

MARXISM AND THE REVISION OF
ARGENTINE HISTORY IN THE 1960S

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Introduction

It is a commonly held opinion that whereas in Europe the Left has refrained from embracing the pursuit of a grand “national” destiny among its principal objectives, the opposite is true for most of the developing world. This also goes for Latin America. As Jorge Castañeda has argued in his widely read book about the Latin American Left, south of the Río Grande the overwhelming hegemony of the northern neighbor encouraged the Left to adopt a nationalist stance, aimed at generating a national consciousness that would lead to liberation from the imperialist yoke. According to Castañeda, the Left “has first normatively identified the ‘people’ and the ‘nation’. [...] It has then bemoaned the fact that the ‘nation’ has not belonged to the people.”² Whilst, arguably, such a trend can be most easily diagnosed in Central America and the Caribbean—

1. I would like to thank Eduardo Hourcade for his comments on my paper “Clase y nación en las narrativas históricas del nacional-populismo, 1955-1973,” delivered at the III Jornadas Nacionales Espacio, Memoria e Identidad at the Universidad Nacional de Rosario, 22-24 September, 2004, on which this article is based, and the anonymous reviewers of EIAL.

2. Jorge Castañeda, *Utopia Unarmed: the Latin American Left after the Cold War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), p. 273.

that is in areas where US hegemony was most tangible—it was forcefully present in Argentina, too. Especially in the wake of the Cuban Revolution, many Argentine left-wing intellectuals espoused anti-imperialism and national liberation as principal tenets and portrayed Argentina as yet another oppressed semi-colonial nation; a state of affairs which in their view should be overcome by Latin American and wider Third World solidarity.

At first glance, the Argentine version of what Alain Touraine has called the “national-revolutionary myth,” according to which “class and nation [...] appeared as nothing but the two faces of the same protagonist of the struggles for national liberation,” differed hardly from its counterparts in other Latin American countries.³ Argentine left-wing nationalists, as their counterparts elsewhere, stressed anti-imperialism and a distinctive Latin American identity, dovetailing with some of the premises of dependency theory. Many of the preferred readings of the Latin American Left of the 1960s, such as Frantz Fanon, had currency in Argentina, too. On the surface, Argentine left-wing nationalism thus differed less from other contemporary examples than one might expect, bearing in mind that the country’s political situation was far from analogous to Cuba’s or Algeria’s.

However, the discourse of what has been called Argentina’s “new intellectual Left” also had its own distinctive traits.⁴ The Argentine nationalist Left, when it came to assert its claim to represent the authentic values and goals of the nation, found itself confronted with the dubious legacy of a strand of nationalism that had emerged during the crisis of liberalism of the 1930s, which praised authoritarian and hierarchical qualities. This was not an exclusively Argentine problem either (Brazil would be a parallel),⁵ but here it was

3. Alain Touraine, *La parole et le sang: politique et société en Amérique latine* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1988), p. 141. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

4. Oscar Terán, *Nuestros años sesentas: la formación de la nueva izquierda intelectual en la Argentina 1956-1966*, 3rd ed. (Buenos Aires: El Cielo por Asalto, 1993).

5. On Brazilian intellectuals in the 1930s, see Daniel Pécaut, *Entre le peuple et la nation: les intellectuels et la politique au Brésil* (Paris: Maison des Sciences de l’Homme, 1989), pp. 9-82. Even in Cuba, a seemingly clear-cut case of left-wing nationalism, there had been strongly authoritarian variants at an earlier stage. See Jules R. Benjamin, “The Machado and Cuban nationalism, 1928-1932,” *Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol. 55, N^o. 1, 1975, pp. 66-91.

perhaps more accentuated than elsewhere. In other respects, the Argentine case differed, too. Firstly—and here the contrast to Brazil is striking—, Argentine intellectuals maintained a more tensional relationship with political power and were less integrated into the state's cultural and political institutions, both in the thirties and, with the short-lived exception of the beginning of Arturo Frondizi's presidency (1958-62), in the period after 1955.⁶ As Silvia Sigal has convincingly argued, this led to a peculiar situation in which intellectuals were in search of political legitimacy and which left them in a state of "availability" in relation to social and political actors.⁷ This tendency, in turn, lent an enormous weight to the contemporary political situation, which equally suffered from a profound crisis of legitimacy after Juan Perón had been ousted in a military coup and his movement prohibited in 1955. Secondly, therefore, as one might expect, the debates of the Argentine nationalist Left in the 1960s revolved incessantly around the phenomenon of Peronism, in relation to which virtually all intellectuals felt urged to position themselves.⁸ This problem only grew over time, as it became increasingly evident that neither military (1955-58 and 1966-73) nor civilian governments (1958-62 and 1963-66) succeeded in their aim to eradicate the working class' adherence to the deposed leader. Ultimately—and at least in part as a result of this crisis of legitimacy—political and intellectual debates had a strong inclination to recur to history as a provider for the justification of contemporary political goals.

This essay analyzes the careers and the discourse of a number of intellectuals, in whose writings these problems converged into a left-wing nationalist and pro-Peronist stance after 1955. The authors in question were typical of the aforementioned characteristics of Argentina's New Left. In the entire period between 1955 and 1973 they largely remained outside the state's cultural and political institutions. They participated in debates about Peronism and con-

6. The contrast with Brazil, in this regard, is stronger than with most Spanish American countries: see Nicola Miller, *In the Shadow of the State: Intellectuals and the Quest for National Identity in Spanish America* (London: Verso, 1999), esp. pp. 245-259.

7. Silvia Sigal, *Intelectuales y poder en Argentina: la década del sesenta* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2002).

8. Such is one of the principal arguments of Federico Neiburg, *Os intelectuais e a invenção do peronismo: estudos da antropologia social e cultural* (São Paulo: Editora da USP, 1997).

sidered the fact that this movement was not disappearing after the removal of its leader from power as proof of Peronism's anchoring in national traditions. They consequently bemoaned what they saw as the inability of the traditional Left—specifically the Communist and Socialist Parties, which had seen Peronism as merely a derivative of European fascism—to come to grips with these traditions. Marxist writers, such as Rodolfo Puiggrós or Jorge Abelardo Ramos, reacted to this with rapprochement towards Peronism, so that their spheres of political sociability became virtually indistinguishable from that of left-wing Peronists. Moreover, they wrote historical essays and books, even though none of them was a professional historian (they mostly pursued a career of political activism). Their essayism about Argentina's social and political life was characteristically molded into a global version of the country's history, which stressed purportedly authentic national values, embodied in nineteenth-century caudillos.

In this, they drew on the legacy of historical revisionism, an anti-liberal and nationalist historiographical current that had emerged in the 1930s. There were, to be sure, differences between the erstwhile authoritarian variants of this historiography and the Marxist and populist neo-revisionists who are the protagonists of this article. Especially through their main institution—the Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas “Juan Manuel de Rosas” (hereafter Instituto Rosas)—the right-wing nationalists of the 1930s had concentrated on the glorification of the Hispanic, Catholic and authoritarian traits of the nineteenth-century caudillo Rosas, who was supposed to replace those who were seen as the “cosmopolitan” and “liberal” figures in Argentina's national pantheon (such as Bernardino Rivadavia, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento or Bartolomé Mitre). In contrast, under the increasing influence of Marxist nationalism in the sixties, the preferentially extolled figures of historical revisionism encompassed a wider spectrum, with a particular insistence on the caudillos from the interior, who were seen as more popular and less oligarchic than Rosas. There were also convergences, however. With regard to their general ideological outlook, both the rightist variants of nationalism of the 1930s and the post-1955 Marxists and populists were fervent anti-liberals. Furthermore, as I will try to show by focusing on the neo-revisionism of the 1960s, the left-wing nationalist intellectuals particularly echoed the beliefs of their reactionary forerunners in the notion that liberalism had will-

fully falsified predominant understandings of Argentina's past and this had to be rectified through the implementation of the version of anti-liberal revisionism, which supposedly uncovered the "authentic" values of the nation.

