

URBAN COWBOYS:  
AN EXAMINATION OF GAÚCHO IDENTITY FORMATION IN RIO GRANDE DO SUL, BRAZIL

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## **ABSTRACT**

This piece investigates the historical, economic, and social development of South America's cowboy, the gaúcho. Situated in southern Brazil, it tracks the emergence of a particular rural way of life and the subsequent conservative social movement established to safeguard the identity it created. It illustrates how the elites in Porto Alegre, the capital of Brazilian's southernmost state Rio Grande do Sul, separated the gaúcho from his historical home on the vast plains of the Campanha and changed him into an idealized hero of the Farroupilha Revolution of 1835, a separatist regional revolution. Applying ethnographic research methods, this project tracks the establishment of gaúcho culture and the ways in which individuals adopt an idealized characterization of it to develop meaningful regional identities in the early years of the twenty-first century. Then, it examines the relationship between four individuals' formal and informal participation in the traditionalist movement, as well as their attempts to negotiate and (re)define gaúcho identity based on their own experiences and beliefs. The thesis argues that although the traditional way of life of the gaúcho collapsed after the introduction of new technologies in the late nineteenth century, the idealized rural figure continues to be a strong source of pride for urbanites in the southernmost Brazilian state and beyond. Set in the industrial city of Caxias do Sul, this work illuminates how individuals contribute certain personal positive qualities to their understanding of gaúcho identity, while simultaneously pushing against the identity's constructed status quo.

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## INTRODUCTION

Gaúcho – for Brazilians, the word immediately conjures an image of a man on horseback, draped in loosely fitted clothes and hat while drinking *chimarrão*, a green tea stuffed in a carved-out gourd. In the United States, these South American cowboys are often associated with the plains of Argentina and Uruguay. Throughout Brazil, however, the identity refers to the natives of the country's southernmost state, Rio Grande do Sul, which occupies a curious position within the national imaginary. This piece investigates the development of the gaúcho's historical, economic, and social identity. It tracks the emergence of a particular way of life and the subsequent conservative social movement established to safeguard it. Then, it examines the relationship between four individuals' formal and informal participation in the movement, as well as their attempts to negotiate and (re)define gaúcho identity based on their own experiences and beliefs. Applying ethnographic research methods, this project tracks the establishment of the gaúcho culture and the ways in which individuals adopt it to develop meaningful regional identities in the early years of the twenty-first century.

For centuries, the cattle industry was the main economic drive of the area. At the turn of the eighteenth century, men on horseback established an economy based on the ranching of the feral cattle that roamed the plains. Consequently, with the introduction of technology like barbed wire and refrigeration, the pastoral culture that had become so synonymous with the state changed dramatically. The gaúcho, whose social, economic, and cultural identity relied solely on the rural manual labor that ranching requires, began to see the world around him shift dramatically. Pressures from Porto Alegre to modernize produced stressors within the labor market and forced many gaúchos to seek employment elsewhere.

Urban elites often discouraged the gaúcho's rural way-of-life, as they saw it as a crude, barbaric lifestyle and a hindrance to the advancement of the state's progress. However, in 1835 war broke out between the state and the Brazilian Empire – known as the Farroupilha Revolution. Due mostly to economic complaints surrounding the cattle industry, Rio Grande do Sul sought independence from the central government in Rio de Janeiro. This failed revolution spurred several political and social theories that then altered the gaúcho's position in society.

Experiencing downward social mobility in the late nineteenth century, some rural-based oligarchy began praising the failed Farroupilha Revolution and utilized it as a point of pride for the state's citizens, closely linking it to the image of the gaúcho. Later, Italian and German immigrant communities throughout the state adopted and upheld the gaúcho as an ideal persona, which successfully served as a means to unify the people of Rio Grande do Sul in contrast to both the rest of Brazil and the gauchos of Uruguay and Argentina.

Brazilian gaúcho culture grew in strength throughout the mid-twentieth century, during which time Brazil experienced rapid urbanization and industrialization. The *Movimento Tradicionalista Gaúcha* (Traditional Gaúcho Movement: MTG) sought to preserve the idealized image of the rural farmhand through the standardization of clothes, dance, rodeos, and more. To achieve this, the movement established *Centros de Tradições Gaúchas* (Centers for Gaúcho Traditions: CTG) in cities throughout the state. CTGs are rural spaces located in urban settings in which participants act out various characters wearing pre-approved outfits. Since its founding, the MTG has been an urban social movement that attempts to “recreate” and “maintain” the rural values of the past. Many who participate today are predominantly middle- and upper-class males, who possess sufficient time and

money to devote to the movement. What drives this socioeconomic group to join in a movement that idolizes the rural, working poor?

Although the gaucho culture exists in Uruguay and on the pampas of Argentina, these countries lack any formalized and organized social movement based on this rural culture. Why is there a need for a structured, rigid, and rule-based traditionalist movement, complete with required ID cards in Brazil but not in the other countries? For the past four decades, scholars have studied gaúcho culture and tradition primarily through a historical lens.<sup>1</sup> However, to understand the historical, cultural, and political situation of gaúcho today, this study tracks the on-the-ground dynamics that structure the relationships among individuals, various facets of their society, and the conceptualization of the gaúcho's multiple and shifting meanings. The ideal gaúcho persona often comes into direct conflict with other aspects of one's multifaceted, ever changing, and elaborate identity. This work presents ways in which people maneuver the awkwardness and seemingly impossibility of embodying the idealized rural past of their community while living and prospering in a twenty-first century urban scene.

This research is a valuable resource to anyone working on Brazilian identity, history, and culture, as it offers insight into how these concepts are thought of and acted out at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Gaúchos are not simply men on horseback drinking *chimarrão*. They are individuals who believe themselves to be safeguards of an iconic, authentic representation of Brazil's past. This research brings this model out of the national and regional history and into the complexity of today's many Brazils.

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<sup>1</sup>Love 1971; Slatta 1983; Bell 1998

## METHODS

My interests in gaúcho history and culture stem from experiences at an ethnographic field school during the summer of 2009 conducted by Dr. Gina Hunter. Through this, the other students and myself I attended classes at the Universidade de Caxias do Sul where we studied various aspects of Brazilian culture, history, and language. The program also promoted interactions with the local Brazilian students both inside and outside of the classroom. As undergraduate anthropology students practicing our field research skills, we were encouraged to engage with and further investigate any cultural phenomenon we found intriguing.

Most memorable were assertions that we were not “really” in Brazil and those with whom we were conversing were not “really” Brazilians. I vividly remember at first feeling misled, confused, and frustrated by the fact that my idealized summer stint in Brazil was not an “authentic” or “real” Brazilian experience. Eventually, however, I turned this initial angst into a proposed research topic, investigating exactly where I was, and with whom I was speaking – Sur-riograndians. I wanted to grasp a better understanding of what a gaúcho was and is and how they fit into the discourse of Brazilian identity.

The current research project stems from this earlier period and effectively builds on the relationships founded during that time. With the support of the Lemann Institute for Brazilian Studies and the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies, I performed ethnographic work in an attempt to better understand questions surrounding identity formation, traditionalism, and regionalism in Rio Grande do Sul, thus adding to the current historical and anthropological discourses of Brazil and Latin America at large. Emerging from my primary shock upon my first arrival to “not-Brazil,” the image of the Brazilian cowboy fascinated me

because this image did not correspond with my original idea of what it meant to be Brazilian. The initial question dealt with the reasons why and how the iconic character of the gaúcho endured into the twenty-first century with such potency. Additionally, and more specific to urban environments, I desired to know how urban cowboys, many of whom have little or no land of their own and would probably fall off a horse if they attempted to ride one, incorporate the rural labor memory of gaúchos into their city lives.

To try to address some of these inquiries, I lived in Caxias do Sul for a little more than two months. During this time, I performed numerous informal and open-ended interviews with individuals who agreed to participate in this study. All names that appear in this document are pseudonyms that I assigned to protect participants' identity. These meet-ups lasted between one and a half to two hours, sometimes more. Most took place at the local university at either a cafe, restaurant, or in a commons area, for the university was easily accessible via public transportation and the location was well known to both the interlocutors and me. All participating parties permitted the recording of the conversation(s), which I then revisited afterward, pairing it with any observations I had written in my field notes.

In addition to these interviews, I also observed how billboards, bus advertisements, and/or storefronts utilized the image of the gaúcho as a means to project a certain concept or identity. I was able to observe how the image of the gaúcho is embodied and mobilized during everyday life.

## THE HISTORICAL GAÚCHO

Where does gaúcho culture originate? How did a culture most associated with the vast plains of South America arrive in the mountain region of Rio Grande do Sul? To help understand this transition, it is first necessary to get an idea of the landscape from which it grew.

