Argentina, it extends to the inhabitants of the Río de la Plata border zone. When one thinks about criteria tied to development such as hierarchy and inequality, the tight bond between Argentina and Uruguay brings to mind the historical, social, and cultural proximity of countries in Europe, in contrast with other countries of Latin America considered to be poorer and more backward (Merenson, 2004). To put it another way: When the objective is to be differentiated from other countries in the region, references to the "Río de la Plata brotherhood" diminish the physical and structural distance between Argentina and Uruguay to give it a crucial characteristic in the configuration of otherness: that "'the other' never is outside of or beyond us; [rather] it arises with force within the cultural discourse, when we think we are speaking in a more intimate and natural manner, `between ourselves'" (Bhabha, 2010:16).

From the contributions of symbolic interactionism we at least know that the categories of (self) affiliation and the process of

identification are not ahistoric and do not operate in a political, economic, social, or cultural vacuum. To the contrary, the situational and contextual character of identification cause it to be subject to constant renegotiation (Frigerio, 2009). By virtue of this, the successive appeals to the "Río de la Plata brotherhood" can be thought of as an "iteration" (Derrida, 1989), where each repetition involves some degree or form of variation.

One of the possible ways to capture such transformations and attributions of new feelings and meanings is to monitor the interpretative frameworks in which the different references and identifications take place and are justified. In this case, as previously mentioned, we maintain that these frameworks are delineated by the ups and downs in the bilateral relationship between both countries and by the national narratives that accompany them, that is to say, by the master narratives in which the nation is the horizon of meaning out of which differences and identifications are perceived with respect to ways of feeling, lifestyles, and moral settings (Segato, 1998; Neiburg-Goldman, 1998). This also includes the reasons for migration and the personal life trajectories of the immigrant men and women. In this last point it is worth mentioning that, from the second half of the 20th century, the Uruguayan grouping in the city recognizes an internal division marked by political migration—"exile," in native terms—a product of the increasingly repressive and authoritarian context of the last Uruguayan military dictatorship (1973-1985), and of migration for economic reasons, in line with the crisis at the end of the 1980s, the neoliberalism of the 1990s, and the crisis that implied its eclipse in 2002.

The interdependence between the dimensions of the experiences that we just pointed out allow the understanding of the "processes of social marking" supporting the discourse of the brotherhood. I refer to, specifically, the ways of registering differences and organizing them using complex classification systems that, among other things, hierarchize variations of otherness (Briones, 1998). These variations of otherness, as indicated by Verena Stolcke, operate as "matters of regulation, vigilance, controversy,

and exclusion or lead to entrenchment in sociohistorical circumstances in which inequalities of power and conflicts of interest are part of the game" (Stolcke, 2006:22). For that reason, as we will show in the following pages, the distinctiveness based on the absolutization of the meanings of certain markings allow establishing that from which distance is gauged.

The discourse of brotherhood and the processes of social marking that drive it involve a repertoire integrated by issues of class, ethnicity, race, and nationality associated with "a set of norms and shared valuations and ways to establish what is morally acceptable" (Boltanski, 2012:30). In this sense, the valuations, classifications, and categories with which differences and hierarchies are established are a central part of the justifications, or, to be more precise, of the "processes of legitimation" undertaken by the actors (Boltanski, 1991). I refer to the agreements between different actors in pursuit of certain arguments that look to specify and to denature, at least to some degree, different forms of asymmetry and difference, demonstrating that the classifications and categories are not "specific sets of people or unmistakable attributes, but standardized and movable relationships" (Tilly, 2004:74) forged in specific frameworks of historical action.

