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**PROPERTY, POLITICAL ECONOMY AND COMMODITY FRONTIER
AN INTELLECTUAL HISTORY OF BUENOS AIRES DURING THE AGE
OF REVOLUTIONS (1776-1835)**

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Property, Political Economy and Commodity Frontier

An Intellectual History of Buenos Aires during the Age of Revolutions
(1776-1835)

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INTRODUCTION*

Property is an elusive concept. From the 19th century onwards, the growing number of speculations about its origins, nature, and functions have elevated it to a fundamental political and economic concept, paralleling the increasing global capitalist interdependence. However, the multiplicity of uttering voices increased confusion. To mention just one striking example, in 1840, the French anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon replied to the question “what is property?” with the famous exclamation “Property is theft!”. A few years later, commenting on his major work, *The System of Economic Contradictions* (1846), he resumed his findings in the formula “Property is freedom”.¹ The two opposite attributes of property could coexist as the meaning depended on who enjoyed the fruits of labour or suffered from toiling with little reward. Social positionality influenced the meanings and definitions of property, and for the following century, opposing political projects would battle for the government of society, grounding their claims on conflicting concepts, among which property played a leading role.

The previous considerations regarded the property of an individual. Zooming out, property also turns into an attribution of any human community. It might be the source of subsistence for a community in the form of a territory providing food and shelter. Customs and manners thus sanction rights for enjoying it, shared among community members, usually at the expense of someone external to the community. As humans progressively developed more complex forms of social coexistence, the rules for allocating rights on collective properties changed “in an answer to the eternal problem of the relationship between man and things”.² In the European context, common property turned into public property alongside the development of more complex state forms. The history of property is, therefore, also the history of how human groups cooperated or competed to appropriate property for themselves. Thus, property has constitutively a double dimension: the property of an individual and the property of a group.

Humans did not remain indifferent to this fundamental historical concept and provided intellectual arguments to justify community rules governing property allocation. During the 18th century, Europe

* NOTE ON THE TRANSLATION. This research relies heavily on a Spanish-written bibliography and works in French and Italian are used, too. We provide all the translations from the original texts. The same applies to primary sources. The translation of the primary sources tried to remain faithful to original syntax, when possible. For translating significant terms, we retrieved their historical meanings in the *Diccionario de autoridades* (1726-1739) of the Real Academia Española, available online at <https://apps2.rae.es/DA.html>.

¹ Proudhon, *Les confessions*, 45.

² Grossi, *La proprietà e le proprietà*, 37.

witnessed the emergence of a new body of knowledge on the relationships among individuals, their interactions within a “society”, and the ways to govern them: the science of political economy. Before this moment, jurists had prominence in producing reflections on the issues of individual and collective property. They were then joined by political economists who put their legal knowledge at the service of the speculations on the origins and causes of human material wealth. This knowledge had a prominent practical character, as it wished to transform (and better) the existing reality. However, a tension between practical political economy and the impulse to universalisation brought by the new natural sciences soon developed. How was it possible to discover and apply the laws governing the creation of material wealth in a world where multiple ecological and cultural contexts coexisted? It was the general question that European imperial powers faced from the 18th century onwards, and the same preoccupations inspired the political entities which materialised following the successive phases of European imperial breakdown and collapse.

This study contributes to resolving the conundrum of property in a specific time and place: the province of Buenos Aires between the 1770s and 1830s. It does so by analysing the multiple meanings that “land property” acquired in the region, evaluating how different governments practically implemented these ideas or tried to. This way, a particular emphasis is placed on the interplay between ideas and reality. The primary sources are administrative reports, economic treaties, legislative texts, newspaper articles, parliamentary debates, and private correspondence. Those texts are examined with an intellectual history approach that first seeks to delineate their ideological connections. However, second, and most importantly, it wants to carefully contextualise their meanings concerning the socio-economic context where these ideas were meant to transform social reality. What were the meanings of the economic concept of “property” in the institution-building processes in the Río de la Plata? How did these ideas affect the drafting and the practical implementation of reforms? To what extent did the increasing circulation and political deployment of politico-economic ideas impact Buenos Aires socio-economic context? This dissertation provides some answers to these questions.

Buenos Aires offers us a fascinating case study for multiple reasons besides a certain degree of historiographical neglect. In roughly a century, the city passed through fundamental transformations. In the mid-18th century, it was the most southern outpost of a declining universal monarchy, when reforms turned it into a flourishing and crucial port in an economically expanding commercial empire. Following 1810, Buenos Aires tried to create a confederation of sovereign provinces, and after being defeated, it autonomously organised provincial institutions. Finally, at the turn of the 19th century, it

became the capital of a federal republic that would expand its territory and create its institutions until the beginning of the following century.

As a high degree of political instability characterised this context, what factor was a constant element during the period under study? It was the progressive expansion of a market-oriented commercial society in the countryside of Buenos Aires, and the deepening of its interdependence with the expanding capitalist global market. This material reality had an intellectual *counterpart*, representing our investigation object. The number of reflections on the local economy and how to improve it increased, and we detailed how “land property” was a central concept in these debates. The pace of economic expansion and the agricultural development model implied that land became a crucial element for institutionalising a market-oriented commercial society, the goal of every actor involved in Buenos Aires’ political and intellectual life during this period. The double dimension of land property is evident in this story and will emerge during the narrative. On the one hand, the imperial and then provincial state promoted the territorialisation of power and the expansion of its (commodity) frontier to appropriate more territory and value it in the global capitalist market. On the other, governments attempted to redefine the rules governing individual land appropriation and enjoyment, promoting the maximisation of individual labour while allocating rights to the economic and political interests that supported them.

	Territory (km ²)	Population	Hide exports
Early 18th century	9.000	3.000	65.940 (1768)
Late 18th century	30.000	9.000	390.780 (1796)
Around 1820	40.000	73.000	728.539 (1818)
Around 1840	180.000	109.000	2.340.638 (1841)

Table 1. Socio-economic expansion in the province of Buenos Aires.³

Studying the intellectual arguments accompanying the increasing economic interdependence between Buenos Aires and the outside world reveals that “land property” was a fundamental concept as it was considered one of the best means to encourage the expansion of a market-oriented commercial society and its stability. The comparison between the intellectual and the material worlds highlights the discrepancy between the two, as the reformers’ dreams rarely materialised. However, notwithstanding

³ See Massé, ‘El tamaño y el crecimiento de la población’; Rosal and Schmit, ‘Del reformismo colonial borbónico al librecomercio’. These data are an approximation to signal the magnitude of the process. For instance, exports greatly fluctuated and the years (1768, 1796, 1818, 1841) are chosen for their representativeness.

the multiple old and new forms of land tenancy characterising the Río de la Plata, economic expansion and market integration did not stop. Therefore, the idea of property, not its institutional form, significantly contributed to local economic expansion and the institutionalisation of a capitalist commercial society in Buenos Aires and the surrounding Pampas. This research tells a part of this story.

1. Buenos Aires between Empire, Independence and Capitalism

The case of Buenos Aires is highly interesting due to the impressive pace of economic and commercial expansion over a very short period. The city had traditionally been the southern outpost of the Spanish monarchy. It was established in a remote territory, surrounded by bellicose *Querandí* communities who destroyed the first settlement founded by Pedro de Mendoza in 1536. At the end of the century, Juan de Garay created a new port, Santa María de los Buenos Aires, to support the stabilisation of the Province of Paraguay and provide it with an oceanic port. Although it was poorly connected with the *Carrera de Indias*, the merchants of Lima soon petitioned for legal restrictions on Buenos Aires trade, alarmed by the possible competition for the export of Peruvian silver. As the Crown configured it as a defensive port, trading in Buenos Aires was permitted through *asientos* or special permissions. Despite the ban on extracting gold and silver, local trade flourished, as evidenced by the many reiterations of the prohibition of trade with Peru during the 17th century. This dynamic entrepôt developed commercial and financial practices to sustain its legal and illegal economic activities.⁴

The fate of the city changed during the following century. The Atlantic economic efflorescence, based on the reactivation of sugar and silver commodity chains, reached the South Atlantic; more *naves de registros* arrived every year, and an increasing number of hides were traded, taking advantage of the impressive cattle and horse stock of Paraguay, the Banda Oriental (roughly contemporary Uruguay), and the Pampas.⁵ The Bourbon reforms and the creation of the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata marked a significant turning point. Buenos Aires became its administrative capital, silver extraction was legalised, and the city experienced decades of sustained economic growth. Urbanisation and external demand contributed to a deep and extensive commercialisation of the surrounding regions. Buenos Aires merchant elites, who based their economic and political dominance on diversification

⁴ Wasserman, *Las obligaciones fundamentales*.

⁵ Tutino, 'The Americas'; Brown, *A Socioeconomic History*.

strategies between commercial, productive, and political activities, articulated an internal economic space that linked the Atlantic and Pacific markets passing through the Andean silver region.⁶

The countryside became a patchwork of different kinds of market-oriented rural exploitations. Since the 1990s, Argentine socio-economic history has experienced an incredible season of historiographical renovation, which overcame the old idea of a colonial agricultural landscape dominated by latifundia and *gauchos* roaming the Pampas.⁷ The debate began addressing the structure of the local rural workforce, and empirical investigations demonstrated that the nuclear peasant family was the main economic unit of Buenos Aires' countryside, alongside large-scale *estancias*. Seasonal wage labour and slavery were integral parts of the market-oriented rural economy, as peasant households and *estancieros* bought slaves and hired *peones*, depending on the rhythms of ranching and agricultural activities, the availability of capital, and so forth.⁸ Land availability and population scarcity meant that households and individuals had a great degree of economic autonomy, thanks to the possibility of easily migrating to new lands and the great bargaining power in contracting wages. Political power and economic elites, therefore, promoted the control and governance of the workforce through the massive introduction of enslaved Africans, as well as attempts to fix the population to the territory by vagrant laws and the progressive criminalisation of the "idle".⁹

War and revolutions shackled this vibrant economic context. The Revolutionary Wars heavily disrupted Atlantic trade as the Spanish fleet succumbed to British naval power. Two British armies reached the Río de la Plata shores (1806-1807) and conquered the city. Local militias finally defeated the invaders, but confidence in the Spanish Crown's ability to guarantee peace and prosperity for the city was shattered. On 25 May 1810, a *cabildo abierto* declared the creation of the Primera Junta, the first local autonomous government, starting the political process that would spark civil and independence wars and culminate in the declaration of independence from Spain in 1816.

The early 19th-century political turbulence deepened the economic divide between Buenos Aires and the other provinces of modern-day Argentina, and the economic expansion of the capital continued along the path started in the late colonial period: the advancement of the local commodity frontier interconnected with the Atlantic markets. Similarly, the socio-economic structure of Buenos Aires' rural population gained in complexity: the expansion of production and the multiplication of large

⁶ Jumar. 'El espacio colonial peruano'; Jumar, 'El comercio ultramarino'.

⁷ Garavaglia and Gelman, 'Rural History of the Río de la Plata'; Garavaglia and Gelman, 'Mucha tierra y poca gente'.

⁸ Mayo, et al., 'Debate sobre la mano de obra rural'.

⁹ Borucki, *From Shipmates to Soldiers*; Alonso, et. al., 'Los vagos de la campana'.

estancias went hand in hand with the increase of autonomous rural households, which were the basic units of production until the end of the 19th century. While the prevalence of husbandry led to considering this economic context as a paradigm of tradition and backwardness, technological change affected the sector and improved productivity and profitability, as evidenced by the rise of sheep breeding.¹⁰ During the 1840s, “a thriving economic order” consolidated, providing the basis for further economic expansion in the second half of the century, thanks to crucial technological innovations (refrigerated ships), massive waves of European migrants, and the defeat and extermination of Pampean sovereign Native groups.¹¹ Since the late colonial times, the majority of the population passed through the market to sustain its living, configuring Buenos Aires and its surrounding countryside as an example of early capitalist development, because the steady Atlantic demand provided continuous incentives for a deeper interdependence between rural production and export trade. The rhythms of Atlantic demands penetrated the countryside and progressively affected the lives of its inhabitants.

Ideas structuring the concept of land property accompanied the export-led socio-economic transformation of this context. As the complexity and dynamism of the late 18th-century economy have been traditionally downplayed, the economic ideas of local elites have not received much scholarly attention. The association of the Spanish monarchy with mercantilism and economic backwardness informed both liberal and Marxist interpretations of the local economic past. According to the former, the development of rural production and secure property rights was neglected as land availability and the mercantile system were negative incentives.¹² According to the latter, the local landholder class co-opted the Spanish structures of power to accumulate lands at the expense of the rural population. However, they were disinterested in improving the economy, as their feudal ideology inspired coercion and backward economic practices instead of a capitalist *ethos*. Even if the centrality of land property was recognised, the Marxist conceptual framework prevented appreciation of the complexity of the developing capitalist economy in the region, and the anachronistic projection of the concept of “class” concealed the many arguments revolving around land property and economic development put forth by different historical actors.¹³ The post-1810 developments had been

¹⁰ The introduction in the early 19th century of the *balde sin fondo* (‘bottomless bucket’) was a crucial technological innovation. A British observer commented that watering the *estancias* became “so rapid and simple, that a man with a change of horses can water two thousand head of cattle in about eight hours”. See Sluyter, *Black Ranging Frontiers*, 156. During the 1830s, steam engines were introduced in the *saladeros*, the establishments to produce salted meat. See Giberti, *Historia ganadería*, 91-92. For the expansion of wool production, see Sabato, *Capitalismo y ganadería*.

¹¹ Fradkin, et.al., *En busca de un tiempo perdido*, 15.

¹² Gondra, *Las ideas económicas*.

¹³ Azcuy Ameghino, *El latifundio y la gran propiedad colonial*; Azcuy Ameghino, *Historia de Artigas*.

interpreted similarly: according to the liberals, modern economic growth was prevented by civil wars and the government of the *caudillos*, and only the governments following the defeat of Juan Manuel de Rosas (1852) realised the May ideals of freedom and prosperity. Marxists pointed instead at the failure of the May Revolution, as the most radical and democratic ideas were defeated by the economic elites that passed from sustaining the colonial domination of the Spanish capital to serving the neocolonial hegemony of British industrial capitalism.

This research describes the intellectual arguments that accompanied the development of a capitalist economy inhabited by “monopolist” merchants seeking to turn into landowners, priests resorting to Enlightenment arguments to better the economic profitability of their parishioners, small rural producers defending the land they possessed on the basis of the legal title conferred by their individual labour, political leaders building their legitimacy thanks to their ability in the governance of the rural economy, and Natives seeking to strategically interconnect with Creole and European markets to strengthen their status in indigenous society.¹⁴ Their claims around land property are the central topic of this research. The focus on the intellectual expressions of the process of economic growth reveals that land property was widely considered the best stimulus to favour the expansion of market production and the institutionalisation of a commercial society. As property assumed many different forms, the positive correlation between the security of individual possession and the stimulus to market expansion is what gives coherence and rationalisation to the different material manifestations of the social relationship between men and land which emerged in the Río de la Plata between the late colonial period and the early 19th century.

The Buenos Aires context perfectly fits into the most recent developments in the global history of capitalism.¹⁵ Trade is now considered a connector of different political systems and labour regimes, resulting in an economic system based on profit and accumulation spanning the entire globe.

¹⁴ Our original contribution to Argentine scholarship on the history of property rights is the intellectual history approach. The issue was already tackled from the point of view of economic history (Garavaglia, ‘La propiedad de la tierra’, Gelman, ‘Derechos de propiedad’), legal history (Poczynok, ‘Los procesos civiles’; Poczynok, ‘La implementación del sistema liberal’) and rural social history (Fradkin, ‘Ley, costumbre y relaciones sociales’; Zeberio, ‘Los hombres y las cosas’). A circumscribed discussion of the intellectual arguments around property during colonial times is provided in Moraes and Rodríguez Arrillaga, ‘Propiedad comunal y propiedad individual’.

¹⁵ As pointed out by Rosa Luxemburg building on Marx’ concept of primitive accumulation, capitalism has always based its expansion on the dispossession and destruction of indigenous non-capitalist forms of economic life. It did not constitute a particular stage of capitalist development, rather it is its main law of motion. See Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*. Luxemburg’s focus on global connection fits into the contemporary global turn of the literature on the history of capitalism. Here, the term ‘global’ stands for the attention of getting rid of the Eurocentric bias typical of normative definitions of capitalism based on European (and British) historical experience. Our urgency to provide a non-Eurocentric global history is reflected in the effort to connect local Argentinian socio-economic history with the international trends and literature of global history and the history of capitalism. See also Edwards et al., ‘Capitalism in Global History’.

Traditional literature on capitalism has already pointed to the pivotal role of trade and merchants in the emergence of a capitalist economic system but usually provides a narrative based on economic elites and finance.¹⁶ Recently, the relevance of commercial capitalism has been stated again, a definition that encapsulates a multiplicity of labour and production regimes, thereby avoiding Eurocentrism and stressing the state's role in backing commercial expansion.¹⁷ The diffusion of the commodity form and the social implications of this phenomenon, is an additional theoretical tool for this research.¹⁸ The necessity to expand the local commodity frontier is a central aspect of the incorporation into the wider capitalist market, and a fundamental process that shaped ideas around land property and economic growth since the late colonial time. Additionally, it has been pointed out how the concept of "commodity frontier" offers a convenient perspective to study and compare the expansion of capitalism in the global countryside, appreciating the multiplicity of outcomes of the attempts to adapt local ecologies to the needs of the global markets.¹⁹ It helps point out the processes of Native land dispossession that took place on a global scale, which are also at the centre of this research. Cattle frontiers were an integral part of this process, beginning in the late 18th century and continuing into the following one.²⁰ This research focuses on the intellectual production that accompanied this economic dynamic, as intellectual arguments were fashioned to resist, adapt to, or deepen the local interconnection with the rhythms of the global market. This work, therefore, builds on the most up-to-date developments in social and economic history and studies the ideas that flourished from economic change.²¹

¹⁶ Braudel, *Afterthoughts on Material Civilization*.

¹⁷ Banaji, *Commercial Capitalism*. Yazdani and Castro, 'Capitalisms'; Tedesco, 'Jairus Banaji's Lineages'. See also Banaji's response in the same special issue. This concept has attracted historians of the Global South who were interested in joining the new wave of histories of capitalism. The necessity to include the Spanish monarchy and Spanish America in the conversation has been repeatedly pointed out. See Tutino, *Founding A New World*; Nemser, 'Iberian Empire and the History of Capitalism'. It should be noted that the unequal relationship between Latin America and the Europe-dominated world market inspired the formulation of influential structural theories of the development of capitalism and the world economy. However, this perspective is now surpassed because of its rigid structuralism and lack of a solid empirical basis. See Gunder Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment*. For a nuanced perspective taking into account Latin American scholarship, see Dabat, *Capitalismo mundial y capitalismo nacionales*.

¹⁸ Postone, *Time, Labor and Social Domination*; Edwards et al., *op. cit.*

¹⁹ See Beckert, et al. 'Commodity Frontiers'; Bosma and Vanhaute, 'Commodity Frontiers as Drivers of Global Capitalism'. Frontiers had also been considered spaces of interethnic and intercultural contact. See Adelman and Aron, 'From Borderlands to Borders', and White, *The Middle Ground*. Argentine scholarship participated in this approach to frontier study. See Mayo, *Vivir en la frontera*, and Ratto, 'La frontera'.

²⁰ Fischer, *Cattle Colonialism*. The cattle wealth formed the basis for the deeper integration of sovereign Native American populations into the wider global markets. See Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire*.

²¹ For the need to study the intellectual and the material change brought by capitalism see Liu, *Tea War*, 12-23. Liu defines these works as "concrete histories of abstract dynamics". Examples of recent books animated by similar concerns include Sartori, *Liberalism in Empire*; Ali, *A Local History of Global Capital*; Bishara, *A Sea of Debt*.

2. The History of Political Economy and Empire

The case of Buenos Aires is situated within the broader framework of an Atlantic world inhabited by competing imperial powers. In recent years, intellectual historians have turned towards studying the history of economic thought, a field once primarily reserved for economists.²² The usual narrative associates European empires with mercantilist policies aimed at increasing wealth at the expense of others through the accumulation of precious metals. It considers that the 1776 publication of Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* marked the discovery of the laws governing the economy, countering the erroneous mercantilist speculations, which were since then considered amateurish expressions of economic reasoning and relegated to the dustbin of the history of economic thought due to their association with protectionism, competition, and empires. Instead, the Anglo-American narrative of the rise of modern economic growth and capitalism was constructed around the concepts of free trade, the wealth-generating character of individual labour, and the nation-state.²³

Analysing the arguments that accompanied the progressive imperial and then republican land appropriation in Buenos Aires reveals the inaccuracy of this narrative and the necessity to rethink the fundamental concepts that structured 18th- and early 19th-century economic categories in the Atlantic Iberian world. Placing the categories of empire and labour at the core provides us with a nuanced narrative of the history of political economy.

Empires were the main protagonists of early modern European international politics and thus are now considered fundamental actors in the circulation and expansion of economic reflections. As Europeans reached overseas territories, “the acquisition of their empires was inexorably intertwined with the acquisition of profits, and the two were seldom discussed in isolation”.²⁴ Historians have highlighted how political economy represented a common language of reform, and imperial entanglements produced a process of exchange and emulation of economic ideas and practices, both in the centres and the peripheries.²⁵ Merchants, administrators and sovereigns were engaged in an international debate that shaped the imperial policies of European states, whose common trait was emulating the practices of the “Other”, to increase wealth and power. The existence of a “colonial mercantilist consensus” has been questioned, and Philipp R. Rossner has proposed to replace

²² Winch, ‘Intellectual History and the History of Economic Thought’.

²³ Roncaglia, *The Wealth of Ideas*.

²⁴ Reinert and Røge, *The Political Economy of Empire*.

²⁵ Hont, *Jealousy of Trade*; Reinert, *Translating Empire*. Other relevant publications on mercantilism and imperial political economy are Donoghue and Jennings, *Building the Atlantic Empires*; Reinert and Fredona, *New Perspectives*.

“mercantilism” with “economic reason of state” in order to highlight the importance that early modern thinkers attributed to political power in sponsoring economic activities (especially production) and in governing the economy, discarding a term heavily charged with imprecise interpretations.²⁶ This shift is possible by including and appreciating alternative traditions of economic reflections in the canon. For instance, Cameralist-mercantilist authors had ideas about “markets and good governance, commerce, capitalism and commercial society”, which were based on “individual economic freedom, possessive individualism, natural rights, competitive markets, and economic dynamics” in not dissimilar ways to their British counterparts.²⁷ The creation of the “modern economic mind” was a byproduct of European-wide debates around political economy in a context of imperial emulative competition for creating and controlling overseas markets.

Between the 17th and 19th centuries, the economy became a fundamental concern for global political formations, to the point that its government became a matter of life and death for every political project. Modern economic and political institutions were established hand in hand through the power of imperial law.²⁸ Commercial treaties became the instruments to regulate the imperial economic international system, attempting to preserve a peace in which every party could be left with opportunities for economic development along the imperial path of trade and production expansion.²⁹ The legitimation of this construction and the consequent expansion of state power are among the concerns of historians of the political economy.

The centrality of production and economic growth generated institutional innovations. Economic societies started to be established throughout Europe. Animated by sentiment of patriotism and civic virtue, those associations bridged the gap between theory and praxis, promoting both intellectual exchange and practical experimentation of technological innovation based on the notion of “improvement”, a concept that would become central in the legitimation of European economic development and imperial expansion.³⁰ “Useful knowledge” was put at the service of economic production, as colonies were seen as the source of new knowledge, as well as virgin land that could be conquered, divided into private property and cultivated - a very practical way to claim man’s dominion over natural resources.³¹ The development of other forms of modern useful knowledge

²⁶ Rössner, *Economic Reasons of State*. See also Pincus, ‘Rethinking Mercantilism’.

