

Imagining *El Ser Argentino*: Cultural Nationalism and Romantic Concepts of Nationhood In Early Twentieth-Century Argentina*

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Abstract. This article reexamines early twentieth-century Argentine cultural nationalism, arguing that the movement's true significance rests in its promotion of a vision of Argentine nationhood that closely resembled the ideal of the folk nation upheld by German romanticism. Drawing from recent theoretical literature on ethnic nationalism, the article examines the political implications of this movement and explores the way in which the vigorous promotion of the ethnocultural vision of *argentinidad* by cultural nationalists served to detach definitions of Argentine identity from constitutional foundations and from the ideas of citizenship and popular sovereignty. It also challenges the accepted view that Argentine cultural nationalism represented a radical break with late nineteenth-century positivism. Positivist ideas about social organicism, collective character and historical determinism all helped paved the way for the Romantic vision of nationhood celebrated by the cultural nationalists.

The early twentieth-century has long been considered a turning point in Argentine intellectual history. As is well known, these years witnessed the emergence of an intellectual and cultural movement opposed to what its proponents saw as the excessive cosmopolitanism of Argentine society. The cultural nationalists, as they have since become known, formed a loosely drawn group of young intellectuals based in Buenos Aires. Primarily from prominent provincial families, these individuals shared a belief that foreign influences and the growing immigrant population posed a threat to the nation.¹ Convinced that the Argentine 'personality' was on the verge of disappearing, they called for the defence of the

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¹ The core members of this intellectual movement consisted of Manuel Gálvez, Ricardo Rojas, Ricardo Olivera, Juan Pablo Echagüe, Alberto Gerchunoff, Emilio Becher, Atilio Chiappori, Mario Bravo, Ernesto Mario Barreda, Luis María Jordán and Emilio Ortiz Grognet. For individual backgrounds see Manuel Gálvez, *Amigos y maestros de mi juventud*, vol. 1 of *Recuerdos de la vida literaria*, 4 vols. (Buenos Aires, 1961), vol. 1, pp. 35–75.

nation's authentic culture and traditions. The cultural nationalists also targeted positivism, a philosophy that had dominated late nineteenth-century Argentine thought. Inspired by neo-idealist writers such as Rubén Darío and José Enrique Rodó, these intellectuals argued that positivism's emphasis on utilitarianism, science and materialism was inimical to the Argentine character. In the words of Manuel Gálvez, one of the movement's principal leaders, his generation was engaged in the 'heroic struggle against the atmosphere of materialism, scepticism and cosmopolitanism that disdained things Argentine and was indifferent to intellectual and spiritual values'.²

Despite the looseness of the movement and the vagueness of its aims, early twentieth-century cultural nationalism has attracted substantial scholarly attention. This interest is due less to the intrinsic intellectual or literary merit of the works produced by the movement than to the widespread belief that these early nativists laid the groundwork for later nationalist thought. This view, most forcefully articulated by David Rock, sees cultural nationalism as a conservative reaction to massive immigration and working-class activism, and thus as the precursor to such movements as the ultra-Catholic Liga Patriótica Argentina and the right-wing nationalist movement emerging in the late 1920s.³ The latter, headed by Carlos and Federico Ibarguren, Juan Carulla and Julio Irazusta, moved beyond a concern over the putative disappearance of Argentine culture and embraced a political programme that was quasi-fascist in nature. Many of these individuals figured prominently in the 1930 military coup that deposed Radical President Hipólito Yrigoyen.

While agreeing in part with such analysis, this article argues that current scholarly treatments of cultural nationalism have overlooked two key problems central to our understanding of the movement and its legacies. The first problem is the relationship between cultural nationalism and late nineteenth-century positivism. Certainly, Argentine cultural nationalists saw themselves as avatars of idealism, blaming both cosmopolitanism and positivism for the putative dissolution of the nation's culture.⁴ But despite the cultural nationalists' claim to represent

² Manuel Gálvez, *Amigos y maestros*, p. 43.

³ David Rock, 'Intellectual Precursors of Conservative Nationalism in Argentina,' *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 67:2, May 1987. For a similar view, see also Aníbal Iturrieta, 'El Primer Nacionalismo Argentino,' in Aníbal Iturrieta (ed.), *El pensamiento político argentino contemporáneo* (Buenos Aires, 1994), pp. 17–43, esp. 27; María Inés Barbero and Fernando Devoto, *Los nacionalistas (1910–1932)* (Buenos Aires, 1983), esp. chapter one; Enrique Zuleta Alvarez, *El nacionalismo argentino*, 2 vols. (Buenos Aires, 1975), vol. 1, p. 85; on Manuel Gálvez as a precursor, see Marysa Navarro Gerassi, *Los nacionalistas* (Buenos Aires, 1968), esp. chapter ten.

⁴ Present-day scholars have generally accepted the cultural nationalists' own view of themselves as anti-positivists, characterising the movement as part of the generalised

a break with positivism, my own research suggests that many of their ideas about national character and its determinants had roots in the previous positivist era. The question then becomes, what were the connections and continuities between the two movements?

The second problem concerns the relationship between the cultural nationalists and later right-wing nationalist movements. Although scholars of Argentine cultural nationalism agree that the cultural nationalists should be seen as precursors to the nationalists of later years, most have also recognised the former's divergent political inclinations. Nowhere is this more evident than in the life histories of the two most important cultural nationalists, the above-mentioned Manuel Gálvez (1882–1962) and Ricardo Rojas (1882–1957).⁵ Generally recognised as the founding fathers of Argentine cultural nationalism, these intellectuals

idealist current sweeping most of Latin America during this period. See for example, David Rock, 'Intellectual Precursors of Conservative Nationalism in Argentina, 1900–1927,' pp. 272–7; Carlos Altamirano and Beatriz Sarlo, 'La Argentina del centenario: campo intelectual, vida literaria y temas ideológicos,' in their *Ensayos argentinos, de Sarmiento a la vanguardia* (Buenos Aires, 1983), pp. 73–7; Eduardo Zimmermann, 'Racial Ideas and Social Reform: Argentina, 1890–1916,' *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 72:1 (Feb. 1992), p. 25, note 4. Sandra McGee Deutsch also sees cultural nationalists as part of the reaction against positivism, but argues that these intellectuals shared '... with the positivists ... a belief in the rule of a talented elite and in racism.' See Deutsch, *Las Derechas: The Extreme Right in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile* (Stanford, 1999), 33. While I agree with the first part of this statement, the claim that the cultural nationalists embraced racism is somewhat misleading. As will be developed below, the leaders of this movement saw race as an ethnocultural rather than biological category.

⁵ Marysa Navarro, for example, contrasts the 'liberal cultural nationalism' of Ricardo Rojas with the authoritarian, anti-democratic nationalism of Manuel Gálvez; Navarro, *Los nacionalistas*, p. 161. Barbero and Devoto likewise distinguish between the 'secular, liberal' nationalism of the early Rojas and the 'Catholic,' 'traditional' nationalism of Gálvez, Navarro, *Los nacionalistas, 1910–1932*, p. 24; Earl Glauert contrasts the liberal cultural nationalism of Rojas with the 'anti-liberal nationalism' of Gálvez, 'Ricardo Rojas and the Emergence of Argentina Cultural Nationalism,' *Hispanic American Historical Review*, no. 3 (August, 1963), pp. 1–17; Zuleta makes clear distinctions between the democratic nature of Rojas' nationalism, see Zuleta, *El nacionalismo* (vol. 1, pp. 97–101) and Gálvez's support of authoritarian nationalism (vol. 2, pp. 684–7); Sarlo and Altamirano also distinguish between cultural nationalism's 'two programmes': one liberal-democratic, the other reactionary, Sarlo and Altamirano, 'La Argentina del centenario,' pp. 100–3. Rock is exceptional in this regard, making no distinction between the political alignments of key cultural nationalists. In addition to 'Intellectual Precursors of Conservative Nationalism', see his 'Antecedents of the Argentine Right,' where he describes Rojas' *La restauración nacionalista* as an 'early right-wing text'. In Sandra McGee Deutsch and Ronald Dolkart (eds.), *The Argentine Right: Its History and Intellectual Origins, 1910 to the Present* (Wilmington, 1993), p. 26.

often collaborated in the early stages of their careers.⁶ Politically, however, they followed distinct paths. Gálvez, while expressing an initial enthusiasm for socialism, had by the early 1900s embraced Catholicism and begun to exhibit decidedly authoritarian tendencies. In 1927, for example, he published various articles in the right-wing newspaper *La Nueva República* and publicly supported the 1930 coup.⁷ Rojas, in contrast, remained a self-proclaimed democrat throughout his life. Until 1930, he generally avoided political involvement, but after the coup joined the party of deposed president Hipólito Yrigoyen. Condemning the coup as fascist, Rojas was later arrested on charges of conspiring against the government and was briefly incarcerated.⁸

The diametrically opposed political alignments of the two most important cultural nationalists, coupled with the widespread portrayal of these intellectuals as the precursors to later eruptions of right-wing nationalism, present an obvious problem. If early twentieth-century thinkers such as Gálvez and Rojas exhibited such widely different political inclinations, how could the movement they spearheaded have inspired the reactionary nationalists of later years? The argument, while easy to make in Gálvez's case, becomes much more problematic when applied to Rojas. Given Rojas' well known animosity toward the later nationalists (a feeling that was strongly reciprocated),⁹ in what way can he be considered their precursor? Related to this paradox is the question of whether or not Argentine cultural nationalism possessed a coherent message or ideology. Given the political differences between Gálvez and Rojas, is it even useful, as Carlos Molinari has asked, to consider Argentine cultural nationalism a single intellectual movement?¹⁰ If so, what commonalities did the movement's key thinkers share?

Focusing on the ideas of Rojas and Gálvez, this essay reexamines Argentine cultural nationalism with these questions in mind. It argues that much of what is confusing about the movement can be resolved by exploring an aspect of the cultural nationalists' thought that has been

⁶ On the importance of these two figures and for information on their backgrounds, see Eduardo José Cárdenas and Carlos Manuel Payá, *El primer nacionalismo argentino* (Buenos Aires, 1978), pp. 13–33.

⁷ It should be noted, however, that despite Gálvez' clear authoritarian tendencies, his relationship with the nationalists of later years was always rocky. For more discussion, see Mónica Quijada's *Manuel Gálvez: 60 años de pensamiento nacionalista* (Buenos Aires, 1985), chapter two.

⁸ Earl Glauert, 'Ricardo Rojas and the Emergence of Argentine Cultural Nationalism,' p. 9.

⁹ See for example nationalist Ramón Doll's essay, 'El grave error de Ricardo Rojas,' in Doll, *Política intelectual* (Buenos Aires, 1933), pp. 13–28.

