

Johanna Dupré

"Die erste Jockey-Reiterin der Welt, aus Süd-Amerika: Rosita de la Plata, Global Imaginaries and the Media"

Abstract

In this paper, the term *global imaginary* describes the way people at different times in history have perceived the increasing interconnectedness of the world: how they have imagined the globality of the world and their place in it. The article's intention is to take the case of the Argentinian-born circus jockey rider *Rosita de la Plata* as an example to show how marketing mechanisms in the entertainment industry of the nineteenth century, a time markedly characterized by processes of global integration, catered to these *global imaginaries*, in order to appeal to different publics. This will be shown mainly with the analysis of a number of newspaper advertisements and articles.

Author

Born in 1982, Johanna Dupré studied Theatre Studies, Comparative Literature and English at Johannes Gutenberg-University, from which she graduated in 2008. From August 2004 until May 2005 she studied at the University of Memphis, Tennessee, as a participant of the exchange program "m3 + zdf" and with grants by Fulbright and the DAAD. From February until May 2007, she spent time in Buenos Aires, Argentina, to do research for her master's thesis. In 2014-14 she worked on a PhD-project on theatre in the La Plata region for the Global Theatre History Project. Her research interests are Latin American theatre, cultural history, transnationalism, performativity and visuality. She currently works as a journalist in Mainz and Wiesbaden, Germany. Her publications include *Spiele des (Un)Sichtbaren. Performativität und Politik*. (Marburg: Tectum, 2010).

Published under the Creative Commons License CC-BY 4.0 All rights reserved by the Author.

1. Introduction: *Global Imaginaries*

In the twenty-first century, we live in an age that is to a large extent defined by globality – and not only in an economic sense. As Manfred B. Steger notes in his book *The Rise of the Global Imaginary*, globalization was never merely a matter of increasing flows of

capital and goods across national borders. Rather, it constitutes a multidimensional set of processes in which images, sound bites, metaphors, myths, symbols, and spatial arrangements of globality were just as important as economic and technological dynamics. The "objective" acceleration and multiplication of global material networks occurs hand in hand with the intensifying "subjective" recognition of a shrinking world. (Steger 2008, 12).

It is precisely this effect that globalization has on the ways in which people imagine the world and themselves in it, both individually and collectively, that he subsumes under the titular term *global imaginary* – a notion that builds upon Charles Taylor's concept of the *social imaginary* as "the way ordinary people imagine their 'social surroundings'", something often "not expressed in theoretical terms" but carried in images, stories, legends etc." (Taylor 2007, 171/2). While Steger's global reframing of Taylor's term makes immediate sense for twenty-first century society, I would argue that, in the vein of one of the possible approaches Sebastian Conrad describes in *What is Global History?* – namely global history as the history of globalization – it can also be applied to study another time period marked by intense and accelerating processes of global integration: the nineteenth century (Conrad 2016, 1-17).

For the purpose of this paper, then, and to a large extent differing from Steger's notion of the term, I understand *global imaginary* to mean the way people at different times in history – for example in the nineteenth century – have perceived the increasing interconnectedness of the world and how they have imagined the globality of the world and their place in it. Thus, a *global imaginary* can encompass national or local imaginaries, but it will always exceed them by placing those imaginaries within a global frame.

Against this framework, a number of questions arise – one of them being how many *global imaginaries* we should surmise to exist at any given point in time, and what happens to the number of highly mobile people who interact with any number of them during their lifetimes. How do they adapt their behavior, and in which way does the identity ascribed to them change against the background of the respective *global imaginaries*?

The case of *Rosita de la Plata*, an Argentinian-born nineteenth century circus jockey or circus equestrienne, who traveled in Europe and South as well as North America as part of her work, allows us to explore some of these questions. It does so precisely because with her, as with circus artists or artists in general, the aspect of media that is very much connected to the emergence of *global imaginaries* gains special relevance: *Rosita* was both an object of media attention and a media player, meaning that she, or more probably her managers, consciously manipulated the media in order to shape the image by which she was perceived. We are in the realm of *public relations*, which is, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*: "The professional maintenance of a favourable public image by a company or other organization or a famous person" (OED 2016). For the purposes of this paper, I would change this definition to read: "The professional maintenance of a prospectively lucrative image by an artist and his or her managers, meant to appeal to a certain public". We can then move on to try to answer the following questions: How was Rosita's international career launched? What public

image was created for her and to a degree also certainly by her? Why was this particular public image chosen? Did it change while she was performing in different countries? How did it tie in with what we could call the different publics' *global imaginary*?

2. From Argentina to Spain: Rosita's First Steps into the Arena



Fig. 1: Rosita on the cover of *La Tomasa*, December 26, 1890.

According to the Argentinian theatre and circus scholar Beatriz Seibel, *Rosita* was born as Rosalía Robba to a family of Italian immigrants on February 15th, 1869 in Buenos Aires (Seibel 2012, 13). A younger sister, María Dolinda was born one year later, on June 8th 1870. Both started their circus careers in 1878, aged nine and eight, respectively, in the *Circo Arena* in Buenos Aires.