²⁷ Rössner, ‘Cameralism, Capitalism, and the Making’, 374.

²⁸ Benton and Ross, *Legal Pluralism and Empires*.

²⁹ Alimientto and Stapelbroek, ‘Trade and Treaties’.

³⁰ Stapelbroek and Marjanen, *The Rise of Economic Societies*.

³¹ While a comparative look at the relation between empire and natural knowledge exceeds the scope of this study, this was a fundamental trait for many European imperial ideologies. See Irving, *Natural Science and the Origins*; Drayton,

accompanied the progressive institutionalisation of political economy and commercial society (such as topography, cartography, statistics, and printing technologies), developing in our context first within the imperial framework and later as a source of republican legitimacy.

The gradual accumulation of economic writings resulted in a dramatic quantitative expansion of economic literature during the second half of the 18th century - a fundamental branch of the wider Enlightenment - recently described as the “economic turn”. Europeans had been reflecting upon economic ideas and practices for centuries, but the frequency and urgency of the period signals an important break in the history of economic thinking. It highlights the extent to which historical actors perceived that the “cardinal issue of the time [...] were fundamentally economic in nature”, and they turned political economy into the “preeminent epistemological lever with which to theorize, discuss, implement and resist change for an increasingly wide spectrum of society”.³²

Before the critical turn of the 18th century, Spanish authors had already created a substantial body of economic literature following the 13th-century “commercial revolution” and the Age of Explorations.³³ The primary contributor to Spanish knowledge production was the School of Salamanca, whose economic and moral reflections accompanied Spanish expansion overseas.³⁴ The wars against American populations, the appropriation of natural resources, and the consequent commercial efflorescence confronted historical actors with deep moral doubts about the sinful character of their actions. Religious men and theologians were there to address these doubts. Far from opposing economic thinking and mercantile *ethos*, the Catholic tradition provided Spanish intellectuals with the methods and arguments to set the licit boundaries of economic practices.³⁵ As a prominent feature of the conquest of the Americas was the appropriation of land and labour, Spanish theologians and jurists became “articulators and ideologists of a global structure of horizontal relationships between holders of the subjective rights of *dominium*”.³⁶ The wealth-generating character of human labour was central in the Spanish debate and provided a moral argument for the legitimation of individual and imperial property.³⁷ While it has been often overlooked, this

Nature's Government. The Spanish monarchy promoted the study of American nature as a stimulus for the imperial economy. See Pimentel, ‘The Iberian Vision’. For the relationship between Enlightenment political economy and Spanish naturalistic expeditions see Dameto Zaforteza. *La economía política*.

³² Reinert and Kaplan, *The Economic Turn*, 6.

³³ Vilches, ‘Business Tools and Outlooks’.

³⁴ Duve, ‘The School of Salamanca’; Gómez Camacho, ‘El pensamiento económico en la Escuela de Salamanca’.

³⁵ García Sanz, ‘El contexto económico del pensamiento escolástico’.

³⁶ Koskenniemi, ‘Empire and International Law’, 32. Property was a central feature of Iberian economic reflections. See also Nemser, ‘Possessive Individualism’; Herzog, ‘Territory, Property and Rights’.

³⁷ Fitzmaurice, *Sovereignty, Property, and Empire*.

consideration is central in placing early modern Spanish economic thinking alongside other European linguistic traditions of political economy: the same concept of labour informed, in fact, physiocracy and classical political economy, the traditions that the Anglo-American narrative sees as the beginning of modern economic reflection.³⁸

The Age of Atlantic Revolutions represents a watershed in the history of empires and political economy, as it heavily impacted the late 18th-century imperial Atlantic world and the interpretations of the economic ideas structuring it. Competition for political control of the growing economic opportunities in the Atlantic world forced the Spanish monarchy into reform programs to sustain global wars, which had the unintended consequence of shaking the social equilibrium between imperial subjects.³⁹ The desire to appropriate more land and economically value it on the market to increase imperial production, power, and wealth informed Bourbon attempts at imperial economic reform. However, Spanish control over its overseas possessions crumbled under the blows of war and revolution. The Spanish American successor states legitimised their claims to sovereignty in political and economic terms. While the Spanish tradition was abhorred, this research identifies a striking continuity between imperial and post-imperial discourse with respect to the necessity of economic expansion, land appropriation, and the institutionalisation of a commercial society. The importance of the imperial legacy during the transition from *ancien régime* to independent states - despite the disdain historical actors expressed for their imperial past - renders the case of the Río de la Plata highly interesting for better understanding the role of political economy in the governance of society and how land property fitted into this discourse.

In this way, the history of South American capitalism connects with the intellectual history of economic ideas, providing an intellectual history of the ideas that facilitated or resisted the progressive institutionalisation of a capitalist market economy in Buenos Aires and its surrounding countryside. This narrative considers the political transformations that the region experienced, thereby contributing to the history of the role of the state in favouring the institutionalisation of capitalism. This approach makes it possible to historicise this economic system and emphasise how its emergence was not a natural or unintended development arising from human nature or the teleological movement of history but was stimulated by various political powers interested in

³⁸ Ricardo's 'labour theory of value' is considered the first theoretical formulation of the central role of human labour in determining market values. While it is recognised that similar ideas were present in earlier traditions, their inferior theoretical sophistication denies them a place in the canon of the history of economic thought. See Roncaglia, *op. cit.*, 186-189.

³⁹ Adelman, 'Iberian Passages'; Adelman, *Sovereignty and Revolution*.

expanding economic production, material wealth, and therefore their political power. Both imperial and post-imperial formations concurred in establishing capitalism in Buenos Aires, indicating that the emergence of market economies is not necessarily associated with a particular political system (the modern nation-state), but can be the goal of divine-right sovereigns, republican polities, or confederal associations of provinces. The first chapters of this research detail the arguments through which merchants, reformers, and administrators promoted the expansion of local commodity frontiers and land appropriation during the late colonial period. Comparing these with the claims around land property and economic growth following 1810 reveals striking resemblances, demonstrating that different political regimes sponsored the institutionalisation of local commercial societies during the turbulent Age of Revolutions.

3. An Intellectual History of Property

The concept of property is examined here as a fundamental political and economic concept. Therefore, rather than starting from a normative concept of modern property, we will closely follow the sources to reveal the cacophony of ideas constituting the layers of meanings surrounding land ownership that emerged in our specific geographical and temporal context.⁴⁰ This approach allows us to offer a history of how the idea of property was associated with economic development and for what reasons, during the critical juncture of the Age of Revolutions, when war, reform, and revolution influenced the institutional trajectory of Buenos Aires.⁴¹ Argentine economic and social history literature has been extensively used to ensure adherence to the historical meanings. This choice addresses both epistemological and theoretical concerns.

Epistemologically, the global turn has emphasised the necessity of including local literatures to avoid falling into Eurocentrism.⁴² Our conclusions bear therefore implications for both the history of capitalism and Argentine political and economic history. Theoretically, the history of the concept of property in Buenos Aires is considered a fragment and a consequence of the global history of the expansion of the capitalist economy. The circulation of an abstract category of land ownership indicates the progressive expansion of capitalist social relations in the city of Buenos Aires and the surrounding regions, which are configured as the fundamental social structures through which historical actors can understand and reflect the social reality around them via the abstract categories

⁴⁰ Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History*.

⁴¹ Fernández Sebastián, *Historia conceptual en el Atlántico ibérico*.

⁴² Adelman, 'Latin American and World Histories'; Serulnikov, 'El giro global en la historiografía latinoamericana'.

of political economy.⁴³ This working definition allows us to relativise our modern concept of individual private property, avoiding the perils of anachronism and stressing the extraneity of the past, where multiple ideas accompanied the “great venture of property” and eventually faded around the end of the 19th century and even beyond.⁴⁴

The concept of property is seen as one of the abstract categories of political economy, given that it derives its meaning from other ones, such as productive labour and exchange value. Assuming the generalisation of capitalist social relations in the Buenos Aires countryside and the progressive adoption of political economy categories to describe the present and the desired economic future, this research reveals the different meanings that the concept of property assumed in economic development plans and the extension of the productive frontier in the Buenos Aires countryside, aimed at institutionalisation of a local commercial society.⁴⁵ The main result has been to clarify how the central meaning shared by Bourbon administrators, “monopolist” merchants, revolutionary *caudillos*, fervent republicans, and rural producers was the valuation of land ownership as a stimulus to the maximisation of individual labour and a guarantee of the social order. Viewed through the lens of the history of capitalism, the idea of property thus becomes a fundamental concept for the progressive institutionalisation of capitalist economic forms, as the generalisation of labour as the source of exchange value creation in a market economy is a specific characteristic of this historical economic system. The same concept thus serves both as a stimulus for the institutionalisation of a political system based on the maximisation of individual labour and as a guarantee for the stability and maintenance of this economic order.

Concerning Argentine history, this work offers the first survey explicitly focusing on the concept of land property during the critical juncture of the Age of Revolutions. Many crucial themes of the historiography have been touched upon thanks to this specific timeframe: the impact of the Bourbon reforms on local society; the socio-economic development of the late colonial times; the collapse of

⁴³ Sartori, ‘Global Intellectual History’; Sartori, *Liberalism in Empire*. Sanjay Subrahmanyam has pointed out that the study of global history should go beyond a conceptual framework provided by Marx and Hegel and pointed out at the Eurocentric perils of studying the global history of political economy. While we share the urgency to critically reflect on how academic fashions might write off the critical epistemological weight of global history, we believe that the reliance on local literature and the specific Latin American context, characterised by an early reception and hybridisation of European concepts, allows to employ Sartori’s global approach to the study of local economic ideas. See Subrahmanyam, ‘Global Intellectual History beyond Hegel and Marx’. On similar concerns, see Drayton, ‘Where Does the World Historian Write From?’.

⁴⁴ Grossi, *Il dominio e le cose*; Bloch, *La fine della comunità*.

⁴⁵ The concept of commercial society is taken from the famous formulation by Adam Smith. It is a society in which individuals are interconnected by labour and exchange pursuing their individual interests. In political-economic debates, this kind of community gradually became the only acceptable form of civilised human community. See Sartori, ‘From Statecraft to Social Science’.

the Spanish rule; the civil wars; the process of institution-building in Buenos Aires; the extension of the commodity frontier; and, last but not least, local factional politics and the advent of Juan Manuel de Rosas. The concept of land property provided us with the leitmotif guiding us through a crucial conjuncture of the local *Sattelzeit*.⁴⁶ Our discussion shows that land property became a central topic of discussion since the late colonial times, in parallel with the increasing expansion of the commodity form and the interconnection with the capitalist market.

Notwithstanding the incredible land availability, different segments of Spanish American society started to compete legally and discursively to shape the ideas and institutions which regulated land access and property. At the same time, frontier violence increased, as the pattern of land use was affected by the increasing exploitation of natural resources to sustain the Atlantic and the Arauco-Pampean commercial circuits. Conflicts around land property affected the revolutionary conjuncture of 1808-1810, albeit the comparison between Buenos Aires and Montevideo signals an important fact: land property became a central social and political issue where commercial expansion and the attempts of territorialising state power and commercial society had most disrupted the previous social order. The Banda Oriental experienced decades of increased market-oriented exploitation of natural resources and attempts of land appropriation and dispossession of local communities and individual households. When the rural population reunited under Artigas' revolutionary banner, new ideas surrounding the legitimacy of land property emerged, most notably the association with the revolutionary cause and the adherence to social justice.

In Buenos Aires, land property became a burning social issue a decade later. During the 1810s, the idea of property as an individual natural right was proposed in the constitutional texts, but the creation of a confederal commercial society inhabited by individual proprietors did not prove strong enough to provide an intellectual basis to accommodate the interests of the different provinces. The following decade, frontier and international violence fed by civil and independence wars and the continuous influence of commercial and commodity frontier expansion impacted on rural society. Our focus on property highlighted the relevance of individual labour maximisation in the victorious conceptions of land property in the institutionalisation of an emphyteusis system and the role of "agrarian republicanism" in the emergence of successful political leaderships. Emphyteusis was deemed the best contract to sustain the deeper interconnection between the local developing republican commercial society and the global capitalist markets and its rhythms. It provided the necessary

⁴⁶ Fernández Sebastián, *op. cit.*

flexibility, the proximity to the ideal of individual property and an intrinsic propensity to promote the maximisation of individual labour.⁴⁷ Other forms of property which shared the urgency to increase individual productive output were instrumentally used to sustain Rosas' power, such as conditional donations. Land was distributed under the condition to participate in the local commercial society, maximising each individual labour. On the other hand, the ideal of federal agrarian republicanism proved effective in coalescing different social sectors around the support for Rosas' government. His qualities as a perfect leader for the agrarian republican commercial society developing in Buenos Aires countryside was one of the rhetorical tropes that effectively sustained his advent to power.

The so-called "formation of the Buenos Aires landowning class" is a last crucial historiographical point touched upon.⁴⁸ Describing how and why Argentine territorial wealth was concentrated in the few and powerful hands of the Buenos Aires and then provincial elites was at the centre of many investigations in rural and political history, as unequal wealth distribution was considered among the original sins of this Latin American economy. Our narrative confirmed and nuanced some key findings of socio-economic history: the complex colonial economic rural context (dominated by small property) and the extensive land availability impeded the domination of latifundia and the massive proletarianisation of the rural population. However, Atlantic commercial expansion and local strategies of economic diversification determined an increasing interest in land appropriation in the late colonial period. This material process produced intellectual arguments around land property, both supporting individual land-grabbing and advocating for more rational rules to access land to defend small producers and regulate economic exploitation.

This process did not generate a unitary landowner class, as politics was still shaped by personal relationships and clientelism rather than class consciousness. Following 1810, land assumed a new centrality as the main provincial wealth, as the local economy turned decisively towards rural production, and land became a way to reward political allegiance. During the time of Rosas, this meant the creation of large fortunes (for instance, the same Rosas or the Anchorenas). However, this same process would repeat every time the province would accumulate new lands through the dispossession of the Native populations. If the origin of an export-oriented landowner class is found in the late colonial and early independent period, this was not a path-dependent process as land availability and demographic growth determined the long persistence of a rural population of

⁴⁷ For the links between emphyteusis, agrarian change and economic growth, see Béaur, Congost and Luna, 'Emphyteusis: A Practical Question?'

⁴⁸ Halperín Donghi, *La formación de la clase terrateniente*; Banzato, Infesta and Valencia, 'Expansión de la frontera, tierra pública'.

individual proprietors. Our analysis of the intellectual arguments backing and rationalising land appropriation in politico-economic terms revealed that different and conflicting arguments could compete, reflecting the multitude of real social relations between land and people inhabiting the countryside of Buenos Aires. The malleability of political economy allowed to rationalise different arguments linking property and growth, therefore advocating for the benefit of large or small property, the possibility to include Native populations in the local commercial society through land distribution or not, the necessity to stick with European example or the convenience to devise original local formulations of economic policies.

To conclude, what role did the political economy play in this story? It provides the intellectual platform for debating the desired economic futures for Buenos Aires and intellectual arguments to rationalise the abstract economic dynamics that inspired the actions and desires of historical actors. As European imperial politics began to be driven by the desire to increase material wealth, political economy provided them with economic and moral arguments to legitimise governmental reforms and territorialise state power, creating sealed economic spaces for the exclusive use of the members of a political community. This process escalated a series of vertical and horizontal conflicts that exploded in Spanish America during the Napoleonic Wars. However, breaking the colonial nexus did not dispel the “space of experience” and the “horizon of expectations” political economy created. Creole leaders resumed to imperial arguments to sustain their politico-economic projects, new institutions promoting this form of knowledge were created, and the debate in the local public opinion intensified. The difference was that economic arguments served the interests of an independent South American republic rather than a province of a composite monarchy.

If political economy was a common language of the actors involved in this story, this is not true concerning the Native groups of the Arauco-Pampean area. The *Pampas*, *Tehuelches*, *Ranquelches*, *Pehuenches* and other groups participated in the expansion of the local commercial and capitalist society, becoming buyers of European and Creole goods in exchange for a developing indigenous market-oriented artisanal sector. Later, they were incorporated into the federal frontier commercial society through wage labour and agricultural production. However, the scarce sources revealing their economic ideas and the ones surrounding property, did not contain some of the central arguments that were informing Creole ideas regarding the relationships between individuals and the economic system surrounding them, most notably the urgency to maximise individual labour and institutionalise a commercial society through the positive effect of land property. This did not impede their alliance with federal Buenos Aires in the period under study, thanks to a form of legal pluralism inherited

from Spanish times. However, following 1852 and the attempt to institutionalise a system of positive rule of law, the different indigenous and Creole ideas surrounding land property became one of the crucial issues legitimising the definitive dispossession of Native lands during the second half of the 19th century.

4. Methodology and Sources

Approaching the history of economic thought through intellectual history is an original claim resulting from the intersection of different strands of literature. First, the dissatisfaction with the received narrative of the history of economic thought has already been noted and pushed a renewed interest in the historical meanings of economic ideas, to avoid the trap of anachronism. Second, the advances in the conceptual and intellectual history of political ideas proved the fruitfulness of an intellectual history that goes beyond the genealogical reconstruction by focusing on the possibilities of enunciation of ideas and their creative use. Third, conceptual history promoted research on the history of modern knowledge, social sciences and their role in administering and governing society. Political economy was one such form of knowledge.⁴⁹

This study analyses treaties, newspapers, petitions, private correspondence, administrative reports and parliamentary debates to track the debate over economic development and their connection with the concept of land property. This set of sources implies that the focus is on elites' ideas rather than the subaltern populations. This choice allows us to problematise and show the complexity of the "proprietary mentality" that, while agreeing on the necessity of labour maximisation and economic expansion, devised different ways to attain it through property. In addition, socio-economic historians had already investigated with brilliant results the ideas of the rural populations of the Río de la Plata.⁵⁰

This research follows the renewed interest in the intellectual history of Latin American political ideas and concepts, albeit shifting the focus to economic ideas.⁵¹ Multiple theoretical proposals concurred in the renovation of the field to avoid the Eurocentric pitfalls of the old traditions (such as the

⁴⁹ Heilbron, et. al. *The Rise of the Social Sciences*. In his reflections on the archaeology of modern knowledge, Michel Foucault reserved a prominent place for political economy, considered one of the crucial forms of knowledge for the deployment of state governmental power. See Foucault, *Security, Territory, and Population*, 105-110.

⁵⁰ Fradkin, 'El poder y la vara'; Poczynok, 'Los procesos civiles'; Poczynok, 'La implementación del sistema liberal'.

⁵¹ The research project Iberoconceptos published numerous dictionaries on fundamental Latin American political concepts. See Goldman, *Lenguaje y revolución*; Goldman, *Lenguaje y política*. For a literature review of their most recent publications see Tenorio-Trillo, 'Conceitos and Conceptos'. Anyhow, in the epoch under analysis, political and economic concepts were strictly interrelated. Therefore, our focus on economic ones means that we concentrate on the economic meanings of concepts, sometimes leaving on the background their political ones.

Cambridge method, German *Begriffsgeschichte*, and French politico-conceptual history).⁵² Indeed, scholars are appreciating the possibility that an intellectual history point of view might add to historical narratives: far from displaying the old history of ideas' focus on "high culture", modern intellectual historians are retrieving the traditional focus on interdisciplinarity but aiming at the inclusion of cultural traditions usually eclipsed by standard narratives, and of subaltern voices or non-European actors. While pointing at the excessive structuralism informing old debates around Latin American intellectual history, Palti notes that the problem of "the peripheral nature of local culture" is still valid and needs to be addressed through a new approach that does not reduce ideas to their referential dimension, but stress instead the semantic and pragmatic ones, in order to analyse which ideas were considered "misplaced", why, by whom, and in which specific historical conjuncture.⁵³ His proposal of an intellectual history of problems is stimulating, as it brings together the study of intellectual arguments and genealogies and the material reality of the context that the ideas tried to shape.

Intellectual history can, therefore, bridge the gap between different academic fields, and it can provide a denser historical context thanks to its focus on the social milieu in which (economic) ideas generated, travelled and influenced the praxis of historical actors. Dialogue with other disciplines is fundamental. Political-economic ideas are not floating objects circulating in a social vacuum, but they are intellectual claims generated from a creative subject reflecting on the reality surrounding him, trying to modify it, or at least deal with it. Therefore, sketching the traits of the socio-economic reality of Buenos Aires and the Río de la Plata is fundamental to understanding what our protagonists were speaking about and the economic challenges they faced. As property was also a legal category, legal historians provided us with the necessary tools to understand early modern legal categories and practices in the context of their gradual transformation during the Age of Revolution. Similarly, historical anthropology assisted us when speaking about the ideas, practices and economic system of the Native groups of the Arauco-Pampean area, some of the keys protagonists of our story.

The distinction between materialist and idealist approaches had traditionally shaped the history of property and possessive individualism.⁵⁴ The intellectual history approach allows to find a balance between these two extremes. Materialism presupposes an almost perfect correlation between interests and class. However, the process of forming collective interests according to membership in different

⁵² Palti, 'The 'Theoretical Revolution' in Intellectual History'; Moyn and Sartori, *Global Intellectual History*.

⁵³ Palti, 'The Problem of 'Misplaced Ideas' Revisited', 169-179; Polgovsky Ezcurra, 'La historia intelectual latinoamericana'.

⁵⁴ Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*.

professional groups began in Buenos Aires during the period under analysis, following the progressive transformation of the local economy driven by the demand from Atlantic economies. Therefore, the correspondence between ideas and class interests is both difficult to establish and of limited epistemic relevance. Simultaneously, the capacity of ideas to guide the actions of historical actors is highlighted as a significant force behind the social, economic, and political changes that the city and region underwent between the 18th and 19th centuries.

Nevertheless, the narrative reveals the highly malleable nature of the concept of property and the ideas surrounding it. We aim to show how ideas about property emerged from considerations of the role it played in the institutionalisation of a commercial society connected to Atlantic capitalist markets (the material interests of administrators, reformers, merchants, rural entrepreneurs, and republican leaders). At the same time, the practical character of political economy and the peripheral locus of these ideas' articulation led to a rejection of the uncritical adoption of "pure" ideal models from the European tradition in favour of local reworkings that exhibit a high degree of creativity.

The fact that land ownership was closely linked to maximising individual labour in Buenos Aires between the Spanish and independent eras allows for a greater understanding of the genesis of modern economic categories, rejecting outdated teleological models. The intellectual authority behind the formation of a labour theory of property is undoubtedly the English philosopher John Locke. His idea of property founded on individual labour and generating a right antecedent to the political association between individuals underpins many genealogical reconstructions of liberal political thought and the genesis of the modern conception of individual rights. However, this vision, besides being strongly ideological as it aims to provide a linear genealogy of modern political concepts, is also historically incorrect, as the centrality of the labour theory of property was already present in Spanish scholasticism, and Locke himself was strongly influenced by it.⁵⁵

Undoubtedly, Locke's formulation remains central, both for its use and because, following Andrew Sartori, the English philosopher formulated his ideas based on careful observation of his social reality, grasping how labour was becoming the structuring principle of social relations among individuals in mid-17-century England. Sartori thus proposes writing the history of the circulation and use of a "Lockean theory of property" to discover the intellectual arguments that accompanied, favoured, or opposed the progressive institutionalisation of a capitalist society on a global scale.⁵⁶ This is the

⁵⁵ Fitzmaurice, *op. cit.*

⁵⁶ Sartori, 'Global Intellectual History'.

perspective used in this study, albeit corrected by the observation that the Iberian world and the appropriation of American lands provided a context for developing a theory of capitalist land appropriation based on human labour even before seventeenth-century England. Moreover, given that we aim to emphasise that the genealogy of modern economic concepts (in this case, that of property) goes far beyond the liberal commonplaces and that mere genealogy is insufficient to restore the historical meanings of politico-economic concepts, which aimed to transform the surrounding reality and were thus influenced by it, an evaluation of the influence of Locke's ideas will not be central to our concern. In this way, space will be given to new actors and new ideas in the genesis of capitalist economic modernity to provide a global approach to this narrative, understood as a critical look at dominant literatures and historical categories received from tradition.