¹⁰ Carlos Molinari, 'El primer nacionalismo argentino,' *Punto de Vista*, Year 2, no. 6 (July 1979), p. 28.

largely overlooked – their deeply Romantic concept of nationhood and national identity.¹¹ As will be argued below, animating the cultural nationalists' attack on cosmopolitanism and their call for authenticity was a particular way of understanding nationhood, one we commonly associate with early nineteenth-century German Romanticism. Briefly, within the German Romantic tradition the nation is seen as an organic entity emerging naturally from the depths of history and possessing a unique personality or character. Members of the nation, according to this view, constitute a distinctive people or *Volk* sharing particular mental and emotional traits, and are bound together by language, religion and common descent. This understanding of nationality also entails a particular view of historical development that celebrates national uniqueness. In contrast to the Enlightenment notion of universal values and the belief that all civilisations develop along a single historical continuum, Romanticism promotes the idea of world history as a process of increasing differentiation. Accordingly, national societies – propelled by their own inner spirit or genius – progressively realize their individual destinies or cultural missions. It was this Romantic vision of nations as distinctive folk or 'ethnocultural'¹² communities, I argue, that gave Argentine cultural nationalism an underlying coherence and linked it to positivism and even earlier nineteenth-century intellectual traditions.¹³

¹¹ This approach is inspired by Katherine Verdery's insistence on the need to connect studies of nationalism with underlying concepts of nationhood and national identity, and by the work of M. Ranier Lepsius on comparative concepts of nationhood. Verdery, 'Whither "Nation" and "Nationalism"?' *Daedalus* (Summer, 1993), pp. 37–46; Lepsius, 'The Nation and Nationalism in Germany,' *Social Research*, 52:1 (Spring, 1985), pp. 43–64.

¹² I take this term from William Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge, MA, 1992).

¹³ While the Romantic nature of Rojas' thought has been much noted, the origins and implications of Romantic influences on cultural nationalism have yet to be sufficiently explored. The most extensive treatment to date is the already mentioned 1963 article by Earl Glauert, 'Ricardo Rojas and the Emergence of Argentine Cultural Nationalism.' Here, however, Glauert limits his discussion to the similarities between the ideas of Rojas and German Romantic philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder. Others who have made the connection between Rojas and German Romanticism have done so only briefly. See, for example, Natalio Botana and Ezequiel Gallo, who note that Rojas had come under the influence of 'the first wave of German nationalism.' Botana and Gallo, *De la República posible a la República verdadera (1880–1910)*, (Buenos Aires, 1997), 105. Nicola Miller also argues for the strong impact of German Romanticism (especially Herder) on Rojas' thought in *In the Shadow of the State: Intellectuals and the Quest for National Identity in Twentieth-Century Spanish America*, (London, 1999), p. 166. More obliquely, María Teresa Gramuglio and Beatriz Sarlo note how Rojas' 'esthetic and philosophical Romanticism' shaped his understanding of the importance of the gaucho in 'José Hernández,' in *Historia de la literatura argentina*, vol. II (Buenos Aires, 1980), p. 18. Tulio Halperín Donghi, while not linking Rojas' ideas to Romanticism, does describe his thought as having been molded by the 'decadence of the new century', a decadence presumably traceable to the revival of ethnic nationalism in

This focus on the Romantic elements of the cultural nationalists' thought and their underlying vision of nationhood also allows us to look at their divergent political commitments in a different light. While the cultural nationalists' Romantic-like construction of Argentine identity was not in and of itself anti-democratic, it did serve to detach definitions of the Argentine nation from constitutional foundations and from the ideas of citizenship and popular sovereignty. It is in this context that I will consider the question of Rojas' reputed role as a precursor to right-wing nationalism. Without attempting to draw direct lines of influence, I will suggest ways in which Rojas, despite his hostility to later nationalists, helped shape a new understanding of Argentine nationhood that proved congenial to subsequent authoritarian programmes.

The Romantic vision of Rojas and Gálvez

Perhaps the best place to begin our discussion of the Romantic ideas underlying cultural nationalist thought is with Ricardo Rojas' 1909 work, *La restauración nacionalista*. Considered one of cultural nationalism's founding texts, the work was conceived of as a study of European school curricula, a project for which Rojas received state funding. What the government expected from Rojas is unclear, but the result was less an analysis of pedagogy than a personal manifesto on Argentine nationhood outfitted in the trappings of a report on education.

In his critique of Argentina's educational system, Rojas argued that the roots of its problems ran deeper than poor pedagogy. The real cause of the system's malaise, he argued, was the underlying incoherence and immaturity of the Argentine 'soul' or personality.¹⁴ According to Rojas, this lack of a defined national personality had led Argentines mindlessly to adopt an eclectic mix of foreign educational methods that had nothing to do with Argentine reality. To highlight the source of the Argentine crisis, Rojas described what he saw as the key differences between older European nations and younger ones such as Argentina. According to Rojas, European nations enjoyed a tremendous advantage over Argentina, because they had 'existed spiritually' before being formally constituted as political entities.¹⁵ As he was to explain more fully in a later work, in such nations the soil, race, language and national literature fused together to

Europe. Halperín, '¿Para qué la inmigración? Ideología y política migratoria y aceleración del proceso modernizador: El caso argentino,' *Jahrbuch Für Geschichte Von Staat, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft Lateinamerikas*, Band 13, 1976, p. 483.

¹⁴ Ricardo Rojas, *La restauración nacionalista* [1909] (Buenos Aires, 1971), 3rd ed., p. 136.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

form a single whole. ‘It is as if’, Rojas argued, ‘each of these is born from the others, all complement and explain the others in a harmonious cycle or whole.’¹⁶ The ethnic, cultural and spiritual unity of European nations meant that each nation had a coherent ‘spiritual nucleus’ that had formed as a ‘consequence of a homogeneous race’ rooted in the remote past.¹⁷ This spiritual nucleus, in turn, had shaped each nation’s educational system, giving it a distinctive cast. In England, for example, the spiritual nucleus had produced an educational system primarily concerned with cultivating the individual conscience, while German schools emphasised a blend of metaphysics and imperialism that reflected that nation’s distinctive personality.¹⁸ In new nations such as Argentina, by contrast, a unified race had yet to form.¹⁹ This process, Rojas believed, had been delayed due to Argentine society’s excessive heterogeneity caused by massive immigration. Calling for a ‘nationalist restoration within education’, Rojas urged the government to ‘imprint the educational system with a national character’ by emphasising Argentine history and literature.²⁰

Despite his support of patriotic education, Rojas believed that curricular reform alone was insufficient to create a unified nation or a homogenous race. In keeping with the Romantic view that nations are natural organisms rather than human creations, he argued that the Argentine race would slowly emerge over time as the Argentine people gradually developed common characteristics. This would occur naturally, Rojas believed, as the telluric forces of the Argentine soil moulded the population into a homogeneous race giving it a distinctive personality. Often sliding into mysticism, Rojas believed that the earth was suffused with ‘invisible forces’ that were ‘moulders’ of civilisations. In his words, ‘the “*genius loci*” of the national territory formed the individual according to his environment, until it had created a homogeneous race, and thus a nationality’.²¹

The retreat from universalism and the belief that each nation develops according to its own inner spirit were also evident in Rojas’ work. While previous generations had acknowledged the distinctive character of Argentine society, most thinkers had assumed (or at least hoped) that

¹⁶ Ricardo Rojas, *Los gauchescos*, vol. I of *La literatura argentina*. Published as vol. VIII of *Obras de Ricardo Rojas* (Buenos Aires, 1924), p. 27.

¹⁷ Rojas, *La restauración nacionalista*, p. 136. Both Rojas and Gálvez – as was common during this period – used the term ‘race’ in the historical, Romantic sense. The distinction between that understanding of race and the use of the term to denote a biological category (also common during these years) will be discussed below.

¹⁸ Rojas, *La restauración nacionalista*, p. 135.

¹⁹ See for example Rojas’ comments in *Los gauchescos*, pp. 28, 139, *passim*.

²⁰ Rojas, *La restauración nacionalista*, pp. 145, 108.

²¹ Rojas, *Los gauchescos*, p. 114.

Argentina would eventually come to resemble wealthier, democratic nations such as England, France and the United States. Rojas, by contrast, rejected the idea that Argentines should seek to remake their nation along European lines, harshly criticising past generations for imitating Europe.²² Again, in keeping with the Romantic ideal of the nation as possessing a unique personality, he argued that the emerging Argentine nation would develop according to its particular characteristics, one with its own destiny. Likening national personalities to that of an individual,²³ he believed each nation possessed a collective ‘soul’ and a ‘racial memory’.²⁴ Argentina’s unique character and destiny, Rojas believed, were the result of the mixing of the indigenous and European races, which the telluric forces of the Argentine soil would fuse together to form a unique single national race.²⁵

Unlike Rojas, Manuel Gálvez was less concerned with elaborating theories about nations and their formation than with describing and promoting the qualities that he believed defined the Argentine national character. In keeping with Romantic understandings of nationhood, Gálvez saw all nations as unique entities that possessed distinctive personalities and destinies. Moreover, members of each nation were stamped with a particular set of distinctive characteristics that marked them from non-members. For Gálvez, language and especially religion formed the cornerstones of this collective character, and thus constituted the distinguishing features of each national race.²⁶

Central to Gálvez’ ideas was his conviction that people of Latin, and especially Spanish, descent differed profoundly from Northern Europeans, and that these differences were inextricably intertwined with the two versions of Christianity these two peoples embraced. Latin Americans, he maintained, had been moulded by the spirit of Catholicism, ‘which had impressed its character on all expressions of [Latin] American life’.²⁷ While Protestantism might be appropriate for such countries as England and Switzerland, its ‘hard, dry and intolerant spirit’ was completely incompatible with Latin ‘ideals, sentiments and convictions’, and ran counter to Argentines’ quality of ‘generosity and our notorious magnanimity’.²⁸ Chastising those who argued that Protestantism would be the salvation of Latin America, Gálvez believed that such a change would represent a complete ‘denationalisation’ of republics such as Argentina²⁹ and that Protestantism in Latin America would always

²² Ricardo Rojas, *Eurindia*, 2nd ed. Published as vol. 5 of *Obras de Ricardo Rojas* (Buenos Aires, 1924), pp. 159–60.

²³ Rojas, *Eurindia*, p. 128.

²⁴ Rojas, *Eurindia*, pp. 128, 175.

²⁵ Rojas, *Los gauchescos*, pp. 144–5, passim.

²⁶ Manuel Gálvez, *El diario de Gabriel Quiroga: Opiniones sobre la vida argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1910), p. 67.

²⁷ Gálvez, *El diario*, p. 66.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

struggle against the Latin ‘racial characteristics, tradition, environment and even the climate’.³⁰ His generation’s most ardent champion of Spain, Gálvez praised the former colonial power as the ‘crucible of the race’ and as ‘perhaps the most noble people that have existed on earth’.³¹ Unlike Northern Europe, and even other Latin nations, Spain had resisted the lure of materialism and the cult of money, remaining mystical and Catholic.³² Exhorting his countrymen to return to their Spanish roots, he proclaimed it time to ‘feel ourselves to be Argentines, [Latin] Americans, and ultimately Spaniards, because this is the race to which we belong’.³³

Yet, like Rojas, Gálvez believed all nations possessed a unique character. For him, Argentina was not simply an offshoot of Spain now growing in the New World, but a new civilisation with an important destiny and cultural mission.³⁴ Gálvez believed that Argentine uniqueness stemmed from racial mixture with the indigenous population, and from the impact of the distinctive geological features of the American continent. These geographical influences, he argued, had produced in the Indian and European inhabitants of the Argentine territory, ‘common qualities, sentiments and ideas’.³⁵ Despite these varied racial and geographic factors, however, the Argentine race would remain fundamentally Spanish.³⁶ Indeed, for Gálvez, Argentina’s fundamental *raison d’être* was to preserve and carry forth the torch of Latin civilization, of which Spain was the purest example. Convinced that the Latin race in Europe was now exhausted, Gálvez believed that Argentina’s historical mission would be to give this race a new beginning. As a land of ‘new energy’, Argentines would carry forth the ‘Latin ideal, Latin energy and Latin virtue’.³⁷ In fulfilling this destiny, Argentines ‘should use the spiritual lessons taken from Spain simply as a point of departure, as a seed that, when transplanted to the moral climate of our fatherland, would vigorously take root [and develop] its own form’.³⁸

While Rojas and Gálvez developed the most elaborate versions of the idea of Argentina as a unique ethnocultural entity with a preordained

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

³¹ Manuel Gálvez, *El solar de la raza*, [1913] (Buenos Aires, 1936), p. 39.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 28–9.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

³⁴ The new Argentine race, he believed, was ‘predestined’ for a ‘magnificent destiny’. *El Solar de la raza*, p. 38.