The neo-revisionism of Marxist and populist nationalist authors not only dovetailed with the predominant climate of political culture in the 1960s, but by the end of that decade, the sales successes of their books had in fact contributed a great deal to their version becoming something like common sense among Argentines. It gained particular currency among the so-called revolutionary tendency of Peronism, as the very name of the guerrilla group Montoneros indicates.⁹ Given these wide repercussions, it is striking that, although a number of scholarly works have been published on historical revisionism as a whole, the literature on this neo-revisionism—be it Marxist or populist—is still scarce.¹⁰ Although this article cannot fill this gap satisfactorily, it aims at clarifying a number of aspects that can help an overall understanding of the discursive negotiations of varying strands of nationalism that were played out in the terrain of history. The principal sources on which this article relies for this purpose are the books and essays of the authors in question, but occasionally these will be complemented by information from periodicals that were usually tied to political groups that

9. The armed hordes of followers of the nineteenth-century federal caudillos were called montoneras. The first public statement of the Montoneros in 1970 clearly showed the group's appropriation of revisionism in order to justify their violence. See "Hablan los Montoneros," *Cristianismo y Revolución*, N° 26, November/December 1970, pp. 11-14.

10. Generally on revisionism see Tulio Halperín Donghi, *El revisionismo histórico argentino* (Buenos Aires and Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno, 1971); Diana Quattrocchi-Woisson, *Un nationalisme de déracinés: l'Argentine, pays malade de sa mémoire* (Paris and Toulouse: CNRS, 1992); Alejandro Cattaruzza, "El revisionismo: itinerarios de cuatro décadas," in Alejandro Cattaruzza and Alejandro Eujanian, *Políticas de la historia: Argentina 1860-1960* (Buenos Aires: Alianza, 2003), pp. 143-182; the special section devoted to revisionism in *Prohistoria*, N° 8, 2004, pp. 165-265; and the corresponding articles in Fernando J. Devoto and Nora Pagano, eds., *La historiografía académica y la historiografía militante en Argentina y Uruguay* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2004). Both Terán, *Nuestros años sesentas*, and Sigal, *Intelectuales y poder*, contain valuable remarks, too, but their books are only tangentially devoted to revisionism. The same is true for Maristella Svampa, *El dilema argentino: civilización o barbarie, de Sarmiento al revisionismo peronista* (Buenos Aires: El Cielo por Asalto, 1994), whose sections on revisionism (pp. 269-281) deal with the subject from the perspective of text analysis.

supported Peronism. The article will, firstly, outline the ideological trajectories and the social background of the most prominent left-wing nationalist and populist intellectuals of the 1960s; secondly, identify the notions which justified the frequent recurrence to history; thirdly, delineate the central tenets of left-wing nationalist discourse with regard to history; and ultimately, assess the implications of historiographical disputes that emerged from the intersection with the older markedly authoritarian versions of historiographical nationalism.

The Heterogeneous Backgrounds of National-Populist Intellectuals

A positive appraisal of Peronism among the Argentine Left was not entirely new by 1955. From the very moment of Perón's ascent to power, there had been groups that did not agree with the Communist and Socialist Parties' branding of Peronism as fascism. Throughout the decade of Perón's government, this had led to the emergence of two principal dissident nuclei that broke away from the traditional Left in order to adopt a more populist stance.¹¹ The first group, guided by Rodolfo Puiggrós, sprang from a communist cell of railway workers in the Federal Capital, which split from the Communist Party in 1948/49 to form the Movimiento Obrero Comunista (MOC). As Puiggrós laid out in the group's organ *Clase Obrera*, "the Codovilla tendency, of which we were a part, stands in open contradiction to the historical development which leads the Argentine people towards their liberation." In contrast, the MOC portrayed itself as "a child of 17 October 1945,"¹² which also implied an increasing appropriation of the traditionalist traits of Peronism and its emphasis on the essential values of the nation and the relationship between an unequivocal leader and the masses. In the

11. Carlos Altamirano, *Peronismo y cultura de izquierda* (Buenos Aires: Temas Grupo Editorial, 2001), pp. 13-25, provides a general overview of these divisions before 1955. See also Aníbal Jáuregui's essay in this volume.

12. *Clase Obrera*, N° 50, April 1950, pp. 3-4. Vittorio Codovilla was a leader of the Argentine Communist Party. On 17 October 1945, a large demonstration in Buenos Aires' central Plaza de Mayo had demanded Perón's release from prison. The Peronist regime subsequently ritualized 17 October as "Loyalty Day" in yearly commemorations, so that it became closely associated with the Peronist liturgy.

eyes of the MOC-ideologues, these traits had to be incorporated as part and parcel of a movement which could eventually lead to an emancipatory national revolution and which therefore deserved to be included in a united anti-imperialist front. The second important nucleus from which Marxist populists emerged was the Partido Socialista de la Revolución Nacional (PSRN), a faction that had broken with the Socialist Party in 1953. Not too dissimilar from the position of the MOC, in December 1955, Esteban Rey maintained in the PSRN-organ *Lucha Obrera* that the last "ten years of tough national struggle waged by the working class and popular movement, which originates on 17 October 1945," could be the prologue of an anti-imperialist coalition.¹³ Intellectuals of the MOC and the PSRN later formed the core of what came to be called the *izquierda nacional*.

The prolonged crisis of political legitimacy that was inaugurated by the coup of 1955 provided the necessary stimulus to agglomerate various left-wing tendencies under the anti-liberal signs of a more vigorous stress of nationalist traditions. In 1957, in the first issue of a fortnightly journal which bore the telling title *Columnas del Nacionalismo Marxista de Liberación Nacional*, the Catholic Nationalist Fermín Chávez clarified his consent to contribute to a periodical that was explicitly Marxist:

Five or six years ago, [...] it would have been easy to deny them [the Marxists] any kind of collaboration [...]. Today, in turn, this dialogue has become possible, more than anything due to the events which have occurred in Argentina in the last two years.

Chávez went on to remark that the principal impact of these events meant that, rather than there being a dialogue that implied the modification of Nationalist positions, it had been Marxists who had opened themselves to "national reality."¹⁴ Thereby he alluded to the trajectory upon which some Marxist thinkers had embarked a few years earlier—among them Eduardo Astesano, an important MOC-figure from the province of Santa Fe and now director of the *Columnas*. In a vein that equally emphasized the development from Marxism towards a nationalist position, Astesano retrospectively summed up this development in 1972 by commentating on his own

13. *Lucha Obrera*, N° 5, 22 December 1955.

14. *Columnas del Nacionalismo Marxista de Liberación Nacional*, N° 1, 14 July 1957, pp. 1-3.

bibliography. There, he qualified the book with which he had initiated his historiographical career in 1941, *Contenido social de la Revolución de Mayo*, as a “class-based analysis.” In 1949, he had finished what he now considered a “first approach to economic nationalism,” finally arriving at the “synthesis of the national vision of the process,” which he attributed to his 1967-book, *La lucha de clases en la historia argentina*.¹⁵ This movement from Marxism to an embracement of nationalist ideas as well as Peronism was followed by several intellectuals. Two more examples that could be mentioned were Rodolfo Ortega Peña (still a member of the Communist Party in 1955), and Eduardo Duhalde, two lawyers who had only recently left the Faculty of Law of the Universidad de Buenos Aires and in the early 1960s began work as legal advisers for the Peronist union of metalworkers (UOM).

