

# ARGENTINE HISTORIANS IN EXILE: EMILIO RAVIGNANI Y JOSÉ LUIS ROMERO EN URUGUAY (1948-1954)

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### I. Introduction

In November 1946, 10 months after the election that elected Juan Domingo Peron as President of Argentina, Emilio Ravignani resigned to his position as American History Professor and as Director of the Historical Research Institute at the School of Philosophy and Literature of the University of Buenos Aires (UBA). One month before he had resigned to his position as Constitutional History at the National University of La Plata, due to his denial of anticipated retreat. In this way ended his long academic career that had began in the first decade of the century. Ravignani had been the first and until then only director of the Institute, position he had held since 1920. His resignation did not constitute an exceptional fact. In the period immediately previous and after Juan Domingo Peron's rise to the Presidency of the Nation, one third of the university professors were forced to leave their positions. Some of them were directly dismissed, others compulsively retreated, and the rest resigned arguing that the adequate conditions for their academic activities development no longer existed. The closest Ravignani's disciple, Ricardo Caillet Bois, was also expelled in November 1946. José Luis Romero, an historian that held very different scientific and also political orientations than Ravignani's and Caillet Bois', was also forced to leave his position of Professor at the National University of La Plata at the end of that same year. He would remain isolated from the university cloisters during the entire Peron administration. After the coup that removed Peron from the presidency, in September 1955, the new government's authorities designated Romero as Dean of the University of Buenos Aires and Caillet Bois as Director of the Historical Research Institute, named since then E. Ravignani Institute of Argentine and American History. Ravignani had died one year before Peron was overthrown from the presidency, the 8<sup>th</sup> March 1954. Ravignani and Romero shared not only the historian profession, but also a remarkable concern for public life. The former was a prominent leader of the Unión Cívica Radical conservative wing, whilst the latter had joined the Socialist Party in 1945. The purpose of this paper consists in analyzing the consequences that the rise of peronism had on both historians and their university activities during the exile in that they were forced due to their political opinions.

### II. The peronism and the argentine academic world

One of the substantive effects that the emergence of peronism on the world of argentine politics was its intense polarization. Society was fragmented in two parts whose differences became in a short time irreconcilable. The reasons of this conflict could be found in their opinions on the new national administration. We must remember here that a great part of the Argentine intellectuals saw

in Peron a replica of European fascist dictators. Peronism suppressed, first in facts, and then in legislation, university autonomy. From 1918, with a short interruption between September 1930 and February 1932, universities had developed their activities in the frame of a relevant autonomy in relation to political power. Furthermore, in the university world, a climate of considerable ideological pluralism predominated. Political positioning of the university actors had not decisively conditioned academic careers until then. From 1943, with the nationalist and catholic government arised from the military coup of June of that year and later with Peron's election as President, politics invaded academic world, and the most renamed opponents were progressively forced to resign their positions. Beyond their relationship with the new administration, political differences between opponents were remarkable. There were radicals, socialists, communists and conservatives. There were also remarkable differences in their orientations in academic, methodological and thematic terms between many of the historians that were displaced from universities.

Even though many of the most important political opponent leaders spent long periods in jail during peronism, this was not the case for Ravignani nor Romero. Despite journeys and prolonged stays outside the country during the most of the 10 years of Perón's government, both of them maintained their residency in Argentina. Even so, none of them could develop activities in the university world nor in public administration. Their expulsion from university had different consequences for both of them. Ravignani was in better conditions to fight the situation. He practiced the lawyer profession in parallel to his duties as historian and professor. He was also an active politician. During great part of the peronism, he was congressman at the National Parliament. Romero's work world, on the other hand, was tightly linked with teaching, in particular in university, but also as a primary school teacher and high school professor. After his expulsion from university, he found a job in the editorial industry as translator and editor. He also practiced as a teacher in non official institutions.

Despite the fact that both of them were already recognized as prestigious historians, their careers and profiles were very different. Ravignani had been since the decade of the '20 and together with Ricardo Levene a central figure of the professional historiographic. That centrality was linked to the direction of state institutions dedicated to the practice of history. He directed since the end of the 1910's decade the most important historical research university institute and had been in two opportunities dean of the School of Philosophy and Literature of UBA. Romero was, on the other hand, a marginal figure in university life. He had studied at National University of La Plata and taught there History of Historiography since the end of the 1930's decade.

