

The *gaúcho* was made into a state icon, and appears associated to everything related to the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. The iconic, mythological *gaúcho* was inspired – loosely, it can be argued – in the *gaúcho* riders and ranch hands of the *Campanha Gaúcha* grasslands close to the Brazilian borders with Uruguay and Argentina. At the same time, the long-term project of domination promoted by the regional elite efficiently managed to make these *gaúchos* dependent on them.

Participating on the discussion on national and regional identities in Brazil, and also on the wider discussion about identities and the construction of traditions, this article aims to analyse the dynamics of elite ideology in the context of complex processes of domination on different levels. It engages in the discussion on the articulation among the State, different regional elites and distinct strata of the regional population in the South of Brazil.

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WHAT IS A *GAÚCHO*?

Intersections between state, identities and domination in Southern Brazil

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The *gaúcho* was made into a state icon, and appears associated to everything Riograndian. The iconic, mythological *gaúcho* was inspired –loosely, it can be argued– in the *gaúcho* riders of the *Campanha* grasslands close to the Brazilian borders with Uruguay and Argentina, today mostly poor ranch workers trying to make the best possible living with the few opportunities available to them. The image of the *gaúcho* ranch workers does not sell as much as that of their mythological counterpart. In fact, the *gaúchos* themselves are hardly able to afford much.

This article explores the similarities and differences between the regional *Gaúcho* identity and being a *gaúcho* in the sense of being a *campanha* horseman. *Gaúcho* identity is widely associated to the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul. Every person born in the state self-identifies as a *Gaúcho*, and the rest of the country identifies the

Riograndians as *Gaúchos*, a regional identity based on a partly imagined rural past. This process, nevertheless, is neither homogeneous nor lacking configuration by a variety of different interests. In its use as definer of a regional identity that stands in opposition to the identities of the rest of Brazil, *Gaúcho* identity developed historically with the participation of different sectors of the state's elite on the creation of a mythological *gaúcho*, promoting a certain image of the state and supporting both the elite's project of opposing the centralizing forces in Brazilian politics and economy, and of preventing possible resistance posed by the rural population, in the last case by promoting a view of the rural ranch hands -who could be called the "real" *gaúchos*- as loyal to their *patrões* and hard working men. This article will discuss the appropriation of regional history by the State in the creation of a regional identity. Through ethnographic data, I will analyse some factors that contribute to the success of the myth in the ranching region of Rio Grande do Sul, were the ranch hands that served as inspiration for the region's identity appear in sharper contrast to their mythological counterpart.

The interplay between states and people can be particularly visible in some circumstances, helping to identify "the traces left by each upon the other, by drawing attention to relations of power" (Donnan and Wilson, 1999: 13). This can have a role in correcting what the authors regard as a tendency to "over-emphasize the symbolic in the anthropology of relations between local communities, ethnic groups and nations" (Donnan and Wilson, 1999: 13).

The discussion about power and identity is closely related to a key question I attempt to answer here, departing from what is considered by scholars interested in the history and culture of the *gaúcho* as one of the hardest ones to provide an answer to: what is a *gaúcho*?

1. ON GAÚCHOS AND IDENTITIES

The term *gaúcho* itself, as well as its synonym *gaudério*, has been in use since the last quarter of the eighteenth century in the *Campanha* of Rio Grande do Sul, and with the variation *gaucho* in the neighbouring Argentine and Uruguayan Pampas. *Gaúcho* at the time meant vagabond, specifically vagabond horsemen that made a living by hunting wild cattle for meat and skins, which they could trade illicitly. According to Slatta (1997: 139) "the term implied marginality and criminality, but by the nineteenth century it broadened to include virtually all rural horsemen who owned no land".

In the twentieth century, the *gaúcho/gaucho* has been promoted, beyond the geographical limits of the *campanha*, to a positive icon of identity. The national identities of Argentina and Uruguay both address the *gaucho*, and in Brazil, Rio Grande do Sul has assumed a *gaúcho* identity.

The *gaúcho* identity, if we consider it as being only one phenomenon, appears to be operating at different levels. At one level, it defines Rio Grande do Sul in opposition to the rest of Brazil. At another level, it defines the *Campanha* region in opposition to the rest of Rio Grande do Sul. Yet in reality, the use of the word *gaúcho* in identity contexts can hardly be understood as the application of the same mechanism to different although similar levels. I suggest that there are at least two distinct social mechanisms in play in different contexts, but before I examine this possibility, I will present these contexts to the reader, while trying to illuminate the way the *gaúcho* identities are activated.

The relation between national/regional *Gaúcho* identities, and being a *gaúcho* in the sense of being a horseman does not stand out for its simplicity. As suggested before by Slatta (1997: 138), "even defining the terms is as difficult as determining the social realities encompassed by them." And even if we forget about the different uses of the terms *gaúcho* and

gaucho in the past and concentrate only on current uses, the difficulty in determining the social realities encompassed by them suggests that it is by no means an easy task to define what a *gaúcho* is. For reasons of methodological choice and clarity, Slatta (1997: 139) decided to use the term with the meaning of “rural ranch workers of Rio Grande do Sul and Buenos Aires Province.” I will show here that this starting point leads to an interesting paradox. The *Gaúcho* is an icon of identity and the patronymic of the state of Rio Grande do Sul. There is also another use of the term *gaúcho*, different from the first one not only in scale, but in substance as well, which corresponds to the ideas that rural ranch workers have about themselves.

In Brazil, the use of *gaúcho* to refer to rural ranch hands of the *campanha* becomes a signifier of Rio Grande’s regional identity in the face of the more inclusive Brazilian national identity. Hence, in the eyes of Brazil as a whole, every Riograndian is a *gaúcho*. In the eyes of the rest of Rio Grande do Sul, anyone from the Campanha region is a *gaúcho*. In the eyes of the urban residents of the *Campanha* region, those from the countryside are *gaúchos*. This could be seen as a case of situational ethnicity (Banks, 1996: 13), if it were not for the fact that as we change contexts, what defines a *gaúcho* seems to follow rules of completely different orders. For the *peões*, *gaúcho* does not work as a “reifying group name” (Banks, 1996), even though it does work in that way for the inhabitants of the state of Rio Grande do Sul as a whole. I will suggest that this exercise of imagination and play of identities is made possible by the existence of a mythological *gaúcho*, symbolically attached to what we could call the “real *gaucho*”, the ranch hands of the *campanha*.