There was, however, no single linear tendency from Marxism to nationalism and the reshuffling of the political and cultural fields after 1955 in fact entailed a more complex intermingling of different political traditions. The ensemble of revisionist writers after 1955 was highly heterogeneous in terms of their ideological backgrounds. There were other Marxists, such as Juan José Hernández Arregui and John William Cooke, but, in contrast to Ramos and Puiggrós, they originally came from a populist background and had already defined themselves as Peronists and nationalists before 1955. Cooke, whose trajectory had also been linked to the anti-imperialist currents of Radicalism, had been a Peronist congressman between 1946 and 1955, although he only gained political significance when Perón appointed him as his personal delegate to Argentina during the “Peronist resistance” of 1955-58. Subsequently, Cooke’s blending of nationalism and Marxism began to form the reading matter of the subsequent generation of the radicalized left-wing Peronist Youth (JP) and the guerrilla group Montoneros.¹⁶ On

15. Eduardo B. Astesano, *Nacionalismo histórico o materialismo histórico* (Buenos Aires: Pleamar, 1972), pp. 207-208.

16. The literature on Cooke is quite abundant. See especially Miguel Mazzeo, ed., *Cooke, de vuelta: el gran descartado de la historia argentina* (Buenos Aires: La Rosa Blindada, 2000), but also Norberto Galasso, *Cooke: de Perón al Che, una biografía política* (Buenos Aires: Homo Sapiens, 1997) and Ernesto Goldar, *John William Cooke y el peronismo revolucionario* (Buenos Aires: CEAL, 1985). A good impression of him as an underground politician can be gained from his correspondence with Perón in the years 1955-57, when Cooke organized the so-called “Peronist resistance” [in *Juan Domingo Perón and John William Cooke*,

the other hand, there were also non-Marxists in this wider left-wing populist current, especially several former members of FORJA, an anti-imperialist group that had broken away from the Radical Party in 1935. The best-known among them was the prolific essayist Arturo Jauretche, who, similarly to Cooke and Hernández Arregui, did not significantly modify his ideological stance after 1955. Ultimately, the prolific revisionist historian José María Rosa can also be counted to this group, but although in the 1960s he declared his support for the Cuban Revolution, he originally came from the authoritarian extreme Right.

Leaving aside ideological questions, it is equally difficult to find distinctive common traits in other aspects of the biographical backgrounds of these writers. In contrast to other intellectuals of the new Left, such as the contributors to the journal *Contorno*, who can be called a "generation,"¹⁷ the national-populist writers did not belong to a particular age group. Although many of the aforementioned were born between 1910 and 1930, Jauretche (born in 1901), Rosa and Puiggrós (both born in 1906) were older, whereas Duhalde was born only in 1941. Geographically, they came from different parts of the country, both rural and urban areas. Although their activities in the sixties were usually based in the Federal Capital, there was no over-representation of people who had been born there, in contrast to the majority of Argentine intellectuals at the time. Nor were their socio-economic backgrounds similar in any significant way. Whilst Hernández Arregui came from a lower middle-class background of the province of Buenos Aires, others had quite affluent and even politically influential parents. Both Cooke and Rosa came from upper-class families and their fathers had been ministers at some point under the military governments between 1943 and 1946, whilst Jauretche came from an upper middle-class family and had studied at the prestigious Colegio Nacional de Buenos Aires.¹⁸ Ultimately, the fact that many had received an education in

Correspondencia (Buenos Aires: Gránica, 1973), 2 vols.] and, for his ideas, from his widely read *Apuntes para la militancia: peronismo crítico* (Buenos Aires: Schapire, 1973).

17. See Altamirano, *Peronismo y cultura de izquierda*, pp. 56-61.

18. On Jauretche see Norberto Galasso, *Jauretche: biografía de un argentino* (Buenos Aires: Homo Sapiens, 1997). Regarding Cooke's and Rosa's fathers, it should be added that their political orientations clearly differed, as did their respective sons': Juan Isaac Cooke, a former Radical congressman who was ap-

law is less a sign of the homogeneity of their backgrounds than an indication that this career was still very common among Argentine intellectuals in general at that time.

Neither their ideological nor their social origins constitute a coherent predisposition for them developing neo-revisionist ideas in matters of history. Rather, it was the political situation after the coup of 1955 that drew this heterogeneous group of writers together in opposition to the anti-Peronist military regime of 1955-58. In some cases, the effect of the regime change on them was quite immediate. Cooke, for example, who in this period was known as a Peronist agitator rather than as an intellectual, was sought by the military authorities for his political activities. He sought refuge in Rosa's house, where both were arrested in October 1955. Whilst Cooke was brought to a prison in Río Gallegos, from which he spectacularly escaped to Chile, Rosa was released after questioning, apparently about his historiographical activities as a revisionist.¹⁹ Furthermore, Rosa lost his university lectureship in 1955, as did Hernández Arregui and Cooke, in the course of the modernization and de-Peronization of universities that ushered in after the coup. As a result, none of the mentioned revisionist writers held a post of any significance at a public university between 1955 and 1973 and most of them consequently went on to work independently as authors of books, journalists and advisers or inspirers of certain political groups—usually in the wide orbit of Peronism. Despite the sales successes of their written products,²⁰ they thus remained outside or at best at the fringes of the state's cultural apparatus, which they attacked in symbolically violent anti-intellectualist diatribes as the bastion of the "official" intelligentsia. All of them pursued their own search for legitimacy through largely political arguments,

pointed minister of foreign affairs in August, 1945, had always disliked fascism, whilst José María Rosa (senior), who was appointed finance minister in 1943, was a fervent sympathizer. See Alain Rouquié, *Pouvoir militaire et société politique en Argentine* (Paris: Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques and CNRS, 1978), pp. 369 (Cooke), 170 and 321 (Rosa).

19. See the *Revista del Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas Juan Manuel de Rosas*, N° 17, 1958, p. 108 and Pablo José Hernández, *Conversaciones con José María Rosa* (Buenos Aires: Colihue, 1978), pp. 130-131.

20. Jauretche's book *El medio pelo en la sociedad argentina: apuntes para una sociología nacional*, which was first published in 1966, was one of the biggest sales successes of the sixties. See the bestseller lists in *Primera Plana*, between N° 204, 22 November 1966, and N° 249, 3 October 1967.

which they bolstered by historical references that extolled the tradition that they identified as the precursor of the political position which they supported. The cumulative effect of this marginalization was that they gained public notoriety as oppositional essayists and contributed to revisionism gaining currency among the New Left. In this sense, as Silvia Sigal has argued, the importance of history in the writings of national-populist intellectuals was connected to the fragility of the cultural field,²¹ rather than to common ideological backgrounds.

The Notion of an Oligarchic Deformation of National Values

It has been argued that there had been a left-leaning and populist current of historical revisionism much before 1955.²² There are examples to support this argument, such as Cooke's vice-presidency in the Instituto Rosas in 1954-55 and some of the populist intellectuals close to FORJA, most notably Raúl Scalabrini Ortiz, who also wrote revisionist essays. However, it is not so clear whether this was a broader current or a number of individual examples. Cooke's role in the Instituto Rosas had been rather marginal and he had never succeeded in persuading the Peronist regime to fully adopt revisionist motifs in its propagandistic efforts or its educational policy. The other main inspirer of FORJA, Jauretche, had shown little interest in history before 1955. Therefore, although there were antecedents, both the Peronist appropriation and the Marxist reformulation of historical revisionism fully developed only in the wake of Perón's overthrow. Populist revisionism, if understood as a widely influential array of many writers, came full circle only after 1955. Besides the marginalization of its proponents mentioned above, the immediate political situation of these years was decisive in two other ways: firstly, the anti-populist and unpopular military regime of Pedro Eugenio Aramburu relentlessly sought to stigmatize Peronism as a recurrence of caudillismo, in particular of Rosas' "tyranny," which led the Peronist underground to accept this analogy, defiantly inverting its originally pejorative valorization. Secondly, the futility of the governmental policy of "de-Peronization" and the

21. Sigal, *Intelectuales y poder*, p. 175.

22. Quattrocchi-Woisson, *Un nationalisme*.

working class' continuing adherence to the exiled leader now appeared to confirm that the conceptions of the traditional Left were entirely mistaken, as they continued to fail to appeal to the masses.