Finally, it is necessary to introduce of the various meanings that property assumed in the early modern world, thanks to legal and socio-economic history. This is necessary to challenge the positive relationship between property rights and economic growth, which was the centrepiece of new institutionalist narratives of economic development.⁵⁷ In fact, their analysis suffered from a reliance on few idealised European experiences, as appreciating the complexity of early modern legal culture reveals the social character of property and the plurality of rights that can coexist in a historical setting.⁵⁸ As mentioned, the modern idea of "private property" was not the main concept structuring European early modern relations between individuals, communities and the material world. This consideration has wider epistemological significance, as, in the Latin American context, a nuanced understanding of land property that refuses the anachronistic projection of the idea of private property into the past is needed to "provincialize" received categories that attach modernity to Europeans and backwardness to local non-European experiences.⁵⁹

When the Europeans arrived in the Americas, the modern concept of property had recently begun to develop in a process that lasted between the 13th and the 19th centuries. Medieval understandings of property expressed an original humility towards nature that was gradually replaced by a new vision of the relationship between men and things based on the pre-eminence of the subject with respect to the material world: subjects received their meaning from their act of appropriation, and the material world, in turn, was understandable only through the lens of the subjects. The translation of this ontological view into legal doctrine resulted in the appreciation of the legal subject as *dominus*, which

⁵⁷ Acemoglu, et. al., 'The Colonial Origins of Comparative Development'; Mahoney, *Colonialism and Postcolonial Development*. The problem with this literature is the scarce adherence to historical reality and the limited empirical basis.

⁵⁸ Congost, 'Property Rights and Historical Analysis'.

⁵⁹ Bastias Saavedra, 'The Normativity of Possession'.

exerted his appropriative power over the social and the natural world. The fundamental characteristic of every dominus is the *dominium sui*, the self-ownership, which immediately translates into the *dominium rerum externarum*, the ownership of material goods.⁶⁰

Debates on the definitions of *dominio*, *posesión* and *propiedad* accompanied jurists during the 16th century in their effort to adapt legal categories to the material world in which the same categories had to be deployed as a way of ordering it and helping humans in establishing earthly justice. The *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española* did not separate the meanings of *posesión*, *propiedad* and *dominio*. This right has “many partitions” (the fundamental one being between *dominio directo* and *dominio util*), and it was not based on natural law, as God gave the material world to humankind in communal property, and civil law later divided among individual proprietors.⁶¹ Almost a century later, the *Diccionario de autoridades* (1726-1739) defined a more complex linguistic situation. *Possesión* is both the act of possessing and the thing possessed. However, different qualities are attributed to the act of possession according to the subject’s intention. The *dominio* was the command (*mando*), authority (*imperio*) and lordship (*señorío*) over a thing, territory or other people, and it was divided into *absoluto* (ownership without dependency), *directo* (including the right to alienate the good), *util* (just related to the use of the good).⁶²

This rapid survey shows how the complexity of the legal concept of property was understood by early modern Spanish intellectuals, a complexity that was strictly related to the jurists’ attempts to adapt the legal categories received from tradition to the changing reality surrounding them.⁶³ As legal formulations were multiple, on-the-ground practices of appropriation were even more complex, as they were generated from claims grounded in different sources of legal normativity (religion, custom, law) and mixed with indigenous property systems.⁶⁴ Legal pluralism was a characteristic of early modern European legal culture, and it implied the co-existence of multiple normative sources, namely customs, *ius commune* doctrine, Canon law and moral theology, and royal and municipal enactments.⁶⁵ American legal pluralism left considerable room for bottom-up legal production, but, in the period under study, this legal culture was shaken by the attempts to turn state law into the only

⁶⁰ Grossi, *Il dominio e le cose*.

⁶¹ Covarrubias Orozco, *Tesoro de la lengua*.

⁶² Real Academia Española, *Diccionario de autoridades* (1726-1739): online. See also Poczynok, ‘Posesión y Propiedad’.

⁶³ Traditional studies in legal history failed to appreciate early modern legal pluralism and considered European law as a homogenous corpus translated to the Americas. See Mariluz Urquijo, *El régimen de la tierra*.

⁶⁴ Yannakis, *Since Time Immemorial*.

⁶⁵ Herzog, ‘Early Modern Normativity in Spanish America’.

producer of legal normativity.⁶⁶ The “great venture of property” was a 19th-century phenomenon aimed at replacing colonial legal pluralism based on natural law with a system of positive normative law.⁶⁷

The concept of *posesión* structured and legitimised the appropriation of American land and labour. Both in Europe and in America, the possession of lands was tied to its proper use and improvement; therefore, debates on reorganisation of land regimes revolved around what would be a “reasonable” use of land. It provided ground for the dispossession of subaltern classes, presenting this as “a punishment of sorts for their own neglect, a means to force them to improve their ways and become ‘modern’”.⁶⁸ In the early phase of conquest, Scholastic tradition provided arguments for legitimising intention the appropriation of Native American lands and labour in line with a Catholic vision of the world where “the laws and customs of a civilized society were meant to produce a common good through the creation of virtuous citizens”.⁶⁹ This ideal persisted but was affected by the emergence of political economy as the science for the imperial economic government from the 18th century onward. It implied considering the kind of society expressed by political economic abstractions as the ideal type of society, one where individuals interacted through the mediating role of labour. The institutionalisation of a Spanish imperial commercial society, a reunion of individuals who gain their subsistence passing through the market, was equalled to the common good. Therefore, the law should promote the transformation of the population into useful and productive vassals, which would contribute to the common good and productive maximisation through the sum of their individual labour.

* * *

The narrative opens by illustrating land property’s role in Spanish political-economic debates on imperial reform (Chapter 1). It was believed to be an effective means to increase the economically productive population, and institutional solutions to expand the commodity frontiers varied according to each context. Reformers considered emphyteusis a “useful” contract as it aimed at expanding production, and it allowed subordinating property to conditions for possession sanctioned by law. Spanish economic turn impacted Spanish America, as political economy and the will to better imperial

⁶⁶ Tau Anzoátegui, ‘Provincial and Local Law of the Indies’.

⁶⁷ For a seminal study on the development of modern property rights in France, see Bloch, *op. cit.* On legal pluralism regarding property rights, see Grossi, *La proprietà e le proprietà*.

⁶⁸ Herzog, ‘Did European Law Turn American?’, 91.

⁶⁹ Yannakis, *op. cit.*, 38.

economic government informed institutional innovations (Chapter 2). The establishment of the Viceroyalty and the Intendancy system were considered institutions that could gradually guarantee the maximisation of individual and imperial wealth. Spanish American elites participated in the reformistic efforts. Economic expansion and the increasing desire to govern the economy generated conflicts among local economic elites, which were not relevantly shaped by the contraposition between *criollos* and *peninsulares*. In the attempt to institutionalise a flourishing commercial society in Buenos Aires, the expansion of the local commodity frontier and, therefore, the concept of “land property” was central during colonial times (Chapter 3). Creating an enclosed economic space was the fundamental concern which ignited imperial conflicts. However, land availability, divergent opinions and a little developed state capacity prevented from sanctioning new legislation on the issue. Imperial authorities promoted the collection of useful knowledge to serve the expansion of the commodity frontier, but the political and economic crisis following the Napoleonic wars prevented local authorities from finding a shared solution and precipitated the conflict.

The May Revolution created a new sovereign subject (the Primera Junta) in charge of local economic government, immediately dedicated to expanding the local commodity frontier (Chapter 4). Pedro Andrés García was the man behind Buenos Aires rural policies, and he turned “agrarian republicanism” into a fundamental trait of local republican ideology. Even during civil and independence wars, Buenos Aires supported García’s efforts in providing a better institutional framework for expanding agricultural commodity production. During the 1810s, central questions emerged, such as the role of Native groups of the Arauco-Pampean area in contrasting or favouring the expansion of the Creole commodity frontier and the contradictory interplay between private and public interests in the institutionalisation of a local commercial society. As Buenos Aires tried to hegemonically impose this political and economic model over the ex-Viceregal territory, it generated opposition and resistance (Chapter 5). The chapter deals with the Native Pampean groups and the federal movement of the Banda Oriental, highlighting how resistance and alternative political and economic models affected the development of Buenos Aires republicanism. At the beginning of the 1820s, it was clear that the Native sovereign populations and the rural masses were fundamental political actors to be dealt with, and their political and economic claims should be listened to for the successful implementation of whatever political project.

The 1820s opened with the end of civil and independence wars and the creation of a provincial government in Buenos Aires. It started a process of institution-building inspired by what we call “liberal agrarian republicanism” (Chapter 6). Besides sponsoring rural production for export, it

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excluded the possibility of incorporating Native groups into the developing Creole commercial society. The national government finally implemented new agrarian legislation (Emphyteusis Law), but the excessive idealism informing the model of liberal agrarian republicanism, coupled with an increase in frontier violence and international crisis, determined the failure of this political project. A new variant of agrarian republicanism, the “federal” one, replaced it (Chapter 7). This time, the alliance with Native groups and their assimilation into Creole commercial society was a centrepiece of this shade of republicanism promoted by Juan Manuel de Rosas and the federal faction. His ability to economically govern Buenos Aires countryside and an extensive use of a republican repertoire of political practices guaranteed a large and shared consensus for the new government. While land property was central, federal governments reverted to legal pluralism to accommodate the diverse ideas about property that existed within the interethnic commercial society that developed in the Buenos Aires countryside.

Introduction

CHAPTER 1

Political Economy, Property and Imperial Economic Reforms

This chapter sets the intellectual context of the study: the emergence and institutionalisation of political economy as the science of economic government and reform in the Spanish monarchy. The specific focus is the relationship between land property and economic growth. Spanish literature provides excellent studies on Enlightenment economic reformism, its ideological origins and its impact on Spanish economic reality.¹ In what follows, we offer a nuanced perspective on this literature, considering the interconnected character of metropolitan and imperial reforms.² In Spain and Spanish America, economic reforms were aimed at expanding commercial society and production for the market through the increase of the imperial “useful” population, meaning the number of productive vassals.³ After an introduction to Spanish Enlightenment economic reformism, the narrative centres on the *Nuevo sistema de gobierno económico para la América* by Melchor Rafael de Macanaz (1670-1760), considered the pivotal text that inspired plans for imperial economic reform. The *Nuevo Sistema* saw land property as the best means to provide incentives for Native Americans to maximise their individual wealth and, in turn, the wealth and power of the monarchy through an increase in the number of economically active individuals. As mainland Spain and the overseas territories were considered a single unit by administrators and reformers, similar ideas on the stimulating effects of land property for labour maximisation informed proposals and plans for imperial land reform. The new economic ideas inspired innovative policies, such as the foundation of agrarian colonies in the Sierra Morena, Andalucía (1767), and the elaboration of the *Informe de la Ley Agraria* by Gaspar de Jovellanos (1794). These projects had a prominent utopian character, and the chapter would help in clarifying which was the model of “useful vassals” that the reformers sought to create through the direct and indirect influence of the laws governing the economy.

The chapter has a twofold aim. First, it seeks to clarify the definition of political economy according to Spanish intellectuals and administrators during the second half of the 18th century. Second, it focuses on agrarian policy, one aspect of the overarching reform plan imagined for the Spanish empire and predicated upon political and economic concepts. It does so to explore the different meanings associated with the concept of rural property and to describe how property fits into the plan for an

¹ Fuentes Quintana, *Economía y economistas*.

² Herzog, *Frontiers of Possession*. She pioneered an integrated approach to legal Iberian history, and her introduction explains the theoretical fruitful implication of her intellectual move.

³ García Sanz, ‘La Reforma Agraria’, 175-180; Owensby, ‘Between Justice and Economics’.

economic reform of the Spanish empire and its population.⁴ During the 18th century, the adoption of political economy as a science of government at a European scale signalled an incipient conceptual change around the economic sphere and its government. In the Spanish monarchy, this process went hand in hand with the progressive institutionalisation of political economy by creating economic societies, newspapers and university chairs. The circulation of economic ideas reached its zenith during the reign of Carlos III (1759-1788) when the adoption of political economy as a science of government was vindicated by the direct support of the king, who appointed “economists” and intellectuals as ministers and bureaucrats.

1. Enlightenment, Reform and Economic Growth

Notwithstanding the scarce international recognition, Spanish authors were actively engaged in the transnational debates on imperial economic governance. Stimulated by the European-wide “economic turn” and the Bourbon attempts to increase Spanish imperial international standing, administrators and intellectuals actively engaged in the discipline of political economy. The focus of research has traditionally focused on the kingdom of Carlos III (1759-1788), as he was the one who implemented more economically inspired and ambitious plans for reform. However, Spanish governing elites adopted political economy after the end of the War of Spanish Succession (1701-1715) as a tool to bend to Spanish interests in the extremely disadvantageous terms of the Treaty of Utrecht (1715). The first Bourbon monarchs and their ministers tried to promote a European-wide program for peace through chartered companies and peace treaties.⁵ If early 18th-century reforms mostly failed short of their goals, they nevertheless paved the ground for “a more intense reforming impetus” at the end of the century.⁶

Early reforms did not impede the relative decline of Spanish international standing with respect to Spanish main competitors (the British and the French empires).⁷ Therefore, when Carlos III arrived in Barcelona from Naples, the capital of the kingdom he had governed between 1734 and 1759, he knew that the monarchy needed urgent reforms. The judgement on their effectiveness has been affected by the underappreciation of the diffusion and acceptance of “modern” economic ideas in Spain. Llombart has grouped this literature into three main tendencies, none of which has stressed how the urgency of increasing imperial wealth through state-sponsored economic development

⁴ For a similar Atlantic approach to land property and reform, see Luna, ‘Los proyectos de reforma’.

⁵ Corredera, *The Diplomatic Enlightenment*.

⁶ Costa et al., ‘Introduction’, 13.

⁷ Palma and Santiago-Caballero, ‘Patterns of Economic Growth’.

inspired reforms - a goal totally in line with the “economic reason of state” that was guiding 18th-century European politics. Indeed, the years 1760-1790 witnessed the “first modern experience of political economy”, thanks to a relatively effective action of the government.⁸

Although it is impossible to trace an overarching and coherent plan, Carlos III acted in almost every branch of the state administration to pursue an overall increase in the wealth of his empire, thanks to the tentative application to the economic reality of the ideas inspired by the Spanish “eclectic political economy”.⁹ He promoted agrarian, industrial and trade policies to improve techniques and legislation; he sponsored the reorganisation of public finances, the construction of more efficient infrastructures for communication, and the establishment of scientific and economic institutions. The fact that the Spanish Empire collapsed after 1810 under the strains of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars should not hide the previous economic development predicated upon modern economic concepts such as the wealth-generating character of human labour, individualism, and the centrality of the market. Carlos III’s reign is a perfect example of the Enlightenment imperial economic turn, as is shown by the central role royalist jurisprudence, political economy, and critical emulation of foreign institutions in the design and enactment of Bourbon reforms.¹⁰ The eclectic character of Spanish political economy inspired the belief in the parallel stimulus of agriculture, industry and trade, given the interdependent and self-enforcing character of the three activities.

Different kinds of economic institutions emerged in this period. Through education and the use of the printing press, they aimed to promote economic growth, spread economic knowledge and organise the economic government of state and finance. The multiplication of periodicals, trade consulates, economic societies, economic dictionaries, and merchant handbooks imbued Spanish elites with economic notions used to elaborate imperial economic reforms.¹¹

The emergence and institutionalisation of political economy as a governing science went hand in hand with the Bourbon desire to reform imperial political infrastructure.¹² During the *ancien régime*, power meant *iurisdictio*, the faculty of accomplishing and exerting a legislative tradition over a determinate *corpus* (group of people united by origin, occupation, cult). The religious worldview saw reality as a

⁸ Llombart Rosa, ‘La política económica de Carlos III’.

⁹ García Sanz, *op. cit.* The introduction offers a timely and sharp criticism of the literature, which denies the fact that sovereigns and administrators were convinced of the necessity of economic growth for the well-being of the state and its vassals and, in turn, prefers to focus on the teleological reconstruction of the presence of British or French ideas in the thought of the leading Spanish thinkers.

¹⁰ Paquette, *Enlightenment, Governance, and Reform*.

¹¹ Astigarraga, *A Unifying Enlightenment*.

¹² Cardim et al., *Polycentric Monarchies*; Herrero Sánchez, ‘Spanish Theories of Empire’.

given order that should be interpreted and governed according to the received tradition, therefore political power “manifests itself as a reading and declaration of a legal order that is assumed to exist and must be maintained”.¹³ The long and contested history of the emergence of the modern state passed through the elimination of this jurisdictional understanding of political power, in favour of the territorialisation of the same power, the elimination of jurisdictional pluralism and a more effective ability to impose decisions over subjects. The new attributes of the sovereign were reflected by the diffusion of new metaphors expressing the more direct and adequate capacity to administer the political space, such as the king as the father of his vassals.¹⁴

This same image, according to Otto Brunner, expressed the conceptual change that the word economy and economic concepts passed through between the 17th and the 19th centuries when political economy, intended as the correct administration of a political community, replaced the old *oeconomica*, the correct administration of the household.¹⁵ As the father had absolute economic power over his household, traditional jurisdictional checks did not supposedly tie the new royal “economic power” (*potestad oeconomica*). This process was contested and lasted decades, if not centuries. However, Bourbon adoption of political economy signalled that the Spanish monarchy was exactly passing through this epochal transformation of the ideas regarding state, power and the economy. Consequently, power had an increased ability to interfere with its subjects’ daily lives and dictate their code of conduct according to its aims.¹⁶ Political economy has been the language sustaining this long and contested process, providing the ideological raw material in order to support or oppose political power, and gradually replacing religion or morals as the intellectual framework with which to interpret and give meaning to the social reality.

New notions on the scope, aim and legitimation of political power impacted economic governance. The Habsburg political framework was meant to “govern ex post rather ex ante”, in line with the jurisdictional understanding of the power of the king, considered the last instance judge to which his vassals were recurring to solve conflicts and restore order and harmony.¹⁷ Therefore, royal power was not administering his empire according to any future-oriented plan or project. The Bourbons, on the contrary, tried to centralise some practices of economic government, for instance promoting the

¹³ Garriga, ‘Orden jurídico y poder político’, 12.

¹⁴ Fernández Sebastián. *Historia conceptual*.

¹⁵ Brunner, ‘La «casa grande»’.

¹⁶ For successful examples of conceptual histories of modern state and economic government institutionalisation in Spanish America see Casagrande, *Gobierno de justicia* and Zamora, *Casa poblada y buen gobierno*.

¹⁷ Da Cunha, et al. ‘Institutions and Policy, 1500–1800’.

professionalisation of the administrators and the collection of information, and increase state intervention in the economy, meant as a stimulus for the expansion of the economic sector.¹⁸

In this respect, Llobart analysed the specific traits of the Spanish “economic turn”: a prominent practical character of economic writings; the multiplication of texts after 1760; the emergence of regional hubs of intellectual production; and the fundamental influence of the circulation of ideas between Spain and other European countries.¹⁹ As already noted, an interest in solving practical economic problems was the characteristic of early European economic thinking, as writings were produced by people involved in economic activities (merchants and later administrators) or clergymen interested in solving everyday religious/moral issues. Similarly, the prominent pan-European character of Enlightenment economic thinking was a shared characteristic of every linguistic school of economic thought.

The regional evolution of economic reflection in Spain is a fascinating aspect to consider. The country’s jurisdictional divisions were mirrored in the disconnection of its internal economic markets, with some regions more deeply interconnected with foreign markets than with the internal ones. Local merchant communities, influential and strong, played a pivotal role in the establishment of the first economic societies. These societies, as fundamental institutions in the creation and circulation of economic ideas, actively promoted the purchase and translation of foreign economic texts.²⁰ They contributed significantly to the creation of the European intellectual space where economic ideas were discussed, adapted, and exchanged, a process influenced by contemporary imperial rivalries. The efforts of regional elites to advocate for the economic measures which would favour local development had real, if swinging impact, as late 18th-century commercial reforms created new regional hubs of production directly linked with the opening of Spanish American markets, resulting in a new hierarchy of centres of economic development.²¹

Political and economic claims formed part of the rhetorical strategies that shaped Spanish politics in the second half of the 18th century. The power struggle reflected the constitutive regionalism of the Spanish monarchy. After the War of Spanish Succession ended, king Felipe V spoiled the kingdom

¹⁸ Spanish *arbitrismo* was already calling for the expansion of government action in the economic sphere, and it was an essential source of inspiration for 18th-century reformers. See García Sanz, *op. cit.* In addition, it is important to stress that Bourbon’s attempts to reform the imperial political structure were contradictory and had numerous unintended consequences. The following chapters will expand on this topic.

¹⁹ Llobart Rosa, ‘Economía política y reforma’.

²⁰ The first economic society in Spain, the Real Sociedad Bascongada de Amigos del País, was established thanks to the efforts of the Basque merchant community. See Astigarraga, *Los ilustrados vascos*.

²¹ Antunes, et al. ‘Trade and the Colonial Economies’.

of Aragon and Valencia of their *fueros* - traditional rights of self-government, to punish their elites, culpable of supporting his Habsburg opponents during the war. Castilian elites, who wanted to maintain their privileges within the monarchy, dominated Spanish governing circles in the following decades.²² Other regional elites tried to protect and expand their privileges (such as the Basques) or to regain them (Aragonese and Catalans). In a petition directed to Carlos III in 1760, Catalan vassals lamented the loss of their ancient rights to direct their “economic government”, stressing the “immense costs and inconveniences” derived from it.²³ Catalan economic culture was strongly influenced by German Cameralism - similarly to the neighbouring Aragon, and based on the sponsorship for industry, the desire to better exploit Spanish American markets, and the necessity of an efficient administration of the treasury and the military sector. The latter was considered a possible engine of economic growth by creating productive colonies.²⁴

The kingdom of Carlos III indeed inaugurated new chances for these regional elites. The new course opened with the appointment of the Italian Marquis of Esquilache Minister of the Treasury in 1759. Few years later, the formation of a committee to reform colonial trade gave an example of the new relevance gained by regional elites. The *Junta* was composed by Nicolas Mollinedo y La Cuadra, Francisco Craywinckel, Simón de Aragorri, Pedro Goosens, and Tomás Ortiz de Landázuri. Craywinckel and Aragorri had strong ties with Aragonese and Cantabrian elites, while Los Llanos was part of an important Basque network. The latter, in a manuscript from 1755, highlighted the dysfunctionality of American trade centred in Cadiz, which was hampering the economic growth of other Spanish ports and their connected regions. A new trade policy was needed to stimulate the growth of consumption and production on both shores of the Atlantic, as well as their trade, and the establishment of *comercio libre* progressively met this goal.²⁵ Trade reform concerned opening regional Spanish ports to Atlantic trade, a long-time aspiration of regional commercial elites.

