

The Effects of Economic Crisis on Argentine National Identity Construction

Rebecca Gelb

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Advisor: Professor Elizabeth Cohn

Abstract

Despite the vast research on national identity construction, little has been studied about the impact of economic crisis on changing national identity frames. Although the literature identifies political ideology through federalism, nationalism, and Europeanization, as well as cultural factors as the main aspects that shape the depiction of the 'Other' in Argentine society, economic factors have also played a part in changing the depiction of the 'Other' and constructing Argentine national identity. This study examines three of the most prominent economic crises in modern Argentina: the 1930s depression, the 1980s debt crisis, and the 2001 financial crisis and the direct or indirect implications that these events had for the definition of the 'Other'. The analysis demonstrates that similar to political ideology, economic factors have played a role in constructing national identity frames, whether by directly changing the depiction of the 'Other' or by affecting the prominent political ideology or cultural factors at the time. Although complete causality cannot be determined in every case, since economic factors impact a society's formation, they deserve greater study as a part of national identity construction.

Introduction

The political and ideological movements, and cultural and linguistic aspects present in Argentina since its founding as a nation have defined the path of Argentine national identity construction. The need for a sense of belonging has pushed politicians, literary figures, and individuals to augment the creation of an Argentine national identity whether by following natural events or by instituting norms such as mandatory education. Since it is a nation so distinct from other South American countries, it is necessary to look at the factors that motivated and morphed national identity construction in Argentina to understand what the Argentine nation consists of and how the national identity has changed over time. Scholars highlight political ideology, federalism, European immigration and the need to fill the pampas, language and literary forces as the prominent factors in the construction of Argentine national identity. Michael Lane Bruner is the only author that connects economic conditions with the constitution of a national identity, however, little has been published about the role that economic factors play specifically in Argentina's national identity construction.

Recently, Argentina has been termed as "strikingly backward in relation to its relative riches." In the mid-1920s, Argentina had been known as one of the countries with the highest standard of living at the time.¹ Current estimates of the poverty level in Argentina rest between 13.9% and 30%, depending on whether the source is private or federal.² Poverty levels reflect economic structure and policy and the higher poverty rates in the last decade have certainly been a result of both. Argentina has been through a series of economic crises, from the 1930s Depression to the 2001 economic collapse, that have had been the impetus for drastic changes in the society as a whole. Similarly, the country has survived political changes from liberal, democratic regimes to repressive, authoritarian dictatorships and scholars highlight these periods

¹ Carlos H. Waisman. *Reversal of Development in Argentina*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 4.

² "Argentina," CIA World Factbook. (29 September 2010) <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ar.html>> (Last Accessed: 14 October 2010).

as important factors in Argentine national identity construction. Little research has been devoted to economic factors as the impetus for change in the formation of Argentine national identity. Since it is the most jolting of economic conditions, economic crisis will serve as the best measurement of change in conditions that could affect national identity. This research will look at how economic crises in the 1930s, 1980s, and 2001 have impacted Argentine national identity. Just as changes in political ideology and cultural aspects have impacted the depiction of the 'Other' in the construction of Argentine national identity, this paper hypothesizes that economic crises have also played a role in defining national identity through the direct or indirect alteration of the 'Other'.

Conceptualizing Argentine National Identity

Since national identity is a highly complex, broad, and difficult topic to conceptualize, it is necessary to consider what constitutes Argentine national identity. Argentine national identity can be narrowed down to a depiction of the national character shaped by a reference to dissimilarities with the 'Other' and commonalities of a collective identity, including common history, political ideology, individual identity, economic conditions, and cultural factors. National identity is constructed through unique combinations of these factors, but usually in relation to the 'Other'. This research will use the depiction of the 'Other' as the major factor in national identity construction, especially because it has been a central component of changing national identity frames in Argentina.³ For the purposes of this paper, the 'Other', whether internal or external, can include and be shaped by ethnic or language groups, social and political classes, other societies and nations, and political ideologies. The 'Other' can be marginalized either within or external to society, or can be an external or internal group incorporated into the collective identity.⁴ Whether economic crises have created or shifted the depiction of the 'Other' will determine whether economic crises have played a role in national identity construction in Argentina. Therefore, economic crises contribute to Argentine national identity construction through shifts in the conceptualization of the 'Other' whether directly or as a result of political ideology, immigration, nationalism, the Argentine destiny, or Europeanization.

Because scholars do not agree completely on the definition and most essential aspects of national identity, it is impossible to include every factor spelled out in the literature review and this may limit research findings. Since this paper is concerned with the contribution of economic crises to Argentine national identity construction, the research will not examine in detail, unless necessary, some of the steadier attributes of national identity apart from the literature review. Federalism, Europeanization, and the Argentine destiny as separate from the rest of Latin America are three examples of Argentine national identity attributes that have not drastically changed over time and they will only briefly be included in the before and after- crisis depictions of national identity. In addition, there is a fairly grounded understanding that national identity construction does not occur at a rapid rate, rather it can incur slight changes throughout

³ Carlos H. Waisman. "The Dynamics of National Identity Frames: the Case of Argentina in the Twentieth Century." In *Constructing Collective Identities and Shaping Publish Spheres: Latin American Paths*, by Luis Roniger and Mario Sznadger (Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 1998), p. 149.

⁴ Ibid, pp. 150-151.

different time frames. By using the depiction of the 'Other' as the major component of national identity construction, it will be possible to identify some of the effects that economic crises have had on the process, however, it is important to remember that overall, they are small shifts in the national identity frame.

Literature Review

Scholars have studied both the general factors of national identity construction and the most prominent elements of Argentine national identity construction very thoroughly. While national identity construction occurs as a result of distinct factors such as political ideology and individual identity, the elements are frequently interconnected and influence each other as well as the national identity. National identity is often expressed as concerning a commonality between members of a nation. The commonality is based on shared experiences involving a political community where "the homeland becomes a repository of historic memories and associations, the place where 'our' sages, saints, and heroes lived, worked, prayed, and fought... the inner meanings can be fathomed only by the initiated, that is the self-aware members of the nation."⁵ According to Smith's Western 'civic' model, important aspects of a nation exist which include both a patria, or a single political will of laws and institutions, and a common homeland and understanding.⁶ The sense of belonging to a common homeland can also be based off of common ancestry, and the fusion of language, culture, polity, legal rights, perceptions, and feelings.⁷ Such shared aspects within a community along with a deeply felt sense of ethnicity that is rooted in the common historical experience, form important elements of national identity construction.

Through the shared historical experience, national identity is constructed around the depiction of the 'Other' whether the internal and external ties are based on language, ethnicity, political ideology, or other cultural elements. Through their interconnectedness, each of the above elements has served to aid in constructing Argentine national identity by motivating changing depictions of the 'Other'. According to Shmuel Eisenstadt, "a central aspect of the construction of collective identities is the definition of 'similarity' among its members, as against the strangeness, the differences distinguishing the other."⁸ National identity frames have three components: the characterization of the 'Other', a definition of the collectivity based on differences between it and the 'Other', and the consequences for national objectives.⁹ In Argentina, the 'Other' could be internal, such as the Indians, Creoles and lower classes, or it could be external such as communism and European nations.¹⁰ As a result of the distinctive

⁵ Anthony Smith, *National Identity*. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), p. 9.

⁶ Ibid, p. 4.