As Seibel has documented, in 1878 a British equestrian company performed there under the direction of one Henry Cottrelly (Seibel 2012, 14). Cottrelly, as Signor Saltarino states in the year 1895 in his *Artisten-Lexikon*, was one of several brothers who formed an acrobat troupe that came to be quite famous in the nineteenth century. However, at some point they split up and Henry became a circus director (Saltarino 1895, 41). One of his company's attractions while appearing in Buenos Aires was a pantomime of the *Cinderella* story, performed by children (Seibel 2012, 14).

How Rosita and Dolinda came to perform in the pantomime is not entirely known, but the Argentinian theatre and circus scholar Raúl Castagnino thinks that Rosita was selling flowers in the circus when Cottrelly decided to incorporate her into the show. He then supposedly suggested to her father to put her under contract, meaning he would take her to Europe and instruct her in the equestrian circus art, while she agreed to work without

pay for ten years – something which was very common in the circus business of that time (Castagnino 1953, 118).

What is certain is that Rosita and Dolinda both traveled to Europe and almost immediately started performing at the *Circo Ecuestre* in Barcelona, where Henry Cottrelly had started to work as artistic director.

This is also where the very first steps in the forging of their public image were taken. As can be seen from a press clipping from the newspaper *Lo Catalinista*, published in 1880, the then 11-year-old Rosita was at first announced with her first name only, and so was her sister Dolinda (fig.2) On other occasions they were also called Rosita and Dolinda Cottrelly, after their artistic foster-father.



Fig. 2: *Lo Catalinista*, October 18, 1880.

But already two years later, when performing in Palma de Mallorca, the debut of *Mlle. Rosita de la Plata* was announced in the newspaper *El Balear*, meaning that her artist's name had already been introduced (fig.3). For a Spanish public, this name must have been evocative of the former Spanish colony "Virreinato del Río de la Plata", which extended over territories that today belong to Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay and Uruguay and which was dissolved in the wake of the successful South American revolutions at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Romero 2004, 37-44). It thus conjured up memories of a lost global imaginary, centered on Spain as a transatlantic Empire, a somewhat nostalgic vision if held against the political turmoil and decline of mid- to late nineteenth century Spain (Tarver and Slape 2016, 53-55).

Although of course by today's standards this vision or global imaginary is seen to be firmly grounded in a history of brutality and atrocities, I think it is still easy to see why it might have appealed to a significant part of the public in Restoration Age Spain, and as a consequence, why choosing to promote Rosita as *Rosita de la Plata* might have been a wise marketing decision. On a more prosaic note, it is simply an indication of her place of birth, Buenos Aires being situated on the banks of the Río de la Plata.

3. *The Place to Launch a Career: Rosita in London*

The next major step in the forging of her public image was taken when, in late 1886, she and her sister Dolinda were set to appear at the Theatre Royal at Covent Garden, London, for the Christmas Season. At that time, London dazzled not only with popular entertainment in general, but also with circus performances in particular. As Brenda

Assael shows in *The Circus and Victorian Society*, between the middle and the end of the nineteenth century, there had been an enormous surge in circus companies and troupes that were advertised in *The Era*, a weekly which soon came to be the main press organ for the entertainment industry. To be precise, the number of circus companies had risen



Fig. 3: El Balear, November 15, 1882.

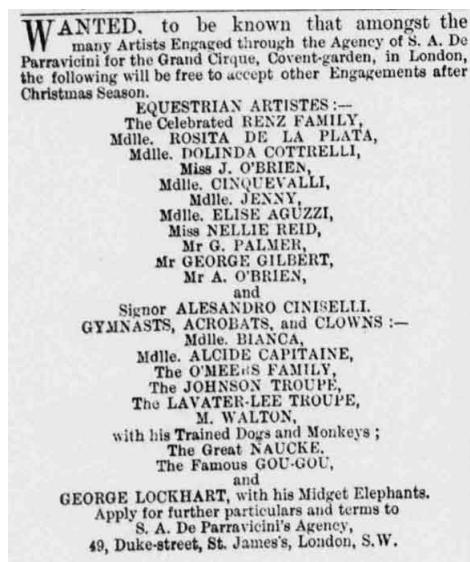


Fig. 4: The Era, November 27, 1886.

from only ten in 1847/48 to 43 by 1887/88, and was set to rise even higher to 74 in 1897/98 (Assael 2005, 25/6). So it seems obvious that, by 1886, London was *the* place to go if you wanted to launch an international circus career.

That this was exactly the intention behind Rosita's and Dolinda's London engagement becomes immediately apparent from the first advertisement that promoted their performance in *The Era*, commissioned by S.A. De Parravicini, who served as their agent

(fig. 4). In the header, it clearly states that they, together with various other artists engaged by S.A. de Parravicini, "will be free to accept other Engagements after Christmas Season". It is striking that while Rosita is being advertised as *Rosita de la Plata*, her sister Dolinda goes back to being Dolinda Cotrelli. This is understandable in the light of the contract Henry Cottrelly is supposed to have made with them in 1878: he was to teach them the equestrian art while they agree to work for ten years without pay. By 1887, it is so to speak Cottrelly's time to cash in on the investment he made, as the contract is about to expire. Thus the reason for Dolinda being called Dolinda Cotrelli might be that Henry Cottrelly wants to make the connection between them clear, which of course, as a well-known artist himself, is also an indication of quality. In later *The Era* advertisements that announce the Christmas program, we actually also see a Signor Cotrelli appearing as one of the artists of the 1887 Grand Circus Christmas Season (fig. 5) and we will see him acting as manager for both sisters sometime after that.