When Esquilache was dismissed following the 1766 revolts, the leader of the “Aragonese party”, the Conde de Aranda replaced him. This faction supported the opening of governing circles to regional elites. This way, it would have been easier to shape government course in their favour - especially regarding economic policies. The “Aragonese” alliance with the *golillas* (middle class bureaucrats led by the powerful Campomanes) was the backbone of the support for Carlos III reforms. In Aragon,

²² The model of a stakeholder empire has been popularised in respect to American elites. However, it might be used to describe the relationship between Spanish regional elites and central power. Grafe and Irigoín, ‘A Stakeholder Empire’.

²³ ‘Memorial de Greuges de 1760’, 5.

²⁴ Lluch, *La Catalunya vencuda*.

²⁵ Stein and Stein, *Apogee of Empire*, 58-68.

economic ideas were widely discussed, as it is proved by the appearance of the Sociedad Aragones in 1778, which sponsored the creation of the first Spanish chair of political economy a few years later. Other regional hubs for the diffusion of economic thinking were Galicia, Valencia, the Basque countries and Andalusia, where economic societies became the platform to elaborate plans for reform and the diffusion of technical innovation.²⁶

2. Political Economy as the Language for Reform

Rivalries divided regional elites, as they held different opinions regarding the economic development of the monarchy, commercial and fiscal policy, or industrial and agricultural legislation.²⁷ However, shared fundamental political and economic concepts structured their intellectual framework, such as the centrality of political economy for a good government of the society, the importance of population as the origin of a nation's wealth and the wealth-generating character of human labour. These were the main ideas inspiring Spanish plans for imperial economic reforms based on the necessity to turn Spanish vassals into industrious ones, thus improving the efficient economic exploitation of land and capital. Administrators coming from different regional contexts shared a similar "economic mind".

Francisco Romá y Rosell was a Catalan who came from a pro-Habsburg family.²⁸ He worked in the Barcelona administration until the new policy of Carlos III opened higher appointments to Catalans. In his main work *Las señales de la felicidad de España* (1768), he advocated for an imperial reform to re-establish Spain's international stance through its economic development. To do so, it was necessary to create a Spanish nation out of its fragmented regional identities and forget old rivalries and local privileges, thanks to the effort of a unified Council of Castille and the positive effects of the "love for the homeland". The work opens with an apology to political economy, defined as the "science of government", because "sustains the great Empires, and elevates the small ones; for although customs, habits, and accidents contribute immediately to the prosperity, or to the decay of the State, the science of government teaches how to correct them". Given its importance, "this science

²⁶ Astigarraga. *A Unifying Enlightenment*; Usoz Otal, 'La Ilustración aragonesa'; Gutiérrez de Arroyo, 'El proyecto de los ilustrados gallegos'; Llombart Rosa and Cervera Ferri, 'Economistas valencianos'.

²⁷ The jurisdictional fragmentation and legal pluralism of the Spanish monarchy represented an insurmountable challenge for economic reform. This problem was most evident concerning the divergent opinions among metropolitan and Creole elites. See Regina Grafe, 'The «Failures» of Mercantilism'.

²⁸ The source of biographical information is the Diccionario Biográfico electrónico de la Real Academia de la Historia. Available at <https://dbe.rah.es/>.

is to be learned by principles in youth, and cultivated, extended, and perfected throughout life, by means of the public Writings”.²⁹

The Aragonese Lorenzo Normante y Carcavilla had similar opinions. After graduating from the University of Zaragoza, he entered the Real Sociedad Económica Aragonesa de Amigos del País in 1781. Few years later, the Sociedad decided to create a centre for the study and teaching of political economy, and Normante was appointed holder of its first chair. In his inaugural speech, he expressed his idea regarding the discipline he was in charge of. Its goal was “to make a nation as numerous and populous as its climate, circumstances and natural forces will permit, to procure for it all the wealth, power and comfort of which it is capable [and] to promote the increase and well-being of mankind”.³⁰ The Sociedad Económica sponsored economic education, in order to train competent bureaucrats, as “studying Civil and Commercial Economics is necessary to acquire and preserve the greatness of the political body”. This was even more necessary in the current enlightened century, when every European power was adopting political economic concepts to attain wealth and power, a century “where one useful occupation or another is demanded to everyone”.³¹

Creating useful vassals is one of the main political goals of reformist policies. The concept of utility was already part of the political vocabulary of the Spanish monarchy, as the establishment of corporations or religious associations had to be legitimised by their utility for the common good of the political and religious community.³² However, during the 18th century, this concept witnessed a conceptual shift alongside the circulation of political economy as the language of government. In fact, vassals should not be useful for their community anymore, rather they should be useful for the state.³³ This concern, coupled with the belief in the wealth-generating character of human labour - the sole origin of a nation’s wealth - determined a strong focus on education to fight the lack of application to labour and inspire an economic habit and mindset. Reformers believed that a scientific approach to social habits could “engineer” individuals, which would aim at maximising their individual interests, and in so doing, they would increase the general wealth.³⁴

Pedro Rodríguez de Campomanes, Fiscal of the Council of Castile (1762-1783), is the character which better illustrates the urgency of the economic education of Spanish masses. Born in a non-

²⁹ Romá y Rosell. *Las señales de la felicidad*, 2-3.

³⁰ Normante y Carcavilla. *Discurso sobre la utilidad*, 6.

³¹ *Ivi*, 15-16.

³² Lemperière. *Entre Dios y el rey*, 42-49.

³³ Covarrubias. *En busca del hombre útil*.

³⁴ Sánchez León, ‘Science, Customs, and the Modern Subject’.

wealthy Asturian family, he was able to graduate thanks to his outstanding results, and moved to Madrid around 1750, to work as a lawyer. He soon entered royal bureaucracy, and during Carlos III's reign he acted as the *éminence grise* behind economic reforms. He opened his *Discurso sobre el fomento de la industria popular* - a best-seller for the epoch thanks to 30.000 copies printed by royal order - stating that his work aimed at the popularisation of "the ideas and principles that could translate into practice the application to an appropriate work for all the classes that are currently unemployed [because] the true wealth of the Kingdom consists in the fact that no one lacks a profitable occupation suited to his or her strength".³⁵ As economic societies and chairs were directed at the education of the elites, Campomanes' works wished to stimulate an "industrious revolution" among the popular classes through technical education and the diffusion of an economic working *ethos*.³⁶

Another prominent Asturian minister, Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos, believed that "population is the first source of public wealth", through "the perfection of the art of performing labour". This stands for the necessity of education in every branch of economic activity. In fact, trying to assess what was the activity which generated more wealth among agriculture, industry or trade was a useless speculation, because "they are not only so interlinked, but also dependent on each other, because they help and serve each other in such a way that an activity cannot exist without the others".³⁷ Reform is a means to increase individual wealth and therefore public and national wealth.

This political and economic framework is evident in other works of Jovellanos, where he also openly states his understanding of "happiness". In a speech he delivered to the Real Sociedad de Amigos del País de Asturias in 1781, while he was advocating for promoting the happiness of Asturias, Jovellanos clarified that

I do not take this word in a moral sense. I understand happiness here to mean that state of abundance and comfort which every good government should procure for its people. In this sense the richest province will be the happiest, because in wealth lie all the political advantages of a

³⁵ Campomanes. *Discurso sobre el fomento*.

³⁶ The other pedagogical works of Campomanes are the *Discurso sobre la Educación Popular de los Artesanos, y su fomento*. (1775) and the four volumes of the *Apéndice a la Educación Popular* (1775-1777). Jan De Vries introduced the concept of 'industrious revolution' to describe the overall increase in working output that British households experienced during the eighteenth century. The Dutch author sees this social change as pushed by the growing demand for exotic goods, while this work aims to expand on the role of government-backed ideas in promoting a change in the working *ethos* of the population. See, de Vries. *The Industrious Revolution*.

³⁷ Jovellanos, 'Introducción a un discurso'.

state. Therefore, the first object of our Society must be the greatest possible wealth of the Principality of Asturias.³⁸

In the eyes of Spanish “economists”, the reign of Carlos III had been a flourishing age, when economic science had been finally sponsored and supported by the political power, allowing the enrichment of the nation and the attainment of public happiness. Soon after he died in 1788, Jovellanos and Cabarrús composed two eulogies to the king, which also were exhortations for his son Carlos IV to continue sponsoring the cultivation of political economy. Jovellanos enthusiastically noted that right after Carlos III’s arrival in Spain, government action had awakened curiosity toward political economy, and Spain “reads its most famous writers, examines their principles, analyses their works; ideas are discussed, disputed, written down; and the nation begins to have economists (*economistas*)”. Actually, this was part of a ruler’s duties in respect to his vassals, as “you [the princes] were placed by the Almighty in the midst of the nations to bring them abundance and prosperity. This is your first duty”.

The homage to Carlos III is focused on the celebration of his economic and political reforms, that the widespread study and appreciation of political economy inspired. This science took its first steps during the 17th century, when patriotism pushed the study of economic phenomena to counteract Spanish misery. For the first time, enlightened intellectuals started to think about a science “which teach to govern men and make them happy, [...] civil Economy”. Carlos III sustained his vassals’ efforts to study the laws of modern economy, actively supported it, and stimulated even more the epistemic advancement thanks to his reformist attitude. Political economy was the science of government and the knowledge or not of his principles divided society into the ones who govern and the ones who are governed.

Economic science belongs exclusively to you [Charles III] and to the guardians of your authority. The ministers who surround your throne, [...] the high magistrates who must intimate it to the people, [...] those who preside over the domestic government [...] those who watch over your provinces; those who immediately direct your vassals, must study it, must know it, or fall into the classes destined to work and obey.³⁹

Political economy was, therefore, seen as a necessary science for every social class. However, it helped to reproduce the social stratification which characterised the Spanish monarchy. If a divine

³⁸ Jovellanos, ‘Discurso dirigido a la Real Sociedad’, 379.

³⁹ Jovellanos, ‘Elogio de Carlos III’.

plan traditionally legitimised social order, “economists” started to interpret societal inequality as originated by the inferior or superior knowledge of economic science. The inclusion into the polity’s governing circle was thus based on economic proficiency (instead of status or birth).⁴⁰ The non-familiarity with political economy led to exclusion, in a similar vein to the refusal to labour which led to the exclusion from society in general.⁴¹

On 25 July 1789, Francisco Cabarrús read his eulogy before the Junta General of the Real Sociedad Económica de Madrid. He was a prominent merchant and banker, a friend of Campomanes and Jovellanos, and the man behind the creation of the Banco Nacional de San Carlos. During his speech, he extensively praised the economic achievements of Carlos III’s years, from the successful consolidation of state finance to the liberalisation of grain trade, from support to industrial activities to the establishment of the agricultural colonies in the Sierra Morena. Only one single paragraph is dedicated to his military conquests. In the final section, Cabarrus staged Carlos’ exhortation to his son, the new king. Here it is evident what ministers and elites were expending from the new monarch, as the voice of his father was admonishing him.

Perfect what I began with so much eagerness; improve some of my providences, and reform the mistakes inseparable from a long administration; hasten the progress of the lights (*luces*), and never fear their salutary effects.⁴²

In the 18th century, the economic and political rivalry among European empires propelled the dissemination and gradual institutionalisation of political economy as an indispensable science for imperial economic governance. Rulers, bureaucrats, and intellectuals unanimously recognised the imperative of economic development to thrive in the cutthroat imperial arena. The concurrent praise for useful knowledge, education and reason, inspired by the Enlightenment values, accelerated the debates on economic issues and the attempts to reform economic reality to increase productivity and overall wealth. As it has been discussed, Spanish authors recognized the necessity of political and economic knowledge to educate the population to an economic ethic which would create useful and industrious vassals.

⁴⁰ Under Bourbon, the appointment of ministers and administrators began to be based on merit instead of status or lineage. For a detailed analysis of the progressive preeminence that military men and intellectuals gained in the Spanish imperial administration, see Ricketts, *Who Should Rule?*.

⁴¹ It was the treatment reserved to *vagos* and *holganzosos* who did not work even if able to. Arguments supporting this view are discussed in the sections dedicated to land reforms.

⁴² Cabarrús. *Elogio de Carlos III*, XLVIII.

At Carlos III's death, the advancements made during his reign were widely recognised, and the expectations to continue a successful path for economic development were high. In this context, the editor Cano published in 1789 a manuscript known in governing circles for a long time, that was now time to render available to the public opinion. In the introduction, the editor stressed how it was directed at creating "considerable advantages" for America, and "greater interests" for Spain. The manuscript was supposedly written in 1743 by José Campillo y Cossío, who had sketched a reform plan for a more efficient economic government of the Americas. The "enlightened government" of Carlos III had already enacted some of the measures proposed, but there was still much to do to maximise the economic profits extracted from the empire. Indeed, the editor recognised that it was the right time to publish the manuscript "while the study of Political Economy will enlighten the nation around its true interests", and when it was necessary to convince the new king on supporting the circulation of political economy and plans of economic reforms as his father did.⁴³

3. The *Nuevo Sistema*, and its Influence

The *Nuevo sistema de gobierno económico para la America* was a fundamental text that had already had a wide manuscript circulation in the second half of the century, strengthening an understanding of property instrumental in turning Spanish American vassals into useful and industrious ones. Almost every 18th-century Spanish administrator and political economist knew the *Nuevo sistema*, turning it into the "blueprint for imperial reform in the eighteenth-century Spanish Atlantic".⁴⁴

Scholars have questioned the authorship of the *Nuevo sistema* by José Campillo y Cossío (1693-1743), an important administrator at the orders of Felipe V. During his long career, he resided six years in New Spain, and he held numerous offices until he was appointed Minister of the Treasury in 1741. However, this interpretation has been subject to criticism for temporal incongruences and other details of its editorial process.⁴⁵ Recently, Fidel J. Tavárez offered a nuanced analysis of the problem, convincingly proposing that the real author was instead Melchor Rafael de Macanaz (1670-1760). Confronting various manuscripts, Tavárez concludes that the text was written between 1747 and 1750 while Macanaz was imprisoned in La Coruña. However, the reform plan widely circulated in governing circles, and its attribution to Campillo was probably due to Macanaz's bad reputation at court (he lived in exile in France since 1715) and to the fact that Campillo had been the most respected minister of Felipe V. His name would guarantee a wide diffusion and a high consideration for the

⁴³ Campillo y Cossío, *Nuevo sistema*, 3-10.

⁴⁴ Tavárez, 'A New System of Imperial Government'.

⁴⁵ Navarro García, 'El falso Campillo'.

ideas inspiring the text. The authorship by Macanaz should not come as a surprise, as he was a prominent minister of the first decade of Phillip V's kingdom and an expert in political economy. Indeed, in his manuscript *Auxilios para bien gobernar una monarquía católica* (ca. 1722), he was the first to express the guiding principle of Bourbon economic reforms, the idea that wealth proceeds from commercial activity (the triad production/trade/consumption) rather than merely from bullion accumulation.

The *Nuevo sistema* started denouncing the “lamentable state” in which the government of Spanish America lied, a deplorable fact given the great riches enclosed in its territory, which could be usefully employed to increase Spanish and Spanish American wealth. The elements distinguishing a good government were “a good police force, and the arrangement of commerce, the civil use of men, the cultivation of the land, the improvement of its fruits, and, in short, everything that leads to the greatest profit and usefulness to the country”. The keys to opulence were good organisation of societal productive forces and the improvement of agriculture and trade. The means proposed to achieve it were not new and revolutionary, as “everything has been practised many times ago by our neighbours, here and there”. Macanaz thought that emulation was the key to economic development, coupled with adapting successful policies to new contexts.⁴⁶

The first chapter opens with the description of the system of government of Martinique and Barbados as the two colonies, it was argued, generated more profits from their sovereigns than America was bearing for Spain. This claim is a practical demonstration of the entangled character of the European Enlightenment, especially regarding the circulation and emulation of economic ideas and practices. The “wisest nations” example was crucial to introduce new and more efficient governmental practices. France and England were considered the best models to follow, as the two nations implemented an excellent system of colonial privilege, where colonial trade was forbidden to foreigners, and colonies consumed goods produced in the metropolises.

An optimal mode of imperial economic development was based on the strict interdependence between trade and production. Former Spanish governments failed to regulate trade according to reason and did not consider it “the main sinew of the State, and the blood that gives rigour and augments the whole body of the Monarchy”. On the contrary, a well-organised imperial trade would stimulate “Agriculture and the Arts” and promote “the interests of all Individuals, from the King down to the

⁴⁶ Campillo y Cossío, *Nuevo sistema*, 3-14.

last day labourer”.⁴⁷ However, trade was not the origin of wealth but rather an indispensable driver of continuous improvement. The Spanish monarchy had the advantage with respect to other European powers of dominating an immense territory rich in natural resources. One of the sixth principles that had to inspire reforms was to “consider the richest mine in the world what the land produces with good cultivation”.⁴⁸ Promoting natural resources exploitation through productive agriculture, coupled with a greater freedom in commerce, would eventually turn the Spanish monarchy into the wealthiest European empire.

Spanish American resources were not limited to the natural ones. In fact, like almost all of his contemporaries, Macanaz considered population as a nation’s most significant wealth, and notwithstanding the dreadful consequences of the Columbian exchange, Spanish American dominions were inhabited by many millions of vassals as obedient as those of mainland Spain. America only lacked rules of good police to make Natives as useful as the Spaniards. The comparative analysis of European imperial possessions made the writer understand Spanish advantage with respect to imperial competitors. Attracting Spanish American Natives to an industrious and civilised life, meaning their inclusion into the expanding Spanish imperial commercial society, was a fundamental weapon for imperial competition.

In particular, the transformation of the Spanish American population into useful vassals passed through the distribution of land in property. Chapter 7 is dedicated to this matter, and it opens by stating clearly the author’s ideas about wealth, land, labour and individual property.

As the good of the Republic principally consists in the cultivation of the soil and the useful employment of men, which are the true power and sound wealth of every Nation; these two are the objects which deserve the first attention, and it is a rule without exception that the soil will never be well cultivated, nor will a man ever do by working for another, what he would do if the produce of his labour were his own.⁴⁹

The example of European nations proved this “rule with no exception”, as England grew rich thanks to the highly productive agriculture practised by free proprietors, while Eastern Europe was lagging due to the widespread practice of feudal servitude. Human labour was the only origin of wealth, and thus the key to opulence consisted in fostering Spanish vassals’ productive occupation.

⁴⁷ *Ivi*, 18.

⁴⁸ *Ivi*, 63.

⁴⁹ *Ivi*, 83.

However, the discrepancy between law and practice was a problem. Macanaz noted that even if Native communities were granted by law with the rights over their property and the fruits of their individual labour, those rights were not secured. Spaniards and Creoles illegally appropriated indigenous labour, a huge damage to Spanish American economy because “a precarious possession is not a possession that encourages a man to work like a secure one; for in the latter, he works with the certainty that whatever improvements the possession obtains, they will remain inviolably for the benefit of his children and grandchildren”.⁵⁰

The core idea behind a Spanish American land tenure reform must be distributing public land parcels in property or long-term leases to the indigenous population. He proposed a scheme of conditional donations. The land would be free from taxation for 15-20 years, and individuals would retain their property at the condition of productively working their possessions. The intendants were to be the officials in charge of overseeing the expansion of rural production. In the case of large estates, they should persuade landholders to put into production every parcel of land. Macanaz did not resolve the problematic tension between the need of economic growth and the respect of property rights and limited himself to suggesting that landlords could be compensated for an eventual expropriation through administrative appointments. On the one hand, he suggested that each intendant should find the best way to address the problem according to each specific context. On the other hand, land availability in the Americas was so high that this issue had less urgency than in Europe, he believed.

Intendants were crucial protagonists of the reforms of the economic government, and they would also be in charge of organising practical education in every useful aspect of agriculture and husbandry to “ease the export of its fruits through trade”.⁵¹ *Caciques* and priests should assist in this educational work, whose final goal was to create useful vassals. In this context, the concept of utility has a prominent economic meaning: a useful vassal is one who constantly applies to productive labour, improving individual economic output, and in this way contributing to the overall increase of the wealth of a nation.

In the last chapter, the author stressed again the two main concepts that should be guiding Spanish American economic reform: Natives had to be turned into “useful and profitable vassals”, and Spain had to be the only nation taking advantage of the great consumption generated by the expansion of Spanish American commercial society.⁵² This twofold goal perfectly encapsulates the ideas

⁵⁰ *Ivi*, 87.

⁵¹ *Ivi*, 99.

⁵² *Ivi*, 284.

underlying the Spanish Enlightenment economic thinking. The conceptual change signalled by the prominent role of the discipline of political economy determined that the greatest source of wealth and power for a nation was based on its population. However, this was not a simple matter of numbers. Wealth was not determined by the number of subjects of a sovereign but by the amount and productivity of “useful” ones. Consumption was considered the factor behind the improvement of individual economic output, together with the stimulus provided by the state through proper legislation. The diffusion of consumer and luxury goods benefited society, as the natural spirit of emulation stimulated individual desires, pushing individuals to work more to satisfy their new material needs. If the stimulus of consumption conceptually preceded the increase of production, those two movements then become self-enforcing. In this framework, freedom of trade was needed to stimulate the circulation of goods necessary to sustain production and consumption. The result was economic growth and the following increase in the power and prestige of the nation.

Luxury is a central driver of economic development thanks to the “civilising” role of towns and fairs. Establishing new settlements and urban markets was “very useful”, as urban centres were the places where “more goods are consumed, as people work more to have more to consume”. Besides the transformative role of legislation, the very nature of men and women would contribute to creating an industrious population: the intrinsic social character of humans and their seek for status recognition inside their group was instrumental in introducing industrious customs. Indeed,

The anxiety to appear well in one’s own person or in the eyes of others is, among all passions, the strongest in both men and women; and from this results the richest mine for the State, for from it comes the desire to possess; from this desire, industry is inseparable, and thus fairs should be considered extremely useful [...] as they provide people with the occasion to see and shine; and it is certain that interaction with many and diverse people serves both to broaden understanding and to refine and perfect manners.⁵³

Regarding America, the general logic of Enlightenment economic improvement resulted in the call for more efficient economic interdependence between Spain and its overseas possessions. However, a fundamental aspect was the previous creation of a useful American population. As mentioned, Spanish reforms believed in the interrelation between agriculture, industry and trade. Applying this principle to the economic reform of Spanish American reality meant the improvement of production first, as it was the activity providing raw materials to be processed and traded.

⁵³ *Ivi*, 140-141.

The author, recognising the Native American's inherent adaptability, dismissed theories of their natural inferiority and lack of reason. Instead, he attributed their "savage" and "backward" way of life to the devastating effects of conquest and disease, as well as to legislation that had, until then, promoted exploitation over economic development. The reform in the economic government, combined with the efforts of intendants, priests, and *caciques*, aimed to provide the necessary economic education to elevate Native Americans to the ranks of civilisation, attesting to their resilience and potential.

Indeed, the distribution of property was a cornerstone of governmental power. Property was the state-backed institution that represented the best guarantee of the maximisation of individual labour. In addition, it was a governmental practice not based on coercion, as political interventionism was grounded in an anthropological view that considered humans as possessive agents whose desires had just to be slightly stimulated. Finally, it entailed a temporal dimension which contributed to the reproduction and growth of the economic system: landowners have a stronger incentive to improve their lands because they own the fruits of their labour, and they know that their lands will be legally inherited by their offspring.

