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Ideology in the Press: Florencio Varela and *El Comercio del Plata* during the Siege of Montevideo, 1845-1848

by

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Abstract

This thesis is an analysis of the ideology of the *doctores*, the liberal wing of the *Colorado* party of Uruguay, during the conflict known as the *Guerra Grande*, 1836-1851. The major primary source for this study is the newspaper *El Comercio del Plata*, published in Montevideo under its first editor, the Argentine exile Florencio Varela, from 1845 until his death in 1848. In addition to historical background information, this thesis examines three topics: the issue of the *caudillos* Juan Manuel de Rosas, Manuel Oribe and Fructuoso Rivera, the conflict in the press between *El Comercio* and *El Defensor de la Independencia Americana*, and the divergent views of nationalism and foreignness between the *Colorados* and the conservative *Blancos*. The aim of this thesis is to demonstrate the connections between ideological liberalism and a cosmopolitan view of the Uruguayan nation, and how the press was used to spread and defend this ideology.

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Contents

Introduction

The siege of Montevideo, 1843-1851, brought the political divisions of Uruguayan society into sharp focus. The conflict, known in Uruguay as the *Guerra Grande*, the great war, had spread beyond the borders of the small republic. What had begun as a dispute between two *caudillos*, the popular military leaders of the day, quickly became an international affair involving Argentina, Brazil, Britain, and France. Alexander Dumas dubbed Montevideo the 'new Troy' because of the extended siege by the forces of former Uruguayan president Manuel Oribe and his ally, Juan Manuel de Rosas, the Argentine *caudillo*. Rosas was seen by liberals on both sides of the Atlantic as a tyrant and a conqueror. The presence of his troops in Uruguay galvanized his enemies, who rallied to defend Montevideo. The struggle to defend the city transformed it from a minor port into an emblem of international liberalism. Within Uruguay, the war had a polarizing effect on the political situation, with the liberal *Colorados* dominating inside of the walls of Montevideo, and conservative *Blancos* outside in the besieging camp. Political partisans on both sides gained a captive audience in their respective camps, each angrily denouncing their enemies as foreign, illegitimate and barbaric. Into this already tangled situation, Britain and France, seeking a quick diplomatic success to bolster the reputation of their respective governments at home, gave temporary support to Montevideo as part of a mediated solution. The most liberal intellectual faction in Uruguay, known as the *doctores*, rejoiced at their salvation by the Europeans, who were seen as civilized and progressive. Britain and France, wanting to avoid expensive entanglements, were unwilling to commit land forces, and so the lines were drawn at the

walls of the city. By the mid-1840s, the war had come to a standstill, with each side unwilling to risk an attack, but secure behind their own fortifications.

The conflict continued through other means. Intellectuals on both sides launched their own attacks, especially through the rising medium of the press. The *Guerra Grande* coincided with the flourishing of print culture. Newspapers had come to South America late in the 18th century, but increased dramatically after independence from Spain, around 1810. Both sides used the power of the written word to craft a version of events that supported their cause, and portrayed their party as the heroic defenders of the 'true' Uruguay. The press provided a way to channel intellectual arguments to serve political causes at an entirely new level. The press was, from the beginning, a political instrument, caught up in the conflicts of the day. These partisan voices provided not only an accounting of events, but also the ideological context for interpreting them. More sophisticated and more widespread newspapers could broaden the appeal of a movement, sharpen its ideological focus, and improve the morale of its supporters. They could also be used to attack the enemy, to undermine their credibility by spreading tales of atrocity or absurdity. These newspapers also crossed the Atlantic Ocean to influence foreign opinion. Influence with one or another government in Europe could decide events in South America. Supporters, both among politicians and the public, were courted through the press.

Behind this political divide was the *Revolución de Mayo*, the May 25th 1810 declaration of independence from Spain, starting in Buenos Aires, but encompassing the

whole Rio de la Plata region. The revolution opened the field for political change. Far from uniting the region, the legacy of the May revolution was hotly contested. Liberals, inspired by European and North American political philosophy, argued that the legacy and promise of the revolution was social progress. They felt that new ideas, new freedoms and new institutions would rejuvenate the region, which had been stagnant under the oppression of colonial Spanish rule. A strong central government would guide the nation to a better future. The advanced nations of Europe, Britain and France in particular, provided examples to be followed. Conservatives, on the other hand, argued that the May revolution was about independence and self-determination. It was their view that what was needed was not a social revolution, but rather a political system appropriate for their local, American heritage. Stability, order, and the enforcement of law were the watchwords, not to be compromised by idealistic dreaming about new societies. Each region would be given its place in a loose federation, to govern itself free from interference. Above all, the conservatives argued, America needed to make a clean break from Europe. The voracious empires of the old world would devour the new South American nations without pity, if given the chance.

The clash between these two basic visions for the future of these nations was deepened by the absence of strong states. Following independence, authority devolved to local leaders, those who established themselves in a position of power, by whatever means. Local bosses, the *caudillos*, wielded influence in their areas, responsible to nobody but themselves so long as they could maintain their following. Partisans for each political position raised armies and fought for control over the new states. These armies

were led by ambitious *caudillos*, who often became the standard-bearers for their regions, causes and factions. Civil war became chronic, and no one political vision for Argentina or Uruguay established itself as dominant until well into the second half of the 19th century. The legacy of these conflicts was that society became factionalized, with personal or party loyalties overriding the weak political structures of the government. The press was one of the most obvious and most influential ways of expressing these divergent opinions and loyalties.

This thesis examines this rising medium, the periodic press, and how it was used by the defense of Montevideo to represent their cause and to combat their enemies. In the main, the basis for my analysis is *El Comercio del Plata*, a newspaper edited by the Argentine exile Florencio Varela, from 1843 until 1848. Through his writings, three aspects of the conflict will be examined, from the perspective of a writer inside the walls of Montevideo. First is the issue of *caudillismo*. Varela and the Montevidean liberals viewed *caudillismo* as a reactionary, illegitimate form of government. Arguments about *caudillo* rule, and how they applied to the war against Juan Manuel de Rosas and Manuel Oribe, highlighted the *doctores'* commitment to political liberalism. The second topic will be the press itself, its responsibilities and its role in society, as seen by Varela. Ideologically driven journalism created a series of intellectual and political debates that brought ideas into the foreground of the war. Third, I will deal with the issue of nationality and foreignness. The role of European immigrants, Argentine auxiliaries, British and French imperial forces, and Uruguayan natives were all questioned in the press, prompting accusations of anti-nationalism and cultural backwardness. The

differences in the interpretation of these terms reflected the broader differences in the parties. Liberal cosmopolitanism, inspired by the multi-national community in Montevideo, and expressed proudly in the press, provided a strong ideological basis for the *Colorado* party during the *Guerra Grande*.

The editors of the 1840s were combatants in the ongoing social and ideological conflict. Their newspapers were a reflection of the times, but also of their editors' political leanings and their group affiliation. I will examine Florencio Varela's writings in *El Comercio* as representative of the liberal ideology of the Montevidean elite. Marco Palacios, writing about Colombia, claims that, since the earliest days in that country, the liberalism and conservatism of the elites were, in essence, titles adopted by competing interest groups rather than genuine ideological commitments.[1] What I will argue in this thesis is that, for Uruguay in the 1840s, ideology and pragmatism coincided. The liberal vision for Uruguay put forward by the *doctores* matched well the multi-national, mostly European population of Montevideo, and the intervening forces of Britain and France. The cosmopolitan liberalism expressed by Varela in *El Comercio* was one of the strongest examples of this confluence of interests. Throughout this thesis, I will highlight the ways in which the liberal ideology of the *doctores* corresponded to their military, political and diplomatic situation.

[1] Marco Palacios, "El (Des)Encuentro de los Colombianos con el Liberalismo," 30. Presented at the symposium "The Colombian Process Reform: A New Role for the State?" Institute of Latin American Studies, University of London, 24-25th of April, 1995.

Historical Background

The turbulent independence of Uruguay set the stage for the events discussed in this thesis. As a borderland between the colonial empires of Spain and Portugal, the political geography of Uruguay was not entirely fixed until the mid-19th century. The region, known as the *Banda Oriental*, the eastern bank of the river Uruguay, began the century as a part of the Viceroyalty of La Plata, centered in Buenos Aires. Montevideo, with a fine natural harbour and a strategic location near the disputed Brazilian border, developed first as a military outpost. By the time of the independence wars, Uruguay was beginning to develop as a separate region, centered on Montevideo. Following the May 25th 1810 revolution, which marked the separation of the region from Spain, the *Oriental*[2] landowner-become-General José Gervasio Artigas left for Buenos Aires, and became prominent in the independence forces. He led an army back to his homeland and took Montevideo from the Spanish, which was the last holdout for the colonial forces in the region. Artigas established a loose protectorate of provinces, the *Liga Federal*, Federal League, to be integrated into a larger federal system for the region. This area included much of what is today southern Brazil, as well as several northeastern Argentine provinces. However, the young state was unable to defend itself against Brazil, which in August of 1816 invaded the *Banda Oriental*. In January of 1817 the Brazilians occupied Montevideo, and the territory east of the Uruguay river became the cisplatine province of

[2] '*Oriental*' refers to an inhabitant of the *Banda Oriental*. The term is basically synonymous with Uruguayan, but is less anachronistic for a time when 'Uruguay' did not formally exist.

Brazil. Many *Orientales* resisted Brazilian rule, and sought its overthrow from both inside the province, and from exile in Buenos Aires.[3]

The Banda Oriental was, in almost all respects, similar to the rest of the area surrounding the Rio de la Plata. The *pampas*, an enormous plain, stretches from southern Brazil through Uruguay and west to the Andes in Argentina. With an abundance of cattle, and very little labour to exploit other resources, the post-independence economy depended almost entirely on ranching. Hides, tallow, jerked beef and other ranching commodities were exported through the major ports, Buenos Aires in the south, and Montevideo in the north. The ports also served as entry points for foreign, especially European, commerce. The wealth of the ports required the production of the rural areas, yet the cultures of these two areas became increasingly distinct. The *pampas*, divided into great estates, small landholdings, and even empty land, were sparsely populated by *gauchos*, the wandering cowboys who formed much of the rural poor. Raising cattle was both a livelihood and a way of life, giving shape not only to the economy, but to the culture and politics of rural La Plata. In this environment, political and economic power centered around control over land. Indigenous attacks made military force a necessity for successful ranching. The state lacked the power to police the rural areas, resulting in extensive banditry. The *gauchos* lived violent lives, sometimes in service to landowners, and sometimes against them. Anyone who could amass land and defend it could gain wealth, and provide employment and security for local *gauchos*. Patronage and protection

[3] Benjamín Nahum, *Manual de Historia del Uruguay, Tomo I: 1830-1903* (Montevideo, Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 2005), 21-28.

were the currency with which the rural elite, the *caudillos*, purchased the loyalty of their followers.

By contrast, the city was a place of relative affluence. Commercial interests, including local ranchers and foreign traders, made their fortunes there. Foreign immigrants, from both the upper and lower classes, came to make their living in the rising economy, and settled in Montevideo. While it was not a developed city by European standards, it was a dramatic contrast with the rural areas. Inside, one could stay at one of many hotels, or have a meal at a restaurant accompanied by French cognac, or on a more British note, *chinchibirre*, ginger beer. One could visit a café for coffee and intellectual discussion, or play billiards alongside French and Italian expatriates, including such characters as Giuseppe Garibaldi, who was at the time teaching mathematics in Montevideo.[4] Bonds of loyalty were shared within national groups inside the city, on the basis of shared language, ethnicity, and experience. Modern technology found its way into the city, and one could find such marvels as an astronomical observatory[5], steam-powered manufactories for soap[6], and even a plant for producing sulfuric acid.[7] The beginnings of the industrial age in Europe were slowly coming to South America, and it was ports such as Montevideo that felt this influence most strongly. Expanding trade, contact with Europe and immigration through the port gave Montevideo a different economy, culture and population from the surrounding rural areas. It is this contrast

[4] Jorge Grünwaldt Ramasso, *Vida, Industria y Comercio en el Antiguo Montevideo, 1830-1852* (Montevideo: Barreiro y Ramos, 1970), 44-46.
[5] Ibid., 75.
[6] Ibid., 87-89.
[7] Ibid., XV.

between the rural and the urban areas of Uruguay that forms the underlying basis for the political conflicts of the 1830s and 1840s.

Turning to political issues, the war for the liberation of Uruguay began in 1825, with thirty-three *Orientales*, known as *los treinta y tres*. They set out for the *Banda Oriental* from exile in Buenos Aires, conspiring to end the Brazilian domination of their "patria," their fatherland. Led by General Juan Lavalleja, with Manuel Oribe as his chief lieutenant, this largely symbolic force was able to attract support from other *Orientales* dissatisfied with Brazilian rule, notably the powerful *caudillo* Fructuoso Rivera. Along with support from the Argentine government in Buenos Aires, these forces liberated their country over several years. Their independence was enshrined in the 1828 accord between Brazil and Argentina, with Britain's Lord Ponsonby acting as mediator. The constitution of the 18th of July, 1830, formally established the government of Uruguay. While the country has remained independent ever since, the years that followed the constitution left the fate of the republic highly uncertain.

These were also tumultuous years in Argentina, where bitter political fighting between the conservative Federalists and the liberal Unitarians had resulted in a succession of unstable governments.[8] The liberal Bernardino Rivadavia came to dominate the politics of Buenos Aires in the 1820s, first as an influential minister, and later as

[8] For the Argentine political factions, I will use the anglicized "Federalists" and "Unitarians" for "Federalistas" and "Unitarios." Unitarians, in this case, refers to the political group favouring a unitary state, and not to the religious movement of the same name.

president of the provisional Argentina[9], 1826-27. Freedoms flourished in this highly idealistic era, and liberal European doctrines were the order of the day, at least on paper. As one example, Rivadavia introduced universal male suffrage. Although it became increasingly curtailed by restrictions, it was nonetheless among the most radical steps taken by any government in South America at the time.[10] However, Rivadavia moved too quickly with his reforms, which envisaged an Argentina of the future that was far indeed from the Argentina he actually governed. Even then, his influence was dependent on his degree of control, which, outside of Buenos Aires province, was very small. In order to gain a greater measure of influence, Rivadavia supported *los treinta y tres*, which led to war with the Brazilian Empire. While enabling him to increase his authority through war measures, the conflict also contributed to the bankruptcy of the increasingly poor state. The conservative rural elites were mostly opposed to Rivadavia's liberal reforms and suspicious of domination by Buenos Aires. Federalist forces soon moved strongly against the Unitarian government. An army led by Facundo Quiroga, the *caudillo* of La Rioja, and other rural leaders marched on Buenos Aires. Realizing the situation was hopeless, Rivadavia resigned the presidency in 1827 in favour of a moderate Federalist, Manuel Dorrego.[11]

The Dorrego government, however, was not much more successful than that of Rivadavia in controlling the emerging chaos. He was able to extricate Argentina from war with Brazil by accepting British mediation and signing the treaty that led to the

[9] No actual constitution was ratified during this era, and therefore the term Argentina, in strictly political terms, is an anachronism. However, it remains the most convenient shorthand for the geographical unit.
[10] David Bushnell, *Reform and Reaction in the Platine Provinces, 1810-1852* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1983), 22.
[11] David Rock, *Argentina, 1516-1982* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 96-102.

independent Uruguay and the creation of the 18th July 1830 constitution. However, his government lacked sufficient support among the factions in the city of Buenos Aires to remain in power. A Unitarian army, led by General Juan Lavalle, overthrew the government of Dorrego, executed him, and established the brief return of Unitarian governance. The government did not last, however, as by this time the Federalists had organized their military strength, drawn from the rural *gauchos*. An alliance of regional *caudillos* led by Juan Manuel de Rosas retook Buenos Aires.[12] Lavalle went into exile, eventually conspiring with other Unitarian exiles to attempt to undo his defeat. Meanwhile, Rosas established a Federalist system wherein each governor had autonomy within his province. Control of foreign relations was ceded to the governor of Buenos Aires, in this case, Rosas himself. This system would endure in Argentina until his overthrow in 1851. Rosas was at the helm of the Federalist ship, first as elected governor of Buenos Aires, and later as dictator entrusted with the *suma del poder público*, the confluence of all powers of government in his person.

Meanwhile, Uruguay continued its turbulent experiment with republicanism. Leaders from the independence struggle against Brazil used their reputations to gain political leverage. The first victor in this contest was General Fructuoso Rivera, who became Uruguay's first president.[13] Well remembered as a military hero, Rivera was popular and decisive. However, he was also notoriously corrupt, and the finances of the state quickly fell into decline as he distributed patronage to his supporters. Lavalleja, despite having been defeated at politics, remained a powerful leader with a large faction.

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[12] Ibid., 102-103.
[13] Juan E. Pivel Devoto, *Historia de la República Oriental del Uruguay, 1830-1930* (Montevideo: El Siglo Ilustrado, 1945), 10-12.

This faction revolted in 1832 in Durazno, attempting to replace Rivera with Lavalleja.[14] While he was defeated and exiled to Brazil by Rivera, his faction remained strong. In 1835, General Manuel Oribe, a popular figure in the *Lavallejista* faction, but who had not participated in the failed revolution of 1832, succeeded Rivera as president of Uruguay.[15] Oribe tried to rectify the financial and political disaster left behind by Rivera, and established a strict law-and-order regime in order to consolidate the new state. The government of Oribe was, by and large, a strong one, honest in its dealings and conservative in maintaining law and order. Even Andrés Lamas, a leading *Colorado* and an implacable opponent of Oribe during the *Guerra Grande*, pointed out in retrospect how much had been lost in overthrowing his government.[16]

However, Oribe's government was not popular with all Uruguayans. He could be inflexible, insensitive to oppression, and, most damning for liberal Montevideans, he was sympathetic to the Rosas regime in Argentina. Unitarians who had settled in Montevideo as exiles were becoming increasingly influential in the city's politics, and their anti-Rosas attitudes went deep, as we shall see in later chapters. Oribe also failed to settle the power struggle with Rivera, who, using his post-presidency position as head of the army in the countryside revolted in 1836 against Oribe.[17] By 1838 Rivera had overcome Oribe, who resigned his presidency and went into exile in Argentina. Rivera was supported in this coup by Montevidean opponents of Rosas, both Uruguayan liberals and Argentine Unitarian exiles. This overthrow began the political division that resulted in the two

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[14] Juan E. Pivel Devoto, *Historia de los Partidos Políticos en el Uruguay* (Montevideo: Imprenta Rosgal, 1994), 60-62.
[15] Pivel Devoto, *República,* 81.
[16] Ibid., 96-99.
[17] Ibid., 86.

conflicting parties of the 1840s: *los Blancos* (the whites), rural, conservative supporters of Oribe, and *los Colorados* (the reds), who were supporters of Rivera. Some *Colorados* supported Rivera for reasons of personal loyalty, and were known as *Riveristas*. Others, known as *los doctores*, supported Rivera against Oribe as an enemy-of-their-enemy. They opposed Oribe by reason of their liberal ideology and his support for Rosas. They would later come to turn against Rivera as well for his *caudillismo*, once the luster of his military triumphs had become tarnished by defeats.[18]

The opponents of Rosas rallied in Montevideo during this period. In 1838, the government of France went to war with the Rosas dictatorship, nominally over his treatment of the French population in Argentina. They blockaded Buenos Aires, and sought local allies. General Lavalle, upon arriving in Montevideo in exile, took the French up on this offer of alliance. He was supported in this by the Argentine Commission, a group of the most influential of the Unitarian exiles. Rivera initially opposed this development, preferring to turn the nation inward and settle its domestic problems, but his hand was forced by the strength of the Argentine, French and Uruguayan liberal interests, leading him to declare war on Rosas. However, what began as a strong prospect of overthrowing Rosas quickly became a military and diplomatic disaster. Lavalle, concerned about the weakness of his support base, and convinced of the necessity of augmenting his forces, decided not to march immediately on Buenos Aires, but instead became bogged down trying to rally support in the north of Argentina. There, he was pursued and defeated by Rosas, leaving Uruguay vulnerable to invasion.[19] Seizing

[18] Pivel Devoto, *Partidos Políticos*, 78.
[19] Rock, 110.

the opportunity to reinstate a friendly government in Uruguay, Rosas sent an army into the *Banda Oriental* to reverse Oribe's defeat and reestablish his claim to the presidency. What began as an Uruguayan civil war came to entangle France, Britain, and the provinces of Argentina as well.

Until the end of 1842, the war, which has become known in Uruguay as the *Guerra Grande*, was fought in the rural areas, between the essentially similar *gaucho* forces of Oribe and Rivera for control of the nation. However, things turned grim for Rivera after the battle of *Arroyo Grande* on December 6 of 1842, where he was routed by Oribe's forces, and retreated to Montevideo to regroup.[20] By February 16, 1843, the siege of Montevideo had begun, and it would not be lifted until 1851. The nature of the war thus changed dramatically, with the *Colorado* side restricted in its ability to act outside the defensive line of Montevideo, except by sea. Although Rivera did manage to raise another army, he was defeated once again at the battle of *India Muerta* on March 27, 1845.[21] This defeat, which was a severe blow to the *Colorado* cause, proved to be a fatal one for Rivera's career. After a period of declining influence, and lacking his military support base, he was overthrown by the *doctores* for his incompetence and for his tendency towards *caudillismo*.[22] He went into exile on October 3, 1847.

