

Ensaaios latino-americanos: “caráter nacional” e construção de estereótipos

Latin American Essays: “National Character” and the Construction of Stereotypes



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Resumo: O artigo se refere à questão do “caráter nacional” amplamente discutida por intelectuais latino-americanos entre as décadas de 1930-50. Procuo analisar ensaios produzidos por autores que, nesse período, demonstraram grande interesse pelo tema. Busco identificar em suas obras aspectos que contribuíram para a formação de mitos e tipos nacionais estereotipados. Essas obras tiveram grande repercussão nacional e continental na época em que foram publicados e até hoje os traços do caráter nacional apresentados nos ensaios que analiso continuam sendo mencionados como se tivessem base científica. Tento mostrar os preconceitos resultantes dessas caracterizações, que continuam vivas nos imaginários sociais, servindo de justificativa para formas diversas de intolerância.

Palavras-chave: América Latina; intelectuais; identidade nacional; estereótipo.

Abstract: This article concerns the matter of “national character”, widely discussed by Latin American intellectuals from the 1930s to the 1950s. The object of this article is to analyze essays produced by authors who showed great interest concerning subject during the aforementioned period. I attempt to identify aspects in their works that contributed to the formation of myths and national stereotypes. These works had great national and continental repercussions at the time they were published. To this today, the national character traits presented in the essays analyzed continue to be mentioned as if they had a scientific basis. I try to show the prejudices that have resulted from these characterizations, which remain alive in the social imaginary, serving as a justification for several forms of intolerance.

Keywords: Latin America; intellectuals; national identity; stereotypes.

This text proposes to analyze the meaning of the representations produced by Latin American intellectuals who, between the 1930s and 50s, were devoted to the preparation of essays focused on the analysis of characteristic traits considered “national” in their respective countries.¹

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The object of this article is to analyze the representations of national identity expressed in the essays produced by prestigious intellectuals during the period they wrote works, which to his day are considered of great literary value.

It should be clarified that the essays that are which are the object of this reflection have, as a common characteristic, concerns relating to the problems of the societies in which their authors lived and also an attempt to reflect on them in order to indicate possible solutions. The “national woes” were seen as legacies of the past that prevented the formation of an authentic national identity.

Applying the tools from new areas of knowledge (cultural anthropology, sociology, philosophy, social psychology and psychoanalysis), they sought to interpret the national reality from different perspectives of those that had prevailed until then, grounded in evolutionary determinism of racial character.

Nevertheless, as I will try to demonstrate, the concepts expressed in the texts are characterized by strong ideological content marked by binary and Manichean explanations that gave rise to prejudices and stereotypes justified from the creation of national myths and stereotypes. Representations of the national identity, constructed from these elements, had a strong diffusion in societies of that era and are still alive in social imaginary these days, serving as argument to belittle or praise individuals or social groups.

I draw attention, in this text, to some aspects of these representations related to the subject of the national character, written by the following authors: Eduardo Mallea and Ezequiel Martínez Estrada (Argentines), Samuel Ramos and Octávio Paz (Mexicans), Gilberto Freyre (Brazilian). Their writings, replete with metaphors, an integral part of narrative essays, presented the reader with a pessimistic portrayal of society at the time.

The concern was about national identities in the nineteenth century, but studies on the “national character” proliferated from the period between wars. Until then, most Latin American intellectuals circulated through Europe and they valued European ideas; yet, the disappointments regarding the “old world”, shaken by the remnants of World War I, caused a shift in perspective in the sense of envisioning possibilities of building a “new world” in America. It was at this point in time that the interest in the construction of original national identities arose; this change in perspective explains the strengthening of nationalist ideologies through which ideas and models imported from Europe were criticized at the time Latin American nations were being formed.

The authors of this analysis operate with the assumption that the Latin American nations had produced false identities, imitated or copied from the Europeans. In this sense, they attributed themselves with the task of revealing the authentic identities hidden under “masks” or “veils”, frequently used expressions by the authors of the essays.

They criticized the ideas and institutions imported from Europe (English liberalism, French Enlightenment, economic materialism resulting from capitalism) for having caused an inversion of autochthonous values. With specific regard to national identities, they blamed both the Iberian colonial heritage and the introduction of European modernity and modernization, which, according to most of them, caused deformations in the national character.