Ravignani was one of the principal exponent of the so called New Historic School y belonged to a generation oriented to the study of legal and institutional history. The New School inherited the traditions of the so called scholar history arised in Europe in the end of the nineteenth century and concerned particularly for the application of the documentary critic methods. Their principal topics

were linked to the study of institutions, legal history and ideas, and political history in its most traditional dimensions.

Romero, by contrast, was an alien figure to traditional and hegemonic circles of historiographic production. As Fernando Devoto has signaled, he initiated his historian career in the 1920s, against the dominant tendencies in the world and also in Argentina from which Ravignani was a typical exponent. He was a critic of the scholar school, concerned about the worship of the data, of the sources and the documental method. In addition, the center of its interests was not in Argentine history. Its first stage of historiographic production had been dedicated to classic Antiquity. Devoto has outlined its attempt for explaining the dynamics of the political processes of Antiquity from the transformations society and economy. These dimensions that linked tightly politics and institutions to social conflict acknowledged the influence of the famous German historian Arthur Rosenberg, who was also a renowned figure, but remote from dominant historiographic canons. The impossibility of acceding to the chair of Antique History and his designation as professor of History of Historiography forced his new orientation to the study of the antique historian's thought. In those years, a growing concern about cultural history and history of ideas arose, as also did his first texts on Argentine history. His first works on Middle Age History, field in which he would develop his most important works, were written in these years.

### III. Careers and experiences in Uruguay: divergent roads

Neither Romero nor Ravignani abandoned in the Peronist period the practice of the historian profession. Both continued writing, researching and publishing. Nevertheless, their isolation from local university circuits – at that time there were none private university institutions in Argentina – affected them in a singular way. Both of them found – as many other Argentine scholars – a place to continue their academic activities in the Oriental Republic of Uruguay. Uruguayan public opinion perceived the new Peron's administration negatively. That country's government remained with the reformist and liberal orientation that had predominated since great parts of the 1910 and 1920s decades in Argentina. An important group of Uruguayan scholars and intellectuals had immediately supported the Argentine exonerated professors. During the '40s and '50s the Uruguayan law recognized, in addition, the university autonomy principle. Since the end of the 1940 decade, the most important figures identified with the political-university reformism, that already had a Latin American character and that Ravignani and Romero too supported, reached the government of the University of the Republic, the only university institution in Uruguay. The proximity between Montevideo and Buenos Aires, barely 6 or 7 hours by boat, made the practice of academic activities without abandoning Buenos Aires residency possible.

The institutional organization of teaching and historical research at the university level was, in Uruguay in 1945, at an initial stage. The School of Humanities and Sciences was created in that same year. It was a teaching and research center whose creation had been demanded for decades. The School was founded by initiative of the philosopher Carlos Vaz Ferreira and its creation law established the development of teaching in the higher level and research in philosophy, history and literature. Its objective was to consolidate an institution specifically dedicated to science, that excluded professional interests, including high school teacher training.

The situation of historiography in Uruguay was at that substantially different to the Argentine, where the process of university establishment and institutionalization of humanities went back to the last decade of the nineteenth century. One of the central issues that the new Uruguayan institution had was the recruitment of a faculty and scientific staff that were capable of leader and organize the teaching and research activities. Carlos Zubillaga outlined that, during the discussion on the foundation of the School, the issue of faculty selection appeared, and the possibility of hiring anti-fascist scholars and intellectuals that were exiled from their home countries was proposed. In December 1946, on the *El País* journal, one of the most influent newspapers of the country, it was suggested that it could be possible to conform an institute similar to the one that Ravignani had built in Buenos Aires at the School. The activities of this institute were well known in Uruguay, partially because of the Ravignani's interest in the figure of José Gervasio Artigas, the Uruguayan national hero, and partially because of the active construction of international external networks that the institute had built since the '20s. Ravignani could contribute here not only his long experience as an organizer, but also his extensive international contacts with historians from Latin America, Europe and the United States. As the preserved correspondence in his personal archive shows, he was, since the middle of the '40s, a frequently consulted figure for historians of different origins, interested in latinamerican history themes. In this context, Ravignani was requested to organize and direct the Historical Research Institute of the School of Humanities and, after that, was appointed in front of the Introduction to Historical Studies course. In July 1947, Ravignani accepted the ad-honorem direction of the Institute. The Uruguayan authorities expected him to build in Montevideo a similar institute to which he had founded and directed in Buenos Aires.