This second perception was especially important for erstwhile Marxists, as can be seen in the trajectory of Puiggrós, Astesano or Ramos. They argued that the traditional Left misread Peronism, because it was anchored in the liberal tradition, generally understood as diametrically opposed to revisionism. This conviction of the izquierda nacional was repeatedly nurtured by the statements of the leading figures of orthodox Socialism. For example, the leader of the Socialist Party, Américo Ghioldi, asserted in 1956 that Peronism consisted of "historical denigration," since Perón had slandered the "builders of nationality," whilst glorifying "the tyranny of Rosas."²³ Although Ghioldi did not single out whom he meant by "builders of nationality," the pantheon of heroes habitually evoked by the leaders of the Socialist Party, such as Echeverría, Rivadavia or Sarmiento, was so unequivocal that he hardly needed to specify his statement. These figures were precisely those incessantly vilified by revisionists (although Echeverría generally attracted less attention). That the congress of the Socialist Party adopted a declaration against historical revisionism in 1956 seemed to further confirm the party's grounding in liberal traditions.²⁴ Although it was more difficult to accuse the Communist Party of liberalism, in matters of history, the writings of who was something like the party's official historian, Leonardo Paso, also maintained a neat separation from nationalist traditions.²⁵

The point that the new revisionists picked up from their authoritarian forerunners was the notion that liberalism had caused the obfuscation of the authentic and profound essences of national

23. Américo Ghioldi, *De la tiranía a la democracia social* (Buenos Aires: Gure, 1956), pp. 91-96.

24. Daniel Omar De Lucía, "Liberalismo e izquierda: una relación poco estudiada," Paper presented at the Primeras Jornadas de Historia de las Izquierdas, Buenos Aires, 8-9, December 2000 (Centro de Documentación e Investigación de la Cultura de Izquierdas en la Argentina), p. 3. There was little to support Ghioldi's judgment. As stated above, Peronist cultural policy and propaganda essentially followed a similar line of historical interpretation as its predecessors.

25. See for example Leonardo Paso et. al., *Corrientes historiográficas* (Buenos Aires: Centro de Estudios Marxistas, 1974), esp. pp. 47-63, and Leonardo Paso, *Los caudillos y la organización nacional* (Buenos Aires: Sílabo, 1965).

identity. There was general agreement on this point between both the right-wing nationalists of the 1930s and the post-1955 populists. Both claimed to rescue from oblivion a real or authentic Argentina, which had remained invisible under the surface of general perception. Although what the Catholic hispanista Ernesto Palacio had simply called "the falsified history" in 1939 was perhaps not exactly the same as what Jauretche later labeled "the pedagogic colonization," both concepts were based on the belief that there had been a systematic distortion, which had led to an "official history" and which was the result of liberalism.²⁶ In both cases the distortion was attributed to the politics of a local oligarchy and an intelligentsia that supposedly were embedded in ideals alien to Argentina's national reality, a leitmotiv incessantly reiterated by the populist intellectuals of the sixties. To counter this perilous deviation, they argued, it was necessary to return to the "authentic nation," as Jauretche demanded in an essay published in 1959, which explicitly linked the necessity of historical revision to the exigencies of the national-populist movement.²⁷

The concept of an official history, allegedly distorted by the "official" intelligentsia, which in the 1930s had originally taken the shape of an anti-intellectual resentment by Nationalist intellectuals who had seen their political ambitions thwarted, was now reformulated according to Marxist categories. Its impact can be seen by the fact that even a non-Marxist author like Jauretche employed Marxist terminology in this point. He explained that his notion of "pedagogic colonization" should be understood as a "cultural superstructure," a concept that he had learned from Ramos.²⁸ Precise definitions were not seen as very important, so that the concept of superstructure was not easy to distinguish from the notions of false consciousness, alienation or that Marxist understanding of ideology which Raymond Williams has defined as the idea of "a system

26. Both expressions were book titles: Ernesto Palacio, *La historia falsificada* (Buenos Aires: Difusión, 1939); Arturo Jauretche, *Los profetas del odio y la yapa: la colonización pedagógica*, 6th ed. (Buenos Aires: A. Peña Lillo, 1973).

27. Jauretche, *Política nacional y revisionismo histórico* (Buenos Aires: A. Peña Lillo, 1959), p. 51.

28. Jauretche, "Don Juan Manuel y el revisionismo tímido," in Federico Barbará et. al., eds., *Con Rosas o contra Rosas: 32 escritores e historiadores emiten su opinión sobre D. Juan Manuel de Rosas* (Buenos Aires: Freeland, 1968), pp. 15-32, 17.

of illusory beliefs.”²⁹ In *Imperialismo y cultura*, perhaps the best Marxist example of an attack against a supposedly official ideology, Hernández Arregui avowed that “the point of departure is the consideration of cultural activity as ideology.” From there,

the aim is to prove how this generation [from the 1930 military coup onwards] was the instrument of imperialism, which used it to reinforce a false consciousness of the nation’s own essence and to disarm the defensive spiritual forces that struggle for national liberation [...].³⁰

In his eyes, the dominant ideology responded directly to the semi-colonial circumstances of Argentina or, in other words, to imperialism. Hernández Arregui thus affirmed that

the imperialist offensive goes hand in hand with ideological invasion. The entire public opinion of the country is infected to the core by this publicity that dissolves the national consciousness of a people. Institutions do not escape this propaganda. I am referring here to imperialist infiltration of the trade unions, the armed forces and universities.³¹

According to this view, imperialist penetration—which ran parallel to the promotion of dominant ideas and was therefore inseparable from the corruption of national consciousness—could be felt in practically all domains of public life, no distinction being made between the holders of cultural and economic capital.

On more detailed questions, for example whether foreign domination was the result of a conscious operation by identifiable protagonists or rather of a general system which historical figures had only reproduced, opinions could vary considerably, sometimes

29. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 55. This concept of ideology coexisted relatively peacefully with other uses. Tulio Halperín Donghi, *Ensayos de historiografía* (Buenos Aires: El Cielo por Asalto, 1996), p. 111, has observed that many revisionists of the thirties saw democracy as an ideology or a false consciousness. It must be added that this was different in the writings of the izquierda nacional. Puiggrós’ criticism of “constitutional fetishism,” for example [Rodolfo Puiggrós, *Las izquierdas y el problema nacional*, 2nd ed. (Buenos Aires: Cepe, 1973), p. 15], does not amount to an antidemocratic stance.