The Configuration of Brotherhood and Exceptionalism
between the First Peronism and Neo-Batllism

To understand the ways in which Uruguayan men and women who arrived in Buenos Aires beginning in the second half of the 20th century acquired their distinctiveness requires explaining, albeit briefly, the tensions between both countries in the context of World War II and the postwar period. The first elected government of Gen. Juan Domingo Perón (1946-1955), the period of Argentine history known as the "first Peronism," has been extensively studied by historians. Something similar, although on a smaller scale, has occurred with the presidencies of Luis Batlle Berres (1947-1951 and 1955-1956) and what is referred to as neo-Batllism in Uruguay. It is not our intent to pause here to analyze

these political stages and, much less, to go into the tensions between both chief executives, their development models, and government management styles. However, what we do want to point out are the different images from the first Peronism that circulated in Uruguay and how they affected the trajectories of Uruguayan men and women who migrated to Buenos Aires, particularly those   who left for political reasons in the period immediately before or after the beginning of the last military dictatorship, as we will see in the following section.

In the second half of the 1940s, the bilateral relationship between Argentina and Uruguay was hampered as a result of "historical and geographic reasons, political and ideological divergences, opposing international alignments, and dissimilar economic potential" (Oddone, 2004:49). The Peronism/anti-Peronism paradox spread past territorial borders to cross into Uruguayan political debate, embodied in the alignments of the two traditional parties: the Colorado Party (PC, red) and the National Party (PN, white). The differences between Perón and Batlle Berres, particularly after the "Griffiths Plot,"[1] as well as the alliances between Perón and the leading figures in the National Party, became central topics that could be followed daily in the press. The same thing happened with respect to the asylum granted to anti-Peronist intellectuals and politicians, who found in Montevideo a place from which to launch diatribes against Perón's government. In the abundance of reports that the Argentine Embassy in Montevideo sent about the Uruguayan press until 1955, opinion pieces and news stories repeatedly discuss the difficult diplomatic relations between the governments, the bonds between the two peoples, and their effects on the daily life of Uruguayans in Argentina.

In the pages of the newspaper *La Mañana*, the press organ of the Colorado Party, "the connections that unite the Uruguayans and

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[1] Toward the end of 1948, it was announced that there had been a supposed criminal plot against the life of Perón and his wife, Eva Duarte de Perón. The alleged culprit was named as John Griffiths, the former press attaché of the U.S. Embassy in Buenos Aires, who had been expelled from Argentina and was living in Montevideo. This meant that the case also had ramifications in Uruguay. This case, although it was never verified, intensified the distrust between both governments (Oddone, 2004).

the Argentinians" are exemplified by having the "same origin and language," the same "racial formation," and a long list of customs demonstrating the "absolute similarity between both banks of the Plata" (*La Mañana*, 1949b). This situation, understood as "unique in the world," was part of a call to understand that "the ideological differences between the governments are historical circumstances" and that those "dedicated to foment […] animosities between the peoples are conspiring against the interests of their own homeland" (*La Mañana*, 1949b). This point of view found it particularly relevant that "millions of Uruguayans who live in Argentina [… are] totally assimilated into their environment" (*La Mañana*, 1949a).

The interpretation that we just summarized is similar to one that backed the National Party in supporting, in this case, the neutrality and "third position" of Uruguay in the context of World War II. In 1944, this position was expressed clearly in the parliamentary debate over the creation of a United States military base in the country, at the mouth of the Río de la Plata along the border. On this occasion, Eduardo Víctor Haedo, then a National Party senator,[2] established the distinctiveness on which he based his opposition to the project as follows: "Frequently `time is confused with eternity.' […] The governments are `time,' that is to say, transitory; `eternity' is the people, the nation, the homeland, which is permanent" (House of Representatives, 1996:12). In line with that, Haedo asserted:

What we must seek is harmony between the peoples. […] Uruguay and Argentina have indestructible bonds. We have common heroes […], an emigration of Uruguayans who have found in Argentina what their own homeland denied them. It can be said that there is no Uruguayan family that does not directly or indirectly have some link with Argentinians (House of Representatives, 1996:12).