The Pampas of South America are fertile, low-lying plains that encompass the Argentinian provinces of Buenos Aires, La Pampa, Santa Fe, Entre Ríos, nearly all of the country of Uruguay, and the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul. Much of the area was disputed territory between the Spanish and Portuguese for hundreds of years during the colonial era. Numerous treaties attempted to solve the issue of the boundary between the two European powers ever since the Treaty of Tordesillas of 1494, which established a line of demarcation through modern-day Brazil granting newfound lands east of it to Portugal and lands to the west for Spain. Even though the Treaty of Ildefonso attempted to demarcate the boundaries in 1777, it was not until 1828 when the area of Banda Oriental became the sovereign state of Uruguay that the frontiers finally crystallized. Until then, as Alistair Hennessy argues in *The Frontier in Latin American History*, this borderland “had been a disputed region of marauding cattle raiders and smugglers and tended to retain this character until the latter years of the nineteenth century.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Hennessy 1978:86

## Rio Grande do Sul

The area that lies between the Uruguay River to the west and the Atlantic Ocean to the east has had forty-one different names over the centuries.<sup>3</sup> Rio Grande do Sul measures 478 miles from its eastern and western most points and about the same running north to south.<sup>4</sup> Contrary to popular impressions, the state is not an endless grass-covered plain. Researchers on the area generally accept three distinct cultural and economic regions: the Litoral, the Campanha, and the Cima da Serra.<sup>5</sup>

The Litoral is the smallest of the regions and rests along the coast. Though it contains poor soil, it is historically the most densely populated due to its location, having economic access to exports, intrastate commerce, and industry. Second, the Cima da Serra, the Serra Gaúcha, or more simply the Serra, occupies the northern section of the state. Its topography is dominated by the Paraná Plateau, which provides the area with rolling hills, and is well known for its red soil (*terra vermelha* and *terra roxa*), soil that is richer than those in the surrounding areas. For historical purposes, the Serra region may be divided into three sub-regions: the Colonial Zone, the Central Plateau, and the Missões District. The Missões District, the most relevant to the history of the gaúcho, derives its name from the Jesuit missions set up in the area in the seventeenth century. Although settlers colonized this area last, the Serra, and that of the Missões District specifically, initially provided the cattle associated with the Campanha, generally recognized as a third region of Rio Grande do Sul. The Campanha is the area south of the Serra, west of Litoral, and shares a boarder with Uruguay. This is the area that is most

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<sup>3</sup>Bell 1998:13

<sup>4</sup>Love 1971:4

<sup>5</sup>Bell 1998:15

linked with ranching in Rio Grande do Sul and Brazil at large. At the onset of its occupation, the Campanha was divided into *estâncias* (or *fazendas*) – huge ranching estates. Though today this grassland falls under Brazilian political rule, Bell argues, “portions of the region lean physiographically towards the Plata [of Argentina and Uruguay] and are seen as having more in common with parts of that region than with the rest of Brazil.”<sup>6</sup>

### Arrival of Cattle

Shortly after Europeans landed in the region, an agrarian based economy in Argentina took root. This tradition based on agro-pastoral trends was concentrated in several foci early on: the Río de la Plata west of Buenos Aires, the area of Córdoba and Tucumán further north, and the triangle made up of Asunción, Corrientes, and Entre Ríos, running along the Rios Parana and Uruguay rivers. The Jesuits, some of the earliest settlers, contributed most to the development of the gaúcho lifestyle that would come to dominate the area. This territory of the old Jesuit Province of Paraguay, including all of modern Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay share similar physical features and climate with the state of Rio Grande do Sul that allows some scholars to think of the area as a homogeneous and unified subject matter.<sup>7</sup>

The cattle introduced by the Spanish colonists in the sixteenth century multiplied and flourished in the area. Most cattle brought from the Iberian Peninsula were a hardy breed, used mostly as work animals, providing little beef and milk, but thrived once the Iberians introduced to the new environment. These Jesuit colleges often had substantial herds that they raised for

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<sup>6</sup>Bell 1998:21. For more information see: “Rio Grande do Sul” in *Campanha Gaúcha*, Bell 1998:13-33. and “The Structure of Gaúcho Society” in *Rio Grande do Sul and Brazilian Regionalism*, Love 1971:3-25.

<sup>7</sup>Cushner 1983:2-3

sale, beef consumption, and for slaughter. In the beginning, as Nicholas Cushner shows in *Jesuit Ranches and the Agrarian Development of Colonial Argentina*, most sales linked with the viceroyalty of Peru. However, before the development of an international trading system (unlike the contemporaneous trade of gold, sugar, or coffee) most of the cattle were used for local consumption. Cushner claims that according to the colleges' records, it is accurate to say people at the colleges enjoyed about one-half kilograms of meat each per day.<sup>8</sup> "On days of abstinence from meat during the year and in the Lenten Season, special foods were prescribed, which means of course that regular meatless meals were the exception rather than the rule."<sup>9</sup> It is clear that even from the beginning of Spanish presence in the area that meat and cattle were an essential part of daily life.

Obviously, settlers used cattle for more than just beef consumption, though in the eighteenth century they sold two other byproducts, the hides and the tallow (animal fat). Hides have been an important export commodity for centuries for the Río de la Plata region. During this time, groups called *vaqueros* (generally translated as "cowboys") would head south to roundup the *alzado* cattle, which they skinned and sold for money. From there, traders sent hides to Buenos Aires. Contemporaries used the money from these sales to purchase such goods as iron, sugar, tobacco, rice, and cloth, all items hard to come by at that time in Las Pampas.<sup>10</sup> This relationship between the college and the ranch (and farm) between "supplier

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<sup>8</sup>Cushner 1983:72-76

<sup>9</sup>Cushner 1983:74

<sup>10</sup>Cushner 1983:76

and producer or purchaser, between owner and distributor, and between laborer and employer” created the foundation for the agrarian structure of rural Río de la Plata region.<sup>11</sup>

As stated earlier, Spanish Jesuits originally occupied the Missões District sub-region within Rio Grande do Sul. These religious men would then head east from Paraguay in an attempt to convert the natives in the area around 1619.<sup>12</sup> During the next several decades, they established an extensive system of settlements, called reductions, throughout the territory of modern Rio Grande do Sul. As they pushed east, they encountered frequent attacks by Portuguese *bandeirantes* (pathfinders) who were attempting to enslave the local native population. Later, the Jesuits tried once more to found (or re-found) missions, and successfully established seven important ones known as the Sete Povos east of the Uruguay River. This area became known as the Missões District due to the character of the settlement.<sup>13</sup>

Consequently, Spanish Jesuits brought ranching into Rio Grande do Sul through such missions. The frequent attacks on the Jesuits by the *bandeirantes* encouraged the livestock to disperse. These escaped cattle wandered throughout broad areas, running wild, eventually spreading east from the Missões District, across the Serra, and south into the Campanha. At first, raiders focused on human captives; they were Portuguese frontiersmen searching for natives to sell as slaves. Before long, the raiders recognized the great opportunity that had developed on the Central Plateau. The Portuguese soon began to notice the potential profit wrangling feral and semi-feral cattle throughout the region would make and it rapidly became their focus. As Joseph Love observes, “Ranching, accordingly, seemed an almost preordained

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<sup>11</sup>Cushner 1983:84

<sup>12</sup>Bell 1998:21

<sup>13</sup>Bell 1998:21-23

activity for the Portuguese as they began making a serious bid for the lands beyond the coast around 1750.”<sup>14</sup>

Like their neighbors in Las Pampas in Argentina, cattle hides became the main export for the Portuguese in modern-day southern Brazil. Looking to capture more cattle, the Portuguese pushed farther south and eventually established Colônia do Sacramento at the mouth of the Río de la Plata.<sup>15</sup> This colony gave the Portuguese greater access to trade routes via Rio de la Plata, fueling the export of cattle hides. Efforts to solidify the borders between Spain and Portugal held lands permeated the eighteenth century during which European governments drew lines demarking the boundaries from afar. Under the Treaty of Madrid (1750), the Uruguay River drew the boundary between Portugal and Spain, leaving the seven Spanish Jesuit missions in the Missões District within Portuguese territory. The Jesuits and their native companions, refused to leave the land and move west into the Spanish Viceroyalty of Río de la Plata, attempted to remain by force. This caused much unwanted friction and contributed to the removal of the Jesuits from both Portuguese and Spanish territories in 1760 and 1767 respectively.<sup>16</sup> Finally, in 1801 the de facto controlled Missões District officially became part of the Portuguese empire, incorporating it into Rio Grande do Sul. Later, Rio Grande do Sul itself was declared a province of the Kingdom of Brazil in 1821, one year before Brazilian Independence.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Love 1971:10

<sup>15</sup>Bell 1998:23-24; Love 1971:7

<sup>16</sup>Bell 1998:24

<sup>17</sup>Love 1971:9

As stated, by the mid-eighteenth century, millions of hoofed animals roamed freely through the greater Pampas region, wild in the sea of green. Groups that resided in the area like the Charruas and Minuanos, learned to ride horses and hunt the long horns. The Guaraní people, who had worked closely with the Jesuits prior to their expulsion, learned to utilize horses and pursue the herds all throughout the grasslands. Notably, after the missions were sent into despair, “thousands of Guaraníes migrated permanently onto the plains and took up the roving way of life of the first gaúchos.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Chasteen 1995:21 - For more information see: “Borderlanders” in *Heroes on Horseback*. Chasteen 1995:21-35

## CULTURE

What do scholars mean when they talk about gaúchos? Some, like Stephen Bell, call this seasonal rural labor ‘tradition,’ while others, Nicholas Cushner for example, use the label ‘way-of-life.’ Perhaps we could understand it as culture. In his book *Gauchos and the Vanishing Frontier*, Richard W. Slatta attempts to define what exactly a gaucho was and what the term meant. In his argument, he claims the origins of the term “gaucho” falls into two theories — Hispanists and Americanists.<sup>19</sup>

Concerning the history of the word, it is important to note the differences between the Spanish and Portuguese orthography. The word *gaucho* – without the accent – is a Spanish term and references the Spanish-speaking cowboys of Argentina and Uruguay, whereas the word gaúcho – with an accent – is the Portuguese spelling and pronunciation, and refers to the culture located within Brazilian territory. Though distinct in some ways, the two share a collective past filled with parallel labor obligations and concerns.