⁷ Robert Kunovich. "The Sources and Consequences of National Identification," *American Sociological Review* 74, no. 4 (August 2009), p. 574.

⁸ Shmuel Eisenstadt. "The Construction of Collective Identities in Latin America: Beyond the European Nation State Model," in *Constructing Collective Identities and Shaping Public Spheres*, eds. Luis Roniger and Mario Sznajder, (Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 1998), p. 246.

⁹ Waisman. "The Dynamics of National Identity Frames: the Case of Argentina in the Twentieth Century." p. 152.

¹⁰ Ibid, pp. 153-156.

character of colonization in Latin America, the clash of races and cultures since the beginning has generated specific patterns for the definition of the 'Other'.¹¹ Since the depiction of the 'Other' has been explained as the major factor in defining national identity frames, the reviewed literature provides an analysis of the most prominent elements that affect changing depictions of the 'Other' in Argentine national identity construction.

The modernist perspective of national identity considers nations the representative of national identity which is the product of modern conditions such as capitalism, industrialization, and mass communications.¹² National identity is very powerful in the regard that it bridges a gap that often exists between the state and civil society. This phenomenon is visible in political movements, such as the nationalist rise in the 1980s during the Malvinas War between Argentina and Britain. Nationalism served to strengthen national unity and identity through the depiction of a British, imperialist 'Other' and that was able to bridge an enormous gap between the military dictatorship and civil society. National identity also relates to the public sphere by building and elaborating criteria "for defining, negotiating or contesting access to public institutions and to control distribution of resources and regulation power."¹³ All of these mechanisms have important consequences for defining inclusion and exclusion, especially in the Argentine public sphere which has experienced shifts through the switches between authoritarian and open societies, helping to create and sometimes fragment national identity. When there was an alteration in the public sphere, such as during the independence movement, the national identity frame changed.

A group of scholars, including Smith and Kunovich, look at the smaller subunits of identity such as class, ethnic, or religious identity, as factors in national identity construction. Individual identities are important building blocks for national identity construction. People locate themselves with one of the subunits of identity, and that association determines their contribution to the national identity. Each individual desires certain content in a national identity therefore it is necessary to study both individual and collective identity in order to fully understand national identity.¹⁴ The idea of ethnic identity has not only played a role in Europeanization, but also includes the 1940s internal migration of *cabecitas negras*, or little blackheads, from the interior of the country to the urban centers.¹⁵ This type of migration, specifically noted for ethnic distinction, shaped the urban working class in the 1940s. The positions left behind in rural areas by these internal migrants were occupied by new immigrants. In the 1940s, migrant flows from Paraguay, Bolivia, Chile, and Peru began increasing, reinforcing a distinct but similar ethnic identity between the groups.¹⁶ In this sense, ethnic

¹¹ Eisenstadt, p. 254.

¹² Kunovich, p. 575.

¹³ Luis Roniger and Tamar Herzog. "Introduction: Creating, Negotiating and Evading Identity in Latin America," in *The Collective and the Public in Latin America*, eds. Luis Roniger and Tamar Herzog, (Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 1988), p.3.

¹⁴ Kunovich, p. 575.

¹⁵ Waisman. *Reverl of Development*, p. 226.

¹⁶ Adriana Marshall and Dora Orlansky. "Inmigracion de Paises Limitrofes y Demanda de Mano de Obra en la Argentina, 1940-1980," *Instituto de Desarrollo Economico y Social* 23, no. 89 (Apr. - Jun. 1983), p. 36.

identity, as a single subset of national identity, has played an important role in national identity construction and ethnicity, connected to racial background, continues to be an important factor in changing depictions of the 'Other' in Argentina today. Most notably, the concept of ethnic identity has been a predominant factor in forging national identity based on the political ideologies of the mid to late 1880s that used ethnicity, especially whiteness and Europeanization, to propel visions of republicanism and liberalism based in Buenos Aires.

Political ideology and political strategies in Argentina, which tended to be of a republican representative form of government led by either liberal or populist notions, have contributed enormously to national identity formation, both directly and through their influence on other elements of national identity construction such as federalism and Europeanization. For example, cultural homogenization through the public school system and universal inscription of men to the army emerged as political goals based on the "superior hierarchy of the native Argentine republican tradition."¹⁷ Some of the republican ideals were transmitted to Argentina by Mariano Moreno, an Argentine politician and journalist, who introduced representative government, institutional rule under law, and universal equality into the Argentine political system.¹⁸ Shumway examines the contrast between the ideologies of the Unitarian, or liberal, landed elite of Buenos Aires and the populist notions in existence since the independence movements. Since liberalism has tended to dominate Argentine political ideology, it has played an important part in constructing Argentine national identity, however, it also tended to mostly represent the identity of the porteños. The early split between liberal and populist thought made it easy for leaders like Moreno to depict populist leaders like Artigas as the 'Other'. Artigas imbued throughout the early 1800s ideas of provincial equality, low-class consciousness, and federalist gauchesque thought that all became essential aspects in constructing an Argentine national identity frame.¹⁹

While controversially considered a political ideology, federalism is definitely closely linked to guiding political ideologies, strategies, and ideological figures in early 19th century Argentina. The liberals, such as Mariano Moreno and his young, porteño, intellectual followers, believed that "political organization, independence, and foreign relations should be left to the educated elite from Buenos Aires."²⁰ The opposition, known as the Saavedristas, sympathized with provincial concerns and were constituted by a heterogeneous group of provincials, Catholic conservatives, and Pro-Spanish.²¹ Out of the political ideology of the early 1800s, as expressed by the characters of Moreno, a liberal and Saavedra, a populist, emerged the federalist attitudes that have since defined the Argentine nation.

The separation of Buenos Aires and the Argentine provinces at the time of the independence movement was one of the principal factors of Argentine national identity construction. The Mayo Revolution that is traditionally associated with Argentine independence "suggests an ideological consensus that never existed."²² With the Mayo Revolution, which was

¹⁷ Myers, p. 135.

¹⁸ Nicolas Shumway. *The Invention of Argentina*. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), p. 42.

¹⁹ Ibid, pp. 66-67.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 43.

²¹ Ibid, p. 44.

²² Ibid, p. 22.

primarily a Buenos Aires phenomenon, the Primera Junta took control and began a series of bloody wars between porteños and the provincial caudillos.²³ As a result of federalist ideas, since there were two governing bodies in Argentina until 1862 along with strong political identities in the provinces, even the location of the capital remained a problem in the emergence of a single Argentine national identity.²⁴ Political autonomy in the early 1800s and huge distances between the cities and provinces had created regional cultures that were not interested in incorporation into one single national culture, especially one that would mostly reflect the elites.

Nationalism can also be considered a political strategy and a demonstration of national identity. A deeply rooted sense of common historical experience, demonstrated through the changing or strengthening of the depiction of the 'Other', can account for the strength of nationalism. Since nationalism is a subset of national identity that Smith uses to build his explanation for national identity construction, it will be helpful to set out a brief understanding of the relationship. According to Smith, nationalism is "an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity, and identity on behalf of a population deemed by some if its members to constitute an actual or potential 'nation'."²⁵ The theory of nationalism looks at all political and social power as being derived from the nation and in order to realize themselves, individuals must identify with the nation. Such identification with a nation requires a comparison to the 'Other' and can aid in the formation of national identity. The idea of nationalist unity has often allowed the state to become the agent of the creation of the future nation, perhaps through cultural and political homogeneity.²⁶ This concept is important when looking at how the state achieves the meaning of national identity and whether it is through symbols or common myths. In this sense, political strategy as promoted by the state is able to shape national identity through the rise of nationalist sentiments or movements. A nationalist movement could also constitute a change in the definition of the 'Other' based on the aspect of political or social homogenization.