The words of Haedo synthesize the strong links between Peronism and nationalism, while at the same time affirming one of the guiding ideas in the debate brought about by Río de la Plata historical revisionism. I am referring to the idea of Uruguay and Argentina as a single country, whose indestructible bonds

[2] After serving as a deputy and senator for the National Party, Haedo was president of National Council of Government between 1961 and 1962.

make their inhabitants "easterners" or "westerners" of the Río de la Plata, but in no way inhabitants of two different countries. It is worth mentioning that this foundation for the "brotherhood" will be taken up again in the following decades to join, as much in Argentina as in Uruguay, nationalism, anti-imperialism and Latin Americanism.

Extremely different, however, are the interpretations that can be seen just a few years later, not just in the Montevideo press, but also in some cities on the river border. Analogies between Peronism and Nazism, which included the comparison of the geopolitical position of Uruguay with that of Norway before the German invasion in 1940 (*La Union*, 1953), headlined news stories and reports about "the virtually suspended diplomatic relations" between both countries, complaints about Argentine military maneuvers along Uruguay's river coast, and descriptions of the ups and downs of the daily lives of Uruguayans in Argentina. The Río de la Plata no longer was empowered with the metaphors of union and brotherhood, nor was it a symbol of everything shared between its banks, but rather constituted the setting where a series of unprecedented measures affected tourism, Uruguayans in Argentina, and the local economies. At the beginning of the 1950s, the doubling in price of the passage between Buenos Aires and Montevideo, strict customs controls, requesting Uruguayan citizens to show their visas and passports to enter the country, as well as complaints about persecution and the banning of Uruguayan artists and writers living in Buenos Aires were some of the practices and methods with which the Uruguayan press showed "the aggressive policy of the Argentine regime," which upset the "classic criollo [Argentine] hospitality, erecting a true Chinese wall" that turned the "Río de la Plata brotherhood into a frank irony" (*Tribuna Salteña*, 1953).

The "disinterest in 'the dear Uruguayan brothers'" (*El Plata*, 1953), which diplomatic reports said was emphasized in the Uruguayan press of all ideological stripes, doesn't just show "the South American character (at least) that anti-Peronism arrived at in the decades of the 1940s and 1950s" (Bohoslavsky, 2012:76); it

also allows the understanding of the position Peronism occupied in the consolidation of the definition of Uruguay as an "exceptional country" in Latin America. As historiography points out, this national narrative took as its base the absence in Uruguayan territory of both an indigenous population and a traumatic sociocultural marginalization; it particularly took into account the inability demonstrated by the rest of the countries in the region to consolidate stable political systems and institutions controlled by parties with civilian leadership (Caetano and Rilla, 1998; Frega, 1993; Porrini, 2005). In this last aspect, the republican, liberal, and democratic character of Uruguay knew to assert itself before an Argentina that seemed to be expressing the complete opposite (Marchesi, 2013).

In summary, as Oddone argues, the "bad neighbor relationship" between both countries moved beyond the diplomatic level to incorporate itself "into the mood of the public" (Oddone, 2004:7). A few years later, these events contributed to delineate the image of a Uruguay "in crisis," on the road toward the first electoral victory of the National Party (1958) in Uruguayan political history, after 93 years of Colorado Party government. As we will see, these images of the first Peronism, as well as the national narratives of Uruguay as an "exceptional country" and the neo-Batllist world will be crucial in explaining what differentiated Uruguayan men and women in Buenos Aires.

The Primacy of Politics for Distinctiveness in Times of Dictatorships

As the 1960s approached, the idea of "structural crisis" took hold in Uruguay. In the political arena, references to being an "exceptional country" left questions and reflections about its viability and the importance of its integration into Latin America. At the same time, the Uruguayan revolutionary left grew its ranks by appealing to nationalism and to the anti-imperialism inspired by the Cuban Revolution, as well as the regional independence movements of the 19th century. This context, added to the sign-

ing of the Río de la Plata Treaty in 1973, where Uruguay and Argentina put an end to their disputes over the river boundary, signaled a new chapter in the bilateral relationship and in the conflictive image of Perón and Peronism that had predominated in much of Uruguayan society, as indicated in the previous section.