Slatta argues that the gaucho appeared sometime in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries as wild cattle hunters pursuing livestock that had spread throughout the Rio de la Plata region. The gaucho’s activities changed over time and along with it the implication of the name. At its onset, urbanites cast the gaucho in a negative light, associated with criminality and rural backwardness. As example, in the 1770s government officials applied the term to “men who illegally killed cattle for hides and tallow on the Pampean frontier.”<sup>20</sup> Stephen Bell claims that, “the label ‘gaúcho’ generally fell on those who lived on the range

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<sup>19</sup>For more on the history of terminology see: “Who was the Gaucho?” in *Gauchos & the Vanishing Frontier*. Slatta, 1992:7-16.

<sup>20</sup>Slatta 1983:9

beyond authority and fixed settlement, or, as a common saying had it, ‘without faith, king, or law’” (*sem fé, rei ou lei*).<sup>21</sup> Of course, the term implied various stereotypes for different social classes, as well as to foreigners. For an English mining official traveling through the area in 1823, the gauchos were “savages ... an uncouth barbarous race ... extremely addicted to gambling,” whereas for Charles Darwin just ten years later in 1833 gauchos were “invariably most obliging, polite, and hospitable.”<sup>22</sup>

The imagery the word “gaúcho” conjures is quite complex, as is so famously captured in Domingo F. Sarmiento’s *Life in the Argentine Republic in the Days of the Tyrants; or, Civilization and Barbarism*, 1845, “Country life, then, has developed all the physical but none of the intellectual powers of the gaucho. His moral character is of the quality to be expected from his habit of triumphing over the obstacles and the forces of nature; it is strong, haughty, and energetic. [...] The gaucho esteems skill in horsemanship and physical strength, and especially courage, above all other things, as we have said before.”<sup>23</sup> Regardless of the view society had of them, it is safe to say that gaúchos created a unique and recognizable culture through their lifeworks, distinct from that of the elites in urban settings such as Buenos Aires, Montevideo, and Porto Alegre. Due to the natural mobility of their work, gaúchos passed down their skills from father to son, creating employment through familiar ties.

Gaúcho labor was exclusively manual, and consequently the introduction of several foreign technologies during the late nineteenth century greatly altered their livelihoods and way of life. The first and most drastic to arrive in the area was wire fencing. As most all

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<sup>21</sup>Bell 1998:44

<sup>22</sup>Slatta 1983:11-12

<sup>23</sup>Sarmiento 1868

literature on gaúcho tradition state, “of the many changes from traditional to modern ranching, fencing perhaps altered the gaúcho’s life to the greatest extent.”<sup>24</sup> The introduction of barbed wire fencing severed the gaúcho from his accustomed way of life. The process of fencing first appeared on the Argentine pampas in 1845. Both the regional media and foreigners noted the effects it had on the culture. Outsiders like the Briton Thomas Hinchliff commented that, “A good deal of land is enclosed by wire fence, a modern innovation which greatly annoys the thorough-bred *gaúchos* who have from time immemorial been accustomed to gallop by day or night in any direction, and as far as they please.”<sup>25</sup> The arrival of fencing largely transformed the economic and social circumstances of the region. It threatened to dismantle the very fabric that defined the culture - a collective identity based on labor practices passed down through the family.

Who were these rural Pampean families? Historical work done on the gaúchos and their livelihoods focuses almost exclusively on the masculine image - their labor conditions, physical appearance, and politics. Boys of the family often began work as a peon very early and accordingly suffered the many hazards of ranch work. Often times, boys as young as four rode horses and aided their fathers in corralling cattle. As was customary, youngsters learned the skills necessary for life on Las Pampas through a blending of play and work.<sup>26</sup> Eventually, the term gaúcho itself came to represent the male elements of the culture.

Meanwhile, girls learned domestic chores by imitating their mothers. Although generally imagined as possessing a passive role in the region, women, too, occupied important parts in

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<sup>24</sup>Slatta 1983:141

<sup>25</sup>Slatta 1983:148

<sup>26</sup>Slatta 1983:61-62

the construction and maintenance of gaúcho life. Along with the important duties of childrearing, frequently done alone or with minimum male help, women participated in the economics of Las Pampas region. They regularly produced cotton goods, ceramics, and cigars for sale. Though women did not normally participate in mounted ranch work, they did aid in one major annual task, sheep shearing (*esquila*) which required extensive physical labor. It would not be for several years later with the founding of a conservative social movement aimed at gaúcho identity that women would be labeled as *prenda*, a word that does not reference any labor-intensive activities, but instead downplays women's roles by classifying them as an adornment, jewelry, or as an object that one gifts to another. However, women played an important and active part on the ranches during times of war. As the men rode off to fight, the women left behind took charge of the ranches, "bearing significant responsibilities of administering their *estâncias*."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Chasteen 1995:37; For more on women's history and family life see: "Women and Family Life" in *Gaúchos & the Vanishing Frontier*. Slatta 1983. and the MTG official website "mtg.org.br"

## WAR & MEMORY

For years, historians have explored the details and the repercussions of the Farroupilha War (1835-1845).<sup>28</sup> In general, there were two factors that brought about the Revolution: the state inhabitants' perception of the centralized imperial government as being inept, and the state's slow economic growth. The push for independence from the Brazilian Empire during the decade long war that began on September 20, 1835, though ultimately unsuccessful, helped to establish a collective identity in the region, one that remains strong today. It was only after this war that the term "gaúcho" came to represent the population of Rio Grande do Sul as a whole.

The term Farroupilha, roughly translated as "ragamuffin," was originally a term used to describe the Liberal Party in the state who demanded decentralization from the Imperial government. However, through this conflict, the term later came to be a sort of badge of courage.<sup>29</sup> Eventually driven from the capital of Porto Alegre in 1836, the Farrapos fell back to the Campanha (the southern plains). During this revolt, the Litoral (the coast) largely remained loyal to the Imperial Government in Rio de Janeiro, while the Campanha and the southeastern city of Pelotas (due to its economic links to the Campanha) was the stage for much of the fighting. Thus, most attribute the local ranch-hands-turned-soldiers of the Campanha to the perpetuation of the fighting and the continuation of the struggle, therefore associating them most closely with the concept of Revolution.

Recriminations and a general silence towards the revolt engulfed the years immediately following the conflict. Eventually, after being reintegrated into the Empire, the once rebels

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<sup>28</sup>For more information see: *História da grande revolução: O ciclo farroupilha no Brasil*. Varela 1933; *A revolução farroupilha*. Spalding 1939; *A Revolução Farroupilha - História e Interpretação*. Pesavento et al. 1985; *República Fratricida – Revoluções Rio-Grandeneses de 1835-1932*. Motta 1989; and more recently *Federalismo gaúcho: Fronteira platina, direito e revolução*. Padoin 2001.

<sup>29</sup>Love 1971:13

recognized the ways in which the conflict caused damages. However, during the late nineteenth century, new political situations, like the rise of republicanism, allowed for a revisiting and reinterpretation of the Revolution.<sup>30</sup> This new re-branding portrayed the Farroupilha as always having been loyal to the nation, instead only having demanded changes to the relationship of the central government and the province.<sup>31</sup> Building off narratives of individual citizens' participation in the event, municipalities began to erect monuments honoring their individual memories. In an attempt to utilize this has political heritage, there was "a need to expose the private memory, passed from one generation to another within the family, and to transform it into a public good, shared as a narrative that is no longer about the trajectory of individuals, but of an entire nation."<sup>32</sup>

By now, the memory of the Revolution had become a catalyst by which to promote ideas such as republicanism and federalism, generally advocating for more autonomy. However, the elites still found it difficult to manipulate the immediate relationship between the gaúcho and the Revolution as a positive one. The image of the gaúcho still dangerously resembled the rural world shared by Brazil's neighbors Argentina and Uruguay because any celebration of the gaúcho exposed a popular tradition that the elites in Porto Alegre still viewed as uncultivated and backwards.<sup>33</sup> In the 1920s, a group of professors founded the Historical and Geographical Institute of Rio Grande do Sul, and promoted it as the producer of official local

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<sup>30</sup>For a general understanding, see: *The Practice of Politics in Postcolonial Brazil: Porto Alegre, 1845-1895*. Kittleson 2006