Having lost their most powerful military force, the situation of the defense of Montevideo became dire. By 1843, Oribe controlled nearly the entire nation outside of the capital, and even there, the port had been blockaded by the Buenos Aires navy. Since

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[20] Pivel Devoto, *República*, 105.
[21] Ibid., 124.
[22] Pivel Devoto, *Partidos Políticos*, 178.

Montevideo could not even obtain the supplies necessary to maintain the defense without access to the sea, nor could it lift the siege with its remaining forces being less than a third of those under Oribe, a change in strategy was necessary if the defense was to hold. One possible plan for salvation lay in convincing a friendly European power to intervene. The cultural and ideological affinity with Europe combined with the need for military, financial and diplomatic support to make intervention an ideal solution for the *doctores*. Britain, having mediated the creation of Uruguay, was one likely possibility. France, having previously fought with Rosas, and having an interest in protecting the substantial French population in Montevideo, was another. However, the *Colorados* hardly had a strong case for requesting assistance. They were only one side in what could be construed as a civil war, and the losing side at that. While Britain had mediated the agreement that created Uruguay, it had expressly not included any guarantee for Uruguayan independence beyond the good faith of Brazil and Argentina. Understanding the difficultly of their position, the government in Montevideo sent emissaries to draw Britain and France onto their side. After the failure of their first emissary, the second man they sent to Europe was Florencio Varela.

Born in 1807 in Buenos Aires into the family of a renowned officer from the independence period, Florencio Varela was, throughout his life, a model of the 19th century liberal intellectual. Educated in philosophy, languages, mathematics and "moral sciences" at *El Colegio de la Unión*, he went on to earn his law degree from the University of Buenos Aires in 1827. He wrote his doctoral thesis on legal philosophy,

deriving his ideas from the works of César Beccaria and Jeremy Bentham.[23] Law would serve Varela as a profession for many of his days, both in Buenos Aires and later in Montevideo. However, Varela was not content to only be a lawyer, and his broad interests led him to poetry, history, and journalism. He was a prominent member of the intellectual movement known as the Generation of 1837, the liberal *salon* of Buenos Aires living in exile. His political thought influenced some of the weightiest names in Argentine intellectual history, such as Domingo Sarmiento and Juan Alberdi.[24] His influence extended beyond his own compatriots, however, and he held considerable sway with the *Colorados* in Montevideo.

Florencio Varela's introduction to journalism came during the Rivadavian era, when liberal thought flourished. An increasingly political press both reveled in the liberalism of the Unitarian cause, and fought against the increasing strength of Federalism. The anonymity of articles makes it difficult to discern exactly when Florencio Varela began his career in journalism. His eldest brother, Juan Cruz Varela, edited several newspapers during this period: *El Centinela*, *El Porteño*, *El Granizo*, and *El Tiempo.* All of these papers were caustically anti-Federalist, and demonstrated the flair of the elder Varela for the combative journalism of the period. Where exactly Florencio began his association with these papers is somewhat unclear. Antonio Zinny gives his beginnings with *El Centinela.* Leoncio Gianello disputes this in his biography of Florencio Varela, claiming he could not have written it, as he was still attending *El Colegio de la Unión*, and was only fifteen years old at the time. Gianello also doubts

[23] Leoncio Gianello, *Florencio Varela* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Guillermo Craft, 1948), 53.
[24] William H. Katra, *The Argentine Generation of 1837* (Madison and Teaneck: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996), 73.

Florencio's editorship of *El Granizo*, as claimed by Zinny as well. However, for *El Tiempo*, it was clear that Florencio Varela contributed, as he published editorial articles as well as poetry. By 1829, during the Federal reaction to the Rivadavian reforms, he also wrote pieces for *El Pampero*, another paper deeply critical of the contemporary government. Throughout the period, Florencio Varela became one of the more important journalists in Buenos Aires. In doing so, he earned himself powerful enemies among the Federalists, ones who would not forget the writers who fought them in the press.[25]

Even among intellectuals, the opposition of the political factions did not stay confined to newspapers for long. During the revolt of General Lavalle, Juan Cruz Varela and several other liberal intellectuals conspired to execute Dorrego, a decision widely lamented as escalating the conflict beyond control. The extent to which Florencio Varela was involved with this decision is debated. Gianello concludes that he had little to do with the decision, being too young, and having opposed political murder in his thesis as inviting even worse opponents.[26] Regardless of the extent of his involvement in the Lavalle revolt and the assassination of Dorrego, what are most important are the ties of family and ideology that linked Florencio Varela closely with Rivadavia, Lavalle, and the Unitarian faction in Buenos Aires. Within a year of Rosas taking power in 1829, this association led to Varela's exile from Buenos Aires, and to his first stay in Montevideo.

[25] Gianello, 61-75.
[26] Ibid., 115-126.

From that point on, he would never return to his home country of Argentina. He lived in exile until his murder, in Montevideo, on the 20th of March, 1848.[27]

Varela did not immediately become deeply involved in the politics of Uruguay, and for the first years of his exile there are few events of note. However, his history in the political arena precluded an entirely peaceful existence. Rosas, taking his vengeance on the Unitarians, whom he blamed for nearly every problem and denounced at the beginning of every decree, used his influence with Oribe to attack the exiles in Montevideo. This led to Varela and his family being persecuted, along with any who sympathized with the Unitarian cause. On April 23, 1837, Varela was jailed, and taken to the *Isla de las Ratas* for several days. The intellectuals of Montevideo had influential friends, as there were considerable connections between the Argentine exiles and the diplomatic and political elite in Montevideo. Pressure from supporters, including the British Consul Thomas Samuel Hood, led to Varela's release. This tolerance did not last long, however. He was again persecuted during October of that year, leading him to flee the city with his family for a few months, hoping to avoid further problems.[28] With the return to power of Fructuoso Rivera in 1838, backed by General Lavalle, Varela's political status improved. He became actively involved in the Argentine Commission, a group of Unitarian exiles in Montevideo offering their support to Lavalle. But as the struggle against Rosas under Lavalle became increasingly a lost cause, Varela's health began to falter, and he left Montevideo for Rio de Janeiro in 1841. This was purportedly

[27] Florencio Varela was knifed while returning home by a pair of Basques. The suspicion of Varela's supporters, both at the time and since, was that he was killed on orders from Oribe. While this entirely plausible, it has never been proven one way or the other.
[28] Ibid., 150-155.

to improve his health, and to work on his latest project, a historical study of Argentina.[29] Within a few years, however, Varela decided to leave Brazil, and return to Uruguay.

Upon his return to Montevideo early in 1843, Varela became once again active in the intellectual and political scene of the defense. The situation was grim, as the defeat of Rivera at Arroyo Grande had led to the siege of the city. The growth of liberal institutions continued apace, however, and Varela joined Andres Lamas and other prominent intellectuals, both Argentine and Uruguayan, to found the *Instituto Histórico y Geográfico del Uruguay*, the historical and geographical institute of Uruguay. While this iteration of the institute would not survive for long, its founders represented a remarkable cross-section of the intellectual elite.[30] The most telling tribute to Varela's status was the mission he was entrusted with by the Uruguayan government. In 1843, Varela left Montevideo for London, to speak with the governments of Britain and France, and obtain a promise of intervention, in order to save the defense and procure a peace favourable to the *Colorado* faction while Montevideo was still in their hands.

The mission of Florencio Varela to London came under criticism, both at the time and since, as encouraging domination and colonization by European powers. Mateo Magariños de Mello devoted a book to the study of the relevant documents which argued that Varela betrayed Argentina and Uruguay. It was claimed that that he planned to propose a British colony encompassing not only Uruguay, but the Argentine province of

[29] Ibid., 216.

[30] The founders were: Melchor Pacheco y Obes, Andrés Lamas, Teodoro Miguel Vilardebó, Manuel Herrera y Obes, Cándido Juanicó, Fermín Ferreira, José Rivera Indarte, and Florencio Varela. In addition, upon the first round of elections, several other names were added: Bartolomé Mitre, Santiago Vázquez, Julián Alvarez and Francisco Araucho. Other important names were added later. Varela also convinced the founders to add Bernardino Rivadavia and José de San Martin as honourary founders. Ibid., 282-285.

Corrientes (today Corrientes and Misiones). For this reason, Magariños de Mello concluded that Varela, although admirable as a person, was unworthy as an Argentine. Gianello defends Varela from these charges, pointing out that the scant documentation hardly supports such a thoroughgoing rejection.[31] During his time and afterwards, Varela was a lightning rod for criticism or praise, depending on the ideological stance of the critic.

At the time, Varela counted the mission to Europe as a failure. The hoped-for intervention did eventually occur, but more due to the *entente cordiale* between Britain and France creating a desire for a joint diplomatic success than by any argument Varela made. His time in Europe did not go to waste, however. In addition to a series of meetings with Lord Aberdeen, then heading up the Foreign Office, Varela took his months in Europe to absorb the culture, writing, "I also want to preserve the details of the progresses that truth, intelligence and work have made in the dominions of science, literature, and industry, because it appears to me that I will find in these memories a source of useful applications for my unfortunate country, if he who gives life and puts light into the minds of men wants to conserve my days and my reason for when the light of tranquility and peace is born in the Rio de la Plata."[32] Varela undertook a whirlwind tour of England, visiting major industrial cities: Manchester, Sheffield, Bristol, Liverpool. Here, he confirmed for himself the value of the liberal philosophy he had

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[31] Ibid., 287-320.

[32] "Deseo también conserver pormenores de los progresos que la verdad, la inteligencia y el trabajo han hecho en los dominios de la ciencia, de la literatura y de la industria, porque me parece que hallaré en esos recuerdos una fuente de aplicaciones útiles a mi desventurada patria, si el que dispensa la vida y pone luz en la mente del hombre, quiere conserver mis días y mi razón para cuando nazca en el Río de la Plata el sol de la tranquilidad y de la paz." Florencio Varela, *Auto-biografía de D. Florencio Varela* (Montevideo: Imprenta del Comercio del Plata, 1848), 15-16.

brought with him from his youth. Peace, commerce and liberty together would generate prosperity.[33] In his view, inspired by his European tour, all that was necessary for Argentina and Uruguay to prosper was the application of these ideas.

From Varela's perspective, one obstacle stood in the way of this coming utopia, and that was the cultural and political barbarism of the pampas, organized by and epitomized in the dictatorship of Juan Manuel Rosas, and spread by his followers, such as Manuel Oribe. Upon his return to Montevideo, Varela gave shape to an idea he had considered since his first years in the city, to publish a high-quality newspaper to broadcast foreign news, encourage commerce, and advocate for liberalism. Combining the experience of his youth as a journalist with a renewed appreciation for the art of printing gained in London[34], Varela founded the newspaper he would edit until his death, *El Comercio del Plata.* The first edition was printed on the 1st of October, 1845. Florencio Varela was the principal editor, and although he was assisted by others in assembling commercial data, translating material and so on, the editorials were his, and the tone of the paper reflected his ideas and style. While *El Comercio* was not the only paper published in Montevideo at the time, it was the most substantial. To Varela and the *doctores*, such a newspaper was a powerful weapon against the dictatorship of Rosas. Antonio Zinny, in his 1883 index of the periodic press in Uruguay, claimed the writing of

[33] Gianello, 353-359.
[34] Ibid., 393.

El Comercio was "purely an act of patriotism, of a poetic faith, that followed only one philosophy – the overthrow of tyranny."[35]

If *El Comercio* was the ideological champion of the defense of Montevideo, then the *Blancos* had their own answer to it: *El Defensor de la Independencia Americana*, published at *El Cerrito*, the encampment of Oribe. As the military situation ground to a standstill at the walls of Montevideo, the conflict in Uruguay was fought with words, partly in the negotiations of diplomats, but also partly in the periodical press. *El Defensor* devoted pages upon pages to condemning the "salvajes unitarios," the savage Unitarian Argentines of Montevideo, who had, according to *El Defensor*, taken over the capital in order to sell the nation to the Europeans. *El Comercio del Plata* and Florencio Varela were among the most popular targets. The sparring between these two papers became a regular feature of the siege, with each accusing the other of barbarism, foreignness, savagery and dishonesty. This was the situation of *El Comercio del Plata*, a newspaper running over with a liberal idealism fuelled by Florencio Varela's enthusiasm for European culture, yet also directly engaged in a local political and military struggle on an immediate level.

[35] "puramente un acto de patriotismo, una fé poética, que obedecia a un solo pensamiento – el derrocamiento de la tirania." Antonio Zinny, *Historia de la Prensa Periodica, 1807-1852* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta y Libreria de Mayo, 1883), 73.

Chapter One: *Doctores* and *Caudillos*

"Rosas – that is to say, the principle of retrograde tyranny, of barbarism supported by brute force – has occupied himself, since having usurped power, with nothing more than starting and consolidating a direct reaction against all the points of that program [of the May 25th 1810 Revolution]; in establishing a dependency worse than the colonial one; irresponsible and permanent dictatorship, in place of freely elected democratic governments; perpetual war and the persecution of all idea of improvement, in place of public calm, which permits devotion to the education of the masses and to social progress."[36]

-*El Comercio del Plata*, May 25, 1846, no. 186

"And the savage unitarians who want to elevate a tiny minority over the great national majority, who want to establish themselves in a privileged class, who want society not to march by itself, but rather receive its impulse from a diminutive faction as they are, and that as a consequence of dominating external action, could they possess ideas of that Republic, and march along the path that leads to it?"[37]

-Bernardo Berro, *El Caudillo y la Revolución Americana. Polémica*, 155

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[36] "Rosas – es decir, el principio del tiranía retrógrada, de la barbarie apoyada en la fuerza bruta – en nada más se ha occupado, desde que usurpó el poder, que en promover y afianzar una reacción directa contra todos los puntos de aquel programa; en establecer una dependencia peor que la colonial; la dictadura irresponsable y permanente, en vez de gobiernos democráticos de libre elección; la guerra perpetua y la persecución a toda idea de mejora, en vez de la pública quietud, que permite entregarse a la educación de las masas y al progreso social."

[37] "Y los salvajes unitarios que quieren elevar una minoría ínfima sobra la gran mayoría nacional, que quieren erigirse en una clase privilegiada, que quieren que la sociedad no marche por si misma, sino que reciba su impulso de una fracción diminuta como son ellos, y eso como una secuela de la acción externa dominante, ¿podrán tener ideas de esa República y marchar por la senda que a ella conduce?"

The issue of the *caudillo* dominated the polemical arguments from the period of the *Guerra Grande*. What was to be made of the dominion of these men?[38] To the *doctores* in Montevideo, both Argentine and Uruguayan, the *caudillos* were loathsome figures. They were the brutal embodiments of the rural masses, come to pillage the civilized cities of the coast. They were the echoes of the Spanish colonial past, lashing out in reaction against the civilizing influence of the *Revolución de Mayo*, the May revolution of 1810, which marked the great break of the Viceroyalty of La Plata from Spanish colonial domination. For the *doctores*, this revolution had promised social improvement, through liberal republicanism, as well as political independence. They saw the *caudillos* as threats to this promise. Dictatorship was the natural government of the *caudillo*, who could make nothing of a nation but the extension of his personal influence. Capricious, violent, and self-interested, they represented everything that civilized, liberal, European culture sought to remedy. The *Guerra Grande*, to the *doctores*, was a war against *caudillismo*, a war to overturn the existing social and political order, or perhaps to turn that order right side up, to return to the promise of the May revolution. In this chapter, I will examine how Florencio Varela and the *doctores* shaped the image of the *caudillo*, and how this was used both as political philosophy and as propaganda. In turn, this shaping of ideas led to a distinctive place for Montevideo and its inhabitants as part of a liberal, progressive project of the Uruguayan nation, beginning with independence, and leading through their struggles into a promising future.

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[38] I use the male pronouns because the vast majority of caudillos, especially in the 19th century, were male, almost to the point of total exclusion. Some have argued for the inclusion of female figures such as Eva Perón as caudillos, but this deals with a much later period than this thesis is concerned with, and is an exception in any case.

The pertinence of the *caudillo* issue to the defense of Montevideo was direct, especially to the *doctores*. On all sides, charismatic, militaristic leaders, mostly from the rural areas, threatened the liberal order the *doctores* sought to establish. In Buenos Aires, Juan Manuel de Rosas, the most successful Argentine *caudillo* of his age, had established a dictatorship. He had killed or exiled his opponents, and was seemingly eager to export his system to the surrounding provinces and countries. From outside the walls fortifying Montevideo, General Manuel Oribe, in command of a mixed Uruguayan and Argentine army, had, through both his personal reputation and the assistance of Rosas, established control of the bulk of Uruguay. From 1843 until the end of the *Guerra Grande* in 1851, Oribe threatened to complete his conquest, should the defense falter. However, to the *doctores*, the threat of *caudillismo* did not stop at the walls of Montevideo. The tendency towards personalist dictatorship had been brought into the plaza itself by General Fructuoso Rivera, the former president, and the first leader of the *Colorado* faction in the *Guerra Grande*. His defeats in several major battles of the war had left him battered, and somewhat discredited, but, until his eventual exile in 1847 at the hands of the *doctores*, he still commanded a measure of authority within the city. There was a perceived threat of *caudillismo*, and thus of reactionary dictatorship, coming from both inside and out.

The theoretical debates about the nature of Latin American *caudillismo* have been continuous since the beginning of the 19th century. The phenomenon has touched every former Spanish colony. *Caudillos* dominate the history of the 19th century, and this was as true in Uruguay and Argentina as elsewhere in Latin America. But what exactly were

caudillos, and what was the nature of their rule? Definitions vary according to the particular *caudillo* being used as a model, and the underlying political theory. As a political system, Eric Wolf and Edward Hansen proposed four "salient characteristics" of *caudillismo*:[39]

> (1) the repeated emergence of armed patron-client sets, cemented by personal ties of dominance and submission, and by a common desire to obtain wealth by force of arms; (2) the lack of institutionalized means for succession to offices; (3) the use of violence in political competition; and (4) the repeated failures of incumbent leaders to guarantee their tenures as chieftains.

For John Lynch, biographer of Rosas, *caudillismo* flourished because of the structure of the societies in post-independence Latin America. By removing Imperial control without firmly establishing a successor system, the revolutions of the early 19th century left a vacuum of power. "The fall of the Bourbons in 1808, however, left America a desert empty of traditional laws and institutions. Now there were wide political spaces to be filled, and the essential conditions for informal leadership were at last in place. Once *caudillos* became possible, they soon became inevitable..." The *caudillo*, with a military force and strong personal loyalties, could solve the problems of anarchy through the centralization of power in his hands.[40]

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[39] Eric Wolf and Edward C. Hansen, "Caudillo Politics: a Structural Analysis," in *Caudillos: Dictators in Spanish America*, ed. Hugh Hamill (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 63-64.
[40] John Lynch, *Caudillos in Spanish America, 1800-1850* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 34.

One popular point of reference is Max Weber's concept of ideal-types of legitimacy, with the *caudillo* usually being interpreted as a clear example of the charismatic type, where one figure inspires confidence in his leadership through inspiration and a common mission. In the case of Latin America, this is linked to Spanish traditions and to Catholicism[41]. Blood ties, as well as the less direct but much broader phenomenon of *compadrazgo*, or godparenting, established a system of personal connections that determines the political power of an individual, but existed outside any formal political structure. The *caudillo*, by this interpretation, used personal qualities, such as ambition, courage, generosity and violence to establish a sub-political network of loyal followers who then formed the basis of his power. Peter H. Smith argues for an extra ideal-type of Weberian legitimacy, that of "domination," to describe this kind of rule, where the *caudillo*'s regime was legitimated simply by the fact that it was ascendant, and therefore capable of maintaining order.[42] The strongest evidence for this position is the fate of many *caudillos*, including the Uruguayan General Rivera and Juan Manuel Rosas himself. After a high-profile defeat, they were abandoned by their followers, their supposed charisma counting for very little without their *macho* aura of invulnerability.

By contrast, E. Bradford Burns, in the influential *The Poverty of Progress*, argues that *caudillos* were the representatives and defenders of a "folk culture," charged by the traditional "folk" with resisting the unwanted liberal transformation of society. For Bradford Burns, Rosas was the very model of this type of folk *caudillo*. The masses

[41] See Glenn C. Dealy, "The Public Man," in *Caudillos*, 42-61.
[42] Peter H. Smith, "The Search for Legitimacy," in *Caudillos*, 92.

identified strongly with his rule. His defeat is ascribed not to the treason of General Justo José de Urquiza, usually considered the proximate cause of the downfall of Rosas, but to the intervention of the Brazilian army at the behest of the "Europeanized elite," many of whom were in exile in Montevideo.[43] This kind of "folk" argument is made in the Uruguayan context by Juan Pivel Devoto, who argues that the conservative *Blanco* party, led by Manuel Oribe, was a more genuine representative of Uruguay than the liberal *Colorados*. "El Cerrito was without a doubt the refuge of the Uruguayan family; the bulwark of authority and order... whose adherence to the American cause ... won for its soldiers the title of defenders of the independence of the country, compromised, without intent, by the liberals of Montevideo."[44] The latter were strongly influenced by foreigners, in terms of followers, ideals, finances, and military support, and therefore represented, despite good intentions, an anti-national position. This nationalist argument will be dealt with in greater detail in chapter three. For now, the relevant idea is that a *caudillo* could be a legitimate leader, since other issues, notably foreign intrusion into local culture, were of greater importance in determining legitimacy.