30. Juan José Hernández Arregui, *Imperialismo y cultura*, 2nd ed. (Buenos Aires: Hachea, 1964), p. 15.

31. Hernández Arregui, *Peronismo y socialismo* (Buenos Aires: Hachea, 1972), p. 66.

even within the writings of one and the same author. Such variations were expressed through different styles and methodologies, ranging from the Rankean optimism of José María Rosa—convinced that the accumulation of documents sufficed to demonstrate what his protagonists had actually been like—to the economist rigidity of Puiggrós, who tried to persuade without too much documentary ballast, but instead on the basis of his more thorough formation in Marxism. As a general tendency, domestic structural factors received little attention in order to account for what was seen as the ideological penetration of imperialism and the distortion of history. When domestic factors were mentioned, they often took the form of laments that Argentine society lacked sufficient rooting in tradition. In the eyes of Ramos, the absence of grandparents among immigrants

[...] makes it completely impossible for the generations after 1880 to perceive the fundamental course of the Argentine historical process, given that the offspring of these successive streams of immigrants, who lacked an oral tradition, could understand history only through the textbooks written by the oligarchy. These super-structural elements have huge importance in twentieth-century Argentine politics and in the historical imposture that still rules.³²

In general, however, analysis of the constellations that had facilitated or fostered imperialist interference amounted to the mere affirmation that there existed abominable pockets of “fatherland-sellers” (*vendepatria*).

Some authors, notably Hernández Arregui, openly underscored the Hispanic roots of Argentina in opposition to the loss of tradition. In his view, one fundamental problem of the Argentine crisis resided in the economic and political replacement of Spain by Britain as a principal point of reference for the ruling class. After assuring the reader of the far-reaching Hispanic influences in Shakespeare—designed to implicitly prove the cultural superiority of Spain over Britain—, Hernández Arregui observed that the masses “remained Hispanic, affiliated to the past.”³³ Hernández Arregui’s notion of *hispanidad* as being constitutive of Argentine

32. Jorge Abelardo Ramos, *Revolución y contrarrevolución en la Argentina*, 3rd ed., 2 vols. (Buenos Aires: Plus Ultra, 1965), vol. 2, p. 166.

33. Hernández Arregui, *¿Qué es el ser nacional? La conciencia histórica hispano-americana* (Buenos Aires: Hachea, 1963), p. 29.

national identity was not only compatible with the repertoire of some reactionary thinkers of nacionalismo and revisionists of the thirties, such as Carlos Ibarguren, Manuel Gálvez or Ernesto Palacio.³⁴ Behind such passages also lurked a similar kind of cultural conservatism, which suspected modernization of inducing societal degeneration. Furthermore, this moralistic aversion towards the latest cultural trends from overseas was also widespread among the left-wing Peronist Youth (JP). Just as Trinchera defined “the Peronist lifestyle” in opposition to consuming alcohol and visiting brothels, the scenes that Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas’ 1968 film *La hora de los hornos* showed from the arts branch of the Instituto Di Tella—at the time the cutting edge of artistic innovation, known as the *manzana loca* (the crazy block)—pictured its students as the quintessence of frivolity, emulation of North American chic and indifference towards the misery of the mass of the people.³⁵ For Hernández Arregui, too, the Instituto di Tella was “modern art without national roots and an empty imitation [...] of foreign fashion.”³⁶

In sum, the reason for the distortion of Argentine reality and history was seen in a circular relationship between imperialism, oligarchy and domestic culturally privileged groups. Puiggrós determined that

[t]he ideological infection introduced through imperialist propaganda provokes, in the colonial mentality of the liberal intellectuals and politicians, [...] a deformed vision of social reality [...].

According to him, since the oligarchy controlled the means of communication, it was only logical that “the conquest of power cannot be learned in books.”³⁷ In the eyes of the izquierda nacional, there was an inevitable link between the control of the domestic cultural market, imperialism and the oligarchy, so that reading books and other intellectual activity ultimately amounted to an instance

34. In fact, the hispanismo of 1930s nacionalismo was explicitly criticized by the izquierda nacional. See for example Puiggrós’ *Pueblo y oligarquía* (Buenos Aires: Jorge Álvarez, 1969), p. 17.

35. *Trinchera*, N° 3, October 1960. The film by Getino and Solanas adopted many motifs from revisionism. One of the first quotes in the first part is by Scalabrini, stating: “The history they taught us is wrong.”

36. Hernández Arregui, *Peronismo y socialismo*, p. 51.

37. Puiggrós, *Pueblo y oligarquía*, p. 13 and his *Las izquierdas*, p. 187.

of "alienation" from the authentic Argentine culture, a concept of which Hernández Arregui prided himself to have introduced it into the debate.³⁸ Insofar as at the roots of this alienation lay the project of foreign economic domination, imperialism in its economic dimension remained the crucial explanatory driving force. Yet the arguments about the material basis of the anti-national character of oligarchic literature in books such as *Imperialismo y cultura* hardly went beyond mere affirmation. Rather than economic statistics or social issues, they discussed literary products, for which the material bases only formed an invariable background. Especially Hernández Arregui's texts were a denunciation of the cultural properties of the liberal oligarchy, always a parasitic rather than an exploitative class. In this point, too, the neo-revisionists' historiography had much in common with the authoritarian strand of the thirties, both of which had little interest in economic analyses.³⁹

Nation and Class in Marxist Revisionism

The idea of a previously falsified liberal "official history" was what came closest to constitute a cohesive ideological denominator of historical revisionism. It provided some strategies and models which allowed for the essentialization of a discursive adversary whose mentality had allegedly distorted historiography and therefore required rectification. In other words, the starting point of the discourse of the izquierda nacional extracted from revisionism the procedure to legitimize itself by *vía negativa*, differentiating itself from an anti-national antagonist who was embedded in a "system of illusory beliefs." In other respects, however, the izquierda nacional differed from its reactionary precursors. The most crucial difference resided in the claim to rescue the history of the popular classes. Hernández Arregui, for example, called for a "reply to the official history of the oligarchy with the revolutionary revision that

38. Hernández Arregui, *¿Qué es el ser nacional?*, p. 12.

39. On the exclusion of material considerations for the characterization of the oligarchy in 1930s revisionism, here in the influential revisionist book by the Irazusta brothers, *La Argentina y el imperialismo británico*, see Tulio Halperín Donghi, "Argentines ponder the burden of the past," in Jeremy Adelman, ed., *Colonial Legacies: the Problem of Persistence in Latin American History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 151-173, 165.

exposes the class content of this canonized fable of our past."⁴⁰

Although the author's words made it appear as if the stress on class was an inevitable outcome of any revision of "official history," the majority of rosista revisionists of the 1930s had shown little sympathy for the popular classes and many of them—most notably Julio Irazusta—firmly resisted what they saw as a leftist deviation that had led to an aggrandizement of the masses. Historical revisionism per se hardly led to the discovery of class struggle as a principal driving force of history. Yet also in the books of the izquierda nacional, the scope conceded to the popular classes was not as broad as usually promised in their introductions. The title of Ramos' best-known book, *Revolution and Counterrevolution*, epitomized its dichotomous pamphletic content much more accurately than the subtitle of the original 1957 edition—dropped for the 1965 edition—which had raised the misleading expectation that the reader held in his hands a study about *The Masses in Our History*. It would have been equally possible to take one of Puiggrós' titles, such as *People and Oligarchy* or *The Left and the National Problem*, since Ramos' most recurring invectives were directed against those whom he saw as the archetypes of the oligarchy, Bartolomé Mitre, and of the anti-national liberal Left, Juan B. Justo.⁴¹ Despite habitually proposing to rescue those who had supposedly been buried by "official history," the products of other genres, such as the history of ideas of Hernández Arregui or the political and diplomatic histories of Rosa, rarely included passages about the popular classes.

