Revista Culturales

The "criollo" and his others. The formation of an identity matrix in the Chaco santiagueño

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RECEIVED
June 5, 2020

APPROVED
June 18, 2021

PUBLISHED
November 9, 2021

ABSTRACT: In the last decades, the process of invention and popular reception of the "Criollo" social identity began to be discussed in the Argentine social sciences. From an ethnographic methodological approach, the article aims to describe and understand this process during the 20th century in the Chaco santiagueño region, located in the province of Santiago del Estero, Argentine. The results of the investigation process indicate that "Criollo" identity was assigned and appropriated by the local inhabitants in the context of a vertiginous change of social order generated by the arrival of the working capital and migrants known by the local people in terms of "Gringos" and "Turcos". In other words, the article argues that it was the contrast with "Gringos" and "Turcos" that allowed the discursive adoption of an identity like "criollo" from the literary world of the late nineteenth century and the formation of an identity matrix in the local life.

KEYWORDS: Criollo; identity matrix; alterization.

El "criollo" y sus otros. La formación de una matriz identitaria en el Chaco santiagueño

TRANSLATION OF SUMMARY
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RESUMEN: En las últimas décadas comenzó a discutirse el proceso de invención y recepción popular de la identidad social "criollo" en las ciencias sociales argentinas. Desde un enfoque metodológico etnográfico el objetivo del artículo es describir y comprender este proceso durante el siglo XX en la región Chaco santiagueña, ubicada en la provincia de Santiago del Estero. Los resultados del proceso de investigación indican que dicha identidad fue asignada y apropiada por los pobladores locales en el contexto de un vertiginoso cambio de orden social generado por el arribo del capital obrajero y migrantes inteligidos por la gente del lugar en términos de "gringos" y "turcos". En otras palabras, el artículo argumenta que el contraste con "gringos" y "turcos" fue lo que permitió la adopción discursiva de una identidad como "criollo" proveniente del mundo literario de fines del siglo XIX y la formación de una matriz identitaria en el plano local.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Criollo; matriz identitaria; alterización.

HOW TO QUOTE
Concha, P. (2021). The "criollo" and his others. The formation of an identity matrix in the Chaco santiagueño. *Culturales*, 9, e534. https://doi.org/10.22234/recu.20210901.e534

Introduction

The main activity of these towns was logging, so lumber entrepreneurs from abroad set up sawmills and charcoal kilns. The natives of the place, overnight find themselves turned into workers of the Turks (Syrian-Lebanese). This copeño, subjected to the Turkish owner, is the area prototype of the Argentine criollo who was subjected to the foreigner who arrived with airs of superiority, trampling and enslaving the criollo that emerged during the Spanish colonization (always with the unrestricted support of the governments) ... when this man encounters the triumphant foreigner, he self-isolates and feels frustrated, and this has marked him with such an inferiority complex (Mansilla, 2013, p. 8).

In the course of the last decade, the identity category "criollo" began to be questioned from the perspective of history and anthropology. This brought into discussion a strongly established historical identity, through which multiple and heterogeneous non-white groups of rural origin were represented in a unified way. In anthropology, the reemergence (Rodríguez, 2017) of ethnicities that were considered extinct in different Argentine provinces stoked interest in the historical composition of rural popular sectors in the long term (Islas, 2002) (Pizarro, 2006) (Rodríguez, 2008) (Escolar, 2007) (Rodríguez, 2017). However, these ethnographic studies analyzed how subaltern subjects from those provinces declared "without Indians since the colony" were alternatively whitewashed or marked in their "Indian" differences through speeches that established discontinuities or continuities between present-day "criollos" and pre-Columbian ethnic groups. In a similar sense, historiographic productions (Prieto, 2006) (Chamosa, 2012) (Adamovsky, 2012) contributed to denaturalize the idea -or ideology-, deeply rooted during the 20th century, that the "criollo" identity essentially referred to a truly Argentinian subject born of colonial miscegenation. [1] On the contrary, they showed that it was a contemporary discursive lie that provided ambiguous imaginaries to different political projects during the previous century. These historiographical perspectives had the particularity that they analyzed the dynamics of production, circulation and reception of "criollista" discourses since the late

[1] According to Adamovsky (2014), while hegemonic perspectives tended to see in that miscegenation processes of whitening, pertaining to a white and European national imaginary, other alternative representations noted the preeminence of the indigenous.

nineteenth century in Argentina and that they introduced the matter of racialized phenotypic marks as an interpretative variable in a country that perceived itself as non-racist.

I believe that situating myself in dialogue with both perspectives can be useful to explore through what process "criollo" became a powerful mode of self-ascription in a specific region of the Argentine province of Santiago del Estero, where it still maintains an important presence among rural popular sectors. Based on the ethnographic articulation (Rockwell, 2009) of memories and an archival corpus, the article analyzes how the "criollo" identity was formed and reconfigured in a marginal social space such as the northern extreme of the Chaco santiagueño[2] (Bilbao, 1964) in the first four decades of the twentieth century[3], a region that in only four decades went from being an indigenous frontier at the end of the nineteenth century to become a space marked by the massive logging of local tree species and the overexploitation of native populations as poorly paid wage earners in the -wrongly named- "labor industry". As shown in Figure 1, the northern end of the Chaco santiagueño covers the current departments of Copo and Alberdi:

[2] The Gran Chaco Argentino is currently the largest forest extension and the largest biomass reservoir in the country. Within this great region is located the Chaco Semiárido or Chaco Seco where the departments of Copo and Alberdi are located.

[3] The labor industry had its expansion cycle in the first four decades of the twentieth century, after which it systematically contracted, leaving high unemployment rates and generating migrations.

Figure 1. Map of the province of Santiago del Estero, Argentina.