Many of these interpretations had rough equivalents in contemporary writings, especially those of the Argentine "Generation of 1837," a group of intellectuals, writing mostly from exile. A controvserial group, they were both praised as nation-builders and visionaries, and condemned as sycophantic followers of European dogmas. Many of this group found a home in Uruguay after fleeing from Argentina: Esteban Echeverría, Juan

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[43] E. Bradford Burns, *The Poverty of Progress* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), 93.

[44] "El Cerrito fué sin duda el refugio de la familia oriental; el baluarte de la autoridad y del orden... cuya adhesión a la causa americana ... le ganó a sus soldados el título de defensores del país, comprometida, sin querer, por los liberales de Montevideo." Pivel Devoto, *República*, 198.

Alberdi, Bartolomé Mitre and Florencio Varela, among others, spent much of the war in Montevideo, defending the cause of Argentine liberalism alongside the Uruguayan *Colorados*.[45] Most tended towards the idea of the *caudillo* as a charismatic leader, with a rural *gaucho* following based on the cultural affinity between the rural masses and those they believe represent their values. This was the position of Domingo Sarmiento, author of the epochal *Facundo, or Civilization and Barbarism*, and Manuel Herrera y Obes, one of the most influential politicians and writers of the Montevidean elite. From their perspective, a political transformation of the region would require not only the overthrow of the *caudillo* and the establishment of a liberal government, but would also require the cultural education of the rural masses. More than most of his compatriots, Florencio Varela's position on *caudillismo* was essentially legalist, arguing that legitimacy arose from laws, embodied in constitutions and enacted by elected governments. By this philosophy, Rosas' regime, along with that of his ally Oribe, was illegitimate. "Domination" described the de facto situation, but it failed to confer legitimacy.

There was also a strong conservative reaction against these ideas, which had its voice in the Federalist press in Argentina and Uruguay. The arguments of Bernardo Berro, a Montevidean intellectual who sided with the *Blancos*, and later became president of Uruguay, were a well-reasoned and influential counter to this image of the *caudillo* as an illegitimate tyrant. His arguments, as published in *El Defensor de la Independencia Americana*, the primary *Blanco* newspaper, will be analyzed in more depth at the end of this chapter. Berro made several arguments about *caudillos*, and specifically about Manuel Oribe. The first was that Oribe was popular, and that his government was made

[45] Katra, 70-76.

legitimate by the support of the people, as well as by the Uruguayan constitution. The second was that the *doctores*' definition of "civilization" was incorrect. For Berro, even if Uruguay lacked economic and cultural development, there was progress being made, rapidly and on locally-defined terms, thereby negating the "civilization against barbarism" argument. Imitation of Europe was not only unnecessary, but also harmful to the continued independence of the American republics. In this model, the *caudillo*, or rather, the specific *caudillos* Oribe and Rosas, were the organic result of their respective nations balancing the desires of the people with opposition to European intrusion. Much like in Bradford Burns' "folk" concept, these *caudillos* were considered by Berro to be the genuine leaders of their people, whereas the liberal intellectuals were arrogantly and frivolously pursuing their dreams of Europeanization without any legitimate power to do so.[46]

The first and foremost target for anti-*caudillo* criticism from the pages of *El Comercio del Plata* was Rosas and his *sistema americano*. Touted as a means of combating European colonization, this "American system" was essentially conservative isolationism. It combined a distrust of foreign powers with a concentration of public power in the hands of the dictator, through the *suma del poder público*, the sum of public power. Rosas would act in the name of the people, theoretically in consort with other South American leaders, to repulse European intrusion into the continent. Domestically, these dictators would establish and maintain what was referred to as "orden," order, and

[46] Berro's arguments to this effect are contained in: Berro, Bernardo Prudencio and Manuel Herrera y Obes. *El Caudillismo y la Revolución Americana. Polémica.* Edited by Juan E. Pivel Devoto. Montevideo: Colección de Clásicos Uruguayos, 1966. http://www.artigas.org.uy/library_CU.htm Accessed July 6, 2007.

"las leyes," the laws. In practice, while Rosas' system did offer some measure of political stability, it did so by reinforcing the strength of compliant *caudillos*, and using their power to crush those who resisted. The leaders of neighbouring provinces and countries, such as Justo José de Urquiza in Entre-Rios or Manuel Oribe in Uruguay, *caudillos* in their own territories just as Rosas was in Buenos Aires, would be co-opted into alliances; those who resisted, such as the Madariaga brothers of Corrientes, would be subdued by force. The considerable armies of Buenos Aires, combined with regional allies, were more than enough to intimidate or subdue wayward *caudillos*. The system was fraught with instability, with various provincial governors deciding, at one time or another, to revolt against Rosas. He was, however, skilled enough at the rough diplomacy of *caudillismo* to maintain his Confederation until 1851, when he was defeated by Urquiza, who had been until then one of Rosas' supporters as well as the agent of the Argentine intervention in Uruguay.

For Florencio Varela, the entire system was a cynical farce, designed only to protect the dictator and his power. The system of Rosas, so Varela argued, was ruinous to any nation under its power. In one of his first editorials, he wrote that "The Argentine Republic, under the restrictive and antisocial system of Rosas, has lost two thirds of its population, and much more of its material wealth; it has set intellectual culture back by a half-century, and has seen the total disappearance of its interior commerce, and a lamentable reduction in exterior [commerce]; its circulating currency has no value whatsoever, and its debt has increased by a terrifying proportion."[47] Growth, the

[47] "La República Arjentina, bajo el sistema restrictivo y antisocial de Rosas ha perdido dos tercios de su poblacion, y mucho más de su riqueza material; ha atrasado medio siglo en cultura intelectual, ha visto

fundamental measure of progress, was curtailed across society. Commerce, technology, education and culture were all held in a state of barbarous stagnation, one that ruined any chance for Argentina, and by extension Uruguay, to join the civilized world. The only avenue left for Argentina, Uruguay, and the entire region, from Varela's perspective, was to overthrow the dictator.

Incompetent government and barbaric cultural tendencies were only the beginnings of Varela's criticisms of Rosas. Irrational passions governed the dictator himself, and, because of the *suma del poder público*, they were therefore visited upon Argentina and its neighbours. Varela wrote, in an editorial from the 16th of September, 1847, that "Immoderate ambition of domination and fearful distrust of dreamed-up conspiracies, incessantly agitate the mind of Rosas: they are the positive and negative electrical poles that give his spirit that convulsive disquiet..."[48] Varela implied here that Rosas was bordering on mental illness, seeing enemies everywhere. In this particular case, Rosas feared an "infamous league," the *Sociedad Patriótica* of Bolivia, a kind of liberal intellectual club, in which Rosas saw "seditious incorrigibles," propagating the "anarchic intrigues of savage Unitarians."[49] For Varela, this was evidence, one piece among many, of the fundamental unsoundness of Rosas' mind. As all public power was in the hands of the dictator, these problems would therefore be visited upon the society he dominated. That such liberal groups, including Varela's own Argentine Commission, had

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desaparecer totalmente su comercio interior, y reducirse de un modo lamentable el exterior; su medio circulante no tiene valor alguno, y su deuda ha crecido en una proporción que espanta." Florencio Varela, *Comercio del Plata*, Oct. 6, 1845, no. 5.

[48] "Ambicion inmoderada de dominio y miedosa desconfianza de soñadas conspiraciones, ajitan incesantemente el cerebro de Rosas: son el polo positivo y el polo negativo de la electricidad que da a su espiritu ese inquietud convulsiva..." Ibid., Sept. 13, 1847, no. 573.

[49] "liga infame" ... "incorrejibles sediciosos" ... "manejos anarquicos de salvajes unitarios" Ibid., Sept. 22, 1847, no. 578.

actually opposed Rosas in the past is perhaps evidence that the dictator was not as much paranoid as he was realistic about the unstable political situation in Argentina. Varela, however, argued that this paranoia was not merely a personal problem, but a structural necessity of the dictatorship. The fear generated by this conspiratorial mindset served to reinforce the state. In order to maintain the system of *facultades extraordinarias*, the legal powers that enabled dictatorship, Rosas required a consistent source of fear. Such fear could then be used to justify increasing state power, under the aegis of strong government. In turn, those justifications would be crudely copied by Oribe, who would then implement them in Uruguay, thereby increasing the scope of Rosas' domination.

According to *El Comercio*, there did not exist a legitimate legal entity "Argentina," of which Rosas could then call himself president. The dictator was merely the governor of Buenos Aires, who then, through military force and diplomatic maneuvering, held together an informal alliance of independent provinces. The failure to ratify a constitution in the 1820s formed the legal basis for Varela's argument. The *de facto* situation, with Rosas in greater or lesser control of the whole Argentine area, did not entitle him to a presidency, despite the common usage of the title, both locally and abroad. The lack of democracy, except as a hollow sham, meant that Rosas had no greater claim to be the government of Argentina than brute force. "...the words Argentine Confederation, repeated endlessly by Rosas, have no practical meaning, no real significance of any type: since there does not exist a federal constitution, nor a federal

pact, nor federal authorities, nor anything of that which constitutes a Confederation..."[50] Whatever Rosas ruled, Varela argued, it was an *ad hoc* structure enforced only by dictatorship, and not by any legal principle recognized by the *mundo culto*, the cultured world. From the perspective of Smith's "domination" category of legitimacy, Varela denied that such a government had any right to rule whatsoever. Only military force had created this situation. While Varela believed in strong government, he also believed that, without a liberal constitution to provide legitimacy, the need for strength had led directly to the suppression of democracy.

One of the principal criticisms of the dictatorial system was that it fed the vain egotism of the *caudillo*. The titles Rosas accorded himself were sharply criticized by Varela. "...one characteristic trait of his [Rosas'] system is to distinguish himself with a title that he does not deserve... In this way he has been called first the *Restorer of the Laws*, later *Hero of the Desert*, after that, *Great American*..."[51] For Varela, there was a code of republican conduct to be upheld. Rosas, with pretensions far beyond even his presumed station, was crassly overstepping his bounds. By collecting extravagant titles, Rosas was not in any way serving the people, but was instead using his position to enhance his own reputation. Rosas claimed a pivotal role in the 1820 military campaign to reestablish order in Argentina, thus extending his championing of "the laws" back long before taking power. For Varela, this was absurd, self-serving revisionism. Rosas was only a *comandante* in that conflict, one who earned no distinctions whatsoever. This did

[50] "...las palabras *Confederación Arjentina*, repetidas sin cesar por Rosas, no tienen sentido práctico, significación real de ninguna clase: que no existe constitución federal, ni pacto federal, ni autoridades federales, ni nada de lo que constituye una Confederación..." Ibid., Feb. 24, 1848, no. 705.
[51] "...un razgo caracteristico de su sistema, es el hacerse discernir un título que no merece... Así se hizo llamar primero *Restaurador de las Leyes*, después *Heroe del Desierto*, más tarde *Grande Americano*..." Ibid., Oct. 10, 1845, no. 9.

not stop the commemoration of Rosas' victories in Buenos Aires, however, where October became *el mes de Rosas*, the month of Rosas. By highlighting the contradictions between Rosas' historical actions and the image created by his propagandists, Varela makes clear his basic point about the dictatorship: it was a farce built on lies, designed only to serve Rosas' ambitions.

One interesting example of this argument can be found in an editorial article from July 28, 1846, sarcastically titled "His Majesty Juan Manuel the First." Mocking the concept that the so-called President of a government that called itself "eminently republican" had put himself on the same level as the monarchies of Europe, Varela wrote: "... the Dictator is assuming airs of royal personage, and puts himself without any more ceremony, in personal and direct correspondence with the King of the French, in the same tone, neither more nor less, than that which the Queen of England could..." To Varela, already convinced of Rosas' delusions of grandeur, this was confirmation of the ruined state of democracy in Argentina. Rosas sought not only self-aggrandizement, but the elevation of his family to special status. "But the President of a Republic," Varela wrote, "never will send the felicitations of their beloved children, because the children of a President are, in republics, of the same status as the last citizen." Rosas, in writing to a monarch as a familiar, and sending the greetings of his family, had committed a gross error of courtesy, diplomacy, and politics. Not only were his actions seen as pretentious (Varela pointed out that not even Lord Palmerston would be allowed such an indulgence), but that he conflated his family with the state, something completely incongruous with

republicanism.[52] Lack of culture, ignorance of courtesy, and unlimited arrogance were, for Varela, the stock in trade of the Rosas dictatorship.

The monarchical pretensions of Rosas were diligently and creatively skewered in *El Comercio* on a regular basis. Rosas was compared to a veritable host of historical dictators, corrupt despots and overreaching egotists. At one point, he (along with fellow *caudillo* Facundo Quiroga) was compared to Attila and Genghis Khan,[53] whereas at another he was reviving the retrograde dictatorships of Louis XI and Oliver Cromwell.[54] Any traveler in Rosas' Argentina would see that it was governed less like a republic, and more like the Barbary States.[55] Rosas himself was more in the mould of King Kamehameha of the Sandwich Islands, although Varela saw Rosas as getting the worst of that particular comparison.[56] Rosas would have been like Napoleon, seeking power at the cost of general devastation, but for the fact that Napoleon was, in addition to being the cause of Europe's suffering, "a colossus of intelligence, an administrative, political, military and legislative genius," whereas Rosas was not only brutal, but incompetent, having stifled commerce, reduced the laws to his personal whims, and kept the people in ignorance.[57] This particular comparison was aimed at both Britain and France, flattering the French hero, but also pointing out to the British that another Waterloo would solve

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[52] "Su Majestad Juan Manuel 1°" ... "eminentemente republicano," ... "... el Dictador asume aires de persona real, y se pone sin más ceremonia, en correspondencia personal y directa con el rey de los franceses, en el mismo tono, ni mas ni menos, que lo que puede hacerlo la reina de Inglaterra..." ... "Pero el Presidente de una República jamás enviará las felicitaciones de sus queridos hijos, porque los hijos de un Presidente son, en las repúblicas, lo mismo que los del último ciudadano." Ibid., Jul. 28, 1846, no. 237.
[53] Ibid., Apr. 25, 1846, no. 163.
[54] Ibid., Mar. 5, 1848, no. 589.
[55] Ibid., Jan. 19, 1848, no. 675.
[56] Ibid., Nov. 4, 1847, no. 614.
[57] "un coloso de intelijencia, un genio administrador y político, militar y legislador," Ibid., Dec. 21, 1846, no. 359

their problems in La Plata. Rosas' Legislative Assembly, supposedly some measure of proof of the enduring democracy in Argentina, was as absurdly corrupt as the Senate of Rome, upon having accepted the Emperor's horse into their number.[58] Rosas was, for Varela, a 16th century dictator imposing his will on the 19th century[59], the very embodiment of retrograde tyranny.

Given Varela's image of Rosas as a kind of mock-monarch, it followed naturally that he should have a court jester. "Rosas is the original, Oribe is the parody," proclaimed one early editorial.[60] In this scheme, Manuel Oribe was assigned the role of Rosas' "accursed lackey."[61] He was portrayed in *El Comercio* as a kind of Sancho Panza, loyally following his delusional master, regardless of the consequences for Uruguayans. The most brutal, xenophobic aspects of Rosas' system were imposed upon Uruguay through imitation. In the particular case cited above, this led to *L'Affaire Montoro*, the execution of four prisoners in the night and without trial so that word would not spread to foreign observers. *El Comercio* obtained a copy of the order, and published it in six languages to present it to the widest possible audience.[62] This particular incident gave Varela ample opportunity to reinforce the issues of foreignness and brutality. Cosmopolitan Montevideo, with its multi-national citizenry, embraced foreign peoples and languages, whereas Oribe and his camp, while putting on an image of tolerance, still had to execute prisoners in the night to avoid scandalizing foreigners. To Varela, this not only mirrored

[58] Ibid., Oct. 9, 1847, no. 593.
[59] Ibid., Oct. 10, 1846, no. 299.
[60] "Rosas es el original: Oribe la parodia." Ibid, Oct. 13, 1845, no. 11.
[61] "maldecido lacayo" Ibid., Mar. 28, 1846, no. 145.
[62] Ibid., Mar. 30, 1846, no. 146.

the anti-foreign attitudes prevailing in Buenos Aires under Rosas, but was a direct extension of the dictator's "American system" into Uruguay.

Oribe was not only brutal, according to Varela, but also so weak in conviction that he could not in any way escape or even resist the influence of Rosas. For Uruguay to fall entirely under the control of Oribe would be synonymous with conquest by the Argentine dictator. Oribe's competence was consistently ridiculed. At one point, Varela claimed he had the judgment of a twelve year old, and the next day, he reinforced the jester image by suggesting that, in place of the uniform of a general, the government of Oribe should award him "the bells and cap of a harlequin."[63] The weakness of Oribe relative to Rosas and his imitation of the Buenos Aires dictator were key points in Varela's polemic about *caudillismo* and independence. If Oribe was a legitimate, independent contender in an Uruguayan civil war, perfectly capable of governance and merely supported by a sympathetic ally, then the case for the defense of Montevideo became much weaker. If, however, Oribe was merely a puppet of the Rosas system, then it would be much clearer that it was the *Colorados* in Montevideo, and not Oribe and the *Blancos*, who represented Uruguayan independence. The polemical image, here as always, was carefully crafted by Varela to fit the political situation. The claim that nationalism and independence were most truly valued by the *Colorados* rather than the *Blancos*, will be analyzed in chapter three.

In addition to showing off his historical erudition and his mastery of the comparative insult, all of these rather fanciful comparisons highlighted one of Varela's

[63] "los cascabeles y el gorro de Arlequín" Ibid., Dec. 6-7, 1847, nos. 641 and 642.

fundamental arguments: Rosas' purported defense of American independence was less relevant than the reactionary social program represented by the dictatorship. To follow Rosas was to return to the past, to the servitude and barbarism of Spanish colonial society, and to embrace the worst models of historical and contemporary tyranny. Varela acknowledged that some of these comparisons were somewhat bizarre, but defended them, in one case in a comparison between Rosas and the Queen of Madagascar: "For as ridiculous as this comparison appears... the principles of Rosas, his doctrine and his practices, are the same as those of uncultured savages, who are not a part of the union of civilization..."[64] In his view, the nations of the civilized world formed a natural unity against "savagery." By invoking this language, Varela not only emphasized, once again, that it was the obligation of the Europeans to support Montevideo against Rosas, but he also subverted one of the principal slogans of Rosas and Oribe. Every letter, newspaper article and decree from Buenos Aires and the Cerrito included the stock phrase *Mueran a los salvajes Unitarios*, death to the savage Unitarians. Varela rendered this Federalist slogan ironic by associating their actions with the natives of Madagascar, who, from the viewpoint of an 1840s South American liberal, would have been considered savages.

El Comercio consistently argued that Rosas distorted, manipulated and even outright falsified historical facts to political ends. Varela was especially horrified by what he saw as the indoctrination of the youth through the false teaching of history. The propaganda of the Rosas government was evident from a glance at the subjects for a course in history and geography, with "fables," Varela wrote, being taught to children "as

[64] "Por ridícula que esta comparación aparezca... los principios de Rosas, su doctrina y sus prácticas, son las mismas de los salvajes incultos, que no pertenecen al grémio de la civilización..." Ibid., Oct. 21, 1845, no. 18.

historical truths." The list included such remarkable topics as "Narrating the three most notable eras of General Rosas," and the "Association of the rebel party with the invader Rivera, the disastrous scourge of the Oriental Republic – With the assistance of the French navy, overthrew D. Manuel Oribe from his seat of authority as legal President of the state." Varela and his fellow exiles were treated no better, and the children were to be instructed about the "Efforts and intrigues of the Unitarian party, who, always beaten and overthrown, came in the end to seek their last refuge in unlucky Montevideo" as well as their "criminal intent to bring to our soil a war of conquest, having negotiated a cruel European intervention."[65] Varela himself was the target of the last comment, having been the last emissary from Montevideo sent to Europe prior to the intervention. For Varela, unsurprisingly, this list had self-evident implications for the quality and veracity of the teaching of history under Rosas. He feared that crude propaganda combined with vain flattery of the dictator would result in the corruption of the youth.

This purported manipulation of history did not end at the teaching of schoolchildren, however. One of the major historical issues Varela had with the Rosas government was its interpretation of the May Revolution of 1810, the seminal event to which both sides of the conflict traced their origins, albeit very differently. For Varela, the basic legacy of the May Revolution was one of progress. "These goals," wrote Varela in his first May 25 issue, in 1846, "summed up in their simplest expression, are none other than improving the political, civil and social condition of these peoples [of the La

[65] "fábulas" ... "como verdades históricas" ... "Narrar las tres épocas más notables del General Rosas" ... "Asociación del partido rebelde al intruso Rivera, funesto azote de la República Oriental – Con el auxilio de las fuerzas marítimas francesas derrocan de la silla del mando al Presidente legal del Estado, D. Manuel Oribe." ... "Esfuerzos e intrigas del bando Unitario, que siempre vencido y derrotado, viene por fin a buscar su última guardia en la infeliz Montevideo" ... "criminal intento de atraer a nuestro suelo la guerra de conquista, habiendo neociado una cruel intervencion Europea." Ibid., Aug. 6, 1846, no. 245.