Ravignani's actions in the direction of the Institute copied, in the most important traces, the same ones that he had carried out as Director of the Historical Research Institute of the University of Buenos Aires. In addition, this same actions were similar to the ones that the most important University History Institutes in Occident were developing since the ends of nineteenth century. This can be inferred from the reading of the report that he presented to the Dean on the activities of 1950, among other documents. A central objective of the Institute was the articulation with similar organisms in other countries, in particular the Panamerican History and Geography Institute. Besides, Ravignani encouraged the hiring of professionals to take care of the copying of the existing

Uruguayan documents in foreign archives. With this purpose, he hired several of his former assistants in Buenos Aires, who had been also expelled from the UBA. The publication – preceded by a critical analysis – of documental series constituted other of the principal objectives. During the same 1950 year, the first volume of the “Documents for the Oriental Republic of Uruguay History,” one of the four planned documental series, was published. This volume contained the University Council acts between 1849 and 1870 and would be the first of a long series. On the other side, 1950 was the centenary of Artigas, the most important Uruguayan hero, death. The Memory written by Ravignani includes a large list of works, some of them written by coworkers at the Institute and University faculty, but also several written by him, that reveal that the study of Artigas' figure constituted a central area of research for the Institute. Following a School of Philosophy and Literature of UBA practice, he also took care of inviting foreign professors, as the renamed french anthropologist Paul Rivet, and of guarantee the exchange of publications with prestigious historiographical research centers from other countries. His work in terms of the dedicated to the research practice institutional system would be recognized as fundamental after his death in March 1954. Nevertheless, his hiring also apparently promoted controversy and resentment between Uruguayan historians. At least it seemed to have caused the hostility of the principal “official” historian, Juan Pivel Devoto, who held also an important influence over the periodic press. Carlos Zubillaga has outlined how, after Ravignani's death, a series of articles that questioned his appointment – as a foreigner – and the orientation that he printed to the Institute appeared in the *El Día* journal. Ravignani's correspondence with the authorities of the School shows certain degree of concern for the critiques to his work. But, likewise, they showed that his links with relevant political figures and the Uruguayan government – results of his condition as an Argentine political leader – permitted him to front these critiques successfully. Ravignani took care then especially of strengthening his contacts in the Senate and obtaining there support like the one from the influent senator Gustavo Gallinal.

Carlos Zubillaga has also studied the process that ended with the incorporation of José Luis Romero to the School of Humanities and outlined the strong differences with Ravignani's case. In September 1948, Romero was invited by the Public Instruction Ministry to dictate a couple of conferences in Montevideo. In this context, a group of students of the School of Humanities asked the Dean to invite him to dictate two conferences. Afterwards, it was Romero who suggested the secretary of the School his incorporation to the teaching body. The answer was positive and, since 1949, he was hired to dictate “Introduction to Historical Studies” and “Philosophy of History” courses. Apparently, it was Ravignani who informally consulted Romero about the possibility of his hiring in Uruguay, which in a certain way reveals the solidarity produced by the common condition as political persecuted in Argentina. The hiring of Romero did not generate, in opposition to Ravignani's, great public controversies, in part because he did not held a hierarchical position in the university structure, but also because Romero did not have Ravignani's public relevance.