In the article I argue that this label was assigned by state forces -as the only possible form of ascription to the national symbolic- and appropriated by the subalterns of the area in the context of a sudden change of social order, encouraged by capitalist expansion, in which differentiations were generated regarding a series of others who are necessary participants in the configuration of an identity matrix or cartography very well established in the local common sense. On the other hand, the movement of alterization was towards the "Chaco Indians", with whom our participants shared scenarios of border control, brutal forms of capitalist exploitation and with whom there was a blurred border both in cultural practices and phenotypical marks. Likewise, those who played a decisive role in the "criollo" affirmation were those migrants from outside the region, codified in the local world of the countryside in terms of "gringos" and "turcos", who arrived to the region within the framework of the development of the labor capital at the beginning of the twentieth century in a broader context of massive reception of foreign migrant population by Argentina.

Some conceptual considerations

During the last decades, the identity category "criollo" began to be discussed in the social sciences from disciplines such as history and anthropology. The historiographic production of Adamvosky (2012) took up some of the lines already traced by Prieto (2006) and Chamosa (2012) to sustain as a central thesis that -although criollismo served as a powerful unifying discourse frequently supportive of the process of discursive whitening among the country's population- it also conveyed alternative perspectives regarding the non-white population of popular sectors that were omnipresent in contemporary Argentina. In this way, it contributed to subtly undermine the hegemonic narrative of the "melting pot" that represented the "Argentine race" as the result of a historical fusion, whose corollary was a white and European nation. This ambivalence was possible as the multiple narratives that evoked the criollo confusingly agglutinated Hispanic narratives with others that portrayed the non-white and non-European origin of subaltern collectives.

As Adamovsky (2014) argues, through school and massive media, popular sectors of rural origin found themselves at the beginning of the century codified through a label of ambiguous connotations. And, possibly, confusion became a powerful weapon to disguise origins for those who could mimic social, political, cultural and aesthetic prescriptions attributed to being "criollo". By recognizing themselves and being selected by this identity, they entered the national cemetery through a sort of "backdoor" that welcomed them in a marginal way within a dominant symbolic order, giving them a limited, unstable and even provisional membership, as they were effectively perceived as racially and morally inferior to foreigners of European origin. In the same way, on a material level, they were compulsively incorporated into the last layers of the salaried society -when they were paid- after many of them were dispossessed of their lands in their places of origin. Basically, being recognized as "criollo" meant, between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, having a higher status than the Indian, but considerably lower than the rest of the social segments of the country.

From the symbolic point of view, the welcoming of the "criollo" was growing in intensity after the folkloric movement (Chamosa, 2012) -developed with the stamp of the Centennial generation[4]- asserting its status as part of a conservative cultural nationalism, turning it into an emblem and symbol of liturgical authenticity. This wide-ranging discursive movement, which in principle was promoted and financed by provincial elites -in the framework of a dispute with the porteño elites regarding state resources capable of subsidizing different sectors of the national economy-, was the instigator for a symbolic inversion of the negative status implied by the nickname "criollo", which did not mean that in daily practice they mitigated the racialized forms of contempt towards the non-white segments of society. In later decades, peronism also drew from these nationalist currents that idealized the "criollo", although thematizing in a very marginal way the phenotypical differences and accentuating the "spiritual" ones, since the movement agglutinated labor sectors of heterogeneous origins (Adamovsky, 2014).

According to Adamovsky (2014), by the mid-twentieth century, criollismo and "criolla" identity had been definitively installed among popular sectors, providing them with topical stereotypes through which they could imagine themselves as part of an idyllic past prior to the arrival of foreigners, which they longed for and restored through different folkloric practices. This attachment to such an idealized speech perhaps allowed mitigating the fact of low-intensity factual memberships based on highly racialized cultural and phenotypical aspects, from which the "criollo" segments were approximated to those who, by the way, made up the constitutive outside in a white, European and civilized national imaginary, that is, the "savage Indian" of the frontier. Agents whom the Argentine State turned into enemies par excellence since the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when the processes of conquest of the interior "deserts" of the Chaco and Patagonia began.

Similarly, the contributions of historiography of the popular sectors have pointed out that the reception of the category "criollo" was popularized, for its part, within the framework of migratory waves mostly of European origin and, to a lesser extent, from the Middle East, mainly from Syria and Lebanon (*Aventura, trabajo y poder. Sirios y libaneses*

[4] Centennial generation and later many folklorists sponsored by provincial elites (Chamosa, 2012).

en Santiago del Estero, 1880-1980, de Alberto Tasso). In fact, it was the sharp phenotypic contrast between the "native" population and the "foreigners", within the framework of dramatic transformations of the social and cultural order, towards the end of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century, which led to the adoption of this new identity category among populations considerably heterogeneous in their historical composition, which was used as a protective emblem against the racialized perception of migrants from other latitudes, who often saw "Indians" among those segments that struggled not to be perceived as such.

Currently, the development of these critical perspectives allows the reinterpretation of social relations taking "race" as a variable of analysis or, more precisely, the processes of racialization based on particular historical conjunctures, thus avoiding the adoption of *a priori* historical logics. As Hall (1980) argues, comprehending this phenomenon consists of understanding the historical conditions under which perceptual differences between groups with contrasting characteristics become socially active signifiers in the construction of inequalities and what intensities they acquire in a given social formation. The author then analyzed how a stereotyped and particularly racialized identity matrix was formed in the context of historical transformations that led to processes of differentiation and stratification in the Chaco santiagueño.

Methodological approach

Although the aforementioned contributions are useful as conceptual and historical frameworks, I consider it necessary to warn that both the circulation and the popular reception of criollos discourses in different social spaces and contexts cannot be generalized or extrapolated from a look without a geopolitical perspective (Martinez, 2019). As documented by different ethnographies produced locally in the last decades in Argentina (Villagrán, 2012) (Gordillo, 2010) (Escolar, 2007) (Gordillo, 2018), the reception of popular identity signifiers must be localized and indexed to multi-scalar processes (Martinez, 2019). This implies relating situated historical experiences with scales of sub-provincial, provincial, national and global orders, thus integrating local dynamics to

hegemonic orders that affect them. Ultimately, the methodological challenge in this text is to show how a hegemonic order of national scale can be distributed and configured in social-particular and localized space.