<sup>31</sup>Zalla and Menegat 2011:55-56

<sup>32</sup>Zalla and Menegat 2011:56

<sup>33</sup>See: *República Rio-Grandense: Realidade e Utopia*. Flores 2002; *Positivism Gaúcho-Style: Júlio de Castilhos' Dictatorship and its Impact on State and Nation-Building in Vargas' Brazil*. Hentschke 2004; and "The Birth of a New Political Philosophy: Religion and Positivism in Nineteenth-Century Brazil." Gollo 2013.

historical truth.<sup>34</sup> They attempted to address conflicting images of the gaúcho and untangle it from the countryside/barbarity versus city/civilized dichotomy that had been prevalent for several decades. As example, in 1925 Moysés Vellinho with his historian colleague Rubens de Barcellos commented in the newspaper *Carreio do Povo* about the prejudice towards the gaúcho, stating, “Conserving his fundamental virtues ... the Gaúcho still feels healthy alongside the locomotive, the automobile, the telegraph, the airplane, and jazz-band.”<sup>35</sup>

On the national scale, the Farroupilha Revolution was but one of many regional revolts - albeit one of the most serious - that threatened to divide the Brazilian Empire. However, from a Rio-grandense perspective, the war was more than simply yet another regional uprising. As Joseph Love states, “[the state’s population] remembered the struggle as a great popular campaign, and radicals of a later generation would stress the republicanism and federalist aspirations of the Farroupilha movement rather than its separatist aspect.”<sup>36</sup>

In the late nineteenth century, French philosopher Auguste Comte’s writings concerning sociology and positivism greatly influenced the state elites. With this, republicans adopted the concept that society (of the state and later as a nation) would prosper under the guidance of an educated political, economic, and social upper class. Necessary reforms would come ‘from above’ and not from pressure ‘from below’.<sup>37</sup> Additionally, and most relevant to gaúchos and their identity, the idea of ‘*conservar melhorando*’ or ‘preserving while improving’ was the main focus of one of the state’s most influential and famous republican governors of the time, Júlio

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<sup>34</sup>Zalla and Menegat 2011:60

<sup>35</sup>Arinos 1979:101

<sup>36</sup>Love 1971:15

<sup>37</sup>Hentschke 2004:56

Prates de Castilhos.<sup>38</sup> The republican ideals were to preserve the state's unique identity, while simultaneously improving and "modernizing" the public. Under this condition, the Farroupilha Revolution then became a way for republicans to clearly identify the state's character and preserve it.

The local elites' demands for more local autonomy were another driving force during the second half of the nineteenth century. Federalism, then, became a route by which they could obtain more provincial autonomy. By highlighting the economic forces behind the Revolution, federalists were able to advance their arguments on the issue of separation or federation. For some, resorting back to the Farrapos episode displayed strong local traditions.<sup>39</sup>

Even today, the population recounts the details of the revolution's battles as legendary and converts its participants into heroes. Currently, regardless if one interprets these forces as a resistance to the oppressive political and economic center of the empire, or as liberators and founders of a new republic, there is a strong sense of the Revolution as a point of pride. Like As historians Zalla and Menegat claim, "[...] as a myth, the revolt has been the matrix for political discourses, historiographic debates, artistic creations, and identity projects."<sup>40</sup>

Zalla and Menegat put forward a convincing argument for five main moments in the production and reproduction the Farroupilha Revolution as myth: a) the political and social differences within the movement itself; b) the negative reactions and memories of the war immediately following the conflict; c) a remaking and celebration of the Revolution by the republicans during the late nineteenth century; d) the rehabilitation of the Revolution as the

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<sup>38</sup>Hentschke 200:43

<sup>39</sup>Love 1971:26-27

<sup>40</sup>Zalla and Menegat 2011:50

official historical memory at the beginning of the twentieth century; and most important for this project e) a more festive use of the myth in the 1940s with the founding of the MTG.<sup>41</sup>

In 2010, when the newspaper *Zero Hora* asked its readers “Which region of the State most represents Rio Grande do Sul?” An outstanding 61% of respondents answered either “the border [with Uruguay]” or more generally, “the south,” both of which are included in the Campanha.<sup>42</sup> Anyone from outside the area who consumes some type of imagery about the region encounters stereotypical representations of a golden age of wandering equestrians and farm hands upon the romantic green desert. The findings from the newspaper’s poll mirrors arguments put forward by Ruben Oliven for a decade before, and as Zalla and Menegat clearly state, “the attributes now credited to the ethnic Gaúcho are fruits of a memorialist selection, foreign to geographic fatalisms. What is presented as ‘typical’ of the south could very well not be so.”<sup>43</sup>

In 1930, inspired by the same positivist ideals that influenced politics and social thought in Rio Grande do Sul, Getúlio Vargas established the *Estado Novo* - the New State (1930-1946) that.<sup>44</sup> This regime centralized much of the economic, political, and cultural powers of Brazil.<sup>45</sup> Under Vargas, there was wide spread repression of regional politics and a denial of cultural specificities throughout the country.

There were newfound regional freedoms at the fall of the *Estado Novo* and the founding of the Second Republic in 1947. As example, at the Júlio de Castilhos College in Porto Alegre,

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<sup>41</sup>Zalla and Menegat 2011:50

<sup>42</sup>“Qual região do Estado tem mais a cara do RS?” - Azevedo, 2010.

<sup>43</sup>Zalla and Menegat 2011:50

<sup>44</sup>Hentschke 2004

<sup>45</sup>See: “Getúlio Vargas and the New Brazil” in *Brazil: The Once and Future Country*. Eakin 1997.

named after the beloved state governor, students began a club for those interested in regional customs and traditions. Headed by individuals like João Carlos D'Ávila Paixão and Luís Carlos Barbosa Lessa (two individuals who would have a great impact on the evolution of gaúcho identity), the group discussed 'the regional', a category heavily stifled by the intellectuals of the *Estado Novo*. This group of young intellectuals began the project of the 'invention of tradition' informed and influenced by the historiographic images discussed above. Their group would later become the Traditionalist Gaúcho Movement.

This cult of gaúcho traditions grew in strength throughout the mid-twentieth century, specifically after World War II when Brazil experienced a surge of urbanization and industrialization. Later, in 1948, the first CTG was founded in Porto Alegre commemorating the start of the Farroupilha Revolution. Historians often understand this as the formal beginning of the Traditional Gaúcho Movement. Ruben Oliven, professor of anthropology, best summed up the movement,

Experiencing downward social mobility, [the members of the movement] had moved to the capital to study. Like their predecessors in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the founders of the MTG, although cultivating values associated with the large estates, did not come from the rural oligarchy. Since its inception, Gaúcho Traditionalism was an urban movement that tried to recreate the rural values of the past<sup>46</sup>

The various immigrant groups of the late nineteenth century adopted and upheld the representation of the gaúcho – with its rural lifestyle, distinguishing attire, and association with machismo bravery, liberty, and whiteness – as a model resident. Between the years 1872 and 1890, the state's population doubled largely in part from German and Italian immigrants.<sup>47</sup> This

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<sup>46</sup> Oliven 2000:131

<sup>47</sup>Love 1971:18. For more information on German and Italian colonization see: *A colonização alemã e o Rio Grande do Sul*. Roche 1969; *A aculturação dos alemães no Brasil: Estudo antropológico dos imigrantes alemães e seus*

image has successfully served as a way to unite the people of Rio Grande do Sul in contrast to both the rest of the Brazilian population as well as the gauchos of Uruguay and Argentina.<sup>48</sup>

The formation of the traditionalist movement was an attempt to crystallize and strengthen a single image of the gaúcho - enshrining his characterizations, preserving him in time and space, and limiting the influences from outside forces. With this, after decades of attempts to (re)define the gaúcho, the movement's members were able to more easily control the imagery that came to represent the state and its people. As the following personal accounts will demonstrate, these traditionalist spaces became enshrined with the sanctity of tradition, community, and authenticity.

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*descendentes no Brasil*. Willems 1975; and *Italianos e Gaúchos: Os anos pioneiros da colonização italiana no Rio Grande do Sul*. Azevedo 1975.

<sup>48</sup>Oliven 2006:311

## SPACE, PLACE, AND THE GLOBAL COWBOY CULTURE

The idea of the sanctity of tradition, community, and authenticity as mentioned above takes root in the Centers of Tradition that the MTG set up. CTGs are rural spaces manufactured in urban settings. The interior of the building resembles certain building structures related to rural labor, similar to a barn or stable, and is meant to provoke sense of nostalgia. They are often wooden constructions with various artifacts of the past hanging from the walls, such as old wooden wheels, lanterns, and ox yokes. Within these walls, participants are to act and dress appropriately, correctly embodying the idea of the gaúcho, an extension of the globally recognized cowboy.