Plata region]..." The May revolution represented the promise of a transformed society, and those who worked towards social progress were the agents of that transformation, and therefore the inheritors of the May 25th legacy. The dictatorship represented the complete abandonment of such principles, according to Varela. As seen in the quote at the beginning of this chapter, Rosas was portrayed as the very opposite of the idealists of the May revolution, someone who would lead the region to a subjugation "worse than the colonial one."[66] In the great teleology of 19th century liberalism, the *caudillo* was the embodiment of the step backwards, the return to a more brutal time. Rosas, as the most successful *caudillo* of his age, was therefore portrayed as the greatest opponent of progress, which, even if inevitable, could be held back temporarily, to the detriment of society.

Varela was not alone in expressing such views. One of the major intellectual and political figures of the defense, Manuel Herrera y Obes, wrote a series of polemical articles for the Montevidean newspaper *El Conservador*. His arguments were met, from the other side of the walls, in *El Defensor de la Independencia Americana*, by Bernardo Berro. The resulting debate was titled "*El Caudillo y la Revolución Americana: Polémica.*" Herrera y Obes shared Varela's views about the Rosas dictatorship and *caudillismo* generally; this particular argument was printed to justify one of the defense's most controversial decisions, the exile of General Rivera. The philosophical framework of anti-*caudillismo*, however, was essentially identical. The cultural duality that Sarmiento proposed, and Varela consistently invoked, that of civilization against

[66] "Esos fines, resumidos en su más simple expresión, no fueron otros que mejorar la condición política, civil, y social de estos pueblos..." ... "peor que el colonial." Ibid., May 25, 1846, no. 186.

barbarism, formed the cornerstone of Herrera y Obes' argument. All *caudillos*, regardless of their allegiance, formed one side, the side of the colonial past, the cultural backwardness that the *doctores* sought to escape. "Rivera, Lavalleja, Oribe, Rosas... are nothing but the expression of the society in which they exist."[67] Society required change in order to become civilized, and yet resistance to that change was a social inevitability because of rural ignorance. The past posed a very real danger of enveloping the present, and the *caudillo* was both the symbol of this danger and its agent.

This reactionary tendency had, for Herrera y Obes, several notable features. First, its roots lay in the Spanish heritage of violent conquest. "We have been educated by Spain. By Spain that has written the pages of its history with the point of its sword; a warrior people par excellence, that when it had no foreign peoples to fight with, put a sword in each hand and tore apart its own members, so as not to lose the custom of fighting... we have their blood in the veins..."[68] Thus, there were two principles at war in America: that of the revolution, trying to escape this legacy, and the reaction, trying to maintain it. The city, meaning not only Montevideo but also the entire concept of the civilized, urban space, represented the revolution. It was the site where enlightened concepts, emerging essentially from Europe, could flow into America, slowly overcoming its barbarous Hispanic heritage. On the other side, the stronghold of the reaction was the countryside, where ignorance and backwardness led to a rejection of the

[67] "Rivera, Lavalleja, Oribe, Rosas... no son sin embargo sino la expresión de la sociedad en que figuran." Berro and Herrera y Obes, *Caudillismo,* 5.

[68] "Fuimos educado por la España. Por la España que con la punta de su espada ha escrito las páginas de su historia; el pueblo guerrero por excelencia, que cuando no ha tenido pueblos extraños con quienes combatir, se ha puesto un sable en cada mano y se ha hecho pedazos sus miembros, por no perder la costumbre de batirse... tenemos su sangre en las venas..." Ibid., 8.

city's civilizing influence. Without even realizing their own function, the *caudillos* were the reactionary force, representatives of the inevitable opposition of the rural masses.[69]

The argument Herrera y Obes presented was that, to oppose a *caudillo*, no matter which, was to support the cause of civilization. It was this principle that he used to justify the exile of Rivera. The *caudillo* and former president had once been the best hope for the defeat of Rosas and Oribe, and therefore a *de facto* ally. The loss of his military forces, however, led to increasingly low tolerance for his political personalism. The *doctores* found him to be insufficiently devoted to the idealistic aspects of the cause; he was also, quite problematically, willing to bargain with Rosas and Oribe, abandoning the Unitarian exiles and the liberal defenders of Montevideo to the mercy of their opponents. The exile of Rivera would not only be an ideological victory, as the end of the association of the defense with an infamous *caudillo*. It also gave political power to the *doctores* themselves. Even before the exile of General Rivera, members of the *doctores* faction controlled most major government positions. Joaquín Suárez, a relative moderate, was president, but more firebrand liberals held important posts under him: Melchor Pacheco y Obes was Minister of War, Andrés Lamas as Political Chief (*Jefe Político*), his father Luis Lamas as Chief of Police, and so on down the list. Many of the members of the *Sociedad Nacional* that overthrew Rivera went on to form the *Asemblea de Notables*, the Assembly of Notables that was to be, in the words of Herrera y Obes, "the centre of a true revolution." Varela also worked behind the scenes against Rivera, but, as an Argentine, he kept away from official positions in favour of Uruguayan *doctores*.[70] The domestic

[69] Ibid., 9.
[70] "el centro de una verdadera revolución." Pivel Devoto, *Partidos Políticos*, 151-160.

struggle against *caudillismo* was both ideologically justified and politically convenient, as the exile of Rivera led directly to the ascension of the *doctores* to direct control over the Montevidean government.

For Herrera y Obes, the military struggle gave shape to the ideological struggle, writing that "Men arm themselves to resist a foreign army; and, without knowing it, they arm themselves with ideas to resist force; the city to resist the countryside."[71] The people of the city emerged in the time of the siege as a new kind of citizen, representative of a transforming social reality. They were more advanced than the Hispanic-influenced rural culture, with its barbaric *caudillismo* and its xenophobic rejection of civilized values. This generation was, for Herrera y Obes, representative of Montevideo itself, not only as the site of contact with Europe, but as the crucible in which liberals were forced to defend their beliefs, fortifying them with arms, and, in a sense, purifying them through conflict. This belief, for the *doctores*, gave Montevideo and its inhabitants a guiding role in the future of the nation. *Caudillismo* was rejected, as "No man has been called Hero inside the city, converted into a battlefield for five years, but all the world has called the City Heroic."[72] The people of Montevideo, in their entirety, were to be the vanguard of civilization and progress. Of course, the *Blancos*, through *El Defensor de la Independencia Americana*, rejected and mocked this concept. They consistently portrayed Melchor Pacheco y Obes, the military leader of the defense and cousin of Herrera y Obes, as a crazed, bloodthirsty fool with Napoleonic delusions, a parody *caudillo*. But,

[71] "Se armaron hombres para resistir a un ejército extranjero; y, sin saberlo, se armaron con ellos las ideas para resistir a la fuerza; la ciudad para resistir al campo." Berro and Herrera y Obes, 16.
[72] "A ningún hombre se le ha llamado Héroe dentro de la ciudad convertida en campo de batalla por cinco años, pero todo el mundo ha llamado Heroica a la Ciudad." Ibid., 17.

according to Herrera y Obes, personalism had been exiled with Rivera. It was Montevideo as a society that was the protagonist in the *Guerra Grande*.

Perhaps the best summation of the ambitions of the *doctores* was given by Herrera y Obes: "Imagine that the enemy army is defeated; and what then can you make out?; the prestige of the Capital, that is to say the illustrious part of the Nation, delivered to all the classes of the Republic; the reign of intelligence and of the law, dominant over material force and the despotism of the caudillo; the principle of democracy building bridges across the ocean to give a path for European civilization, imported in its men, its books, in its industry, in every type of relation. This, precisely, is the thought of the Revolution."[73] The war was a profound struggle, relating to the whole of society and its progress. Montevideo and those who defended it were afforded a privileged place in this new order. The defeat of the *caudillo*, the natural opponent of this order, would result in a golden age, marked by all types of progress, in the mode of European liberalism. This was, in sum, the national and civilizational dream of Varela, Herrera y Obes, and the *doctores*, their vision of the potential future. It was an integrated polemical philosophy; the perceived needs of the defense of Montevideo in the immediate conflict coincided exactly with the *doctores*' progressive vision for the country, opportunism and idealism in harmony.

[73] "Figuraos vencido al ejército enemigo; y, ¿qué divisaís entonces?; el presitigio de la Capital, es decir de la parte ilustrada de la Nación, repartido sobre las clases todas de la República; el imperio de la inteligencia y de la ley, dominado sobre la fuerza material y el despotismo del caudillo; el principio democrático poniendo puentes sobre el océano para dar camino a la civilización europea, importada en sus hombres, en sus libros, en su industria, en sus hombres, en sus libros, en su industria, en sus relaciones de todo género. Es ése precisamente el pensamiento de la Revolución." Ibid., 14.

However, not all Uruguayan intellectuals found this romantic liberal ideal appealing, or that Montevideo was necessarily the site of civilization in Uruguay. Bernardo Berro, writing in reply in *El Defensor de la Independencia Americana*, was deeply cynical about this portrayal of the conflict. Cultural superiority, even if one were to grant it to Montevideo, was quite beside the point. Legally, Oribe was President, and the vast majority of Uruguayans supported him against the *Colorados* in Montevideo. The war was between Rivera and Oribe, with the former an ambitious usurper, and the latter the defender of law and order. That the *salvajes unitarios* claimed to be distinct from Rivera and his followers was "a miserable fiction that is impossible to sustain even with the slightest appearance of a basis... That which exists today in Montevideo... is nothing more than the continuation of this same rebellion [of Rivera], that has not received any modification whatsoever in its essential character, or in its principles, except some alterations following from divergences sustained by personal aspirations and resentments."[74] Berro argued that the *doctores* could not escape their own legacy of *caudillismo* with a handful of newspaper articles. The association of the *doctores* with Rivera undermined both the political and ideological basis for their resistance. Their cause was his cause, and even having exiled him, the basis for their revolt remained unchanged, and therefore illegal.

Berro also attacked the claims by Herrera y Obes that the entire society of Montevideo was somehow united by ideology and civilization. The *doctores*, far from

[74] "una ficción miserable imposible de sostenerse ni con la más leve apariencia de fundamento... Lo que existe hoy en Montevideo... no es más que la continuación de esa misma rebelión, que no ha recibido modificación ninguna en su carácter esencial, y en su principios, sino algunas alteraciones procedentes de divergencias suscitadas por las aspiraciones y resentimientos personales." Ibid., 82-83.

being the civilized vanguard of society, squabbled like children. They were, for Berro, every bit as ambitious and personalist as they accused the *caudillos* of being, and moreover were hypocrites for claiming otherwise. The ideology of liberalism, anti-*caudillismo*, and civilization progress was, for Berro and the *Blancos*, merely a screen behind which the *doctores* could hide their manipulations. The legacy of independence had been misinterpreted in their idealistic, romantic dreams: "The 25th of May is converted into a deity to which they give attributes of their own invention."[75] Having perversely interpreted the Revolution as inviting European culture (and, in this case, their navies as well) rather than defending American independence from Europe, the *doctores* were in philosophical limbo, inventing principles and applying them at their political convenience. For Berro, America and Europe shared the same civilizational basis, writing that "the elements and principles of its [America's] socialization, in the main, are the same as those of Europe."[76] Civilization had triumphed over barbarism in Europe in the times of Rome, and that this heritage was shared equally by America.[77] The intervention was therefore unjustifiable on the grounds of civilizaton, and represented nothing but a threat to independence.

The real struggle, for Berro, was "that of knowledge against ignorance and worry."[78] The Spanish colonial experience had left the colony "degraded in its absolute dependence on metropolitan dominance, oppressed under a cruel despotism and deprived

[75] "El 25 de mayo es convertido en una deidad a la que dan atributos de su invención." Berro and Herrera y Obes, 85-86.
[76] "los elementos y principios de su sociabilidad, en lo principal, son los mismos que los de la Europa." Ibid., 128-129.
[77] Ibid., 130.
[78] "la del saber con la ignorancia y la preocupación." ... "[d]egradada en su absoluta dependencia del dominio metropolitano, oprimida bajo un despotismo cruel, y privada de todo progreso moral y material..." Ibid.

of all moral and material progress..." However, this hardly represented a good reason to invite a new metropolis into the nation. Indeed, it was a strong argument against European intervention, as it could result in a return to dependency. This was the other side of the concept of the city, urbanity representing the despotic metropolis in Europe, through its agents in Montevideo. To support the influx of European influence was, for Berro, not to support the cause of civilization, but rather to return to colonial subjugation. The idea of Montevideo as the champion of civilization against the barbarism of the countryside was, for Berro a propagandistic sham. He believed that his writings demonstrated that "this struggle has not existed, and that it is a fiction which the savage Unitarians have grabbed onto in order to defend their antinational position."[79] The struggle was over the nation, not civilization, and the *Colorados* in Montevideo had chosen the wrong side. Whether considering Uruguayans, such as Herrera y Obes, or Argentine exiles, with Varela being the example given, the defenders of Montevideo were simply anarchists, the detritus of a failed rebellion defending no worthwhile principle whatsoever.

Berro saw through the rather propagandistic attempt by the *doctores* to reclassify the conflict as an epic struggle over civilization. His interpretation was, for the most part, adopted by Juan Pivel Devoto, who wrote that "The *Guerra Grande* was not a war between civilization and barbarism, but rather between Uruguayans who aspired to nationalize the country and define its borders against those who, attracted by the splendour of liberal ideas, lent themselves, without intending to, to sustaining situations

[79] "esa lucha no ha existido, y que es una ficción a que se han asido los salvajes unitarios para defender la posición antinacional." Ibid., 132.

created by factors foreign to our organization and our interests."[80] While the epithets about savage Unitarians has been, by this point in the historiography, dropped, the conservatism and national focus remain. The *doctores* were still, for Pivel Devoto, idealistic but not realistic, whereas the *Blancos* represented the pragmatic, law-abiding core of the nation.

Returning to Berro, however, there was one notable omission in his reply to Herrera y Obes that indicated how he himself was being selective with his arguments. Nowhere did he mention Juan Manuel Rosas or the presence of the Argentine forces auxiliary to Oribe. By restricting the terms of his argument to Uruguay, Berro claimed a superior nationalist position. The *salvages unitarios* (the *Blancos* usually referred to the defense by the name of the Argentine political party) were portrayed as foreigners, in league with European colonizers. Uruguayans, then, played the part of the legitimate local inhabitants, whose interests had been swept aside by the ambitions of a handful of elites, trying to establish themselves in power through the rebellion of the then-defeated General Rivera. Had he focused on Rosas, as the *doctores* did, Berro would have substantially undermined his argument that the *Blancos* were Uruguayans, fighting against usurpers and foreigners. Rosas' reputation as a despot who murdered political enemies would have forced a reconsideration of just how "civilized" the *Blanco* forces were, given such an ally. While *El Defensor* regularly defended the Buenos Aires

[80] "La Guerra Grande no habría sido una lucha entre la civilizacion y la barbarie, sino entre los orientales que aspiraron a nacionalizar el país y su política y a definir sus fronteras, contra los que, atraídos por el brillo de las ideas liberales se prestaron, sin habérselo propuesto, a sostener situaciones creadas por factores ajenos a nuestra organización y a nuestros intereses." Pivel Devoto, *Partidos Políticos*, 152-153.

dictator, Berro, perhaps seeing the potential vulnerability in his argument, left Rosas, and thus the major example of *caudillismo*, out of the picture.

For both Varela and Herrera y Obes, two of the most influential *doctores*, the political situation was clear. The progression of barbarism to civilization, through social development in culture, economy, and ideas, was the cause of the city, the locus of civilization. European culture would pass through Montevideo into the countryside, overturning the barbaric legacy of the Spanish colonial era. That legacy, however, was defended by the *caudillos*, the violent representatives of the worst elements of the past. Rosas was the purest expression of this system, but far from the only: Oribe, the "jester" of Rosas, was a lesser copy of his master; Rivera, despite having begun the war on the correct side, suffered from the same faults as his opponents as an inevitable consequence of being a *caudillo*. When faced with this surge of reaction, the true defenders (in their own minds) of the legacy of the May 25th 1810 revolution fought, not as individuals, but as a progressing society, to defend Montevideo, the last stronghold of civilization in La Plata. Their opponents derided this philosophy as self-serving romanticism, a poetic gloss on crass opportunism. While critics like Bernardo Berro had solid points against the *doctores*, they also did not tell the entire story. If expediency seemed to dictate the actions of the *Colorado* faction, it is worth remembering that their cause was increasingly desperate. To the *doctores*, civilization was real, its progress their cause, and the *caudillo* its enemy.

Chapter Two: The War in the Press

"To doubt now the power of the press to move the moral world is like disbelieving in the power of steam in the mechanical order..."

-*El Comercio del Plata*, November 25, 1846, no. 338[81]

"It is an observation a thousand times repeated that the periodical press of each country is a sure indicator of the nature of its political and civil institutions, and of the grade of culture of its inhabitants."

-*El Comercio del Plata*, May 24, 1847, no. 480[82]

In this chapter, I intend to give a brief overview of the newspaper *El Comercio del Plata* during its run under the editorship of Florencio Varela, its first editor. This will be followed by an assessment of the ideology of journalism expressed in the paper, its meaning, and role in the larger situation. The elementary questions one might ask of a newspaper help to place it in its time and locale, and attach it to the broader political, military and ideological conflict of the *Guerra Grande*. Beginning on the first of October, 1845, and running until May 20, 1848, the day after the murder of Varela, *El Comercio*

[81] "Dudar hoy del poder de la imprenta para mover el mundo moral sería como no creer en la fuerza del vapor en el órden mecánico..."
[82] "Es una observación mil veces repetida la de que la imprenta periódica de cada país es un indicante seguro de la naturaleza de sus instituciones políticas y civiles, y del grado de cultura de sus habitantes."

spanned three crucial years of Uruguayan history, at the heart of the *Guerra Grande* and the Anglo-French intervention. The issue of when is simple; other questions are deeper. Why was the paper written? How did Florencio Varela view his role as a newspaper editor? What was the intended audience, or was the paper directed at multiple audiences? What were its political affiliations? How did the content reflect these issues? What can we learn from the tone of the language used? The newspaper itself contains answers to many of these questions, in the words of the editor. And, in turn, those answers generate yet more information as we consider their context as part of the larger conflict.

For the 19th century intellectual world, the power of the printed word was vast. Control over local and international opinion was contested by all sides of the intellectual world. This was especially true of Argentina and Uruguay during the 1840s. Both sides of the ongoing conflict published polemical newspapers. From Buenos Aires, editors supportive of, and supported by, the dictatorial system of Juan Manuel de Rosas published the official propaganda of the Argentine government. Of the Buenos Aires press, three stand out as being particularly relevant: *La Gaceta Mercantil*, *El Archivo Americano*, and the *British Packet*. A similar press at *El Cerrito* encampment of their Uruguayan Blanco allies published a similar, although much less sophisticated paper entitled *El Defensor de la Independencia Americana*. On the other side of the war, within the walls of Montevideo, were the Uruguayan liberal *Colorados*, and their Unitarian allies, in explicit or de facto exile from Argentina. While a great many papers, mostly short lived, were published in Montevideo during the defense, *El Comercio del Plata*

stands out as the most remarkable, in terms not only of ideologically representative polemics, but as a sophisticated cultural production.

Denied their natural locale of Buenos Aires, the Argentine Generation of 1837 wrote their intellectual criticisms from exile. *El Comercio del Plata* was a cornerstone of this community-in-exile. In William H. Katra's analysis of the Generation of 1837, he described *El Comercio* as "the journalistic organ of perhaps the most lasting value during the entire decade," as well as "the clearest exposition available of the issues then at stake in the ongoing conflict in the Plata region."[83] He went on to list many of the key issues of the conflict that found their first voice in Varela's newspaper, including free navigation of the river Plate, and the need for European immigration. Varela's reputation has been consistently high among liberals throughout the historiography. Isidoro de Maria, himself a newspaperman in Montevideo during the siege, wrote, in his retrospective history of the *Guerra Grande*, "The cause of liberty and of civilization in the River Plate, had in this important publicity organ, a powerful athlete." He points out that *El Comercio* had a circulation of 400 copies, which he remarks as very high, given the poverty of the besieged city.[84] The influence of Varela as an opinion maker, both as a member of the faction of the *doctores* in Montevideo, and as a member of the Generation of 1837, was considerable.

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[83] Katra, 72.

[84] "La causa de la libertad y de la civilizacion en el Rio de la Plata, tuvo en ese importante órgano de publicidad, un atleta poderoso." Isidoro de-Maria, *Anales de la Defensa de Montevideo, 1842-1851, vol. 3* (Montevideo: Imprenta á vapor de El Ferro-carril, 1883-1887), 89.

The format of *El Comercio* was in part determined by Varela's youth in Buenos Aires, where he, along with his brother Juan Cruz and several other young liberals, worked in the newspaper business. They thrived during the dizzying era of liberal reform under Bernardino Rivadavia, but were forced to ply their trade elsewhere following the rise of Rosas, whose harsh censorship led to the burning of opposition newspapers. Varela also drew inspiration from *The Times* of London, which he had seen first-hand during his diplomatic mission to Britain during 1843. *El Comercio* was a more serious production than the previous newspapers of La Plata. Its format was clean and modern, in emulation of the European press. The paper was published six times a week, every day but Sunday, with remarkably few interruptions in the two and a half years of Varela's editorship. Its scope was much more than political propaganda. Every edition contained a variety of sections covering a wide range of interests. Foreign news began every issue, often occupying a full page or more. The topics covered were those of interest to any liberally-minded intellectual of the 1840s, and not at all restricted to South America: the Oregon question, the state of Chinese trade, the debate over the Corn Laws in Britain, the Zollverein trade union, the Mexican-American war, and so forth. This reflected the universalist outlook of the editor, representing the liberal values of global trade and a wide political field of vision. Following the news, there would often be a section devoted to official decrees of the Montevidean government, dealing with matters of policing, taxes, or the needs of the defensive situation. Occasionally, relevant official materials from other areas, notably documents on the various peace negotiations with Buenos Aires would be included, often at great length during the height of negotiations between Rosas and the intervening powers. Letters to the editor would follow when there were any.