After the coup d'etat in Uruguay, in 1973, articulation of the "Río de la Plata brotherhood" claimed a position of crucial importance, particularly in illustrating how labor, political, humanitarian, and cultural networks welcomed political immigrants who moved to Argentina, and framing what would differentiate them from other resident immigrant groups in the country. In this task, as we will see, some of the national narratives about Uruguay, forged in the course of the previous decades, turn out to be fundamental.

Among "the exiles," the management of their stay in Argentina—more specifically the story of their interaction with agents of the state—is one of the examples used to explain the advantages, or preferences, they enjoyed as a result of being Uruguayan. These discretionary practices, which identify and justify based on the "Río de la Plata brotherhood," are constructed in dialogue with the image and the stereotyped representation of immigrant groups from other border countries. A conversation with Javier, who today is 71 years old and who arrived at Buenos Aires in 1974 as a member of the Uruguayan Communist Party, showed one of the possible versions of such a distinctiveness:

Javier: It was not complicated to take residence here [Argentina]. They gave preference to Uruguayans.

Silvina: Why?

Javier: And because culturally we were always very well situated. […] We always had good education and good health. I arrived on the 20th and on the 21st I was already getting my papers processed, because that was reassuring, in case they asked for us to be deported, understand? And, well, I remember that in the migration line, ahead

of me, there was a Bolivian. And, of course, I had put everything [documents] in a small folder, with certificates in pockets, in a kraft-paper envelope, and here this Bolivian pulls out all these crumpled and stained papers. That image always stayed with me. The man in the window said to him: "What's all this? Scram and start all over again," and sent him running off (Javier, interview, 2012)

Among "the exiles," these kinds of distinctions, which usually include a series of cultural and historical justifications, are common. Leonel, who arrived in Buenos Aires in a "clandestine" way in January 1976, explained it as follows: "When you see other migrant groups you realize that there is a certain something between Argentina and Uruguay. History says it this way. […] In that era [19th century], if you think about it, the Río de la Plata was a place for coming and going, and that is what the culture of the two peoples does" (Leonel, interview, 2011).

As with other cases, the one where these two Uruguayan Communist Party members think of the Río de la Plata as a vessel of communication from the remote past is part of a multifaceted way of thinking. This includes a critical reassessment of some of the ideas and positions about the first Peronism, which we discussed in the previous section. As Markarian (2006) says, the first Peronism was extremely influential with members of the Uruguayan left. Even though "the majority had criticized the government of Perón (1946-55), its nationalism and its authoritarian methods, as well as the military-popular alliance and the bureaucratized unions that sustained its power […] many had changed their minds by the end of the '60s" (Markarian, 2006:54), particularly among those who went to Argentina. The social mobilization and reception that "the exiles" encountered in Buenos Aires contributed to this change in thinking; also contributing were articles on Latin American integration's effect on the viability of Uruguay published in the celebrated magazine *Marcha* and articles written by Methol Ferré and Vivian Trías in other publications (Espeche, 2010). People arrived at these reassessments to varying degrees; still, they were in the minds of a number of people as they mulled

over the failure of the revolutionary project and the crisis they saw Uruguay sinking into. In these cases the "Río de la Plata brotherhood," which came to signify distinctiveness and its justifications, also functioned as a complaint.

Mercedes, who identified herself as being from Río de la Plata before being a Uruguayan or Argentinian, was a member of the Uruguayan Socialist Party and managed to settle in Buenos Aires with her family in 1982. If she actually shares and is a strong defender of Leonel's interpretation, she finds that at the base of this basic identification is the "profoundly racist nature of our countries." Without hesitation, she declared: "I never felt like a foreigner here. My longtime friends forget that I am Uruguayan; they remember only when I tell them I have to go to Montevideo to renew my passport or to vote. We are equal, we are all the same because of our history […], but also, do you know why? Because we are white! It is necessary to say that—it is also for that reason" (Mercedes, interview, 2011).