Chris Gibson's work *The Global Cowboy* (2013) focuses on the construction of the North American cowboy and the spread of its romantic, masculine ideology around the globe. He claims that popular western movies, literature, and music spread "a persona, a stereotype, an ideology, and a style of manhood strongly associated with rurality."<sup>49</sup> In his work, Gibson investigates the historical emergence and diffusion of what he calls the 'global cowboy,' a general concept of a cowboy iconography, fashion, music, and myth associated with rural masculinity.<sup>50</sup>

As is the case with the gaúchos of Rio Grande do Sul, Gibson argues that while the world's population becomes more urbanized, as everyday experiences with the countryside become more scarce, the imaginary of the cowboy continues for many as a direct link to rural space connected to the local history, even if embellished and knowingly dependent on invented

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<sup>49</sup>Gibson 2013:199-218.

<sup>50</sup>Gibson 2013:199

qualities. Such is the situation of the gaúcho in the CTGs in Rio Grande do Sul. The MTG invented certain traditions to create an idealized local cowboy – their version of a gaúcho – so that those living in the cities would have access to a rural space in which they may demonstrate their authentic gaúcho identity.

The MTG emphasized the rural feature of the identity through the CTGs. The rules and regulations set in place at these establishments produce strongly held ideologies that participants see as natural, true, and unchanging. Attempts to modify definitions of the gaúcho or the established cultural aura surrounding it can produce acts of resistance or, in the case of CTG *Sentinelas do Planalto*, violence.

Situated in Santana do Livramento, a city of about 200,000 inhabitants along the border of Uruguay, four men attacked the local CTG in the early mornings of September 11, 2014. According to *Zero Hora*, a Sul-rio-grandian newspaper, word had spread that the CTG was going to be performing a group wedding for some 30 couples, a common occurrence within the movement. However, within this group, and quite uncommon, was a homosexual couple. The four men, then, used Molotov cocktails to burn the building.<sup>51</sup>

This extreme reaction illustrates the disdain and/or fear some have to challenges to the hegemony of the MTG. Clearly, some saw the couple's attempt to marry within a place that adheres to a strict code of masculinity and heteronormativity as a threat to the established gaúcho discourse of tradition. The comments on the article and the subsequent forum posted on the news station's website highlight the dialog surrounding the incident:<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>"CTG Que Vai Sedar Casamento Gay é Incendiado Em Santana Do Livramento." Mariano 2014.

<sup>52</sup>"MURAL: Qual O Motivo Para a Intolerância Com a União Homossexual?" Zero Hora 2014.

Dears, a CTG is a particular place of worship of gaúcho traditions, and to perform a gay wedding, a *funk*<sup>53</sup> dance, a ballet festival, or any other act that is not a gaúcho tradition goes against what is to be worshiped in this space. You all speak about the respect of minorities, but today the authentic gaúchos [and] effectively their traditions are also minorities.

T. W.<sup>54</sup>

Other responders echoed T.W.'s sentiment concerning the sanctity of the CTG space.

This argument was by far the most popular of the reactions:

It is not a question of intolerance or homophobia, it is a question about the customs of the tradition.

J.S.M.<sup>55</sup>

[The] CTG is not the place for this! Rent an events center or whatever, get married and be happy. Soon enough customs and values will be treated like crimes.

G.M.<sup>56</sup>

With all respect, the chosen place has nothing to do with what was meant to happen there. Why in the CTG? [...] There are so many other places to do that ceremony. [The] CTG is not the place for that.

G.S.S.<sup>57</sup>

These statements support Gibson's arguments concerning the general masculinity projected by the ideal global cowboy. Though, as individuals such as J.S.M. point out, it is not necessary about homophobia or any other form of intolerance, it is simply that these acts do not fit within the traditional discourse of the MTG (and thus the gaúcho image itself). G.S.S.'s claim that there exist several other options where the couple could choose to wed suggests

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<sup>53</sup>Pronounced "funhg-kee," this popular style of dance originated from Rio de Janeiro during the late 20th century.

<sup>54</sup>*Prezados, um CTG é um local particular de culto as tradições Gaúchas, e realizar um casamento gay, um baile funk, um festival de balé ou qualquer outro ato que não seja das tradições gaúchas vai contra aquilo que é para ser cultuado neste espaço. Falam tanto em respeitar as minorias, mas hoje os gaúchos autênticos que efetivamente suas tradições também são minorias.*

<sup>55</sup>*Não é uma questão de intolerância ou homofobia, é uma questão de costumes da tradição*

<sup>56</sup>*CTG não é lugar para isso! Aluguem um centro de eventos ou qualquer outra coisa, casem e sejam felizes. Daqui a pouco costumes e valores serão tratados como crimes.*

<sup>57</sup>*Com todo respeito, o lugar escolhido em nada tem a ver com o que ali seria realizado. Por que no CTG? [...] Existem tantos outros locais para a realização dessa cerimônia. CTG não é lugar para isso.*

that the population of Brazil at large accepts the idea of homosexual partnerships. However, in doing so, they convey that the space of the CTG should be reserved strictly for performances understood to be gaúcho - natural, true, and unchanging - and certainly heteronormative. Though most of the commentators did not explicitly support the acts of the arsonists, their commentary does advance the idea that the CTG is a space and a place that requires protection and safeguarded from outside influences.

Gibson rightly points out, if there exists a global cowboy whose timeless nature is connected to the countryside, a “global rural” or “global countryside” with which he interacts also must exist. Michael Woods describes the global countryside as,

A rural realm constituted by multiple shifting, tangled and dynamic networks, connecting rural to rural and rural to urban, but with greater intensities of globalization processes and of global interconnections in some rural localities than in others, and thus with a differential distribution of power, opportunities and wealth across rural space.<sup>58</sup>

Like the gaúcho itself, CTGs of the traditionalist movement are at once both real and imagined places in which the global countryside immediately connects with the urban. They are recreations and representations of an imagined cultural history. Within their borders, participants maintain and express the gaúcho in events like parties or dances and in music and recitals. These events are seen as safe-havens of the identity and places in which one is able to gain access to the gaúcho personality, where one is able to ground oneself in the local culture, even as one lives in an urbanized and globalized environment. Perceived as safe-havens, there is a strong desire to protect and preserve these places, oftentimes reacting violently to any attempts to alter set concepts of community. It is in this sense that the symbol of the gaúcho of

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<sup>58</sup>Woods 2007:491

Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil engages with the idea of a “global rural” or “global countryside,” and thus adds to the existing academic discussions about identity and globalization.

On gaúchos and globalization, Ruben Oliven briefly mentions the process in relation to the rise of importance concerning tradition of the gaúcho both within Brazil and internationally.<sup>59</sup> According to Oliven, rather than erasing local customs and practices, as is commonly thought, the processes of cultural globalization and economic internationalization in fact re-create tradition. “This process of cultural globalization not only gives us the impression of living in a global village but once again poses the question of tradition, of nation, and of region. As the world becomes more complex and more internationalized, the question of differences again arises and an intense process of identity formation occurs.”<sup>60</sup>

People express their responses to questions of tradition, nation, and region in numerous, multifaceted ways. These responses shift with concerns to gender, income, and age and while some choose to link their identity with the standardized, clearly demarcated image of the gaúcho the MTG offers, others choose different routes. Though they may recognize the power the MTG processes to advance a certain image, some express their gaúcho identity by circumventing or directly challenging the gaúcho of the MTG.

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<sup>59</sup>Oliven 1996:xiv, 115

<sup>60</sup>Oliven 1996:115

## GAÚCHOS TODAY

Some self-proclaimed gaúchos, like the individuals that follow, do not necessarily equate the presence and preservation of the CTGs with their gaúcho identity, opting instead to access and claim their gaúcho-ness by other means. They engage with the tropes of the global cowboy in other ways, sometimes challenging the MTG status quo, while at other times aligning with it.

The conversations with the following, Alex, Sara, João, and Thiago, offer a glimpse into their thoughts about gaúcho identity as they negotiate their identities in dialog with the socio-historical situation as described above. Their relationships with the gaúcho identity and the positive and negative qualities affiliated with it are complex and entangled with several different variables. Notably, there are tensions between the process of self-identifying as gaúcho and the formal and informality in which one partakes in the identity. Those who do not participate in the MTG wish to define the gaúcho on their own terms while others uphold the movement's value.

The ideal gaúcho persona often comes into direct conflict with other aspects of one's multifaceted, ever changing, and complex identity. The following individuals, with whom all interactions took place in Caxias do Sul between research stints in 2014 and 2015, offer insights into how some individuals attempt to maneuver through the awkwardness and seemingly impossibility of embodying the idealized rural past of their community while living and prospering in a twenty-first century urban scene.

Ariane, a woman in her late forties, is an English instructor at one of the local universities in the area where I first visited in 2009. Ariane is herself from the state, holds a

Master's degree in Education from the University of Caxias do Sul, and, thanks to her strong community ties, offered several potential informants for this project. Utilizing her connections in the university and surrounding area, Ariane helped contact several individuals whom she knew to have participated in a CTG, or who have been active in the gaúcho way of life.<sup>61</sup> As will become evident, this way of life for contemporary gaúchos as diverged from the explanations Chasteen, Cushner, and Bell proposed in the previous sections.

### Alex

Alex was 51, with a deep voice and fair, graying hair. He was born in Caxias do Sul to Italian immigrants in 1963. In his twenties, he moved from the Serra Gaúcha to just south of the mountains in Santa Maria where he studied chemical engineering at the local federal university. After his studies, he returned to Caxias do Sul where he could more aptly apply his new knowledge at any of the booming industries manufacturing transport equipment, textiles, and food products.<sup>62</sup> He first engaged with the CTGs after this return to Caxias do Sul.