³⁵ Gálvez, *El diario de Gabriel Quiroga*, pp. 118–19. It should be noted that Gálvez placed much less emphasis on the indigenous component of the Argentine race than did Rojas.

³⁶ Gálvez argued that despite massive immigration, the emerging Argentine race would remain part of the ‘Latin race,’ and within the Latin race, ‘we are, and eternally will be of the Spanish sub-race’ (*casta española*). *El solar de la raza*, p. 39.

³⁷ Manuel Gálvez, ‘Los himnos a la nueva energía,’ *El Monitor de la educación común*, Year 30, vol. 39 (1911), p. 73.

³⁸ Gálvez, *El solar de la raza*, p. 16.

historical mission, it is important to note that theirs were not lone voices launched into a void. In articulating their vision of Argentine nationhood and destiny, the cultural nationalists employed language, ideas and images that resonated with – just as they helped shape – contemporary understandings. In 1918, for example, an editorial in the magazine *Ideas* applauded the government's decision to designate October 12 as the 'Día de la Raza' by explaining that peoples 'who possess the same customs, beliefs, aspirations, and above all language ... are morally of the same race'. And when to this is added a character forged by common historical origin, the author continued, 'the fraternal union that fuses them into the same spirit cannot be dissolved.'³⁹ Using the same understanding of race, Martín Noel, an architect who sought to develop a uniquely Hispanic American architectural style, wrote of the need to promote the 'racial values' of Hispanic Americans.⁴⁰ Similarly, Alvaro Melián Lafinur, reviewing Gálvez's *El solar de la raza* in the highly influential magazine *Nosotros*, noted the need for Argentines to define their collective character and to 'affirm ourselves as a racial entity'. In true Romantic fashion, Lafinur believed the creation of an authentic national literature was integral to this process, and noted approvingly that Argentine writers had ceased to '*hacer literatura*' and begun to '*hacer patria*'.⁴¹

Even intellectuals who criticised the cultural nationalists for what they viewed as the latter's excessive nativism often shared their tendency to identify race with nationality. In the well-known literary magazine *Renacimiento*, Eduardo Maglione published a spirited attack on the new nationalism, apparently aimed at Rojas' *Restauración nacionalista*. Yet while critical of the anti-immigrant implications of their ideas, Maglione nonetheless accepted the cultural nationalists' vision of nationhood. 'No one', he notes, 'is disputing, or can dispute, the need to give a soul to the variegated conglomerate of men and tendencies that are [now] in the process of forming the Argentine race ... We are, and will continue to be for a long time, in a process of a fusion of races and characters.'⁴² But, he concludes, 'This variegated cosmopolitanism is only a stage [in the development] of [our] nationality, after which will come the true Argentine race and Argentine nationality.'⁴³

³⁹ Editorial, 'Día de la raza,' *Ideas*, Year 1, num. 1 (Oct. 1918), p. 2. (This publication should not be confused with the earlier literary magazine by the same name published by Gálvez.)

⁴⁰ Martín Noel, 'La nueva dirección,' *Síntesis*, Year I, num. 8 (Dec. 1927), pp. 133–34.

⁴¹ Alvaro Melián Lafinur, 'El solar de la raza,' *Nosotros*, Year 7, num. 55 (Nov. 1913), pp. 202–3.

⁴² Eduardo F. Maglione, 'Cosmopolitismo y espíritu nacional,' *Renacimiento*, Year 1, vol. 2, num. 6 (Nov. 1909), pp. 320, 328.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 329.

The cultural nationalists' rejection of unilinear notions of history and their belief that Argentina should reject foreign models in order to realise its own destiny also resonated with contemporary understandings. One contributor to the literary review *Sagitario*, for example, noted that Argentines no longer accepted the assumption that European civilization was synonymous with the term civilization itself. The breakdown of this 'cultural monism', he opined, had led to 'a new way of thinking about the historical universe,' one that 'comprehends and accepts ... that in all epochs there is a plurality of civilizations, independent worlds with distinctive spiritual modalities and vital propensities.'⁴⁴ Juan Propst, the foreign-born editor of the review *Verbum* (who declared himself an 'Argentine at heart'), expressed similar notions in an issue dedicated to the newly designated 'Día de la Raza.' Argentina's celebration of the day, Propst argued, helped defined Argentine nationality by affirming 'its membership in the circle of Hispanic culture'. This was important for both Argentina and the world, he continued, since human progress required a 'heterogeneity' that would come from 'defined and coherent components' such as the Hispanic-American world.⁴⁵ The grouping of nations into distinctive components or cultural circles, Propst believed, enriched all of humanity and helped move mankind toward its true destiny. Writing in much the same vein, Jorge Max Rohde, a founding member of the anti-positivist group Colegio Novecentista, decried Argentines' tendency to follow European dictates, lamenting that Argentines 'quiver like an errant leaf in the gusts of European wind'. It was time, he proclaimed, for the 'latent forces of the race' to awaken. Once this occurred, Rohde believed, the 'great Hispanic family, united by its language and soul,' would cease to imitate other races and would instead offer 'new worlds' to the rest of humanity.⁴⁶

As these statements suggest, this emphasis on national distinctiveness and the conviction that each nation possessed a distinctive character, spirit or *ser* with a unique historical destiny, were clearly liberating for many Argentines, who had traditionally seen the national task as one of emulating European models. By celebrating national differences as necessary for human progress, the Romantic philosophy of history encouraged Argentine intellectuals to embrace the idea of Argentine (or

⁴⁴ Carlos Astrada, 'La deshumanización del occidente,' *Sagitario*, 1:2 (July–Aug. 1925), p. 196.

⁴⁵ Juan Propst, untitled editorial note, *Verbum*, Year 12, num. 45 (Oct. 1918), p. 5.

⁴⁶ Jorge Rohde, 'Apuntes,' *Cuaderno Colegio Novecentista*, Year I, vol. I, Cuaderno 3 (Dec. 1917), p. 133. It should be noted that the editors of this journal strongly identified with the 'work and intellectual orientation of Ricardo Rojas'. See 'Notas', p. 184 of same number.

Hispanic American) distinctiveness. But at the same time, the celebration of national uniqueness also helped produce a new anxiety over cultural authenticity and a fear that Argentina was in danger of losing its essential character or of deviating from its historical mission. Although writing about the Spanish Generation of 1898, H. Ramsden could be describing the Argentines' ideas when he noted the Spanish intellectuals' belief that,

each nation has its own particular character, its own way of looking at reality ... its own special strengths and weaknesses; in short, its own '*conciencia colectiva*,' its own '*personalidad nacional*.' A nation that struggles against or is forced to act against its own native character becomes inwardly confused and outwardly ineffectual; a country that lives at one with its character prospers.⁴⁷

Thus the task at hand was no longer one of emulating supposedly more advanced societies, but in grasping the true nature of the *ser nacional*, and insuring that the nation did not stray from its authentic self and its predestined path.

The belief in the existence of an essential, underlying national *ser* or essence with which Argentines were in danger of losing touch prompted a new interest in the rural interior among cultural nationalists. Like the members of the Spanish Generation of 1898 who celebrated the rural family as the repository of the 'soul of the race' and of the Spanish peoples' 'intrinsic virtues',⁴⁸ many Argentines of the same period believed the real Argentina could be found only in the countryside. In both Spain and Argentina, the assumption that geography or environment shaped national character was undoubtedly an impulse behind the new ruralism: people who lived more closely to the soil were believed to be more authentic embodiments of the national being or *ser nacional*, while those who lived in urban centres were less affected by the telluric forces of the national territory, and thus more alienated from the underlying core of national traditions.⁴⁹ In turn-of-the-century Argentina, however, ruralism was given added weight by the arrival of millions of foreigners who settled primarily in the city, and by the traditional nineteenth-century view of Buenos Aires as the conduit for European, modernising influences. Thus, for both Gálvez and Rojas, the provinces were more

⁴⁷ H. Ramsden, *The 1898 Movement in Spain* (Manchester, 1974), p. 16. The similarities and links between the Generation of 1898 and the Argentine cultural nationalists will be discussed further below.

⁴⁸ Enrique Madrazo, *El pueblo español ha muerto* (Santander, 1903), quoted in Ramsden, *The 1898 Movement in Spain*, p. 141.

⁴⁹ See for example, Ricardo Güiraldes' comments on individuals whose everyday work kept them in 'close contact with the soil' in 'Nosotros (Lo que puede ser)', published posthumously in *La Nación*, Feb. 3, 1963. Güiraldes, of course, was the author of the celebrated gaucho novel *Don Segundo Sombra* which appeared in 1926.

idealistic, less tainted by materialism and thus more authentically Argentine.⁵⁰ In Gálvez' words, the rural interior was where the 'national soul' had taken refuge.⁵¹

Sources of ethnocultural understandings of nationhood

How do we account for the florescence and great strength of Romantic notions of nationhood during this period? In answering this question, it is first important to note that Romanticism had long played an important role in Argentine intellectual life, and had served as a constant (albeit subordinate) counter current to the nation's fundamentally liberal traditions. As is well known, the members of Argentina's independence generation drew their primary inspiration from the French Revolution, justifying their call for independence not in the name of some preexisting ethnic or cultural entity, but for the purpose of establishing a new nation based on the liberal – and supposedly universal – principles of equality, liberty and popular sovereignty.⁵² Despite the importance of French revolutionary thought, however, Romantic ideas about nationhood soon seeped into political discourse.⁵³ Such tendencies intensified in the early 1830s, when the ideas of Edgard Quinet, Jules Michelet, Victor Cousin – all French interpreters of German Romanticism – gained currency in the Rio de la Plata region, having an especially important impact on the famous Argentine Generation of 1837.⁵⁴ Indeed, many of the ideas expressed by Juan B. Alberdi, D. F. Sarmiento and especially Esteban

⁵⁰ This ruralism was also manifested in the celebration of the Argentine gaucho or cowboy, who enjoyed a new status as the prototype of the Argentine race. The new interpretation of the gaucho and the view of the countryside as the source of authentic Argentine values have been much discussed in the scholarly literature, and thus need not detain us here. ⁵¹ Gálvez, *El diario de Gabriel Quiroga*, p. 138.

⁵² Carlos Chiaramonte, 'Formas de identidad en la región de la Plata luego de 1810,' *Boletín del Instituto de Historia Argentina y Americana 'Dr E. Ravignani'*, 3rd Series, Sem. 1, no. 1 (1989), p. 83. For recent treatments of the influence of the French Revolution on nineteenth-century Argentine political thought, see essays by various authors in *Imagen y recepción de la Revolución Francesa en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1990).