To better understand the analysis proposed herein, I chose to divide the exposition into two parts. The first refers to criticisms made regarding the introduction of ideas of modernity and modernization, with the emphasis on urban aspects. The second part addresses prejudices and stereotypes related to images, both negative and positive, created about the urban or rural worlds and characters that were part of them.

I - Modernization and representations of the Metropolis

The Argentine author, Adrián Gorelik, emphasizes the importance of the essays written both in Europe and Latin America, since they present questions concerning the meaning of the Metropolis. They stand out, according to the author, by revealing similarities between a figural way of thinking, as provided by the essay, and a material reality, such as the city with its symbolic configurations through which it is possible to question the social facts related to large modern Metropolises. (GORELIK, p. 1)

In the case of Latin America, the metropolis came to be seen as a nefarious product of the modernization process started in the last few decades of the nineteenth century.

Most of the authors mentioned were critical, to a greater or lesser degree, regarding both modernization and modernity. Two of them stood out due to their exacerbated criticism in relation to the consequences of the modernization processes: accelerated and disorganized urbanization, which caused negative social changes. I refer to Eduardo Mallea and Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, Argentinean authors, which tried to show how their essays had negative and stereotypical images, both in relation to urban spaces and to the characteristics of its new inhabitants.

It is important to clarify that the two first authors had ideological affinities; they shared the same nationality and produced essays at around the same time, i.e., within the same historical context: Argentina in the 1930s. Whereas the second, although presenting reflections on the same subject – the consequences of modernization in big cities – presented distinct ideological conceptions referring to the Peruvian scenario in the 1960s. In this case, we draw attention both to common aspects and to the specifics, which can be attributed both to national and temporal peculiarities.

1) **Eduardo Mallea**

Eduardo Mallea published *História de una pasión argentina* (*Story about an Argentinean passion*) in 1938, at a time of very deep crisis marked by the end of an era of prosperity in which Argentina had distinguished itself among some of the most developed countries in the world. The 1929 crisis had shaken the country's economy with impacts on society and politics. This situation resulted in a strong nationalist reaction and exacerbation of social conflicts that were manifested in the public sphere.

The author was a descendant from a traditional family of decadent oligarchy. Born and raised in the Pampean countryside, he moved to Buenos Aires in his adolescence. According to his own statements, the change was traumatic due to the huge contrasts between two different environments.

Urban modernization had transformed the city into a major cosmopolitan Metropolis, populated by foreigners who produced the “*mescla de razas*” (mix of races).

Mallea, just like other representatives of nationalist movements that had had similar experiences, began his literary activity embedded in this movement. They all reacted against modernization, held responsible for the coming of immigrants, which, according to nationalists, had shaken the national identity.

The author condemned in his works the importation of bourgeois materialist values resulting from modernity and modernization, which had caused disorderly urban growth. Buenos Aires was the main target of his outrage because the city had become a symbol of material progress and of utilitarian, rationalistic and individualistic mentality.

Among the set of transformations considered negative, he considered that the largest of the country's woes stemmed from the successive waves of immigrants. He referred to them in the following terms:

[...] foram esses contingentes vindos de fora, das sociedades marcadas pela pobreza, desordem moral e pela ambição desmedida, os que pronunciaram pela primeira vez a palavra riqueza, como um grito de guerra [...] Como nada de benéfico trouxeram para o ‘Novo Mundo’, ao invés de contribuírem para fundamentar uma nacionalidade harmônica, provocaram a degeneração espiritual, intelectual e moral dos argentinos, reproduzindo, na ‘boa e nova’ América, o mal que trouxeram do ‘Velho Mundo’ degenerado em decorrência da ameaça da multidão e domínio da técnica (MALLEA, 1938, p. 85).

Following the train of thought of the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, the author of *A rebelião das massas* (*The rebellion of the masses*), he despised the “masses” [immigrants] because he thought them incapable of producing culture as they only knew how to manage the

technique in a reproductive and mechanical fashion. In this regard, he referred to immigrants as "massa obscena" (an obscene mass), which produced "disenchantment" and "loathing" in his spirit. Also, according to the author, the foreigners had produced a "mescla de razas" (mixture of races), responsible for weakening the "raízes nacionais" (national roots). Rootlessness, in turn, had deformed the national identity.

Material progress, according to Mallea, replaced culture, the result of a creation based on traditional values, the technical, mechanical repetition toward the accumulation of wealth; the major objective of Men with a utilitarian mentality.