Recounting his time immediately after university, Alex explained that he did not have many friends and found it difficult to make new ones as a young professional focusing on building a career for himself. He often stayed at home on the weekends. His interest in gaúcho related activities grew gradually as he attempted to find friends in various other social circles, for example in dance halls or clubs. He was, generally speaking, unsuccessful in establishing a

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<sup>61</sup>A concept that Chasteen 1995, Cushner 1983, and Bell 1998 visited

<sup>62</sup>Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Caxias do Sul

strong bond with others. He noticed, however, that friendships made within the movement appeared to be very stable and long lasting relationships.

Alex's parents were not involved with the MTG or CTGs as they spent most of their time working and did not have "much fun like this" as they focused on making a living for their family. Thus, Alex did not have any familiar connections in the CTGs or throughout the movement in general off which to build. One Saturday, a friend of his, rather than an uncle, brother or father, invited him to a local CTG. "That's how it works," he clarified, "one person invites a friend, who invites another, and another and so on." Alex's case illustrates that gaúcho identity is not only accessible through familiar ties, it is no longer necessarily passed down from parents to child as was cited as the most common occurrence, but is now used instead as a catalyze by which an individual may build up and more closely connect with his community.<sup>63</sup>

Alex discussed how he came to learn about the history of the state through his involvement with the movement. He explained that prior to the CTG, he had known some things, like the history of the Farroupilha Revolution, but only as it pertained to the broader discourse of national Brazilian history. He had learned so little, he said, about the history of the state itself or about the Farroupilha Revolution - he learned nothing profound, nothing about the motivations behind it, or its consequences. Within the CTG, there are resource books that Alex and others can read that elaborate on the history of the state and gaúcho culture. Alex enjoys these sources because reading them allows him to better understand the movement and state, giving him further passion for both.

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<sup>63</sup>See: Chasteen 1995; Bell 1998; and Cushner 1983

Alex was adamant on explaining the gaúcho's history within the context of the Brazilian nation,

Nowadays, there is more information about [gaúcho history], but some time ago, 10 years ago, there was practically nothing. It was this time when laws were created to incorporate our culture. Just like today, they are searching for black people [in history] and [now, historians are] also [searching for] the gaúcho. It was not studied at all. Now, there is passion to study such things. Like the dances, because, I know this... before it was an embarrassment to say you were gaúcho. Because... this history of independence, it was taboo... because they wanted to separate from Brazil... that at first it was not for independence, but then it was. Therefore, now there is some passion to study this history better.

In the above quotation, Alex makes an important connection when linking the history of the gaúcho with the history of black people. Like those in historically marginalized groups such as people of color or women, Alex envisions himself and others like him as belonging to a group whose job it is to seek out the gaúcho within the broader Brazil discourse and attempt to revive and preserve it. The black movement in Brazil is a good example of the changes social scientists saw in the framing of historical and cultural work.<sup>64</sup>

With concerns to gaúcho traditionalism, Alex's sentiments are echoed in statements like Oliven's, "At the end of the decade of the 1970s it was common to hear that *gaúcho* tradition was an endangered species or that it was reduced to pockets of tradition and folklore."<sup>65</sup> Similar to the way Alex understands the gaúcho movement, the black movement redefined its identity on new critical readings of the overall values and unspoken traditions of Brazilian life. Social movements like these attempted to effectively exercise their rights as Brazilian citizens

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<sup>64</sup>Paoli 1992

<sup>65</sup>Oliven, 2006:314-315

under theories of democratization and produced “autonomous groups of politicized cultural expressions.”<sup>66</sup>

### Sara

Sara was a small framed young woman in her early twenties with shoulder-length brown hair and a soft but friendly voice. She explained that she does not currently participate in a CTG, but rather her father had another house just outside the city in the countryside with horses. Sara and a group of her friends enjoyed riding and doing “those traditional things” together. She made it a point to clarify these meetings are informal gatherings; it is not a CTG and they are therefore not required to abide by the MTG’s rules such as ones pertaining to clothes and social roles. Although she enjoyed performing such activities, she claimed that due to time constraints between both work and school she could not participate in a CTG. Admittedly, the thought of participating in the CTGs excited her and had drawn her attention when she was younger, but because her family did not participate, she did not either. “I am still gaúcho!” she exclaimed and laughed.

Her exclamation that she was indeed “still gaúcho” is important as it illustrates how Sara, like others who do not directly participate in the MTG or CTGs still lay claim to this identity. Having lived her entire life in the second largest city in the state, Sara did not grow up in a situation in which she would have automatically learned these specific skills linked to rural labor and the gaúcho identity. In addition, she nor her family participated in the CTG, which removes her experiences ever further from the standardized gaúcho culture. The land her

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<sup>66</sup>Paoli 1992:147

father owns, where she and her friends ride horses and participate in what she claims are “traditional things,” is the strongest tie to being gaúcho that Sara possesses. Similar to the issues addressed above in the section concerning the adoption of the gaúcho in Caxias do Sul, Sara’s own claim to the gaúcho identity lays with her father’s land. Because her father owns land just outside the city, allows Sara to claim a direct connection to the gaúcho. Here, Sara calls upon the idea that the gaúcho has access to both land and horses. Although she does not belong to the organized system meant to revive, maintain, and promote a cohesive cultural identity, she feels that her playing with friends in this space allots her a validated position from which to proudly and defiantly claim, “I am still gaúcho!”

Unlike Alex above, Sara does not automatically link her identity as gaúcho to the movement or to the CTGs. For her, there exist alternative ways to belonging. Sara is significantly younger than Alex is and may represent a shift in urbanites’ relationship with the gaúcho’s rural image. Although she enjoys the performing actives on her father’s land with her friends, she does not prioritize participation in the centers, and instead chooses to focus most of her energy on work and her studies. Her father’s land and horses allow Sara room to pursue other identities, such as a university student, while still maintaining a close relationship to the rural past of the state.

Sara, and others in her position, feels pressure from other responsibilities in their lives. They down play the importance of the MTG and CTGs for various reasons, and often claim to not have enough time or money to participate. For Sara, her employment and student status take precedence over both formal and informal participation, because of her other duties, Sara visited her father’s land less often. During our conversation, she demonstrates the tensions by

discussing her desire to participate in Sunday barbecues, but is unable due to her work schedule.

After discussing her reasons for not participating in any formal way, Sara elaborated on what she understood as the role of the CTGs. For her, CTGs are a way to “maintain the traditional life of the old ways ... it is a time to stop, remember, continue, and preserve the culture.” She explained what it was she believed the MTG was maintaining exactly, stating that, “In the past in this region, most people worked in the country and had these habits of working with animals, horses, and had different music. Then they tried to separate [from Brazil]. It was not a revolution because it did not change anything. However,” she claims, “it did produce heroes; people that we celebrate.”

While talking about doing those ‘traditional things’ with her friends at her father’s land, Sara brought up the issue of clothes. She claimed to having never liked wearing the traditional women’s dress because it was both uncomfortable and impractical for such activities. However, as do most inhabitants of Rio Grande do Sul, Sara associates the marked differences in dress from the rest of Brazil as a cornerstone from which gaúcho culture developed.<sup>67</sup> The MTG is an institution dominated by the male body and subsequent imagery in which women often (if not always) play a supportive role. Like the men’s, women’s clothing is also highly regulated by the MTG. A certain hairstyle and dress indicates a specific rank within the organization. This rank, however, is often directly linked to that of the man’s. As example, Sara offers the role of the “First Lady,” the wife of the man in charge of any given CTG.

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<sup>67</sup>Zalla and Menegat 2011

It is common for women to wear men's style clothing, such as the pants and hat. This allows them greater movement, both physically as they perform the tasks, and socially as they utilize the inherent masculinity in the movement for their own. By donning traditionally masculine costumes, Sara and other women are pushing against the normativity of gaúcho culture and its standardized identity, extending the means by which "gaúcho" can, and should be, defined. By not directly participating in a CTG, Sara is able to circumvent these norms mandated by the MTG and engages with her own idea of gaúcho identity.

### João

While collecting data, observations of women wearing traditionally male gaúcho attire seemed commonplace. Yet notably, there were no mentions of men wearing traditional women's clothing. In line with the theories concerning the global cowboy, this highlights the emphasis placed on the masculine form within the culture and social movement.

João, like Sara, was in his early twenties and spent most his evenings at the university. As a child, João himself used to participate in the CTG, and directly linked his own involvement with that of his father's. This bit of information illustrates the intensity and seriousness of his family's involvement with the movement. Again, drawing upon the general idea of machismo, the discussion surrounding João and his family's participation took place only with conversation about male figures in his life. João's activities in and relationship with the CTG and the gaúcho image are associated exclusively with his male relatives. When discussing the CTG and MTG, João spoke solely of his brothers, father, grandfather and multiple uncles. His mother only

entered into the conversation when directly asked, and only then in an adjacent topic not directly related to the CTG or gaúcho.