The words of Mercedes allow us to pause and examine two crucial questions for understanding the process of social marking. As Frigerio points out, the "Buenos Airean whiteness," frequently seen as an objective fact of reality, is part of a socially constructed process that displaces considerations of stratification, social differences, and class to factors of race or color (Frigerio, 2009:21). This operation, by racializing certain social sectors, unifies in the "Río de la Plata brotherhood" the national narratives that accentuate the European matrix, which defines a good part of daily social interaction and backs up the arguments and justifications we saw with Javier. I specifically refer to its valuation with respect to the level of public education and health in his country of origin (two central topics in the story about the "exceptional country"), legitimizing the otherness synthesized in the figure of the "Bolivian" ahead of him in the line to regularize his residence status.

Nevertheless, and as is known, the national narratives, far from being homogenous, are formulations under dispute, and for that reason they make possible different processes of identification whose shades allow the observance of gaps from which the dis-

tinctions are made. These gaps also mark the limits that "the exiles" establish for the "Río de la Plata brotherhood"; I am referring to the characteristics in which the Uruguayans and Argentinians would not be so similar or united. Among them it is possible to point to the ahistoric exaltation of some aspects relative to the relationship people have with "social conflict" and the possibility of consensus. All that was synthesized in the description of Uruguayan society as a "shock absorber society" (Real de Azúa, [1973] 2000) of deep democratic values, as opposed to Argentinean society, described as an authoritarian and "accelerated society" (Terán, 2008).

Among those who migrated for political reasons, this assessment justifies the differing regard held for the dictatorships in Uruguay and Argentina. In this case, the context and regional coordination involving repressive actions do not prevent observing and comparing "what the dictatorship was 'there' and `here'" and the magnitude of systematic human rights violations in each country. Pedro, a Uruguayan Communist Party member who arrived in Buenos Aires in 1973, explains as follows:

> Dictatorships are terrible anywhere, always. But for Uruguay it was dramatic, it was terrible, because in Uruguay it was something completely new. Totally new. Here [in Argentina] the coup d'etats were an everyday thing, but we were not accustomed to that. […] In Montevideo, you did not see street confrontations, dead people in the streets, children being kidnapped—the aberrations that were taking place here (Pedro, interview, 2010).

The comparison put forth by Pedro describes a widely shared perception, relative to the profound break with decades of institutional and democratic stability, brought about by the last dictatorship in Uruguay. This is one of many examples that show that the "brotherhood" does not always function as a synonym of equality, and that sediments from the narrative about the "exceptional country" in the Latin American context keep a strong and paradoxical power of articulation and identification among "the exiles."

In summary, those who immigrated for political reasons in the 1970s and still live in Buenos Aires come up with different ways to describe what they think distinguishes them from other groups. In this task, what they call "the Río de la Plata brotherhood," characterized in some cases by a deep reassessment of Peronism, explains the advantages or preferences they found upon arriving in the country or their successful incorporation into the host society, legitimized by the combination of intellectual, cultural, and historical marking of class, race, and nationality. Nevertheless, as we have seen, references to this version of the "Río de la Plata brotherhood" do not exclude listing what also differentiates them from the native population. It is in this territory where the national narratives enter with renewed force, signaling the exceptional nature of Uruguay, justifying the distinctions in the regional context. As we will see, such markings will acquire new meanings among those who migrated for economic reasons in the following decades.

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*The Primacy of Knowledge
and Citizenship for Distinctiveness:
Times of Crisis and Integration*

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Since the decade of the 1980s, [economic] fluctuations and crisis associated with the neoliberal cycle marked the flow of Uruguayan emigration toward Argentina. In this framework, incorporation into the labor market and citizen participation are two of the main characteristics when it comes to mentioning what members of this group say provide it distinction. Obtaining "good jobs," as well as the "civic culture of the Uruguayan"—that, in the words of Leonel, "is something very particular to us" (interview, 2009)—suggest new perspectives for understanding the references to the "Río de la Plata brotherhood" as well as the markings and justifications that legitimize them.