The fact that neither the traditionalist rosista currents of the thirties nor their Marxist successors produced social histories does not mean, however, that class as a category did not play a central role in the populist narratives. Here was in fact the most palpable difference vis-à-vis classical rosismo, as the writers of the izquierda nacional reiterated. Firstly, they depicted the nineteenth-century masses—not yet the proletariat of the following century—as a naturally national class. For Hernández Arregui, on the one hand, "the nationalism of the masses stems from the immediate, not theoretic-

40. Hernández Arregui, *Nacionalismo y liberación* (Buenos Aires: Hachea, 1969), p. 19.

41. The respective Spanish titles were: Jorge Abelardo Ramos, *Revolución y contrarrevolución en la Argentina: las masas en nuestra historia* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Amerindia, 1957), Puiggrós, *Pueblo y oligarquía*, and Puiggrós, *Las izquierdas y el problema nacional*.

cal, fact of colonization. Not from books, but from the destructive eradication that comes upon us from outside." Whereas here his interpretation referred to imperialism, the nationalism of the masses appeared, on the other hand, as something that had existed a priori. Since they were masses, "they do not think of the there of the world. They think of the here. Of the fatherland." It thus turned out that "the masses are always national, although they do not know the definition of nation" and that "the proletariat [here, the contemporary] is, by definition, a national and revolutionary class."⁴² Similarly, Cooke maintained in his *Apuntes para la militancia* that after the overthrow of Rosas "the popular masses were left over [...] as the only trustees of the moral and cultural values of nationality."⁴³

At the same time, the condensation of characteristics of class and nation allowed for investing the agency in national liberation into a single organic subject. The fact that this entity was not only based on national values, but also on the values of the proletariat, would—at least if it became conscious of its own destiny—ensure the ultimately socialist outcome of national liberation. In principle, this body could be a class as well as a historical figure. It was only a short step, then, from the conviction that "every historical individuality personifies social powers" to the discovery of figures that purportedly embodied the values of both nation and popular class.⁴⁴ Marxist revisionists saw these values above all in the federal caudillos who had resisted Mitre's porteño centralism, such as Ángel Vicente "El Chacho" Peñalosa or Felipe Varela, i.e. in the interior. Past and present were the same in this respect. Hernández Arregui asked

[...] from where did the focal points of national emancipation emerge in the last years? From the provinces, Córdoba, Tucumán, Rosario [sic], Corrientes, San Juan, Catamarca [...]. The country, crushed during the nineteenth century with the extermination of the last montoneras of Felipe Varela, is in the interior.⁴⁵

According to Ortega Peña and Duhalde, "Mitre [...] is the symbol of the directing cattle-breeding class which organized the country according to the dictates of English financial capital,"

42. Hernández Arregui, *Peronismo y socialismo*, pp. 16, 70, 67.

43. Cooke, *Apuntes*, p. 47.

44. Hernández Arregui, *Imperialismo y cultura*, p. 21.

45. Hernández Arregui, *Peronismo y socialismo*, p. 70.

whereas "Felipe Varela [...] is the organization of the people, of the provincial working classes."⁴⁶ For them, Varela did not only do what the nation or the people wanted, but he was the organization of the people, at the same time synonymous with the "provincial working classes." The identity between caudillo and people had already been established through a homology in the title/subtitle of the book: *Felipe Varela Against the British Empire. The Masses of the Unión Americana Confront the European Powers*.

As this example indicates, the understanding of history of Marxist populists was usually dichotomous. Cooke, for example, identified "two currents, which have clashed since the days of the May Revolution: that of the port of Buenos Aires, cosmopolitan, free-trade, vehicle of ideas and interests that suited Europe [...]; and another one, nationalist popular, which saw the country as a whole and as a part of Latin American unity."⁴⁷ Yet the most extreme adherence to binary oppositions can be found in Ramos' works. At the beginning of the second volume of *Revolución y contrarrevolución*, he declared that the social, cultural and political changes of the twentieth century "only find themselves confronted with one invariable factor: the cattle-breeding and commercial oligarchy." On the last pages of the same volume, the reader was told:

However surprising it might seem, and in spite of the transformative power of history, there is one thing that a century and a half of vicissitudes has not changed in our country: the all-embracing power of the cattle-breeding oligarchy, built from the Latin American balkanization and the eclipse of Artigas. The oligarchic nucleus, a truly parasitic and paralyzing core, corrupter of Argentine economics, politics and culture bases itself on the same interests, the same psychology and the same myths, with which it confronted the caudillos, sustained the exclusivism of one port against the Nation, elevated Rivadavia, admitted Rosas, acclaimed Mitre, exterminated Paraguay, opposed Roca, overthrew Yrigoyen and exiled Perón. The entire life of the Argentine people has turned on the fight against that same power, under the most varying em-

46. Rodolfo Ortega Peña and Eduardo Luis Duhalde, *Felipe Varela contra el Imperio británico. Las masas de la Unión Americana enfrentan a las potencias europeas* (Buenos Aires: Sudestada, 1966), pp. 165-166.

47. Cooke, *Apuntes*, p. 41. This passage bore remarkable similarities to the historical justifications that the left-Peronist guerrilla group Montoneros published in 1970. "Hablan los Montoneros," *Cristianismo y Revolución*, N° 26, November/December 1970, p. 11.

blems; and the people have been defeated until the present day.⁴⁸

Throughout the twentieth century, the struggles of liberation had received their justification through their negative opposite. Another common strategy of the populist revisionist writings was to establish a system of points of reference which mutually explained themselves: the historical distortions of liberalism led to imperialist penetration. This penetration was manifest in economic and cultural practices, which led to the exclusion of those who resisted these distortions. In this way, the imperialist penetration was in turn held to have caused a false historical consciousness. It was possible to insert more elements into such chains, but in any case the fact that they explained themselves *eo ipso* forever relegated to a subordinate level questions about determinants or about the relationship between base and superstructure. It would be futile to search for discussions of Marx's preface of the *Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy* or to any other serious methodological debate of Marxism in the populist or Marxist revisionist writings. Something similar occurred with the intimate relationship between history and politics in their writings, which mutually legitimized and explained each other, too. According to Jauretche, for example, a national policy was conducive to the revision of history just as much as historical revisionism would entail a national policy.⁴⁹

Such binary oppositions and self-sustained chains, in which the arguments confirmed each other, shaped a discourse that attempted to be at once closed and all-encompassing. It ascribed an immobile significance to every historical protagonist and event within a global model of interpretation, in which every element referred to another. Yet, it was not always easy to distribute the roles in this game and there needed to be some possibility of historical change. Varela or Perón, let alone Rosas, could not simply be seen as the representation of a precisely defined working-class constituency. The crucial problems of Argentine history thus assumed an ethical rather than a socio-economic character. The enemy was identified as the enemy of the fatherland rather than the representation of interests of specifiable social groups. This explains why the tone of these writings was always moralist and "betrayal" became

48. Ramos, *Revolución y contrarrevolución* (vol. 2), pp. 7, 698

49. Jauretche, *Política nacional*, pp. 23-25.

a decisive concept that allowed to account for historical change. Urquiza's uprising against Rosas was not explained by changes in the country's socio-economic structure or by differences in their interests. Instead, he had simply "betrayed" Rosas.⁵⁰ The seeming strength and self-sufficiency of argumentative coherence therefore frequently necessitated the recurring to moralist categories.