When speaking with João, it became clear how participation within the CTG seemed like a rite of passage. For him and his brothers, it was something their father required of them during their youth. Mirroring earlier claims by Alex, João also associates his attendance at the CTG with positive personal qualities like responsibility and respect. However, he claimed that he never really enjoyed taking part in the CTG and only went because of his father's insistence.

For João and his brothers, going to the CTG was a nonnegotiable involvement. Their father would say, "You must go [to the CTG]." Unlike João, his brother was more similar to his father in that he enjoyed it very much. In fact, according to João, his brother continues to be a very active member at their CTG, and he had won several awards by winning competitions. Sometimes, João attends his brother's competitions, but does not want to participate in them. "As a teenager," João said, "you start choosing things for yourself," and thus, at about the age of 14 or 15, he chose not to return.

João's father owns two horses, one for himself and the other for João's brother. When not in use, the horses stay in a community stable about a 20-minute drive from the city. The rent his father pays for the two stalls covers the cost of housing and the cleaning of the horses. Highlighting the extent to which gender participation is skewed; only men take care of the horses. At the stables, João explains, two men work full time as caretakers. The local CTG, to which both men belong, manages the stables, and offer a location at which those involved may practice various gaúcho activities such as lassoing.

The fact that, again, only the role of men informs João's understanding of the organization furthers the concept that masculinity defines the MTG and gaúcho identity in general. Like Sara, masculinity seemed to be the only vehicle through which the informants could successfully describe the gaúcho identity to an outsider. By drawing upon commonalities found in the ideal global cowboy, Sara and João wished to tap into clearly linked qualities that would help someone unfamiliar with the gaúcho's local cultural or historic significance to easily understand.

Linking this local cultural phenomenon to conversations that are more universally accessible helped the interlocutors locate themselves, their experiences, and opinions on a more comprehensive scale. Drawing upon their desires to be seen and understood as global actors despite their relationship to and participation in such a strong regional identity, they described their situation in terms that they imagined any foreigner would grasp. Similarly, while discussing the structure and role of the MTG as an organization, João compared it to the then omnipresent FIFA World Cup. "The MTG is like FIFA. If you want to have a CTG, you have to subscribe to the MTG and they allow it or not. One cannot simply create a CTG. There are rules [to belonging]." Referencing his brother, João used the idea of someone who may wish to compete in a rodeo lasso competition. "For example, if you are someone who competes with the lasso," he explained, "you must have specific clothes - the belt and boots, and the club."

Both Sara and João laughed at the mention of the club and explained that nobody actually uses it. As the knife commonly found attached to the gaúcho's belt originally meant for skinning animals, the club is solely for show and is only a decorative part of the costume. There

is no longer any practical need or use for the club, yet this item, along with several others, is a requirement for making the gaúcho image complete.

Like FIFA, the MTG is an organization that has rules and regulations, a standard that one must meet in order to participate in its events. Both institutions possess a governing body made up of voted-in officials that preside over the creation, interpretation, and application of its guidelines. Most similarly between the two, is their emphasis on the participants' appearance. The MTG regulates the uniforms - the color of the handkerchief, length of the dress, and the height of the boots - that the participants wear during dances, rodeos, and other cultural events.

Books such as "The Farroupilhas and their Exploits" (2009) and "Our Symbols: Our Pride!" (2008) are works that piece together various episodes throughout the area's history in an attempt to create a more basic understanding of what it means to be gaúcho.<sup>68</sup> Both are less than 200 pages long and contain numerous pictures, diagrams, and drawings that help depict diverse aspects of gaúcho identity.

Most telling is the book "The Art of Sul-Riograndense Dress in the Farroupilha Decade" (2008).<sup>69</sup> In this book, each page is dedicated to different types of dress, for example there is a page for "Rich Men with City Suits," one called, "Dance Costume of the Upper-Middle Class," another for the "Middle Class Small Rural Landowner Costume," and "Black slaves."<sup>70</sup> A drawing

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<sup>68</sup>Savaris 2008; 2009

<sup>69</sup>Hyarup 2008

<sup>70</sup>*Homens Ricos com Trajes Citandinos* (p 15), *Traje de Baile de Classe Média-alta* (p 32), *Classe Média – Traje do pequeno proprietário rural* (p 39) and *Escravos Negros* (p 48). Hyarup 2008

meant to represent the individual category accompanies each brief description. This book presents some examples of the great variety and styles of clothes from around 1830 to 1850.

The State Government of Rio Grande do Sul funds all three of these books' publications in part or in full. It follows, then, that the state perceives some value within these types of publications. This vested interest in constructing a particular image shows how the state attempts to develop a historical narrative and with it an identity that is more accessible to the public.

João reaffirms this idea. Near the end of the conversation, he reiterated the importance that the clothes play within the discourse of gaúcho identity and the MTG as a social movement. João wanted to make clear his own understanding of the state's position in Brazil as a whole nation. He states that, "Brazilians say gaúchos are very regionalist, perhaps the most [in Brazil]." For him, this is not a positive quality.

As much as he loved his family and enjoyed riding horses, he did admit there is quite a bit of closed-mindedness found in the movement. João applied the term *bairrismo* - someone who prides themselves based on their neighborhood (*bairro*), state, and/or locale. In this case, João employed it in a negative connotation, suggesting that those highly involved in the movement exhibited closed-mindedness and prejudice towards others not from the area.

João distanced himself from these qualities by pointing out his study abroad stint in Ireland. "I was in Ireland for one year studying English. I used to think [like] that, but I met many people from different places, so I opened my mind and decided it is not cool to think like that. When I met other people from difference places and countries," he continued, "I started to see how closed minded I was." Although João enjoys a range of activities associated with gaúchos,

he desired to establish a distinction between these negatively associated stereotypes and himself.

At the end of the interview, he mentioned a book he was currently reading, which he described as a kind of impolite history of Brazil, a book that offered him an “alternative” history. He recounted how the book contained information that he did not learn in school or in the CTGs. Admittedly, he could not say if this information were true or not, but he did find it interesting and enjoyed reading it. For him, it altered the way in which he understood the entirety of the Farroupilha Revolution. For example, João said that the book claimed the war began because the meat processing industry was losing too much money to imported Uruguayan meat products and not, as he had learned in school, because of taxation issues.

As Sara helped illustrate above, João’s comment suggests that, though one may self-identify as gaúcho, they may not want to immediately associate with the status quo produced by the MTG and CTGs. Doing this challenges the timeless image of the hero advanced by organizations like the state run institutions and the MTG. Individuals like Sara and João claim some aspects of the identity while distancing themselves from those which they find negative.

### Thiago

The male gaúcho image saturated Caxias do Sul. While moving about the city, I could see many advertisements featuring a man wearing traditional gaúcho attire - on billboards, at the bus stop, and various other types of advertising. The dwindling down of the gaúcho identity to that of clothes became one of the major points of the conversation with another person,

Thiago, a man in his late twenties who, like the others, worked during the day and studied at night.

I met Thiago at my friend Doug's family's farm, which was located some two hours north of the city. I came to know Doug back in 2009 when I first visited the area. When he learned I would be returning to conduct research on gaúchos, he invited me to accompany him for a weekend at his family's ranch.

Leaving Caxias do Sul and heading north, the road constantly curved up and around the mountains, then it would plug down into a valley, only to rise again a shortly later. While traveling throughout the mountains, the road would straighten here or there only for a few seconds, which allowed just barely enough time to pass the numerous semi-trucks hauling manufactured goods. After an hour of this, the land began to flatten out and became rolling hills. This area is an elevated plateau, which extends south from the São Paulo region, and offers an environment better suited for raising cattle than the mountains region.

From the car, I could see expansive swashes of open land and very few, if any, structures. Doug had been adamant on my joining him on this journey to the rural area because here, he explained, I was to meet "real gaúchos," outside of an urban setting. I was to meet those whose livelihoods centered on actives dealing with cattle and other livestock - activities far removed from the city center. Unfortunately, it rained for the entirety of the three-day weekend, which postponed our scheduled work of castrating the new calves.

In the end, there would be no horseback riding or cattle wrangling, but this allowed for a lot of card playing, singing songs, and eating *churrasco* — a gaúcho style barbecue. Most of those in attendance were men in their 50s and 60s, and were in one way or another related.

These men had come from all over the south of Brazil from cities like Porto Alegre and Caxias do Sul to spend the weekend together at the family's barn. Few others, such as Thiago, were paid help.

Similar to the land of Sara's father, this farm served as a familiar gathering point. It was a rural space where family and friends were able to escape from city life and engage in activities generally associated with the ideal gaúcho. Doug said that they gather there at the farm usually once a year. He used to go more frequently with his father (who had recently passed), but since finishing his university studies he had begun to work full time and confessed that it was difficult to find time to visit.

At the farm, Thiago was very friendly. I usually found him playing his guitar, accepting suggestions and encouraging others to sing. When he was not entertaining everyone in the barn, he would gladly play cards with Doug and me, or we would sit around and engage in light conversation. Thiago, like me, was there by his friend Matheus' invitation and did not know anyone else there. Thiago's non-family member status provides him with a different relationship to the farm and the work required.