Political ideology also played an enormous role in the construction of Argentine national identity through the desire to fulfill Argentina's greatness as a nation. The belief in the Argentine destiny as a great nation is an aspect of Argentine national identity that has barely faltered throughout history. The national conception of Argentina has been grounded in a dream of greatness and the "kind of country Argentines believe they can, should, and want to have" in order to create a 'new Argentina'.²⁷ The myth that by identifying and getting rid of each Argentine culpable group, Argentina would be able to fulfill its original destiny as "one of the best countries in the world," persisted as a major factor in Argentine national identity construction.²⁸ As Armory and Armory emphasize, while Argentina is by no means alone in Latin America with its sense of greatness, its idea of exceptionality, where the promise to

²³ Ibid, p. 22.

²⁴ Myers, p. 118.

²⁵ Anthony Smith, p. 73.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 76.

²⁷ Ariel C. Armony and Victor Armony. "Indictments, Myths, and Citizen Mobilization in Argentina: A Discourse Analysis," *Latin American Politics & Society* 47, no. 4 (Winter 2005), p. 35.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 42.

achieve greatness is continuously left unfulfilled, is fairly unique.²⁹ The idea that greatness is part of Argentine national identity, relates to the method in which this destiny would be fulfilled: through the promotion of a new 'raza argentina'. This would require a shift in the depiction of the Argentine population and a change in who was considered the 'Other.'

Some Argentine politicians and literary figures saw Argentina as having to realize its own unique personality, while others thought that national identity was based on mutable attitudes and perceptions that varied depending on the situation.³⁰ The constructivist vision of Argentine national identity achieves liberal nationalism by promoting patriotic education, often a strategy that Argentine politicians used to construct a new Argentine national identity.³¹ In the 1820s, President Rivadavia emphasized education in order to spread enlightenment on the progress of Argentina as a nation.³² "Education was seen as an instrument capable of engendering the unity of Argentina as a nation."³³ Public school textbooks throughout Argentine history have served to play a controlling role in nation building. During the late 19th century, Argentine textbooks depicted the shift from barbarism to civilization as the Argentine national history and Peronist textbooks of the 1940s and 1950s installed new ideas of a national identity mostly based on the working classes.³⁴ In advocating the spread of civilization – "a category associated with whiteness, economic modernization, and an urban and cosmopolitan European culture," textbooks portrayed Argentina's indigenous as barbaric.³⁵ Textbook accounts of national independence focused on elites and with the turn of the twentieth century, began to propose the creation of a homogenous state which in Argentina would signify mass European immigration. Vom Hau demonstrates the shifts in Argentine national identity from 1910 public school textbooks focused on the elite to 1940 textbooks where workers and peasants would recreate the nation.³⁶ It was not until the 1980s and 1990s in Argentina that the state began to consider cultural heterogeneity.

The creation of a new 'raza argentina' took the form of mass immigration from Europe. Between 1870 and 1930, over six million European immigrants moved to Argentina.³⁷ Delany, Myers, Dijkink, and Shumway emphasize that the desire to fill the pampas after the Conquest of the Desert was entirely dependent on European immigration. Civilizing the pampas was also one of the goals of the Rivadavian Literary Society in the 1820s.³⁸ Domingo Sarmiento, president and intellectual, portrayed the pampas as "a source of barbarism" and claimed that Argentina

²⁹ Ibid, p. 43.

³⁰ Michael Bruner. *Strategies of Remembrance: the Rhetorical Dimensions of National Identity Construction*. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), p. 91.

³¹ Jeane Delany. "Imagining la Raza Argentina," in *Nationalism in the New World*, eds. Don H. Doyle and Marco Antonio Pamplona (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), p. 148.

³² Shumway, p. 86-87.

³³ Klaus-John Dodds. "Geography, Identity, and the Creation of the Argentine State," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 12, no. 3 (Sep 1993), p. 316.

³⁴ Matthias Vom Hau. "UNPACKING THE SCHOOL. Textbooks, Teachers, and the Construction of Nationhood in Mexico, Argentina, and Peru," *Latin American Research Review* 44, no. 3 (July 2009), p. 129.

³⁵ Ibid, p. 132.

³⁶ Vom Hau, p. 137.

³⁷ Waisman. *Reversal of Development*, p. 5.

³⁸ Shumway, p. 87.

was better off than other Spanish American countries “because it [had] more white people.” The desert in Argentina which was the most sparsely populated territory was blamed for economic backwardness and violence which could only be fixed by European immigration.³⁹ Among the main leaders at the time, there was the feeling that “everything not European [was] barbaric... Indian which is synonymous with savage, and European which means those of us born in America, who speak Spanish, and believe in Jesus Christ.”⁴⁰

The formation of the new ‘raza argentina’ was envisioned in many ways. A proponent of cultural nationalism, Ricardo Rojas, claimed that it would be a mixture of European and indigenous elements that would produce the new race, however, European immigration was needed to improve a “defective Creole population.”⁴¹ Others said that the formation of the race would occur through its Spanish and Catholic core.⁴² In whichever way it would occur, the focus on Europeanization as the main component of national identity construction, especially coming from the liberal porteños such as Moreno and Sarmiento, had a major impact on Argentine national identity construction throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Political ideology also relates to the cultural aspects of Argentine national identity construction, mainly language and the intellectual movement, through its relationship with the pampas and the gaucho heritage. The intellectuals intended to redefine a national philosophy, culture, and intellect beginning in the 1830s. Not only was the intellectual movement helpful in defining the Argentine national identity, the literary figures of the time also promoted a new vision of national identity through the gaucho culture by means of writing, art, and ‘cocoliche’ dialect.⁴³ Partly a creation of the intellectuals, gaucho imagery was a model of transformation and hybridization that made it possible for millions of immigrants coming to Argentina in the late 1880s to be ‘creolized’ or symbolically converted into gauchos.⁴⁴ The gaucho is another symbol of the struggle that Argentine national identity often went through.

The nationalists looked at the gaucho as a “symbol to represent the cultural heritage of the nation under ‘threat’ by immigration” since the gaucho was the very subject that had been condemned to disappear by the European immigration.⁴⁵ While the meaning of the gaucho underwent many changes, in the late 1800s, nationalist and populist writers made the gaucho a symbol of the authentic Argentina, providing local imagery especially of the rural lifestyle. Some groups have tried to romanticize the gaucho by glorifying the bandit spirit of the roaming gauchos, while others criticized the image as backwards and heathen.⁴⁶ Hernandez’s poem *Martin Fierro*, one of the most influential gauchesque literary pieces depicts gauchos as

³⁹ Myers, p. 120.

⁴⁰ Shumway, p. 134 & 141.

⁴¹ Delany, p. 151.

⁴² Ibid, p. 150.

⁴³ Delany p. 155.

⁴⁴ Eduardo P. Archetti. "Masculinity, Primitivism, and Power Gaucho, Tango, and the Shaping of Argentine National Identity," in *Gender, Sexuality, and Power in Latin America Since Independence*, eds. William E. French and Katherin Elaine Bliss, (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc, 2007), p. 212.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 216.