As already noted, the *Nuevo sistema* was widely known among government circles, and it influenced other texts proposing imperial reform, such as Miguel Antonio de la Gándara y Pérez's *Apuntes sobre el bien y el mal de España* (1759). Just before his inauguration on the Spanish throne, he dedicated the work to Carlos III. Gandara came from a Cantabrian noble family and worked in the administration during the reign of Fernando VI until his protector, the Marquis of Ensenada, remained in power. After that moment, he moved to Sicily, where he gained the trust of the future Carlos III, with whom he returned to Spain in 1759. He was then jailed following the Esquilache Riots (1766), as he was accused of being one of the promoters of the rebellion for his proximity to the Jesuits.

Gandara's work was in line with the contemporary wave of economic thought, as it was a collection of useful pieces of advice aiming at the economic improvement of the empire.⁵⁴ Spain urgently needed to strengthen its economic stance, and according to Gandara the key provision was to improve the commercial interdependence between Spain and the Americas. The roots of Spanish backwardness lay in not considering its American dominions as colonies but only as lands of conquest. Better commercial legislation was necessary to integrate the European and overseas territories economically. Spain should exploit American consumption markets and the other way around. Only in this way was

⁵⁴ Gándara y Pérez, *Apuntes sobre el bien*.

it possible to get more benefit from extra-European dominions, as Britain and France did in Martinique and Barbados.⁵⁵ Population was the origin of state wealth therefore it should be increased through a commercial-driven improvement of production.⁵⁶ An increase in individual wealth would have permitted the expansion of the financial burden, considerably augmenting state revenues and wealth, Gandara's ultimate goal. Indeed, "there was never a rich Prince with poor vassals; and there will never be a poor Prince with rich vassals".⁵⁷

Echoing Macanaz, the *Apuntes* stressed the need to turn millions of loyal indigenous into useful vassals through their incorporation into a commercial society. The American "great mine of men" would generate more revenues than all the Asian gold or Potosí silver if they were "educated in every possible domain [and] breed to industry". New laws were needed to exploit Spanish American economic potential, improve silver extraction and promote "two thousand other American trade branches", such as new species of medicinal herbs, fruits, metals, timbers, spices and textiles.⁵⁸

To do so, new agricultural colonies would be established, joining Native Americans and Catholic migrants from Northern Europe. European migration would help the diffusion of finer consumer tastes and the desire to acquire more goods. This way, the development of American consumer markets would increase demand for Spanish production.

From there (from America, I mean), the means for what is here must come, and what is there must be improved from here, providing the *Indios* with liberties and lands in property, encouraging them in agriculture and the cultivation of the other fruits that the respective countries produce, instructing them in the rude, material and mechanical arts, directing them, caressing them and making them industrious. The art of government greatly compensates for the influences of temperance.⁵⁹

Gandara did not provide a detailed analysis of how to improve American agricultural output through property distribution, as he is more concerned about reforming commercial rather than agricultural legislation. He was firmly convinced that if Spain would enact a more liberal trade policy for Spaniards and a stricter one for foreigners, the positive influence of external demand would guarantee

⁵⁵ Macanaz used the same example to highlight the lesser profitability of Spanish overseas territories compared to Anglo-French ones.

⁵⁶ He openly states that "men are priceless; the increase of population is the increase of everything". Gándara y Pérez, *Apuntes sobre el bien*, 218.

⁵⁷ *Ivi*, 34.

⁵⁸ *Ivi*, 218. The numerous expeditions to Spanish America during the 18th century aimed to study American nature to make it more profitable and discover "useful" animals and plants. See González Bueno, 'La utilidad de la flora americana'.

⁵⁹ *Ivi*, 227-228.

the stimulus for improving agricultural production. Nevertheless, the few pages dedicated to America expressed the same ideas of the *Nuevo sistema*. The key provision was turning millions of Spanish American vassals into useful and industrious ones, meaning individuals incorporated into an Atlantic commercial society, which would produce agricultural and artisanal commodities to be sold in the market. Property distribution was seen as guaranteeing application to labour, as individuals work more if they are sure that the fruits of their labour would remain in their possession.⁶⁰

Macanaz's influence is even more evident in Bernardo Ward's *Proyecto Económico*. Ward was an Irishman at the service of Ferdinando VI. Between 1750 and 1754, he travelled through Europe to study the economic ideas and technical innovations driving European empires' economic growth. He concluded his *Proyecto Económico* in 1762, posthumously published only in 1779 by Campomanes, who turned it into a best-seller as new editions appeared in 1779, 1782 and 1787. The work opened an appreciation of Spanish economic potential: the monarchy had almost infinite possibilities for development, which were not being exploited because people, land and money were not efficiently exploited due to detrimental legislation. Imperial emulative competition shapes his intellectual framework, as Ward interpreted the Spanish condition in the light of her opponents' economic achievements (mainly Britain and France).⁶¹

Ward's aim was to demonstrate how the Spanish monarchy could effectively exploit its natural and human resources, through an alliance between the king and his vassals. The main idea behind it was that "the protection of the King must be the great driving force behind everything". He sought to empower Spanish producers to economically utilise their possessions and enhance them, "by placing in their hands the means of being makers of their own happiness; and at the same time promoters of their nation's prosperity".⁶² The ultimate goal was to increase the productivity of Spanish vassals, as this was the source of wealth. To increase the overall imperial economic output, Ward also proposed a detailed plan to transform paupers into productive vassals in his *Obra pía y eficaz modo de remediar la miseria de la gente pobre de España* (1750), printed at the end of the *Proyecto*.

Even if the work comprised many provisions, Ward summarises his main goal in eight points, one of which is related to the Americas and its indigenous people. It was necessary to "give them land, teach them how to cultivate the precious fruits produced by those vast territory, let them freely enjoy

⁶⁰ *Ivi*, 219.

⁶¹ Ward, *Proyecto económico*.

⁶² *Ivi*, XXIII.

whatever their labour produces”.⁶³ The second part of the *Proyecto* is entirely dedicated to America, and it is an extensive plagiarism of the *Nuevo sistema*, as many passages are blatantly copied, and others are rephrased or summarised. Far from discrediting Ward’s erudition, this fact proves the wide acceptance and high esteem Macanaz’s ideas enjoyed in Spanish political economic discussions, as copying or quoting without reference was widely diffused in 18th-century European republic of letters. Ward had never visited the Americas and, therefore, used the *Nuevo sistema* to compose an imperial reform plan, as Spanish and American economic improvements were to be necessarily entangled.

4. Agrarian Colonies in Metropolitan Spain

Reform plans were not elaborated in Spain and then applied in the Americas, thus creating a unidirectional intellectual exchange. Instead, the constitutive imperial character of Spanish political and economic reformism aimed at increasing economic profitability on both shores of the Atlantic, and the commercial connections between the two regions meant that one could not advance without the other. Bourbon monarchs aimed to replace the Habsburg model of a jurisdictionally fragmented empire with an interconnected and commercial one.⁶⁴ Therefore, interdependence should substitute economic and political disconnection. The arguments that inspired and sustained economic imperial reforms were elaborated in the interconnected Iberian space, and thus, they might be used to describe the American or European side of the empire. The next chapter is dedicated to the economic ideas sustaining plans for the economic development of a specific American region (the Río de la Plata). This section, instead, deals with the resonance the concept of imperial property had in the discussion of agricultural improvement in metropolitan Spain. The goal is not to assess the origin of some particular ideas. Instead, it shows entangled arguments inspired by a similar concern: how to increase the profitability of the Spanish empire through the creation of useful vassals.

The goal of creating useful and productive subjects was not restricted to the American Native populations but was also included in plans for economic reform addressing metropolitan Spain. There were different ways of crafting industrious citizens (education, tax reform, economic patronage). The reform of agrarian legislation was a crucial goal of the reformers, suggested by the centrality of agrarianism and agricultural production in European economic thought, as well as the economic

⁶³ *Ivi*, 221.

⁶⁴ Tavárez, ‘La invención de un imperio commercial’. A cornerstone of the project was the creation of an imperial Postal Service. See Moreno Cabanillas, *Comunicación e imperio*.

structure of Spain, as primary production played the prominent role.⁶⁵ However, regarding land distribution, there was a crucial difference between the European and the American Iberian dominions: land availability. If the Americas enclosed an almost immense extension of free land (or this was the Spanish perception), Spain did not, and the most productive lands were usually already being appropriated by the nobility or the Church. Therefore, a crucial issue was to reform the legislation over *mayorazgos* and mortmain, while finding some lawful way to distribute land to the landless. Proposals to increase agricultural productivity were based on expanding the commodity frontier to free or uncultivated lands and rationalising the property regimes and their legislation. The projects analysed are the creation of agrarian colonies in the Sierra Morena and Andalusia and the elaboration of a new *Ley Agraria*. Agrarianism played a prominent role in the projects of economic reforms. On the other hand, the influence of physiocracy was negligible, or at least it was considered a negative example not to follow.⁶⁶

The 18th century witnessed the formulation of numerous plans for agricultural colonisation.⁶⁷ In 1749, the ambassador in the Netherlands, Marquis del Puerto, proposed to Ensenada that Hungarians and Germans could be usefully employed to colonise empty lands in Spain and America. However, Fernando VI stopped the project as he felt it needed further study and preparation. Other proposals by Luis de Borbón, don José Borràs, and Bernardino Ward were unsuccessful because of the king's anxiety toward introducing foreigners.

During the reign of Carlos III, new plans for contracting foreign workers were drafted. Eventually, the men surrounding the new king convinced him of the necessity of productive colonisation as a part of the overall agricultural and economic reform they were planning for Spain and the empire. Pedro Rodríguez de Campomanes, Miguel de Múzquiz y Goyeneche and Pedro de Aranda were the main supporters of the "Nuevas Poblaciones" in the Sierra Morena. Additionally, the success of population policies in Prussia, England and Russia provided Spanish rulers with positive examples.⁶⁸

Campomanes shared the idea that an industrious population was the origin of public wealth, and "population is needed to make the land fruitful".⁶⁹ Promoting marriages (and the consequent

⁶⁵ Bernal Rodríguez, *Estructuras agrarias y reformismo ilustrado*; García Sanz, *op. cit.*

⁶⁶ Lluch and Argemí, *Agronomía y fisiocracia*. Notwithstanding authoritative studies re-addressed old and teleological interpretations, the overestimation of the influence of physiocracy in the history of economic thought is still diffused. See Reinert and Kaplan, *The Economic Turn*, 11-12.

⁶⁷ Alcazar Molina, *Pablo de Olavide*, 6-10; García Cano, *Las Nuevas Poblaciones Carolinas*, 43-45.

⁶⁸ Delgado Barrado, 'La génesis del proyecto repoblador', 313.

⁶⁹ Campomanes, *Bosquejo de Política Económica*, 153. For his ideas on property, see Luna, 'El intocable dominio'.

opposition to celibacy) and establishing new settlements were the two ways to increase population. The Minister compared the last provision to Ancient Roman *colonias*, thus drawing a parallelism between establishing new villages and colonising newly conquered lands. To meet this goal, the government can use Spaniards, and “true Catholic foreigners”.⁷⁰



Fig. 1. Rodolfo de León Sarmiento, *Nuevas Poblaciones de Sierra Morena* (1782). Real Academia de la Historia. Biblioteca Digital.

In 1767, Carlos III approved the plan for introducing 6.000 German and Flemish workers in the Spanish domains. Campomanes sponsored the project and commissioned it to a German named Johann Kaspar Thürriegel. Once they arrived in Spain, the king would decide how many settlers to send to Peru and Puerto Rico, and how many to Sierra Morena. Who was destined for America would receive almost three hectares, while the settlers of the Sierra Morena would obtain “whatever is possible”.⁷¹ In addition to the distribution of property, the newcomers would be granted cattle, working instruments, and a ten-year tax exemption. However, Pablo de Olavide opposed the plan to populate Puerto Rico with German migrants, as their lack of patriotism would lead to ineffective

⁷⁰ Ivi, 159.

⁷¹ *Real Cedula [...] para la introducción de seis mil colonos flamencos y Alemanes.*

military defence in case of a foreign invasion of the island.⁷² German migrants were finally destined only to the colonisation of the Sierra Morena, but anxieties towards their political allegiance remained.

In the *Fuero de Población*, the king appointed Olavide as the superintendent of the Nuevas Poblaciones. He is the perfect example of the intersection of state-backed plans for economic productive colonisation and agrarian reforms in the Spanish imperial context. Son of a *limeño* merchant and administrator, he grew up in the capital of the Viceroyalty of Peru, where he taught at the University and started his administrative career, holding different positions in the Audiencia and the Trade Consulate. In the 1750s, he had to face charges of malfeasance and moved to Spain, where he dedicated to trade and commerce, not holding any public office until 1766.

As superintendent, he was granted extensive executive powers. For instance, he was even in charge of promoting marriages between Germans and Spanish migrants, which could be taken from the working houses of the kingdom. This way, foreigners could be easily incorporated into the “body of the Nation”.⁷³ The interdependence between projects of colonisation and working houses signals once again the efforts toward creating a productive and industrious population: people might end up into working houses if they were judged as “vagrant” and “lazy”. Their displacement to Sierra Morena would turn them into useful vassals, as they could contribute to the productive development of the new colonies, and the “creolisation” of German migrants. The *Fuero* compelled settlers to build a house and work their lands because “if they failed to do so, or if a negligent behaviour is noticed, he shall be deemed to be a vagrant”, and he will be assigned instead to the Royal Army or Navy, where it was harder to escape the fate of becoming useful for the king.

In the colonisation plan, the distribution of property was a necessary but not sufficient step to create a productive and useful community out of the blue. Indeed, lands were assigned through emphyteusis contracts, so the public authorities retained the right to impose a code of conduct over its use. In fact, the settler could not sell, lease, or mortgage it, establish a mortmain or a vow. The state goal was that a “useful Settler” and his family would constantly possess the land. Indeed, the rule for the settlers and the degree of public control over them was quite high, and the penalties quite serious: they had to maintain their household “populated” for ten years if they did not want to be sent to the Army. After ten years, the punishment for disregarding their property was just confiscation. A high degree

⁷² Corredera, ‘The «Indians of Europe» in Sierra Morena’, 186-187.

⁷³ *Real Cedula [...] que contiene la instrucción, y fuero de poblacion.*

of state dirigisme characterised the colonisation of the Sierra Morena to sustain the project in the first years of its establishment. It was a strategy of economic development coupling state (quite coercive) patronage with private initiative.

In a late writing, Olavide resumed the ideas that inspired his years as superintendent of the Sierra Morena. In the Carta XXXVII of his *Evangelio en triunfo*, he staged a dialogue between two friends, Mariano and Antonio, over the decadence of Spanish agriculture, its causes and the means to promote a flourishing countryside. Creating a population of small landholders is a central concern, but “it is not enough to simply give them the land. It is essential to give it to them with certain laws, requirements and conditions”. To do so, Olavide believes that emphyteusis was the most appropriate contract, as it transfers “the *dominio útil*, which is the enjoyment and usufruct of the land”, but not the *dominio directo*. This way, the contract imposes some conditions to the receivers aimed at stimulating the maximisation of production over a long time. The clauses are the annual canon payment in a fixed number of products, the prohibition of selling the parcel, the compulsion to work over it, and the prohibition of dividing it between heirs. Those conditions were meant to inspire “trust and security” in the settlers, which were necessary conditions to improve productivity, as “the assurance that the fruits of their labours will be transmitted to their children and other offspring will make [settlers] work with pleasure and zeal”.⁷⁴

In the autumn of 1767, the first foreign families arrived in Andalusia. However, many problems arose immediately. Soon, royal inspectors arrived, and the *visitador* Pérez Valiente blamed the government of Olavide for the bad state of the colonies in 1769. His prominent friends at court and supporters of the colonisation (Campomanes, Aranda, Muzquiz) defended his work. However, after a few years, he became the scapegoat of intrigues at the Madrid court, and the desire the Inquisition had of re-establishing its control on Spanish elites, even at the wane of its century-long power.⁷⁵ He was accused of impiety, materialism and heresy, and, on 24th November 1778, was sentenced to eight years of reclusion in a monastery and perpetual exile from Madrid, Sevilla, Córdoba, Nuevas Poblaciones and Lima.⁷⁶

However, the experience of Sierra Morena was highly valued in Spanish governing circles, notwithstanding Olavide’s fate. The “exemplary character” of the *Fuero de Población* influenced

⁷⁴ Olavide. *El Evangelio en triumpho*, 136-191.

⁷⁵ Gómez Urdáñez, ‘Con la venia de Carlos III’.

⁷⁶ Alcazar Molina, *op. cit.*, 127-193.

following projects of agrarian repopulation in Extremadura, Canary Islands, Castile and Aragon.⁷⁷ In 1807, Antonio de Capmany defined the Poblaciones as an “immortal work of the greatness and beneficence of Carlos III”.⁷⁸ Born in a Catalan family, he had moved to Seville in 1769, where he had become a collaborator of Olavide. Capmany was appointed Director of Agriculture of the Nuevas Poblaciones, sponsoring the immigration of Catalan families. However, he testified against Olavide in the Inquisition trial, accusing the *limeño* of favouring the vice of luxury in the colonies. Indeed, it is necessary to disconnect the judgements of contemporaries and later commentators over Olavide and his proceedings as superintendent. If the Inquisitorial condemnation discredited him in someone’s eyes, the utopian project of the Nuevas Poblaciones aroused admiration and high expectations in Spain and elsewhere, as the colonisation plan responded perfectly to European anxieties for improving agricultural production and overall economic output.

The *Fuero de Población* had a fast circulation. In 1768, Francisco Romá y Rosell quoted its texts, and some ideas resonated in his work, especially in the section regarding agrarian policy. He considered land reform the first means to increase a nation’s population. A fair land distribution was necessary to stimulate productive labour, to assign a “permanent domicile” to whoever lacked it and to diminish unproductive large estates. In this respect, Romá y Rosell noted that the King had the natural right “to take all the most effective measures to extract as much produce as possible from the land, and much more, so that the Kingdom does not become depopulated”. This belief in the liceity of strong political interventionism signals his cameralist sympathies. Perpetual emphyteusis - the land contract in the Sierra Morena - was the best arrangement to distribute land, because it allowed to avoid expropriation, which would have been an attack to the natural right to property, as well as to benefit the worker “with a perpetual security, which fixes his domicile, and encourages him incessantly to improve the land”. The most important goal was to increase productivity and overall wealth, and the distribution of land in a quasi-property regime would stimulate a productive population and diminish waste and inefficiency. Additionally, this would safeguard the common good of the polity, one of the duties of every good ruler.⁷⁹

Regarding colonisation policies, he looked at the example of the Roman Empire, arguing that military colonies were an appropriate solution to increase population in “an exhausted and depopulated Kingdom”. Indeed, this would lead to a stimulus for productive labour, the advancement of the

⁷⁷ García Cano, *op. cit.*, 181-186.

⁷⁸ De Capmany y de Montpalau. *Questiones críticas*, 72.

⁷⁹ Romá y Rosell, *op. cit.*, 17-20.

internal commodity frontier and the expansion of household consumption. At the same time, soldiers would benefit from their agricultural occupation during the year, being right to fight the enemy at any given moment. In fact, “a fixed and industrious domicile” would guarantee “a Veteran Troop, and a militant offspring” and it would attract “a multitude of Foreigners, especially German troops to stay in the Kingdom, always ready to fight in time of war, and increase the Population, till the Fields, and build Canals and Roads in time of peace”.⁸⁰

If Romà y Rosell did not directly mention the Nuevas Poblaciones in his discussion of agrarian colonisation, Nicolas de Arriquibar extensively commented on them. Son of the Basque merchant community, he was one of the most active members of Bilbao Trade Consulate and the Sociedad Bascongada.⁸¹ In his *Recreación política*, Arriquibar proposed a comprehensive plan of reform based on his experience regarding the Basque economy, considering it applicable to other contexts. He believed that the main reason behind the abundance of useless lands in Spain was “the lack of domestic and foreign consumption”, and the establishment of new towns was the only way to stimulate trade and industry, the two interrelated engines of economic activity. The under-utilisation of three factors of production (land, money and men) elicited depopulation. Public authorities must reverse this situation, as “it is very easy for the sovereign power to combine the three dead funds of land, men and money, and consequently the repopulation of such lands”. Arriquibar defined the *Fuero de Población* a “wise regulation”, as it permitted to put into production lands that were left uncultivated, whose conquest would be “more glorious, useful and safe than that of distant countries”.⁸² Again, Arriquibar highly valued the wealth-generating character of labour, and he stressed how every vassal should be assigned a productive occupation, as “man was born to work, as a bird is born to fly: and to want to live without working is not only against the order of providence, but also against the interest of society”.⁸³

Concerning the establishment of new settlements, Arriquibar is inclined to distribute lands among different families (in property), stressing the economic potential of smallholding. However, he mentions the possibility to distribute a large estate to a single owner which would then lease it out to nuclear families and was in charge of creating a new settlement. The new urban centres established in the desert regions were “small republics”, which were going to be successful if “their fruits find a corresponding consumer market”. Indeed, mere subsistence was not enough to grant prosperity and

⁸⁰ *Ivi*, 213-214.

⁸¹ Astigarraga, *Los ilustrados vascos*, 104-146.

⁸² Arriquibar y Mezcuta. *Recreación política. Vol.1*, 235-241.

⁸³ *Ivi*, 50.

wealth to a population. Commercial development and market production and exchange were the real indicators of wealth. Considering the settlements created on the frontier with Portugal, Arriquibar added another policy recommendation: that the landholder was to be obliged to maintain a military garrison of 50 men. Members of the new agrarian community had to provide resources for the troops, but militiamen should contribute to their subsistence through their own individual labour, as lands were to be assigned to them as well. Indeed, “Ceres and Mars are not incompatible, but I judge, that the most vigorous militia is the one exercised in an appropriate labour”.⁸⁴

If wealth was created through the productive deployment of human labour, agriculture was the most important wealth-generating activity, as it was dedicated to the transformation of natural resources into commodities or raw materials. Labour could additionally process or transform primary goods, thus increasing their added market value. Therefore, the reform of the techniques, practices and customs governing the rural activities was a primary concern, together with the study of the correct macroeconomic legislation regarding trade and commerce. The experience of the colonisation of the Sierra Morena was the most ambitious project of Spanish economic reformism. It should have provided the model for an agrarian utopian regeneration based on the efficient and knowledge-based economic government of the new communities. This idyllic utopia failed to perfectly adhere to the expectations of his promoters and contemporaries. However, notwithstanding the investigation against Olavide and his allegedly poor results, the colonisation of the Sierra Morena became a fundamental reference for the agrarian ideology of the Spanish Enlightenment, and particularly Gaspar de Jovellanos, the author of the 1795 *Informe de la ley Agraria*.⁸⁵

5. Projects of Land Tenure Reform

Before falling from the grace of Carlos III, Olavide participated in a second reform project: the elaboration of an agrarian reform. The need for a land reform has been a pressing public concern since 1767, when the Council of Castile commissioned the Minister of Finance Campomanes to coordinate a survey to collect information about the state of Spanish agriculture. The was *Memorial de la Ley Agraria* (1784) was the first work the project generated, collecting various reports penned by different local administrators, as well as the preliminary ideas of Campomanes. Olavide, as

⁸⁴ *Ivi*, 252-259.

⁸⁵ Anes, ‘Del Expediente al Informe’.

intendant of Seville, wrote an extensive document highlighting the ills afflicting Andalusian agriculture and the ways to solve them.