At the end of the same decade, calls for regional integration and the path toward the Common Market of the South (Mercosur) were not foreign to the national consciousness that in Argentina

denationalized the social effects of neoliberalism. In a context of increasing segregation, fragmentation, and ethnicization of certain sectors of the population, the "'border-country migrant' became the scapegoat that—for state, economic, and social actors, the mass media, industrialists, and unions—was to blame for epidemics and [the] rise in unemployment and crime" (Jelin, 2006:60). In this respect, the distinctiveness, built under the protection of the emphasis placed on Europeanized national narratives and xenophobia against other immigrant groups, refers to intellectual markings associated with the labor market and class difference. "Those years," said Nelson, who settled in Buenos Aires in 1988 to work in a notary's office,

> were very difficult for coming [to Buenos Aires]. There was no work anywhere, but we Uruguayans looked, and looked some more. […] The Uruguayan uses his head. In addition, we came with the goal of working, we did not come for an adventure. There were others who arrived with nothing. […] Bolivians, Paraguayans, they went from bad to worse. The Bolivians ended up as vegetable sellers and the Paraguayans bricklayers.

> Silvina: And why do you think this happened?

> Nelson: I don't know, I think that because that for an employer here, it is the same thing to hire Uruguayan or an Argentinean. Some even prefer us, for the reputation we have, right? That is why they say that we are well-prepared and that we are educated, honest. … As they say, "We have a good reputation." It's not the same for others [other immigrants] (Nelson, interview, 2012).

As we will see, this is an interpretation that goes beyond those who, like Nelson, belong to the Buenos Airean middle-class. In the low-income sector, the markings of nationality and class, associated with the labor market, also are present. Nevertheless, in this last case, at the same time these markings allow for privilege, they also allow the denunciation of the prejudices it is sustained by. Patricio, who arrived from Mercedes to Buenos Aires in 1997

and since has worked as a waiter, bricklayer, and painter, explains it as it follows:

> When I went to look for work, the first thing I said was that I was a Uruguayan. More than once I went with my brothers-in-law, who are Paraguayan, and I was always the first one to get work. And my brothers-in-law are professional bricklayers and I "learn as I go." […] The Buenos Aireans are racists and the Montevideans as well. If it comes down to a white and a half *morochito* [darker-skinned person], they go with the white guy, even if he doesn't know a whit about masonry (Patricio, interview, 2011).

In this case, the racial, national, and class markings reveal the attitudes toward the "undesired otherness" that, as Halpern says, "not only anchor in national origin, but also in the specification of skin color, in relation to language (mainly in prosodic features) and in the projection that is made about the legitimate capital-coloring/legitimate prosody relationship, as a basic condition of the legitimation of a subject" (Halpern, 2009:299). It could be largely said that sociocultural similarity and de facto integration—two characteristics that define the "Río de la Plata brotherhood"—present in the justifications recounted by Nelson, operate as reinsurance in the face of the mechanisms of exclusion and discrimination mentioned by Patricio.

When the crises of 2001 and 2002 dramatically signaled the end of the neoliberal cycle in both countries, the interpretative framework for articulating distinctions, as we have been noting, changed again. The arrivals to the presidency of Néstor Kirchner (2003-2007) in Argentina and of Tabaré Vázquez (2005-2010) in Uruguay were added to the processes in a region that began to (self-)designate itself as center-left or "progressive," thus auguring a new stage for the regional countries and their relationships (Pousadela, 2010). Argentina and Uruguay then initiated a sustained process of economic reactivation and reforms in the matter of redistributive, social, and rights-extension policies, but also faced one of the tensest moments in the bilateral relationship since the mid-1940s.

In Argentina, the revision of migratory policies[3] and actions aiming to extend migrant rights had various effects. Among them were the formation of networks and organizations "of and for migrants" (Caggiano, 2011) strongly articulated with various state agencies and diplomatic delegations. Since then, these networks and organizations have concerned themselves with furthering the debate on proposals of full citizenship and on approaching some of the starkest forms of inequality that particularly affect the migrant population. Among them are arbitrary police detentions, labor and sexual exploitation, and human trafficking. I cannot linger here to discuss the dynamics involved in these issues; nevertheless, it interests me to observe the absence of these issues in the organizations of Uruguayans who live in Buenos Aires, as well as how some of their members justify this decision.