2) **Ezequiel Martínez Estrada**

His countryman, Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, had a similar impression of Buenos Aires presented in two essays, *Radiografía de la Pampa* (Radiography of the Pampas) (1933) and *La cabeza de Goliath* (Goliath's Head) (1940), in which he exposed a negative view regarding the Metropolis.

Conceptions of Buenos Aires, the protagonist in both essays, were not significantly modified.

Even though he was the son of immigrants, Ezequiel Martínez Estrada participated in the official culture and was integrated into the circle of Argentinean descendants from decadent traditional families, which is why they worshiped the past and were hostile towards immigrants.

Just like Eduardo Mallea, he was also critical of modernization, which he considered "artificial", and referred to Buenos Aires as a "cidade-nação" (nation-city) against which the "interior" (countryside) had become insignificant.

The monstrous growth of Buenos Aires, according to Martínez Estrada, had made the countryside dependent on the Metropolis. Each skyscraper that rose made the abandoned piece of land in the provinces poorer, more ignorant, and more unproductive. As a result, according to the author, there had been a separation between material things and spiritual goods, between soul and body, with a moral deficit in relation to surplus matter. After listing economic, political, and cultural aspects, he stated that the moral and intellectual level had never reached the same low. He referred to "[...] a political depravity without antecedents, liaison between government and ignorant, selfish, fanatical multitudes", who had put democracy down. And, he concludes: "[...] what we called barbarism had not disappeared, but it had taken refuge in neutral zones biding its time" (MARTINEZ ESTRADA, 1946, p. 236-237, 238-239).

He recognized the loss of importance of the rural world compared to the urban one; however, he considered it the guardian of authenticity: the countryside was authentic because it represented reality, while Buenos Aires was an “illusion”, i.e., falsely European.

The author disqualified Buenos Aires, referring to it as “casa de jogo” (a play house), a place with the dissolution of morals where “women and men can plunge themselves into all sorts of adventures” (MARTINEZ ESTRADA, 1942, p. 200-1).

By questioning the growth of Buenos Aires at the expense of the rest of the country, he stated:

Buenos Aires é uma grande máquina, que absorve brutal e cegamente a riqueza do interior, [...] devora pressupostos fantásticos, e come, como todo gigante, pela boca de sua cabeça cortada. Alimenta-se da miséria e do atraso, da ignorância e da solidão. Buenos Aires é um muro no horizonte urbano, impedindo que se olhe o interior (EZEQUIEL MARTINEZ, 1983, p. 84 apud GORELIK, 2009, p. 3).

The author of *Radiografía de la Pampa* blamed modernity and modernization for obstructing the organic development of nationality in favor of exploiting the nation.

In his work, *Cabeza de Goliath*, published in the following decade, the issue of immigration reappears and continues being part of the repertoire of national woes. However, there is a change worth highlighting. In the previous work, he referred to the “promiscuity” caused by Argentineans who mingled with “scum” brought from European countries (GORELIK, 2009, p. 6). Ten years later, he reiterated his opinion about immigrants, referring to them as “foreign utilitarians who have the aspirations of a guest and do not love the country” (GORELIK, 2009, p. 6).

II - National types and the creation of stereotypes

In this item, I will try to analyze the representations of national character that contributed to building national stereotypes. The figures of the “roto” (ragged) Chilean, the “pelado” (naked) and “ser hermético” (being tight) Mexicans, the “mulata sensual” (sensual mulatto woman) Brazilian, which were created from the analysis of intellectuals in their respective countries.

1) The ragged Chilean

This Chilean character emerged as an expression of miscegenation from the analysis of several authors who bothered to discuss the topic, building on racist theories in vogue from the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century.

Opinions differed regarding mestizos: for some, miscegenation denigrated the race, for others it reinvigorated it, as presented by Horário Gutierrez.

The author Nicolás Palacios, in his main work, *Raza Chilena* (1904), advocated miscegenation and uplifted the figure of the “roto”, identified with the working classes and despised by the ruling oligarchy. The author, who sympathized with the promising labor movement, considered him the prototype of the Chilean worker.

Whereas Francisco A. Encina, considered the main Chilean historian of the twentieth century, producer of a monumental work on the *História do Chile* (History of Chile) in 20 volumes (written between 1940-1952), considered the ethnic peculiarities of his people, very different from the rest of America, the cornerstone of Chilean history. Although inspired in the ethnic analyses of Nicolás Palacios, he valued the participation of the white race in shaping the psychology of the Chilean people and considered that the miscegenation with the indigenous population had corrupted the vital energy brought by the superior element. According to Gutierrez, his opinions on the subject contributed to the dissemination of the image of the “roto” in a pejorative sense (GUTIERREZ, 2008, p. 111).