At a certain point, at least up to the early twentieth century, the national affiliations in the grasslands close to the -at the time disputed- borders between Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay were relatively flexible, apt to be bent and adjusted. Those families of Brazilian origin building a life on the Uruguayan side

of the border could use different national affiliations according to the context and to their personal perspectives. The brothers Aparicio and Gumercindo Saravia, for example, famous for their armed insurgencies in both countries, claimed respectively Uruguayan and Brazilian nationalities, and they had important political roles in different countries. According to Chasteen (1995: 54), “Gumercindo Saravia could claim Brazilian nationality because he was born at a time when Rio Grandenses like his parents took their children to be baptized in Brazil and because his baptism was a matter of institutional record.” One could be Brazilian or Uruguayan, depending on the situation. Many Brazilian families acquired lands on the Uruguayan side of the border. Chasteen (1995: 102) notes that:

“For them, the perils and opportunities of borderland life went hand in hand. This was, after all, what had first attracted (*a specific*) family to Uruguay in the previous generation. The early land speculators of the Uruguayan side of the borderland had bought and sold their huge tracts so cheaply at the dawn of the nineteenth century precisely because these properties were so hazardous to occupy.”

The view of the horsemen’s social identity as a phenomenon of the same kind as the contemporary regional identity demands from scholars possible explanations to its specific configuration with all the other identities at play in the region. Hartmann (2004: 140), for instance, suggests that there is a common identity uniting the frontier groups, and that this can be perceived especially from oral narratives. The author also points out that this frontier identity does not obscure national identities, but allows their coexistence and shifting according to the context. Nevertheless, through the analysis of scholarly production on regional *Gaúcho* identity, followed by a discussion of some things that define a *gaúcho* in the *campanha*, I suggest that *gaúcho* is not simply some



kind of frontier ethnic identity, but is instead a social phenomenon different from the regional identity that borrows the same term and tries to identify with it.

While the myth of the *gaúcho* is alive and well, there is another *gaúcho*, also very much alive, in the *Campanha Gaúcha*. What I suggest here is that the regional *Gaúcho* identity in the state of Rio Grande do Sul has one constitutive mechanism, while being a *gaúcho*, for the *peões* and general rural inhabitants of the *campanha*, has another, completely different, constitutive mechanism. One clue that points to this possibility lies in the processes through which a regional *Gaúcho* identity was created, recreated and appropriated by different actors in different political contexts and moments in history.

2. (RE) CREATION OF THE GAÚCHO: ORIGINS OF THE MYTH AND ITS APPROPRIATIONS

2.1. Appropriating history: the state and the creation of a regional identity

One of the main icons of regional *Gaúcho* identity in Rio Grande do Sul is the *Farrroupilha* Revolution, whose insurgents managed to resist the Brazilian Empire from 1835 to 1845. Later, it would be used again and again to support certain political and ideological claims. The *Farrroupilha* Week (*Semana Farrroupilha*) is the main celebration of *Gaúcho* culture and identity, and of a particular interpretation of *Gaúcho* history. Every year, in the week that precedes and culminates on the twentieth of September (the anniversary of the revolution), the whole state -and Riograndians gathered elsewhere- mobilize in festivities, mass rides and events. The importance of Gauchism can be seen clearly in these celebrations, which mobilize thousands of people throughout the state every year, in a full week of parades on horseback, *gaúcho* barbecues,

rodeos and dances. “No governor of the state would fail to pay homage to *gaúcho* tradition at this time of year” (Shirley, 1991: 207). It seems clear that the movement has a political character. As a movement, it is by no means the only political force in the region, but it certainly remains a political resource for many candidates in state and local government (Shirley, 1991: 207). Its importance is such in the state that a friend and informant from Dom Pedrito left a message in my Orkut page, a networking website similar to MySpace or Facebook, telling me that he thought that I would travel there from England for the celebrations of the *Semana Farrroupilha*.

The *Farrroupilha* Revolution was reinterpreted more than once in the history of the region, and its symbolic values appropriated by the state and other institutions. In the first instance, the *Farrroupilha* Revolution can be seen as an armed insurgency of the landed elites of Rio Grande do Sul against the authoritarian power of the Brazilian Empire established with independence from Portugal in 1822. The so-called revolution answered to the interests of the ranchers of southern Rio Grande do Sul, and the rancher’s elite managed to keep the masses at the margin of the movement (Maestri, 2003). It was not the only regional revolt during that period. It was one amongst many, such as the Balaiada in Maranhão and the Cabanagem in Grão-Pará¹, part of the centrifugal forces that, were it not for the authoritarian imperial regime, could have led Portuguese Latin America to the same kind of fragmentation faced by Spanish Latin America.

Although the leaders of the movement managed to resist and control parts of the state for ten years, from 1835 to 1845, claiming the foundation of a Riograndian Republic, they never managed to secure the support of the capital city, the immigrants, the

¹ The main difference lies in the popular participation in the Balaiada and the Cabanagem revolutions, driven by the precarious conditions in which the population lived, while the *Farrroupilha* Revolution attended solely the interests of the landholding elite (Maestri, 2003).

urban population and the traders. Their programme was liberal but shaped to address the needs of a large estate economy.

Slaves and *peões* formed the bulk of the revolutionary army, and this has led some historians to claim that the movement was strongly socially inclusive. The equality between all men in war and the abolitionist aspect of the *Farroupilha* Revolution have been promoted as an important part of the myth of the *gaúcho* and of the formation of regional identity, but contemporary historiography has been questioning these assumptions (Maestri, 2003), finding convincing data that supports a different image, one that includes forced military service and the delivery of the *Farroupilha's* own black infantry to be massacred by the imperial forces as a token for securing peace between the local ranching elite and the Empire.

Maestri suggests that in the decades following the separatist war factions of the Riograndian elites, the historical meaning of the *Farroupilha* Revolution was redefined using the social inability of the movement to adapt its memory to the promotion of their own distinct political objectives. The urban elite and the middle classes manipulated the memory of the *Farroupilha* Revolution to the point of recreating the rebellion as an abolitionist movement, an interpretation that would have been repudiated by the slave owners that led this separatist war of half a century earlier (Maestri, 2003).

Just before the proclamation of the Republic in Brazil in 1889, the Riograndian republican leader Júlio de Castilhos proposed the public celebration of the twentieth of September, the date of the *Farroupilha* Revolution. Not much later, Rio Grande do Sul experienced a new revolution, that of 1893-1895. The Federalist Revolution was one of the most violent civil wars in Brazil, marked by the frequency of execution of prisoners by both sides through throat-cutting (*degola*). The federalist revolutionary leaders, mostly ranchers from the *Campanha* region, contested the office of Castilhos in the state's government and

the state's Constitution in the period of definitions that succeeded the Republic. The outcome of the revolution strengthened the ruling group of the PRR, the Riograndian Republican Party (*Partido Republicano Riograndense*) of Castilhos. The symbolic heritage of the *Farroupilha* Revolution ceased to be an asset of the landed elite, and was appropriated by the positivism of the PRR, with its aspects of autonomy and republicanism emphasized (Maestri, 2003). In this new version, according to Maestri, the *Farroupilha* memory was reinterpreted as the heritage of all southern people, be it black or white, rich or poor, from the coast or the pampa, in a manipulation of history that presented the Republican movement as that of the whole population against the central State. The myth of the unity of the population in the struggle for a unitary, republican and federalist ideal was an important trend in a process that made "history to evanesce behind the myth" (Maestri, 2003). Later, this myth was to be given a voice in the mythological *gaúcho*, disconnected from his living relative through the stripping of the social reality of rural class relations.