"Yes, they invited us and we went to the first meeting [of the network], but they are putting forth such a different reality. ... I don't know in what area we can work with them," said Juana, who actively participates in one of the consultative councils that operate in Argentina under the framework of Department 20, a program promoting ties with Uruguay.[4] But it was Sara, her companion on the consultative council, who has lived and worked as a translator in Buenos Aires since 1983, who explained her sharp opposition to participation in these meetings promoted by the state. Despite the lengthiness of her remarks, it is worth pausing to hear her words:

[3] Other migration developments include the new migration law (Law 25.871) that replaced one promulgated during the last military dictatorship; the plan for document regularization implemented between 2006 and 2010, called the Great Homeland Program; and the general law of recognition and protection of the refugee, approved in 2006.

[4] By decree of then-President Tabaré Vázquez, in 2005 the Department 20 program was created in the Foreign Ministry. With the objective of "recuperating the state's relationship with Uruguayans who live outside the country," the consultative councils were created, defined as "citizen and sovereign agencies in each part of the world the Uruguayan community merits it." In Argentina, four consultative councils actively operate.

I do not agree with some of their proposals. Nobody gave me any-
thing, I did my documentation paperwork and was always legal;
that is very Uruguayan, we are very formal, particularly with pa-
perwork. They [referring to groups of immigrants in the network]
want everything, that the documentation bar be lowered, that they
be allowed to vote immediately. I don't think it needs to be that way.
... There are many migrants who are nearly illiterate, who come to
work as day laborers. What criteria can that person have? It seems
to me that it is all right to try to offer guarantees, but everything in
good time. That they be given their basic rights, that they be treated
as human beings, and that their basic operational problems be re-
solved, that would be good. Now they want to vote. … All of them,
Bolivians, Paraguayans, Peruvians. They want to have rights? Well,
become citizens! (Sara, interview, 2012).

The feeling of indifference that Juana conveyed with respect
to the agenda of the mentioned networks and the arguments
of Sara indicate how some middle-class Uruguayan immigrants
demonstrate what differentiates them from other groups. These
markings, which allude to cultural, moral, intellectual, class,
and nationality differences, seem to oppose the political shift by
the state and decidedly have an impact on the references to the
"Río de la Plata brotherhood" and its limits. In this transforma-
tion, the references to the language of the citizens that we saw
with Sara are not a small matter, but are fundamental when it
comes to activating the narrative about Uruguayan "exception-
ality." But, to explain it better, we must consider the course of
the bilateral relationship from 2003 and the so-called "conflict
of the paper mills."

For seven years, between 2003 and 2010, the conflict over the
installation of two cellulose factories financed with Finnish capi-
tal in the Uruguayan city of Fray Bentos, located across from the
Argentine city of Gualeguaychú, caused a prolonged blockade of
the international bridge between both border cities, extremely
tough statements from the presidents of both countries, and su-
pranational mediations in pursuit of a resolution in the dispute.

What is of interest here are not the details of the conflict but the ways in which they were decoded by Uruguayan residents in Buenos Aires when they marked and justified their distinctiveness in the new context of extreme tension.