The Chilean “roto” was also praised by other authors, such as Roberto Hernández (1929) and Luis Durant (1941); but was also celebrated in popular poetry and the visual arts. During this period, the thesis of the degenerate mestizo, touted at the turn of the century, came to live with the uplift of Chilean miscegenation. Moreover, according to Gutierrez, the primitive “roto” created by Encina, began to be appreciated. The image gained a double meaning: a ragged figure that marred the image of the nation and a brave/virile figure, a symbol of nationality (GUTIERREZ, 2008, p.112).

Roberto Hernandez, author of *El roto chileno*, work considered by Gutierrez as a “hymn in praise of the mestizo character”, was also defined by him as an expression of a legitimate piece of invention of traditions. Hernandez tries to show that the “roto” did not emerge as figurehead for miners, because the image had been created during the colonial period, from the “Guerra de Arauco” (War of Arauco), and, therefore, an expression of “virile Araucanian heritage of the aborigines”. He attributes the origin of his figure to the epic poem *La Araucana*, written in the sixteenth century by Alonso Ercilla. In fact, this author described the Araucanian Indians and not the “roto”.

Nicolás Palacios, who had inspired Encina, unlike the latter, advocated miscegenation and uplifted the *roto* figure, which was identified with the working classes despised by the ruling oligarchy: the author considered it the prototype of the Chilean worker.

Luis Durand, consecrated novelist, published, in the *Presencia de Chile* Collection from 1942, the work *Apreciación del roto* in which he praised the character. The author lamented that the concept had been degraded, thus representing “bad morals and worse habits”. In order to fix this error, he resumed his story identifying it with the working classes.

Around the same time, Orestes Plath, also came out in defense of the “roto”. In the article “Epopéya del roto chileno” (Epic of the Chilean roto), published in 1957 in the *Autoretrato de Chile* (Self-portrait of Chile) Collection, he defined it as a “selo da chilenidade” (Chilean seal) and sought to understand it from the physical environment in which he worked. He concluded that, as Chile's geography had very different characteristics, it had generated various types of “roto”. Just like Durand, Plath countered the common meaning of “roto” as a vulgar, shabby person and sought to strengthen the positive values from their identification with the people, or more specifically, with the working classes.

The literary critic Raúl Silva Castro also inveighed against the insulting images representing the “roto”. A text from 1941 (subsequently published in the *Estampas y ensayos* - Essays and prints, collection) criticized the caricature of a character named “Verdejo”, a new version of the “roto”, which circulated in a comic magazine of great popular acceptance.

“Verdejo” was represented as a thin, short, toothless-mouthed, patched-clothed, holey-hatted man with foul language and devoid of education; however, friendly and fun. Some authors protested against the infamous, offensive and harmful creation from the Chilean people because it dealt with a character that fostered the inferiority complex among Chileans.

As Horácio Gutierrez shows, the efforts of these authors were in vain because the *roto* is still present in Chilean society until today, in plays, in “cuecas” (South American dance) songs, in advertising posters, in comic strips and always controversial, whether uplifted or deprecated.²

2) The “pelado” (naked) Mexican

Samuel Ramos, in his work *El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México* (the profile of men and culture in Mexico) (1934) paused in the analysis of mestizo psychology, indicating it as one of the most negative traits of the Mexican national character. The author claimed not to believe in racial theories because biology proved that these had no scientific basis; however, he considered that social psychology was able to uncover truths about the races and their mixtures.

Supported by this “new science”, he directed his attention to the “pelado”, figurehead of miscegenation, who was identified as a social outcast, and who lived on the banks of the great metropolis, Mexico City.

Ramos loaded up on ink to describe the “pelado”. The author referred to the “pelado” as the best example to study the national character. He was described in the following terms:

Ostenta, cinicamente, certos impulsos elementares que outros homens procuram dissimular. Pertence a uma fauna social de categoria ínfima [...]. Na hierarquia econômica é menos do que o proletário e na hierarquia intelectual, um primitivo.

[...]. É um ser de natureza explosiva, de trato perigoso [...] É um animal que se entrega a pantomimas de ferocidade para assustar os demais e parecer mais forte e decidido. Tais reações são um disfarce ilusório de sua situação na vida real, que é a de um zero à esquerda.