What is also remarkable is how exactly the artists are presented in these advertisements, keeping in mind that, in advertising, space is money. It seems to be very important to point out that almost all of these artists, while being from the "principal Continental Cirques", were also new faces for a London audience. That is obviously seen as an asset. That said, in the majority of the cases it does not seem to have been of particular interest *where* these artists *came from*, other than from the "principal Continental Cirques". Notably, the only exact geographic reference in these particular examples concerned Archie O'Brien, who had just returned "from India and Australia" – both places, of course, part of the British Empire at that time. Similarly, in the reviews of the Grand Circus Show, which appeared in *The Era*, the *Standard*, the *Morning Post* and *Lloyd's Weekly*, among other titles, the artist's nationalities were hardly ever mentioned. All this indicates a *global imaginary* where London was the center of a global empire, a hub of the entertainment industry, a center of attraction: it was where people *came to*, regardless where they *came from*.

It is interesting to keep this in mind when we now look at a further series of advertisements that were clearly meant to broker Rosita and Dolinda to interested circus proprietors. The first two of that series appeared in *The Era* on January 8th and 15th and obviously their main objective was to draw the attention of prospective employers to their remaining performances at Covent Garden (fig. 6). What we can see from the surrounding announcements is that Rosita and Dolinda are far from being the only female equestrian artists seeking an engagement at that time. Moreover, Dolinda is suddenly Dolinda de la Plata and, for the first time in London, they are directly linked to a geographical origin – not only via their telling names – but by referencing "these two American Young Ladies".

While this is still vague, one week later they are suddenly clearly advertised as "The Two South-American Female Equestrians" in the header of another *The Era* ad (fig. 7). Why this is the case can most likely be inferred from the notes directly beneath this one: they once again bear witness to the fact that Rosita and Dolinda were definitely only two female equestrians among many others who were seeking employment at that time. They needed something to stand out – and it is very likely that Henry Cottrelly, who we can see acting as their manager here, figured that their being South American could be a unique selling point. Of course, in reality, both Rosita and Dolinda, while certainly having been

born in Buenos Aires, are highly transnational figures: their parents are Italian immigrants, and they left Argentina when they were but children. But that does not mean that Cottrelly could not make use of the words "South American" to fire the imagination of a prospective audience, or, more precisely, suggest to employers in the circus business, who were looking to put artists under contract in London, that these words might carry attraction value for prospective audiences.

A success that cannot be erased.
COVENT-GARDEN GRAND CIRCUS.
First Appearance of
SIGNORINA ROSITA DE LA PLATA,
acknowledged as the most elegant, graceful, also champion,
Female Jockey Act Rider in the World.
Signorina **DOLINDA DE LA PLATA,**
most accomplished Pirouette Rider ever seen in England.
These Two American Young Ladies appearing every Night,
with big success, at Covent-garden Circus.

To Equestrian Managers.
Will shortly be at Liberty for Long or Short Engagements.
SIGNORA ADELAIDE, Trick and Scene
Act Rider, with her own Horse; also **JEMMY PASTON,**
surnamed by Mr F. Ginnett and Norton "The Clown of all
Clowns." The Brighton Argus says:—This brought in Jemmy
Paston, one of the drollest of clowns, his imitation of Tom
Sayer's exhibition of the noble art with his feet while standing
on his head proving excessively funny. He possesses an abundance
of wit, many of his sallies displaying smartness and
originality. His very actions cause bursts of laughter. The
Brighton Daily News says:—Amongst the numerous clowns
engaged at Mr Ginnett's establishment is Jemmy Paston, who
appears likely to increase the popularity he has previously
attained in Brighton. He has lost none of his old vivacity or
amusing powers, and is already reinstated as a popular
favourite. The Brighton Gazette says:—Jemmy Paston is a
clown of no mean order, who holds the audience in one continuous
roar of laughter from his entering the ring to his exit,
and proves himself a great favourite.
All letters, address, 16, Brewer-street, Brighton.

M D L L E. L I Z Z I E A G U Z Z I,
Celebrated Bareback Equestrian,
Grand success, Second Season,
INTERNATIONAL CIRQUE, COVENT-GARDEN,
Morning and Evening.
At Liberty to follow.
Address, 10, Soudan-road, Battersea-park, S.W.

Fig. 5: The Era, December 11, 1886 (snip), Identical ads on December 18 and December 1886.

COVENT-GARDEN GRAND CIRCUS.
Continued success
of
the Two South American
Female Equestrians,
SIGNORINA ROSITA DE LA PLATA,
Signorina ROSITA DE LA PLATA,
Signorina ROSITA DE LA PLATA,
Signorina ROSITA DE LA PLATA,
Signorina ROSITA DE LA PLATA,
Signorina ROSITA DE LA PLATA,
the Champion Female Jockey;
and
Signorina **DOLINDA DE LA PLATA,**
in her extraordinary and brilliant Pirouette Act.
These Two Young Ladies appearing Nightly
with the admiration of the Public.
All letters to be addressed to
Mr **COTTRELLY,**
Covent-garden Circus.