Situated from a historical and ethnographic methodological perspective (Rockwell, 2009) the writing was acquiring body in a reciprocity between fieldwork and formation of an archival corpus (Troulliot, 2017). This raised the need for an interpretative dialectic between the narratives collected during my fieldwork -in the Chaco region of Santiago between 2014 and 2019, through participant observation techniques and in-depth interviews- and a corpus composed of a series of heterogeneous texts in which these identity differences were mentioned. The archive consists of a series of diverse writings whose common pattern is that they refer to the reality of the Chaco santiagueño and were produced by agents who were part of that social space at different times in its history. In the same way, this reciprocity between field and archive is interpreted in terms of a dialogue with historiographic productions that address the structural transformations between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the new millennium.

The development of the northernmost part of the Chaco santiagueño: migratory dislocation, the labor regime, and the state invention of the "criollo"

> El Bracho was formed by houses made of sticks and mud [...] there were no commercial houses, nor gringos, as there are now [...]. El Fuerte was about a hundred meters from the barracks and another hundred from the chapel [...]. The place of the shootings was about three hundred meters from the chapel and the ground was always covered with fresh blood (El Liberal, 1910, p. 19).

Until the early years of the twentieth century, the Chaco santiagueño was a completely unknown place for the state elites, a real wall of forests cartographically represented as *terrae incognitae* in the maps of the time. However, since the first decades of the twentieth century, a series of drastic reconfigurations have taken place that have drastically changed the modes of sociability in this frontier area. Three historical events converged in a decisive way in this new territorial arrangement from which this region,

previously considered a "desert", became one of the most important productive centers of the province.

The first of these occurred between 1884 and 1904 (Tasso, 2007) and consisted of the territorial incorporation to Santiago del Estero of what later became known as Chaco santiagueño: almost a third of the current provincial territory to the east of the Salado River, a space that belonged until then to the National Territory of Chaco in jurisdictional terms, and was under indigenous control until the end of the nineteenth century. In fact, this region served as a frontier social space until military policies, deployed by the emerging Argentine state between 1870 and 1885, managed to suppress inter-ethnic conflicts by shifting the border from the Salado River to the Bermejo (Spota, 2010). And much of the newly conquered territory was divided as spoils of war between the provinces of Salta, Santiago and Santa Fe.

Simultaneously to the territorial attachment, the second event consisted of the migration of a heterogeneous mass of frontier agents historically settled in the vicinity of the Salado River, who moved towards the interior of this geography recently expropriated from the Chaqueños ethnic groups (Bilbao, 1964). Finally, the third determining event was the joint expansion of forestry establishments and railroads, which allowed the incorporation of these *hinterlands* into the logic of capitalist production (Tasso, 2007). In this section we will begin with this last event and then return to the second.

As Tasso (2007) affirms, the arrival of labor capital was a turning point that led to the creation of a new geographic, economic-productive, and cultural center of gravity[5]. The agroforestry complexes or obrajes consisted of locations situated deep in the Chaqueño forest, from which red quebracho wood was mainly extracted to obtain different products such as sleepers, round logs, posts, firewood and charcoal[6].

During the process of construction development, the brand new railroad stations became centers of reference for exchange and sociability. Around them, increasingly

[5] As Bilbao (1964) points out, obraje and transportation are always linked due to the characteristics of the product.

[6] The vegetation consists of deciduous forests and its composition is mainly accompanied by quebrachos (*aspidosperma quebracho-blanco and Schinopsisis lorentzei*), carob trees (*Prosopis nigra and Prosopis alba*) and the mistol (*Ziziphus mistol*).

numerous nodal towns developed in terms of demographic density, bringing together material and human flows of workers waiting to be employed, foremen, contractors, foreign traders, construction and railroad authorities, state agents, etc. The northernmost part of the Chaco santiagueño (Bilbao, 1964), conformed by the current departments of Alberdi and Copo, was the last region of the province to be "colonized" and abused by this productive regime, between 1910 and 1935, approximately. The two main towns of this new sub-region of Chacosantiagueña were Campo Gallo and Monte Quemado, small centers that became the respective departmental capitals of Alberdi and Copo.

The extraction, production and transfer of products were carried out by subaltern "paisanos" who until a few decades ago oscillated between multiple subsistence strategies and trades, from hunting/gathering, small-scale cattle raising, wetland or dryland agriculture, to working on local ranches and seasonal migrations to other regions (Palomeque, 1993). Many of them were also forced to be militiamen in forts and frontier forts in order to prevent the advance of Chaqueños ethnic groups (Rossi, 2004). Many of them were also forced to be militiamen in forts and frontier forts in order to prevent the advance of Chaqueños ethnic groups (Rossi, 2004). However, in this new social system they were reconverted into axemen, carriers, rounders, receivers and loaders; workers generally laboring in teams or groups, who were paid on a piecework basis - per unit produced and not per work time - by using "food vouchers" instead of real money, and were forced to purchase consumer goods from the workplace suppliers (Dargoltz, 1991) (Tasso, 2007), (Martinez, 2008).

The second event to be considered in this section -occurring in an overlapping manner and related to the advent of the obrajes - was that this area of impenetrable forest, incorporated into the province between 1884 and 1904 (Tasso, 2007), was populated by numerous contingents of internal migrants, who, until then, had inhabited scattered settlements located in areas almost always close to the beds of the Salado, Ureña and Horcones rivers, in the former departments of Copo 1° and Copo 2°.[7]

[7] In this border region at the end of the eighteenth century, the reduction of the Vilela ethnic group was in charge of the Jesuit order, at first, and after the expulsion it remained in the hands of the Franciscans.

This migratory phenomenon, present in the northernmost part of Chacosantiagueño from 1910 onwards, had actually begun to develop some decades earlier along the southern and middle reaches of the Chaco santiagueño. With such displacement, the dominant patterns of territorial occupation forged during the pre-Hispanic period and the colonial frontier were completely torn apart (Bilbao, 1964) (Concha Merlo, 2019). Leaving behind a life that revolved around the riverbeds they were making incursions into the interior of the semi-arid southern Chaco to populate a space with zero surface riverbeds. Some of them organized risky expeditions with the aim of founding scattered settlements in places with better ecological conditions for the multiple activities developed. Others did it to "conchabarse" in the timber works that began to spread after the construction of the railroad.