The Problem of Rosas

The collocation of history at the centre of the discourse of the izquierda nacional could not conceal that debates about historiographical interpretation remained subordinated to political considerations. This is not to say that the populist Left did not voice varying opinions on the role of history or did not engage in interpretative debates. Whereas in Ramos' eyes it was legitimate to more or less freely manipulate history so that it could serve as a prop for contemporary political goals, Ortega Peña and Duhalde rejected such a view.⁵¹ For this reason, the stance of the latter two conformed to the ideas of the Instituto Rosas, which relentlessly propagated the discovery of historical "truth" as the first and foremost aim.⁵² They thus associated themselves to the institute, where they engaged in internal debates with its more right-wing historians about the correct reading of the War of the Triple Alliance. In their view, this had to be understood as an imperialist aggression against the autarkic Paraguay of Francisco Solano López that Mitre sought to force into an integration into the world market, whereas their opponent, Juan Pablo Oliver—who was not so sure anymore whether Mitre deserved his erstwhile vilification by revisionists—condemned "a communist tactic of infiltration" among the ranks of revisionism, of which, according to Oliver, Ortega Peña and Duhalde were principal promot-

50. See for example José María Rosa to Rodolfo Puiggrós, Madrid, 14 March 1958 (I would like to thank Omar Acha for drawing my attention to this letter). The list of usages of betrayal as the explanative factor in historical events is potentially endless.

51. See the interview with them in *Todo es Historia*, N° 38, June 1970.

52. The editorial of the institute's bulletin called for accomplishing "our mission to consolidate the truth up to its most extreme limits," for example. *Boletín del Instituto Juan Manuel de Rosas de Investigaciones Históricas*, N° 4, second series, April 1969, p. 3.

ers.⁵³ As this example shows, the intertwinement of authoritarian and Catholic strands of thought that had originated in the thirties with the Marxists' claim to historical revisionism generated a number of difficulties.⁵⁴

Regarding historiographical discussions, the most problematic aspect was one *fait accompli* of classical revisionism: its extolment of Rosas. He could be depicted as a popular patriot and even, if one liked, as an embodiment of national capitalism who protected the manufacturing industries of the interior, but without doubt he had also been the owner of vast lands who had acted in the name of the cattle-breeders of Buenos Aires. If, up to this point, it had not been necessary to come to an unmistakable decision to apply either class or nation in historical analysis, the figure of Rosas seemed to disrupt the complementarity of the two categories. Jauretche's discussion of class and nation evolved around the question of "Don Juan Manuel and timid revisionism," published in a book that had the clear-cut title *For Rosas or Against Rosas*. According to him, the socialists who had argued that Rosas was principally a member of the land-owning elite were guilty of "crude materialism." Those who, from a left-wing perspective, juxtaposed Rosas to the federal caudillos were furthermore characterized as "Mitro-Marxists." *Vis-à-vis* such tendencies, Jauretche thought it appropriate to rescue Rosas by reaffirming that the national question "was always the axis and this remains so."⁵⁵

In contrast, most Marxists (and especially Puiggrós) could not bring themselves around to the glorification of Rosas. Hernández Arregui tried to circumscribe a profile beyond "the nationalist tendency grouped around the figure of Juan Manuel de Rosas and the liberal one around Mayo and Caseros," since "during Rosas' government the porteño monopoly maintained all its vigor" and "Rosas' arguments were the same as those put forward by Rivadavia."⁵⁶ Similarly, when Cooke evoked historical figures as antecedents of

53. *Boletín del Instituto Rosas*, N^os 4 and 5 (second period), April and May 1969.

54. Large parts of Hernández Arregui's best-seller *La formación de la conciencia nacional, 1930-1960* (Buenos Aires: Hachea, 1960) were devoted to differentiating reactionary from progressive nationalism. See also Puiggrós, *El proletariado en la revolución nacional*, 2nd ed. (Buenos Aires: Sudestada, 1968), pp. 47-66.

55. Jauretche, "Don Juan Manuel," pp. 20, 18, 21.

56. Hernández Arregui, *Imperialismo y cultura*, pp. 15 and 20.

the popular national revolution he envisaged in a speech delivered in Havana in 1962 with the title "National consciousness is also historical consciousness," Rosas was not his preferential choice, but instead the rather uncontroversial figures of San Martín and Güemes, accompanied by Mariano Moreno, who was frequently used as an icon by the Left.⁵⁷ However, it was not so easy to exclude Rosas from the debate. The decision of the Instituto Rosas—which despite the arrival of some Marxists such as Ortega Peña and Duhalde continued to be a nucleus of right-wing rosistas—to re-launch its bulletin in 1968 was an attempt to regain ground, over which it had increasingly lost control in previous years. The symbol of the former governor of the province of Buenos Aires rendered palpable the discrepancies which separated the izquierda nacional from rosismo's hierarchical authoritarianism, Catholicism and nostalgia for a lost golden age, tending to stylize Rosas as the "restorer of law" rather than the popular caudillo.

Yet there were also Marxists who arrived at positive conclusions about Rosas. Astesano was perhaps the most creative in this. After having abandoned the position he had defended in 1951—namely that Rosas had not been a champion of economic independence—, in 1957 he interpreted Rosas "according to the bourgeois revolution." Given that this revolution,

on a political level, gives rise to nationalist movements [and given that...] in some cases it counted on the active collaboration of the popular masses, [...] the bourgeois revolution assumes in this case the character of a popular-bourgeois, or democratic-bourgeois, revolution.

Even though Astesano, too, detected the most strenuous anti-imperialism in the interior provinces, he nonetheless curtailed the distance that separated Rosas from the federal caudillos of the hinterland by asserting that both forms of federalism "expressed the reaction against a dependent, colonizing and foreign capitalist development." Astesano thus paved the way for his interpretation of Rosas as a popular leader and the founder of Argentine independent capitalism.⁵⁸ The other two principal Marxist defenders of

57. Cooke, "Documentos, cartas, discursos," *Crisis*, N° 9, 1974, pp. 4-5.

58. *Columnas del Nacionalismo Marxista de Liberación Nacional*, N° 3, 1 September 1957, pp. 1-3. He fully elaborated his reading of Rosas in his book *Rosas: bases del nacionalismo popular* (Buenos Aires: A. Peña Lillo, 1960).

Rosas, Ortega Peña and Duhalde, were less scrupulous about making their accounts compatible with their Marxist approach. In fact they suspected that the Marxist origins of the *izquierda nacional* led to an over-emphasis on historical stages and progression, which overlooked the centrality of the *montoneras* as an emblem for the contemporary political struggle. They consequently chose to highlight the deeds of the federal caudillos after Rosas' downfall in 1852 and to aver "the continuity between the policies of Rosas and the *montonera* [...] on the level of the historical needs of nationality" without focusing too much on the problems that surrounded the former governor of Buenos Aires.⁵⁹

Nevertheless, such historiographical discussions remained subordinated to the logic of contemporary politics. The contributions of the ideologically flexible Rosa were illustrative both of the disturbances caused by historiographical arguments within historical revisionism and of their relative insignificance. In a letter from 1958, Rosa criticized Puiggrós for not having sufficiently revised his interpretation of Rosas, published in 1944 in a book called *Rosas el pequeño*. Trying to persuade Puiggrós that "Rosas was a socialist *avant la lettre*"—based on a document in which Rosas had expressed his sympathy for the European revolutions of 1848—, he felt that he had to insist that "the problem of Rosas is crucial in our history and it has not been 'overcome by time,' as you say."⁶⁰ On another occasion, however, Rosa insisted that "we must establish the following: the essential problem is not the figure of Rosas but the different criterion that we apply to judge him."⁶¹ In the same letter to Puiggrós, Rosa wrote that "when communism and nationalism coincide [...] the world-wide national liberation of the peoples and social emancipation of the proletariat [...] is inevitable."⁶² On the other hand, he had no difficulties to posit class and nation as analytical categories in a strict dichotomy. In an interview in 1968, he explained that history sometimes shows us the internal confrontation of a national mentality and a class mentality [...]. The bourgeoisie has a class mentality, but I cannot find this in the so-called working class. Look

59. Ortega Peña and Duhalde, Felipe Varela, 166. For their criticism of the *izquierda nacional* see *Boletín del Instituto Rosas*, N° 5 (second period), May 1969, p. 24.