Many of the Generation of 1837, such as Esteban Echeverría, Domingo Sarmiento, and Juan Alberdi would write to Varela on one topic or another. Although there were frequent feuds between Varela and one or another of his peers, Argentine press historian Felix Weinberg emphasizes that "in no way did they affect the respect and even esteem that they felt for the person and the works of the editor of *El Comercio del Plata*"[85]

As the title of the paper suggests, commerce played a prominent role in the content of *El Comercio*. Prices, tonnages, arrivals, and other commercial statistics were prominently displayed, usually on the third page of each issue. Occasional summary reports would be published, chronicling the total trade in Montevideo. Throughout the period of Varela's editorship at *El Comercio*, trade was considerable, despite the siege, thanks to the blockade at Buenos Aires by Britain and France. An entire section of assorted notices and advertisements on the back page dealt with a plethora of topics, ranging from English lessons to daguerreotypes, accommodations to pharmaceuticals. While I lack the materials to conduct a thorough study of the material culture of the period, the *Avisos*, the advertisements, of *El Comercio* would make a fascinating point of departure for a study of urban life in Montevideo. The profusion of European technology and material goods is clear, as part of the continuing world trade moving through the port. Whatever the commodity or service, if it was for sale, it probably found a place in the *Avisos* of *El Comercio*.

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[85] "en nada afectaban el respeto y aún aprecio que aquellos sentían por la persona y las obras del editor del *Comercio del Plata*." Felix Weinberg, "Florencio Varela ante la encrucijada política de su tiempo," in *Florencio Varela y El 'Comercio del Plata'* (Bahía Blanca: Instituto de Humanidades, Universidad Nacional del Sur: 1970), 15-16.

Cultural issues also played a prominent role in *El Comercio*. Theatre schedules were published often, with Italian operas and Spanish-language plays featuring most prominently. Poetry featured prominently, often displayed on the first page. Varela, being a poet himself and a well-known critic of poetry, published materials from many of the poets of the struggle against Rosas. Their poems were usually written along nationalistic or liberal lines, extolling the glories of the May revolution, the Uruguayan or Argentine nationality, and the terrors of the Rosas regime. Collections of poetry were prominently advertised, notably the *America Poética* collection, which featured hundreds of South American poets, including Argentine exiles like Esteban Echeverría and Uruguayans such as Andres Lamas. Humanitarian causes such as the *Sociedad Filantrópica de Damas Orientales*, the Uruguayan Ladies' Philanthropic Society, organized by Bernardina Rivera, wife of the *caudillo*, and former president, Fructuoso Rivera, were proudly displayed as examples of the humane aspect of the defense of Montevideo.

La Biblioteca del Comercio del Plata was another standard feature, an ambitious project to print a series of books along with the newspaper, included in installments. Varela himself often translated these texts, ostensibly for the purpose of enhancing the cultural life of his readership. The books printed in *La Biblioteca* were mostly non-fiction, intended for the edification of society in the absence of a more sophisticated system of publication. History and politics were the favoured topics, and much of what Varela printed was, at some level, an oblique reference to the political situation he faced. The constitutions of South America, for instance, were all released as part of this series, in part a backhanded reference to the fact that Rosas, in Varela's opinion, did not govern

with a legal constitution, or that Manuel Oribe, again according to Varela, had no legal authority under the Uruguayan constitution. However, *El Comercio* did not publish only non-fiction. The section titled *Folletín*, roughly translating to melodramatic fiction, running at the bottom of the first two pages of the paper nearly every day, printed serialized fiction. Alexander Dumas features most heavily, and although a variety of authors are represented, no fewer than seven of his translated works were published, including the first, *Revolución helvética*, and the last, *Ascanio*.

Last, we come to the ideological core of the newspaper, the editorial articles. It was through these articles that Florencio Varela expressed his political opinions. While the other aspects of the newspaper should always be kept in mind, it is these articles which shed the most light on how *El Comercio* fits into the larger political picture. Varela used this platform to create a sophisticated polemic. By expounding an editorial philosophy based in 19th century liberal values of free commerce, personal liberty and international peace, he created a philosophical framework for the struggle against Rosas that cast the conflict, for his readers both at home and abroad, in terms favorable to the defense of Montevideo, and to a *Colorado* view of the Uruguayan nation. What might have been seen initially as an Uruguayan civil war, one *caudillo* against another, became, in Varela's writing, the focus of the free, liberal, cultured world, fighting bravely against the forces of retrogressive dictatorship. The depiction of the conflict using a civilization/barbarism dichotomy, or the rejection of that dichotomy, is much discussed in the historiography. Here, I will focus on one aspect of this ideology: the use of the free press, and its associated values, as a metonym for society.

Varela's basic concept of the relationship between the press and society is clear: a free press is indicative of a free society. A dictatorship, by contrast, will inevitably resort to censorship and control over the press. Therefore, one can gauge the relative social development of a country, from a 19th century liberal perspective, by examining the state of its newspapers. Buenos Aires under Rosas was portrayed as having no independent press, with all media output being funded and controlled by the dictatorship. Montevideo, by contrast, operates under the principle of the free press, free from government interference. For Varela, this was both the social reality and a helpful polemical argument. If the readership of *El Comercio*, both locally, within the Americas and especially in Europe could be convinced of this connection between press freedom and free society, then it would strengthen the case in favour of foreign intervention. Since Varela understood foreign support to be both one of the keys to the defense of Montevideo and the most likely cause of a favourable peace, his journalism emphasized these arguments. In an article from April 9, 1847, freedom of the press was invoked as a metonym for the *mundo culto*, the cultured world. *El Comercio* itself became a kind of performance, an active demonstration of how Montevideo represented civilization against Rosas' barbarism.[86]

Similarly, the state control of the press in Buenos Aires reflected badly upon the state of their culture and society. For Varela, this connection was of considerable importance, and he made clear on the 29th of September, 1847 that "... the official press is a secure, infallible way of knowing the tendencies and the level of culture of the

[86] Varela, *Comercio*, Apr. 9, 1847, no. 444.

government that it serves."[87] If *El Comercio* was the metonym for the liberal nature of the Montevidean government, then Rosas' press was equally indicative of the dictatorial system prevailing in Buenos Aires. Varela went even further with this argument in his article of September 24, 1847.[88] Here, he claimed that it was a structural imperative of American *caudillismo* to oppose the free press, just as it is necessarily the role of that same press to oppose dictatorship and champion the cause of civilization: "The caudillo, who is a representative of a retrograde and barbarous principle, makes fun of the press, because it is the great agent of civilization; he makes fun of the opinion of foreigners, because the deprecation of that which is not of the land is the distinctive principle of uncultured peoples..." Varela here invokes the same opposition of civilization and barbarism that forms the central thesis of Domingo Sarmiento's epochal *Facundo*. It is clear where on this spectrum Rosas and his system fell; it is equally clear that, for Varela, the Montevidean cause, supporters of the free press, and European civilization fell in *together* on the opposing side. The reinforcement of the ideological ties stringing together liberals everywhere was, here as always, a primary goal for Florencio Varela and *El Comercio del Plata.*

One of the most consistent accusations made in *El Comercio* was that the press under Rosas' dictatorship was in the pay of the government. In acting as a mouthpiece for propaganda, they were violating their journalistic obligation to offer unbiased information to the public. The frequent repetition of this accusation, attached to a variety of different

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[87] "... la imprenta oficial es un medio seguro, infalible, de conocer las tendencias, y el grado de cultura del gobierno a quien sirve." Ibid., Sept. 29, 1847, no. 584.

[88] "Caudillo representante del principio retrógrado y bárbaro, se burlaba de la imprenta, porque es el gran agente de la civilización; se burlaba de la opinion del extranjero, porque el desprecio a lo que no es de la tierra es el distintivo principal de los pueblos incultos..." Ibid., Sept. 24, 1847, no. 580.

events and opinions, makes a complete listing of the evidence impractical. However, it is possible, by examining several representative articles, to give an overview of Varela's critique of the press of the Rosas system. This is made easier by Varela's basic opinion that the Buenos Aires press was a sham, with papers being nothing but propaganda, essentially identical to each other, marching in step to Rosas' tune. "In the present age of the dictatorship, the four papers that exist reduce to two;- *El Diario de la Tarde*, contracted exclusively to publishing advertisements, melodramatic stories, and one or another notices of foreign news; without political character of any type; and *La Gaceta*, *El Archivo* [*Americano*] and the *British Packet*, which really constitute one publication, in origin, in methods, in their spirit and in their objectives. The three emanate directly from the government, and are paid for by the public treasury, for official objectives." [89]

La Gaceta Mercantil, the primary commercial and opinion paper from Buenos Aires, was the most frequent target of Varela's criticisms. An early attack appeared in an editorial for January 16, 1846. The tone is clear enough from the beginning of the article: "Since the fundamental principle of the system of the Dictator is the lie, nothing irritates him more than he who throws in his face the impudence with which he turns the most well known and solemnly notorious facts upside down."[90] The article goes on to express indignation at a claim made by Felipe Arana, Rosas' foreign minister, that the press in

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[89] "En la presente época de la dictadura, los quatro periódicos que existen, se recucen a dos; -- el Diario de la Tarde, contraído exclusivamente a publicar Avisos, Folletines, y una que otra noticia del exterior; sin carácter político de ninguna clase; y la *Gaceta*, el *Archivo* [*Americano*] y el *British Packet*, que constituyen realmente una sola publicacion, por su oríjen, por sus medios, por su espíritu y por sus fines. Los tres emanan directamente del gobierno, y son costeados por el tesoro público, para objetos oficiales." Ibid., May 24, 1847, no. 480.

[90] "Como el fundamento principal del sistema del Dictador es el embuste, nada le irrita más que el que le echen en rostro la impudencia con que trastorna los hechos de más reconocida y solemne notoriedad." Ibid., Jan. 16, 1846, no. 88.

Buenos Aires was completely free, and the opinions expressed by the papers reflected the legitimate opinions of their editors. Varela, adopting the mocking tone typical of his writings on *La Gaceta*, pointed out that there had not been "a lone syllable," written in any Buenos Aires paper, that was not "most servile adulations to the Dictator." He went on to describe the tone of the press in terms of religious stereotypes, calling their work "an uninterrupted chorus of Muslim adulation," and claiming this alone would suffice to demonstrate how the Buenos Aires press is servile to Rosas.[91]

Varela's claims that *La Gaceta*, and the Buenos Aires press generally, were paid off by the dictatorship were not left undeveloped. The theme is recurrent, and he attacks the problem in more detail in a small editorial from April 14, 1846. Here, more specific accusations are brought forward that the press in Buenos Aires takes over a million pesos per year in funding. Estimating that *La Gaceta* costs the government 450,000 pesos annually, he then guesses that the figure for *El Archivo Americano*, another Rosas paper, was slightly higher still, based on the typeset and number of pages. This money, Varela claims, was used not only to distribute free copies of the propagandistic papers, but also to translate them into foreign languages to increase their audience. Using biting sarcasm to drive home the political point, Varela writes, "One cannot, therefore, estimate at less than one million [pesos] annually... that the *spontaneous* expression of the *free, national opinion* in favor of Rosas costs the treasury of Buenos Aires..." The *British Packet*, the

[91] "una sola silaba" ... "servilisimas adulaciones al Dictador" ... "coro no interrumpido de adulación musulmana" Ibid.

English-language newspaper of Buenos Aires, was treated even worse, and Varela claims it subsisted "on the scraps, on the crumbs that fall from the banquets of the powerful."[92]

This impression of the state of the press in Buenos Aires was as damning as it was accurate. John Lynch, the biographer of Rosas, confirms that all five presses in Buenos Aires were owned and operated by the government. Rosas "exerted a direct and detailed control over newspapers," through his hired journalists, notably Pedro de Angelis. A journalist from Naples who emigrated to Buenos Aires, he edited much of the Buenos Aires press for Rosas, including *La Gaceta Mercantil* and *El Archivo Americano*, among others. He became, according to Lynch, "in effect if not in name, director-general of information and propaganda." The *British Packet*, the English-language newspaper of Buenos Aires, was also "unmistakably part of the Rosas propaganda machine." Edited by the Englishman Thomas George Love, it mostly reiterated *La Gaceta*'s information, only translated.[93] Rosas' use of foreign immigrants as press agents made him vulnerable to criticism, given his ordinarily incendiary invective against foreign influences, especially in Montevideo. Varela used this to defend himself against charges of "foreignness." He pointed out that it was hypocritical of them to attack the opposing press for being under foreign influence, when Rosas himself hired foreigners to act as his press agents, such as the Italian Pedro de Angelis or the British Thomas Love.[94]

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[92] "No puede, pues, estimarse en menos de un millon annual... lo que cuesta al tesoro de Buenos Aires la expresión *espontánea* de la *libre opinión nacional* en favor de Rosas..." ... "con los desperdicios, con las migajas que caen de los banquetes de los poderosos." Ibid., Apr. 14, 1846, no. 153.
[93] John Lynch, *Argentine Dictator* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 180-183.
[94] Varela, *Comercio*, Nov. 29, 1845, no. 51.

It was not only the press within Buenos Aires that Varela accused of being in the pay of Rosas. Both in the La Plata region and in Europe, there were newspapers, according to Varela, disseminating the lies of the dictatorship in exchange for money. Among these was *El Defensor de la Independencia Americana*, published at *El Cerrito* in the besieging camp of Manuel Oribe. It was seen, at best, as a cheap imitation of the more substantial *La Gaceta Mercantil*, and at worst, as a mere mouthpiece that recycled Rosas' propaganda, scarcely edited for the Uruguayan context. Varela discussed this frequently, an early example being an editorial from October 30, 1845. He mocked the claims of Oribe being in "perfect independence from Rosas' power." *El Comercio* pointed to the similarities between two new coats of arms, one published in *La Gaceta*, and the other in *El Defensor*. "*El Defensor* could not fail in the obligation to imitate *La Gaceta*, and appears with a coat of arms almost perfectly identical to the other, which at a short distance is distinguished only in that one is Oriental and the other is Argentine; and with the title in the same identical letters that *La Gaceta* adopted.- This is the necessary way of things: the patron of Palermo [Rosas] demands submission, servile imitation, in large things as in small ones."[95]

Varela wrote a more specific attack on the close relationship between *La Gaceta* and *El Defensor* on October 28, 1846. Here, he claimed that *El Defensor* took its cues in several ways from *La Gaceta*. The "popular societies" of Rosas were copied by the Cerrito, who repeated the same arguments in favour of "dictatorial powers," only for

[95] "perfecta independencia del poder de Rosas" ... "El *Defensor* no podía faltar a la obligación de remedar a la *Gaceta*, y aparece con un escudo de armas tan perfectamente idéntico al de aquella, que a corta distancia se distingue apénas que el uno es Oriental y el otro Argentino; y con el título en las mismas idénticas letras que la *Gaceta* adoptó.-Eso está en el órden necesario de las cosas: el patron de Palermo exije sumision, imitación servil, en lo grande como en lo pequeño." Ibid., Oct. 30, 1845, no. 26.

Oribe and Uruguay, rather than Rosas and Argentina. Varela asked sarcastically "This [argument] is used by Palermo, why should it not be used here at the windmill? [Cerrito]" Varela even took a step further and claimed that, in its "intemperance and excess," *El Defensor* has even come to surpass *La Gaceta*.[96] Here we find one version, specifically dealing with the press and propaganda, of a larger argument Varela made, that Oribe and his cause were a laughable imitation of Rosas and his system. Proving the subservience of Oribe to Rosas was an essential part of Varela's argument. In order to claim that Rosas' army constituted a foreign invader, it was imperative for Varela to make the point as broadly as he could that every aspect of Oribe's system was merely an extension of the Buenos Aires dictatorship. This argument will be dealt with more specifically in chapter three.

The contrast between the free press of Montevideo and the Rosas-governed newspapers of Buenos Aires was made abundantly clear in an editorial from August 20, 1846. Varela wrote that "In Buenos Aires there is not, in reality, a periodic press, understanding by that what the whole world understands by it...," defining a free press as a tribunal of free discussion for political, commercial, religious and philosophical debates essential to civilization, as well as a repository for facts of all kinds. That this was perhaps not exactly what the "whole world" believes the press to be speaks to his intended audience; the "whole world" here refers to his concept of the "mundo culto," the cultured world, basically synonymous with the liberal world. By contrast, in Buenos Aires, "The papers that they publish each day... do not contain anything but a direct or

[96] "sociedades populares" ... "facultades extraordinarias" ... "Esto se usa por Palermo, ¿porque no se ha de usar aquí en el molino de viento?" ... "destemplanza y ... desmaño" Ibid., Oct. 28, 1846, no. 314.

indirect defense of the person and the personal system of Rosas." In case the connection of these ideas to their universal, civilizational context was not yet clear enough, Varela makes it explicit, in referring specifically to foreign papers publishing articles from Rosas' press for money: "... his doctrine [Rosas'] is so monstrous, his language so excessive, so insolent, so contrary to the ideas received in the daily press of *cultured peoples*, that even the papers which serve him for money do not dare to dirty themselves by admitting such productions."[97] (Italics mine.)

Having so described his opponents, Varela then turned to the Montevidean press as an exemplar of free press values. "In Montevideo, as in all other States where they write against this same idea [of state press control], it occurs entirely opposite."[98] Varela emphasized again the connection between Montevideo and other free countries, referring not only to Britain and France, but to Brazil, Chile, the United States, and anywhere else liberal writings had an audience. Since those values were, in large part, the ties that bound people to the cause of the defense of Montevideo, the reinforcement of those ties was a priority in *El Comercio*. Reinforcing this point, Varela expounded the major difference between the press of Rosas and the press of his enemies. For Rosas' papers, it was fair, according to Varela, to say that the opinion of any one publication reflected on the whole of the dictatorial system, since the press took their orders from the dictator. For

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[97] "En Buenos-Aires no hay, en realidad, prensa periódica, entendiendo por tal lo que en todo el mundo se entiende..." ... "Los papeles que se publican cada día... no contienen otra cosa que la defensa directa o indirecta de la persona y del sistema personal de Rosas." ... "... su doctrina es tan mostruosa, su lenguaje tan desmedido, tan insolente, tan contrario a las ideas recibidas en la prensa diaria de los pueblos cultos, que aun los papeles que le sirven por dinero no se atreven a mancharse admitiendo semejantes producciones." Ibid., Aug. 20, 1846, no. 256.

[98] "En Montevideo, como en los *otros Estados* donde se escribe contra esa misma idea, sucede todo lo contrario." Ibid.

the Montevidean press, however, there was an "infinite variety of writings,"[99] and that to attribute the opinion of any one to the whole cause of the defense was absurd. On one level, this served to reinforce the basic distinctions Varela was making, that Rosas' dictatorial system was odious and repressive, and that the besieged Montevideo represented the focus of liberty in the region. From another standpoint, it was a rhetorical convenience. If all Argentine papers were directly responsible to Rosas, then he could be held accountable for any errors, contradictions or absurdities. As revealing such contradictions was one of Varela's basic methods for attacking Rosas, this was not a trivial point. The converse defensive principle also held true. If a Montevidean paper was caught in an embarrassing error, it would not necessarily reflect on the entire cause, but only on the individual editor. By emphasizing this point, Varela was both selling his view of the Buenos Aires dictatorship and adopting a position of tactical advantage in the polemical conflict.

Florencio Varela also emphasized that Rosas had agents in the foreign press, and that therefore articles could not necessarily be trusted simply because of their European origins. The most relevant of such papers was the Parisian paper *La Presse*, whose La Plata correspondent Varela considered to be in the pay of the Buenos Aires dictator. He made this accusation explicitly in the July 3, 1846 edition, beginning his editorial column with "*La Presse*, as everyone knows, is the newspaper of Rosas in Paris: its Rio de la Plata correspondent is also the editor of *El Defensor de Oribe*, and this suffices in order to judge the level of independence and of truth that he communicates to the paper in

[99] "infinita variedad de escritos" Ibid., Apr. 9, 1847, no. 444.

Paris."[100] Since *El Defensor* itself is, for Varela, a cheap copy of *La Gaceta*, which in turn prints only what Rosas authorizes, there is a direct propaganda link between the dictator in Buenos Aires and *La Presse* in Paris.

Varela went beyond merely making the link between Rosas and *la Presse*, and used the connection to strengthen his anti-Rosas rhetoric. The editorial of the 5th of January, 1846 examined the motivations of *la Presse*, connecting them not only to Rosas, but to his purported ambitions to conquer Uruguay, rendering it a part of his Argentine Confederation. He described an argument of *la Presse* that Europeans had no ability to defeat Rosas, that his *gaucho* armies were essentially invulnerable, and that in any case all the people of South America loved Rosas. Accepting this, alongside the mercantile advantages of obtaining a solid trading ally in Rosas, *la Presse* came to the conclusion that Uruguay should be subsumed into Argentina, solving once and for all the La Plata question. Varela wrote, "In this way they declare overtly and boldly the whole of the thoughts and plans of Rosas. *La Presse* sustains that the Oriental State should not be independent... that it reincorporate to the grand confederation of South America, just as Texas has to the grand confederation of the North..."[101] Varela, of course, dismissed this argument entirely, asking what possible advantage to commerce could accrue from union with Argentina or Brazil that would not also be the case as an independent country. He ends his article asking *El Defensor* and the partisans of Oribe to check their love of Uruguay against what he puts forward as a naked admission of Rosas' ambitions of

[100] "*La Presse*, como todos saben, es el diario de Rosas en París: su corresponsal del Río de la Plata... es el mismo editor del *Defensor de Oribe*, y eso basta para que se juzgue del grado de independencia y de verdad de lo que comunica al papel de Paris." Ibid., Jul. 3, 1846, no. 216.