2.2. Evolution of the myth of the *gaúcho*

Unlike many other Brazilian state capitals, the capital of Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, was not the home of absentee landowners who, in fact, lived in the *campanha*, with many spending stretches of time in Europe. Porto Alegre was home to bureaucrats, traders and liberals (Shirley, 1991). Its elite, an urban and positivist one, managed to promote the association of a rural image -one that could be more easily associated with the contrasting interests of the ranching elite in the *campanha*- with the state, in order to give to its modernizing and political projects an image of social unity. It is worthy of note that a famous Riograndian, Getúlio Vargas, a member of PRR since his youth, was to be responsible in the 1930s for a nationalization campaign that aimed to suppress regional feelings and affiliations and to promote a nationalist



ideology through an authoritarian regime. As part of this process, the samba music genre of the kind that had emerged in Rio de Janeiro was adopted as a defining element of Brazilian identity (*brasilidade*). It was part of the new interest in all things Brazilian that followed the 1930's revolution. According to Vianna (1999: 118),

“that orthodoxy converted samba, the product of interaction among very different social groups, into an agent of internal ‘colonization’. A national music born of indefiniteness came to define the rule, the only way of being authentically Brazilian. (...) Other ways of being Brazilian have always existed anyway. And they always will exist.”

The problem facing the State, when attempting a full centralization through, among other projects, the formation of a national consciousness, is “how to convince these many oppositional groups to abandon their local identities, and to join the community of the nation” (Nugent, 1997: 08-09). In Rio Grande do Sul, Vargas' nationalization campaign had partial success, or perhaps achieved a complex accommodation. After Vargas' dictatorship, Riograndian identity arranged itself in a way in which Riograndians can only be Brazilian if they are *gaúchos* first (Oliven, 2000).

Oliven (2000: 1996) identifies the 1930s as the point in which the *gaúcho* as an icon of identity started to play a major role in the definition of the place of Rio Grande do Sul in relation to Brazil, as a response to the increasing economical and administrative centralization promoted by the State. Nevertheless, the nationalization campaign promoted by Vargas in the same period in fact represented a serious blow to the regional affiliation promoted in Rio Grande do Sul during the Old Republic, although according to Maestri (2003) *gaúcho* identity kept a strong grip in local contexts in the form of a romanticized reading of pastoral life. According to Maestri (2003), the

regional elites accepted the new situation, worried about losing their regional dominance.

After World War II, and especially after the populist era of the 1950s, the Brazilian federal government, located first in Rio de Janeiro and later in Brasília, projected a period of rapid industrialization. Brasília was a major part of that plan, and aimed to propel the development of Central Brazil by locating the new capital city there. Juscelino Kubitschek's office planned a period of rapid growth in what was called the National Development Plan, also known as “fifty years in five”. Progress towards a socially conservative modernization was accentuated even more after 1964, under military rule. Cities such as São Paulo became industrial cities and regional industrial centres, attaining important economic, cultural and political power. The rural interests of the landowning elite found themselves fighting to maintain their wealth and privilege in this context (Shirley, 1991: 202; Oliven, 2000). In the face of the decreasing importance of the state in the national scenario, regionalist movements reaffirming Southern specificity started to regain strength. When a regional identity was forged in Rio Grande do Sul, it was in certain respects in opposition to the centre that this identity developed, and Shirley (1991) even argues that the *Gaúcho* “nation” is a by-product of the Brazilian national symbolic culture that has developed since the last century. Oliven (2000) gives a slightly broader explanation, suggesting that Gauchism was a result of a growing centralization, not only culturally or symbolically but also economically and politically. The author places the *Gaúcho* identity in a conjunction of tendencies that are contrary to this process, “tendencies that manifest themselves through the affirmation of regional identities, with Rio Grande do Sul serving as an expressive example” (Oliven, 2000: 122). Although it is not only in the Brazilian symbolical field that we can find its driving forces, these tendencies do manifest themselves through the promotion of regional identity and regional tradition.

These movements appropriated the ranching past of the state as an idealized and utopian Pampean Golden Age (Maestri, 2003). This choice was probably related to the opposition to the more industrialized Southeast of the country, that from then on became the undisputed economic centre of Brazil. Maestri (2003) suggests that the already hegemonic industrial capital of Rio Grande do Sul supported the traditionalist model despite its pastoral associations simply because the ranching capital did not pose a threat to its hegemony anymore.

In the social construction of the *Gaúcho* identity, there are strong elements that refer to a mythical glorious past, where the *gaúcho* has the central role. This image refers to the cattle-ranching region of the *Campanha* in south-west Rio Grande do Sul and to the real or idealized figure of the *gaúcho* (Oliven, 2000; 1996). The *gaúcho* in Rio Grande do Sul, as in Argentina, was deemed a hero only long after he ceased to be a military threat. The revolutionary battles ended by 1930, when Getúlio Vargas became the Brazilian president, disarming the private *gaúcho* armies and even prohibiting the carrying of guns in public. “Thus the *gaúcho* could be symbolically fabricated without running the risk of reviving an armed popular movement in the interior of the state” (Shirley, 1991: 203). In the past, or more accurately in the popular memory, the *Farrroupilha* Revolution (1835-1845) appears as the reaction of Rio Grande do Sul in the context of the privileges given to the Southeast by the crown. Later and today, opposition against centralizing forces is no longer expressed in the tradition of the *Farrroupilha* Revolution, but through the expression of cultural difference, standing in opposition to the influences of the means of mass communication, very often originating in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. And it is almost inevitable that this process of identity construction should refer to the rural past or, to the same effect, to a “rural elsewhere” existing only in the urban imaginations, making the *gaúcho* the distinguishing emblem of the state (Oliven, 2000:

123). Moreover, some local and regional authors, such as Golin, cited by Shirley (Golin, 1983 cited in Shirley, 1991: 216), have opposed the traditionalist movement responsible for promoting this idealized version of the past, arguing that it “deliberately falsifies *gaúcho* history to create an ideology glorifying military hierarchy and patronage in order to preserve the power of the landed elite of Rio Grande do Sul”. This interpretation seems plausible, in the sense that although the traditionalist movement was not created by members of the landed elite but by intellectuals not linked to the academy, it was welcomed both by the landed elite and the state.