To Circus Managers.
MISS NELLIE BAILEY,
First-class Equestrian, now concluding a Two Years'
successful Engagement with C. Hengler, Esq., in conjunction
with her Sister Miss **LIZZIE HARMSTON,** Contortionist.
First-class Dancer, Ride in Entrées, &c. Will be at Liberty
for at Home or Abroad after Feb. 26th.
Address, HENGLER'S GRAND CIRQUE, GLASGOW.

MISSES BOORNES, Equestriennes, will be
at Liberty for Home or Abroad on Jan. 31st, after a
successful Season of Sixteen Weeks at GINNETT'S CIRCUS,
ALBERT PALACE. Miss Boorne, Dashing Balloon Act, own
Horse. Miss Jessica, Heroine of the Slack Wire, Single
Trapeze, and Fancy Acts on Horseback. Miss Carlotta, Trick
Act. Address, 9, Meath-street, Battersea-park.

MISS FLORIE TRANSFIELD, the
great American Trick-Act Rider, acknowledged by
Public and Press to be the Premier Equestrienne in England.
Jumping Two of the broadest Banners ever attempted by
any Lady; also in her great Balloon and Fire Hoop Act, with
own Horse. Splendid Costumes. Also Miss **IDA,** the Human
Serpent and Running Vaulting Act Rider. Now at Liberty
for Home or Abroad. In active preparation, a grand Trapeze
Performance by Miss Florie and Ida. Address, Yarmouth
House, Havelock-street, Temperance Town, Cardiff, Wales.

Fig. 6: The Era, January 15, 1887, nearly identical advertisement on January 8, 1887.

A sure success for Circus Proprietors
on the Continent.

SENORITA ROSITA DE LA PLATA,
the Celebrated South American Equestrienne in
her Unrivalled Jockey and Bar Act—à la Richard—
and her Sister Senorita DOLINDA DE LA PLATA,
the great South American Backward Pirouette
Rider. These Two Celebrated Equestrienne Young
Ladies appearing Twice Daily, with continued
success, at COVENT-GARDEN GRAND CIRCUS,
LONDON. At Liberty end of February, 1887.

All letters to be addressed to
H. COTTRELLY,
Covent-garden Circus.

N.B.—None but responsible Managers need apply.

Fig.7: The Era, 01/22/1887.

The supposition that this was part of Cottrelly's strategy is corroborated by the next advertisement, this time published two weeks later, on February 5th (fig. 8) The interval of two weeks, as opposed to the previous one-week interval, might suggest that this ad was not originally planned for, and that Cottrelly decided to commission it because he was not satisfied with the employment offers Rosita and Dolinda had received up to then – but we have no way of knowing this for certain.

NOTICE.

SENORITA ROSITA DE LA PLATA
and her Sister DOLINDA DE LA PLATA,
the Celebrated South American Equestriennes,
thank all American and European Circus Proprietors
for their kind offers as they are Engaged with
Mr Carl Hagenbeck's
GREAT MAMMOTH CIRCUS, GERMANY.

C H A L L E N G E F O R £200.
Senorita ROSITA DE LA PLATA,
the great Champion South American Female Jockey Act-
Rider, challenges to ride for the above sum any other female
Jockey Rider, for Style, Trick, Dress, and Appearance. It is
well understood this act must be rode on a full-grown horse,
and not on a big pony. This challenge is to be tested by
public opinion, or by old professional artists of reputation.
This challenge can come off in any part of Europe by giving
One Month's notice.

All letters to be addressed to H. COTTRELLY, Esq.,
HAGENBECK GRAND CIRCUS,
HAMBURG.

Fig. 8: The Era, February 5, 1887.

What we can see, however, is that we not only have the words "South American" twice, but suddenly the names are also "Senorita Rosita de la Plata" and "Senorita Dolinda de la Plata", not "Signorina" or "Mdlle" as before (the frequent use of these terms as opposed to "Miss", of course, already testifies to an exoticistic marketing strategy underlying the circus business as a whole, even though, as we have seen, there are no clear geographic markers in the advertisements for many London performances), so there is clearly more emphasis put on forging the sisters' public image as *South American* equestriennes.

And this strategy seems to have worked: by the end of February, as announced by another *The Era* advertisement (fig. 9), both Rosita and Dolinda were engaged with Carl Hagenbeck's circus – which was probably very close to the best possible engagement they could get. After all, by 1887 Carl Hagenbeck was already a highly prominent and respected figure in the fields of animal trade and also the so-called *Völkerschauen* (i.e. nowadays highly questionable public displays of (exotic) human beings in Zoos and public gardens). He was, however, new to the circus business, just planning to open his very first circus in April that year – which is why this engagement was in Rosita's and

Dolinda's league. From the way the Hagenbeck advertisement and the "challenge" beneath it are worded, we can also see that Rosita's public image as *South American Equestrienne* or *Jockey-Act Rider* had finally been fully established.