⁵³ Michael Riekenberg, 'El concepto de la nación en la región del Plata,' *Entre pasados*, 3, pp. 4–5 (1993), pp. 95–6. For more discussion, also see Chiaramonte, 'Formas de identidad en la región de la Plata luego de 1810,' pp. 71–92.

⁵⁴ Much of my discussion of the impact of Romanticism on the Generation of 1837 draws from Jorge Myers, 'La revolución en las ideas: La generación romántica de 1837 en la cultura y en la políticas argentinas,' in Noemí Goldman (ed.), *Revolución, República, Confederación (1806–1853)*, (Vol. 3 of *Nueva Historia Argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1998)). Also helpful are Fermin Chávez, *Historicismo e iluminismo en la cultura argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1977), p. 43; Michael Riekenberg, 'El concepto de la nación,' Jorge Myers, "'Revoluciones inacabadas": Hacia una noción de "revolución" en el imaginario histórico de la nueva generación argentina: Alberdi y Echeverría, 1837–1850,' *Imagen y recepción de la Revolución Francesa en la Argentina*. (Buenos Aires, 1992), p. 251, and Eduardo Segovia Guerrero, *La historiografía argentina del romanticismo*, diss. Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 1980.

Echeverría seem to presage those articulated over half a century later by the cultural nationalists. Fundamental among these was the notion that Argentines should pay attention to ‘that which is ours’,⁵⁵ and the belief that the development of the new nation would be ‘based on the specific experiences of the New World, with its representative landscapes, autochthonous human types, etc’.⁵⁶

But while the impact of Romanticism on early- and mid-nineteenth-century Argentine thought was clearly powerful, its influence should not be overestimated. As Jorge Myers has noted, the political culture of the River Plate region was fundamentally Republican during this period, and these values served as a sort of intellectual ‘screen’ through which Romantic ideas were filtered.⁵⁷ The result, according to Myers, was a Romanticism tempered by Enlightenment ideals, whose adherents saw their mission as that of fulfilling the liberal revolution against Spain.⁵⁸ Although committed to the notion of an authentic, original Argentine culture, they saw the nation not as a pre-existing essence or atemporal *ser nacional*, but as the product of a dynamic revolutionary process that was in large part shaped by human agency.⁵⁹ Nor did this emphasis on originality mean rejecting European models. While the members of the Generation of 1837 believed Argentina would develop according to the specific nature of the New World experience, it should also express what were seen as universal (European) values, among which was democracy.⁶⁰ Accordingly, Echeverría urged members of his generation to concentrate on promoting the symbols of ‘liberty’, ‘equality’, ‘progress’ and ‘association’, forging them into a coherent doctrine that would become the basis of a unified national system of belief.⁶¹

The vision of the Argentine nation as a civic community and the liberal, universalist model upon which it was based faced increased competition from both Romantic and positivist ideas during the closing decades of

⁵⁵ Myers, ‘La revolución en las ideas,’ p. 412.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 426. Other similarities between the Generation of 1837 and the cultural nationalists was the former’s criticism of their predecessor’s embrace of a ‘materialistic philosophy’ that ignored Argentine realities, and their belief that literature and art were direct reflections of an underlying collective character. Accordingly, they called for a literature that would reflect the nation’s individuality. Myers, ‘La revolución en las ideas,’ pp. 422, 420. Finally, the Generation of 1837 embraced a form of historicism, or a philosophy of history that saw the historical trajectories of individual nations as governed by underlying, general laws. As Myers notes, however, this embrace of historicism was not complete. Rather, the Generation of 1837 also believed that human agency could shape historical development. Myers, ‘La revolución en las ideas,’ pp. 436–7, 490.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 418.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 424.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 425.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 426. On this point see also Oscar Terán, *Vida intelectual en el Buenos Aires fin-de-siglo (1880–1910): derivas de la cultura científica* (Buenos Aires, 2000), pp. 56–7.

⁶¹ Myers, ‘Revoluciones inacabadas,’ p. 258.

the nineteenth century. As is well known, positivism dominated late nineteenth-century Argentine thought, and provided the justification for many of policies of the ruling Partido Aut3nomo Nacional (PAN). This party, organised by General Julio Roca, controlled the Argentine political system from 1880 to 1914, and took as its watchwords the positivist ideal of ‘order and progress’. The assumptions underlying Argentine positivism will be discussed in greater detail below, but for now what is important is the notion of ‘scientific politics’ that justified the PAN’s long rule. Drawing from the positivist tenet that political institutions should be tailored to underlying social conditions, PAN leaders embraced the idea of a limited or controlled democracy, that would preserve the republican political institutions outlined by the 1853 Constitution while at the same time using fraud and voter manipulation to ensure rule by the enlightened elite.

Romantic ideas about nationhood also gained ground during this period.⁶² Key here were the increasing numbers of European immigrants arriving during this period and their perceived impact on Argentine identity. Grappling with the question of how to assimilate the newcomers, elites focused on patriotic education as a means of converting immigrants – or at least their children – into loyal Argentines,⁶³ and it is in debates over educational policy and language instruction that Romantic ideas frequently surfaced.⁶⁴ In 1896, for example, the Senate considered a bill that would require all schools to carry out instruction in Spanish. When promoting the measure, Senator Marco Avellaneda appealed to the ideas of Swiss jurist M. Bluntschli, who, like most Romantics, saw language and nationhood as organically linked. Citing the threat to national unity posed by immigration, Avellaneda argued that the state

⁶² In many ways, the increasing attractiveness of Romanticism among Argentines mirrored a similar phenomenon in Europe. As Eric Hobsbawm has noted, the upsurge of ethnic nationalism in late nineteenth-century Europe stemmed from three key developments: the tide of modernity that threatened traditional groups, the emergence of new social classes in the urban areas, and massive migrations that brought different groups in contact with each other for the first time. All, of course, are relevant to the Argentine case. See Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (London, 1990), 109.

⁶³ The political climate of the time meant that assimilation was seen in cultural, rather than political terms. Give the PAN’s desire to de-emphasise popular political participation, the notion that assimilation should also entail naturalisation, and that becoming Argentine meant assuming the rights and obligations of citizenship, enjoyed little appeal.

⁶⁴ As Osc3r Ter3n has noted, after 1890 discussions of the ‘national question’ would in a sense be a dispute about the nation itself, whose ‘terminal points’ would be the civic nationalism of previous generations stressing political and universal values, and another that was ‘essentialist’ and ‘culturalist’ in nature. Ter3n, *Vida intelectual en el Buenos Aires fin-de-siglo (1880–1910)* pp. 56–7.

should strive to protect the national language ‘as an element of union, force and nationality’.⁶⁵ Also typical was the warning of Ernesto Quesada, who expressed fears that Argentine Spanish was being contaminated by foreign terms and expressions. Calling upon the educated classes to preserve Spanish in its pure form, he proclaimed language to be the ‘depository of the [national] spirit, race and genius’.⁶⁶

Such statements make it clear that Romantic ideas were very much a part of late nineteenth-century debates over nationality and immigration. But as in the case of the earlier Generation of 1837, these essentialist, organic notions of nationhood continued to remain subordinate to the older model of Argentina as a community whose unity rested on common ideals rather than on shared ethnicity.⁶⁷ For the most part, the new nationalism was more civic than ethnic, and more concerned with nation-building and the expansion of state authority than with defending a pre-existing collective character or essence.⁶⁸ Moreover, many of proponents of the new nationalism proved deeply ambivalent about breaking with Argentina’s universalistic traditions. The plan to promote patriotism through the public schools, and particularly the efforts and attitudes of José María

⁶⁵ Quoted in Botana and Gallo, *De la república posible*, p. 70. It was precisely this Romantic-like reasoning that drew the ire of the bill’s opponents. In his attack on the measure, E. Gouchón cited the examples of Belgium and Switzerland, where a plurality of languages and customs coexisted with a profound sense of nationhood. F. Barroetanveña, in his response to the bill, described it as ‘obscurantist’ and ‘reactionary,’ and warned that its passage would lead to a similar call for the ‘unity of religion and race.’ All quotes from Botana and Gallo, *De la república posible*, pp. 70–1. It should be noted that although the bill failed to pass in the Senate, two years later it was approved by both chambers of Congress. At that point, however, the executive vetoed the measure, arguing that it might be perceived as anti-immigrant. See Hobart Spalding, ‘Education in Argentina, 1890–1914: The Limits of Oligarchical Reform,’ *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 3:1 (Summer, 1972), pp. 42–3.

⁶⁶ Ernesto Quesada, ‘El criollismo,’ *Estudios*, vol. 3 (June–July 1902), pp. 452–3. Romantic-like formulations of nationhood appeared elsewhere as well. The organicist tendencies of Joaquín González’ *La tradición nativa* (1888), a work Terán describes as the one of the first manifestations of what would become the ‘march toward cultural nationalism’, would find fuller expression in the author’s 1900 textbook *Patria*. Terán, *Vida intelectual*, p. 225. Officially approved for use in primary schools, *Patria* proclaimed that ‘Every nation that has managed to become an individual and perpetual organism becomes a fatherland (*patria*); [a fatherland] is a complex and united personality that at the same time is an indestructible unit.’ Joaquín González, quoted in Carlos Escudé, *El fracaso del proyecto argentino: educación e ideología*, p. xxvii.

⁶⁷ As Natalio Botana has noted, despite the very open divisions within the Argentine political elite, both supporters of the status quo and would-be reformers saw the liberal Constitution of 1853 as the undisputed foundation of the political order. Botana, *El orden conservador: la política argentina entre 1880 y 1916* (Buenos Aires, 1994), pp. v–vi.

⁶⁸ On this point, see María Teresa Gramuglio, ‘Literatura y nacionalismo: Leopoldo Lugones y la construcción de imágenes de escritor,’ *Hispanérica* (22: 64–65, Apr.–Aug. 1993), p. 7.

Ramos Mejía, the plan's chief architect, are illustrative. A prominent positivist, Ramos Mejía served as president of the Consejo Nacional de Educación from 1908 to 1912. During his tenure, schools adopted a daily pledge of allegiance, dropped foreign texts in favor of ones authored by Argentines, and organised frequent civic festivals. But, as Tulio Halperín Donghi has argued, despite his activism, Ramos Mejía remained, deeply ambivalent about the measures he himself instituted. Loath to abandon the liberal progressivism that had for decades guided Argentina's political elite, he viewed the new nationalism as a necessary evil and as the most acceptable means of integrating immigrant children into the national community.⁶⁹ Also important in understanding the impulse behind these new policies are the views of fellow positivist Carlos Octavio Bunge, another vocal supporter of patriotic education. Like Ramos Mejía, Bunge saw the Argentine nation as an entity to be constructed, and whose basis would be collective sentiment rather than ethnicity. Contemporary societies, Bunge argued, were unavoidably pluralistic, thus making it necessary 'to seek social unity in something distinctive and superior to ethnic, linguistic, religious or geographic unity'. This something, he continued, was the 'unity of sentiment and the idea of the homeland [*patria*]'.⁷⁰

But with the cultural nationalists, this ambivalence toward the new nationalism would vanish. What Ramos Mejía and his fellow positivists saw as a necessary evil, the younger generation of intellectuals promoted without reservation.⁷¹ Moreover, the Romantic tendencies already evident in debates over education and language would come to full flower.