How can we trace the sociological face of those who were transported from the Salado to the depths of the impenetrable Chaco? In a letter written by Antonino Taboada[8] to his brother, the former military chief of the frontier, he assured him that he had been unjustly accused for the montonera uprisings in Los Copos. The reason given was that, in this region, as in many other places of the campaign, the uprisings had not been led by their allies, "the important people of the countryside", but by a "desperate peasant", a "shameless rabble of low rank" disgusted by the persecution and violence committed against them and their families (Carrizo, 2014). From the data available from the 1869 and 1895 census, we can interpret this gap between "countrymen" and "important people of the rural areas" in the following way. On the one hand, the agents with the highest status in the Salado area were those who owned cattle in large quantities as a source of wealth, given that property never had fixed limits or a determining weight in this frontier space;

[8] The Taboada family maintained hegemony in the province during the second half of the nineteenth century. Manuel Taboada was governor on different occasions, and Antonino Taboada was in charge of the military organization of the province. He directed the Salado frontier and was in charge of different forts and fortresses.

the hill was a place of common use for different activities. Within each population, those who owned the largest stock of "ranch land" were called "principals" (Bilbao, 1964).[9]

In Argentina, the agro-export model involved the productive development of a particular region of the country, the Pampas, which was inserted in the world market as one of the main exporters of raw materials, mainly meat and grains since the end of the nineteenth century (Barsky & Gelman, 2009). The humid pampas consolidated its position as the world's leading exporter of frozen meat by becoming the supplier par excellence of the European markets, from 23,286 to 436,859 tons per year in 1914. According to the 1914 Cattle Census, Argentina had a total of 25,866,763 cattle, 80% of which were concentrated in this region: Buenos Aires (9,090,536), Santa Fe (3,179,260), Corrientes (3,543,395), Entre Ríos (2,334,372), and Córdoba (2,540,313). Meanwhile, other regions where cattle raising had had an important weight during the nineteenth century, were relegated from the system and began to lose relative importance, without disappearing. A specific case of relegation was the province of Santiago del Estero, whose cattle production continued to be carried out in the traditional way, without technological improvements, in open fields, and its commercialization was limited to small regional exchange networks.

While the province of Santiago del Estero had a total of 757,352 heads in 1914, this border region had 65,034 heads, which represented almost 9% of the total provincial stock. These "principals" marketed their cattle in neighboring provinces and to Bolivia, based on exchange networks that had been woven during the nineteenth century (Palomeque, 1993).

Gil Rojas, a descendant of a wealthy family -he later became a school teacher- from Los Copos, pointed out in *El Ckaparilo* (Gil Rojas, El Ckaparilo, 1954) that those who depended on "principals" owed him "slave submission" (Bilbao, 1964), and in his first book he describes an order structured around relations of deference and obligations between subordinates and masters. With greater or lesser intensity, depending on the number of cattle that each "principal" owned, networks were configured around him composed of

[9] The formation of modern agriculture in Argentina took place between 1880 and 1914, with the development of the agro-export model, from which Argentina's exports came to represent 32% of South America's total.

sons, servants, entenados, attachés and laborers who contributed with their work and were paid according to specific obligations for each case, the latter were partially remunerated with money (Bilbao, 1964). On the other hand, in the Copeña society of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in addition to the subordinates dependent on these ranches, there were the "countrymen" of "low rank" whose subsistence strategies and trades were described above.

In the book *Escuela y Patriotismo* (1938), Medardo Moreno Saravia[10], a school inspector of Copeño origin, described himself as "shalako"[11] or "saladino". These categories with a strong negative charge referred to a way of life that oscillated between swamp agriculture on the banks of the Salado River - a "distant and wild" place - and hunting as a means of subsistence (Moreno Saravia, 1938, p. 194). As an inspector, Moreno Saravia warned the authorities in speeches and journalistic notes about the difficulties of civilizing a population that moved seasonally from the "parajes" (where the schools were located) to the "bañados" (where the main activities such as farming and harvesting were carried out). He also warned how this type of circumstances generated the possibility of "the triumph of an atavistic-indigenous autochthonism" (Moreno Saravia, 1938, p. 187). In the same way, through different speeches made in the brand new schools of Los Copos (1st and 2nd), the Copeño community was urged to keep away from their lives savage behaviors, generally illustrated in relation to the negative image of the savage Indian. For example, during the inauguration of a school in Copo 1º, the neighbors who attended the ceremony were addressed as follows:

[10] Due to unknown circumstances, Moreno Saravia was transferred in his childhood to the Santo Domingo convent in the city of San Miguel de Tucumán. After learning to read and write in this religious institution, he enters the Juan Bautista Alberdi Normal School (recently founded). Once he finished elementary school, he went to the teachers' college in Paraná where he was trained as a teacher. The book Escuela y Patriotismo compiles a series of school speeches and journalistic notes published during his tenure as school inspector in Los Copos between 1901 and 1910.

[11] While the category "paisano Saladino" appears in Alejandro Gancedo's descriptive memoirs of 1885, the category "shalako" or "chalaco", generally translated from Quichua as "from the Salado River", I find it for the first time in the newspaper El Chaqueño (1921) in feminine form as "chalaca", in a newspaper article of 1914. The category shows a certain difference of these countrymen from the Salado River with respect to the rest of the countrymen of the province in terms of civility.

> Religion is not enough, a cultured brain is also indispensable as an instrument, especially in the new peoples of Latin origin or grafted on indigenous stock [...] Woe to the ignorant who do not take advantage of culture! As refractory Indians, they will be repelled in the end, until they die of ignominy, consumed even by the very matter they animated; the envelope will have swallowed the soul, the vessel will have absorbed the liquid (Moreno Saravia, 1937, p. 36).

It should be noted that the difficulty for the development of a cultured brain among the new peoples, such as the Argentines, could be based on their Latin origin - implicitly contrasted to the Anglo-Saxon in this *Sarmientina* vision - or the fact that civilized culture was grafted onto indigenous bodies. "Refractory Indians" were those who allowed themselves to be consumed by the impulses of a body dangerously dissolving civilization. Hence Moreno Saravia saw the triumph of a certain atavistic indigenous autochthonism over a population that during the nineteenth century was marked as "Indian" by different travelers who traveled through the region.