The *Memorial* starts from radically different premises than the *Fuero de Población*. The issue was reforming traditional laws and practices detrimental to agricultural production, without provoking social turmoil. Indeed, the memory of the Esquilache Riots (1766) was still fresh, when administrators became aware of the active reaction of the population to political and economic reforms that were affecting their everyday lives. Olavide had faith in the social transformative character of legislation. Rather than an authoritarian agrarian law, he called for promulgating a “sweet and more effective legislation” which would push vassals to develop new economic practices “voluntarily, and in their own interest”.⁸⁶ In fact, he noted that if every parcel of land of the whole earth were cultivated, an agrarian law would be necessary to distribute land to the landless. However, if uncultivated areas exist, it is better to exploit them all first.⁸⁷ As virgin lands were available, directing individual interests toward them was sufficient, and there was no need for coercion: humans were rational beings, and political power should only show them how to fulfil their interests. Olavide probably refers to the infinite American territories and desert regions of mainland Spain. His efforts to establish the *Nuevas Poblaciones* stand for his belief in expanding the commodity frontiers prior to land redistribution. If every soft means would be useless to convince landholders to lease out their properties, “then it will be time for the laws to force them”.⁸⁸ Commodity frontier expansion included uncultivated land, as well as already cultivated one. Introducing better techniques and convincing big landholders to lease their property would increase the cultivated area and overall productivity.

Again, land property is a tool for creating happy and wealthy vassals. Small peasants were suffering from the insecurity given by their short-term leasing contracts, but

The government can conveniently transform today’s unhappy men and lazy Workers into useful and profitable Ones, educated and well-off Taxpayers, comfortable *Vecinos* and settlers, without there being any need to do more than give them a very long lease or sell them a parcel, the ownership of a small piece of land, where they will live with their Livestock and family, and so they will be happy Owners.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ *Memorial [...] sobre los daños, y decadencia que padece la agricultura, Madrid 1784, 176r.*

⁸⁷ The term “agrarian law” was linked to economic redistribution programs. The legacy of Ancient Roman history influenced this association.

⁸⁸ *Ivi*, 245r.

⁸⁹ *Ivi*, 210.

Communal and empty lands should be distributed, and if a wealthy person buys some land to cultivate it, the purchase should not exceed 200 fanegas to prevent property accumulation. More land can be purchased if the receiver pledges to distribute it and establish a village, providing the settlers with all the facilities needed to start their activities and compelling them by contract to work their lands.

Indeed, the government-sponsored reform projects were not taking place in a cultural vacuum, as the discussion regarding the improvement of agricultural output sparked. In 1786, Manuel Sisternes y Feliú published *Idea de la Ley Agraria Española*, a valuable work that granted him an appointment at the Council of Castile. His Catalan origins determined his proximity to the Aragonese faction and Francisco Romá y Rosell. After moving to Madrid, he entered the governing circles of Campomanes and Jovellanos. He pleaded to the project of the *Ley Agraria*, in a period in which the *libre comercio* had animated external trade, and he offered his humble contribution to the Council. Land was the origin of men's subsistence, if individuals were permitted to toil it with their sweat, following "a wise guidance" and "fixed rules". The state had already advanced in the civilising mission of turning desert lands into productive ones, and the useless population into industrious vassals. The *Ley Agraria* was an additional step in the direction of an overall improvement of the general happiness and the public good, which was the nation's material wealth.⁹⁰

Sisternes highlighted the political implications of this reform from the very start. While agrarian laws in the Roman Empire aimed at increasing equality among fellow citizens, this was impossible in a monarchy based on inequality of fortunes and status, which was "its very essence and constitution". The redistribution of lands would force expropriation, "which, being against property rights, would lead to revolutions among families, and finally to the destruction of the State".⁹¹ According to him, a land tenancy reform should not destroy the social pact that held communities together. Therefore, landholders cannot be forced by law to cultivate or lease it as "since he is the main interested party, no one should believe him to be so indolent that he does not want to improve his lot".⁹²

Property is, therefore, considered a cornerstone of the social order, which is used as the argument to oppose any attempt at egalitarian redistribution. In fact, the goal of the *Ley Agraria* was not to level social inequalities but to improve production. To do so, it was necessary to rationalise agricultural

⁹⁰ Sisternes y Feliu. *Idea de la Ley Agraria*, IV.

⁹¹ *Ivi*, 1.

⁹² *Ivi*, 44.

practices, invest capital in technical improvement, end detrimental legislation, and distribute property to the idle population. In particular, the *Ley Agraria* was concerned with

1. Dividing land into lots commensurate with the faculties of the cultivator: 2. Arranging land contracts in such a way that the rights of the owner are preserved without prejudice to the settler or tenant; 3. Encouraging Agriculture in all its parts, so that, being cultivated more and better than hitherto, it may reach a flourishing state, and remain in it, by regulations and provisions adaptable to the climate, nature and qualities of the land.⁹³

The text encloses 107 articles, each providing advice regarding some of the abovementioned matters. Sisternes stressed that “every fruitful land” had to “be cultivated, dividing it among active farmers able to improve it”, noting another time that this applies only to empty and communal lands.⁹⁴ Labour generated property rights, he believed. Who was already cultivating common lands, thus holding it “in *pacifica posesion*”, should be considered the possessor and could not be evicted. The lawful owner (a community or a religious order) could only claim for an annual canon over it.

The productivist orientation of the text is paramount. While Sisternes was against compelling landowners to cultivate their properties, the distributed lands were obliged to putting them into productive use. The first distribution recipients had to be workers who owned at least one yoke of oxen, followed by day-labourers “accustomed to rural works”. Even artisans should be included as agriculture was the perfect activity “in order to productively employ also the empty time of their occupation”. Paupers had to be excluded: it was impossible that people “uneducated, with no ethics, and no spirit nor ability to improve their lot” turned into industrious subjects only thanks to land allocation and granting land to them “it is not improving agriculture, but rather damaging it”.⁹⁵ Sisternes was not a radical and progressive reformer but a perfect exponent of Spanish Catholic and monarchic economic Enlightenment.

The author supported soft means for social reform. The text included suggestions to convince landowners to distribute their lands in emphyteusis, not tapping into the force of law but instead into the human search for social recognition. In fact, it was proposed to prize who would create a new settlement with at least fifteen families with the jurisdiction over the new political community and the title of Baron. Emphyteusis was the best contract to do so, and Sisternes was enthusiastic about

⁹³ *Ivi*, 3-6.

⁹⁴ *Ivi*, 6-7.

⁹⁵ *Ivi*, 18-21.

it, because it stimulated agriculture “through soft and very useful means”, improving agricultural production without affecting any previous rights of landholders, receivers or communities. This way, the incentive to production inherent in land property was preserved because “the settler thus has irrevocable *dominio útil* of the land, treats it as his own, distributes it among his children”.⁹⁶

After two years, Luis Marcelino Pereyra published a reply to Sisternes, hoping to contribute to the ongoing elaboration of agrarian reforms. He was born in Galicia, and after 1780 became a central figure in the creation of the Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País de Santiago, proposing the establishment of a chair of political economy at the Universidad de Compostela. Albeit praising Sisternes for his erudite work, Pereyra feared that some of his proposals could have dreadful consequences. In fact, “any curtailment of property rights is the most terrible obstacle that can stand in the way of agricultural progress”. Pereyra had a radical opinion regarding the different spaces that individual interests and state action held in the promotion of economic growth. The latter should not interfere in the economic sphere, ruling by law what men must or must not do, as “whatever a law may prescribe for a man to do for his own benefit, he will do for himself with the greatest care, without being commanded to do so by anyone, provided he knows this usefulness”.⁹⁷ Everything a man is compelled to do, it would do it in the worst possible way. Individual interest was the primary mover behind human action, both morally and economically.

Not surprisingly, Pereyra favoured distributing lands in individual property rather than emphyteusis and was against the compulsion to work on the land included in Sisternes’ proposal. The underlying assumption is that if someone requested or bought a parcel of land, the buyer wanted to extract the most profit he could from it. Consequently, the land would be cultivated, or if some drawbacks prevented the buyer from economically exploiting it, he would surely sell it. The only incentives workers needed were prizes and competitions organised by economic societies. Normative laws were unnecessary and harmful.

Comparing Sisternes and Pereyra highlights one of the central themes that agrarian reformers faced during the 18th century: the role and limits of legislation in shaping individual customs. The proactive understanding of legislation was a product of the Enlightenment, and it signalled the incipient transition toward an administrative state that gave laws to society in an attempt to mould it instead of just maintaining a God-inspired order. The desire to sketch a rational legislation aimed at promoting

⁹⁶ *Ivi*, 25.

⁹⁷ Pereyra, *Reflexiones sobre la Ley*, 13-15.

the natural and rational development of human society to reach the higher stage of happiness was the goal of Gaetano Filangieri and his *Scienza della legislazione*, a widely read and influential work, which was a recurrent point of reference for many authors discussed in this study. Nevertheless, not everyone was sure about the liceity that law had for transforming reality. Conservative arguments relied on the necessity to maintain the God-inspired order and abhorred reforms. However, other arguments came from different ideological sources, such as Pereyra's. In fact, physiocratic ideas advocated for very limited government intervention in the economy, as the law might distort the natural course of economic forces. As individual property was considered a pillar of economic order, Pereyra refused any form of "imperfect property" that was hampering the individual rights of a possessor. On the contrary, Sisternes and most Spanish thinkers believed that the state had to guide the development of individual interest toward the common good of society, as passions might misplace it toward the fulfilment of self-interest at the expense of other community members.⁹⁸

However, supporters of the power of legislation to shape society might divide into different opinions regarding the extent to which laws might accompany or force societal reform. The dialectic between soft and hard means to reform economic customs is another recurrent theme of this study. This debate developed changing arguments according to ideological influences or the social and political context of the participants. In general, Enlightenment thinkers supported the deployment of soft means intended as legislative incentives (such as tax exemptions), as their anthropological view suggested that humans were rational beings who had to be educated by reason. Normative laws or coercion were not considered optimal solutions. However, in specific cases, using coercion to create useful and productive vassals would be advocated as the only solution to govern recalcitrant and lazy urban or rural masses.

6. The *Informe de la Ley Agraria*

In 1794, Jovellanos finally delivered the *Informe de la Ley Agraria* to the Sociedad Matritense, which published it the following year. However, the world that received the *Informe* radically differed from the one that expressed its need. The decision to elaborate a land tenure reform was taken in 1766, during a relatively peaceful time in which individual hopes for reforms met with state goals - the colonisation of the Sierra Morena started in 1767. In 1795, the future looked darker for the Spanish monarchy: the French Revolution and the execution of Louis XVI (member of the same royal family

⁹⁸ Hirschman studied how Enlightenment thinkers believed that individual interests might tame passions. See Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests*.

as the Spanish rulers) had shaken the legitimacy of traditional royal sovereignty, and the Revolutionary Wars were putting strains on royal finance. It was not the time to invest resources in a reform that could alienate the support of both the nobility and the popular classes, and many of the ideas contained in the *Informe* remained on paper.

Additionally, growing anxieties concerning the role of ideas in favouring social turmoil replaced the incentive for the free circulation of economic ideas characterising the previous decades. The history of the publication of the *Informe* attests to the growing censorship of ideas. The Sociedad Económica Matritense asked for royal permission to publish a new volume of its *Memorias*, in which the *Informe* was inserted. In addition, the cover page clarified that Jovellanos wrote it according to the ideas of the Sociedad. These cautions aimed at sheltering Jovellanos from the Inquisition, as well as to allow a better circulation of the work, and this goal was almost met as it became one fundamental text of Spanish Enlightenment, but the Catholic Church indexed it for almost 50 years.⁹⁹

Anyhow, the *Informe* represents the highest expression of Spanish Enlightened agrarism and composed after years of extensive research, the work summarised in a creative way shared ideas about agricultural reforms. It was a fundamental text of political economy, and it included a theoretical introduction aimed at interpreting the current Spanish economic state in the light of a social theory of economic growth and evolution. It reveals the ideas of Spanish administrators about the origins and the laws of motion of society, a framework strongly affected by economic abstractions.

Jovellanos saw individual private interest as the primary mover of the economy, and reform plan had to remove the different hindrances - political, moral and physical - that opposed the free unfolding of individual action in the economic field.¹⁰⁰ The practical policy suggestions include land distribution through emphyteusis or sale; abolition of customary laws that impeded economic development and improvement; abolition of privileges for the nobility and the Church; promotion of economic education, regarded both in its theoretical aspect and practical one; public works to build or renovate infrastructures (roads, bridges, canals, etc.).

The focus on individual interest has pushed scholars to assess the influence of Adam Smith on Jovellanos' thought, notwithstanding the conceptual differences between the two authors.¹⁰¹ In addition to that, the Spanish economic tradition included authors who analysed the positive role

⁹⁹ Anes, *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁰ For a richer analysis of his ideas on property, see Luna, 'La propiedad y el trabajo'.

¹⁰¹ On the intellectual relation between Smith and Jovellanos, see Llombart Rosa, 'Jovellanos y Adam Smith'.

individual interest played in the economic sphere, therefore the subsequent canonisation of *The Wealth of Nations* should not mislead historians regarding the influence this text had on historical actors.¹⁰² Llombart has also noted that the ideas on which Jovellanos built his work came from the eclectic Spanish tradition. Thus, he considered the main innovation of the *Informe* to be “the whole analytical framework” in which individual interest was placed.¹⁰³ Thanks to this, the complex Spanish agrarian reality was interpreted according to unifying principles: individual interest and the interplay between obstacles (political, moral and physical) and remedies (freedom, laws and state support) to promote economic expansion. The same author signalled the perils in interpreting intellectual history according to received categories (liberalism, mercantilism, physiocracy), trying to fit authors into these containers. This deductive approach might impede the appreciation of the peculiarities of some authors and schools of thought and might support teleological interpretations.

In the pages of the *Informe*, property is part of the natural rights God assigned to mankind. In fact, it was the Almighty that gave to men the “dominion over the earth”.¹⁰⁴ At the same time, mankind was condemned to work the land for its subsistence, having the right to claim its possession, from which derived the duty to cultivate it. When men congregated into society, they had to “divide among themselves the dominion of the earth”, and a better definition of individual possessions pushed the improvement and extension of individual interests. Therefore, if property is a natural right, private property is not, as it is derived from society. This nuanced self-interest animated men to “increasing and exploiting nature’s productions”, and the extension and betterment of individual labour generated the “property of labour”. Lands bear fruits only through human labour, and therefore the fruits of one man’s labour are his individual property. Therefore, if the earth is humankind’s property, individual property is a right generated by the reunion of men into society, thus considered not a natural right but a civil one. Individual property had to be secured not because it descended from God but because it stimulated economic progress and happiness.

The first section dedicated to the political hindrances to agricultural progress deals with empty and municipal lands, and Jovellanos advises distributing them in individual property or emphyteusis. The receiver must have the guarantee of long-term possession, as

¹⁰² Viejo Yharrassarry, *Amor propio y sociedad comercial*.

¹⁰³ Llombart Rosa, ‘El *Informe* y su autor’.

¹⁰⁴ Jovellanos, ‘Informe de la Ley Agraria’.

only a safe and secure property can inspire that lively interest without which plots are never advantageously improved; that interest which, identified with all the owner's desires, is the first and most vital stimuli that overcome his laziness and compel him to hard and unceasing labour.¹⁰⁵

Therefore, as other authors discussed, Jovellanos sees property as a fundamental stimulus to maximising production. The primary anxiety behind reform projects was the need to increase imperial production, consumption and trade, and the distribution of land in property or emphyteusis was one of the ways to attain more efficient and productive agriculture. The increase in agricultural commodities was fundamental in stimulating the economy, as those were the source of subsistence and the raw materials for industry, providing the bulk of manufactured commodities to be exchanged in local and foreign markets. In conclusion, the goals of reforming the Spanish tenancy system were to conform it to natural laws, reforming erroneous legislation “to open the first and most abundant source of public and private wealth, raise the nation to the highest summit of splendour and power, and lead the peoples entrusted to Your Highness's supervision to the ultimate height of human happiness”.¹⁰⁶ Economic growth was again considered the primary vehicle for political power and international primacy.

Despite the Inquisitorial persecution, the text gained significant traction in Spanish and European intellectual circles. Between 1806 and 1816, it underwent five different translations (in French, English, Italian, and German), and James Mill, a renowned critic, lauded it in the *Edinburgh Review* (1809). In his *Historia de los vínculos y mayorazgos* (1805), Juan Sempere y Guarinos hailed the *Informe* as “the most illuminating piece of writing we have on agricultural legislation”, extensively quoting from the section on ecclesiastical property. This praise underscores the profound impact of the ideas presented, which emphasized the “importance of extending ownership, and freeing it from the endless fetters to which it has been subjected”.¹⁰⁷

The final voice of this discussion of the multiple meanings attached to the economic concept of property comes from the pen of Francisco Cabarrús. He published in 1808 his *Cartas sobre los obstáculos que la naturaleza, la opinión y las leyes oponen a la felicidad pública*, a reply to and a dialogue with Jovellanos, to which the work is dedicated.¹⁰⁸ The *Informe* was the “immortal project” which consecrated the Asturian author to the pantheon of Spanish and European economic thinkers,

¹⁰⁵ *Ivi*, 208.

¹⁰⁶ *Ivi*, 341.

¹⁰⁷ Sempere y Guarinos. *Historia de los vínculos*, 395-407.

¹⁰⁸ Cabarrús. *Cartas sobre los obstáculos*, 25-26.

and his friend Cabarrús commented on his analysis of the hindrances the Spanish economy faced in the path to prosperity. Besides the praising words spent on the *Informe*, signalling the considerable influence this work had on its contemporaries, it is interesting to note the different places that property held in the social anthropology which sustained the two different theoretical frameworks.

The disarray of political communities is a consequence of legislators prioritizing their individual goals over the common good. This is the foundation of Cabarrús' argument, where he imbued law with a proactive role in shaping and transforming its social environment, for better or worse. Therefore, a thorough examination of the contemporary issues with Spanish legislation necessitated a return to the "origins of political societies" to discern when the Spanish monarchy had devolved from a balanced social evolution, and for what reasons. The contrast with Jovellanos is starkly evident here.

According to Cabarrús, property rights were generated when an individual and his family worked a piece of land, legitimising the possession of it in this way. At this moment, society did not exist yet. In fact, it was created when

[Families] understood the necessity of coming together to protect the security and the property of each one: such is still, was and will always be the social pact: it aims at protecting individual security and property, and therefore society can do nothing against these rights prior to it.¹⁰⁹

Monarchy and republic were just two different political forms, and both aimed at maintaining the original social pact and preserving individual property and security within political communities. Disorder and disarray could result when legislators gear the laws toward their self-interests instead of the common good. In the Spanish context, a critical turn was when the legislative power was assigned to "to a corporation composed of men who are almost all without property, and therefore enemies of it". Additionally, those men interpreted the law instead of simply applying it - an arbitrary and unaccepting attitude for those who believed in a positive and homogenous understanding of law. This corporation of men was the Catholic Church. The attribution of legislative power to religious institutions was the origin of political disarray, which continued under the guidance of bad administrators. In the rest of his work, Cabarrús commented on Jovellanos' *Informe* to sketch an administrative organisation that could reconcile imperial government with the interest of the community. This would guarantee the attainment of happiness, individual as well as common.

¹⁰⁹ *Ivi*, 9.

In contrast to the previous elaborations, property was not considered to secure the maximisation of individual labour and, thus, productivity. Instead, it was seen as a fundamental natural right, a pre-political right not based on divine intercession but on the deployment of individual labour over nature. Cabarrús' labour theory of property echoed the most famous Lockean formulation, as it is signalled by the example used for describing the human state of nature: the North American empty grasslands. In his argument, he imagined human communities as an association of proprietors, whose essence was the freedom from dominium, and who established a political community refusing a part of their freedom to safeguard the individual properties of them all. Property was a pre-political and, therefore, natural right, not a man-made institution aimed at regulating individual behaviour (maintaining peace and guaranteeing individual labour maximisation).

The influence of liberal ideas over the Spanish economic Enlightenment has been primarily interpreted as a history of intellectual pioneers (Olavide, Jovellanos, Cabarrús, de Foronda) who fought against the backwardness and superstition of Spanish Catholic culture. However, it has already been noted the peril of interpreting the intellectual history of economic ideas in the light of preconceived categories such as liberalism, as one assumes the risk of misunderstanding historical concepts in favour of crafting teleological narratives. Indeed, the fact that Cabarrús interpreted property as a natural right signals the circulation of this idea in the Spanish intellectual context and the fact that this argument could be deployed in support of political projects alternative to the monarchy in the years to follow, a conceptual possibility that opened after Napoleon invasion of Spain in 1808. It is interesting to note, thus, that although most of the authors analysed did not share Cabarrús (and Locke) ideas around the origin of property as a natural right, they agreed on the fundamental role of human labour in generating wealth.

7. Conclusions

This chapter discussed the emergence of political economy as a science of government in the intellectual and political context of the Spanish monarchy. Contemporaries were well aware that the preservation and enlargement of an empire had to be based on the stimulus of the economic sector, and the advocates for the diffusion of economic knowledge through publications and new educational institutions multiplied. Calls for economic reform of the empire and its government reached a zenith during the kingdom of Carlos III, also stimulated by his support for the diffusion and circulation of politico-economic ideas and economic institutions. The central concern was politically increasing the population, meaning increasing per capita productive output. Spanish subjects had to

be turned into useful vassals, and everyone should be employed in a productive activity generating wealth. Gradually, political economy started to structure the definition of a good vassal. For instance, productive labour became a necessary duty of every vassal, opening the space for the increasing criminalisation of the character of the vagrant. Economic abstractions were influencing social reality.

The focus of the discussion has been on agrarian policy to highlight the meanings attached to the concept of property. The most influential text of the epoch, the *Nuevo sistema*, regarded land property as an instrumental means to turn millions of Native American subjects into useful vassals. In this way, the Spanish monarchy could exploit an incredible stock of human capital that was useless because of a backward and detrimental legislation. The stimulus of property would be beneficial in providing economic security for the present, as it prevented the dispossession of Native American labour from rapacious Spaniards; at the same time, it granted the maximisation of individual productive output because of its future-oriented temporal dimension: the perspective of leaving properties in inheritance to their offspring guaranteed that individuals would be stimulated at the improvement of their land.

Given the imperial dimension of the Spanish political economy, the reformers were addressing both overseas and European territories with their speculations. However, historical and geographical differences called for different ways to attain the desired increase in agricultural output: inferior land availability and detrimental legislation immobilising Spanish properties called for alternatives to a simple property distribution. First, agrarian colonisation allowed to put into production uncultivated lands, military secure some frontier areas and gain new useful vassals in the ranks of the Spanish active population. Second, the emphyteusis contract was a very convenient means to increase the cultivated land area without resorting to expropriation and land redistribution. The elaboration of land reforms was predicated upon a broader debate regarding the role of legislation in affecting individual behaviour and practices, as well as on the limit of state power to interfere with individual initiative and interest. Alongside advocates of the active role of the government in shaping individual economic practices, some voices rose to denounce the detrimental side of an intrusive legislation which would interfere with the free action of individual interest. Finally, the nature of the monarchical system affected economic debates: both state intervention and inequalities were justified on the basis of their adherence to the very nature of the political system, which was hierarchical and God-inspired.

Indeed, Spanish authors participated in the European intellectual debate that contributed to the emergence of a “modern economic mind”. The main idea signalling this is the shared belief in the wealth-generating character of human labour and the consequent understanding of human society as

Chapter 1

a congregation of individuals bound together by the mediating role of labour, meaning that each individual held a particular place in the general division of social labour. The very fact of performing a productive activity legitimated participation into society, that was a commercial one. The policy recommendations that included “imperfect” forms of property were subordinated to the wider goal of establishing a productive market economy, and it was a way of coming to terms with the social reality around them to achieve the utopian market society they envisaged for the future. Property was instrumental in attracting an increasing number of imperial vassals to the market-oriented commercial society, both in Europe and in the Americas.