60. José María Rosa to Rodolfo Puiggrós, Madrid, 14 March 1958.

61. *Mundo Nacionalista*, N° 3, 5 September 1969.

62. Rosa to Puiggrós, Madrid, 14 March 1958.

what happens in our country: those above have 'class consciousness'; those below national consciousness.

Although there was little in this statement that would have made it incompatible with the Marxist analyses of other authors, his observations led Rosa to remind the readers of "the great mistake of Marxism."⁶³

Beyond the appearance of ideological zigzagging, we can identify the difficulty that Rosa had in integrating a number of divergent political or ideological positions which exerted their centrifugal effects on the Instituto Rosas and on revisionism as a whole. At the same time, however, they reveal that the interpretation of certain historical figures as well as ideological precisions were of secondary significance. Even those who, as Rosa or Ortega Peña and Duhalde, insisted on the appearance of "objective" historical scholarship, were without much hesitation prepared to drop the task of historical research for the political undertakings that seemed more urgent.⁶⁴ This political activism led to the paradoxical situation that the great success of national-populist revisionism in sales figures and in molding the historical imaginary of the young urban middle class in its rapprochement with Peronism simultaneously led to the relegation of historiography to a secondary place. The erstwhile proponents of revisionism, with their insistence on social hierarchies and unearthing a truthful golden age through the Instituto Rosas, were less and less important for the whole current of revisionism. At a time when Hernández Arregui held discussions with the proto-Montoneros—also fervent readers of Cooke's writings, despite his virtual political insignificance within Peronism by the time of his death in 1968—, the criticism of Ramos' Marxism by the reactionary Catholic priest Leonardo Castellani from the pages of the bulletin of the Instituto Rosas went largely unnoticed.⁶⁵ Whilst

63. José María Rosa, *Historia del revisionismo y otros ensayos* (Buenos Aires: Merlin, 1968), pp. 10-11. The expression "internal confrontation" supposedly referred to a confrontation within one country.

64. See on Ortega Peña and Duhalde, Ariel Eidelman, *Militancia e historia en el peronismo revolucionario de los años 60: Ortega Peña y Duhalde* (Buenos Aires: Centro Cultural de la Cooperación, 2004).

65. *Boletín del Instituto Rosas*, N° 5 (second period), may 1969, p. 21. That Castellani mistakenly called the reviewed book *Ejército y política* instead of *Ejército y semi-colonia* shows to what extent he was out of touch with Marxist vocabulary and, by implication, with debates in the social sciences and among intellectuals in

the historiographical discussion was taken up between the ideologically different sectors of historical revisionism, the politicization of the intellectuals of the *izquierda nacional* had a far more ambitious goal: to contribute to a revolutionary transformation of Argentine society, for which historiography was a subordinated proxy.

Conclusion

Although the growing embracing of nationalism by left-wing Argentine intellectuals had undeniable parallels in other Latin American countries, it was closely tied to the domestic political situation in the wake of Perón's overthrow. Whereas before 1955 the experience that Perón's appearance had reduced the traditional Left—i.e. the Socialist and Communist Parties—to an urban middle class clientele could still be explained by referring to the propaganda of an authoritarian regime, the continuing adherence of the popular sectors to Peronism after 1955 seemed to require a more fundamental revision of the hitherto prevailing interpretations of Peronism among the Left. Interwoven with Marxist approaches to the so-called national question, this climate of revision permeated wide sectors of the Left, including groups such as the young contributors of *Contorno*. In the case of the *izquierda nacional*, the rejection of the traditional Left was particularly far-reaching, articulated in symbolically violent invectives against its supposed liberalism, as well as a radical re-reading of the phenomenon of Peronism. Without launching much discussion about Marxist categories, the *izquierda nacional* endeavored to blend these categories with nationalist tenets. A number of left-wing populist intellectuals identified their exclusion from the cultural apparatus of the state and with the illegalization of the Peronist movement. By equating their marginal status in terms of cultural capital with their exclusion from political power they arrived at the conclusion that cultural, political and economic power were concentrated in the same hands. Their exclusion from public cultural institutions set Argentine nationalist intellectuals of the 1960s apart from their Brazilian counterparts.⁶⁶

general. On Hernández Arregui and the Montoneros see Richard Gillespie, *Soldiers of Perón: Argentina's Montoneros* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 80.

66. In Brazil, because (at least before 1964) this left-wing nationalism found its niche in state institutions, notably the Instituto Superior de Estudos Brasileiros,

The fact that in Brazilian nationalism, historical narratives played a comparably less significant role, as Sandra McGee Deutsch has observed,⁶⁷ suggests that the oppositional discourse of historical revisionism might in part have been an outlet of its proponents' perceived marginalization.

On the one hand, the essayistic narratives of the *izquierda nacional* appropriated the leitmotiv of historical revisionism—an anti-liberal, nationalist and combatively politicized strand of historical writing that had emerged in the 1930s—, which maintained that Argentine history had been falsified by an anti-national oligarchy in order to impede the fulfillment of the country's grand destiny. History therefore had to be recast according to the needs of a “national project.” On the other hand, as Fernando Devoto has recently argued, it is difficult to find common ideological denominators among the many intellectuals who are usually named when it comes to identify the producers of historical revisionism in the 1960s.⁶⁸ The authoritarian Catholicism of the revisionists of the thirties met with some reservations from the later Marxists. The specificities of revisionism, therefore, lay not so much in a coherent ideology that expressed certain group interests, but rather in the communication of a number of predicaments, for which revisionism promised a solution. Firstly, if the traditional Left's shortcomings in its interpretations of Peronism had been the result of its nineteenth-century liberal inspirations, then an appropriate understanding of Peronism also had to radically challenge these inspirations. Secondly, in opposition to that, the revision of Argentina's history would bring to the surface the authentic nation as well as indicating the future revolutionary paths for national liberation and, ultimately, *socialismo nacional*. The populist Left thus constructed historical accounts, in which past and present reciprocally legitimized each other. This relationship characterized the strong bond between history and politics in this discourse.

But in this relationship, historical revisionism remained

founded in 1955 by presidential decree. See Caio Navarro de Toledo, *ISEB: fábrica de ideologías* (São Paulo: Ática, 1977).

67. Sandra McGee Deutsch, *Las Derechas: The Extreme Right in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, 1890-1939* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 327-328.

68. Fernando Devoto, “Reflexiones en torno de la izquierda nacional y la historiografía argentina,” in Devoto and Pagano, eds., *La historiografía académica y la historiografía militante*, pp. 107-131.

subordinated to the needs of political legitimization. An outlook onto later developments can support this argument, as revisionist discourse declined to the degree that it was co-opted. After Perón's return to power in 1973, with the exception of Hernández Arregui, most of the intellectuals whose writings have been analyzed in this article were drafted into minor positions in the cultural apparatus of the state. With this, their intellectual output began to drop. Many years later, again in the context of building legitimacy, the Peronist presidential candidate Carlos Saúl Menem drew once more on the populist revisionist imagery by stylizing himself as a reincarnation of the federal caudillo Facundo Quiroga. Once elected, he hurried to repatriate Rosas' remains in an official ceremony, only to declare the chapter of revisionism as finally closed. The meaning of Rosas' repatriation, according to him, was "an authentic pacification of profound national reconciliation" and the farewell to "an old, wasted, anachronistic, absurd country."⁶⁹ Not too long thereafter, even Menem's caudillo-style sideburns disappeared. Consubstantial to the profound crisis of legitimacy after 1955, revisionism had always been marginal in academic terms, but after the reintroduction of democracy in 1983 it also increasingly lost its importance as a legitimizing prop for political projects.

69. *Clarín*, 1 October 1989.