Several weeks after our initial meeting on the farm, Thiago agreed to meet to discuss his opinions of and relation with the MTG and CTGs. We started the conversation discussing his personal history and work background. Only in his twenties, Thiago had lived in several areas throughout the state and had worked a plethora of jobs, including, he stressed, several years as a ranch hand. When Thiago was younger, his father had worked with cattle on farms, thus the family moved three or four times per year as his father found jobs. Later, in 2005, his family moved to Caxias do Sul because of the high standard of living and plenty of stable work in

industry. When he was old enough to work, Thiago, like his father, worked seasonally on farms. When he (sometimes accompanied by a friend) finished the work, he relocated to another.

It was not until Thiago was around 14 years old when he first became involved with a local CTG. Similar to Alex's experience with his friends, Thiago's neighbor invited him to participate at his center. His experience at the CTG, however, was brief. He enjoyed the artistic aspect of the CTG, during which he could practice playing his guitar, but he left only after attending for a couple of months. "It was too institutionalized, too rigid with unnecessary rules," he explained. By describing the CTG as too institutionalized, Thiago affirms that for him, one may find the gaúcho identity through one's own experiences, rather than participating in a movement with a governing body that establishes rules.

For Thiago, there was a clear distinction between experiences on the farm and those in the city. He brought up the act of changing clothes when leaving the farm to illustrate his point. He felt that there was no need to claim to be gaúcho once he left the farm. One may call themselves gaúcho while living and working on a ranch, while tending to cattle daily, and earning a living doing so. Once Thiago donned his jeans and t-shirt, he no longer felt the need to claim to be gaúcho.

Voicing his frustration about the rules of the movement and the emphasis placed on the clothing, Thiago explained that, in this sense, "A gaúcho is a character – if you put on the right pants, boots, hat, and belt with a knife, you, too, could be gaúcho. The CTG is a theater," he elaborated,

I can be the best farm hand, know everything there is to know about the farm, horses, cattle, but if I wear jeans, I am not gaúcho. It is not so important that you study and know the tradition, but to wear the *bombachaos* [pants] and boots. If you do not wear these clothes, you are not gaúcho. I live here in Caxias, I have a life here, and I do not

want to pretend to be another character. I already lived on a farm, and so someone who has lived and worked on a farm can say they are gaúcho, because I already worked in the countryside - I milked cows. Now, I do not have cows, or a horse. I use the bus, a car, attend the university. So to wear *bombachaos*, it is not necessary. I like my tennis shoes; they are useful for city life.

Here, Thiago attempted to establish legitimacy based on his experiences rather than belonging to a certain social group. For most others, Thiago thought, “[being a member of the MTG] is like a hobby, not an actual lifestyle. It is something to do only when you do not have anything else to do.”

This then led Thiago to feel the need to explain what a gaúcho is in relation to economic constraints and the financial commitments require to belonging to the movement. “The gaúcho is not rich,” Thiago assured me. As mentioned in previous sections, the city of Caxias do Sul exhibits a high standard of living in part to its industries. However, Thiago illuminated the tension between income levels and the CTG. He, like the interlocutors above, voiced his conflict concerning time commitments and financial responsibilities in regards to the CTG. “Those who go to the CTG cannot be poor. If you are poor, you need to work... I do not know anyone who participates in the CTG and is of working class.” He talked about the hours necessary to make a living working for minimum wage, issues of transportation, and the financial requirements to join a CTG, including but not limited to clothes, membership dues, and fees to participate in the festivals.

This voiced frustration concerning the monetary obligation highlights the struggle Thiago felt as he attempted to legitimize himself as gaúcho, while simultaneously criticizing the control the movement has over the image and identity granted to those who could afford to participate. Thiago’s sense of belonging as a gaúcho did not lay in his admittance to the center

through means of financial contribution, but rather on his idea of what a “real gaúcho” was - labor on farms such as the one where we first met. Due to this mentality, the mere act of separating the gaúcho from his rural working space killed the gaúcho. Living in an urban environment eliminates one’s right to identify as gaúcho. Thiago did not see any necessity for gaúchos in the city, claiming that “if the gaúcho died one hundred years ago [in the countryside], here in Caxias he died two hundred years ago. Gaúchos do not exist here [in the city].”

## CONCLUSION

The alleged death of the gaúcho is a curious thing. Some observers claim he disappeared early in the nineteenth century during the independence wars of Argentina, Uruguay, and southern Brazil. Others attribute the shrinking number of wild cattle on the Pampas and throughout the Campanha during the mid-nineteenth century as an indicating point of his demise.

Yet still others claim the gaúcho never vanished at all, but rather lived on in an altered form. As some writers sarcastically point out, several generations claimed that the gaúcho “only existed in the past, preferably seventy years before.”<sup>71</sup> The presence of nostalgia provoked many to, “date the decline of the gaúcho to the previous generation.”<sup>72</sup>

Any difficulty in determining the gaúcho’s end stems for problematic definitions of who or what they were or are. Descriptions range from cattle thieves and vagabonds to a noble, loyal, and a free social group.<sup>73</sup> As demonstrated in this paper, history has witnessed the gaúcho from its birth in the eighteenth century at the expulsion of the Jesuits, to a drifter with little regard for law, then as a soldier in the Revolution, and then finally as a collective imagined identity. Several different forces influenced transformations of the gaúcho as well as the population’s perception of him. Introductions of new technologies altered the work generally associated with the gaúcho way of life, thus changing the definitions of the gaúcho. Philosophical and political theories, such as positivism and republicanism, influenced others’ perception of the gaúcho and thus changed his position within society.

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<sup>71</sup>Bioy Casares 1970

<sup>72</sup>Slatta 1992:189

<sup>73</sup>Slatta 1992:189

As Ruben Oliven so articulately argues in his book *Tradition Matters: Modern Gaúcho Identity in Brazil* (1996), at the end of the twentieth century there was a resurgence of regionalism due to processes like globalization and internationalization. At this time, the national identity becomes a collective of multiple regional characterizations, which in turn allows for the integration of diversity into a multicultural nation. He concludes by stating, “It is precisely at the time Brazil finds itself quite integrated politically, economically, and technologically that it becomes imperative to rethink the question of cultural diversity.”<sup>74</sup>

Historians like Zalla and Menegat do important work as they investigate the evolution of the creation, manipulation and use of the gaúcho image changed over time. The gaúchos transition from past into history allow it to emerge in the present through discussions of the identity of a people. By drawing upon historical figures and linking their individual stories to the more general trajectory of the region, the experience of the Farroupilha Revolution, for example, ceases to be an event located in the past, but instead becomes a vital point in the history of the state - effectively linking its inhabitants to a single narrative.

Additionally, the founding of the MTG and its CTGs helped in some ways to re-territorialize the identity. The gaúcho image was no longer directly linked to the Campanha region of the state with its endless prairies, and instead became part of the imagination of a population that had never ridden a horse. These centers offered a place in which urbanites could more easily participate in activities generally associated with the rural character, thus allowing them access to an identity idealized as hard working, industrious, and prosperous.

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<sup>74</sup> Oliven 1996:116

The individuals visited in this work demonstrate the gaúcho's ability to adjust and appropriately redefine itself in an ever-changing world. Alex's story is one of virtue and of finding oneself. Having come from a typical Italian immigrant family located in the mountains, Alex sought out and adopted the gaúcho through the MTG and his participation in the CTGs. By fraternizing in the movement, Alex was able to establish the long-lasting, well-meaning friendships he had been unable to find elsewhere.

The other three, Sara, João, and Thiago, however, feel differently than Alex towards the MTG itself and the gaúcho image in general. Both Sara and João illustrated the difficulties some face as they attempt to pursue other aspects of their identities while still trying to maintain a sense of gaúcho but without participating in the CTGs. The two also speak to the role gender plays in the variations of experiences. Sara's exclamation "I am still gaúcho!" illustrates her defiance in claiming the identity, regardless if others see her as such or not. João's experience, in turn, points to the complexities that some face as they come to terms with the more negative depictions of Rio Grande do Sul and gaúchos. Not wishing for me to see him as closed-minded or uneducated, João made sure I noted his international travels and consumption of non-standardized information pertaining to the state's history. Thiago, then, brought the importance of work back into the conversation of what it meant to be gaúcho. Expressing his frustration with the uneven accessibility of the movement to many outside of it, Thiago pointed out that few, of which he is one, have the right to call themselves gaúcho based on the physical labor required - both presently, and in the past.

The gaúcho is certainly not dead, but continues living on in the minds and hearts of Brazilians throughout the state, the country, and indeed the world. The diverse experiences described above present varied ways in which people living the Caxias do Sul experience the gaúcho narrative. The issues brought up by these individuals stress the uneven accessibility to

participate in the formal gaúcho communities like the MTG and CTGs, by often citing time and financial constraints. However, these restrictions also provide individuals with ways in which they can rework and diversify the gaúcho identity, possibly creating ways in which the gaúcho may continue into the future. The matter of inclusion or exclusion in the MTG gives rise to struggles to (re)define gaúcho tradition in one's own image, challenging the status quo of who speaks for whom, and what constitutes *gaúcho*.

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