Maestri (2003) suggests that the creation myth of Rio Grande do Sul represented a pastoral democracy. This myth was appreciated and appropriated by the ranching elites of the *Campanha*. In a strange land without evil, food was plenty and labour was free and non-compulsory, while the *peão* was more of a friend to his *patrão* than a subordinated worker. In my fieldwork in Dom Pedrito, the recollection of history changes in an interesting manner according to who is telling it. Even with urban elites appropriating *gaúcho* identity, the local ranching elite gladly absorbed this mythological construction of the past, using it to measure the changes brought about by modernization and socioeconomical changes. Seu Remi, a rancher in his early sixties, was very keen to tell me how things were before labour legislation “spoilt it all”:

“There are many social laws that protect the worst element and harm the good one. Before those laws, the good *peão* was favoured. Those who work together, alongside each other, are not as much *patrão* and worker as they are partners. Unfortunately, it is all becoming like a factory. It favours the ordinary, the vagabond, and harms the good one. Before, there was loyalty on one side, and protection on the other. If something happened in the city, the *patrão* would put his wing over the *peão* to protect him from the



law. The saddest of all is that *patrão* and *peão* are moving away from each other.”

Nevertheless, it may be claimed that this proximity, this friendship in a relationship in which labour was given freely in exchange for favour and protection, was never real to this or to any extent. The same informant told me that slavery did not exist in the ranches. Surprised by his suggestion, I could not refrain from asking about the black *peões* I have met. He said that there was slavery, but the kind of work that took place on the ranches supposed the use of horses and knives, so there needed to be trust between *patrão* and *peão*, and besides, the life of the *patrão* could depend on the *peão* as much as the other way around, so they were equal. This exemplifies the egalitarian ideology that is part of the myth of the *gaúcho*.

However, if someone cares to ask people in different social positions about history and their memories, the picture appears quite different. I was driving through the periphery of Dom Pedrito, hoping to locate a possible informant from the part of the countryside known as Ponche Verde. I ended up in a small mechanic shop, actually an open garage with an earthen floor. While I waited for the barking of the dogs to call the attention of someone in the adjoining house, I deduced from the age of the two cars parked there that this small shop probably depended on services offered to customers living in the immediate vicinity. Luiz Mário came out of the house, no sign yet of the toothless smile that would be so present during the rest of our conversation, telling me not to worry, because the dogs would not bite. I learned from our conversation that yes, he was from Ponche Verde, but had moved to the city some twenty years ago, after his wedding. In everything he told me, what impressed me the most were his recollections of the balls in the countryside. A Room Master (*Mestre de sala*) would collect all the guns, and from time to time would spill water over the earthen

floor for the dust to settle down. “Of course”, he told me, “there were balls for fair skinned people and balls for black people” (*Há bailes de moreno e bailes de branco*). According to him, a black man would never dare to try and enter a room where a *baile de branco* was taking place, under risk of being lynched. The same was true for the opposite situation, and a white man in a *baile de moreno* would face the same fate. The idealistic version of Riograndian history promoted by the Traditionalist Movement and supported by the local ranching elite seems indeed to be very fragile, notwithstanding its wide acceptance. So much for racial democracy in the *campanha*.

Historiography of Rio Grande do Sul has been finding plentiful support for the suggestion that this racial and social democracy was anything but real, as could be suspected (see for instance Maestri, 2003; Cardoso, 1962). The existence of slavery in the *campanha* stains the mythological history of the state, and in that sense the story told in traditionalism cleansed the racial history of the *campanha*. The CTGs -Centres for *Gaúcho* Traditions (*Centros de Tradições Gaúchas*)-controlled by the *Gaúcho* Traditionalist Movement, claim to follow the social structure of the *estâncias*, with its members organizing its administration in the roles of *peões* and *patrões*, but interestingly enough there are no slaves.

In order to attract the public and to construct a movement based on a social and historical figure, an ideology was created from the *gaúcho*. In the creation of this myth, according to Shirley (1991), Oliven (2000) and others, the intellectuals of the Movement have systematically censored Rio Grande do Sul history: slavery and Indian wars were eliminated. Shirley states that “although all history distorts, *gaúcho* Traditional historiography distorts painfully. It was necessary to create an image of the *gaúcho* and his society that denied his origins, his social position, and his independence” (1991: 203). Hence, the myth of the *gaúcho* was carefully constructed, and he was portrayed not as a poor herder, living a dangerous

and dirty life, but as something much more appealing: he was praised as free, yet honest and loyal to his patron, a skilled man, even a hero in the official accounts of regional wars.

Although both Oliven (1996; 2000) and Shirley (1991) imply that the creation of the myth of the *gaúcho* and its promotion as an icon of regional identity was the work of a state elite, I believe it is necessary to understand the different roles played by different groups. Not only the groups involved in the formation of the myth, but also the way in which local ranching elites, intellectuals and the state itself accepted and collaborated in the promotion of the myth of the *gaúcho* as an icon.

The long process by which the *gaúcho* passes from his partially independent way of life as a wild cattle hunter to a dependent *peão* (Slatta, 1983) had its coronation in the transformation of the *gaúcho* into a symbol of valiant submission in the service of the state.

In this sense, the *gaúcho* was not only promoted as a positive icon of identity. The state successfully managed to transform the people that once resisted its control into a symbol of the state itself. This long process encompassed the Land Law of 1850, which commoditized land, and “sought to eradicate the practice of squatting on unused public land” (Pessar, 2004: 24). This was in the interest of the ranching elite because it represented an important step toward greater proletarianization of the local population, which could no longer ensure its economic survival through the use of free land. The local population became dependent on the landed elite, providing them with cheaper and more available labour. Furthermore, it represented another step on the process of opening the pampas for capitalist exploitation, as in the expansion against the indigenous population in Argentina (Rowe and Schelling, 1991: 29). Slatta (1983) suggests that the lack of *gaúchos* willing to work as *peões* raised constant complaints from the ranchers in Argentina, who managed to promote the

creation of laws making the semi-nomadic and relatively independent life of the *gauchos* increasingly difficult, such as hunting prohibitions and compulsory army service. In the *Campanha Gaúcha* of Rio Grande do Sul this complaint of lack of men willing to take employment in *estâncias* is currently once again very much alive in the everyday discourse of the ranchers. With modernization, other work opportunities were made available, while changes in the organization of *estâncias*’ work means that *peões* feel that ranch work has become harder and a less desirable option. The rural exodus to urban areas in Brazil since the 1950s and especially the 1960s further decreased the number of workers available to the ranches. Rowe and Schelling suggest that major technological and social changes in the pampa “brought about the disappearance of the *gaúcho* as a distinct cultural entity and his integration into national society” (Rowe and Schelling, 1991: 32).

The process of transformation of the *gaúcho* into an iconic symbol for the state and the elite in Rio Grande do Sul had parallels with the similar process in Argentina. According to Rowe and Schelling (1991: 31) the *gaúcho* was used as a vehicle for the construction of a national consciousness. Literature in Argentina gave a voice to the *gaúcho* as a personage that reflected ideas related to the European Enlightenment, such as fatherland (*pátria*) and liberty, presenting them as if they belonged to the popular voice.