In spite of evidencing a feeling of otherness (Escolar, 2007), Moreno himself felt a clear example that this dissolving impulse could be overcome by means of school instruction. For this reason, he encouraged the Copeño community by pointing out that "a criollo, no matter how much indigenous kishka ("thorn" in Quechua) he may have inherited, can become the most cultured, powerful, wise and beneficent of men" (Moreno Saravia, 1938, p. 187).

Thus, "criollo", an identity category that was not part of the social cartography of the place, appeared on the scene through state rituals such as school ceremonies, capable of constructing subjectivities, affects, and identities[12] linked to belonging to a nation (Blázquez, 2012). For these frontier subjects, being recognized as "criollos" simultaneously made it possible to build symbolic links with the nation and to dissociate themselves from that constitutive exterior inhabited by others with whom they could easily be confused at first glance because they spoke Quichua, hunted, fished and gathered, practiced swamp

[12] It replaced the category "paisanos", which was understood as "natural inhabitants of the country".

agriculture and, in addition, maintained integumentary characteristics perceived as indigenous.

This mystification of the Indian, however, does not only refer to hegemonic imaginaries provided by the school. In fact, behind this process of alterization with respect to the Chaqueño Indian, there are two historical experiences to be taken into account. The most remote in terms of current memories is that in many cases the ancestors of our participants were recruited as militiamen in the frontier forts during the *levas*[13] (Rossi, 2004). Less distant in time are the seasonal migrations to the Chaqueño cotton plantations where the differentiation between "criollos" and "Indians" was reinforced in practice through the assignment of hierarchies that impacted on the way in which both were paid in their salaries (Gordillo, 2010).

As we will see below, the adoption of the criollo identity intensified in the following decades as a category that served to contrast between "natives" and "foreigners" who arrived in the Chaco santiagueño between the late nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth century.

The "gringos" enter the Chaco Santiagueño

"I remember as if in a dream that, among the workers, there was a gringo, the first one to set foot in those areas" (Gil Rojas, 1962, p. 129).

From 1904 onwards, the current departments of Alberdi and Copo formed a large departmental jurisdiction known at that time as the department of Copo. Copo, despite having an area of approximately 26,000 km² in 1914 (Dirección General de Estadística, 1917), had a small population of 5,200 inhabitants, with a meager population density of 0.2 inhabitants per km². It was a largely unexplored area, where the economic activities described in the previous section prevailed. However, in 1921, Provincial Law No. 782 was passed, which established the division of the Copo Department into two departments of similar spatial magnitude: the current Alberdi Department and Copo Department.

[13] Since the colony, frontier defenses were formed with reduced "Indians" whose ethnic labels gradually disappeared. First dissolved into the legal category indio, then into "paisanos" when "indio" lost its legal status (Farberman, 2019).

The settlements that gave shape to the departmental head of Alberdi, the town of Campo Gallo, react to the arrival of the railroad and the advent of labor establishments. These two processes unfolded together after the massive purchase of these lands by the Quebrachales Tintina Sociedad Anónima Company, owned by Juilius Hasse, of Belgian origin (Dargoltz, 1991). As Dargoltz (1991) argues, Hasse's company was undoubtedly one of the largest extractive estates in the history of the province. It consisted of multiple establishments scattered over the current surface of the department of Moreno and part of the department of Alberdi, which by 1921 reckoned 360,000 hectares, even though at that time the company had sold part of the lands obtained in 1893 (González Trilla, 1921, p. 495). Later, the lands located in Alberdi were acquired by the firm Cabezas y Cía. Which, according to memories collected in the town, belonged to Marino Cabezas, whom my interlocutors remembered as a "Spanish gringo".

Towards the end of the thirties, Cabezas y Cía. concentrated great economic and political power despite not being the only extractive company in Alberdi. According to locals, one of the company's managers became in 1938 the first municipal commissioner of Campo Gallo by appointment of the provincial government. Regarding political organization, several authors have pointed out the existence of a patronage system (Tasso, 1988) or clientelist networks (Martinez, 2008) in Santiago del Estero during the first half of the twentieth century, at a time in Argentina when suffrage rights were not universal in practice. In this context, lumber mills maintained a decisive weight in the elections because, at least until the 1940s, the vote of forestry workers was fully subordinated to the interests of mill owners, despite the fact that these establishments housed about 130,000 workers in a province with approximately 500,000 inhabitants.

In this sense, as Martínez (2008) points out, the political and bureaucratic field was in a relationship of dependence with respect to the bourgeoisie of the forestry industry. During the fieldwork, many people alluded to the Santa Felisa mill of the Cabezas firm as part of a golden era of timber extraction between 1925 and 1955, while others did not fail to mention experiences of arbitrariness, referring, among other things, to extreme forms of labor exploitation and corporal punishment by foremen and police officers who

responded to the power of the mill owners. From the social and cultural point of view, the development of the obrajes extremely transformed the local world. The construction companies brought with them bosses, foremen and administrators, merchants and even railroad workers, and these were joined by representatives of state agencies such as teachers, school inspectors, police, etc. Between the Third National Census carried out in 1914 (Dirección General de Estadística, 1917) and the Fourth National Census of 1947 (Dirección Nacional de Investigaciones, Estadística y Censos, 1947), the population increased from 1,598 to 14,200 inhabitants, which shows an intercensal growth of 48%. Besides, of the population censused in 1947, 1,710 (12%) were people born outside the province, of which 95 were of European origin and 43 of these were born on the Asian continent.

Many of these agents, who came to occupy places of prestige in the newly-formed towns such as Campo Gallo, brought with them forms of urban sociability and phenotypical characteristics that contrasted markedly with the local inhabitants. Despite their origin differences of each of these newly arrived agents, in the local perspective they were codified under the label "gringo". Gil Rojas pointed out in the 1960s the distinction between the "gringus" and the "cara i gringu" (Gil Rojas, 1962, p. 46) that established a difference between those who were in fact foreigners and those who acted as if they were in order to endow themselves with greater status. In this sense, the category was much broader than in other areas of the region, such as the Santa Fe Chaco, where "gringo" implied a Friulan origin in addition to phenotypical and classist diacritics.