CHAPTER 2

The Economic Government of the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata

While the previous chapter discussed the theorisation and enactment of reform plans in Spain - based on the role of property in stimulating production, the focus is now on the other bank of the Atlantic. First, this chapter seeks to understand how the economic turn affected Spanish imperial policies and how those ideas were practically implemented in the economic government of an American territory. Second, the discussion highlights the ways in which reformism and economic growth affected local society. The case study for the implementation of reformist policies is the creation of the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata. This new administrative unit comprised territories of contemporary Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and Bolivia, and its establishment was directly linked to the governmental desire to secure a tighter military control on the edges of the empire, stimulate the economic sector and rationalise the imperial fiscal architecture. The new institution created for guiding the economic government of the Viceroyalty was the intendancy system, as the intendants were in charge of the allocation of local fiscal and military resources. Francisco de Paula Sanz and his economic ideas are taken as the exemplary character of the intendant in Spanish America.

In parallel to state-sanctioned administrative innovations, Bourbon reformism and Spanish American vassals gradually created an institutional infrastructure that favoured the circulation of economic ideas in the Atlantic space, based on administrative reports, newspapers, and petitions. Later in the century, the establishment of the Trade Consulate of Buenos Aires stood for the Crown's commitment at local economic development. In fact, it became a crucial centre for the circulation of economic ideas, elaboration of reform schemes and petition for economic privileges. In addition to institutional change, the dramatic demographic growth and economic expansion affected local society. The main evidence is the pristine segmentation of the local economic elite according to economic interests, which produced conflicts among different groups regarding the future economic asset of the region and the best ways to progress toward it. Therefore, political economy was the language in which the conflict was expressed, providing ideas and arguments regarding the local economic future. Following the most recent literature on Spanish American independence, the discussion did not postulate a neat distinction between *criollos* and *peninsulares* in the economic debates. Nevertheless, one of the fracture lines between opposing plans for development was shaped by positions favouring local interest against others more geared toward metropolitan ones.

1. The Colonial Status of Bourbon America

The previous chapter has considered Bourbon reformism as directed toward both mainland Spain and overseas territories, as their mutual stimulus and development was a fundamental goal of the Spanish monarchy. However, claiming that Spanish rulers wished to promote colonial economic development challenges traditional interpretations of imperial history and historical sociology.¹ A colonial power is usually associated with economic extractivism rather than economic growth. However, this interpretation is mainly based on 19th-century European imperialism. Before the Age of Revolutions, the modern meaning of “colony” did not sedimented yet, and this section illustrates how it is possible that a colonial power, Spain, promoted the economic development of its overseas possessions.

To begin with, Spanish administrators had different opinions about the political status of the Americas in respect to Spain. Traditionally, the Bourbon reforms have been interpreted as aiming to turn Spanish American provinces into colonies: Spain, following the path of the other European imperial powers, had to rationalise the imperial government to extract more revenues from its overseas territories. American possessions should become suppliers of agricultural and mineral raw materials and buyers of Spanish manufactures to acquire the status of “true colonies”.² These authors interpreted Bourbon reforms as an attempt to increase Spanish imperial governmental capacity and put the new administrative machine at the service of imperial extractivism. Some implications of this argument fed the interpretations of the following movement of Spanish American emancipation, seen as a reaction to late 18th-century reforms that discriminated Creoles over metropolitan Spaniards, a byproduct of economic extractivism of the centre over its peripheries.

These ideas had been challenged doubting the colonial status of the Americas with respect to Spain. Annick Lempérière has noted how the “colonialist paradigm”, which informed many perspectives on the region, originated from the late 19th-century critique of European imperialism and the anti-colonial backlash of the following century.³ Therefore, the Spanish conquest was regarded as the first example of European colonialism, without paying due attention to the different forms of political organisation that characterised Spanish American societies and later examples of European domination over non-European territories and subjects. From a political history perspective, it is necessary to note the epochal change implied by the nineteenth-century appearance of the nation-state paradigm, which inevitably affected imperialist ventures.

¹ Gunder Frank, *op. cit.*

² See for instance, König, *En el camino hacia la nación*; Stein and Stein, *op. cit.*

³ Lempérière, ‘El paradigma colonial’.

Conceptual history contributed to the debate. Francisco Ortega had extensively studied the conceptual history of “colonia” in the Iberian world. Until the 1770s, the term “colony” did not have any pejorative meaning, as it derived from the Ancient Roman political culture and referred to an overseas European settlement integrated into a wider political structure. Spanish American kingdoms were juridically seen as “perfect communities”, implying a “economic viability” and a “capacity for self-government”.⁴ Ortega convincingly argued about the necessity of distinguishing between contemporary meanings of “colony” and the historical understandings of this concept.

However, these nuanced interpretations should not fall into the denial of the colonial status of Spanish America. The multicultural and multiracial society generated from the encounter of European and Native cultures was highly unequal and segmented according to status and racial lines. On a legal basis, American kingdoms did not enjoy an inferior status, and Spanish American elites did not suffer from any racial discrimination for their American origins, even if they developed “patriotic” identities that might clash with similar metropolitan local identities. However, American Native communities suffered from political and economic exploitation from the beginning of Spanish invasion. Even if they were integrated into the Spanish political system, and the rights of the *naturales* as vassals of the king were granted by legislation, in practice, abuses were widespread, usually involving the attempts of Spaniards to control and exploit the indigenous workforce.⁵

Spanish American political status remained ambiguous, resurfacing in late 18th-century discussions on imperial economic regeneration. Ortega signalled how this ambiguity was evident in the *Nuevo sistema*, as its author stated that America should be seen as a consumer market for Spanish products and an integral part of the monarchy that had to be economically stimulated, such as the peninsula. During the century, these two orientations “will enter into intense contradiction”.⁶ As we have already seen, the adoption of political economy had a prominent role in shifting the modes of government and the meaning of a good government, which in the 18th century was intended to provide individual and collective material well-being. When this general principle happened to be applied to a polity

⁴ Ortega Martínez, ‘Entre «constitución» y «colonia»’, 62-63; Ortega Martínez, ‘A Brief Conceptual History’.

⁵ While it is necessary to problematise the colonial status of the Americas, it is undeniable that American Native communities lived under a regime of colonial subordination, as they were stripped of their capacity for self-government. For a nuanced perspective on this topic concerning legal history, see Garriga, ‘Cómo escribir una historia’. In addition, Garriga highlights how South American nationalisms fed the historiographical interpretations that denied the colonial status of Spanish American territories. As noted, the continuous Spanish attempts to exploit the indigenous workforce through institutionalised coercion and forced migration can qualify as “colonial” the form of Spanish domination in the Americas. The Peruvian *mita* is a perfect example of the institutionalisation of workforce exploitation. In a polemical reply to Lempérière’s thesis, Juan Carlos Garavaglia has rightly pointed out how the economic exploitation suffered by American indigenous populations unquestionably identifies as “colonial subordination”. See Garavaglia. ‘La cuestión colonial’.

⁶ Ortega Martínez, ‘Entre «constitución» y «colonia»’, 66.

with an ambiguous status of domination/autonomy, it generated a contradiction revolving around the question of whether peninsular or local authorities were in charge of drafting the best program for economic development or establishing the righteous balance between the local economic development and the metropolitan one.

As rapidly noted at the beginning of the chapter, the poor intellectual contextualisation of those debates and the undervaluation of the relevance of the discipline of political economy led to the interpretation of Bourbon economic reformism as the beginning of an economic colonial nexus where America provided raw materials for Spanish manufactures. The coloniality of this relation was granted by the impossibility for American territories to choose an alternative path for economic growth, one which would have granted the development of local industries and, therefore, self-sufficient and modern growth. This dependency would have lasted throughout the whole 19th century.⁷ However, those debates were heavily affected by the modernisation theory and its inherent concept of capitalism and industrialisation, heavily shaped by the English development path.

A nuanced perspective on the concept of “industry” employed in Spanish reformist debates might help to appreciate the inaccuracy of old economic history theorisation of Spanish dominion in the Americas in favour of the problematisation of the contradiction faced by Bourbon economic reformism.⁸ The supposed absence of local industrial development was based on the problem of the lack of independent sovereignty, hence the inability to implement economic policies aimed at the development of local manufactures that could then be the basis for modern economic growth. In fact, starting from Felipe II (1556-98), Spanish monarchs had tried to curb or suppress American manufacturing activities, but in vain: the inability to enforce commercial monopoly against European competitors and the flourishing markets that developed surrounding the silver economies of New Spain and Peru meant that artisanal and proto-industrial manufacturing was a vital part of American economies, notwithstanding the King’s will.⁹

Eighteenth-century administrators were well aware of the impossibility of suppressing American manufactures, as well as of its detrimental effect for the monarchy. Indeed, the point of the *Nuevo sistema* was very clear: it was necessary to ban the production of what Spanish industries could supply, such as wool, fine linen and silks, as well as iron, steel, copper, tinsplate, brass and brassware.

⁷ Stein and Stein, *The Colonial Heritage*. Neo-institutional economics refashioned this argument, pointing at the impossibility of Spanish Americans to create inclusive institutions, as metropolitan power favoured extractive ones. See Mahoney, *op. cit.*

⁸ We presented this argument elsewhere concerning the colonial development of the meat industry in Buenos Aires. See Steardo, ‘Market Integration, Empire and Industry’.

⁹ See Miño Grijalva, ‘El obraje colonial’.

In fact, “I do not see, nor do I find, any reason that would lead us to prohibit it [manufacture] in the Indies, but rather the high reason of policy and justice demands that it should not only be permitted, but encouraged as in Spain itself”.¹⁰ In particular, the “Fabricas” (manufactures) to be stimulated were the ones that were lacking in Spain, the ones that could exploit American natural resources and the ones that albeit present in Spain cannot fully supply American demand. If one would draw a list of banned and patronised industries, the latter would probably highly surpass the former. The *comercio libre*, implemented from 1778 in order to open trade between different Spanish and American ports, recognised the necessary circulation of manufactures in the imperial commercial space. This circulation was obviously predicated upon local American productions.¹¹ Finally, the 1782 *Real ordenanza de intendentes* will include the promotion of American industries among the duties of intendants and *subdelegados*.

To clarify the connection between commerce and empire, Fidel J. Tavarez has recently provided a nuanced analysis of the theory of commercial empire that underlay Bourbon economic reformism toward America.¹² It was based on increasing production and stimulating the development of markets on both sides of the Atlantic. The colonial aspect of this policy resides in the fact that mainland Spain should be the primary beneficiary of the overall economic growth, as well as because the final decision-making centre was the peninsula. However, two tendencies can be extrapolated from this general theory: “tutelary colonialism” and “soft colonialism”. The former, centred on the politics of José de Gálvez (1720-1787), was based on a negative appreciation of the American subjects, which should be excluded by the administration of the new revenues generated from growth because they were not considered apt to manage them by themselves.¹³ The second tendency, which gained prominence after the American turmoil of the 1780s, was more inclined to redistribute the fruits of economic growth throughout the territories of the Crown, as American provinces were not just colonies but an integral part of the kingdom. This idea was again already stated in the *Nuevo sistema*. The *Reglamento de Comercio Libre* represented the central piece in the reformist architecture under Carlos III concerning imperial economic policy. Commerce was the main motor and stimulus of economic activity; therefore, increasing commodity circulation would represent the necessary incentive for individual industry and production.

The *Reglamento* did not come out of the blue, as it was the culmination of different projects of commercial reforms imposed or sponsored by the Crown. The War of Spanish Succession and its

¹⁰ Campillo y Cossío, *Nuevo sistema*, 115-116.

¹¹ Rossi. ‘Illuminismo e sviluppo economico’.

¹² Tavárez, *The Commercial Machine*.

¹³ This opinion was based on the prejudice of American racial inferiority. See Gerbi, *La disputa del Nuovo mondo*.

conclusion granted French and British merchants with some official ways to trade with the Americas, via the *asiento* trade. In addition, new regulations were gradually introduced, such as the *naves de registro* and the official habilitation of some ports for inter-American and Atlantic trade.¹⁴ Wars influenced trade policy, and trade policy influenced wars, as the 18th century was the century of the “jealousy of trade”. Nevertheless, the 1778 *Reglamento* and its 1789 extension to New Spain opened trade between Spanish and American ports, excluding foreign ships and heavily regulating them. According to Fisher, the *Reglamento* determined a four-time increase in the average value of Spanish exports to America and a ten-time increase in American exports to Spain.¹⁵ Trade in the Spanish Atlantic was predicated upon an increased production of agricultural goods, a sector in which the exploitation of formerly neglected American natural products played a crucial part. In Chapter 3, the dramatic increase in the exploitation of local natural resources will be the context of the discussion on reformist policies in the Río de la Plata.¹⁶

2. The Creation of the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata

Buenos Aires elites took part in the reformistic climate, and the city was targeted as a fundamental player in the commercial reform of the empire, as it was widely believed that its convenient geography and its abundant natural resources could be better exploited to enhance imperial wealth. As the establishment in 1728 of the Guipuzcoan Company of Caracas has fomented cacao production in New Granada - thus stimulating a region that had until then been on the imperial fringes, similar projects of commercial companies addressed the Río de la Plata.¹⁷ Since the previous century, there had been multiple proposals to better exploit local fertile plains, inhabited by immense herds of cattle, which guaranteed a cheap stock of meat, hides and tallow. Those projects had always failed for a variety of reasons, including the active opposition of Lima, whose commercial elite was concerned about the economic damage it might suffer from the growth of the port of Buenos Aires.¹⁸ As well as a source of agricultural commodities, in fact, Buenos Aires could become the new privileged port for the extraction of Potosí silver to Europe. Despite opposition from Lima and Cadiz, a series of reforms were enacted in the latter part of the 1700s that deregulated the Atlantic trade, breaking Cadiz’s monopoly and allowing trade between Spanish and American ports. Already from 1750 onwards,

¹⁴ Fisher, *Commercial Relations*, 9-19.

¹⁵ *Ivi*, 87-90.

¹⁶ For a comprehensive analysis of the trade between Spain and the Río de la Plata, see Silva. ‘El comercio’.

¹⁷ Mariluz Urquijo. *Bilbao y Buenos Aires*. For an account of economic reformism in New Granada see Bassi, ‘Narrating the Rise of Capitalism’.

¹⁸ In 1734, Juan de Verría was appointed deputy for the Lima Trade Consulate at the Madrid court, where he actively opposed every commercial project favouring Buenos Aires. *Ivi*, 64-66.

overseas hide trade considerably expanded, especially thanks to an increase in the number of the *naves de registros*, which allowed exchanges between Buenos Aires and the peninsula.¹⁹



Fig. 2. Willem Janszoon Blaeu, *Paraguay, ó prov. de Rio de La Plata* (17th century). Library of Congress Online Catalog. Until the creation of the new Viceroyalty, Buenos Aires was a small port at the fringes of the empire. Regional economies developed alongside the route to Potosí and surrounding the Guaraní Missions of Paraguay.

Anxieties toward the improvement of the South Atlantic were shared among Enlightened ministers. In his *Reflexiones sobre el comercio español a Indias* (1762), Campomanes drew a short but comprehensive sketch of reformist policy toward the southern imperial frontier, which equally included military and economic measures.²⁰ The region was “one of the most neglected and least known in Southern America”, because the old imperial policy paid attention only to territories rich in precious metals. Spanish relaxed policy had allowed the foundation of Colonia do Sacramento by the Portuguese, whose involvement in contraband was highly prejudicial to imperial commerce. Colonia

¹⁹ Hides export rose from 15.000 units in 1756 to 96.000 units in 1766. Twenty years later, the port of Buenos Aires exported 390.780 hides. See Moutoukias, ‘El crecimiento en una economía colonial’, 804-805.

²⁰ Campomanes, *Reflexiones sobre el comercio*, 101-122.

had to be destroyed, while Montevideo and Maldonado had to turn into flourishing commercial centres, from which the civilisational effects of trade would irradiate toward the surrounding indigenous population. As it was happening to the English and French in North America, the Spanish should negotiate and trade with autonomous groups living at the imperial fringes.

Campomanes then describes the local commodities most useful to imperial commerce: hides, tobacco, *yerba mate*, grain and wool. Numerous animals and plants represented potentially useful commodities, but the scarce Spanish population, especially in the region between Buenos Aires and the Magallanes Strait, meant that resources were neglected and unexploited, and “as there are few *Pueblos de Españoles*, the *Indios* are not well civilised”. This was detrimental for the economy and the imperial security, as foreign nations could settle in this vast region and gain indigenous support against the Spanish. The remedy was “creating our Colonies [...] to be established as the only means of civilising and bringing good policing to the *Indios*”. Productive colonisation was the way for enhancing the economic output of frontier territories, as well as to increase their security against foreign incursion thanks to the help of indigenous populations, whose alliance had to be based on the civilisational effects of trade. In the Río de la Plata, the alliance with Native groups in the Banda Oriental would shelter the frontier from the Portuguese ambitions, while treaties with the “Pampas” would prevent other Europeans from attacking the southern frontier.²¹ Trade was the ground for friendly relations and the necessary stimulus for production.

Notwithstanding previous quasi-indifference, the Crown directed his ambitions toward an economic space that had already shown signs of dynamism between the 17th and the 18th centuries. The Río de la Plata region was an important contact zone between Spanish American markets (especially the rich Andean silver economies) and overseas ones (including North America, the Caribbean, Brazil, Africa and Europe). The location at the fringe of the empire was crucial for the development of the region, as this was heavily based on illegal activities and contraband, which main goal was “to introduce goods and slave labour into the circuits of the Spanish monarchy and to extract precious metals from Alto-Peru (silver) and Chile (gold) as well as some other American productions as a return”.²² Indigenous populations at the fringe of Spanish territories did participate in late 18th-century commercial expansion, as “Araucanos” and “Pampas” groups established a flourishing if

²¹ Here, “Pampas” is a general term that refers to the different indigenous groups that were seasonally living in the territories south of Buenos Aires. Spaniards coined the term, and it is extremely imprecise according to anthropologists. Chapter 5 will expand on the colonial creation of identities for local Native groups.

²² Jumar, ‘La región Río de la Plata’, 127. Jumar highlights how this economic region should be analysed as a whole, due to its deep interdependence and division of labour. The region included Buenos Aires, the port cities Colonia del Sacramento and Montevideo on the other side of the river, and smaller ports such as Maldonado and Ensenada de Barragán.

unstable trade with Spaniards.²³ Commercial dynamism and the possibility to access Potosí silver rendered the region the object of imperial rivalry, as Colonia do Sacramento turned into the access point to the local resources for other European powers. Spanish anxieties increased, as well as the desire to seal off the region to foreign ambition.

The securitisation of the southern imperial frontier had been a crucial factor pushing this administrative reform. Since the War of Spanish Succession, confrontations with the Portuguese town of Colonia - the hub of European contraband in the region - had exacerbated. The frontier region of the Banda Oriental and the Jesuit Mission had always been contested between Spain and Portugal, with local communities setting the moving imperial border with their own local practices.²⁴ The treaty of Madrid (1750) had tried to settle frontier disputes, devolving Colonia to the Spaniards in exchange for the territory east of the Uruguay river, comprising seven wealthy Guaraní Missions. This decision fuelled a large-scale revolt, the Guaraní War, as the indigenous populations felt that the king had broken the reciprocity pact that bound him with his American vassals.²⁵ Arguments supporting the Crown dispositions were based on the necessity to improve the utility of Jesuit Missions, but, ironically, after a bloody and victorious war against the Guaraní, the terms of the treaty were not enforced, and the Portuguese returned to Colonia. During the Seven Years War, the governor of Buenos Aires Pedro de Ceballos invaded the Río Grande and conquered Colonia again, but after the peace it was returned for the third time to the Portuguese Crown in 1763.

Beside the Portuguese menace, Spanish authorities were expressing growing concern for English and French ambitions over Patagonia, as expeditions were sent in the South Atlantic to establish footholds for the Magallanes strait crossing during the 1760s. Foreign settlements in Patagonia endangered Buenos Aires, and Chile, as it was believed that navigating up to the Río Negro it was possible to reach Valdivia. The 1767 Bourbon Family Pact stopped French projects, but a real solution was drafted with the 1778 plan for the establishment of settlements in Patagonia by Floridablanca and Gálvez. Following it, military trading posts were created in San José, San Julian, Puerto Deseado and Carmen de Patagones, this last one being the only settlement that prospered in the following decades, notwithstanding its remote location.²⁶ The main authority in charge of organising the Patagonian

²³ Solís, *Maloqueros y conchavadores*, 105-115. See Chapter 5.

²⁴ Herzog, *Frontiers of Possession*.

²⁵ The Bourbon new mode of economic government generated dissatisfaction that led to rebellion among the Guaraní. See Ownesby, *New World of Gain*.

²⁶ A good discussion of the Patagonian Plan and its relation to other colonisation projects, such as in the Sierra Morena, Baja California and the Banda Oriental, is to be found in de Paula, *Las nuevas poblaciones*.

colonisation was Manuel Ignacio Fernández, the first Superintendent of Buenos Aires, who had arrived in the South Atlantic with the Ceballos expedition.²⁷

Finally, Spain took advantage of the American Revolution - which was keeping the British Navy busy - to secure the imperial southern frontier once for all. In 1777, a fleet of six warships and 9.000 men sailed from Cadiz under the command of Pedro de Ceballos. He was ordered to conquer and destroy Colonia, as well as to establish the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata. The new administrative unit was finally created, stretching from the Potosí silver mines (which produced basically all the silver of the Southern Cone) to Buenos Aires, elevated as the rank of viceregal capital. In this way, the Crown was establishing a legal and administrative framework to unify an already existing economic space, trying to take advantage from it through fiscal extraction. The other royal goal was to secure the southern imperial frontier from the Portuguese menace and possible invasion from rival European powers. Coupled with the 1778 introduction of *comercio libre*, this decision contributed to the beginning of a radical change in the official political economy of the empire, and Buenos Aires and its surrounding regions were among the territories that mostly benefited from this new policy.²⁸

After the successful conquest of Colonia, Ceballos' first provisions had a prominent economic character. First, he asked the Crown to extend to Buenos Aires the *comercio libre*, as well as free trade with the region of Chile and Peru. This measure would benefit the city as well as the Royal Treasury. The *auto de libre internación* of 6 November 1777 stated that

I have considered as consequent and necessary to the new establishment and erection of this Viceroyalty, the openness and freedom of active and passive trade between provinces and cities, both in the goods they produce and in the goods arriving in this port from Spain in the *naves de permiso*, as without the help of trade, which is the spirit that vivifies the populations, they [the cities of the Viceroyalty] will never be able to make the slightest progress.²⁹

A new institutional setting was created, one in which Buenos Aires and the surrounding region would act as the trade hub connecting Peruvian silver economies with Atlantic and Spanish markets. Ceballos solicited the creation of an Audiencia and the establishment of fiscal institutions, as well as sketching plans for developing mercury trade and for regulating hide export.

²⁷ It was his first duty, which perfectly exemplifies the unification of military and economic jurisdiction sought in creating intendants. See Rees Jones, *El Superintendente Manuel Ignacio Fernández*, 241-257.

²⁸ Regarding the economic benefits of Bourbon reformism in the Río de la Plata, see Gelman and Moraes, 'Las reformas borbónicas'.

²⁹ Quoted in Barba, *Don Pedro de Cevallos*, 279.