4. Playing the Global Imaginary: Rosita in Hamburg

By April of 1887, then, Rosita was scheduled to perform at the grand opening of Carl Hagenbeck's Great Mammoth Circus in Hamburg. And judging from the way her performance was promoted there, and how it was received by the local press, it becomes very likely that the public image forged for Rosita and Dolinda in London was an important factor in Hagenbeck's decision to put them under contract. At least, he decided to continue the strategy. For instance, we see that on a poster that announces the last performance of Hagenbeck's circus in Hamburg on April 25th 1887, Hagenbeck clearly promotes both Rosita and her sister Dolinda as "berühmte süd-amerikanische Reiterin", which translates to "famous South-American equestrienne" (fig. 10). He uses the same wording for Dolinda in the advertisement, which announced the opening performance, published in the *Hamburger Nachrichten* and all other major Hamburg newspapers on April 4th, 1887 (fig. 11).



Fig.9: The Era,
02/26/1887.



Fig. 10. Carl Hagenbeck's internationaler Zirkus, Programm.



Fig. 11: Hamburger Nachrichten, April 2, 1887.

Rosita, here, is promoted as the main attraction, without the words "South American", but there are several advertisements over the following days where she is announced as "the famous South-American equestrienne".

When we now take a look at the press coverage of the circus performance, we see that, in Hamburg, this marketing strategy found fertile ground. While, as stated earlier, in the London reviews Rosita and Dolinda are never described as South American, in German newspapers we find the following sentences:

Eine ebenso feine als künstlerisch hervorragende Leistung bietet die Südamerikanerin Dolinda de la Plata mit ihren Pirouetten zu Pferde. (*Hamburger Nachrichten*, April 6, 1887.)

Which translates to:

A very refined and outstanding artistic performance was shown by the South American Dolinda de la Plata with her pirouettes on horseback. (My translation, JD)

Or this:

Hagenbeck's Circus war, wie wir vorhergesagt haben, am gestrigen Benefizabend der kühnen südamerikanischen Reiterin Frl. Rosita de la Plata ausverkauft. (*Hamburger Fremdenblatt*, April 23, 1887.)

As we predicted, Hagenbeck's circus was sold out for yesterday's gala performance by the audacious South American equestrienne Miss Rosita de la Plata. (My translation, JD)

Both quotes show that she was clearly perceived according to the public image created for her – and that her performances were a commercial success. And finally, the last example for now, which is also the most interesting one. It was published in the city of Magdeburg, one of the stations of Hagenbeck's circus once they had started touring.

Sollte beider Schwestern Wiege auch an der Spree gestanden haben, so verleugnen die reizenden Künstlerinnen doch anscheinend nicht das verwegene und feurige, echt südamerikanische Blut. (*Magdeburger General-Anzeiger*, June 16, 1887.)

Which translates to:

Even if the cradle of these two sisters may have stood on the banks of the river Spree [the river flowing through Berlin in Germany], these two charming artists do not at all give the appearance of repudiating their dashing, passionate, authentic South-American blood. (My translation, JD)

The striking element here is that, in this quote, we see both a certain degree of skepticism as to whether they actually are South American *and* a very clear example of the powerful exoticist fantasies this association conjured up at the time. This makes it a perfect testament to the fact that the kind of public image forged for Rosita and Dolinda was both recognizable as a marketing ploy for a contemporary audience – and that this marketing ploy was still highly effective.

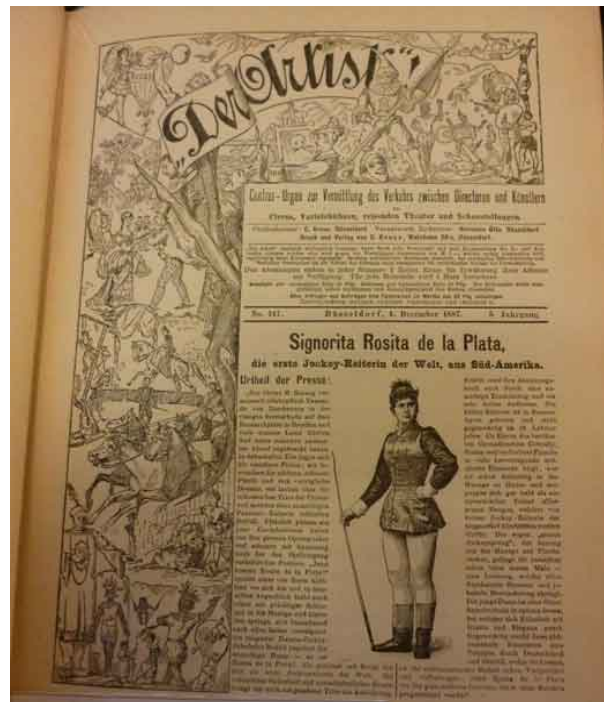


Fig. 12: Der Artist, December 4, 1887.