Figure 2. Arrival of the first teacher at Campo Gallo (1919).

The 1919 photograph captures the arrival of the first teacher in Campo Gallo, Sofía Franzzini Bravo, born in Ramos Mejía, province of Buenos Aires. She was brought by a "Sabio del pueblo"[14], Riso Patrón, who for some years had been working on the reconstruction of the history of the departmental capital through the collection of archives and by interviewing older people. The first impression of the photograph is the striking contrast of groups. To the left and behind the teacher are concentrated the "paisanos", characterized by non-white phenotypical features, who are dressed in handmade hats, chiripas and barefoot. On the right side are railroad workers and a couple of prominent people from Campo Gallo.

Conversely, some of these "gringos" settled in the region at the beginning of the century saw "Quechua Indians" in most of the settlers coming from the Salado, as noted by González Trilla, an intellectual of Spanish origin settled in Añatuya, who served as editor of the newspaper *El Chaqueño*[15] (González Trilla, 1921). Lochel (*El Liberal*, 1910, p. 16) of French origin, marked the differences between the quichuista paisano and the Indians of

[14] This is how the neighbors of Campo Gallo referred to Don Lucio Riso Patron

[15] Published between 1910 and 1914.

toldería, still in a wild state. Among the natives of the capital of Santiago, the issue was divided; Ricardo Rojas (1907) established differences between the Chaco Indians -tobas, mocovíes, abipones- and the paisano santiagueño, which restores a discursive antagonism formed in the late nineteenth century whose case has been worked on in other articles (Concha Merlo, 2019).

With Rojas' culturalist narrative, a mestizo imaginary was constructed that would end up being hegemonic during the twentieth century (Farberman, 2010), in which the "paisanos" or "criollos" were represented as emerging *sui generis* from the colonial crossbreeding between conquerors and remnants of the Inca civilization; aboriginal, it is true, but very advanced with respect to the savage state of the barbarian peoples of Chaqueño origin that had become political enemies of the Argentine State. With this vision, the phenotypical traits, the predominance of the Quichua language in the region and the mountainous life of the region were saved from being put on an equal footing with the ethnic groups that Gancedo (1885) had considered "bimano animals". Instead, they were recognized as santiagueños despite highlighting in them a series of moral weaknesses intrinsic to them such as "indolence" or laziness. Other contemporaries, such as Gallo Schaefer (Gallo Schaefer, 1911), were much cruder in their descriptions of both the local populations and their destiny in the community of Santiago. In reference to some obrajes near the present Campo Gallo, he stated:

> The life of the obrajeros in the mountain is very curious. They live in small huts, made of sunchos and keresene cans, in remarkable promiscuity. Most of them are indigenous people. They love quarrels and alcohol. The men use revolver and knife. And blood events tend to be frequent. These aborigines constitute the base of the labor force in the forest exploitations. They speak Quichua, their native language [...] If the needs of this race were greater or more difficult to practice, it would have already disappeared [...] but they escape this fate because their food consists of corn [...] and when corn is lacking, the mountains provide different fruits and wild honey; eggs of country birds; and the land, everywhere, various animals. This race, in the author's humble concept, will belong to history [...] suffocated by the agglomeration of other superior races that will snatch its dominion, fulfilling the Darwinian laws of the struggle for existence and natural selection [...]

> However, it is the job of a good government to preserve and protect this race that is already dying. Is the only one made for the great fatigues on our soil (Gallo Schaefer, 1911, p. 32).

From the perspective of Carlos Gallo Schaefer (1911), "criollo" was a nickname that applied to those with proven Hispanic roots, while the axemen of the obrajes were simply an "aboriginal" race inferior to the new European population that arrived in the country during that context, whose extinction had not yet been consummated by the simple fact that they could subsist with limited resources through small-scale agriculture and hunting/gathering. However, these "aborigines", who were in decline, were irreplaceable pieces in the labor mechanics of the beginning of the century, since they constituted a labor force resistant to the climate and the environment, capable of tolerating ravenous forms of exploitation in unfavorable contexts, and for a lower pay than the common workers, since the access to the resources of the forest made it possible to acquire the necessary goods to complement domestic reproduction.

If the vision of a Santiago intellectual such as Gallo Schaefer (1911) is important, it is because the explicitness of his evolutionist and racialized perception diverges markedly from the classification system mobilized by established intellectual works such as *El país de la selva* (Rojas, 1907). If Rojas presented an idealized image of the frontier peasants by describing them as the product of a *sui generis* synthesis between high civilizations such as the Spanish and the Inca (Farberman, 2010), Gallo Schaefer expressed a cruder and more strikingly concordant view of the forced labor regime in the context of the expansion of labor capital in these recently colonized frontier spaces of the southern Chaco.

The hierarchy constructed by the hegemonic identity regimes consolidated between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Briones, 1998), which disseminated the imaginary of a national subject "*bajado de los barcos*", contributed to the white/European becoming a desirable signifier while the non-white/non-European became a sign of abjection, a specter that generated enough rejection as to dream of its extinction at the hands of the new waves of migrants arriving in the country during the first decade of the twentieth century. As in many other places in the country, this discursive dynamic

provided a general framework from which people coded as "gringos" -or at least "cari i gringo"-, mostly from the urban world, were symbolically positioned above the local population. However, the hierarchy was not only structured around the symbolic capital granted by phenotypical characteristics. In fact, the majority of these outsiders dragged by the labor activity usually occupied positions of higher hierarchy in these emerging spaces of capital, while the locals of subaltern origin could be considered as workers of the obraje.

The "Turks" become employers

> The locals did not call the Turco this way, but respectfully called him "Patron", because he was the only large merchant in the town, who provided them with merchandise and everything the people needed, in exchange for their regional products. And his prosperous monopolistic business was done by following a trail that went from the city to the mountain (Mansilla, 2012, p. 143).