⁴⁶ Shumway, pp. 68-69.

representing freedom, tradition, and the fight against state injustice.⁴⁷ The twentieth century nativist movement glorified rural society and portrayed gauchos as the “genuine manifestation of the national spirit...the Argentine soul,” otherwise known as *argentinidad*.⁴⁸ What this demonstrates is that the symbolic nature of the gaucho is connected to the creation of a true ‘raza argentina’ as promoted by the liberal political ideology of the time, however, while *argentinidad* embraced a more traditional version of the Argentine, the new ‘raza argentina’ differed in its depiction of the ‘Other’, as previously described.

Similar to the new ‘raza argentina’, the formation of a distinctive language in Argentina has been an important aspect in the creation of the new nation through the liberal thinkers of the time, and is central to Argentina’s national identity formation. “Only by liberating themselves from academic Spanish and by incorporating ‘cocoliche dialect’ and ‘gauchesque norms’ of speech that were ‘most genuinely Argentine’ could Argentines produce an authentic national literature” that demonstrated its divergence from Spain.⁴⁹ The composition of the new Argentine race drove the permanent incorporation of words, expressions, and phrases that were not accepted by the Royal Academy.⁵⁰ The version of Spanish spoken in Argentina has grown out of a combination of Italian, French, Spanish, and gaucho influences that make it unique among South Americans and help to identify Argentina as a nation. Not only has language changed the depiction of the ‘Other’ based on other Spanish-speaking nations, it has reinforced the separation of Buenos Aires, where the European dialect is most distinct, and the provinces where more gauchesque language still lingers.

As demonstrated by the reviewed authors, national identity construction in Argentina has consisted of political, ideological, and cultural factors that have changed depending on the time period. These types of explanations tend to dominate the literature on Argentine national identity construction as the major factors in the shaping of the national identity since independence. Economic crises, while clearly not characteristic only of Argentina, have been an important factor in defining Argentine history, just as political and social factors have. Whether they have directly affected national identity construction itself or have directly affected some of the other defining factors of national identity construction, economic crises hold an important position in the welfare of a nation and should not be left out of the analysis. This paper seeks to further examine the main economic crises in Argentine history and the direct and indirect effects that they have had on the construction of Argentine national identity through the depiction of the ‘Other.’

Michael Bruner is the only author that creates a connection between economic conditions and national identity construction. National identity is a ‘malleable fiction’ that has been expressed through changing discourse on property, laws, infrastructure, economic policies, type of governance, cultural markers, and different remembrance strategies. He claims that “the economic nation [is] the product of a wide range of state policies, from protective tariffs to social

⁴⁷ Archetti, p. 216.

⁴⁸ Waisman. *Reversal of Development*, p. 41.

⁴⁹ Delany, p. 155.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 155.

security, designed to protect interests and secure the allegiance of subjects. This, in turn, [has] led to public identification with the state.”⁵¹ Different cultural groups reap the benefits or suffer from state economic policies and these economic conditions help to define what constitutes the national identity within a nation. He explains that during times of economic hardship it is the easiest moment for an imagined community to become a xenophobic or ethnocentric weapon that serves to marginalize a population.⁵² In this way, changing economic conditions play a role in creating discourse around the sense of national belonging which negotiates the national identity. The most striking argument is that collective identities tend to be formed in part as a result of economic crises and historical trauma and Bruner is the only reviewed author to make such a connection.⁵³

Elements of Argentine national identity construction have been satisfactorily covered in literature, however, nothing has been written about the main economic crises in Argentine history and how they may have influenced the national identity frame. Argentine political ideology and strategy, as expressed through federalist and nationalist attitudes, along with language and cultural markers, have helped to form Argentine national identity through the changing depiction of the ‘Other’. Since Bruner does not detail the process through which economic crises have shaped national identity and there is very little scholarly literature on the topic, this paper seeks to identify whether economic crises have altered the definition of the ‘Other’ which will be used as the main aspect of national identity formation in Argentina.

Context: Argentine Economic Crises

I. The 1930s Depression

In order to determine whether economic crises have had an effect on the definition of the ‘Other’ in constructing Argentine national identity, it is necessary to look at the depiction of the ‘Other’ before the crisis and whether the crisis changed such a conceptualization or created a new ‘Other’. There may also be factors that shifted the ‘Other’ that were not a result of the economic crisis and this will have to be taken into account. As a ‘new country’ Argentina had been following Adam Smith’s theory of economic growth that through capitalism and liberal democracy, the society would develop and grow.⁵⁴ The expansion of the core of the world economy led to Argentina’s progress as a nation in the late 1880s, especially as Britain looked for a way to reap benefits out of the emptiness of the pampas. From early on, Argentina’s economy had been incorporated in world markets, especially because of its production of wheat and beef. From 1890 to World War I, Argentina’s wheat output increased by five and by 1925, the country supplied “66 percent of world exports of corn, 72 percent of linseed, 32 percent of oats, 20 percent of wheat and wheat flour, and more than 50 percent of meat.”⁵⁵ Between 1870 and 1913, Argentine exports grew at an average rate of six percent yearly and GDP grew at a rate

⁵¹ Bruner, p. 5.

⁵² Ibid, p. 88.

⁵³ Ibid, p. 90.

⁵⁴ Waisman, *Reversal of Development*. p. 4.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 58.

of 4.6 percent yearly.⁵⁶ This demonstrates the rate of economic growth and depth of interdependence between Argentina and other countries before the 1930 crisis. In addition, from the late 1800s through the 1920s, Argentina “could be included among the countries with the highest standards of living” and was ahead of Britain on per capita income, and as such it was difficult to picture Argentina as the typical Latin American society of that era.⁵⁷ Immanuel Wallerstein categorized Argentina during this period as constituting part of the semi-periphery rather than the periphery because “Argentina belonged to a category more economically and socially advanced than others,”⁵⁸ a feeling often shared by Argentina’s political leaders of the 1800s and possibly even today.

By the 1930s, a liberal democracy and a Eurocentric focus emulated by mass emigration from Europe had contributed enormously to Argentine national identity construction, as examined in the literature review. The national identity, as formed by the depiction of the ‘Other’, at the time included both an internal ‘Other’ in the Indian population and an external ‘Other’ in Spain, Britain, and France. As already mentioned, the pampas were seen as the source of barbarianism and from 1860 on, liberal governments ordered the displacement and murder of Indians in the Conquest of the Desert. The existence of the Indians as the ‘Other’ had blurred the imagined political community that was creating the Argentine nation through the process of Europeanization.⁵⁹ This depiction of the ‘Other’ determined part of the national identity conceptualized as non-Indian, or white and European which was begun by intellectuals such as Moreno and Sarmiento. Since such attributes was not automatically part of the national identity, “the state had to step in rapidly to compensate this lack of ‘natural’ identity, improvising myths, and more importantly, generating negative images of their immediate neighbors.”⁶⁰

An essential aspect in Argentine society before the Depression was the elite- middle class relationship. According to Waisman, until 1930, most social and political forces supported the basic workings of Argentine society and the vertical relationship created between the elite landholders and lower-middle class workers tended to be non-controversial since Argentina’s increased exports benefited both.⁶¹ This demonstrates the depiction of the internal ‘Other’ as represented by the lower-middle classes in an inclusionary facet that did not create political polarization. The mobilization of the lower classes was not a huge worry of the elite as workers could be deported, but once Argentina’s economic stability was shaken, the elite worried about their control in the domestic sphere under democratic rule. With the change of political leadership, they adopted an exclusionary depiction of the popular classes as the ‘Other’.