This is also why, some months later, in December 1887, we even find Rosita de la Plata, who by then had left Hagenbeck for an engagement at the Zirkus Herzog in Dresden, on the front cover of *Der Artist*, the central German press organ for the circus industry at that time (fig. 12). And by now it should be no surprise that the headline for the article, which sings her praise in the highest manner is "*Signorita Rosita de la Plata. Die erste Jockey-Reiterin der Welt – aus Süd-Amerika*". In English: Signorita Rosita de la Plata. The world's best jockey – from South America (my translation, JD).

To some extent we even have a similar oscillation here between the effectiveness of her public image and markers that point to its constructedness: Clearly, the word "signorita" does not exist – it should be either "señorita" or "signorina".

This public image or marketing ploy was very effective; having established this, I would like to briefly go back to find out *why*. Apart from the fact that of course the end of the nineteenth century was one of the high points of exoticism in Europe as a whole, and most certainly also in Germany – the poster promoting the last performance of Hagenbeck's circus, for example, also promotes one of his infamous *Völkerschauen*, the Singhalese Caravan or Ceylon show – there is, I think, another reason, at least in the Hamburg context – and this has to do with a specific *global imaginary*.

Being the headquarters of the huge shipping line *Hamburg America Line* and also the *Hamburg Süd-Amerikanische Dampfschiffahrts-Gesellschaft*, Hamburg was a major hub when it came to connecting Europe with the Americas. As an unnamed contemporary states in a small treatise that was originally published in 1901 as an annotation to the timetable of the *Hamburg America Line*, by the end of the nineteenth century there were three ocean liners per week which departed for New York, and four which departed for South America, particularly for Brazil and the Río de la Plata region. Twice per week ships were leaving for Mexico, and there were also several additional

biweekly connections to North and South America (Thiess 2010, 12/3). These ocean liner connections were advertised on a regular basis in newspapers like the *Hamburger Nachrichten* (fig. 13) and by this fact alone must have been prominent in the minds of the newspaper readers among Hamburg’s inhabitants.



Fig. 13: Hamburger Nachrichten, January 4, 1887. Advertisement for ocean liner connections Hamburg – North & South America Mexico; Hamburger Nachrichten.

In the treatise, the contemporary author even states that by 1901, Hamburg’s shipping lines, together with the Bremen-based *Norddeutsche Lloyd*, had surpassed every other steamship company in the world (Thiess 14). While this clearly has to be seen in the light of the nationalist sentiment of the time, even today scholars, such as Lincoln Paine in his book *Sea and Civilization: Maritime History of the World*, maintain that "by the end of the century, British primacy on the North Atlantic was under threat from both Germany and the United States" (Paine 2014, Chapter 18, "Annihilation of Space and Time", "Competition on the North Atlantic").

In addition to that, there is also the fact that nearly all of the roughly six million Germans who emigrated overseas between 1820 and 1930 migrated to the Americas – overwhelmingly to North America, which attracted 90 percent of all emigrants, but some also went to South America (Schmahel 2016). Keeping these two factors in mind, I think it is fair to state that within the *global imaginary* of many Germans at that time the Americas – while still being seen as exotic and probably exciting fantasies of untamed open landscapes and wild men on horses – were in a sense much closer to home than any other region of the world – which of course made a marketing strategy centering on the factor *South American* highly promising, and demonstrably effective.

5. An American *Global Imaginary*: Rosita’s Return to Argentina

But was this phenomenon, a marketing principle, which could be viewed as appealing to the public’s *global imaginary*, only to be found in the European circus business of the

nineteenth century? If we consider this period as one marked by a growing interconnectedness of the world, as a historic precedent to the forces beneath today's globalization, this clearly ought not to be the case. Interconnectedness, after all, means that there are transformations in all the connected parts, albeit to different extents and effects. Let us then take a look at what happened when Rosita returned to the country she left when she was a child.



Fig. 14: Advertisement for the performance of Frank Brown's Company at the Teatro San Martín, Buenos Aires (published in Seibel 2012, 67)

By 1893, Rosita de la Plata had gone back to South America and was currently engaged with the company of Frank Brown, a British-born clown and circus impresario whom she was to marry some years later. In the program which announces her performance at the *Teatro San Martín* in Buenos Aires, she is promoted as "la célebre ecuestre argentina que tanto ha llamado la atención en las principales capitales del Viejo Mundo" which translates to "the famous Argentinian equestrienne who received so much attention in the principal capitals of the Old World" (my translation). Also, you can see the words *Jockey Inglés* next to her image, they refer to the trick she performed, jumping onto the back of a galloping horse, which was sometimes called the English Jockey Act – but of course it is also somewhat of a signal that the words are spelled out.

At first glance the sentence "received so much attention in the principal capitals of the Old World" does not carry that much meaning – but it starts to be relevant when you read it against the context of the major transformations which the city of Buenos Aires was going through at that time. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the city was not only massively growing due to mass migration. It was also undergoing a huge infrastructural modernization project, whose goal was to leave the colonial past behind once and for all, and to turn Buenos Aires, which had been called *la gran aldea* or *the great village* up to that point, into a modern metropolis that could rival the ones in Europe (Rapport and Seoane 120-136).