What led to this unabashed embrace of the idea of the nation as an organic, ethnocultural community that so marked early twentieth-century Argentine cultural nationalist thought? Certainly it would be fair to see this movement as an intensification of prior Romantic tendencies, despite the cultural nationalists' insistence that their generation represented a break with the supposedly cosmopolitan ideologies of the past. European intellectual influences also played a role. Gálvez, in particular, notes the impact of French nationalist Charles Maurras, and both he and Rojas were well aware of the broader currents of ethno-linguistic nationalism sweeping Europe during the late nineteenth century. But without question the most important influences from Europe came from the Spanish

⁶⁹ Halperín Donghi, '¿Para qué la inmigración?', pp. 480–3.

⁷⁰ Carlos Octavio Bunge, 'La educación patriótica ante la sociología,' *Monitor de la Educación Común*, Aug. 31, 1908, pp. 67–70, quoted in Carlos Escudé, *El fracaso del proyecto argentino*, p. 38.

⁷¹ Regarding this point, Halperín Donghi sees Ramos Mejía as a transitional figure between Sarmiento, who loathed the idea of nationalist education, and Ricardo Rojas, who championed it. '¿Para qué la inmigración?', pp. 482–3.

Generation of 1898, and in particular from Miguel Unamuno and Angel Ganivet,⁷² who themselves exhibited the twin influences of German idealism and scientific determinism.⁷³ Indeed, many of concepts central to Argentine cultural nationalism – including the idea of a national character with its ‘irreducible nucleus’ and ‘racial ideal’, the view that this racial character is shaped by geographical influences, the belief that nations struggling against their inner character inevitably flounder, and the historicist notion that all nations have a unique destiny – could have been lifted wholesale from the pages of Ganivet’s *Idearium español* (1897) and Unamuno’s *En torno al casticismo* (1902). These ideas in turn have been traced to the influence of nineteenth-century Spanish Krausism, a movement emerging directly from early nineteenth-century German Romanticism.⁷⁴ Also influential, as noted above, were the writings of Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío and Uruguayan essayist José Enrique Rodó, who both helped popularise the notion of a Latin or Hispanic race endowed with a unique, highly idealistic sensibility and possessing an important historical mission.

Why these concepts were appealing is another story, for ideas from any source have an impact only if they speak to the anxieties and tensions of the period. As noted earlier, Argentina’s extraordinarily rapid economic growth, coupled with the impact of massive immigration, helped create an intellectual and emotional climate favorable to Romantic notions. Against the onslaught of these often disturbing changes, the view of Argentina as a unique people bound by language, shared historical memories, descent and religion struggling to maintain their collective identity had obvious appeal. But as suggested above, another reason for the appeal of the Romantic view of nationhood is that, in significant ways, this vision complemented ideas that had gained currency during the era of positivism. While positivists such as Bunge and Ramos Mejía shared an understanding of Argentine identity that ultimately remained rooted within the liberal tradition, the ideas about historical change, collective

⁷² On the influence of the Spanish Generation of 1898 on early twentieth-century Argentine cultural nationalism, see Gálvez, *El solar de la raza*, pp. 12–13, Cárdenas and Payá, *El primer nacionalismo*, pp. 120–1; Rock, *Authoritarian Argentina*, p. 48; Sarlo and Altamirano, ‘La Argentina del centenario,’ pp. 74–5.

⁷³ On the influence of scientific determinism on the Generation of 1898, and especially the impact of French positivist Hippolyte Taine (himself influenced by German idealism), see Ramsden, *The 1898 Movement in Spain*.

⁷⁴ As Elena M. de Jongh-Rossel has argued, many of the concepts identified with this Generation such as ‘intrahistory’ and the existence of an underlying *ser español* had been articulated earlier by Spanish followers of German philosopher Carl Christian F. Krause, a thinker who was very much a part of the Romantic tradition. On this point see Jongh-Rossel, *El krausismo y la generación del 1898* (Valencia, 1985). Also very useful is Dolores Gómez Molleda, *Los reformadores de la España contemporánea* (Madrid, 1966).

character and the organic nature of society that they and other positivists espoused helped to pave the way for the Romantic vision of nationhood celebrated by the cultural nationalists.

Cultural nationalism and positivist sociology

Positivism in Argentina was notably eclectic.⁷⁵ But although Argentine positivists never defined a single, coherent philosophy, they did share a general faith in science and the belief that the scientific method could be applied to the study of human societies. Society itself they saw as an evolving organism that passed through set, pre-determined stages of development. These stages were predictable and the same for all societies, but positivists believed the progress of individual societies along this path differed. To gain a deeper understanding of a given society, it was necessary to eschew theory and all *a priori* knowledge in favour of either direct observation or the search for objective historical facts. Equipped with empirical evidence, Argentine positivists believed it would be possible to ascertain the underlying laws that governed a society's particular development, and then to devise political institutions and social policies appropriate to its particular needs.⁷⁶

But not all Argentine positivists saw the scientific method as the only source of knowledge. Some were also critical of positivism's overweening emphasis on empiricism, arguing that ideas and religious beliefs were also important historical forces.⁷⁷ Carlos Baires, for example, apparently came under the sway of German intellectual currents and developed an understanding of nationhood that seems Romantically-inspired.⁷⁸ Writing in 1898, a full decade before Rojas' *Restauración nacionalista* appeared, Baires theorised about the existence of a 'national soul' or spirit that developed according to multiple influences such as the '*raza madre*', climate, geography and culture.⁷⁹ A similar intellectual hybridism can be seen in the ideas of José Ingenieros (1877–1925), who, while a contemporary of the cultural nationalists, occupied a notable spot in Argentina's positivist pantheon. Especially in his early years, Ingenieros

⁷⁵ Hobart Spalding, 'Sociology in Argentina', p. 51.

⁷⁶ For a good synthetic discussion of positivism in Latin America, see Charles Hale, 'Political and Social Ideas in Latin America, 1870–1930,' in Leslie Bethell (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Latin America* (New York, 1986), vol. 4, esp. pp. 382–96. For Argentine positivism, Terán, *Vida intelectual en el Buenos Aires*, provides the most recent and sophisticated analysis. Also helpful are various essays in Hugo Biagini (ed.), *El movimiento positivista argentino* (Buenos Aires, 1985).

⁷⁷ Spalding, 'Sociology in Argentina', p. 51. For a more recent, and fuller discussion of the idealistic elements of Argentine positivism, see Terán's *Vida intelectual en el Buenos Aires*, esp. chapter three. ⁷⁸ Terán, *Vida intelectual en el Buenos Aires*, p. 51.

⁷⁹ Carlos Baires, 'El espíritu nacional,' *Revista Nacional*, vol. 25 (April 1898), pp. 251–8.

embraced the Spencerian view that biological laws ruled human existence, and he saw human progress as the result of natural selection.⁸⁰ Later, however, he moved toward idealism. While never entirely abandoning the scientific approach, Ingenieros began to write of nations as ‘races’, which he defined as ‘homogeneous societ[ies]’ comprised of individuals sharing a ‘spiritual and social unity’ that distinguished them from other nations.⁸¹ Although he continued to differ from the cultural nationalists in many respects, he once expressed to Rojas his own ‘ardent faith’ that ‘cultural mixture would give our country its own soul, transforming it into a true homeland [*patria*]’.⁸²

That many positivists easily slipped toward ideas that we identify with cultural nationalism suggests important affinities between the two movements.⁸³ One key similarity was the assumption that Argentina was a unique society with its own distinctive institutions and collective psychology.⁸⁴ While cultural nationalists and their sympathisers frequently portrayed the positivist Generation of 1880 as avid Europeanisers and positivism as an imported, cosmopolitan ideology, positivism – especially the version promoted by Herbert Spencer – actually encouraged Argentines to focus on the unique qualities of their own society. Spencer’s theory that all societies evolve in distinctive fashion according to unique environmental and racial factors, and his keen interest in the comparative study of political systems, customs and ethnic traits, helped late nineteenth-century Latin Americans turn their attention to the peculiarities of their own nations.⁸⁵ While reaching very different conclusions,

⁸⁰ See for example his 1908 essay ‘Sociología argentina (De la sociología como ciencia natural),’ reprinted in José Ingenieros, *Antimperialismo y nación*, ed. Oscar Terán (Buenos Aires, 1979), pp. 259–70.

⁸¹ José Ingenieros, ‘La formación de una raza argentina,’ *Revista de Filosofía*, vol. 1, 2nd Semester, 1915, p. 466. It should be noted that Ingenieros continued to use the term ‘race’ to denote a biological category, and indeed uses it in this second sense in the same article.

⁸² Ingenieros to Rojas, Buenos Aires, March 30, 1914, Archives of the Museo Ricardo Rojas.

⁸³ The blurring of positivism and Romanticism also occurred in Spain, but in a different order. Towards the end of the century, Spanish followers of Krausism adopted positivist approaches in their attempt to define more rigorously the Spanish collective character. See chapter nine of Gómez Molleda, *Los reformadores*.

⁸⁴ For a discussion of Argentine positivists and their efforts to understand the unique nature of Argentine society, see Hugo Biagini, ‘Acerca del carácter nacional,’ in *El movimiento positivista argentino*, pp. 21–37; also see Hobart Spalding, ‘Sociology in Argentina’, pp. 50–59 and Terán, *Vida intelectual en el Buenos Aires*.

⁸⁵ Hale, ‘Political and Social Ideas in Latin America’, p. 397. For a discussion of Spencer’s influence in Argentina during this period, see Marcel Monserrat, ‘La mentalidad evolucionista: una ideología del progreso,’ in Gustavo Ferrari and Ezequiel Gallo (eds.), *La Argentina del ochenta al centenario* (Buenos Aires, 1980), pp. 785–811, esp. pp. 795, 814 (endnote 23).

Argentine positivists attempted to employ the scientific method to unearth the historical, environmental and racial basis of the collective psychology of their people.

The tendency to view differences between peoples and nations in racial terms was another key legacy of positivism. Race became a central element in Argentine theorising about national character and destiny. Present-day scholars have often associated positivism with turn-of-the-century scientific racism and the view of race as a biological category. Race within this understanding is defined by inherited physical markers such as skin colour, phenotype and hair type, which in turn are presumed to be accompanied by a given set of mental and emotional characteristics.⁸⁶ But positivists, as the example of José Ingenieros indicates, also often employed an understanding of race that was more historical than biological, and that reappears as a central element in the cultural nationalists' concept of nationhood. Rooted in Romantic historiography and philology, and bolstered by theories of environmental determinism and Lamarckian ideas concerning the inheritedness of acquired characteristics, race within this tradition is equated with nationality, which in turn denotes a psychologically homogenous group of people with a common origin, shared language, and collective mental and emotional qualities.⁸⁷

Key here was the influence of French positivist Hippolyte Taine, whose life-long concern with the determinants of individual and collective psychology drew on both English positivism and German idealism.⁸⁸ According to Taine, each nationality possessed an underlying 'elemental moral state' or collective psychology that sprang from the interaction of 'race, milieu and moment'.⁸⁹ Taine's environmental and racial determinism is clearly seen in the writings of the previously mentioned Carlos Bunge, who attempted to explain the 'vices and modalities' of Hispanic American political life by analysing the collective psychology of the Hispanic American race.⁹⁰ According to Bunge, this collective

⁸⁶ For discussions of the biological concept of race in early twentieth-century Argentina, see Eduardo Zimmermann, 'Racial Ideas and Social Reform: Argentina, 1890–1916,' and Nancy Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender and Nation in Latin America* (Ithaca, NY, and London, 1991), esp. chapters four and five.