For some, the commentary that resulted from this bilateral conflict entered daily life without great effect. Such was the case of Pablo, who arrived at Buenos Aires in 2000 to work and to study food engineering: His former boss jokingly called him "the contaminating Uruguayan"; Pablo retorted with "bridge-blocking Argentinian." However, for others it caused a series of civic and political interpretations worth detailing. Although there are many ways to look at the regional context in which this dispute took place, what predominates are the references, criticism, and reflection about the "Río de la Plata brotherhood," stained by "the evils of Argentine policy," "corruption," and the "bullying attitude that Argentina always had with Uruguay." In these cases, the conflict evoked differences with deep historical roots associated with antagonistic political cultures of both countries. Pedro asked me about a key issue:

> Why do you think the paper mills were built in Fray Bentos and not in Gualeguaychú? Simple: because of the *coimas* [bribes] that they demanded here! The guys [the companies] went to Uruguay because there they see political seriousness and economic stability. Here everything is bribery, corruption. […] Everything is conflict. They cut off the bridges! It is beyond belief that if you have a problem with a brother country—you go and cut off the international bridge for years! That is authoritarianism (Pedro, interview, 2010).

The conflict provoked by the installation of the cellulose factories triggered a well-known narrative that emphasized the republican, liberal, and democratic character of Uruguay facing an Argentina that, in the midst of the conflict, once again represented the complete opposite. As Marchesi points out, "That rhetoric is not all that different from what the vast majority of Uruguayans thought in the Uruguay of Luis Batlle. Fifty years later, this was

being discussed in similar terms" (2013:24) to those described in the second section of this article.

In short, among the Uruguayan men and women who arrived in Buenos Aires from the end of the 1980s through the 1990s, references to the "Río de la Plata brotherhood" seem to work like a trench in the defense against the stigmatization of the "border-county migrant," and the "exceptional nature" of Uruguay, as the sign of distinctiveness that justifies and legitimizes the brotherhood, particularly when explaining the successful entry into the labor market and the upward social trajectories of those belonging to the middle class. Nevertheless, at least in some cases, the political turn at the beginning of the 2000s and the situation created by the "conflict by the paper mills" seem to displace the feelings of "exceptionalism" toward a discourse on citizenship, which transformed into a crucial marking when it came to the "Río de la Plata brotherhood" and its limits. In this territory, the political and moral virtue of Uruguay and its inhabitants, as Sara said, delimit new markings and forms of distinctiveness.

Conclusions

Based on the uses and feelings associated with the "Río de la Plata brotherhood," we set out to explore the processes of identification, social marking, and legitimation put into play by Uruguayan residents in the city of Buenos Aires with the goal of establishing what, from their perspective, distinguishes them from other groups. We saw that it turns out to be central to research the intersections between the interpretative markings provided by the ups and downs of the bilateral relationship, the activation of certain national narratives, and the migrants' personal trajectories and their reasons for migrating.

The repeated references to the "Río de la Plata brotherhood," besides allowing us to think of them as an "iteration" (Derrida, 1989), show that the suggested and analyzed distinctiveness, to date, do not exist independently, but rather appear like part of a dialogue that establishes meaning and identifications that express,

and are a product of, a constant negotiation (Bhabha, 2010:412). It is in this sense that the "discourse of the brotherhood" seems to work between (dis)solution and reinforcement, that is to say, in the interplay between the answer and the process where people look to dissolve or—in the best of cases—resolve for themselves some of the most dramatic aspects of inequality that, in the same exercise, winds up emphasized and reproduced.

In the case under examination, the category of "the border-country immigrant," presented as "undesired otherness," is identified through cultural, moral, intellectual, national, class, and racial markings. The various combinations and valuations from these markings allow Uruguayans in Buenos Aires, who belong to different generations and sociodemographic insertions, to argue in favor of a privileged position, reinforced by the activation of the Europeanized national narratives, but also subject to political and diplomatic ups and downs.

In light of the above, the tensions that accompany the references to the "Río de la Plata brotherhood" at certain historical moments can be understood. The years of the first Peronism, its re-elaborations among "the exiles," or the valuations derived from the recent "conflict of the paper mills" among those who migrated in recent decades for economic reasons, indicate that the "brotherhood," far from producing a homogenizing effect, also involves limits that are legitimized by the narrative about Uruguay as "an exceptional country." Thus, at the risk of falling into simplifying schematics, it could be said that between "brotherhood" and "exceptionalism," what can be expected is the operationalization of the distinctiveness that Uruguayan residents in Buenos Aires procure for themselves.

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