*Fig. 15: Postcard depicting the Avenida de Mayo around 1900
(courtesy Biblioteca Nacional Mariano Moreno)*

It was the time when the *Avenida de Mayo* was being built (fig. 15, construction started in 1888 and ended in 1894), a spacious, magnificent avenue similar to the grand Parisian boulevards. One of its chief advocates was Buenos Aires' then mayor Torcuato de Alvear, who expressly took George-Eugène Haussmann and his renovation of Paris as a role model (Llanes 1955, 23-32). It is also during that time that the old colonial-style theatre *Coliseo Provisional* (1804-1872/73), a relatively plain building whose entrance, in the minds of some beholders, seemed to befit a coach house more than a theatrical building (40), was replaced with a whole plethora of new, modern, neoclassical and Art Nouveau style theatres that were constructed in Buenos Aires in the last quarter of the nineteenth century (fig. 16 and 17, Rapoport and Seoane 2007, 239).

The historic *Teatro San Martín* at calle Esmeralda, in which Rosita's 1893 performance was staged, was one of them. Thus, it does not seem too far-fetched to surmise that it is a global imaginary connected to this modernization project and to the fact that the population of Buenos Aires was mainly comprised of people with strong ties to their original European homes that the words "the famous Argentinean equestrienne who received so much attention in the principal capitals of the Old World" appeal to. This was a global imaginary in which Buenos Aires was not only in many ways connected to the Old World, but had become itself a modern metropolis and capital, on a par with its Old-World-counterparts.

Rosita thus came to be something like a connecting figure – which is highlighted by the fact that the 1893 performances did not mark the first time she returned to Argentina. That had already happened five years earlier, in 1888, and after she left to tour Europe again from 1888 to 1893, Argentinean newspapers excessively reported on

her success abroad, or the presents awarded to her by important people who visited her gala performances (Seibel 2012, 60). By virtue of this media coverage Rosita was, in a sense, connecting Argentina to the world – and the world to Argentina.

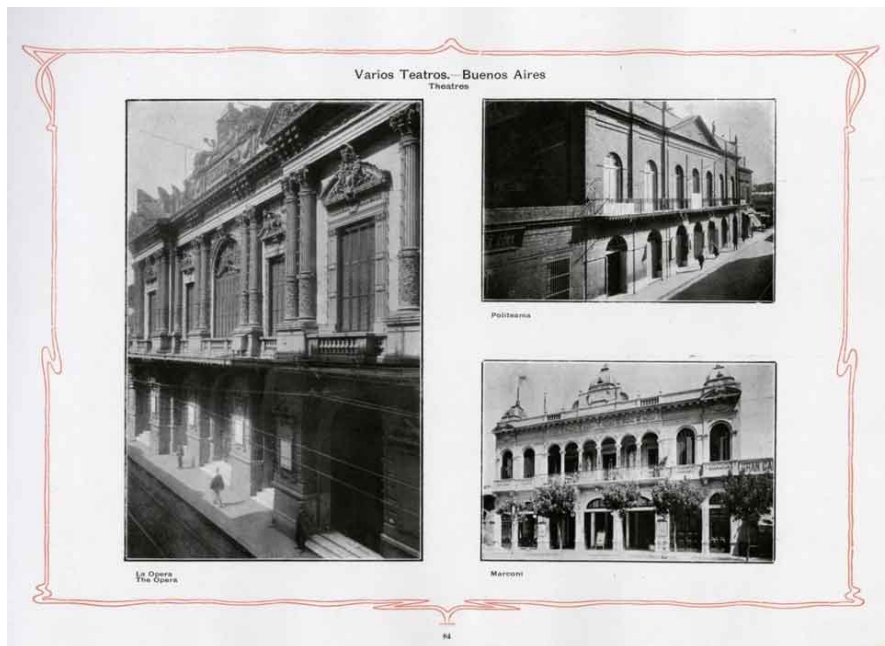
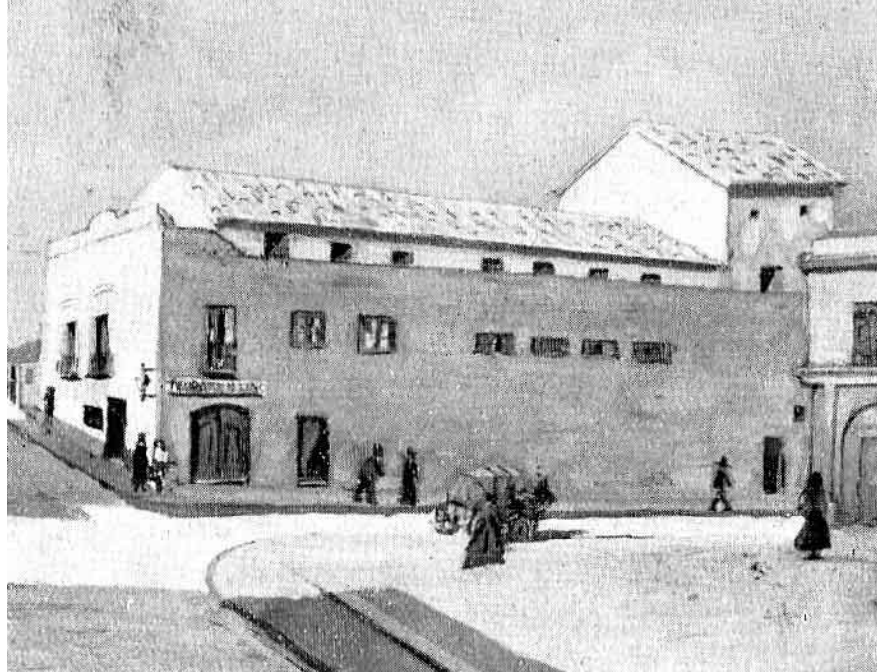