Argentina’s relationship with Britain as a trading partner was different from its relationship with Spain which was seen as a backward society. According to Sarmiento, the Spanish heritage was one of the evil afflictions preventing the emergence of an Argentine

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 5.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 7.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 14.

⁵⁹ Dodds, p. 317.

⁶⁰ Dodds, p. 324.

⁶¹ Waisman. *Reversal of Development*, p. 83.

national identity.⁶² Spain was depicted as an excluded external ‘Other’ in the formation of Argentine national identity before the 1930s and national leaders refuted their Spanish heritage in the creation of a new national identity. On the other hand, Britain was Argentina’s largest trading partner even before the Depression and had chosen Argentina as its source of meat and grain. This type of relationship depicted the Argentine national identity in relation to its relationship with Britain as the ‘Other’ in an external but inclusionary way.

Argentina began to feel the effects of a depression in the late 1920s, and its collapse in the early 1930s led the country to “be perceived as a national failure, one of the few countries that have moved from first-world to third-world status in only a few short decades.”⁶³ Because of Argentina’s place as a middle developed nation, its reinsertion into the world economy after the Great Depression of the 1930s was more difficult than the process that less-developed nations went through and had to take into account both the changing international order and domestic structural modifications. The question to be analyzed is whether the economic crisis causing such difficulties affected Argentine national identity construction based on the depiction of the ‘Other’ in society or whether other factors of national identity construction played a more prominent role.

In order to determine any effect that the economic crisis might have had on the construction of Argentine national identity, it is necessary to lay out the major changes after the Great Depression. The economic crisis did not have much of an effect on the Argentine’s view of Spain therefore Argentine national identity tended to separate itself from the Hispanic origins as it had been doing for the previous century. One major consequence of the Depression was a change in the Argentine perspective of Britain which shifted from an external inclusionary ‘Other’ to an external exclusionary ‘Other’. This occurred mostly through the 1933 Roca-Runciman Treaty between Argentina and Britain which granted the United Kingdom concessions in trade and investment. This, along with the issue of the foreign-owned meat-packing industry and transportation system of Buenos Aires, were seen as “indicative of dependent and even colonial status.”⁶⁴ At the time of the Depression, one third of fixed capital in Argentina was foreign which included some of the grain exporting firms, the meat packing industry, railroad lines, shipping services, and banks.⁶⁵ An important aspect of the economic crisis was therefore an alteration in how Argentines viewed their independence in relation to imperialist powers. The strengthened critique of foreign domination and view of Argentina as under exploitation and servitude, converted the image of Argentina into one similar to that of much of Latin America. The emergence of nationalist feelings based on dependency would eventually play a role in Argentina’s choice to follow an Import Substitution Industrialization Model in the 1940s. The idea of liberation from an imperialist power in order for Argentina to achieve its greatness independently was one important aspect of the national identity at the time and pushed Britain to the outskirts of such a conceptualization.

⁶² Ibid, p. 37.

⁶³ Shumway, p. x.

⁶⁴ Waisman. *Reversal of Development*. p. 48.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 68.

After the Depression, Argentina's agrarian production also stagnated as would later be the trend throughout Peron's government from 1946-1955. While this led to a decrease in grain output, livestock production continued expanding, transforming the pampas from agricultural land to pastures.⁶⁶ The resulting internal migration, from rural to urban areas, created a much different dynamic within the cities. Often, occupation of the rural landscape was taken over by the neighboring-country immigrants. As Waisman notes, "neither the immigrant middle and urban lower classes, nor the largely Creole lower classes in the interior provinces who migrated to the cities after the Depression, were considered by the elite as full-fledged members of the national or, at least, the political community."⁶⁷ Many of these migrants would later be incorporated into the working sector, however upon their arrival they were depicted as the new 'Other.' The migrants were a mix of Creole and Europeans, but from the rural and lower classes. Scholars speculate that many had moved to Argentina in the hopes of acquiring land, found out upon arrival that landed elite controlled the majority of the empty land and only needed labor, and eventually settled in the cities. Especially after the Depression, the elites looked at the rural and lower classes as unwanted groups, forging out of them the separation between the 'true' Argentine identity and the 'Other'. This resulted in another change in the national identity frame that was not dependent so much on the Europeanization of Argentina based on the immigration of any European classes, but on the specific view that the new political and economic elite would control the destiny of the country while the rural migrants would have no say in politics or the direction of the nation.

The issue of internal migration of lower class Europeans is also an interesting result of political ideology through both federalist thought and the new 'raza argentina'. Although in the 1880s and early 1900s, the goal of political leaders was to fill the pampas with white Europeans, the plan had generally backfired, leaving a class considered lower than the elite porteños in Buenos Aires. Economic crisis, which left many farmers without production incentives, motivated a slightly new national identity frame where internal migrants became the 'Other', along with their darker-skinned replacements in rural areas.

Economic crisis often worsens social indicators within a nation, however, in Argentina, they did not change drastically right after the Depression. This plays out in an interesting way concerning Argentina's relationship with its Latin American neighbors. Levels of nutrition, physicians per capita, and access to higher education remained important indicators of the original Argentine status and generally were sustained at levels higher than the rest of Latin America.⁶⁸ Despite outsider views on Argentina's prosperity, the Argentine image of its own state did not seem to have changed in regards to its 'manifest destiny' after the Depression. In terms of a depiction of national identity through Latin America as the 'Other', the frame does not appear to have shifted as a result of the 1930s Depression. Moreover, because social indicators did not drastically change after the Depression, it enforced the Argentine elite image of a white,

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 63.

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 43.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 72.

Europeanized, and aristocratic nation, depicting the 'Other' as the less developed and generally darker-skinned Latin American neighbors.

A final important change that the economic crisis may have brought about was the transition away from liberal democracy by the 1930 military coup which placed President Uriburu in power. The question of how much the economic crisis affected the political change and whether it represented a change in national identity construction is controversial. There was inevitably some causality, however, there is no question that political instability existed before the economic crisis. The perpetuation of political instability occurred through the declination of real wages and per capita GNP and the development of a negative balance of payments at the end of the 1920s. The negative balance of payments led to the abandonment of the gold standard which devalued the peso and decreased the value of imports, consequently decreasing government revenue and leading to a fiscal crisis of the state.⁶⁹ It is clear that the economic crisis created a weak political regime and those planning the coup understood the vulnerability. Such a drastic change in state authority can have a severe impact on national identity construction.⁷⁰ Political strategy, from the shift away from liberal democracy to military dictatorship may have prompted an alteration in the depiction of the 'Other', where the depiction of the 'Other' as those who had upheld liberal democracy gained a foothold in Argentine national identity construction. By the 1930s, the Argentine national identity was shifting away from definition as a liberal democracy toward a military dictatorship and a more conservative ideology. Within the political sphere, the 'Other' also included the Radical Party and Communists, which began a long period of power switching both between ideologies and between types of political authority in Argentina.