Just as the Alberdi department achieved an intercensal growth of 48% in terms of population, the Copo department was second in the provincial podium with 35% (Dirección Nacional de Investigaciones, Estadística y Censos, 1947). In fact, it went from 3,692 to 13,619 inhabitants between the population censuses of 1914 and 1947; these are 1,700 people born outside the province, of which 102 were European and 20 were Asian. Monte Quemado became the departmental capital in 1931 and displaced other historical jurisdictions in the region by virtue of the fact that it became the main railroad station of the Chaqueña Metan-Barranqueras line that linked the provinces of Salta and Santiago del Estero with the National Territory of Chaco. However, the process of colonization of the Copo department gained strength in the mid-thirties.

Actually, the decade of the 1930s was marked by an important transformation in the form of forest exploitation at the provincial level and of the capitalist actors that invested in the forestry industry. In this regard Mansilla (2013) pointed out that:

> The foreign immigrants that populated this area were mostly the so-called Turcos (Syrians and Lebanese) such as, for example, the Auíl, Salomón, Auad, Hazam and Julian, among others. Or the Turcos (Arabs) such as the Aguel, Rufail or Ade. The Turcos, mostly, dedicated themselves to logging [...] Very few Gringos came to Monte Quemado (p. 36).

Based on the Copeño historian's statement, it is necessary to ask ourselves why the Syrian-Lebanese or Arab migration was more relevant in the history of the Copo department when statistics clearly show a European predominance among migrants, and how this statement is related to the transformations in the labor economy.

The decade of the thirties was a turning point in the history of the labor regime. From the mid-thirties onwards, with increasing speed, new forms of exploitation began to appear with medium and small farms in both the Alberdi and Copo departments (Martinez, 2008), a new form of obrajes was made possible by reorganizations in the state policies of access to land. In this new stage, marked by the global crisis of 1929, there was an important change in the way of acquiring farms: if previously there was a predominant mode of acquisition based on the purchase of titles at low costs, after the 1930s the land lease system prevailed (Martinez, 2008). This transformation was part of a policy aimed at encouraging the growth of a stagnant and decreasing activity that was the main source of income for the province. Most of the investors were entrepreneurs settled in the province who had managed to accumulate sufficient capital in other activities such as commerce or agriculture. Some of them were traders of Syrian or Lebanese origin who were nicknamed "turcos"[16].

Tasso (1988) pointed out that most of the Syrians and Lebanese, "turcos" for "criollos" and "gringos", arrived in the area as peddlers from the early years of the twentieth century. Different documents and memoirs referring to the first decades of the twentieth century show that trade in this post-border region was not an easy business, in fact, they show a certain persistence in "bloody deeds" that had as victims "turcos" merchants. Sometimes with bandits that crossed the Chaco fleeing from the authorities, from time to time with local families unwilling to pay for the products acquired, the truth is that they were often the target of robberies, murders, and mistreatment (Moreno Saravia, 1938). Gil Rojas, who narrates how a relative of his murdered a "turco" in a similar altercation, regretted in the fifties the permanence of these "skillful and calculating" who

[16] Most of the Syrians and Lebanese who migrated in these years had passports of Ottoman origin and were processed as "turcos".

entered "as friends" "where they saw little cowboys" and showed up to collect with "winchester in hand" (Gil Rojas, 1954, p. 104):

> In those distant times and places, the merchant turcos began to arrive, first with their small loads on donkeys, then on carriages, and finally on trucks as it happens nowadays, that is to say, as the native criollo opened paths to go from one town to another, to the distant stations of the F.C., or to enter the desert, to conquer it, to subjugate its bravery, the turco was entering with his half tongue, but with skill to deceive this criollo who until then remained healthy in body and soul, respectful, united and orderly in the midst of his crass ignorance (Gil Rojas, 1954, p. 103).

Regarding this fragment, it is necessary to highlight two elements. The first is related to the stereotypical self-perception of Gil Rojas as an "autochthonous criollo" dedicated to work in contrast to the "Turco" devoted to increasing his coffers through commercial deceit. This self-affirmation of Gil Rojas's identity is in solidarity with an idyllic representation of a past prior to the arrival of the "turcos" -and all the transformations implied in this process-, without social conflicts in that patriarchal ranch configuration where the relations of respect or deference towards the "principals" were described, paradoxically, as a "slave submission" (Gil Rojas, 1962, p. 104). It is possible that this idealized perspective of the past developed by Gil Rojas is directly linked to the marginal membership of the Copeño master in circles of provincial intellectuals of folkloric style such as Di Lullo and Canal Feijóo. This hypothesis is not only supported by the different references to the friendship links that united him with the former and certain correspondence with the latter, but also by the fact that his two books are explicitly offered as reliable materials destined to folklorists interested in knowing how life went on until the beginning of the twentieth century.

Secondly, the fragment summarizes a trajectory that Alberto Tasso also generalizes for Arab migrants. These Syrian-Lebanese traders who had arrived in the area as peddlers – "mercachifles", in the words of Gil Rojas- at the beginning of the 20th century, in a logic of gradual ascent that is repeated in different areas of the rural world of Santiago,

progressively established their businesses in towns and villages. In these "general stores" they used to receive native peasant products in exchange for goods in asymmetrical barters, and they gradually formed small zonal trade monopolies based on access to means of transport to move products to other places. In addition, since the 1930s they began to diversify into the extraction of labor based on the capital accumulated in previous periods (Martinez, 2008). It was then that the "Turcos" began to acquire the status of employers and also positioned themselves permanently in the field of local power.

Indeed, Tasso (Tasso, 1988) argued that since the 1930s, the Arab community began to transform its growing commercial power into concrete political influence under the leadership of Rosendo Allub. The Syrians and Lebanese established not only a community with inward-looking corporate traits but also wove a complex web of exchanges and alliances, which blended with the cultural forms of local rural life, and many of them were inserted as employers, to whom gestures of deference were owed.