The *pelado* was also described as an expression of Mexican machismo. According to Samuel Ramos, sexual allusions revealing “a phallic obsession, born to consider the sexual organ as a symbol of male strength”, abounded in their language. However, according to the author, the “*pelado* was neither a strong man nor a brave man. The physiognomy that he shows us is false”. Based on these considerations, he concluded that the “*pelado*” had two personalities: one real (hidden) and the other fictitious (apparent), diametrically opposed to the genuine one. The split personality, also according to the analysis of Ramos, constituted a ruse to hide his feelings of inferiority (RAMOS, 1990, p. 52-57).

The “*pelado*” is featured in the “teatro de carpa”, a popular theater on the outskirts of Mexico City. This cultural activity ended up becoming consecrated as a “national symbol”, especially from the moment he becomes a movie character in the figure of Cantinflas, played by actor and movie director Mario Moreno.

Nationally and internationally consecrated, Moreno began his artistic training linked to the *teatro de carpa* that represented the “*pelado*”, a national stereotype hitherto disqualified from the representations constructed by Ramos. Subsequently, the success of the character in the cinema caused a reversal of direction in the representation of the “*pelado*”: associated with the figure of Cantinflas, he became the “*peladito*” (wee naked -- term of endearment), which delighted the movie-going audiences.

Maurício Bragança conducted a comparative analysis of Cantinflas and Mazzaropi, pointing out similarities between two social types that they represent: the Mexican “*peladito*” and the Brazilian “*Jeca Tatu*” (Story about a rural worker). According to the author, Mario Moreno turned the *pelado* into a *peladito*, less aggressive and more mischievous, burlesque, comical, restless and questioning, which achieved great empathy with the public from the working classes as he represented a marginal character in the urban world, which served as a counterpoint to the developmental project comprised from 1940-50. (BRAGANÇA, 2003, p. 7)

In spite of the differences between Samuel Ramos' “*pelado*” and “*peladito*” (Cantinflas), these figureheads, from popular Mexican sectors, were built in a stereotyped way and, as such, are still present in the collective Mexican imagination to this day.

Furthermore, as regards Mexico, it is worth mentioning some interpretations of Octávio Paz, who also bothered to decipher the national Mexican character.

3) **The Mexican and his masks**

The essays that comprised the book *Labirinto da solidão* (Labyrinth of Solitude) by Octavio Paz, published in 1950, at a time when the results of the revolution were already visible, presents the author's reflections about “ser mexicano” (being Mexican). From the theory that there still was a “Mexico buried, yet alive”, he sought to decipher the signs of the past, which he believed responsible for deformations of the national character.

He referred to Mexico as a being that was closed, which preserved itself through masks. There was, according to Paz, an invisible wall between reality and the “Mexican”, which is why he was always far away from the world, from others and himself. Opening up to someone represented weakness or betrayal.

Hermeticism was, therefore, one of the traits of “being Mexican” to be unveiled. He sought to explain what he understood as defensive behavior, using metaphors related to the female condition, due to the prevailing macho culture in the country.

He sought to explain the reasons for the inferiority attached to women and, accordingly, he concluded that females symbolized by “openness” were associated with an open wound. Whereas the male, depicted as a hermetic being, which, according to the author, was suspicious about the environment in which he lived. The hermeticism, which also explained the machismo, was attributed to Mexican history and the social character arising from it.

The author was referring to simulation and dissimulation as characteristic features of “mexicanidad” (Mexican-ness): simulating meant appearing; however, dissimulation, according to Paz, required greater subtlety, because he who dissimulates does not represent; thus, wants to become invisible, passes unnoticed.

In this case, he hypothesized that the dissimulation that characterized a predominantly indigenous society was due to Conquest and Colonization: in a dominated condition, the Indians took advantage of dissimulation and mimicry as subterfuge for survival. From this idea, he concluded that the Indians, in this mimetic process, eventually merged with the landscape and so concealed their uniqueness, which resulted in their extinction. Such an attitude was played by Paz as a defense against the colonizers and their weapons of domination.

These conditions explain the reasons why the “Mexican being” valued itself in masks to hide the true essence. Octavio Paz understood the masks as responsible for hiding the essence of national being, which he considered one of the great evils of national identity. The “inauthenticity” was considered, by him and other Latin American intellectuals of his time, as an obstacle that prevented society from facing its problems and, as a result, not finding ways to solve them.