⁸⁷ On the twin sources of racial theorising in Europe and Latin American, see Hale's discussion in 'Political and Social Ideas in Latin America,' pp. 396–409. On the influence of Lamarckian theories see Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics*, esp. chapter three.

⁸⁸ In the words of H. Ramsden, Taine sought '(n)either English positivism nor German idealism, ... but a fusion of the two, *The 1898 Movement in Spain*, p. 67. For more on the dual nature of Taine's thought see D. G. Charlton, *Positivist Thought in France during the Second Empire, 1852–1870* (New York, 1959), esp. chapter seven.

⁸⁹ Hale, 'Political and Social Ideas,' p. 398.

⁹⁰ Carlos O. Bunge, *Nuestra América* [1903] (Buenos Aires, 1905), 2nd ed., pp. 3, 7.

psychology was the product of the three constituent ‘races’ (the Spanish, Indian and Negro) and the geographic conditions that shaped them. Of particular interest is Bunge’s lengthy discussion of the formation of the Spanish national character, which he believed to be deeply flawed. Spain’s progress, Bunge argued, had been stymied by its people’s excessive arrogance. Tracing this flaw to Spain’s vulnerability to foreign invasions due to its geographic position, he argued that this ‘geographic fatality had imposed on Spaniards a *psychic fatality*’.⁹¹ This flaw, deeply rooted in history, had become an indelible part of Spaniards’ national character, and unfortunately had been transmitted to their American descendants.

Rojas’ mystical concept of telluric forces that supposedly shaped the Argentine race certainly went beyond Bunge’s more straight-forward environmental determinism, but the similarities between the two approaches were in many ways more profound than their differences.⁹² What is important here was the positivist notion, constantly reiterated by Bunge, that each national community (or in the case of Hispanic America, a family of national communities) possessed a clearly identifiable set of historically and geographically rooted psychological traits that both distinguished it from other nations and determined its future possibilities.

Another important similarity between positivists and cultural nationalists was the belief that societies were natural organisms rather than creations of autonomous, free-thinking individuals. Because both generations of thinkers saw the nation or society as the product of history, race and environment, they considered it to be a natural rather than an invented solidarity, and thus relatively impervious to human agency or will.⁹³ This determinism underlay the positivists’ belief that while society was steadily evolving toward a higher state, the process should occur incrementally. Reform, rather than revolution, was the key,⁹⁴ and the impact of human agency on social evolution was considered limited. What educated elites *could* do to promote this evolution was study their society scientifically, then develop political institutions and educational practices appropriate to national realities.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁹² Interestingly, Rojas initially sought to ground his theory of an emerging Argentine race shaped by telluric forces by appealing to Taine’s theory of geographic determinism (*La restauración nacionalista*, p. 68). He was later to dismiss Taine as too mechanical (interview with Ricardo Rojas by ‘Silvano’ in *Atlántida* (Nov. 15, 1923), n.p.

⁹³ See Hale, ‘Political and Social Ideas,’ pp. 369, 383. On organicism in the thought of Argentine positivists and the influence of Gustave Le Bon’s concept of the crowd see Botana and Gallo, *De la república posible*, pp. 69–70 and Terán, *Vida intelectual en el Buenos Aires*, esp. chapters two and three.

⁹⁴ In C. O. Bunge’s words: ‘What will be the treatment [of Hispanic America’s ills]? Without a doubt, the best, the only remedy is [to improve] the general culture ... In a word, Evolution, not Revolution!’, *Nuestra América*, pp. 5–6.

Cultural nationalists embraced a similar form of determinism, believing that Argentina's development was essentially governed by underlying forces or processes. As we have seen, Rojas saw the telluric forces of the Argentine soil as the principal shaper of Argentine personality, and as the primary determinant of the nation's future.⁹⁵ For others, such as Gálvez, the determining force shaping the Argentine nation was ethnic. Gálvez, it will be recalled, believed the Spanish character formed the bedrock of the national personality, which would – despite the impact of immigration – forever form the core of the Argentine essence. For cultural nationalists, regardless of their particular emphasis on the relative importance of environmental or ethnic determinism, national destiny seemed to be more the product of autonomous forces than of human agency.

At first glance this argument appears undercut by the cultural nationalists' well known celebration of the talents of exceptional men, among whose ranks they counted themselves.⁹⁶ These men, they believed, should form a new elite to promote the twin causes of idealism and nationalism. Such a belief suggests a faith both in human agency and the power of ideas in shaping history. A closer look, however, reveals a different story. As noted above, the cultural nationalists saw Argentina's problem as one of alienation from its true character and deviation from its historical trajectory. Accordingly, what was needed were not men of action or ideas to reshape the national destiny, but individuals of heightened aesthetic sensibilities who could grasp the hidden essence of the national race, the continuity of its underlying traditions and its destiny. Like the positivist belief that men, using the scientific method, could grasp the hidden laws governing Argentine development, the cultural nationalists believed that certain individuals – by virtue of their intuitive powers and heightened sensitivity – could see beyond surface phenomena to understand the occult forces shaping the nation, and thus help guide it back to its true course.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Rojas' fundamental determinism comes through even as he urged the federal government to take concrete steps to promote a more cohesive sense of nationality through patriotic education. While these measures were needed, he suggested they would play a secondary role in consolidating the Argentine nation. More important, he believed, were the telluric forces of the Argentine territory. See for example, his comment that the European immigrant was ultimately insignificant. What was important were his descendants, that have 'the common matrix imposed upon them by the American environment.' *La restauración nacionalista*, pp. 136–7.

⁹⁶ On this tendency for early-twentieth-century intellectuals to exalt their own status, see Altamirano and Sarlo, 'La Argentina del centenario,' esp. pp. 77–88.

⁹⁷ On special role of the writer/artist as 'soldiers' in the new nationalist struggle, see Rojas' speech given at a banquet honoring him on his return from Europe in 1908, published in *Nosotros* (vol. 3, year 2: 13–14, Aug.–Sept. 1908), pp. 126–7. On his own

As has been shown, throughout the nineteenth century, both in the earlier Romantic and later positivist era, the idea of the nation as a unique, organic community formed an ever-present thread running through Argentine thought. But acknowledging antecedents should not blind us to important intellectual shifts in the early twentieth century. One of the most significant was the cultural nationalists' insistence that national distinctiveness should be celebrated and encouraged, not deplored. When members of the Generation of 1837 and their positivist heirs⁹⁸ sought to understand the uniqueness of their national society, they did so in the manner of a physician seeking to diagnose a patient's malady. For most nineteenth-century intellectuals, the drive toward collective self-understanding found its impulse in the desire to remedy perceived collective character flaws that prevented Argentina from joining the ranks of civilized nations. While acknowledging that all peoples developed according to particular conditions, neither generation of thinkers could wrench itself away from the assumption that Argentines should attempt to remake the nation in the image of Europe or the United States.⁹⁹ Cultural nationalists, in contrast, championed a vision of history that celebrated national and cultural uniqueness and believed humanity to be enriched by differences, thus seeing Argentine distinctiveness in a positive light.

Political implications of romantic understandings of nationhood

What did this championing of the Romantic ideal of nationhood and history mean in political terms? Are the ideas of the cultural nationalists important because they formed the first step down a path that would lead to right-wing nationalism, and ultimately – as some would have it – to the horrors of the 'Dirty War'? These questions, of course, return us to one of the original problems set forth in the opening section: can both Gálvez

abilities to grasp the 'true essence of our collective being,' see his comments in *Eurindia*, pp. 115–16. Leopoldo Lugones, whose views on nationhood were very similar to those of the cultural nationalists, also promoted the idea of the writer or poet as critical to the nation's destiny. On this point, see Gramuglio, 'Literatura y nacionalismo', p. 9.

⁹⁸ As Noé Jitrik has noted, the positivist Generation of 1880 was the 'organic realisation' of the previous generation. *El mundo del ochenta* (Buenos Aires, 1982), p. 20. The similarities between the ideas of the Generation of 1837 and later positivist thinkers led Argentine philosopher Alejandro Korn to argue that Argentine positivism was of 'autochthonous origin'. Hale, 'Political and Social Ideas,' note 38.

⁹⁹ In Hale's words, while 'Latin American positivists recognized that their society had unique features ... the limitations of evolutionary theory forced them to view that society as inferior on a unilinear scale of civilization.' Hale, 'Political and Social Ideas in Latin America, 1870–1930,' p. 413.

and Rojas, who pursued very different political paths, be considered precursors to the more xenophobic, authoritarian Liga Patriótica Argentina and the right-wing nationalists?

As noted above, the anti-democratic content of Gálvez's thought is easily detected, and his support of the 1930 military coup was fully in keeping with the ideas expressed in his writings. Indeed, by the time of the coup, Gálvez had become so deeply alarmed by what he saw as the ill effects of massive immigration and cosmopolitanism that he openly repudiated Argentina's liberal political institutions and called for the establishment of a corporatist regime. Cosmopolitan influences and the lure of easy wealth, the author proclaimed, had led to the loss of traditional Argentine values such as heroism and self-sacrifice.¹⁰⁰ It was now time, he affirmed, to 'correct, demolish, erase, purify or destroy all those customs or tendencies that correspond to an unhealthy, impoverished or insignificant concept of life'.¹⁰¹ Gálvez believed that such a task could not be accomplished within the framework of the 1853 Constitution, which, he affirmed, had 'never corresponded with our modalities'.¹⁰²

Although Gálvez did not openly embrace fascism until 1930, his belief that the Constitution inhibited the defense of *lo argentino* appears early on in his writings. In his 1910 novel *El diario de Gabriel Quiroga*, for example, Gálvez suggests that threats to the Argentine way of being required drastic, even unconstitutional measures. Employing the literary device of a fictional diarist named Quiroga who serves as the author's alter ego, Gálvez/Quiroga expressed dismay over the activities of Protestants in Argentina and recommended harsh measures. Individuals who practiced a religion [or sect] other than Catholicism, he proclaimed, threatened the national personality by 'introduc[ing] into our collective modality, the seeds of spiritual [and thus national] disintegration'.¹⁰³ Given the dangers facing the nation, the fictional diarist argued, it would be best to expel all 'apostles' of foreign religions and international social doctrines. While such actions might conflict with the Argentine law, he concluded that the protection of Argentine nationality must come first.¹⁰⁴

In advocating the violation of the Constitution, Gálvez makes a clear distinction between the Argentine nation – identified as an ethnocultural community defined by its Catholic, Hispanic origins – and the political institutions of the state. This distinction reflects the Romantic idea of the nation as a 'pre-political essence' or historically-rooted folk community whose existence precedes the establishment of the state apparatus. While the organisation of a state ultimately becomes necessary in order to

¹⁰⁰ Manuel Gálvez, *Este pueblo necesita ...* (Buenos Aires, 1934), p. 31.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 114.