[101] "Ahí declarando abierta y paladinamente todo entero el pensamiento y los planes de Rosas. La Presse sostiene que el Estado Oriental no debe ser independente... que se reincorpore a la gran confederacion de Sudamírica, como Tejas a la gran confederacion del Norte..." Ibid., Jan. 5, 1846, no. 79.

conquest. The not-entirely-subtle undertone was that, to any reader, Uruguayan or otherwise, who prized the idea of free nations being safe from conquest, there was an obligation to support Montevideo against Rosas and Oribe.

Having made accusations that his opponents were mercenary journalists who owed their existence to their political master and not to any philosophical notion of journalism, Varela also had to defend his own newspaper from the same charge. *El Comercio del Plata* was regularly referred to as "*El Comercio de Lafone*" in the Federalist press, the accusation being that the paper received its funding from Samuel Lafone, a wealthy British merchant with ties to the Montevidean government. The charge was also made, almost constantly, that Varela was simply a mouthpiece for the intervening governments of Britain and France, or for their respective consuls, William Gore Ouseley and Baron Deffaudis. Varela rebuts these arguments on April 13th, 1847 with a pithy table, showing, rather sarcastically, the enormous contributions of his supposed patrons: from Lafone, one subscription, worth 3 pesos per month; Ouseley and the British delegation, two subscriptions, worth 6 pesos; from the French, another 3 pesos; from the Montevideo customs commission, five subscriptions, 15 pesos total. All told, according to Varela, *El Comercio* receives a total of 27 pesos per month from those accused of being his patrons, amounting to nothing more than the total cost of their respective subscriptions.[102]

However, he did not merely rest at absolving himself of these charges, but turned the issue on its head, taking the opportunity to excoriate his opponents, writing that "the

[102] Ibid., Apr. 13, 1847, no. 447.

case is obvious. Writers who do not publish one line of their own accord; who are literally employees of the government... write, not what they themselves think, but what they are told to think, cannot comprehend that there are other writers who publish only the expression of their consciences and their judgement..." Throughout the article, he extended this criticism both to *La Gaceta* and *El Defensor*, claiming that "they sell not only their pen, but also their intellect and judgement..."[103] This attack was clearly aimed at those outside the region, to rhetorically ask the European reader: Whom do you support? The side of honest journalists or the side that resorts to paid propagandists? In this way, Varela implied the connection between his performance as a journalist and the broader conflict.

A temperate, reasoned style of editorial writing was of crucial importance to the image of culture he was attempting to project. One source of great pride for Varela was his reliance on "hechos," facts, to prove his case about the Rosas dictatorship, rather than rumors or insults. Varela was careful to emphasize the importance of judging political issues by the facts, without launching personal attacks. "We try... to be moderate, just, tolerant, even with our most caustic enemies... we try to always find in the facts themselves, not in our own theories, the explanation of their conduct, and the proof of our accusations."[104] There is a measure of gentlemanliness in this concept of journalism. The facts, so we are told, are meant to speak for themselves, deflecting criticism from

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[103] "la cosa es natural. Escritores que no imprimen una linea por su propia cuenta; que son literalmente empleados del gobierno... escriben, no lo que piensan ellos, sinó que les mandan pensar, no pueden comprender que haya otros escritores que nada publiquen sinó la expresion de su conciencias y de su juicio..." ... "venden, no solo su pluma, sino tambien su inteligencia y su juicio..." Ibid.

[104] "Nos esforzamos... por ser moderados, justos, tolerantes, aun para nuestros enemigos más acerbos... procuramos siempre buscar en sus propios hechos, no en teorias nuestras, la explicación de su conducta, y la prueba de nuestras acusaciones." Ibid., Feb. 4, 1848, no. 688.

Varela's own obvious Unitarian liberal orientation by deferring to a higher concept of objective journalism. As to whether Varela himself lived up to this, or was merely putting on a polite mask to hide a darker propagandistic purpose, this is an open question. The judgement of Antonio Zinny, in his 1883 overview of the press in Uruguay, was that *El Comercio* was the most meritous newspaper of the age, not only for its illustrious editors, but for "language completely devoid of insult or diatribe," which he contrasts sharply with the press of *El Cerrito* and Buenos Aires.[105] Obviously, his enemies at *El Cerrito* thought rather differently, as will be discussed later. It suffices, for the purpose of this study, to say that, deeply felt or merely faked, this attempt to provide a moderate, factual style was a crucial part of the appeal to ideological sympathizers.

There was a pair of notable examples throughout the course of the paper of this emphasis on polite journalism. The first was a discussion with the Brazilian newspaper, *La Gaceta Oficial do Imperio do Brazil.* An article had appeared in that paper criticizing some of Varela's articles on the topic of Oribe selling cattle through the Brazilian province of Rio Grande do Sul. Although the content of these articles is fairly unimportant for our purposes here, the reaction from *El Comercio* is of interest. Varela wrote in a February 3, 1848 article: "It is a very honourable homage, and conforms to the spirit of the representative and constitutional system... defending, by way of their official organ, their acts... which have been the object of censure from the foreign press; since in this censure they have kept to the forms and conditions of a legitimate discussion. This

[105] "el lenguaje completamente ageno del insulto y de la diatriba," Zinny, 74.

always honours the government which acts in this way."[106] The contrast to Varela's opinion of Rosas and his press system could scarcely have been greater. While Varela, on a regular basis, criticized the Brazilian government on a number of topics, such as these cross-border sales, or the continuing slave trade, he emphasized the moderate and reasoned tone of the discussion as a sign of both peoples being cultured. In this way, the links of liberal, free press thought extended not only inwards to Montevideo and outwards to Europe, but also to Brazil.

It is worth noting that Varela also regularly wrote articles pointing out Brazil's interest in opposing Rosas; by including them in the category of civilized people, despite their disagreements, Varela was in part trying to solicit their assistance against Rosas. Varela's use of flattering language with Brazil was part of his overall vision to win the *Guerra Grande*. The natural result of Rosas' ambitions, from Varela's perspective, was war with Brazil. He emphasized that the conquest of Uruguay would put Rosas at Brazil's borders, and that they had common cause with the defense of Montevideo in protecting the rule of constitutional governance against military dictatorship. Allying with the liberal monarchy of Brazil was clearly preferable, to Varela, to defeat by the forces of Rosas. While Brazilian neutrality frustrated Varela during his lifetime, his efforts, along with the diplomatic wrangling of fellow liberal Andrés Lamas, paid dividends. In 1851 they

[106] "Es un homenaje muy honroso, y conforme al espíritu del sistema representativo y constitucional... defendiendo, por medio de su órgano oficial, actos suyos... que han sido objeto de censura de la prensa extranjera; desde que en esa censura se hayan guardado los formas y las condiciones de una legítima discusión. Eso honra siempre al gobierno que lo hace." Varela, *Comercio*, Feb. 3, 1848, no. 687.

succeeded in procuring Brazilian military intervention, resulting in a victorious end to the *Guerra Grande* for the defense of Montevideo.[107]

The second example of Varela using gentlemanly language to create a tone of moderation and reasonableness was a series of open letters to Lord Howden, the British plenipotentiary during 1848. Howden had been entrusted with negotiating a peace with Rosas and Oribe, one separate from France, and if necessary, bypassing the government in Montevideo entirely. The stakes for the defense of Montevideo were high indeed at this point. The British Navy was crucial in maintaining the blockade of Buenos Aires, supplying firepower to the defense, and intimidating Oribe's forces into inaction. British withdrawal would have seemed likely to seriously damage the military, commercial and diplomatic situation of the defense, possibly to the point of total defeat. Yet, the tone of the letters was polite to the point of reverence, even as the content was deeply critical. Howden was addressed as "Milord," in English, throughout the letter, and Varela used the formal *vosotros* as the referent pronoun. Varela used rhetoric to draw attention to his points without breaking tone, beginning his letter by pointing out that, in England, the press was given the freedom to attack any institution, whether by reason or by satire. Thus, Varela's letter had a kind of double-edge to it, polite to the point of flattery on one side, but on the other, prepared to defend its criticism. Varela invoked the words of the British to describe their own dealings, that they were "fair and honourable," and asked

[107] For a brief description of Varela's writing on the issue of Brazil, see Nora Avale de Iurman, "Rosas, Varela y la Política Internacional Americana," in Weinberg, 250-254.

Lord Howden to compare this concept to the treaty being negotiated, which, to Varela, heavily favoured the Rosas government.[108]

In the end, the letter had little effect on Howden's negotiations, as he was under orders from Lord Palmerston to end the intervention, and not sufficiently susceptible to the ideological allure of the Montevidean cause to alter his judgment.[109] He did, however, write a letter in reply, praising Varela for the civilized style of his argument, writing in English: "You will naturally excuse a person in my position from entering into a discussion upon what I conceive, right or wrong, to be my duty; but, as these letters are written in a gentlemanly style, in perfect good taste, and in that fair and legitimate tone of discussion to which the acts of a public servant are justly amenable, I can assure you that I have read them with that consideration to which they have an undoubted claim."[110] To some extent, this revealed the limits of Varela's influence. Appeal to a common ideology, in a common language, was not capable, in this circumstance, of overcoming the *realpolitik* interests of the British Empire. However, it is clear Varela at least struck some kind of chord with Howden, and that he was, at least on the surface, using the right dialect for obtaining influence with the European powers.

The use of diplomatic language to gain favour with the intervening powers was not restricted to Varela, however. He was aware that the rhetoric of Rosas was also crafted to resonate with foreign audiences. In an editorial column for the 19th of

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[108] Varela, *Comercio*, Jul. 18, 1847, no. 524. The second letter appears the following day.
[109] This point is not as obvious as it sounds. The previous plenipotentiary, William Gore Ouseley, certainly stretched his official instructions, almost to the point of violating them, whenever it was convenient for the defense of Montevideo. It was this problem which led to his being replaced by Lord Howden.
[110] "Esos son siempre los manejos de Rosas." Varela, *Comercio*, Jul. 21, 1847, no. 529

September, 1846, Varela made the argument that, while *La Gaceta* contains language carefully tailored to assuage the outside world, the press in the inner provinces, no less controlled by Rosas, was substantially more incendiary. This article was published during the Hood negotiations, one of the more direct attempts by Britain to find a reputation-saving way to end the intervention. Varela wrote that, through *La Gaceta*, Rosas refers to "the justice and benevolence" of France and Britain, his papers in Entre-Rios refer to their politics as Machiavellian. Similarly, while *La Gaceta* wrote of Hood, the British informal representative and friend of Rosas', as being completely impartial, the paper *el Federal Entrerriano* wrote of him as being a "decided partisan" for the "just cause" of Rosas and Oribe. While the good treatment of Hood was somewhat unusual in the rhetoric of Rosas, it is likely that, at this point, Rosas was using Hood to broker a separate peace with Britain, and therefore isolate Montevideo from its allies. This apparent duplicity was consistently emphasized by Varela, who wrote in the conclusion to the article, "These are always the ways of Rosas."[111]

In this way, Varela attempted not only to make strong connections between what he sees as the various arms of Rosas' press machine, but also tried to play them against each other. By showing that the partisans of Rosas in Europe were interested in the integration of Uruguay into Rosas' Confederation, he reinforced key elements of his overall argument: that Rosas was a conqueror, not an ally; that the defense of Montevideo was seeking only independence from foreign tyranny; and that the duplicity of Rosas and his allies meant he could not be trusted by the intervening powers, Britain and France. In showing that the interior press in Argentina revealed a more partisan side of the Rosas

[111] "la justicia y benevolencia" ... "decidido partidario" ... "justa causa" Ibid., Sep.19, 1846, no. 281.

system, Varela implied a "real" Rosas, one antagonistic to Europeans, but willing to put on a show to gain diplomatic advantage. By highlighting these aspects of Rosas' own press rhetoric, he not only made his own look more intellectually consistent, but also tried to dissuade the European powers from taking Rosas seriously in negotiations. This was entirely consistent with the goals of the defense of Montevideo. In seeking peace on advantageous terms, the defense could not afford to lose the support of either Britain or France. The most likely way that the needed support would collapse was through successful negotiation, and so Varela used *El Comercio* to prevent this outcome as best he could, by portraying Rosas as duplicitous.

The October 1, 1846 issue of *El Comercio* contained an editorial retrospective of the accomplishments of the first year of its publication. One point emphasized here is a major one in understanding Varela's perceptions of the press, and how it was to be used as a polemical tool. "[W]e have scandalized no one with our language nor with our doctrine; having been provoked, slandered cruelly, we have never descended to defenses, which would have made of our paper a gladiatorial arena, in place of a tribunal of calm and beneficial discussion..."[112] There are several notable attributes of this quote. Consider the emphasis on civilized language. On a naïve level, one can say that it was an admirable goal to discuss things calmly and rationally, rather than making *ad hominem* attacks. (Whether this was entirely the case with *El Comercio* is another matter.) However, it is important to connect this concept to other things evident in the quote. The metaphors are Roman, the newspaper being compared to tribunals and gladiatorial arenas.

[112] "a nadie escandalizamos con nuestro lenguaje ni con nuestra doctrina; provocados, calumniados cruelmente, jamás descendimos a defensas, que habían hecho de nuestro papel una arena de gladiadores, en vez de una tribuna de templada y provechosa discusíon..." Ibid., Oct. 1, 1846, no. 291.

This is culturally loaded language, used to delineate his audience. Who was that audience? Varela claims that neither his language nor his doctrine has scandalized anyone. Given the constant attacks back and forth in the press, including accusations of murder, duplicity, barbarism and corruption, it seems unlikely, even in the polemically charged environment of the time, that Varela could honestly believe nobody would take offense at his language, especially given the screeds against himself and *El Comercio* that appeared regularly in the Federalist press. I would venture to say that he was not referring to his enemies in this passage, but his allies. The "cultured peoples" of the "cultured world" are the intended audience, the ones who are not scandalized, and the language was chosen to emphasize his, and by extension, the Montevidean cause's, affinity with educated, cultured, liberal peoples everywhere. The Roman metaphor underlined both the civilizational context, and the imminent danger of conquest by barbarism. In this context, reasonableness itself became a polemical armoury: a suit of armour to protect the cause of liberalism, and a sword to attack the system of Rosas.

The pattern of Varela's arguments is clear. His main goals were polemical: to defend the cause of Montevideo in the court of public opinion; to attack Rosas, his system, and its defenders; to reinforce the links between the defense of Montevideo and the Europeans, both governments and individuals, that they relied upon for support. His methods are equally clear: to establish a metonymic relationship between a free press and a cultured society; to demonstrate, at every opportunity, the ways in which Rosas' government and the press in Buenos Aires failed this cultural test; and lastly, to remind the readership that, in Montevideo, there remained a bastion of support for the ideals of

freedom. This then implied the necessity of defending this culturally advanced group against their opponents. The ideas of reasonable discussion, free exchange of ideas and journalistic integrity were not so much followed by Varela as they were used as weapons in the defense of Montevideo.

Chapter Three: Cosmopolitan Liberalism

"They [the Federalists, Rosas] want to surround their country with an impenetrable barrier, inside which nothing can escape the savagery of the pampa, nor can the civilization of Europe ever penetrate."

-*El Comercio Del Plata*, Feb. 27, 1847, no. 406[113]

"These are the lessons of humanity and civilization that they come to give us! These are the demonstrations of culture that they hold out before the inhabitants of these countries, whom they call barbarians and savages!"

-*El Defensor de la Independencia Americana*, Jan. 19, 1846, no. 71, referring to mutilated corpses hung from *Colorado* fortifications[114]

Among the most important polemical issues of the *Guerra Grande* was nationality. Each side in the conflict claimed the high moral ground of being the local, legitimate government, fighting against a foreign oppressor come to subjugate Uruguay. For the *Colorados*, Manuel Oribe and his troops were little more than an Argentine invasion force. They feared that the Argentine Dictator Juan Manuel de Rosas had chosen Oribe as his puppet to extend his dominance to the other side of the La Plata river, and

[113] "Pretenden rodear a su país de una barrera impenetrable por donde no pueda escaparse nunca el salvajismo de la pampa, ni penetrar jamás la civilización de la Europa!"
[114] "Esas son las lecciones de humanidad y civilización que vienen a darnos! Esas son las muestras de cultura, que ostentan ante los habitantes de estos países, a quienes llaman bárbaros y salvajes!"

would transform the scarcely-independent nation into a mere province under Rosas' dictatorial federalism. Any and all allies from the "civilized" world were enjoined to assist in the struggle against the aggressive Argentine dictator, who represented not only a national foreignness, but the cultural foreignness of barbarism. On the other side of the conflict, this was seen as backwards. Rosas was merely fulfilling his obligations to his ally and friend, Oribe, in order to win back Uruguay. Montevideo had been unlawfully dominated by foreign interests, and it was a matter of duty to restore law and order through a genuinely American government. Britain and France were not to be trusted, as they were voracious empires eager to put South America back under European dominance. In this conflict, questions of nation and ideology were strongly contested. As a major polemical newspaper, *El Comercio del Plata* made its contribution to the question of nationality, and did so in a way which reflected the ideology of its editor, Florencio Varela. I will discuss the arguments used in his editorials, and how they reflect the situation of Montevideo as well as the ideology of internationalist liberalism.

The Montevideo of Varela's editorship at the helm of *El Comercio* from 1845-1848 was a remarkably cosmopolitan place. Its status as a trading port had risen precipitously, as a result of the blockade of Buenos Aires and the occasionally isolationist policies of Juan Manuel de Rosas. From the influx of foreign peoples, goods and ideas there arose a political orientation distinct from the conservative traditionalism prevalent in rural Uruguay: a liberal ideology, emphasizing the rule of law, freedom of trade, individual liberties, and a cultural pursuit of European notions of civilization. The thesis linking urban cosmopolitanism, in the sense of being open to foreign influence, and

Colorado liberalism is old, going back as far as Juan Pivel Devoto, the great conservative archivist-historian who dominates Uruguayan historiography.[115] It was developed further by Roberto Ares Pons, who argued that the international character of commercial interests and the influx of European ideas shaped the urban elite class.[116] It was these elites who formed the core of the most liberal faction in Montevideo, the *doctores.* From sympathetic elements of the *Colorado* side, this was a description of their intellectual status; from the *Blanco* side, it was a mockery of their pretensions. Much of Uruguayan historiography emphasizes the disconnectedness of this group of elites from the rural masses, and that their extreme liberal viewpoint was, even if valuable, essentially alien to the experience of most Uruguayans. While that may have been the case, their constituency was at least large enough inside the walls of Montevideo to resist eight years of siege, if barely at times.

There is little question that, throughout the 1840s, Montevideo was by far the most liberal locale in the La Plata region. Argentina, under Rosas and his system of friendly (or subjugated) *caudillos*, had taken a decidedly conservative turn. While the extent of Rosas' conservative isolationism has been exaggerated in the historiography, in no small part due to the enduring influence of liberal writers like Varela, it remains an accurate generalization. Rural Argentina was dominated by *caudillos*, most of whom were conservative Federalists allied with Rosas. Uruguay, outside of Montevideo, was, from 1843 onward, in the hands of Manuel Oribe, who was nearly as conservative as

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[115] For this distinction between Blanco nationalist isolation and Colorado internationalism, see Pivel Devoto, *Partidos Políticos*, 78.
[116] Roberto Ares Pons, *Uruguay: Provincia o Nación?*, "Doctores y Caudillos" (Montevideo, Ediciones del Nuevo Mundo, 1967), 34-40.

Rosas himself. However, within the walls of Montevideo, the faction of the *doctores* controlled many of the most important positions, and their influence, while not extending far beyond the walls, was at least considerable within them. Freedom of the press was guaranteed, although it must be underscored that most major publications in Montevideo were edited by members of the *doctores* faction, and therefore there was little reason to censor them. Slavery was abolished in 1842, although this too was pragmatically motivated, as all freed slaves were subsequently drafted into the defense.[117] Freedom of religion was guaranteed, and while Roman Catholicism remained the state religion, Protestantism was tolerated to the extent that a church was built inside the walls of Montevideo, starting in 1844.[118] Tariffs were kept low, as befitted a city whose major source of wealth was trade, but also due to the free trade philosophy advocated by its intellectuals. All of these causes found a voice in Varela, whose editorial page ranged across nearly every aspect of 19th century liberalism.