Such analytical perspectives on the national character have already been completely refuted; however, traces of identity representations are still evident: Mexicans are still being

defined, stereotypically, as hermetic, dissimulated and false. These stereotypes still populate the national imagination and they were also incorporated by foreigners.

4) **The "Brazilian mulatto woman" as a symbol of nationality**

Gilberto Freyre, unlike any of the other authors mentioned, created national myths and stereotypes, but in a positive sense.

The author of *Casa Grande & Senzala* (The Big House and the Slave House) and other important works, created the myth of the three races, as Renato Ortiz states, conceals racial conflict insofar as it relates to equality between races.

To explain the formation of Brazilian society, the author defined the racial, social and cultural balance as its basic characteristics. In this sense, he emphasized the connection between masters and slaves, whites, blacks and mestizos. He attributed the social balance and harmony to the plasticity of the Portuguese, of Iberian origin.

As the Iberians had been formed from the mixture of different ethnic groups (Jews, Romans, Moors), this heterogeneous formation made miscegenation possible. Moreover, Portuguese colonization had good results thanks to lyrical Catholicism and to the loose sexual morality of the Portuguese.

From these arguments related to the integration of diverse people, Gilberto Freyre justified, not only the patriarchal society, but also slavery, which, according to him, had been imposed by the "means and by the circumstances".

Due to the ability of harmonizing contrasts, the Portuguese made a growing proximity possible between the different races. Also this explanation also served to justify the Portuguese colonial society's ability to resist obstacles and carry out an unparalleled work of colonization. From this reasoning, the author also concluded that the relationship between master and slave was harmonious. In this regard, he affirmed that the slaves in Brazil were not marginalized as in other slave societies, and instead exercised a civilizing role by absorbing African culture in the bosom of the Big House. It was from this perception of positive interrelationship between races that the author constructed the concept of "racial democracy", which is the basis of the definition of the Brazilian "national character".

Gilberto Freyre's thesis contributed to the construction of the myth of racial democracy. The representation of the sensual and satisfying mulatto woman is a product of this myth that became an icon of Brazilian-ness. The author invented the "mulata" as a result of "harmonious relations" between the white master and black slave.

The mulatto figure was part of a stereotypical portrait of “tropical Brazil”, which is still produced until today, both for internal and external intake. Her figure decanted into “prose and verse” through literature, music, dance, painting, media and commercial advertising, distinguishing her among all women, both for her positive and negative qualities.

Admired or scorned, the image of the mulatto usually appears associated with adjectives that suggest sensuality or pejorative aspects related to the conventional “moral”.

The purpose of the stereotype related to the mulatto, I quote a review of a Brazilian Buddhist monk called Cohen who, in an interview with the *O Estado de S. Paulo* newspaper, highlighted the following positive aspects of Brazilian culture:

“Our more exacerbated sexuality led us into an easier miscegenation [...]”. And, besides this positive trait of the national character, she referred to another, related to the myth of passivity of the Brazilian people, when she said: “we are a peaceful people”.

As one can see, the “racial democracy” and “peaceful spirit” are still being touted as a reason of pride for Brazilians. Myths and stereotypes emerged from interpretations of Brazil made by recognized intellectuals; ideas that were developed in a particular situation in the past and were eventually incorporated by common sense as unquestionable truths.

Final Considerations

The theme of “national identity” has been widely debated and questioned in recent decades. Leyla Perrone-Moisés in his work *Vira e mexe nacionalismo. Paradoxos do nacionalismo literário* (Paradoxes of literary nationalism), states that national identity defined by the parameters presented herein always tend to resurface, albeit in different ways, because the identities are neither original nor immutable. They resurface, especially through national myths and types created in the past that still circulate in the present, presenting their own variations of changes in historical context and also in accordance with the objectives and interests of those who manipulate them.

Finally, it should be noted that the national types or those that represent groups that are diverse in nature, even when starting with the intention of causing “laughter”, are not anodyne or innocent because they mobilize stereotypes that encourage prejudice, reinforcing feelings and attitudes of intolerance.

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1 This text is the result of a larger project in which I analyze Latin American authors who produced essays on “national character”, trying to show the exchange of ideas among them. The project is entitled “Circulação de ideias e caráter nacional na América Latina (1930-1950)”. (Exchange of ideas and national character in Latin America (1930-1950)).

2 References to the “roto” were taken from texts written by Horácio Gutierrez, mentioned at the end.

Received in May/2013.

Approved in June/2013.