The spread of *Centros Criollos* in Argentina was linked to a new cultural archive “of the working class and those parts of the petty bourgeoisie living at its fringes” (Rowe and Schelling, 1991: 35). This suggestion led me to ask if what Oliven identifies as the state elite could not be better categorized as a petty bourgeoisie at the fringes? Oliven himself is very clear in that the intellectuals that founded the Traditionalist Movement in Rio Grande do Sul were not part of the mainstream, or linked to the academy or other official institutions. Oliven seems to align with Gellner’s



(1997) ideas about the role of an intelligentsia linked to a literate high culture in the genesis of a national identity -as well as with Anderson's (1983) stress on the importance of the printing press. The sum of these perspectives help to support my suggestion that the *Gaúcho* state identity has not developed from a *gaúcho* ethnic identity that could be found in the *peões* of the *campanha*. Gellner, like Anderson, does not see ethnicity as a sufficient, or even necessary factor in the rise of nationalism (Banks, 1996: 129) -or regionalism, in our case. Regional *Gaúcho* identity did not develop from some pre-existing *gaúcho* ethnic identity. It was created in a specific process from outside the social realities of the *campanha*.

It is interesting to note that Oliven (1996; 2000) associates the very beginning of the Movement with rural immigrants to urban areas and with the members of the petty bourgeoisie. A form of rural nostalgia must have played a major role in that process, in a period, the 1950s, marked by a fleeting process of modernization promoted by the Brazilian state. The landed elite of the state embraced the Movement and the version of the myth of the *gaúcho* it promoted because it reproduced and reinforced an ideology of hierarchy and social order. This ideology reinforced the position of the state, attending its own and the landowners' mutual interest in the further regulation of the work force against the diminishing independence of the *gaúcho*.

"The true *gaúcho* of the *campanha* is an ignoramus", a rancher confided to me in an afternoon at his house. During his youth, this same rancher had travelled throughout Europe and could speak English, some Italian and Spanish (although he learned this last language mostly in neighbouring Uruguay). A characteristic of the Brazilian modernizing project was the search, by the elites, for inspiration in European liberal ideas. The ranchers of the *Campanha* were particularly influenced by European Cosmopolitanism, and identified with the Parisian lifestyle, in what Rowe and Schelling (1991: 38) characterize as a "negation

of any element of popular culture which disturbed the civilized image of the dominant society."

The Brazilian modernizing project, as in Latin America as a whole (Rowe and Schelling, 1991: 38-39), relied on the adoption of a particular set of European models. Order and Progress (*Ordem e Progresso*), the motto of the Brazilian flag, is emblematic of the Brazilian governing elites' view of modernization from above as the answer to the issue of civilization and modernization of Brazil (Rowe and Schelling, 1991: 39).

Nevertheless, the rural workers and small ranchers have managed to keep part of the dispute on their own terrain, by insisting on maintaining the discussion in other terms. Their focus on skills related to their way of life -and indispensable to the ranching business that finances the ranchers' cosmopolitanism- produced a resistance to the hegemonic project of the local and regional elites. To be able to deal with the *peões*, providers of much needed labour, the dominant elite had to make concessions, and skill continues to be the touchstone by which *peões* negotiate their value, in terms of the need their *patrões* have for them, given the rancher's "lack of skill".

2.3. The *Gaúcho* Traditionalist Movement

Contemporaneously, the *Gaúcho* Traditionalist Movement (*Movimento Tradicionalista Gaúcho* or *MTG*) secures what is probably the strongest position in the field in which *Gaúcho* identity and tradition are negotiated and defined. According to Oliven (2000; 1996), they are the oldest actors in Gauchism, although one could dispute this affirmative based on the central role played by political groups and later by the state in the promotion of a *Gaúcho* regional identity. Nevertheless, the MTG has a key role in *Gaúcho* traditionalism, a role recognized even by the

state². They try to exercise control over the symbolic goods of the state. There is a constant preoccupation with establishing parameters and separating the pure from the impure in everything that relates to *Gaúcho* “tradition” (Oliven, 2000).

Shirley and Oliven agree that the state elite had a major role in the creation of the myth from the actual *gaúcho*. To Shirley, the Rio Grande do Sul elite have used the myth of the *gaúcho* to build a feeling of nationality and political legitimacy, a position to stand against the Brazilian national elite, especially São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro (Shirley, 1991: 200).

The traditionalist movement is, in the words of Shirley (1991: 200), a weapon in the struggle of the political elite of Rio Grande do Sul against that of Brazil “and, indeed, the modern industrial world”. A stand based on symbolic grounds, as we have seen, given that even the regionally hegemonic industrial capital of the State’s Capital city embraced *Gaúcho* identity. The characteristics of the emerging regional identity were associated with ideas opposed to those of a centralized Brazilian nation. It promoted ideas of regional autonomy and of a specific culture presented as a support for an identity that could not simply be absorbed -or substituted- by national culture and identity, which were in fact being created from the financial and industrial centre that was the Southeast of the country. This culture, as it was advocated, carried references to the rural origins of Rio Grande do Sul, offering resistance to the modernizing and centralizing projects of the national elite that threatened part of the regional elite of the state.

Thus, traditionalism represents different interests and has been appropriated as a part of projects of different actors. It represents a certain rural nostalgia

for part of the population, a distinct site where some power may be exercised by a regional intelligentsia, in opposition to the intellectual circles of the Southeast, and it is also used by the state political class, both to support its hegemonic project in Rio Grande do Sul and to stake its political claims in the national scenario. Traditionalism and the promotion of a regional *Gaúcho* identity is therefore a complex phenomenon, one that has its ambiguities in its promotion and acceptance by different social actors. In the macro, national context of interactions, Shirley indicates that *Gaúcho* identity originated in the tension between region and centre, in the hostility to São Paulo and the rest of Brazil, finding in the once-despised *gaúcho* a ready-made symbol of regional integration and local independence. Nevertheless, while Shirley locates the origins of contemporary *Gaúcho* identity in the opposition between centre and region, Oliven (2000: 203) argues that the integration in national identity is made possible only through regional identity. Despite the fact that parts of their arguments follow parallel lines, this is a significant point of difference worth considering. While one departs from an idea of national unity towards a model of centre-periphery, the other focuses on national integration through regional identity. The core of Oliven’s position in the discussion about regional identity in the state of Rio Grande do Sul is that “what is happening (...) seems to indicate that today, for the *Gaúcho*, the national is realized through the regional. That is, the people of Rio Grande do Sul can only be Brazilian if they are *Gaúcho* first” (Oliven, 2000: 123).