¹⁰³ Gálvez, *El diario de Gabriel Quiroga*, pp. 67–8.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

protect the folk community and its territory, collective identity remains based on the unique qualities of the folk, not upon political institutions or principles.¹⁰⁵ Such a vision, of course, contrasts sharply with liberal understandings of the nation that view political institutions as constitutive of, and integral to, nationhood.¹⁰⁶ Gálvez did *not* see the liberal Constitution of 1853 as part and parcel of Argentine identity. Indeed, he believed that under certain circumstances, it posed a danger to the nation's survival when it prevented the state from taking action against threats to Argentines' collective character.

The willingness to jettison individual rights in order to protect the greater interests of the nation is another element of Gálvez' thought traceable to Romanticism. While the basis of the nation is the 'people', the term is understood as an ethnic community constituted gradually over time and gaining the status of a folk through shared historical experiences, common language, religion and attachment to a particular territory. Within this vision of nationhood, the individual derives his or her identity from the collectivity.¹⁰⁷ This means, of course, that individual rights and liberties can easily be abridged when the greater interests of the folk are at stake.¹⁰⁸ In advocating fascism, Gálvez forthrightly acknowledged this trade-off. In a fascist state, he acknowledged, liberty and individual rights would suffer, but the 'good of the country and its inhabitants' must be put first. 'This is sad,' he recognised, '... but it is necessary for the salvation of the peoples [*pueblos*] ... The individual is no longer the fundamental thing, but rather the collective, or better the State that represents and contains the individual.'¹⁰⁹

As with Gálvez, Rojas' political beliefs very clearly bore the marks of Romanticism. But in his case, this influence would be less straight forward and more attenuated. Drawn simultaneously toward Argentina's liberal heritage and Romantic understandings of nationhood, Rojas was also caught between two definitions of *argentinidad* with potentially divergent political implications. But unlike Gálvez, who believed that Argentina's liberal traditions threatened the survival of a putative national essence, Rojas never acknowledged a conflict. Indeed, as he asserted in *Eurindia*,

¹⁰⁵ As John Hutchinson has noted, within the Romantic understanding of nation, the state and its constituent political institutions are often viewed as 'accidental' to the nation. Hutchinson, 'Moral Innovators and the Politics of Regeneration: The Distinctive Role of Cultural Nationalists in Nation-Building,' *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, ed. Anthony Smith (New York, 1992), p. 103. On this point see also Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood*, p. 9.

¹⁰⁶ In Hobsbawm's succinct formulation: 'state = nation = people'. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*, p. 22.

¹⁰⁷ Lepsius, 'The Nation and Nationalism in Germany', p. 49.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 50. As Lepsius notes, these interests are invariably interpreted by the ruling elite.

¹⁰⁹ Gálvez, *Este pueblo necesita ...*, pp. 89–90.

the nation's democratic institutions were necessary for the continued evolution of the *raza argentina*.¹¹⁰

This double attraction to liberalism and Romanticism produced an ongoing tension between Rojas' pro-democracy rhetoric and his general lack of interest – at least in his earlier years – in political life of the nation. His dismissive attitude toward politics comes through, for example, in the writer's long standing refusal to participate in electoral politics. As Rojas noted in a 1911 interview, he had voted only twice in his life: once for a candidate who was defeated through electoral fraud, the second time because he was required to serve as a poll observer. At that moment, he noted, he had cast his ballot for a socialist candidate as a cynical gesture.¹¹¹

But besides cynicism, evidence suggests that Rojas' decision to remain aloof from politics had roots in his belief that political institutions and practices were largely irrelevant to the real life of the nation. Here the writer's views on the electoral reform bill, contained in the 1911 *La Nación* interview, are revealing. Rather than criticising the proposed reform directly, Rojas expressed scepticism about any attempt to regulate collective behaviour that did not take into account local 'topographical conditions'. Returning to his favourite theme of the telluric forces of the land, he argued that the 'soil [or national territory], was the physical base of the political structure,' inevitably shaping the collective consciousness. Argentina had found it difficult to develop appropriate laws and political institutions, Rojas maintained, because legislators had ignored the nation's underlying geographic conditions, wasting their time reading foreign political tracts instead of 'condensing the cosmic unconsciousness of our soil into the social consciousness' of Argentine society.¹¹²

Rojas' scepticism about the reform bill and his call for attention to what he saw as the underlying determinants of Argentine reality make clear his view that political life, rather than being central to Argentine identity, was essentially epiphenomenal. Dismissing elections and legislation as relatively unimportant, Rojas believed what really counted were the hidden processes shaping the nation's character and destiny, such as the blood of Argentina's indigenous peoples that he believed flowed like a 'subterranean river' in the depths of the Argentine race.¹¹³ This hidden history, or 'intrahistory' as he called it, was more 'essential' than the 'external' or observable historical events produced by human agency.¹¹⁴ Clearly then, within Rojas' vision, political events are part of this external

¹¹⁰ Rojas, *Eurindia*, p. 134.

¹¹¹ Rojas, 'Cuestiones electorales,' *La Nación*, Sept. 10, 1911.

¹¹² All quotations from Rojas, 'Cuestiones electorales,' *La Nación*, Sept. 10, 1911.

¹¹³ Rojas, *Los gauchescos*, p. 134.

¹¹⁴ For more of Rojas' explanation of external, visible history versus intrahistory see his *Eurindia*, pp. 177–9.

history: existing on a superficial level: they reflected, rather than shaped, the essential life of the nation. This view is also evident in one of Rojas' other rare pre-1930 references to politics. In *Restauración nacionalista* (1909), he describes the 1890 rebellion against the ruling PAN as the observable manifestation of the country's underlying moral crisis, itself rooted in 'intrahistorical causes.'¹¹⁵

Another aspect of Rojas' political outlook that appears influenced by Romanticism was his grave doubt about the capacity of the Argentine people for self-governance. Rojas believed that suffrage should be extended only to individuals who were 'suitable' and possessed a certain level of culture. It was impossible to believe, he argued that 'those who are illiterate, incapable and unaware (*inconsientes*)' could participate in shaping the public destiny. Achieving democracy would be a gradual process and for the moment Argentina needed a group of 'selected electors' to choose its political leaders.¹¹⁶

There is, of course, nothing particularly Romantic about the belief that the Argentine masses were ill-prepared for active citizenship and that the journey toward truly democratic institutions would be a long one. Such a view underlay Juan Bautista Alberdi's idea of the '*república posible*' and was embraced in a more extreme form by the Generation of 1880. In some ways then, Rojas' ideas about Argentine democracy differed little from those of other members of his social class. However, the role he assigned to the masses in creating Argentina's unique identity *is* distinctive, and it is here that his Romantic inclinations are evident. For Rojas, the Argentine masses were much more (and in an important sense, much less) than potential citizens: they served, he believed, as the avatars of the national soul. In keeping with the Romantic idea of society as a natural, internally diverse organism comprised of sub-organisms fulfilling different roles,¹¹⁷ Rojas argued that *argentinidad* was the product of the complementary efforts of both the popular classes and the educated elite. The creole masses, he believed, embodied the indigenous or autochthonous spirit, while the latter embodied the more rational, cosmopolitan European element. When discussing Argentina's break from Spain, for example, he praised the role of the 'gauchos, Indians, mestizos and slaves' who answered the call for independence, and who 'invaded the cities carrying the (democratic) spirit of the countryside'. It was the educated

¹¹⁵ Rojas, *La restauración nacionalista*, pp. 109–10.

¹¹⁶ Rojas, 'Cuestiones electorales,' *La Nación*, Sept. 11, 1911. In a speech given that same year, he proclaimed that the 'destiny of nations, even democracies, depends – and will depend for a long time – on their directive minorities.' Speech contained in *Los Arquetipos*, vol. II of *Obras de Ricardo Rojas* (Buenos Aires, 1922), pp. 152–3.

¹¹⁷ On the Romantic view of supposed internal diversity of society, see Hutchinson, 'Moral Innovators', p. 105.

elite, however, whose task it was to interpret this inchoate spirit and to transform these crude passions into the new national ideal.¹¹⁸ Similarly, Rojas touted the importance of folklore, traditional music and dances as expressive of the ‘soul of the people,’¹¹⁹ but saw these as the ‘raw material’ that educated classes would use to create an original, and more erudite, national literature.¹²⁰

Such a view of the masses as the embodiment of the national soul did lend a somewhat popular tincture to what was, in the context of the reformist currents of the time, a conservative political position. And it could be argued that in exalting the Argentine folk as avatars of *argentinidad*, Rojas dignified the common people by granting them a central role in the historical evolution of the nation. He was, however, unwilling to grant these same individuals the status of full, participating citizens. Instead, for Rojas, the masses or folk served as passive – and unthinking – vessels of an indefinable spirit or essence.

The anti-egalitarian and even anti-democratic potential of this organicist, corporatist vision is obvious.¹²¹ While not leading inevitably to authoritarianism, by celebrating the internal diversities of societies and the supposedly complementary functions of distinctive groups, the Romantic vision of nationhood does tend to devalue the ideals of legal equality and active citizenship. Thus despite his continual support for democracy (a support that would strengthen after the 1930 coup),¹²²

¹¹⁸ Rojas, *Los gauchescos*, p. 448.

¹¹⁹ Rojas, Comments in Santiago del Estero upon publication of his book, *El país de las selvas*. Comments published without title in *Ideas*, 5: 23–24 (March–April 1905), p. 345.

¹²⁰ Rojas, *Los gauchescos*, pp. 255–6.

¹²¹ Rojas himself admitted his anti-liberal inclinations. His political ideas, he noted, were ‘a bit harmful to the old, magic trilogy of liberty, equality and fraternity’. But Argentines should not fool themselves, Rojas continued, ‘equality and liberty don’t exist in nature nor among souls’. Quoted in Cárdenas and Payá, *El primer nacionalismo*, p. 93.

¹²² Contemporaries detected a decided shift in Rojas’ political behaviour after 1930. As noted, before that time Rojas rarely commented publicly on the political events of the day. (The principal exception was his brief militancy against Yrigoyen’s policy of neutrality during WWI.) But after the coup, Rojas became an outspoken member of the UCR and even wrote a hagiographic account of the party. As one of his former students recalled, after 1930 Rojas ‘left [the cloister of] the university and moved to the tribunal of the street’ where he carried out his ‘civic teaching.’ In difficult times, the student continued, ‘I began to look for the *maestro* Rojas in the political street corners of Buenos Aires. In precarious places, in improvised tribunals, many times without a microphone or electric light ... [he] expounded the doctrine of the UCR with clear conviction and in accessible language.’ Nélica Baigorria, ‘Ricardo Rojas: el político,’ in *Testimonios sobre Ricardo Rojas* (Buenos Aires, 1984), p. 12. As Nicola Miller notes, while Rojas never abandoned his Romantic ideas, he did ‘increasingly tend to complement an ethnic conception of national identity with an invocation of civic values.’ Miller, *In the Shadow of the State*, p. 167.

Rojas' early grounding of Argentine identity in ethnocultural served to detach Argentine identity further from constitutional arrangements.