This liberalism was not merely an affectation of the intelligentsia, a kind of fashionable delusion created by the allure of European culture. The demographics show the substantial foreign population in Uruguay at this time. From 1835, near the beginnings of the Guerra Grande, until 1842, shortly before the beginning of the siege of Montevideo, 48 118 foreigners entered the country, over a third of the previously existing population of 128 371. Montevideo, by the time of Andrés Lamas' census in 1843, was comprised of approximately 60% foreigners, with 19 758 immigrants and only 11 431

[117] Bushnell, *Reform and Reaction,* 69-70.
[118] Ibid., 72.

nationals.[119] The diverse ethnicities and nationalities had converged at Montevideo for eclectic reasons: slaves freed by the abolition of slavery by the *Colorados*, and drafted into the army; Frenchmen and Spaniards, who had, since the founding of Montevideo, been a substantial number, especially those from the Basque regions; Britons, often merchants, who had settled in Montevideo to take advantage of commercial opportunities; Italians, notably the republican adventurers led by Giuseppe Garibaldi, known as José in Uruguay, fighting for their ideals across the world while awaiting revolution in their homeland; Argentines in exile, mostly liberal *Unitarios* cast out by the Rosas regime (it is into this group that Varela himself falls); and, of course, Uruguayans, living within the city walls for their liberal ideology, their loyalty to General Fructuoso Rivera, or for various personal reasons. This cosmopolitanism was further heightened by the intervention of Britain and France, their diplomatic envoys, naval squadrons and cultural influence being of tremendous importance to this period. Indeed, according to the Federalist-*Blanco* school of thought, these influences constituted outright colonization.

The armies of the defense were similarly a patchwork of nationalities. In 1843, near the beginning of the siege, the largest single force was the French legion, 2500 strong, under the command of Colonel Juan Crisóstomo Thiébaut. Second largest after that was the force of 1400 *negros libertos*, freed blacks, having been given their freedom in 1842 not only for ideological reasons, but for the pragmatic purpose of having them serve as troops. Italians under Garibaldi numbered 500. The Argentine exiles formed a legion comprising another 500. Uruguayan nationals formed a guard of 800, and while

[119] Pivel Devoto, *República,* 253-254.

this was a significant force, it was less than 20% of the total 5000 defenders.[120] While the defense of Montevideo was desperate enough for defending troops that it could scarcely afford to reject any assistance, there was a powerful downside to the multinational character of the defense. It opened the door to accusations that the defense was not of a genuinely Uruguayan character, that a "caliphate of adventurers from all nations"[121] had come to dominate the city. So long as foreigners constituted the majority of the defenders, it was impossible to convincingly portray the struggle as an exclusively Uruguayan cause.

This theme is taken up by the Uruguayan historian Carlos Real de Azua. In his opinion, the urban population was not homogenous, but rather a series of "factions and sub-factions."[122] It was a difficult coalition, held together by only by "the fear of the severity of Oribe," and otherwise highly divided in their beliefs. Real de Azua isolates three basic power groups: Foreign commercial interests, such as Samuel Lafone[123], who provided much of the financing for the war; French and Italian artisans, and their respective legions, led by Thiébaut and Garibaldi, which formed the "backbone" of the defense; and the "Generation of 1838,"[124] of whom Andrés Lamas and Manuel Herrera y Obes formed the political core, and César Diaz and Melchor Pacheco y Obes representing

[120] Ibid., 122.
[121] "cáfila de aventureros de todas las naciones" Varela, *Comercio*, August 8, 1846, no. 247.
[122] Carlos Real de Azua, *El Patriciado Uruguayo* (Montevideo: Ediciones Asir, 1961), 95.
[123] He also notes on page 97 that by 1854, after the end of the war, in the vicinity of Montevideo there remained only one of the many slaughterhouse-owners of the age: Samuel Lafone.
[124] Presumably, an Uruguayan analogue to the Argentine Generation of 1837. Given the interconnectedness of the intellectual world in La Plata, it is reasonable to consider these as essentially the same movement, differentiated only by nationality.

the military.[125] It is this third faction, plus their close allies the Argentine Unitarian exiles, whom I consider to be basically synonymous with the faction of the *doctores*, although it is clear that the presence of the first two had a profound impact on their thinking. Real de Azua also discusses the Unitarian exiles, including Florencio Varela. He describes them as being "stuck in hatred and fear of Rosas and saw the Uruguayan cause and their divisions as a mere instrumentalization of their fight against that adversary."[126] While this comment accurately captures the single-minded focus of the exiles against Rosas (Varela admits as much in the first edition of *El Comercio*), it does not deal with Varela's basic argument, that the future of Uruguayan independence was threatened by the dictator in Buenos Aires. This argument will be discussed below.

This issue was, from a polemical standpoint, a weakness for the defense and for Florencio Varela in particular. As an Argentine, he himself was one of those accused of violating Uruguayan independence, of hijacking the government for his own anti-Rosas crusade. *El Defensor de la Independencia Americana*, the official paper of Manuel Oribe's government at the Cerrito encampment outside Montevideo repeated this point constantly. To prove that foreign influence had come to dominate Montevideo, they emphasized the non-Uruguayan character of the defense, noting "In Montevideo, there are not even 400 Uruguayans among those who are under arms. The entire force consists of French adventurers, Italians, Argentine émigrés and blacks enraged at their

[125] "bandos y sub-bandos" ... "el Temor al rigor de Oribe" ... "espina dorsal" Real de Azua, *Patriciado,* 94-98.
[126] "aglutinados por el odio y el temor a Rosas y veían toda la causa y las divisiones uruguayas como un mera instrumentalización de su lucha contra aquel adversario." Ibid., 94.

masters."[127] It is worth noting that, at this time, Oribe had not yet freed the slaves in the territory under his control, which did not take place until October of 1846.[128] The diverse composition of the defending forces, from the perspective of the besiegers, meant a lack of national character, domination by foreign powers, and a breakdown in law and order. From these points emerge the epithets that would be thrown, on a daily basis, at Montevideo by *El Defensor*: that the defense were anarchists, foreign adventurers, greedy liberals and opportunists looking to usurp the rightful authority of the nation, granted to Oribe under the constitution.

As for Varela's newspaper, it was described in the following unequivocal terms: "*El Comercio of Lafone*, a foreign newspaper that they publish in Montevideo..."[129] *El Comercio*, as a highly visible defender of liberal thought published by a well-known Argentine exile, was a prime target for *El Defensor*. The connection to British merchant Samuel Lafone emphasized subservience to Europeans. Varela's involvement with the Argentine Commission, a group of political exiles that supported the Argentine General Lavalle in his failed 1839 attempt to overthrow Rosas with the backing of France, had deepened his problem. Similarly, his 1843 diplomatic mission to London as the envoy of the Uruguayan government sent to procure European intervention, had raised questions about his commitment to Uruguayan independence. From the perspective at *El Cerrito*, the Argentine exiles had taken control of the capital in order to hand over power to the

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[127] "En Montevideo no pasaban de 400 naturales los que estaban sobre las armas. La fuerza toda se componia de aventureros Franceses, Italianos, emigrados Argentinos y negros arrebatados a sus amos." *El Defensor de la Independencia Americana*, May 13, 1846, no. 109.
[128] Bushnell, *Reform and Reaction*, 155.
[129] "El *Comercio de Lafone* diario extrangero que se publica en Montevideo..." *Defensor,* May 28, 1846, no. 114. This phrase is *El Defensor*'s formula for referring to *el Comercio*, and appears in some form in almost every reference.

Europeans, who sought to colonize Uruguay. For them, Varela was trying actively to sell Uruguay to Europe.[130] Since this point was a potentially persuasive one, Varela needed to make a counter-argument, one which would transform the international nature of forces assembled at the fortifications into an advantage.

Varela's editorial skill was more than up to the task of generating such an argument, and he put forward several points to reinforce the ideological structure of the defense against the attacks of *El Defensor*. First, Varela defended the government in Montevideo as the true inheritors of the 1830 constitution, and therefore as the institutionally and legally legitimate government of the nation. Second, he portrayed the army of Oribe as being principally composed of Rosista Argentines, and therefore an invading foreign power seeking to usurp the rightful government of Uruguay and install Oribe as a puppet dictator. Third, Varela defended the European intervention, claiming it was both the right and obligation of every civilized nation to support the freedom of nations and to oppose barbarous tyrrany. Last, and perhaps most interesting, Varela recasts the idea of nationalism as a cosmopolitan concept, wherein nationhood meant belonging to the *mundo culto*, the cultured world, a community of civilized countries supportive of individual freedoms, living together in obedience of the principles of international law. This conception of the nation as the exemplar of internationally recognized cultural and legal concepts, rather than as a populist conception based on ethnicity, language or geography, constituted an important ideological justification for the cause of the defense of Montevideo.

Varela himself was inextricably enmeshed in the problems of nationality and foreignness. As mentioned earlier, accusations of foreign complicity were regularly leveled at *El Comercio* as a newspaper, and Varela as an editor. To be an Argentine meant being vulnerable to accusations of hijacking a foreign government, of letting your own interests override those of your host country. Varela was sensitive to this accusation, and discussed it in an editorial from the 18th of March, 1846. Responding to the accusations of hypocrisy regularly leveled by *El Defensor* that it was nonsense to decry Argentine influences while being an Argentine oneself, Varela wrote that, however much he desired the aggrandizement of his own nation, he would always resist "the influences of a personal system, tyrannical, irresponsible... we resist those influences, because they are not *Argentine*; because, far from being that, they tend to frustrate those effects of a great political alliance, in which the Argentine Republic is a very important part. It, - not Rosas... - agreed to the creation of an independent state [Uruguay] as an element of peace in this region."[131] The "true" Argentina obeys international laws, and stands by its agreements, including the independence of Uruguay. Rosas, since he was in violation of those agreements, according to Varela, was violating not only the rights of Uruguay, but also removing himself from being truly Argentine.

The editorial for October 13, 1845, shortly after the founding of *El Comercio*, put the relative positions of Rosas, Oribe, the defense, and the European powers into clear terms that Varela would reiterate until his death in 1848. He wrote, "The politics of

[131] "las infuencias de un sistema personal, tiránico, irresponsable... Resistimos aquellas influencias, porque no son *argentinos;* porque, muy lejos de serlo, tienden a frustrar los efectos de una gran combinación política, en que fué parte muy principal de la República Argentina. Ella, - no Rosas... - concurió a la creación de un Estado independiente [Uruguay]... como un elemento de paz en esta región." Varela, *Comercio,* March 18, 1846, no. 137.

Europe, of today; the material interests, the advantage of trade, the general tendency of this century; all of them oppose the idea of coming to conquer these regions. The politics of Rosas are essentially invasive: his interests, as he conceives them, of *reducing Montevideo to its normal state*, the uniform tendency of his system, all drives him to conquer his neighbour."[132] (Italics in original.) He argued that Europe had little reason to conquer Uruguay, and therefore the intervention must have been benign. The advantages of a liberal peace between nations would come to South America through commerce and culture. Rosas, on the other hand, would conquer his neigbours as an inevitable result of his dictatorial system, reducing them to a "normal" state of submission to Buenos Aires. He must therefore be opposed with all possible force.

The argument continued, under the heading *Rosas y los Mediadores*, running several days from October 15 to 20, 1845. Varela gave further shape to the argument that, completely contrary to the accusations of Rosas' press, it was Europe that was intervening to preserve Uruguayan independence, and Rosas himself who threatened conquest. To this effect, Varela made strong use of a phrase from Rosas' foreign relations minister, General Tomás Guido, that the British are trying to preserve "the phantasm of Uruguayan independence."[133] He further analyzed the orders of the British envoy, William Gore Ouseley, showing that, to his satisfaction, there was no threat to the independence of Argentina and Uruguay. How, then, did he account for the intervention against Rosas? Varela here made the argument, which would be common throughout his

[132] "La política europea, el día de hoy; los intereses materiales, la ventaja del comercio, la tendencia general del siglo; todo se opone a la idea de venir a conquistar estas regiones. La politica de Rosas, esencialmente invasora : sus intereses, como él los concibe, *de reducir a Montevideo a su estado normal*, la tendencia uniforme de su sistema, todo le empuja a conquistar a su vecino." Ibid., Oct. 13, 1845, no. 11.
[133] "el fantasma de la independencia Oriental." Ibid., Oct. 15, 1845, no. 13.

polemics, that, with Rosas, "*todo es personal*," everything is personal. (Italics in original.) The actions of the dictatorship were those of the dictator, and not of the people of Argentina, since what would be the role of law, in a civilized country, was instead entirely under the power of Rosas himself. This was done using the *suma del poder público*, the legal principle of uniting all the functions of government in the dictator.[134] About the war, then, "This is not... so much an attack on the independence of these countries, as a war against Rosas: because Rosas is not, nor does he himself represent, national independence."[135] The independent nation existed as an ideal, belonging to the past and, Varela clearly hoped, the future. For the time of the *Guerra Grande*, however, there was only the dictatorship, and to fight against Rosas was to fight for, and not against, independence. By presenting Rosas in such a way, Varela created a place for intervention by Europe, as well as for legitimate resistance by those who represented the "true" Argentina, the exiles in Montevideo.

If Rosas was a dictator who did not represent the will of the people of Argentina, then Oribe was, for Varela, even less, an Uruguayan who had sold the independence of his own country to the dictator for his own personal ambitions. The accusation of foreignness, so often leveled against the defense of Montevideo, was thrown back at Oribe's forces, "On our side there are few nationals; on theirs there are none, all are foreigners. In our camp, there are foreigners by the side of nationals; in that of the enemy,

[134] Ibid., Oct. 16, 1845, no. 14.
[135] "No hay... tal ataque a la Independencia de estos países, aunque haya guerra a Rosas: porque Rosas no es, ni representa en su persona, la Independencia Nacional." Ibid.

there are no nationals, all are foreigners."[136] By this, he did not mean strictly that there were no Uruguayans whatsoever in the camp of Oribe, but that the preponderance of Argentine forces, combined with their barbarous objectives, being soldiers of Rosas, disqualified them as being truly "national." Varela's cultural criteria for belonging to the nation will be discussed later. For the moment, what is important is the polemical argument. Varela took Rosas and Oribe's supposed defense of American independence, which formed such a large element of their ideology that it gave Oribe's newspaper its name, and stood the argument on its head. Where Montevideo and its inhabitants began, starting from the criticisms of *El Defensor* and others, as a ragtag of foreign adventurers defending European commercial interests against genuine Uruguayans, they became transformed in Varela's rhetoric into valiant defenders of independence against a foreign invader.

Since, in Varela's formulation, Rosas was a usurper, it was the exiles in Montevideo who represented both Argentine and Uruguayan nationalism. This argument was emphasized often, for instance in this editorial from October 27, 1847. In defense of his own mission to London, seeking intervention from Britain, he quoted his instructions from the government in Montevideo, highlighting that negotiations must "in no point damage the absolute independence of the Republic..." From there, he wrote that this document proved "not only that the émigrés never attack the nationality, the independence of their country [Uruguay], but they have acted temporarily to save those objectives, which they value more than Rosas does, and which treat the country with

[136] "De nuestro lado hai pocos nacionales; del lado de ellos no hai ninguno. En nuestro campo, hai extranjeros al lado de los nacionales; en el de ellos no hai nacionales, todos son extranjeros." Ibid., Jan. 11, 1848, no. 668.

complete and just equality."[137] The exiles, if not Uruguayans themselves, could stand in as allies, since they legitimately valued the independence of Uruguay as a nation equal to Argentina. In absolving himself of the charge of foreignness, Varela also, by extension, absolves the international defense of Montevideo.

On occasion, Varela extended his ideological principle of international liberalism beyond La Plata in order to reinforce the notion that to support civilization anywhere is to support it everywhere. On January 20, 1848, *El Comercio* welcomed Liberia into "the family of nations." Described as "small and humble," it was nevertheless an important force, as it "transplanted the democratic institutions [of America]" to a continent where "barbarism and secular idolatry reject with all its might the regenerating influence of civilization and of Christ himself." Just in case the readership might have missed the obvious comparison between another "small and humble" nation supposedly defending democracy from barbarism, Varela spells out the comparison to Uruguay and Rosas. "Rosas, the *eminent republican*... combines in his person alone all the powers of the state," whereas the "free blacks of the coast of Guinea... recognize as an agent *of the security and freedom of the State* the free exercise of the right to think, to speak, and to print"[138] (Italics in original). The freedom of the press, as discussed in the last chapter, was supposedly the indicator of the level of civilization in a country, and thus even

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[137] "en nada menoscabe la absoluta independencía de la República..." ... "no solo que los emigrados jamás atacaron la nacionalidad, la independencia de su país, sinó que pusieron interinamente a salvo esos objetos, que estiman más que Rosas, y de que tratase al país con entera y justa igualdad." Ibid., Oct. 27, 1847, no. 608.

[138] "familia de las Naciones" ... "pequeño y humilde" ... "trasplanta las democráticas instituciones" ... "barbarie y la idolatria seculares rechazan con todas sus fuerzas la influencia rejeneradora de la civilizacion y del cristi mismo." ... "Rosas, el *eminente republicano*... reune en su sola persona todos los poderes de Estado..." ... "negros libres de la costa de Guinea... reconocen como un ajente *de la seguridad y de la libertad del Estado* el libre ejercicio derecho de pensar, de hablar y de imprimir." Ibid., Jan. 20, 1848, no. 676.

Liberia was more civilized than Buenos Aires. The comparison, Varela writes, is a humiliating one for Rosas, and, by extension, a favourable one for Montevideo.

These arguments served many purposes, a tactic common in Varela's rhetoric: it is at once an argument for idealistic, liberal ideology, a vindication of the practical necessities of the defense of Montevideo, and an appeal to the outside world to join forces in opposition to Rosas. As noted earlier, one of the chief dangers to the defense was the abandonment of Montevideo by its powerful European allies. The British withdrew their naval squadron in 1848, much to Varela's dismay, and the French would do the same within a year.[139] Garibaldi and his Italian Legion left for Italy to carry on revolution there. Despite the fading chance that foreign intervention would save the defense and lift the siege, Varela emphasized even more the cultural cosmopolitanism of his nationalist ideal as the war dragged on. It was, for Varela, the task of all civilized people to defend free nations, to support the cause of civilizational progress against dictatorship, even if that cause was, at any given point, hopeless. Varela writes, in the same article, "Since when has an advantage of numbers, or of victory constituted law? In the present age, conquest is not law. – Oribe, or better said, Rosas, could defeat us, fortune always was capricious: - but justice can also belong to the defeated."[140] This passage seems to indicate that, to Varela, this ideology was not merely a propagandistic tool, designed only to attract the support of foreign liberals, but a deeply-held conviction that the defense of Montevideo was a noble cause. It was connected to the highest ideals

[139] Ibid., Jul. 18, 1847, no. 523. (Lord Howden's declaration of the withdrawal of British forces.)
[140] "De cuando aca la ventaja del número, o de la victoria constituyen derecho? En la edad presente, la conquista no es derecho. – Oribe, o más bien dicho, Rosas, podrán vencernos, siempre fué caprichosa de la fortuna: - pero la justicia puede ser tambien de los vencidos." Ibid., Jan. 11, 1848, no. 668.

of civilization and cultural progress, and that, even if the supposedly liberal, cultured powers of Europe did not support them, their struggle had meaning in the context of liberal ideals.

The largest issue facing Varela in terms of nationalism, however, was the nature of the Anglo-French intervention. Of all the intellectuals in Montevideo, he was among the most strident about the value of the Europeans, both as mediators of peace and as civilizational models for development. Protesting the neutrality of the intervening parties was a regular feature of the editorials in *El Comercio*. However, the political issue was a tricky one, insofar as Varela was simultaneously defending one intervening force, the Europeans, while condemning another, Rosas' army supporting Oribe. The editorial of November 4, 1845, wherein Varela outlines the difference between the two intervening forces: "Rosas is obligated by treaties not to intervene in Uruguay; and England and France have a right by the same treaties to impede whatsoever other power intervenes in a country whose independence concurs with the common interest."[141] England and France are presented as exemplars of civilized nations, whose behaviour is dictated by the "common interest" of the community of free nations, rather than by territorial ambition, as is the case with Rosas.

El Comercio's position on the role of Britain and France in the defense was further elaborated on the 15th of April, 1846. Varela condemned as absurd the idea that the Europeans sought colonization as an objective, claiming that every statement from the

[141] "Rosas, está obligado por tratados a no intervenir en la República Oriental; y la Inglaterra y la Francia tienen derecho por esos mismos tratados a impedir que otro poder intervenga en un pais a cuya independencia concurrieron por común interés." Ibid., Nov. 4, 1845, no. 29.

cabinets of Britain and France, the history of the intervention to date, as well as the costs involved in maintaining so distant a colony contradicted this idea. This idea was, on its face, doubtful in the context of the world-spanning empires Britain and France already possessed. However, it does accurately reflect the concerns expressed in the foreign office documents of Britain, at least. Empire could be as expensive as it was profitable. South America was far from the most lucrative area for colonial exploitation, and it was among the most troublesome. Indeed, as Varela would later come to lament, the desire to end the costly intervention would, by the end of the decade, overcome any remaining liberal idealism. The easy diplomatic success that Aberdeen and Guizot had hoped to obtain had been blocked by Rosas, and it was increasingly embarrassing for the world's most powerful nations to be frustrated by a South American dictator. Britain, and soon afterwards France, withdrew their forces, leaving the defensive strength of Montevideo greatly diminished. However, in 1846, the intervention was in full force, leading Varela to conclude his article praising the motives of the European governments, writing that "Europe wants to stem the torrent of barbarism that is trying to erase these countries from the map of civilization."[142] Many of Varela's most important arguments are succinctly contained here: the purely defensive nature of the European intervention, the barbarity of the opposing side, and, most importantly, the unity, within the "map of civilization," between Europe, Uruguay, and the potentially-civilized Argentina, *sans*-Rosas.