Romero's historiographical perspective diverged from the adopted by Ravignani in similar courses. While the latter proposed focusing classes in the matters fundamentally related to documental critique, Romero explored conceptual aspects, topics related to knowledge theory and the problem of the truth and historical criteria. In addition, the course dedicated a relevant space to historiographical themes. In 1950, Romero was hired to dictate the Philosophy of History and Contemporary History courses. Afterwards, he was asked to dictate a History of Culture seminar. The differences between them in terms of historiographical orientation can also be noticed in the reading of a text written by a student of this last seminar, Carlos Visca, that was published in the School of Humanities and Sciences Review. The work, focused on the "Moral Structure of the Middle Classes" at the ends of the nineteenth century and beginnings of twentieth had been elaborated for the History of Culture seminar taught by Romero. Unlike the works that Ravignani motivated, based on original archive sources analysis and institutional and legal texts, Visca's text was based on novels and literary texts. It was about, the author affirmed, an essay about thinking and moral feeling of a determined social layer in an enclosed historical period. He affirmed then, emphatically: "The archives are not the place where we should look for our information, because little or anything useful could be found that reflected light over the mentality of our subject." Visca wanted to reconstruct the evolution and transformations of the bourgeois mentality and the conformation of the modern ideas of progress, nationality, family, class and upward mobility.

From 1953, Peron's government rulings limited travels to foreign countries, in particular the ones that were periodically carried out to Uruguay. This regulation not only affected Romero's activity, but also the ones of many Argentine scholars that had found a place for professional development in the University of the Republic. Facing this situation, he was offered the possibility of keeping the academic and work link with the institution based on the writing of a paper referred to any subject of the course. This work should be published afterwards. Romero accepted the offer and his answer also reveals the importance that the Uruguayan university space had to continue his duties as historian and avoiding a simple office job. He showed then his enthusiasm with the proposal, that gave him the opportunity to work in a subject in which he had a particular interest: "... instead of doing correspondence in an office or any other job that I would have to turn to." However, in May 1954, the financial situation of the University generated the interruption of the contractual relationship. Some time later he was offered a new contract that required his definitive settlement in Montevideo, which he accepted. Nevertheless, the change in the political situation in Argentina, and Peron's overthrow, stopped the concretion of this project. Romero would resume his links with the University of the Republic in 1956.

#### IV. Exiles, political persecution and historiographical production

It is significative to ask about how the political experience of persecution under peronism and the

subsequent exile in Uruguay inceded in the historiographical work of the to figures studied in this paper. The historiographical trajectories of Romero and Ravignani show, in this sense, a different effect of the rise of peronism and their exile. In Romero's case, his production as an historian was not decisively affected by political circumstances. During the years prior to peronism rise, his historiographical concerns jumped from antique to medieval history, central object of his work since then. Until the beginnings of the '50s, Romero had clearly turned into a medievalist. At that time, he also interested himself in Argentine history, in particular in ideas development. This process seems to derivate from an intellectual project build-up in the mid and long term and from readings and thoughts produced by his experience as an historian. During those years, Romero was granted a Guggenheim Fellowship, which forced him to postpone his teaching commitments in Montevideo with the purpose of examining material related to diverse aspects of Medieval History at the Widener Library at Harvard University. Anyway, peronism was not excluded from his new concerns, as it can be seen in his writings about history of ideas in Argentina, published from the middle of the 40's decade.

In Ravignani's case, on the contrary, the rise of peronism and probably exile too had an important impact on his works, especially in his thematic and interpretative orientation, although this was not the case for his methodological approach. Unlike Romero, the object of his research work was Argentine historical evolution from the colony to the middle of the nineteenth century. Ravignani had dedicated an important part of this works to the study of the origins of federalism, *caudillism*, and he had even written several articles on Juan Manuel de Rosas, who had governed with dictatorial methods Buenos Aires Province between 1835 and 1852. Ravignani was, as we have already said, an historian of laws and institutions. His preferences for constitutional history and his fidelity to the documental critique methods evidently characterize his works. However, some of his conclusions questioned some hegemonic opinions in some reference law historiography texts and even of school historiography. This comes evident when one reads some of his writings published in the '20s and '30s decades. It is difficult to summarize the content of Ravignani's ideas about Argentina's past. We will try to outline here some of the its most important aspects. In the first place, it can be seen in his works a strong defense of the contributions of the provinces and *caudillos* to the construction of the modern liberal order in Argentina. Ravignani tried to demonstrate with his works that provincial states through their leaders, the *caudillos*, had simultaneously the principle of local autonomy and the will to integrate themselves in a bigger political entity: the Argentine Nation. In this sense, he criticized influent versions of legal historiography that exalted the ruling class of the City of Buenos Aires and accused the *caudillos* – authentic popular leaders of their provinces – of anti nationalists and separatists. Ravignani demonstrated with his works the popular and provician origin of argentine political institutions and its National Constitution. In this was he had also studied the figure of the most important Uruguayan hero, José Gervasio Artigas; who had been harshly described as a separatist and despotic *caudillo*, in the two foundational works of argentine historiography: the