Fig. 16 and 17: Drawing of the Coliseo (1804-1873, Talluad 1932, 32) and a postcard depicting turn of the century theatres (courtesy Biblioteca Nacional Mariano Moreno).

References

Primary Sources

- Der Artist*, April 12, 1887.
- El Bolear, periódico de la tarde: Año I Número 257*, November 15, 1882. Biblioteca Virtual de Prensa Historica.
- Hamburger Nachrichten*, April 2, 1887.
- Hamburger Nachrichten*, April 1, 1887.
- Hamburger Fremdenblatt*, April 23, 1887.
- Magdeburger General-Anzeiger*, June 16, 1887.
- La Tomasa: setmanari catalá: Any III Número 122*, December 26, 1890. Biblioteca Virtual de Prensa Historica.
- Lo Catalinista: diari no polítich: Número 3*, October 18, 1880. Biblioteca Virtual de Prensa Historica.
- Poster advertising the last performance of Hagenbeck's circus in Hamburg. Courtesy Hagenbeck Archiv, Hamburg.
- Postcard depicting the Avenida de Mayo in Buenos Aires around 1900. Courtesy Biblioteca Nacional Mariano Moreno, Buenos Aires.
- Postcard several newly constructed theatres in Buenos Aires around 1900. Courtesy Biblioteca Nacional Mariano Moreno, Buenos Aires.
- The Era: The Official Organ of Entertainment [...]*, November 27, 1886. British Newspaper Archive.
- The Era: The Official Organ of Entertainment [...]*, December 12, 1886. British Newspaper Archive.
- The Era: The Official Organ of Entertainment [...]*, December 18, 1886. British Newspaper Archive.
- The Era: The Official Organ of Entertainment [...]*, December 25, 1886. British Newspaper Archive.
- The Era: The Official Organ of Entertainment [...]*, January 8, 1887. British Newspaper Archive.
- The Era: The Official Organ of Entertainment [...]*, January 15, 1887. British Newspaper Archive.
- The Era: The Official Organ of Entertainment [...]*, January 22, 1887. British Newspaper Archive.
- The Era: The Official Organ of Entertainment [...]*, February 5, 1887. British Newspaper Archive.
- The Era: The Official Organ of Entertainment [...]*, February 26, 1887. British Newspaper Archive.

Secondary Sources

- Assael, Brenda. *The Circus and Victorian Society*. (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2005).
- Castagnino, Raúl H. *El circo criollo*. (Buenos Aires: Lajouane, 1953).
- Conrad, Sebastian. *What is Global History*. (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016).
- Lanes, Ricardo M. *La Avenida de Mayo*. (Buenos Aires: Editorial Guillermo Kraft, 1955).
- Oxford English Dictionaries (2016), "Public Relations", in: *English Oxford Living Dictionaries, 2016*; <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/public_relations> (07. 21. 2016).
- Paine, Lincoln. *The Sea and Civilization: A Maritime History of the World*. (London: Atlantic Books. Kindle-E-Book, 2014).
- Rapoport, Mario, and María Seoane. *Buenos Aires. Historia de una ciudad*. Tomo 1. (Buenos Aires: Grupo Editorial Planeta, 2007).
- Romero, José Luis. *Breve Historia de la Argentina*. (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2004).
- Schmahl, Helmut. *Die Auswanderung nach Nordamerika im 19. Jahrhundert. Umfang und Verlauf*. (Mainz: Universitätsverlag Mainz, 2016).
- Seibel, Beatriz. *Vida de circo. Rosita de la Plata. Una Estrella argentina en el mundo*. (Buenos Aires: Edición Corregidor, 2012).
- Signor Saltarino. *Artisten-Lexikon. Biographische Notizen über Kunstreiter, Dompteure, Gymnastiker, Clowns, Akrobaten, Specialitäten etc. aller Länder und Zeiten*. Vol.2.(Düsseldorf: Ed. Lintz, 1895).
- Steger, Manfred B. *The Rise of the Global Imaginary. Political Ideologies from the French Revolution to the Global War on Terror*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
- Talluad, A. *Historia de nuestros viejos teatros*. (Buenos Aires: Imprenta López, 1932).

- Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).
- Tarver, H. Michael and Emily Slape, trans: *The Spanish Empire. A Historical Encyclopedia*. Vol. 2. (Santa Barbara and Denver: ABC-CLIO, 2016).
- Thiess, Christian. "Kurze Geschichte der deutschen Schifffahrt im 19. Jahrhundert". In: *Historische Schifffahrt*, Vol. 136. (Bremen: Salzwasser, 2010).