Indeed, Varela placed the blame for the necessity of Anglo-French intervention squarely on the shoulders of Rosas himself. "... without the excesses of Rosas, without

[142] "la Europa quiere atajar torrente de barbarie que amenaza borrar estos paises del mapa de la civilzación." Ibid., Apr. 15, 1846, no. 154.

the disturbance of all social order, without the annihilation of all civilized principles, of all respect for the first rights of man –nationals the same as foreigners -, without the barbarism, in the end, that constitutes the essence of the system of the dictator, the idea would never have been born in Europe to come to oppose such a terrifying disruption."[143] Varela went on to claim that, without Rosas' corrupting influence, peace and free commerce would raise up Montevideo in both wealth and civilization. The universal benefits of opposing Rosas were therefore obvious. The European intervention was merely two of the *primeras potencias de la cristiandad*, the primary powers of Christendom, as Varela often named Britain and France, fulfilling their moral obligations. By casting of the conflict as being between civilization and barbarism, rather than an internal political struggle, Varela further reinforced the international character of the conflict that he needed, in order to justify his own position and those of his allies.

The impact of these ideas on the representatives of Europe whom Varela tried to attract to his cause was mixed. The doctrine of international liberalism as opposed to barbarous tyranny, as espoused in *El Comercio*, found one of its most enthusiastic champions in William Gore Ouseley, the British consul in La Plata, sent, along with his French counterpart Baron Deffaudis, to broker a peace that would restore peace, order and commerce to the region. Ouseley echoed many of the polemical arguments made by Varela and the defense in letters sent back to Lord Aberdeen. His distrust of Rosas was especially clear. He referred to Rosas' forces, in one letter, as "Buenos Ayrean cut-

[143] "... sin los excesos de Rosas, sin el desquicio de todo órden social, sin el aniquilamiento de todo principio de civilización, de todo respeto a los primeros derechos del hombre – asi nacional como extranjero -, sin la barbárie, enfín, que constituye la esencia del sistema del dictador, jamás habría nacido en Europa la idea de venir a enfrenar tan espantoso desbocamiento." Ibid., Apr. 16 1846, no. 155.

throats,"[144] claiming that a great slaughter would follow if Rosas, working through Oribe, were to reclaim Montevideo. The use of the phrase "cut-throats" was simply the nearest English translation of the popular phrase for Rosas used by the Montevidean press, *corte-cabezas*. Ouseley maintained that, were Rosas to win the war, the position of Europeans would become "unsupportable," implying the necessity of continued intervention.[145] Following the rhetorical lead of Varela and the *doctores*, Ouseley wrote that Oribe was an unpopular leader relying on the Argentine dictator and outright coercion for his support. Ouseley described Oribe's force as consisting of, aside from the Argentines, "... Spaniards, including Spanish Basques, Canariots, and emigrants from Spain... French Basques, some Brazilians, Portuguese, Italians and French; nearly the whole of these serve by compulsion." He further claimed that, depending on one's estimate, the *Orientales* numbered no more than 1500.[146] Ouseley was no fool, and understood that interest in Britain would quickly sour if the conflict was understood as being a purely local affair. By emphasizing the foreign character of Oribe's forces, he reinforced the case that supporting Montevideo was a worthy cause.

In Ouseley, the defense of Montevideo found a sympathizer who saw the conflict in the same terms they did, as an invasion by Rosas for the purpose of imposing Oribe as a puppet dictator. According to David McLean, following a thorough analysis of the diplomatic correspondence, "Montevideo became, for him [Ouseley], as for many in Europe, the 'new Troy' where constitutionalism and liberty made their stand in South

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[144] William Gore Ouseley to the Earl of Aberdeen, Aug. 9, 1846, in *British Documents on Foreign Affairs, Part I, Series D, Volume 1: River Plate, 1849-1912*, general eds. Kenneth Bourne and D. Cameron Watt, ed. George Philip (University Publications of America, 1991), 21.
[145] Ouseley to Aberdeen, August 1, 1846, in *British Documents*, 21.
[146] Ouseley to Aberdeen, August 31, 1846 in *British Documents*, 26-27.

America against the tide of military despotism."[147] While he served British interests, at least in some sense, he also made every attempt to intervene on behalf of the besieged city, and to interpret his instructions as generously as possible. It was not surprising, then, that the defense of Montevideo, upon hearing of Ouseley's impending departure, wrote a card thanking him for his services. This was signed by 800 Uruguayans, the last of which was notably Andrés Lamas, the very model of an Uruguayan liberal.[148]

If Ouseley was the extreme case for an ideologically sympathetic European diplomat, those sent after him, first Thomas Samuel Hood and later Lord Howden, were much more skeptical about Montevideo. Hood had been sent because of his previous connections with Oribe and Rosas, to parlay his past friendship into a solution to the diplomatic impasse. In a letter written shortly after his arrival as an unofficial representative, he wrote scathingly of the state of the defense, "Monte Video appears to be a perfect pandemonium, party feelings and personal interests swallowing up all other considerations. Everything is topsy-turvy. Everyone set up for himself. Selfish ends, virulent passions, and the most extraordinary perversion of facts, seem the general order of the day. Black made white, and yes is explained into no. In truth, insanity has usurped the place of reason, and chaos the place of order, and what is to be done to get things back to their old place, god only knows."[149] Far from echoing Varela's rosy picture of the valiant defense, this was much closer to the arguments of *El Defensor*, that Montevideo was in anarchy, ruled only by self-serving foreign oligarchs. Unsurprisingly, Varela

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[147] David McLean, *War, Diplomacy and Informal Empire: Britain and the Republics of La Plata, 1836-1853* (London and New York: British Academic Press, 1995), 193.
[148] Varela, *Comercio*, May 21, 1847, no. 478. Signatures listed on May 22, 1847, no. 479.
[149] Thomas Samuel Hood to Mr. Addington, July 25, 1846, in *British Documents,* 19-20.

consistently downplayed the role of Hood in his articles, always carefully emphasizing that he had no official function. It is notable that it had been none other than Hood who gave Varela shelter during the 1830s, when Oribe, acting for Rosas, tried to silence the Unitarians in Montevideo. By this point in 1846, however, the two had clearly parted ways.

Ouseley's successor, Lord Howden, took an even less sympathetic view of the defense than Hood had. His mission was marked by a strong preference for Rosas, and he actually went so far as to fall in love with Rosas' daughter, Manuelita. His opinion of Montevideo was that it had fallen entirely under foreign domination. "Since the appointment of Generals Thiebault and Garribaldi (sic) to the command of the armed population of the town, the exclusive domination of foreigners is no longer even modestly veiled..." He was equally scathing about the press, claiming, "The Frenchmen and the Monte Videan Press (which they either pay or force) strive untiredly to impress the world that the war is between the independent fraction of the Orientals and General Rosas," adding that, "... it is simply between a small number of foreign shopkeepers, artisans and labourers (whose defences are manned by French and English sailors), and a larger number of Orientals, who, if they were not frightened by a few bad walls and worse guns, would have taken the town long ago."[150] Howden's anti-French sentiment, which he admitted repeatedly in letters to Lord Palmerson, had extended to the *doctores*, whom he saw as the puppets of the French. Varela himself was directly implicated by Howden, who described *El Comercio* as "...the 'Comercio del Plata,' a newspaper of

[150] Lord Howden to Viscount Palmerston, July 17, 1847, in *British Documents*, 78.

Monte Video, supposed to be the organ of M. Deffaudis..."[151] After Howden negotiated an end to the blockade of Buenos Aires and the withdrawal of the British fleet, Varela criticized him repeatedly in *El Comercio*, first with almost fawning politeness, and later with angry dismissal. He clung to the position that Britain would reject Howden's diplomacy, and return to armed intervention. While the appeal to liberal principle, in *El Comercio* and elsewhere, had some draw for the British, it was not decisive, and did not outweigh imperial interests. There were those who found him to be less than convincing, including Hood and Howden, and it was their position that eventually came to sway British policy.

Not everyone followed Varela in his somewhat quixotic internationalist nationalism, founded on lofty liberal ideals. His enemies in the Federalist and *Blanco* press, notably *El Defensor de la Independencia Americana*, cast aspersions upon this cosmopolitan nationalism, and upon the Uruguayan character of the defense itself. In a cynical commentary from January 16, 1846, they asked: "Who could have inspired this love for the independence of a country which is not *theirs*, in Varela, Lafone, Garibaldi and Thiebaut?"[152] Love of country, so the implication went, could not be a trait of the defense, since it was composed of foreigners, and instead must have been simply a farce covering deeper, more sinister motives. For *El Defensor*, the defense of Montevideo was almost entirely comprised of foreigners allied with the "the savage Unitarians" exiled from Argentina. What few Uruguayans were left were always referred to as "the anarchists of this country." There was no legitimacy whatsoever to the continued

[151] Howden to Palmerston, June 3, 1847, in *British Documents*, 48.
[152] "Quién puede haber inspirado ese amor a la Independencia de un país que no es el *suyo*, a Varela, Lafone, Garibaldi y Thiebaut?" *Defensor*, Jan. 16, 1846, no. 70

resistance to the siege, according to *El Defensor*, and Oribe was President of Uruguay, both by "hecho," fact, and "derecho," law.[153] To belong to the "true" Uruguay meant being a native Oriental, one whose home and interest lay in the vast rural territory outside the walls of Montevideo, territory which, as his press emphasized regularly, Oribe had controlled since 1843. In this conception, Montevideo was not the last stand of the valiant defenders of liberty, but rather the last outpost of European domination in the region, and they fought only in defense of their own interests, against the will of the people. Insofar as there were Uruguayans within the walls, they were either there under the coercion of foreigners, or were traitors to their country.

Appeals to global concepts of liberal nationalism by Varela and other intellectuals of the defense were rejected and ridiculed in the opposing press. *El Defensor* claimed that "The liberalism runs parallel with their 'honesty' and their 'delicacy'," [154] and that the vaunted "civilization" of the defense was a sham, that the ministers of Europe covered "the world of true intentions... under the deceitful veil of civilization and humanity."[155] To *El Defensor*, the real enemies were the British and French, voracious European powers looking to swallow Argentina and Uruguay into their expanding empires. As for the defenders of Montevideo, they were no more than "a new species of the English, like the coolies of India, or the subjects of New Zealand." By invoking the spectre of European colonization, *El Defensor* attacked with its strongest polemical argument, that the defense of Montevideo was fundamentally foreign. By casting the conflict as

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[153] "salvajes unitarios" ... "anarquistas de este país" Ibid., May 10, 1846, no. 108.
[154] Ibid., June 19, 1846, no. 121.
[155] "El liberalismo de los salvajes unitarios corre parejas con su "honestidad" y su "delicadeza,"" ... "el mundo de verdaderas miras... bajo el mentido velo de civilización y humanidad." ... "una especie nueva de Ingleses, como los coolies de India, o los sometidas de Nueva Zelandia." Ibid., May 10, 1846, no. 108.

Europeans against Americans, it deflected attention from its chief weakness, Oribe's close alliance with Rosas.

The strengths and weaknesses of the *doctores*, their affinity with Europe, and their concept of civilization are well summed up by Pivel Devoto. "Rosas gave them [the *doctores*] an opportunity to harmonize with the sub-consious tonality of their selves. It was not only out of necessity that besieged Montevideo made recourse to England and France; it was out of the logical affinity of their thoughts." Their beliefs were "essentially universalist, broad, humanitarian, pretending to shelter under their banner the interests and immutable rights of civilization." However, according to Pivel Devoto, they were chasing an unrealistic dream, one which essentially meant betraying the Uruguayan cause. "And when they saw how humiliating this intervention [by Europeans] would be, their skepticism was always drowned by the marvelous prestige of European civilization." Their program "Lacked almost entirely... local colour, nature, circumstance."[156] Pivel Devoto, a conservative historian and lifelong *Blanco* party supporter, essentially sides with *El Defensor* against the *doctores*, as he emphasizes the anti-national aspects of the intervention. Disregarding the political slant, however, his analysis is essentially correct. Florencio Varela envisioned Uruguay as a reflection of the outside world, in terms of ideology, society and commerce, and the details of local

[156] "Rosas le dió la oportunidad de armonizar con la tonalidad sub-consciente de su ser. No fué sólo por necesidad que Montevideo sitiada recurrió al apoyo de Inglaterra y Francia; fué por afinidad lógica de pensamiento." ... "esencialmente universalista, amplia, humanitaria, pretendiendo cobijar bajo su bandera los intereses y derechos inmutables de la civilización." ... "Y cuando vió cuánto importaba de humiliante esa intervención, todavía su escepticismo seguía ahogado por el presitgio maravilloso de la civilización europea." ... "Faltó casi totalmente... [e]l color local, la naturaleza, el ambiente." Pivel Devoto, *República,* 215.

culture, especially as it existed outside of Montevideo, were given very little attention, except as a problem to be overcome.

Nine days before his death, Varela put forward a clear and radical concept of nationalism in the editorial column for January 11, 1848 that represents, better than any other passage, the connection between culture and nation. It is worth quoting this passage at length, as it represents the culmination of Varela's thought, the furthest reach of his philosophy of culture:

> "We repeat, then, that even when foreigners are the principal element of the force of the government, the justice of its cause is not less; which is the defense of the land, against a foreign army. – And we say further that the civilized and Christian governments ought to see that any army of Rosas', even one that speaks Castillian [Spanish], is more foreign to us than any other that speaks the languages of civilization. The greatest or the least, in the matter of foreigners, cannot be of any relation except by the greater or lesser points of contact which we have with them. Good, then; with the people of Rosas, the Uruguayan state does not have, and does not want to have, any point of contact."[157]

Here, as always, Varela portrayed the government of Montevideo as the legitimate government of Uruguay. However, it was not so by virtue of the support of Uruguayans, as perhaps a purely nationalist philosophy might argue, but because it was in harmony with the cultured world. Those who did not share the values of civilization, as defined by liberal ideology, were cast out of this national conception. It was, for Varela, irrelevant if Oribe's forces were born in the territory of Uruguay, or that they spoke Spanish as their

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[157] "Repetimos, pues, que aun cuando fuera extranjero el principal elemento de la fuerza del gobierno, no por eso sería menor la justicia de su causa; que es la defensa de la tierra, contra un ejército extranjero. – Y decimos además que los gobiernos civilizados y cristianos, deben mirar a todo ejército de Roasas, aunque hable castellano, como más extranjero para nosotras, que cualquiera otro que hable los idiomas de la civilización. – El mas o el menos, en punto a extranjeros, no puede estar en relacion sino de los más o menos puntos de contacto que con ellos tengamos. – Ahora bien; con la gente de Rosas, el Estado Oriental no tiene, ni quiere tener ningun punto de contacto." Varela, *Comercio*, Jan. 18, 1848, no. 668.

native tongue. They opposed the civilized ideal, and therefore they represented a profoundly "foreign" influence. Likewise, it was equally irrelevant if an Italian, French or Argentine native came to defend Montevideo without having been born there, since the struggle for the rule of civilized ideals was their struggle, just as much as for the Uruguayans. The concept of the nation transcended its ethnic or linguistic identity, and was instead built out of ideology.

As the editor of the major newspaper from Montevideo, Florencio Varela needed to expound ideological positions that reflected both his own liberal values and yet simultaneously served the needs of the defense and the struggle against Rosas. Through his arguments, he created a strong framework for deflecting criticism from opposing papers, such as *El Defensor*, and making polemical attacks in kind. By viewing cosmopolitanism as a value rather than a detriment, he recast the argument over Uruguayan nationality as a matter of civilization against barbarism, a comparison in which Montevideo, by the standards of European liberalism, would fare much better than its opponents. Varela argued that Rosas was an invader, using Oribe as a puppet, and thereby subverted any accusations of "foreignness" made against him or his faction. Just as Varela did with press freedom, expounding an ideology that made of the defenders of Montevideo the champions of moderate, reasonable discussion, so here he created a concept of nationalism that cast Montevideo as the focus for aspirations towards civilization and progress. The polemical value of this model is clear, as it provided a framework, one that would resonate with both local and foreign audiences, in which Varela and the *Colorados* would be the heroes of civilization, and his enemies only

savage barbarians. That these polemics failed to maintain the support of Britain and France speaks to the political realities of the day. Ideology was less powerful than pragmatic necessity.

Conclusion

The press was no less involved in the *Guerra Grande* than the armies, and Florencio Varela was one of the strongest voices on the *Colorado* side. His daily attacks on the cause of Rosas and Oribe helped shape the image of the siege as a defense of liberal republican values against barbaric dictatorship. Without a decisive military event for over eight years of siege, intellectual warfare was one of the major ways that the conflict was fought. The struggle to define the conflict was crucial in determining national and international sympathy and support. By making the case that they were fighting against dictatorship, the *Colorados* won a measure of support from the British and French despite the lukewarm sentiments of their home governments. Internally, it offered a unifying ideology that accommodated the various international legions, while still justifying the defense as a fundamentally Uruguayan cause. *El Comercio* also served as a defense against Blanco propaganda, which cast the *Colorados* as traitors and foreigners selling Uruguay to the Europeans.

The struggle against Rosas, his allies, and most importantly, his system of government, was the fundamental focus of *El Comercio*. Varela saw the Buenos Airean dictator as the absolute antithesis of his ideal of government: arbitrary, wasteful, reactionary, oppressive, xenophobic and cruel. It should come as no surprise that every edition of *El Comercio* was an attack on Rosas and his system as much as it was a defense of liberal ideology, because these two things were two sides of the same coin for Varela. As for Oribe, his role was downplayed consistently by Varela. Portrayed as weak

but cruel, autocratic yet indecisive, he was relegated to the role of Rosas' jester, a trivial copy of his patron. For Herrera y Obes as well, Oribe was simply another *caudillo*, and even if he was an Uruguayan, this was nothing to recommend him over Rosas. Both were portrayed as representatives of the barbaric elements of the Hispanic heritage, and thus had no place in a progressive vision for Uruguay.

Varela and *El Comercio* were criticized at the time, and have been since, for lacking a distinct sense of Uruguayan nationality, or even of Argentine nationality. For Varela, nations were legal entities, based upon constitutions and made legitimate by its citizens, not by a locally authentic culture. The ideal, for any nation, was to emulate the best in ideas, culture, laws, and politics, but not to generate a unique or local model. His vision for the future was, simply put, to apply the principles of liberal philosophy to all aspects of society in order to join the cultured world. The "folk" of Bradford Burns' *The Poverty of Progress* do not appear in Varela's vision for Uruguay or Argentina, except as the great ignorant mass held back by oppressive *caudillos*. Yet this position, which the *Blancos* called anti-national, fit well with the diverse groups that formed the defense of Montevideo. International liberalism had a strong influence inside the walls. It provided a common cause that could unite the various nationalities without excluding any of them as "foreign." In contrasting the progressive, liberal vision of the future with a caricature of Rosas as the reactionary past, Varela and the *doctores* grafted a hopeful idealism to an otherwise desperate cause.

I have focused here on some of Varela's beliefs: freedom of the press, republican government, international cooperation, and tolerance for foreigners. He clearly believed these liberal virtues were exemplified by Britain and France, and yet *El Comercio* was not merely a celebration of European accomplishments. Varela always maintained that his obedience was to facts, as was appropriate for a free press, and not to his personal preferences. No doubt Varela believed that this was the case, and this effort shows in his writing. *El Comercio* was a wartime paper, and the pressures of the siege of Montevideo shaped Varela's rhetoric, amplifying his affinity for Britain and France, and diminishing the incentive to compromise with his conservative opponents. Fear of the Argentine dictator was always at the forefront of Varela's writings. He believed that his fate, and those of his allies, would likely be bleak given a *Blanco* victory in Uruguay.

However, Varela was not merely a political partisan fearing for his life. His faith in the principles of liberalism was deep. The arguments he made in *El Comercio* reflected his belief that the cause of Montevideo was justified in terms of those principles. As I have shown, the language and arguments he chose were intended to convince European liberals and ideological sympathizers. This was not only an attempt to propagandize, but also a part of his self-identification. Varela wrote as he did because he saw himself as fundamentally similar to those he was trying to persuade. Liberalism formed a kind of international collective identity, exemplified in the concept of the *mundo culto*, the cultured world. All of the things that Varela wanted for Argentina and Uruguay, he saw as emanating from Europe: salvation from Rosas' tyranny, commercial development, cultural refinement and belonging to an international community of law-abiding nations.

Courting European assistance in resisting Rosas was in complete agreement with the *doctores*' ideology and cultural preferences.

Varela's writings represented one vision for Uruguay and Argentina. Even if his opinions were not universally shared, his cosmopolitanism, his implacable opposition to Rosas, his belief in the free press, his doctrinaire liberalism and his belief in the fundamental benefits of European civilization all found a home behind the walls of Montevideo. The press was exalted by Varela as the herald of these beliefs. His high reputation among both his contemporaries and in later writings indicates that he had an influence in propagating his vision of the *Guerra Grande*. He provided an account of events as seen through a liberal lens, and used those events as examples to highlight the underlying political principles. Readers of his paper found a story of the city as a champion of liberty, a heroic outpost of freedom fighting against tyrants and oppressors. It was an inspiring story, and it is clear that many found it such, both inside the city and abroad. Florencio Varela was one of those most responsible for harnessing power of the press for the *Colorado* cause. His writings in *El Comercio del Plata* helped remake Montevideo into an international liberal cause, the 'new Troy' resisting the tyranny of Rosas.

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