History of Belgrano and the Argentina Independence by Bartolomé Mitre and the History of the Republic of Argentina by Vicente Fidel López. Ravignani denied Artigas' separatism and accused the authorities of Buenos Aires, which he qualified as centralist and authoritarian, of attacking and harassing him unfairly. Finally, he had also dedicated a relevant part of his works to the study of the figure of Rosas, "damned" figure for the traditional Argentine historiography. In opposition to an institutional and legal historiography that had even denied the necessity of taking care of his figure and his time, arguing that a Dictatorship did not create institutions worthy of being studied, Ravignani claimed that it was impossible to understand Argentina's second half of the nineteenth century political order without Rosas' contributions. Rosas' administration, even with its dictatorial features, had permitted the union of the country and its organization under the federal form, outlining in that way positive aspects of that stage.

The rise of peronism, to which Ravignani was a public and passionate opponent, caused an important twist in his historical interpretations. One of the dimensions of that twist was the close relationship he established in that time between the readings of the past and the discussions of the present. His historiographical works were politicized in a new and unprecedented way, although it followed the traditional political discourse that had characterized his historiographical perspective until then. At least it can be noticed how he tried to avoid, in an explicit way, that his vision of the time of Rosas could be seen as a defense of Dictatorship as a form of government. In the prologue to a little volume published in 1945, he would argue that in his writings on Rosas he had only tried to build an original and renewed explanation. He clarified then in an emphatic form that he had never tried to found a "justification of evil." The writings on Artigas that he published in these times, which he elaborated partially during his exile in Montevideo and that were published in Uruguay, the most of them in 1950, are, in this sense, more explanatory. As we have already stated, in his first writings on Artigas, he had insisted on presenting him as a popular, federal and democratic leader. On the contrary, in his last writings of the '50s, the Uruguayan leader was fundamentally a hero of the republican principles of government. To understand Artigas correctly, he claimed that it was necessary not only to acknowledge his defense of provincial autonomy, but also, and especially, his firm opposition to the monarchical and absolutist form of government. That way, through his historical writings, Ravignani was talking, in an implicit way, to the Argentine political present, which he considered dominated by a clearly dictatorial regime.

## V. Final thoughts

Both Ravignani and Romero found in Montevideo a proper place to continue their academic activities. None of them achieved in imposing his historiographical modes and criteria, that were substantially different. Neither tensions nor conflicts between the both of them, despite their political and historiographical disagreements. It is probable that the shared condition of expelled had

displaced this difference to a second plane. The Uruguayan university world was plural and required for the organization of the School of Humanities the contributions of foreign specialists. Ravignani was hired due to his experience in the study of Uruguayan history, in particular his renowned works on the most important Uruguayan hero, Artigas. But, probably, the decisive factor that explains his incorporation to the University of the Republic had been his experience in the institutional management of historical research. In addition, it is likely that his established contacts with many of the most important figures of Uruguayan historiography through the years had an impact. On the other hand, his experience in international networks construction that made the Historical Research Institute of the UBA a latinamerican referent of the discipline, surely constituted a factor that helped in his hiring.