Depictions of the 'Other' changed drastically as a result of the 1930s Depression in both political and social, internal and external ways. Since many factors can shift the depiction of the 'Other' as explored in the literature review, it is imperative to disentangle those factors caused directly or indirectly by the economic crisis. Before the Depression, the Argentine national identity espoused a liberal democracy, the continued need to fill the pampas, and through this, the defining of the 'Other' as Spain, Britain, and the internal Indian population. With the economic crisis, the transition away from liberal democracy, the transformed view of lower, rural class Creole and European migrants, and the British as the 'Other' separated the Argentine imagined identity from the undesired traits. The British went from being the 'Other' in an inclusionary sense to the 'Other' but in an exclusionary way because of the imperialist notions that the economic crisis brought upon Argentina's economic independence. Since it is impossible to determine whether the economic crisis was responsible for the political turnover, there is no causality to be found between economic crisis and the changing national identity frame as a result of political changes. The complexity of shifting state authority and its immediate and long term effects on national identity are a topic far outside of this paper. While it may have been combined with other factors that influence the depiction of the 'Other', overall, in

⁶⁹ Anne L. Potter. "The Failure of Democracy in Argentina 1916-1930: An Institutional Perspective," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 13, no. 1 (May 1981), p. 91.

⁷⁰ Bruner, p. 1.

the case of the 1930s Depression, the economic crisis did play a role in the construction of a new Argentine national identity frame through a shift in the internal and external 'Other'.

II. The 1980s Debt Crisis

The debt crisis differs from the 1930s Depression for a few reasons that are important for supporting the thesis of this paper. While the Depression occurred worldwide, the debt crisis was concentrated mostly in developing countries and more specifically, regionally in Latin America. In terms of its effect on Argentina, the debt crisis took on unique distinctions compared to the 1930s Depression because it demonstrated Argentina's vulnerabilities and similarities to the rest of Latin America and how much further its international status had dropped since the golden years before the 1930s. In Argentina in the 1980s, the situation in terms of national identity was also more complicated than in the 1930s because the decade involved a variety of controversial factors such as the Guerra de las Malvinas (Falklands War) and the regime change from military dictatorship to democratic rule. This section intends to extract the relationship between the economic crisis and changing depictions of the 'Other' from the complexity of the political change.

The 1980s debt crisis came at an important time in the modern construction of the Argentine nation for two reasons and these factors surely had an enormous impact on the construction of Argentine national identity. It would be impossible to completely separate out the effects of an economic crisis on the depiction of the 'Other' from the effects of the transition to democracy in 1983 with the election of Raul Alfonsín, and the 1982 Guerra de las Malvinas between Argentina and Britain. While the democratic transition clearly plays out in the political and economic decisions taken, the Guerra de las Malvinas struck a different nationalist sentiment in Argentina that is worth spelling out considering the role that national identity construction, through the expression of nationalism, undertook in times of political crisis.

At a time when the military junta had disappeared and repressed civilians, the fight to reclaim the Malvinas was a unifying goal within Argentina. In an advertisement in *La Nación*, the spirit of Argentines during the Guerra de las Malvinas was praised. "All the Motherland was involved in the fight for sovereignty and identity, every one of us, going deep into the roots of his own identity. We all were reunited in the shared sense of a common mission: to be Argentines."⁷¹ The Argentine government used territorial completeness as a rationale for mobilizing national identity in the Guerra de las Malvinas where national pride could not be lost to the greater, stronger Britain. While the conflict can be seen as a fortifier of a positive and unifying Argentine national identity, after Argentina's defeat, many people began to see the junta as having ignored reality and falsified nationalism which disgraced Argentina in front of a larger power.⁷² It seems accurate to say that the British were depicted as an external, excluded 'Other' both before and after the Guerra de las Malvinas and such a depiction was more the result of a political crisis than an economic crisis. Argentina was also cut off from the United States and

⁷¹ Nora Femenia. *National Identity in Times of Crisis*. (New York: Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 1996), p. 200.

⁷² Ibid, p. 202.

many European nations during the Guerra de las Malvinas because they supported Britain, provoking some anti-imperialist feelings.

Apart from the depiction of Britain as the external 'Other', as a result of the Malvinas War, the early 1980s brought a slew of anti-imperialist and nationalist slogans because of the huge foreign debt that Argentina was building up.⁷³ Across Latin America, the debt crisis was a stark reminder of imperialist control even over the desired progress of developing nations through huge amounts of borrowing. Argentina "exhibited the symptoms of a decadent imperialism. Abandoned and left to shift unsuccessfully for itself, with few ideas and tarnished ideals, its people became...collectively diminished."⁷⁴ In addition, the conditionality of IMF loans served to muster up anti-imperialist feelings. This could be termed as a new depiction of the 'Other', referring mostly to the United States, European powers, and Western global organizations. The IMF and World Bank neoliberal strategies of the late 1980s and early 1990s also derived significant opposition from the protectionist sectors, provoking nationalist sentiments. The state authority in general, both military dictatorship and Alfonsín, were blamed for the economic dependency that allowed international institutions to basically mandate interactions between the state and civil society. The depiction of the 'Other' as external and imposing formed around the demonstration of the national identity through nationalist sentiments of the collective population.

Just as changing relations between external powers and Argentina altered the depiction of the 'Other', so did the changing relationship between the state and public sphere in the 1970s and 1980s. In terms of changing regimes during this time period, it is difficult to pinpoint which characters or entities can be deemed the 'Other', however, national identity was in part shaped by the repressive military governments. The military coup of 1976 took over a disintegrating Argentine society and replaced democratic rule with repressive tactics. Government action included subversion of all enemies usually through disappearance and there was a lack of constitutional right for the families of those disappeared. The view of Argentina's government as illegitimate from the outside also puts a distancing mechanism between the state authority and the public sphere, creating a different space in which national identity frames might be constructed. Some might argue that the military government represented the Argentine nation and all of the subversive elements should be depicted as the 'Other', however, another perspective could argue that, in the same way that political elites would become the 'Other' in 2001 because of their failure, the military government became the 'Other' because of its inability to retake the Islas Malvinas, to correct the economy, and to respect the basic human rights of its citizens.

The economic downfall throughout the 1980s also led to dire criticism of the military dictatorship and contributed to its failure. As oil prices rose during the 1970s, U.S. and European banks were eager to recycle their petrodollars by lending money to just as eager developing

⁷³ Luis Alberto Romero. *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), p. 277.

⁷⁴ Colin M. MacLachlan. *Argentina*. (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2006), p. 184.

countries, especially in Latin America. With high global interest rates, a high valuation of the U.S. dollar and depleted foreign exchange reserves in debtor nations, many countries could not sustain the debt. By 1983, Argentina's current account deficit was at 3.3 billion, external debt represented 67 percent of GDP, and interest on loans reached 69 percent of all exports.⁷⁵ By one year later, the inflation rate had reached 626.7 percent.⁷⁶ The result of a fiscal crisis where the state held the responsibility of servicing most of the debt was a severe decrease in the accessibility and quality of education, healthcare, transportation, and energy. During the time of military dictatorships, normal citizens held no political recourse in receiving access to any public services. Again, this could be another reason for the military dictatorship to be depicted as the 'Other' which fostered an Argentine national identity based on democratic freedoms and the prosperity that Argentina so greatly 'deserved' and always desired.