Cultural Nationalism and later Nationalist thought

What is the relationship between the cultural nationalists and the nationalist movements of the late 1920s and beyond? Should we see the former as precursors to the latter? The similarities between these movements are unmistakable. Clear echoes of the cultural nationalists' views can be heard, for example, from Liga founder Manuel Carlés, who believed long education 'sought to erase from the soul of Argentina all the noble characteristics derived from the original Spanish race, and to substitute for them the materialism of a decadent Europe'.¹²³ Julio Irazusta, one of the most important nationalist thinkers of the 1930s and 40s, concurred with this linking of religion, the Spanish heritage, and Argentine identity, arguing that Argentines were a 'Catholic people, of Spanish origin, with a modality of life and character that [has its] own style.'¹²⁴ We see repeated the cultural nationalists' view of nations as organic entities, emerging naturally from history and possessing a unique historical mission. Nationalist theorist Juan Carulla, for example, understood the nation to be the 'organic product ... of smaller societies that extend along a social hierarchy ranging from the family to the region, that form historically when a spiritual bond between them emerges.'¹²⁵ Another nationalist, Federico Ibarguren, directly echoed Rojas when he compared nations to individuals, proclaiming that, 'Each people, like each human being, has its history, its destiny, its charge [*carga*] or mission.'¹²⁶

Present, too, is the cultural nationalists' concern about deviation or alienation from Argentina's essential nature. Roberto de Laferrère argued, for example, that in their confused pursuit of progress, Argentine leaders had sought to destroy Argentine traditions. Herein, he believed, lay the 'origins of the Argentine tragedy: a people ... threatened with losing its personality and even nationality'.¹²⁷ In a darker vein, Juan Carulla wrote

¹²³ Manuel Carlés, 'Liga Patriótica: 9° Congreso Nacionalista de Mayo, 1928,' (Buenos Aires, 1928), p. 93.

¹²⁴ Julio Irazusta, 'Alberdi en 1838,' in *Ensayos históricos* (Buenos Aires, 1952), pp. 201–2.

¹²⁵ Juan E. Carulla (quoting Víctor Pradera), *Valor ético de la revolución del seis de septiembre* (Buenos Aires, 1931), p. 80.

¹²⁶ Federico Ibarguren, 'La misión histórica de España,' in *Criterio* (Dec. 17, 1936). Reprinted in Federico Ibarguren, *Orígenes del nacionalismo argentino, 1927–1937* (Buenos Aires, 1969) p. 365.

¹²⁷ Laferrère, 'Tradición y cultura,' in C. Ibarguren (h.), *Roberto de Laferrère*, p. 105. Originally published in *La Razón*, Nov. 22, 1943.

of forces that had ‘conspired in the moral and intellectual realms to deform or throw off track [*desvirtuar*] the collective personality and to detain our pueblo’s progress’.¹²⁸ As was the case with the cultural nationalists, later thinkers believed any deviation from the nation’s underlying *ser* or personality interrupted Argentina’s process of historical development, leaving it weak, confused and divided. As Laferrère argued, when a nation [*pueblo*] adopts ‘modalities and customs alien to its *ser*’, it not only ceases to progress but loses its unity, disappearing as a pueblo, and degenerating into a ‘dispersed, incoherent and anarchic multitude’.¹²⁹

The later nationalists also naturally considered themselves to be true patriots, who worked to ‘serve the Nation, to defend the *ser nacional*, the very substance of the Nation, that [was] in danger of dying’.¹³⁰ But because they defined the nation in highly apolitical terms they saw the democratic institutions and civil liberties outlined by Argentina’s 1853 Constitution as irrelevant and even harmful to the nation. And they could also advocate stripping citizens of their liberty and right to self-governance in the name of the greater interests of the nation. As Ernesto Palacio put it, ‘Nationalism seeks the good of the nation, of the organized human collective; it considers there to be a necessary subordination of the interests of individuals to the interest of the collective, and of the rights of the individual to the right of the State.’¹³¹

The similarities between the ideas of the cultural nationalists and later nationalists does not mean that the former were the sole, or even the most important, intellectual inspiration for authoritarian nationalism. As David Rock has amply demonstrated, the right-wing nationalists of the late 1920s and beyond were clearly influenced by their own reading of Catholic social doctrine, classical political theory, and the writings of thinkers such as Taine, Renan, Maurras and Menéndez Pelayo.¹³² And while Gálvez often associated with these nationalists, they in no way considered him a mentor. But what the cultural nationalists *did* do was to articulate a way of thinking about the Argentine nation, and about nations in general, that helped provide a conceptual framework, a language and set of assumptions upon which later nationalist thought would rest. Thus nationalist historian Enrique Zuleta is essentially correct when he argues that Rojas was a ‘forerunner of subsequent Nationalists, despite the fact that he

¹²⁸ Juan Carulla, *Genio de la Argentina: deberes frente a la crisis político social de nuestro pueblo* (Buenos Aires, 1943), 2nd ed., p. 41.

¹²⁹ Laferrère, quoted in C. Ibarguren (h.), *Roberto Laferrère*, p. 105.

¹³⁰ Laferrère, quoted in Carlos Ibarguren (h.), *Roberto de Laferrère*, p. 85.

¹³¹ Ernesto Palacio, ‘Nacionalismo y democracia,’ *Nueva República*, Year 1, no. 13 (May 5, 1928), p. 1. Quoted in Zuleta, *El nacionalismo argentino*, vol. 1, p. 221.

¹³² Rock, *Authoritarian Argentina*, esp. chapters one to three.

wanted nothing to do [with the nationalists] ... and had an 'ideological base completely opposed' to their programme.¹³³ In his calls for the defence of *lo argentino* Rojas helped produce, albeit unwittingly, a political programme he abhorred.

Conclusions

In revisiting Argentine cultural nationalism I have argued that it should be understood not simply as a right-wing response to massive immigration and rapid change, but as an intellectual movement driven by the vision of Argentina as an organic, ethnocultural community and a philosophy of history that rejected unilinear notions of historical development. Some aspects of this vision of Argentine nationhood were new: the idea that Argentine uniqueness should be celebrated, the conviction that the nation had a unique historical mission from which it should not deviate, and the belief in an underlying *ser nacional*. Other key elements clearly rested on assumptions articulated by earlier generations of Argentine intellectuals. What the cultural nationalists saw as a complete rupture with the past was more properly a new variation of older ideas about social organicism and collective character with roots reaching back at least to the early decades of the Republic and which gained greater currency towards the end of the nineteenth century.¹³⁴ Thus, the break between the cultural nationalists and previous generations was not as complete or profound as the former proclaimed. This essay has also explored the relationship between the cultural nationalism and later manifestations of nationalism. While agreeing with previous interpretations that the cultural nationalists can be seen as precursors to the right-wing nationalists of the late 1920s and beyond, I have tried to probe the deeper connections between these two groups. What links the two, and what may be the cultural nationalists' greatest contribution to later nationalist thought, is the fact that by vigorously promoting the vision the Argentine nation as a unique ethnocultural community, they helped to legitimise the concept of Argentina's unique historical destiny and to further detach notions of collective identity from liberal political values.

I would argue, however, that understanding the legacies of cultural nationalism requires that we look beyond the right-wing nationalism of later years. In reacting to the multiple tensions of early twentieth

¹³³ Zuleta, *El nacionalismo argentino*, vol. 1, p. 101.

¹³⁴ While David Rock also links the cultural nationalists with nineteenth-century thought, our analyses clearly differ. According to Rock, the cultural nationalists 'drew substantially on nineteenth-century Argentine federalism', and goes so far as to identify the movement as an 'atavism of federalism'. Rock, 'Intellectual Precursors of Conservative Nationalism,' pp. 272, 277. I, however, detect no such connections between nineteenth-century federalism and the cultural nationalists.

century – massive immigration, rapid modernisation and working-class challenges to elite authority – cultural nationalists promoted an organicist, anti-liberal strain in Argentine thought that would continue to appear in both populist and democratic political discourse for decades to come. As Alberto Spektorowski has noted, this organicist idea of nationhood was a key element in the hybrid political ideologies of both Radicals and Peronists, which paired, in different ways, the ideal of popular sovereignty with the idea of the nation as an ‘organic entity with its traditional myths, religions, glories and graveyards’.¹³⁵ And while the sources of that vision of nationhood were many – including Spanish Krausism, Thomism and European ethnic nationalist thought – cultural nationalists certainly helped fortify and legitimise this tendency at a crucial juncture in the nation’s history.

In a less overtly political arena, the cultural nationalists also helped set the terms for subsequent debates over national identity. While questions of national identity have preoccupied Argentine thinkers throughout the nineteenth century, it was only at the turn of the twentieth that identity became such a central theme of Argentine intellectual life.¹³⁶ The cultural nationalists’ energetic promotion of the idea of a subjacent Argentine essence or tradition threatened by cosmopolitan forces, and the fear that the nation was deviating from its true historical trajectory, served to invert Sarmiento’s nineteenth-century civilisation/barbarism dichotomy and to replace it with a new dichotomy that pitted the authentic or invisible Argentina against the visible, or unauthentic Argentina.¹³⁷ Identified with Buenos Aires, the visible Argentina was believed to be false, cosmopolitan and superficial, while the invisible Argentina was the authentic *ser nacional*, a collective personality or autochthonous national culture rooted in the Hispanic past and shaped, in some versions, by the experience of the Argentine pampa. The master narrative emerging from these dichotomies is that of an authentic *ser nacional*, threatened by foreign influences or modernity, struggling to remain true to its essential nature and to realise its full potential. The enduring strength of this master story is such that in 1976 former Radical president Arturo Frondizi could write that, despite the ‘adulteration of Argentine culture’ by foreign ideol-

¹³⁵ Alberto Spektorowski, ‘The Ideological Origins of Right and Left Nationalism in Argentina, 1930–43,’ *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 29 (1994), p. 158.

¹³⁶ Carlos Altamirano, ‘Algunas notas sobre nuestra cultura,’ *Punto de Vista*, Year 6, no. 18 (Aug. 1985) p. 8.

¹³⁷ In Jorge B. Rivera’s words, ‘One of the great philosophical and literary themes of the first quarter of the century was, undoubtedly, that of “appearances” and the underlying relations between “being” (el “ser”) and its representation.’ Rivera, ‘El ensayo de interpretación. Del centenario a la década de 1930,’ *Historia de la literatura argentina. Las primeras décadas del siglo* (Buenos Aires, 1981), vol. 3, p. 454.

ogies and customs, many Argentines have been engaged in a ‘titanic struggle’ to

restore the historical truth, to save [our] tradition, to make evident the national roots of [our] thought and culture in spite of the distortions and deformation that threaten them. [Because of these efforts,] never in our national evolution has the guiding thread of the Argentine essence [*lo argentino*] been interrupted.¹³⁸

As Argentina strives to overcome the legacies of that disastrous year, it remains to be seen whether the vision of Argentina as a unique ethnocultural community under siege will endure, or if other, competing understandings of nationhood will flourish.

¹³⁸ Arturo Frondizi, ‘Cultura para el desarrollo y la autodeterminación de la nación,’ *Cultura nacional* (Buenos Aires, 1976), p. 373. Frondizi’s statement is but a single example of the widespread preoccupation with an imagined Argentine *ser nacional* or national essence, a preoccupation that has long cut across ideological boundaries. This concept, for example, is a recurrent theme in the documents and discourses of the Argentine military in the wake of the 1976. On this point, see Marguerite Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies of Torture* (New York, 1998), p. 21. For other comments on the centrality of this notion in Argentine intellectual history, see Alberto Ciria, ‘Elite Culture and Popular Culture in Argentina, 1930–1955,’ *Revista Interamericana de Bibliografía*, 37:4 (1987), p. 503, and José Luís Romero, ‘Las ideologías de la cultura nacional,’ in his collection of essays by the same title (Buenos Aires, 1982), pp. 75–85.