The construction of regional identities in contemporary Brazil, Oliven stresses (2000: 123), goes through the development and appropriation of features in Brazilian culture that are used as diacritical marks, conferring a mark of distinction on different social groups. The process of selection of traits and elements to compose “*gaúcho* culture and folklore”, promoted as a tradition upon which regional identity would be built, was marked by the existence of an

² The Law of the *Pilcha*, for instance, defines that the *pilcha Gaúcha* -traditional *gaúcho* clothes and attire- is accepted as part of the dress code for official state ceremonies and public events, as long as it complies with the standards defined by the MTG. Another example is the celebrations of the anniversary of the *Farrroupilha* Revolution, organized by the state government with a strong participation of the MTG.

institution that sought to define what is *gaúcho* culture, and what it is to be a *gaúcho*.

The context in Brazil for the institutionalization of the *Gaúcho* identity in a movement was the context of the military and political opening, in the 1980s, when democracy was once again established in the country (Oliven, 2000; 1996). This political opening was not only in terms of political parties, but also of social movements and organizations of civil society, and at this moment the movement toward the *Gaúcho* identity grew stronger. Nevertheless, we can find its roots much earlier, in the 1950s. In the year 1949, two of the founders of the first modern centre for *Gaúcho* tradition in Brazil, called “35 CTG” (Centro de Tradições *Gaúchas*), attended the Tradition Day in Montevideo, Uruguay. According to them, in contrast to what they had seen in Montevideo, they were disillusioned by the death of musical and choreographic themes in Rio Grande do Sul. The solution adopted was to begin to invent traditions, dances and songs. They were able to create a full presentation the following year in Rio Grande do Sul (Oliven, 2000: 111-112).

Today there are museums in several major Riograndian cities, private presses devoted to the theme, publishing poetry, romances and historical accounts, and also critiques of the movement (Shirley, 1991).

This strong notion of tradition, present not only in the core of the field of representations dominated by the MTG but as well in the definition of *Gaúcho* regional identity itself, can be used as a route of access to differences between specific uses of the term *gaúcho* in the social definition of different groups.

3. TRADITION

What is the relation between identity and tradition? Must every identity always refer to a corresponding idea of tradition? I do not believe this is the case.

Tradition usually refers to a set of ideas and/or practices legitimized by the idea of authenticity. Thus, there may be practices considered to be authentic, legitimized by a supposed continuity with the past, in opposition to other practices considered not to be authentic.

Nevertheless, not all manifestations of identity are based upon an idea of authenticity, driven by a diacritical gaze upon social life and its past. Identity can be drawn from ideas of body substance, for example. The culturally variable relation between tradition and identity, although possible and even frequent, is not obligatory. As an example, we can take for instance the case analysed by Buckser (1995), in which the author compares two Danish religious movements of the nineteenth century. While for one of them identity relied heavily on the idea of continuity with the past, for the other group's identity the main characteristic was the creation of meaning that could help make everyday life more bearable.

Furthermore not only its contents, but the idea of tradition in itself may be considered a native category. In fact, as we will see, analysing tradition as a native category is what provides the key to the comprehension of the role played by that notion on the construction and maintenance of a specific identity. Moreover, as it is in the case studied here, it is the approach of the notion of tradition as a culturally variable one that allows the comparison of and distinction between two different phenomena, commonly taken for renderings of the same phenomenon at different levels. What is it to be a *gaúcho*? Do we arrive at the same answer both in the case of the *Gaúcho* identity associated with the population of Rio Grande do Sul and in the case of the *Campanha Gaúcha*, especially if we consider the rural population of *peões* and owners of small plots of land, in an existence economically linked to cattle ranching?

Perhaps the key question is: does the idea of a tradition play the same role in both cases? Scholarly definitions of tradition are problematic. According to

McDonald (1997: 48) the term has been retained by scholars throughout the twentieth century, although shifting its meaning for their own theoretical purpose. I will concentrate on the ethnographic aspect, thus distancing my argument from problematic academic definitions of tradition. This is in a sense the instrumental approach suggested by the author, in opposition to an approach that would describe tradition as an ontological phenomenon.

Tradition has been reified both by natives and scholars as a historical object. Later, the articulation of history with tradition has been addressed for instance by Hobsbawm (1983), who distinguishes between genuine and invented traditions, somewhat helping to disentangle tradition from history³. Linnekin (1983) takes this idea even further, suggesting that not some, but all traditions are invented. It is widely understood in contemporary anthropology and correlated fields that to live according to tradition does not mean living “as in the past”, but living according to an accepted and socially legitimized version of the past, or sometimes indeed a totally constructed past.

McDonald (1997) argues that the low heuristic value of tradition offers strong grounds for abandoning it. I agree that the concept of tradition has no heuristic value per se. Its usefulness, however, depends on the category of tradition or another similar category being used or not by the social group in question, in terms of a native category or organizing view of the world. This is not the case for the *peões*.

Toren (1988) draws our attention to the existence of “culture-specific notions of tradition”. If we accept this, it is reasonable to accept that a concept of tradition or another similar concept may or may not

³ Briggs (1996) analyses the concept of tradition from the perspective of the conflict between researcher and the native-native scholars included- that perceives tradition as his own. This perception has led to the development of native critiques that identify the researchers with legitimizers of discursive domination. Views such as Hobsbawm’s, that consider that some traditions are invented while others are not, put the researcher in a position to judge which traditions are invented and which are legitimate.

be held by any social group. The contents of the category of a specific tradition are variable and therefore culturally created. In fact, the concept itself is also created, and must be studied from this perspective. If not seen as a native category, it will be unwarily projected by the social scientist over the subjects as if it made part of their own world view. McDonald (1997) supports the view that the idea of authenticity is a part of the anthropological discourse, in fact a projection of western world categories over the others that we study, proposing to use the concept of tradition as instrumental, not ontological.

The existence of native notions of tradition -or relative lack thereof- is one clue that points to the different characteristics of regional *Gaúcho* identity in the state of Rio Grande do Sul versus being a *gaúcho*, for the *peões* and general rural inhabitants of the *campanha*. While the notion of tradition plays a central role in the workings of the *Gaúcho* regional identity, it has little or no place in the world view of the countryside *gaúchos* and in their experience of what it means to be a *gaúcho*. It is impossible to exaggerate the confusion created by the fact that the term *gaúcho* is applied to different people, with different meanings, but for the remainder of my argument the key point is that it can be said that there are the Riograndians in general, using *Gaúcho* as a patronymic, and there are the rural inhabitants of the *campanha* countryside, who use the term *gaúcho* as an adjective turned noun. To the latter, to be a *gaúcho* is to be fluent in certain skills, to experience the world in a certain way. The matter is further confused by the existence of a mythological *gaúcho* that functions as the base of the Riograndian identity; and this mythological *gaúcho* is confused with the countryside *gaúcho*.

The Riograndian *Gaúchos* and the *campanha* countryside *gaúchos* deal differently with the idea of tradition. The Riograndians build their identity upon an accepted *gaúcho* tradition, defined and policed by “intellectuals” that claim control over the definition into categories of purity and impurity (Oliven, 2000).