It is probably valid to say that high inflation and the imposition of strict price controls through the 1985 Austral Plan served to mobilize collective action both in the private sector and from labor unions. While political failure under the military government had undermined government legitimacy, Alfonsín's government also failed to consistently repair the economy after the debt crisis and contributed to the election of Carlos Menem in 1989. Alfonsín and Menem's policies tended to be more inclusionary towards the marginalized classes which can be looked at as a shift in the depiction of the 'Other'.⁷⁷ While lower classes had been the 'Other' but in an exclusionary sense, they reverted to the inclusionary 'Other'. His policies tended to be redistributive, raising worker's wages and introducing important social welfare initiatives. It is impossible to conclude, however, whether the structural changes that caused such drastic distributive effects in Argentina were initially a result of political or economic changes.

As is the case with every economic crisis, there were some purely economic and social effects as a result of the debt crisis. Between 1975 and 1988, per capita GDP dropped by twelve percent, wages and salaries as a percentage of GDP dropped 23.8 percent. The distribution of wealth worsened and poverty levels increased. In 1974, the top ten percent of income earners in Argentina, received thirty-five percent of GDP compared to forty-six percent in 1988.⁷⁸ Within the nineteen districts surrounding Buenos Aires, 68.7 percent of working and middle class households had been pushed into poverty because of the prolonged economic downturn.⁷⁹ This has led to the development of urban poverty especially concentrated around large cities, a growing informal economy, and lack of services in these areas. These statistics demonstrate what have been some of the results of the economic crisis. How the economic crisis has altered social indicators and the conditions of peoples' lives plays into how they view themselves as part of the nation and whether the nation includes them in its production of the national identity.

⁷⁵ Jose L. Machinea and Juan F. Sommer. "El Manejo de la Deuda Externa en Condiciones de Crisis de Balanza de Pagos: la Moratoria Argentina de 1988-1989." *Comision Economica para America Latina* (1990), pp. 5-6.

⁷⁶William C. Smith. "Democracy, Distributional Conflicts and Macroeconomic Policymaking in Argentina, 1983-1989." *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 32, no. 2 (Summer 1990).

⁷⁷ Romero, p. 269.

⁷⁸William C. Smith.

⁷⁹William C. Smith.

One issue to consider would be how much the transition from military dictatorship to a democratic government was dependent on the economic conditions of the decade. President Alfonsín put a lot of stress on the return to democracy especially in the hopes of preventing collapse back to a military government. Economic conditions had been deteriorating for a few years before the debt default, further delegitimizing the military authority. Through the displacement of civil society and destruction of the relationship between dictatorship and public sphere, the military regime became depicted increasingly as the ‘Other’. As examined in the literature review, the shifting back and forth between authoritarian regimes and liberal democracies in Argentina had consequences for the definitions of inclusion and exclusion in society and further marked a changing national identity frame. While perhaps there is no direct connection between the debt crisis and Argentine national identity construction, maybe there is more of a relationship between deteriorating economic conditions in general and how the depiction of the ‘Other’ has changed through the place of the public sphere.

Because of the various transitions at the time, from the Peronist government to military dictatorship and the 1983 democratic transition, political ideology and strategy played an enormous role in defining the Argentine national identity. It is almost impossible to extract a change in the depiction of the ‘Other’ after the debt crisis as a direct result of the economic crisis. The same holds true because of the Malvinas War which was considered a mobilization of Argentine national identity.⁸⁰ Since there is no clear creation or alteration of the ‘Other’ as a result of the debt crisis, in this situation, any changes in the national identity frame of the 1980s cannot be attributed to the economic crisis. The generally-deteriorating economic conditions throughout the 1970s and 1980s might have had more of an impact on political transitions and the definition of the ‘Other’ than did the debt crisis itself, however, this would require a much more in-depth analysis. There is no conclusion therefore that the debt crisis contributed directly to Argentine national identity formation in the 1980s.

III. The 2001 Financial Crisis

Argentine national identity before the 2001 crisis appears to be constituted of similar aspects in 2001 as it was before the 1930 Depression with the exception of a few distinct elements, especially considering some of the nationalist sentiment and subversion of Argentina as any other Latin American nation by western creditors. The origins of the 2001 crisis can be found in the 1980s debt crisis and subsequent ‘fixing’ of the economy through conditional IMF loans. The new round of politicians took it upon themselves in the 1990s to attempt social development programs that improved their public approval, however, most clashed with the Structural Adjustment Loan policies and exacerbated social marginalization. Although politicians have been far from trusted throughout Argentine history for corruption and not meeting their constituents’ needs, the lack of coherent policymaking and breakdown of communication between politicians and civil society throughout the 1980s and 1990s, led to a

⁸⁰ Femenia, p. 185.

situation of rejection of the political class in its entirety, which will be examined later briefly. The 2001 crash was the final turning moment in the realization of this change.

Another factor that had begun to slightly shift the Argentine national identity was immigration from neighboring countries such as Bolivia, Chile, and Paraguay which has replaced European immigration to Argentina. Although these immigration flows began as early as the 1940s, they picked up after the debt crisis in Latin America and the subsequent reforms. As of the most recent census in 2001, INDEC reported that there were 923,215 people born in bordering countries living in Argentina including 235,000 Bolivians and 325,000 Paraguayans.⁸¹ As a total, the foreign born from these five nations represents about 2.6 percent of the Argentine population and does not include descendents of these immigrants who were born in Argentina. Racially speaking, descendents of such immigrants that tend to have darker skin would comprise a much larger percentage of the Argentine population. This has altered many factors including the 'whiteness' of the Argentine population and the size of the unskilled labor force. Even though Argentina has generally kept open borders, the perceptions towards this type of immigrant tend to place them in a category of the 'Other'. By not being part of this 'Other', the white, and European Argentine nation strengthens its national identity, even when the nation is really comprised of a very diverse population.

The 2001 economic crisis in Argentina has had one of the most profound impacts on the income distribution, poverty rates, and investor confidence in the system. Despite Argentina's success throughout the 1990s in reducing hyperinflation, increasing output, and implementing IMF-supported programs, vulnerabilities began to build up. Government expenditure increased by 97 percent between 1991 and 2001 and the spending was largely funded by foreign lenders.⁸² Argentina's decision to peg its currency in 1991 and maintain convertibility resulted in most of the negative social indicators similar to those of the earlier debt crisis. Without world market, labor market, and public expenditure flexibility, currency depreciations could not be controlled and led to default and financial paralysis especially of the banking system.⁸³ In 2001, the crisis peaked with bank runs, the renunciation of President de la Rúa, default on loan payments, and the termination of the Convertibility Plan.

There is a sense of denial that has played out concerning the Argentine situation after the 2001 crisis and it relates to social indicators that have perhaps helped to construct a slightly different Argentine national identity. Almost ten years after the peak of the crisis, it seems to be an ideal time to analyze some of the results in the following years and how these have played out for Argentina as a nation. The impact of the crisis on social factors has been similar to that of the previous debt crisis. From 1998 to 2002, GDP dropped by twenty-five percent, unemployment rose to 21.5 percent, urban poverty rose to fifty-three percent, and education and health services

⁸¹ *Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos*. <www.indec.gov.ar> (Last Accessed 17 September 2010).

⁸² Ricardo Lopez Murphy, Daniel Artana, and Fernando Navajas. "The Argentine Economic Crisis," *CATO Journal* 23, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2003), p 24.

⁸³ *Ibid*, p. 29.

both less accessible for much of the population.⁸⁴ Urban poverty has been a phenomenon of third world countries in general and was severely exacerbated in Argentina by the 2001 financial crisis.