Durval Abdala, a local writer of Syrian-Lebanese origin, depicted in his novel *Criado Braulio* (Abdala, 1962) the harsh stereotype of the "Turco" Salomon, a greedy local merchant, the most important in town, who in the midst of a quarrel between neighbors did not hesitate to describe the natives as "negros piojosos" ("lousy blacks") (Abdala, 1962, p. 53). This assessment by Abdala suggests not only the disgust of "turcos" for "criollos", but also a certain incorporation of the stereotype of the "turco" as a ruthless trader by the Syrians and Lebanese themselves. Another oriental voice was that of Luciano Vitar, a schoolteacher who described in *Rincón de mi patria* (Vitar, 1946) the peasant women as "chinas" and the "paisana" or "criolla" people as "chalacos"[17], a "suffering race", "attentive and submissive". In addition, he referred to the "native" people as:

> He has nothing of foresight, he is a completely different character from the foreigner. The latter generally arrives poorer than our native, but with a spirit rich in hope and willingness to work, he already has that peculiar gift of being farsighted and it is very common to see the foreigner, with his store, others with his finca or his small farm, etc. While the criollo has not yet built his ranch, the foreigner has acquired good positions and maintains

[17] Or "Shalako".

> superiority over the native; as immediate conscience of this material superiority comes the spiritual one and nobody can argue that generally the foreigners occupy the most important social or political functions in case all the populations of the interior of the province (Vitar, 1946, p. 21).

During the early years of Peronism, in the perspective of people of Arab origin, this differentiation between "natives" and "foreigners" was constituted as a hierarchy in which the latter were weighted in a place of intellectual and moral superiority, against a background of economic and political inequalities that seemed to justify such symbolic asymmetries. But Vitar did not only find unworthy moralities among the "natives". In fact, he did not fail to highlight gestures of attentiveness and submission as part of the "paisano" disposition, showing that this feeling of foreign superiority was reciprocated through deferential bonds.

An important group of Syrians and Lebanese consolidated themselves as businessmen in a context in which the economic returns of the labor system had decreased, which generated a greater adjustment on the laborers. They were also inserted in a moment in which the extraction of coal and firewood was predominant, which had serious ecological consequences and brought with it severe pulmonary diseases. Since the forties, the axemen have been working in the obraje only to obtain merchandise, while they migrated to other neighboring provinces in search of salaried work: the sugarcane harvest in Tucumán and the cotton harvest in Chaco (Bilbao, 1964).

The "turcos" were not the only ones who rose through the ranks by setting up small and voracious plantations based on leasing. According to data from 1986, a peak moment of crisis and massive migrations to urban centers, only 42.9% (45) of the large forestry producers were of Arab origin -of which 17 resided in the area of Tintina (5), Campo Gallo (5) and Monte Quemado (7), against 21 who did not respond to this identification and resided in the provincial capital (Tasso, 1988). Although they did not account for half of the large forestry producers in the region, the label "turco" tremendously condensed a social transformation of enormous characteristics that, in turn, catapulted and sustained the

Syrians and Lebanese at the top of the social space, which generated immense hardships among the workers.

These circumstances translate into a generalized contempt behind the scenes from "criollos" to "turcos" who are considered guilty not only of labor exploitation and of being voracious bosses, but also of environmental deterioration. The reason for the disdain on the part of the "criollos" is also rooted in another cultural circumstance that takes us back to the first half of the twentieth century. Indeed, the Syrian-Lebanese never constituted the immigration model desired by the provincial elites of traditional families in the first half of the century, as were the European migrants. For this reason, the nouveau riche of Asian origin were significantly stigmatized, even though they had positioned themselves in terms of economic capital. However, this behind-the-scenes rejection was reversed by deference in the public arena; hence, as discussed in the heading, peasants referred to them as "turco" or "patrón" depending on the circumstances in which they found themselves.

Conclusion

The article analyzed the process by which the "criollo" category was affirmed as a social identity in the departments of Alberdi and Copo during the first forty years of the twentieth century. This research was carried out following a relational approach that allowed the explanatory articulation between hegemonic processes on a national scale and regional historical events such as those that occurred in the northernmost part of the Chaco santiagueño.

Far from being a traditional and authentically Argentine identity, born of a *sui generis* synthesis that occurred in the context of the colony, as the culturalist imaginary of the first half of the twentieth century maintained, criollismo was a contemporary invention with a great power of recruitment among vast and diverse popular sectors of rural origin throughout the length and breadth of Argentina. It operated as a powerful device of whitening and homogenization among extremely heterogeneous non-white collectives.

The sources used show that the main mediators between these cultural movements and the popular sectors of the Chaco santiagueño were state officials linked to the educational system, especially teachers and school inspectors, who operated as reproducers of culturalist discourses of the provincial and national elites, which made possible the dissemination of the criollo identity in marginal spaces.

However, the reception of a discourse capable of claiming to be authentically Argentine took place in the context of migratory waves to the country and strong transformations of the productive model, the social and cultural order of the Argentine Republic. It was in this context that the Chaco santiagueño became a space incorporated into the productive system by state policies and capital of various kinds and origins that exploited its biodiversity voraciously throughout the twentieth century. In fact, the "forestry industry" transfigured the region in just a few years, generating not only the massive incorporation of frontier populations as forestry workers or axemen, but also encouraging the arrival of migrants who contrasted significantly with the native population.

In this new scenario, the criollo identity was appropriated by the populations of the Chaco santiagueño from the arrival of a series of other foreigners or outsiders to the region, such as "gringos" (or "cari gringu") and "turcos". It was a discourse that made it possible to claim a place in the national imaginary as a legitimately Argentine subject against upstart migrants who in a few decades acquired greater status in the rural world and were characterized by stigmatizing non-white phenotypical features and native cultural practices, in addition to exercising cruel forms of labor exploitation and territorial dispossession.

Mainly, the groups categorized as "turcos" by the criollos rose socially in a short period of time and came to occupy positions of greater hierarchy in the social space. Whether as bosses of obrajes or ranches, important merchants or public officials, they came to form a network that articulated under the Syrian-Lebanese ethnic category a corporate network composed of important agents of the rural bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie. In this sense, the identities that made up this matrix involved highly

stereotyped constructions insofar as they combined ethnic, racial or cultural diacritics legitimized or delegitimized by hegemonic discourses with belonging to social classes unequally positioned in the rural social space.

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