In the Rio Grande do Sul context, tradition is a term often used to explain who they are and why they are as they are. The symbols associated with this idea of a *Gaúcho* identity rooted in the past play a central role in their experience of the world and in their positioning in relation to the rest of Brazil. The diacritical marks are drawn especially from the mythical *gaúcho*, his clothes, dances, music, habits, accent and expressions, and although they are not performed all the time, they can always be evoked to explain why they are as they are. In televised advertising for example, the regional accent is exploited and even exaggerated to create a rapport with the audience and to create an identification of the product with Rio Grande do Sul. The advertising campaigns of Polar beer, produced and sold in Rio Grande do Sul, use the fact that this product cannot be bought anywhere else in the country as a selling point, with actors speaking in a strong regional accent in humorous situations that play on the contrasts between Rio Grande do Sul and the rest of the country, putting the former in a more positive light.

As we will see in the last section of this article, the *peões* and small *gaúcho* ranchers -not to be confused with the ranchers that hire *peões*- of the *campanha* have a completely different way of understanding their place in the world, compared to the Riograndian *Gaúchos*, and the notion of tradition does not have a central place in the way they experience the world. This is a crucial point that allows us to differentiate Riograndian regional identity from the countryside *gaúchos* as separate phenomena. Nevertheless, the *peões* do get involved in activities promoted by the state, MTG or other actors as a celebration of the mythological *gaúcho* and his culture.

4. "REAL-LIFE" GAÚCHOS

Beyond its use as a methodological tool to understand the relation between region and centre in Brazil, the

study of *Gaúcho* regional identity and its wide acceptance can be used for a better comprehension of the elite role in the region, the role of the *gaúcho* in this symbolic process, and the role of the *gaúcho* in the economical and political life of the *campanha*.

Tradition, according to Linnekin (1983: 241) "is not a coherent body of customs, lying "out there" to be discovered, but an a priori model that shapes individual and group experience and is, in turn, shaped by it." Hence, it is important to note the difference between the value given to the notion of tradition by *peões* and the MTG.

The *gaúchos* of the *campanha* countryside, the *peões* and small ranchers usually do not use tradition or related notions to explain their being in the world. In fact, during one year of fieldwork I believe I have never heard a single *peão* even articulate the word 'tradition', let alone use it to explain things to me. When a narrative is constructed, be it in a context of power relations, or to explain their way of life or their activities at the ranches, the term *campeirismo* takes on the meaning-creation role. *Campeirismos*, in plural, refers to the set of skills and practical knowledge applied to these horsemen's way of life. It includes skills such as riding, taming, lassoing, treating cattle and sheep diseases, as well as many others. When in a situation of opposition to other social groups, be it a landowner or an immigrant, a temporary form of identity that resembles ethnic identity may come into play. That happens for instance when original locals incorporate onto their critique of the more recently arrived commercial farmers the claim that "they are gringos, they are not *gaúchos* like us". Nevertheless, although the skills may be used as diacritical marks in interaction, the *peões'* experience of the world is mainly skill-centred, and not identity-centred. Skill may play a role in interactions by supporting an identity that can stand in opposition to the ethnic identity of the other, but it commonly has a much stronger role. It defines the *peões'* experience of the world. It organizes social life and ranks social equals, thus further

organizing hierarchy. Skills are sometimes used in discourses and narratives that criticize authority. It is not tradition, or even an idea of continuity between the present and a mythical distant past that defines what it is to be a *gaúcho* for the *peões*. To be a *gaúcho* is to be proficient at those skills, the *campeirismos*. It is so central, that when I first arrived at a particular *estância* where I would spend a significant amount of time, after the landowner told the *peão* that I would be staying there, the first thing he asked was: “*patrão*, do you want me to teach him all the *campeirismos*?”

The distinction between those two different kinds of uses of the term *gaúcho* is very elusive, even to researchers. They appear, at first glance, to be different renderings of the same phenomenon at different levels. This difficulty is a tribute to the work of the MTG, which put an enormous effort towards constructing the association, accepted by the population, between the regional identity and the real *gaúcho* through the myth of the *gaúcho*. In that sense, the myth has a living reference, but not in terms of the consciousness of the people who are that referent. Or, in other words, the *peão* sees himself as a *gaúcho*, but that is related to his skills and perceived social value, not with ideas of community, ethnic origin, shared past or regional identity.

During the second week of May 2006, many of my friends in Dom Pedrito told me about the rodeo the following Sunday. I was spending my Saturday in the *estância* Santa Marta, and it was the weekend off of the foreman, Santiago. It was early morning, and although the sun had been shining for an hour already, it was still cool, and the mist from the previous night was still clearing. In that countryside, any approaching vehicle can be heard much earlier than it can be seen, so when I heard the noise of a small motorcycle I waited, curious as I had learned to be while spending time with the *peões*, about who could it be. The bike stopped closer than someone would while waiting for permission to enter the space of the houses and the barn. A somewhat agitated Santiago

handed the helmet and some money to the driver, who set off along the dust road. Over the noise of the bike, he excitedly explained to me that he had plans to compete in the rodeo, but as his friend from another *estância* close by would not be able to take his horses to the city, he came to fetch them himself. While at the same time inviting me to watch the rodeo and apologizing for not having time to talk, he threw a sheepskin over a semi-tamed horse's back, put on the bridle and rode to the fields with amazing dexterity at an overwhelming speed. In no time at all, by some well-orchestrated movements -running his horse over the ones he wanted to guide to the corral, cutting off their escape route and generally outwitting them- two mares were secured. The third one, a young horse (*potro*), gave him a lot more work, and for some time, from the slightly higher ground where I was standing I could see a furious galloping across a vast stretch of pasture, dust unsettled by the hoofs of the *potro* and the pursuing horse ridden by a skilled *gaúcho* using no stirrups or saddle. Although I considered it an amazing show of skill, I could see he was a little embarrassed by having been left behind by the horse a couple of times. I asked him if he would be able to get to the rodeo on time, considering that it usually took me half an hour's driving to get from the *estância* to the town. He told me he knew many ways through the fields, and that he could cover the distance, at a gallop, in the same thirty minutes.

In the afternoon I went back to watch the rodeo, which was being held in a place just outside the town, not far from the road. There were many cars parked close to the large corral, and an even bigger number of horses. Families had arranged folding chairs under the shade of the trees, while many mounted men, and some mounted women and children, were watching the rodeo from the other side. The fenced area where the competitions take place was rectangular, and both the shaded and opposite sides gave fairly good views of both the lasso and the bronco riding competitions. Under the trees other activities were being carried



out. There was a small bar, working from a wooden shed, and from there I could hear a group making music with a guitar and an accordion, cut from time to time by the yells and calls of a larger group playing the *taba* game⁴ for money, with its number oscillating between fifteen and twenty five men between players, onlookers and the referee. Other small groups of men in traditional *gaúcho* clothes gathered in different spots, while the women and families tended to drink mate seated on folding chairs facing the corral.