The issue of increased urban poverty rates relates to Argentina's reluctance to see its destiny in a different light – its long history of inability to rise to first world level. The growing prominence of villas miserias, especially after the 2001 crisis with increased rates of chronic and structural poverty, Argentines refused to accept the truth about the situation because of how it made the 'Argentine' look. This has impacted Argentina as a nation and has definitely produced a depiction of the 'Other' as the urban slum. Although the villas miserias have existed for decades, the drastic increase in number of inhabitants after the 2001 crisis has drawn them to the forefront as a controversial social and economic issue. While many native Argentines were forced into poverty after 2001 and moved to the urban outskirts, many of the villas' occupants also came originally from a neighboring country. As a result of the economic crisis, the 'Other' shifted from darker-skinned immigrants to the urban poor which tends to include the earlier depiction of the 'Other' in an ethnic categorization anyway. The villas miserias, in their economically-behind nature have of course been deemed one of the reasons that Argentina still has not been able to pull itself out of the decades-long rut. While the overall tone of Argentina's destiny has not changed, when Nestor Kirchner became President in 2003, he seemed to be changing track by speaking about an ordinary Argentina, a normal Argentina, in contrast to the high and mighty aspirations of his predecessors.⁸⁵ More recently however, this still does not seem to have changed the Argentine view of its own nation and its ability to continue trying to achieve greatness. If this had been pushed by Kirchner, it might have required some alteration eventually in Argentine national identity by discontinuing the belief since the birth of the nation that it would become one of the best nations.

As just mentioned, Argentina has always assumed a myth of grandeur that motivated public discourse, even if Kirchner seemed to have slightly dropped the issue. With the perceived ability to achieve rapid economic growth and be seen as a first world nation, the question arises of how the inability to arrive at this point has threatened the national myth. The 2001 crisis was seen as both economic and political and "engendered a narrative of victimization, which became the staple of almost every political point of view: there is someone who is liable for robbing Argentina's wealth and worse, for steering the country away from its glorious destiny."⁸⁶ The blame is often put on a specific group, the 'Other', which has ranged from military dictatorships to imperialist control. By 2001, this figure was the political representation in general. It is interesting to look at the national myth of Argentina's greatness, which was relevant before the crisis and is still relevant today, as a factor in shaping the national identity. With any type of crisis, the blame on the 'Other' serves to strengthen the belief of Argentines that their nation will

⁸⁴ Ariel Fizbein, Paula Ines Giovagnoli, and Isidro Aduriz. "El Impacto de la Crisis Argentina en el Bienestar de los Hogares," *Revista de la CEPAL* 79 (April 2003), p. 152.

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 48.

⁸⁶ Armony & Armony, p. 44.

succeed “and they refuse to accept any truth which makes them inferior to anyone else.”⁸⁷ This belief has been a strengthening force for Argentine unity and national identity, especially throughout the 1980s.

Similar to the 1980s, economic conditions and political instability were closely intertwined in 2001. Failed programs to boost the economy and the delegitimizing nature of the political regimes destroyed the possibility of a recovery before a disaster. While it is impossible to draw complete causality between the economic crisis and changing depiction of the political leaders as the ‘Other’, Armory and Armory state that this was the first time where Argentines truly pushed away the entire political class. The economic crash was the moment of indictment of the political class, resulting from a longstanding conception of Argentine national identity, which rejected the political class as those who could not achieve the grandeur of the Argentine nation.⁸⁸ In addition, politicians’ failures throughout the previous decade to correct dependency on foreign creditors exacerbated the mentality that too much connection with imperialist powers would bring about Argentina’s doom. As a result of the 2001 crisis, Argentina’s social indicators mirrored much of Latin America, especially with the growth of poor, urban concentrations. While pushing Argentina closer to its neighbors, the economic crisis may have slightly changed the way that Argentines view themselves, although this will be a long process in the making. Changes in the depiction of the ‘Other’ can also occur through how the state forms a national vision and since Nestor Kirchner began his term downsizing Argentine greatness, perhaps such a view of Latin America as the ‘Other’ has shifted. More than anything, economic crash of 2001 altered the depiction of the ‘Other’ in Argentine society as the marginalized, excluded classes, especially the urban poor.

Conclusion

While literature on Argentine national identity examined in great detail the 1930s time period, there is very little research concerning more recent events. National identity construction is constantly occurring but notable changes will be unidentifiable until the depiction of the ‘Other’ has shifted whether through political ideology and strategy, or economic crises. For the 1930s Depression, it is possible to look at some of the literature to determine the likely effects of the economic collapse on Argentine national identity construction. For the 2001 crisis, the literature is abundant in theories about why the crisis occurred and its economic consequences, however its effect on national identity has not been documented, therefore in the last section, some of the conclusions were based off of my own observations of the Argentine national identity present before and after the crisis.

The research studied in this paper stems from a basic understanding of national identity as detailed by authors such as Smith, Waisman, Eisenstadt, Shumway, and Myers where national identity construction occurs through the depiction of the ‘Other’. While the original formation of Argentine national identity has been a topic of much study because of its complexity and differential aspects from the rest of the Latin American continent, it has not been examined in the context of recent change, whether political, economic, or social. Since this paper has taken the

⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 44.

⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 27.

theory that national identity frames alter slowly over time based on changing depictions of the 'Other', its goal was to apply the theory to economic crises. In general, the impact of economic factors has been left out of research on Argentine national identity. Since political factors can alter the depiction of the 'Other' it stands to reason that economic factors should also have some impact. As has been mentioned in this paper, economic crisis has altered the depiction of the 'Other' which is especially clear from the 1930s Depression and the 2001 financial crisis, although at times causality is unclear. It is impossible to analyze every aspect of Argentine society in order to determine which variable is impacting the national identity shift which is why the 1980s correlation could not be made. There is, however, the possibility that economic factors did substantially alter the definition of the 'Other' but over a longer period of time, making it difficult to distinguish from various regime changes and social unrest. It is important to remember that many of the variables affecting national identity construction are interrelated, and just as political ideology may be behind European immigration as an indirect factor of national identity construction, economic crisis also indirectly shapes national identity through its influence on political ideology and strategy.

Also important when analyzing the outcome of this paper is to consider national identity in its broadest meaning. Even within a country with drastic economic and political changes, it is likely that most of the features of the national identity will remain unchanged over time. This is generally the case in Argentina and the purpose of this paper was not to refute that, but rather to look at the small changes that have occurred in different national identity frames. Political ideology, the strength of federalism, the filling of the vast pampas with white Europeans, and the destiny of Argentina as a great nation are factors that shaped the nation from independence and will probably always be the strongest identifiers of Argentine national identity. The relationship between Argentina and other nations, between state authority and civil society, and between social classes possess the most volatility as factors shaping the national identity and the results of this have been explained through shifting depictions of the 'Other'. In the case of the 1930 crisis and some of the events of the 2001 crisis, the economic conditions did result in a changing national identity frame, but it is impossible to make this conclusion about the 1980s debt crisis. In order to further this research, it would be necessary to identify and isolate effects of the economic crisis in more detail as well as look at the relationship between economic and political structures. Despite the uncertainty of some of the conclusions of this paper, it is clear that economic conditions should be considered as a factor in Argentine national identity construction as a result of its influence on the depiction of the 'Other'.

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