In Romero's case, on the contrary, the participation of students, that due to the co government traditions of the Uruguayan university held an important influence in academic activities, was decisive. The fact that both of them were hired reveals also that the power and government structure of the School of Humanities and Sciences of Montevideo allowed the coexistence of figures characterized by differences of political and historiographical opinions. Ravignani was criticized by relevant figures of the historiographical local world figure, but was finally accepted. Romero's popularity with students was greater than Ravignani's, as it can be read in the testimony of Blanca París de Oddone and was a decisive factor in his incorporation to the University of the Republic. Romero also had a decisive impact in the historiographical orientations of a great part of the new generation of Montevideo historians. However, his works did not have the public repercussion of Ravignani's, whose works and writings appeared frequently in the most important journals. The lack of consolidation of the historiographical and academic Uruguayan fields allowed this way the coexistence of diverse alternatives. In conclusion, Ravignani and Romero played different roles in the process of constitution of the School of Humanities of Montevideo. Ravignani was an organizer of and institutional manager. Romero, instead, was much more involved in substantive aspects related to teaching and intellectual training of students. The place Ravignani held made him a target for public critiques and questioning, and his figure was more resisted than Romero's, which always had the sympathies of second range authorities, but also – and above all – counted on the popularity with students. In the end, the University of the Republic could count in this circumstances characterized by persecution and expulsion of prestigious scholars and intellectuals from the Argentine University on two central figures of its academic world, who played a crucial role in the institutional build-up and in the profession

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Pablo Buchbinder, *Historia de las Universidades Argentinas*, (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2010) e *Historia de la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras*, (Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 1997).

F. Devoto, "En torno a la formación historiográfica de José Luis Romero", en J.E. Burucúa, F. Devoto y A. Gorelik, *José Luis Romero. Vida histórica, ciudad y cultura*, (San Martín: UNSAM EDITA, 2013), 37-56.

C. Zubillaga, *Historia e Historiadores en el Uruguay del siglo XX*, (Montevideo, Librería de la Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias de la Educación (2002), 181.

Deposited documentation can be seen in the *Archivo de Emilio Ravignani (AER)*, Second Series, Box nº52.

In a letter sent to the uruguayan historian Edmundo Narancio, Ravignani stated: "I have meditated over the fundamental matter of your honorable invitation to collaborate in the build-up of an Historical Research Institute, at the School of Humanities, following the pattern of the one created in Buenos Aires, to which direction I was forced to resign;" *Archivo del Instituto de Ciencias Históricas (AICH)*, Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias de la Educación de la Universidad de la República, Correspondence 1947-1948.

E. Ravignani, "Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas. Memoria. Año 1950", *Revista de la Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias*, 6, (1951), 23-34.

José M. Traibel to Emilio Ravignani, Montevideo, 23 de enero de 1948, en *AICH*, Volume 1947-1948.

It should be noticed that students were here part of the university government.

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desarrollo de la historiografía uruguaya," *La Historiografía Argentina en el siglo XX*, comp. F. Devoto (Buenos Aires: Editores de América Latina, 2006), 345-376. By the same autor the following texts can be consulted: C. Zubillaga "Comunidades historiográficas y renovación disciplinaria en Uruguay", *Revista Complutense de Historia de América*, 29, (2003), 179-191. A warm description of Romero's period in the School by one of his former students at Montevideo in B. París de Oddone, "Presencia de José Luis Romero en la Universidad Uruguaya", *Cuadernos Americanos*, 4, (1988), 122-128.

A summary of Romero's historiographical trajectory can be consulted in F. Devoto, "En torno a la formación historiográfica de José Luis Romero", eds. J.E. Burucúa, F. Devoto and A. Gorelik, *José Luis Romero. Vida histórica, ciudad y cultura*, (San Martín: UNSAM EDITA, 2013), 37-56.

E. Ravignani, *Inferencias sobre Juan Manuel de Rosas y otros ensayos*, (Buenos Aires: Huarpes, 1945), 12.

E. Ravignani, *Inferencias sobre Juan Manuel de Rosas y otros ensayos*, (Buenos Aires: Huarpes, 1945); "Trascendencia de los ideales y la acción de Artigas en la Revolución Argentina y Americana", *El País*, Montevideo, 24 de septiembre de 1950.

B. París de Oddone, "José Luis Romero Universitario", *Cuadernos Americanos*, N 10, (1988), 129-136.