Leisure in the countryside has become scarcer, opening a gap partially occupied by these rodeos and other activities organized closer to urban areas, to which the horsemen have to travel often covering relatively large distances if they want to attend. It may be related to the depopulation of the rural areas in Brazil since the 1950s and especially the 1960s. The public for these activities has moved from the countryside to the city fringes, and so the rodeo has followed. Nevertheless, I believe it is related as well to a loss of importance of the countryside in the state's policies, in the face of the increasing centralization of the state's bureaucracy in the promoted urban areas. This trend follows the structural reorganization of the State with Vargas' centralist government, and its further centralization following the military coup of 1964. This centralization was accompanied by a partial withdrawal of the State from the countryside.

Seu Bruno told me that land has reached a high value in the region. Combined with the increased difficulty in making a living in the countryside, small ranchers can barely survive. Their sons and daughters want to spend their time in the city to attend the balls.

Leisure has moved from the countryside to town. Those living in the countryside need to visit the city if they want to attend a ball, watch or participate in a rodeo, or generally eat and drink out.

⁴ Similar to knucklebones, but with the difference that only one bone is involved, the *Jogo do Osso* or *taba* game is common in the Campanha of Rio Grande do Sul and in the Argentinean grasslands. The contenders bet on the side of the talus bone that will land upwards after a throw.

Rodeos are the celebration of *gaúcho* skills. Although they have been promoted by the MTG as a celebration of the mythological *gaúcho* so admired and emulated, most of the riders taking part are very real, flesh and bones, *gaúchos*. A large part of the contenders in a rodeo are *peões*, coming from *estâncias* in every corner of the municipality where the competition is being held.

On one occasion I was accompanying a rancher in a short drive to borrow an electric bandsaw that we would use to cut up an ox that had been slaughtered the previous day. He introduced me to Onório, a *peão* he had good relations with. He told me humorously beforehand that Onório was given to big talk (*falador*): "just give him rope and listen to him." Onório quickly became interested in the fact that I was involved in a research project, and started to show his knowledge, always asking "does the mister know what that is?", promptly followed by an explanation of everything he thought I had a chance of not knowing, so he could amuse me with his knowledge of strange things for an urban eye. One of the things he wanted me to guess the use for was a stationary cow (*vaca parada*), which I knew, but nevertheless let him explain it was a frame made from wood and other odds and ends, comprising a body and a head that the *gaúchos* use to simulate a cow in dismounted lasso training. Kids start lassoing a *vaca parada*, and *peões* can play with the lasso when not in the fields. José, another *peão* I know, told me that he lost jobs in many *estâncias* because the *patrões* do not like rodeo men. They fear they may practice lassoing on running calves, possibly injuring the animals. He had, according to himself, lost many jobs because he liked rodeos too much.

It is these *peões* that constitute the main competitors in the rodeos of towns like Dom Pedrito. Although the MTG appropriated the rodeo as part of its promotion of *Gaúcho* regional identity and its interpretation of *gaúcho* traditions, with support if not participation of the state and other institutions linked

to certain elites, the *peões* managed to appropriate it back, at least partially, as a promotion of their own skill, one of the strongest values and most important definers of what it is to be a *gaúcho* in their worldview. This is one of the major reasons for the popularity the Traditionalist movement managed to gain in the land of the real *gaúcho*.

Gaúcho, in its sense of a regional identity, is the product of very complex interactions between particular elite groups and other groups in Riograndian society. It is closely related to certain projects of domination promoted by certain groups in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, and it is also a response to a nationalization process promoted by the Brazilian government. At the same time, the term *gaúcho* holds a different meaning for the rural ranch hands of the *Campanha Gaúcha*. For them, being a *gaúcho* is defined mainly by the proficiency in a certain set of skills. The different possible meanings of the term *gaúcho* are thus, as I showed, closely related the processes of domination to which the population of Rio Grande do Sul has been subjected at a State level.

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Resumo

O *gaúcho* foi promovido a ícone estadual, e aparece associado ao Estado do Rio Grande do Sul, Brasil. O *gaúcho* icônico, mitológico, foi inspirado -com certas liberdades- nos *peões gaúchos* da *Campanha Gaúcha* próxima às fronteiras brasileiras com as pampas argentina e uruguaia. Paralelamente, o projeto de dominação de longa duração promovido pela elite regional eficientemente fez com que estes *gaúchos* se tornassem dependentes da mesma.

Tomando parte na discussão sobre identidades nacionais e regionais no Brasil, assim como na discussão mais ampla sobre identidades e construção de tradições, este artigo analisa as dinâmicas da ideologia da elite no contexto de complexos processos de dominação em diferentes níveis. Toma parte na discussão acerca da articulação entre Estado, diferentes elites regionais e distintos estratos da população do Sul do Brasil.

[GAÚCHOS, BRASIL, IDENTIDADES, ELITES, DOMINAÇÃO]

Resumen

El *gaúcho* fue promovido como icono estatal, y aparece asociado al Estado de Rio Grande do Sul, Brasil. El *gaúcho* icónico, mitológico, se inspiró -vagamente- en los peones *gaúchos* de la *Campanha Gaúcha*, próxima a la frontera brasileña con las pampas argentinas y uruguayas. Paralelamente, el proyecto de dominación a largo plazo promovido por las elites regionales logró que los *gaúchos* dependieran de ellas.

En el marco de las discusiones sobre las identidades nacionales y regionales en Brasil, así como de las consideraciones más amplias sobre identidad y construcción de la tradición, este artículo analiza las dinámicas de la ideología de elite en el contexto de complejos procesos de dominación en diferentes niveles. Participa en las discusiones sobre la articulación entre el Estado, diferentes elites regionales y distintos estratos de la población del sur de Brasil.

[GAÚCHOS, BRASIL, IDENTIDADES, ÉLITES, DOMINACIÓN]

Resum

El *gaúcho* ha estat promogut com a icona estatal, i apareix associat a l'Estat de Rio Grande do Sul, Brasil. El *gaúcho* icònic, mitològic, es va inspirar -vagament- en els peons *gaúchos* de la *Campanha Gaúcha* propera a la frontera brasilera amb les pampes argentines i uruguaianes. Paralelament, el projecte de dominació a llarg termini promogut per les elits regionals va aconseguir que els *gaúchos* en depenguessin.

En el marc de les discussions sobre les identitats nacionals i regionals al Brasil, així com de les consideracions més àmplies sobre identitat i construcció de la tradició, aquest article analitza les dinàmiques de la ideologia d'elit en el context de complexos processos de dominació en diferents nivells. Participa en les discussions sobre l'articulació entre l'Estat, diferents elits regionals i diversos estrats de la població del Sud del Brasil.

[GAÚCHOS, BRASIL, IDENTITATS, ELITS, DOMINACIÓ]