The creation of the Viceroyalty inaugurated a proactive policy in respect of the populations living in the Pampa and in the Banda Oriental. Renewed attitudes toward sovereign indigenous groups were an additional feature of 18th-century imperial policies.³⁰ Bourbon ministers shaped a new policy for the subordination of, or at least the coexistence with frontier groups at the same time that those manifested a general new inclination to attack Spanish settlements and commerce. Military or religious conquests were not viable policies anymore as Native populations had adopted new military techniques after European arrivals (horses and artillery), and poorly equipped frontiers forces could not do much about them. Therefore, a politics of peace and trade treaties started to regulate interethnic relations, paving the ground for mutual exchange and pacific coexistence. The intellectual foundation of this politics was the belief in the civilising character of trade and the assumption that sooner or later indigenous groups would integrate into the Spanish society and adopt modern and civil manners. As policy implementation was carried on by men on the spot, the debate on the merits of commerce or violence in relation to *indios bravos* continued until the end of the colonial period, and well beyond.

In the Río de la Plata, this overall policy materialised in two different attitudes, the expansion of Spanish controlled territory or the conservation and securing of the already existing borders. The first one was evident in the north bank of the river, where 23 new settlements were founded between 1778 and 1801.³¹ This was directly linked to the conflicts over marketable natural resources, the Portuguese menace and the expansion of jurisdictional powers of the Intendants and Viceroy. The conservative stance was more evident in the southern frontier, where a new military unit was created by the Cabildo of Buenos Aires already in 1752 for patrolling the frontier. At first, peninsular authorities did not sanction this decision, a rejection that passed unnoticed in Buenos Aires. When the frontiers became a central concern for the imperial government, the Blandengues were officially recognised, and a new line of forts was established to limit possible incursion of indigenous groups into Buenos Aires territory, although most of the resources were always allocated to the frontier of the Banda Oriental.

The connection between the creation of the Viceroyalty and the intendancy system, as well as between military and fiscal goals, is evident in the character of Manuel Ignacio Fernández, first Superintendent of Buenos Aires. He started his career in the administration of the Army, and he was a *subdelegado* of the Intendant of Seville Pablo de Olavide between 1774 and 1776. Ricardo Rees Jones believes that his decision to apply for an Intendancy in America was moved by the investigation carried out

³⁰ Weber, *Bárbaros*.

³¹ Djenderedjian, 'Roots of Revolution', 648. The power of creating towns and Cabildos had tried to be restricted only to the Council of Indies since 1627. The adjudication of this faculty to Intendants and Viceroy and its rapid implementation signals the importance of a new territorialisation of state power in the region. For an overview of the region's new foundations, see Mariluz Urquijo, *Estudios sobre la Real Ordenanza*.

against his superior and friend Olavide.³² Therefore, he was appointed as Intendant of the Ceballos expedition, being in charge of its financial administration. When the military campaign was over, and the process of institutionalisation of the new Viceroyalty began, Fernández's good proceedings earned him the appointment as Superintendent of Buenos Aires, with "the important purpose of putting my Royal Revenues of the Province and territories comprising the newly erected Viceroyalty of Buenos Ayres at their due value, and of fostering its population, agriculture and commerce".³³ Beside planning the Patagonian expeditions, Fernández diligently completed his tasks, such as the organisation of the militias, the establishment of Buenos Aires custom house, the regulation of slave trade and tobacco monopoly.

3. The Economic Goals of the Spanish American Intendancy System

The creation of an integrated commercial empire necessarily required an increase in commodity production. To do so, imperial government enacted a proactive attitude in line with the Enlightenment economic culture that appreciated the patronising role of the state in respect to the economy. Which institution would oversee stimulating the local economies and turning more and more of the King's vassals into useful ones? Minister Gálvez thought that implanting in America an intendancy system would help in standardising practices of government, in eradicating corruption and inefficiency and in providing the necessary incentives for economic activities.

The intendancy system was introduced in Spain after the end of the War of Succession, as a way to unify in a single institution military and fiscal attributions and to better control different provinces, as the intendants responded directly to the central power. To solve the many problems of Spain and to support the political effort to transform social reality, the Bourbon monarchs sponsored the "institutionalisation of the intermediate territorial instance with a governmental agent in charge of it".³⁴ This system proved effective, but its establishment lasted long, and it was generalised only in 1748. However, it is not by chance that a few years later Macanaz advocated for the introduction of intendancies in the Americas in his *Nuevo sistema*. Intendants should be in direct communication with the restricted circle of power in the capital, allowing for an effective government of every corner of the monarchy. In his own words, "these Ministers are those who in all parts [of the Monarchy] are in charge of the Economic Government, and in America they must be not only the Protectors and Preservers, but also the Founders of it in all its branches".³⁵ While this reform had been seen as part

³² Rees Jones, *op. cit.*, 35.

³³ Real Cédula (21 March 1778). Reproduced in Rees Jones, *op. cit.*, 353.

³⁴ Orduña Rebollo. *Intendentes e intendencias*, 16.

³⁵ Campillo y Cossío, *op. cit.*, 71.

of Bourbon's attempt to establish a centralised system of imperial governance, it is better to interpret it as a way to foster political and economic integration of the different imperial territories.³⁶

However, this project proved quite difficult to carry on, as the first attempts to establish intendancies failed mainly because of the opposition of already existing institutions.³⁷ In 1765, José de Gálvez was sent to New Spain, to conduct a *visita* (inspection) of the Viceroyalty, producing a proposal for implanting the intendancy system in 1768. Gálvez thought that the intendants contributed to regeneration of the Spanish economy "as the Magistrates most suited, by their training, to improve the civil and economic government of the Provinces". Similarly, his goal in proposing the introduction of this institution in the Americas was

to promote the re-establishment of this great Monarchy and to standardise its public and economic system with that of the Matrix, from which will result, among many other benefits that time will prove, that Spanish American Government will be informed by the same principles of the Superior Government of Spain, and not having to learn here those who come to serve as employers will not have to learn here [in Spain] rules that are opposed or at least very different from those that are observed there [in America].³⁸

Notwithstanding his efforts, the active opposition of the Viceroy Bucarelli wrecked the plan, and the first intendancies in New Spain materialised only in 1787. The resistance to this reform and following jurisdictional conflicts can be explained on the basis of individual rivalries between administrators - or even open antipathies as it will be explained in the case of Viceroy Loreto and Superintendent Sanz in Buenos Aires. However, the difficult implementation signalled a more profound shift in the government practice and the deployment of state power.

Indeed, legal historians have highlighted the fundamental modification in the logic of government that the introduction of the intendancy system implied. Bourbon goals of military security and financial rationalisation aimed at the expansion of governmental capacity. However, new institutional settings had to be implanted on the jurisdictional reticulate that was undergirding the institutional frame of the Spanish monarchy. The old logic of government was moulded on the concept of justice, but 18th-century administrative reforms were trying to isolate what has been called the *potestad oeconomica* from jurisdictional control. As it has been noted, a consequence of the adoption of political economy as the prominent science for government was that it did not represent anymore a

³⁶ Adelman, *Sovereignty and Revolution*. Adelman introduced the focus on imperial integration, and the collection and management of information ordered to intendants confirms his findings.

³⁷ Domínguez Orta. *El sistema de intendencias indiano*, 136-138.

³⁸ 'Informe y plan de Intendencias', 165.

set of ideas and practices aimed at a correct administration of the household, but rather it was now directed at the administration of society. A residue of this epistemic translation was exactly the *potestad oeconomica* untied by jurisdictional checks.³⁹ Such as the *pater familias* had an absolute administrative power over the household members, the sovereign should have an absolute power over his territories. On a regional level, the intendants were the expression of the new logic of government. Intendants appointed also *subdelegados*, their representatives in local communities, whose actions are now finally being inspected by historians, as a way to study the local ramifications and implications of governmental reforms.⁴⁰ On a local scale, the movement toward the detachment of power from jurisdictional constraints is signalled also by the proliferation of *alcaldes de la Hermandad*, local mayors and judges which reunited judiciary and police powers - nominated by the Cabildos. As the *alcaldes de la Hermandad* were nevertheless judges, they were not detached from the old jurisdictional logic. Indeed, the history of the progressive prevalence of the *potestad oeconomica* over jurisdictional powers, of the affirmation of the administrative function, and finally of the institutionalisation of the modern state structures is a long and contested one, that has been widely scrutinised by legal historians.⁴¹ However, this was a crucial moment in the movement toward the prevalence of the rule of law over legal pluralism, and the discussion aims at highlighting this discontinuity and the role that the discipline of political economy had in legitimising and in favouring this epochal transformation.

As already noted, reforms had different outcomes depending on local circumstances and especially on the willingness of the local powers to collaborate. Indeed, Bourbon economic reformism had the best results when it tried to create new structures of power almost from scratch. This was the case of the Río de la Plata region. As John Lynch noted long ago, “in no part of the empire, however, did the new policy have more spectacular results than it did in Spain’s colony in the Southern Atlantic”.⁴²

The Río de la Plata configured as the brightest success of Bourbon reforms of the American government. In 1782, metropolitan authorities sent the *Real ordenanza de Intendentes* to leading administrators of the new Viceroyalty, asking for their opinions on it. Albeit every reply offered suggestions on how to improve the instructions, “all agree on the usefulness of the institution for the peace of those Kingdoms and the interests of the treasury, the benefit of the *naturales*, the most

³⁹ Casagrande, *op. cit.*, 47.

⁴⁰ Enríquez, ‘De las intendencias a las subdelegaciones’.

⁴¹ See Mannori, ‘Per una preistoria della funzione amministrativa’.

⁴² Lynch, *Spanish Colonial Administration*, 24.

righteous administration of Justice and other purposes”.⁴³ The juridical content of it has been extensively studied, as well as its implementation.⁴⁴ It was divided into a general introduction (article 1-11), the instructions regarding justice (12-52), police and government (53-70), treasury (71-219) and war (articles 220-276). What this study is concerned for is the section regarding the *Causa de policia*, which included the instructions to implement an effective economic government of the Río de la Plata - as the section regarding treasury was more concerned with fiscal matters and the creation of a centralised fiscal system.

Actually, some interesting points are present also in the first section dedicated to general provisions. Article 9 is dedicated to the *subdelegados*, which have to substitute the old *corregidores* (notorious for their corruption), but with the absolute prohibition of providing manufactures or animals to anyone (the old practice of *repartimiento*), “meaning that the *Indios* other Vassals of mine in those Dominions are consequently free to trade wherever and with whomsoever they please”. The *ordenanza* also gives instructions for the elections of administrators in the *pueblos de indios*, as Natives were allowed to elect individuals from within their communities. The elections need to be confirmed by the intendants should later approve the decision, with preference for those who knew Castilian and “are most distinguished in the highly recommended applications of Agriculture and Industry”, by inclining them to prefer those people “by the means which he may consider softer”. Basically, the King was ordering that the intendants should interfere with indigenous elections as to prefer individuals which adhered to the ideal of useful and industrious vassals. This was necessary to achieve “the very fundamental purpose of stimulating the *Naturales* to apply themselves to Agriculture and Industry.”⁴⁵

Intendants had to possess an accurate knowledge of the territory under their jurisdiction. Local natural resources were, in fact, fundamental to promote the expansion of productive activities, the only way to provide durable happiness and material wealth for the Crown’s subjects. To do so, they were “forever obliged” to conduct yearly inspections (*visitas*) to comply with their duty of

to improve Agriculture, promote Commerce, stimulate the Industry of the *pueblos*, to favour Mining, and to endeavour, in short, by all the means within the power and authority granted to them, the happiness of those Vassals.⁴⁶

⁴³ Quoted from the *expediente* in the Archivo General de Indias. See Mariluz Urquijo, *Estudios sobre la Real Ordenanza*, 31. The implementation of the intendency system followed the defeat of the Andean rebellions of 1780-1782. See Serulnikov, *Revolution in the Andes*.

⁴⁴ For a legal perspective, see the collective volume by Mariluz Urquijo in the previous footnote. In addition, Lynch, *Spanish Colonial Administration*.

⁴⁵ *Real ordenanza intendentales Buenos-Aires* (1782), 15-18.

⁴⁶ *Ivi*, 26.

The section dedicated to the *Causa de Policia* opens with another call to apply knowledge to government: intendants had to supervise the creation of topographic maps of their respective provinces, a crucial tool for taking care of “everything that contributes to the Policing and greater usefulness of my Vassals”.⁴⁷ The information collected for mapping the territories had to be used in order to plan infrastructural works to increase the rentability of natural resources. In addition, this bulk of knowledge, together with the reports generated by the intendants’ *visitas*, had to be sent to the Council of the Indies, which would revise “all information aimed at the preservation, increase and happiness of those Dominions”.⁴⁸ Additionally, they had to inform the Viceroy about the abundance and scarcity of goods, and their price, as to better coordinate the supply and demand of the different parts of the Spanish commercial empire (Article 67).

The regulation of economic government has some classic points. The intendants were to undertake to everything to “disciplining and punishing those who are idle” because they caused disarray in the Republic (Article 55); therefore, those who qualified as *Vagamundos* and without any work were to be assigned to military service, the navy or the construction of public works (Article 56). Individual agricultural production was to be stimulated by encouraging the cultivation of hemp and flax, for which purpose the intendants could proceed to the distribution of public and private land (Article 57). Other productive activities openly encouraged were the harvesting of beeswax and beehives, the production of cotton, wool (Article 58) and cereals (Article 59). Obviously, the productive exploitation of cattle is encouraged, and intendants must supervise this branch to avoid “the disorder with which, for the sake of the hide alone, their excessive slaughtering has been conducted up to now”.⁴⁹

Land distribution to indigenous families was an important part of the *Nuevo sistema*, and the *ordenanza* provides some rules to carry it on. A central point is the duty to cultivate the land. In fact, intendants were allowed to expropriate and distribute private lands (“only those which, due to the negligence or absolute incapacity of their owners, remain uncultivated”), and recipients “who do not devote themselves to the appropriate utilisation of the land” had to be stripped of their rights over it. The text is very clear in stating that public land should not be alienated, but recipients have to receive only the *dominio útil*. In this way, the Crown would retain the *dominio directo*, being in this way

⁴⁷ *Ivi*, 56.

⁴⁸ *Ivi*, 58.

⁴⁹ *Ivi*, 63. The Banda Oriental, contemporary Uruguay, experienced a sustained process of economic growth, as Atlantic demand for local hides exploded. It generated widespread crime and illegality in the countryside, and Spanish authorities formed a heavy *expediente* to address these issues. See the following chapter.

allowed to regulate land exploitation (especially regarding the duty to cultivate it). The kind of contract preferred is therefore emphyteusis, albeit this is not openly stated.

This is a fundamental endorsement for what was considered the most useful contract for agrarian regeneration. In fact, various proposals for land reforms were discussed in the previous chapter, and emphyteusis contract was one possible option among others. It was valued as the preferred way to retain partial control of land exploitation as to stimulate individual application to work, and for these reasons it was chosen as the basis of the tenure system in the most important experience of agrarian reformism (the colonisation of the Sierra Morena). Here, almost 15 years later, preference for emphyteusis instead of distributing land in absolute property is expressed by the King's will, in the regulation aiming at creating the institutions responsible for American economic development.

As recent research has shown, the men behind the implementation on the ground of the economic government of the empire were the *subdelegados*. In fact, the Intendant of Potosí, Juan del Pino Manrique, distributed the instructions to his *subdelegados* on 28 January 1784.⁵⁰ While the points dedicated to *Justicia* and *Hacienda* are way less than in the *Real ordenanza*, the instructions of the *Causa de Hacienda* were basically the same, signalling that those prescriptions were especially directed to the men on the spot. Besides his *Instrucción metódica para el regimen y gobierno de los subdelegados*, Pino Manrique also left us the text of a *visita* from 1787. The last paragraphs are a valuable source for diving into the mentality of a loyal administrator guided by the principles of the Enlightenment. After the careful topographic and socio-economic description of the territories comprised in his jurisdiction, Pino Manrique signals the obstacles to local economic development. According to him, the most detrimental ones were “the persistence with which the *naturales* follow the principles in which they have been brought up”, and “the lack of governmental hands and means to instil in them other more convenient and opportune ones”. However, the elaboration of effective policies for such a vast monarchy was a difficult and lengthy process, which had to advance alongside the experience in the practice of government. The instructions were to be periodically reformed as to guarantee an always increasing effectiveness of government, because

Looking at these countries as a whole; comparing them in their various aspects, and foreseeing future developments with anticipation, by fixing the results of thorough and well-considered combinations: - principles which, so far as human prudence permits, will provide the government with a firm and solid basis to be followed without discontinuity or variation by all ministries -

⁵⁰ Gavira Márquez. ‘Instrucciones para los subdelegados de Potosí’.

this seems to me, in short, the major operation of a policy which combines enlightenment with experience.⁵¹

This passage expresses the dream of Bourbon rational reform of the imperial government, an ideal which inspired many Spanish officials who arrived in the Río de la Plata with the Ceballos expedition (1776-1777).⁵² However, the ideal would clash on the Spanish American reality, and generate something different than the administrative centralisation once believed, that is expressed in the concept of “Bourbon corporate centralisation”, described in the last section of this chapter. However, Pedro de Angelis calls Pino Manrique “one of the most enlightened ministers of his time”, commenting his instructions in the prologue to their first publication in 1836. Bourbon aspiration of a rational economic government of the population inspired the dreams of local administrators for a long time.

4. Francisco de Paula Sanz, the Creator of Useful Vassals

Francisco de Paula Sanz (1745-1810) is among the men who better illustrates Bourbon ideology of reform in the Río de la Plata. Indeed, Sanz administrative career overlaps perfectly with the existence of the Viceroyalty: he arrived in Buenos Aires in 1778, few months after the successful expeditions of Ceballos, and he died in December 1810, executed by the Army of the Primera Junta of Buenos Aires, arrived in Potosí to subordinate the mining centre to the authority of the ex-viceregal capital. Strenuous defender of the Crown’s interests, he attracted harsh criticisms by Creole patriots.⁵³ Sanz was seen as the archetype of the corruption and despotism inherent in Spanish domination, and the desire to discredit him generated the widespread rumour that he was an illegitimate son of Carlos III or José de Gálvez.⁵⁴ Actually, Rose Marie Buechler in a detailed study of Bourbon Potosí revised the contrasting opinions he generated, concluding that “it was a fact that throughout his public career the intendant was more aware of the royal will than the Kings of Spain themselves”.⁵⁵ This trait did not prove a blessing for his posthumous memory, as the contradictions generated by Spanish late imperial mode of government poured in his figure.

⁵¹ Del Pino Manrique. ‘Descripción de la villa de Potosí’, 24.

⁵² Marchena Fernández vividly described the deception of Enlightenment ideals once the young generations of reformers touched the American shores and had to face the “nightmare of blood and terror” of the repression of Andean rebellions. See Marchena Fernández, ‘Al otro lado del mundo’.

⁵³ See Funes. *Ensayo de la historia civil*, 282.

⁵⁴ Christopher Thomas Williams has uncovered and debunked the origin of these rumours, as Sanz was the son of a noble family from Malaga. See Thomas Williams, *Francisco de Paula Sanz*, 44-49.

⁵⁵ Buechler, *Gobierno, minería y Sociedad*, 383.

He served as Director of the Tobacco monopoly in the newly established Viceroyalty between 1777 and 1783, when he replaced Manuel Ignacio Fernández in the important office of General Superintendent of War and Finance of the Viceroyalty. This was the most important intendant of the Viceroyalty, whose extensive jurisdiction included fiscal and economic branches of government. His powers over economic matters were meant to be as effective as possible, a duty that Sanz tried to enforce at his best. After the abolishment of the office of Superintendent, Sanz was appointed Intendant of Potosí (1788-1810), the richest intendancy of the region, as it was its economic beating heart. There, Sanz devoted twenty-two years trying to reanimate the decadent mining centres, sponsoring the introduction of new technologies for silver amalgamation, drafting new regulation for mines exploitation and proposing the expansion of the *mita* system.⁵⁶ He was not a representative of Spanish backward mercantilism, but indeed he was an important representative of late 18th-century Creole economic reformism.⁵⁷ Francisco de Paula Sanz was the ultimate authority in charge of creating useful vassals in the Río de la Plata, through the stimulus to individual productive labour improvement, grounding the legitimacy of his power on the *potestad oeconomica* conferred to the intendants and his ability to comply with the King's will and desire.

As part of the establishment of the Royal Monopoly of Tobacco, Sanz was ordered to travel around the Viceroyalty, as to decide how to organise the cultivation, production and sale of tobacco. According to Daisy Rípodas Ardanaz, the effectiveness of this new institution was based on “reason and experience placed at the service of economic achievements”.⁵⁸ Sanz's journey was aimed at gathering local knowledge in order to adapt the general provisions received to the local context in which this new economic institution was to operate, with the aim of stimulating economic growth in the region and, at the same time, increasing imperial revenues. Such a long journey (from Buenos Aires to Asunción, Potosí and Santiago) was nothing new for Bourbon officials, but its difficulty was not minor, given the territorial extension of the Viceroyalty and its natural conformation. Thus, the Spaniard became maybe the only official which had first-hand experience of basically any corner of the Viceroyalty, and his knowledge was put at the service of royal power. In his *memoria*, Viceroy

⁵⁶ In his rigorous study of Potosí and his socio-economic world, Enrique Tandeter devotes one chapter to the reformistic efforts of the late 18th century and the period of Sanz's government. He attempted different measures to revitalise the mining industry, and overall, he met the goal of increasing state fiscal rents. In Potosí, it meant expanding the use and exploitation of coerced labour and support the privileges of the *azogueros* class, the local economic oligarchy. See Tandeter, *Coacción y mercado*, 213-278.

⁵⁷ His library held 690 books on religion, universal history, science, practical knowledge and travel accounts. Political and economic ones included works by Muratori, Genovesi, Filangieri, Arriquibar, Campomanes, Muñoz, Sempere y Guarinos, and others. See BN, Sala del Tesoro, *Inventario de libros embargados a Don Francisco de Paula Sanz*, 11 Febrero 1811.

⁵⁸ de Paula Sanz, *Viaje por el Virreinato*, 7.

Vértiz recalled that Sanz's reports "have adequately compensated for the lack [of information] that we are trying to remedy today".⁵⁹

The Monopoly aimed at increasing fiscal revenues and stimulating economic activities in some imperial regions, similarly to what had happened in other Spanish dominions and other European empires. Sanz decided that Paraguay was the most convenient producer and issued a regulation for reforming local tobacco production and exchange. He was met by resistance by the local elites, but Sanz depicted his reforms as a privilege granted by the King to the Natives of the province of Paraguay "with the intention of encouraging them and that with this help they could begin to possess the sealed currency, the lack of which makes them live in continual indigence".⁶⁰ In fact, tobacco production would guarantee the improvement of the province, promoting the diffusion of "a determined and substantial sum of annual money, the desire to acquire it would move the spirits of these *naturales* to emulation, to work and to cultivate their land, which they have hitherto looked upon with so much abandon because of the lack of profit it produced for them".⁶¹ Thus, the implementation of the Monopoly serves two objectives at different times: the collection of revenue for military defence in present times, as well as the development of a civilised commercial society in the future. It introduced massive amounts of silver coins in the local economy, playing a "catalytic role in the process of commercial and productive dynamization in Paraguay".⁶²

As already mentioned, during his twenty-two years as Intendant of Potosí, Sanz devoted his efforts in trying to raise productivity of the mining centres, fighting back the decadence it experienced throughout the 18th century. While his first efforts pointed at introducing new technologies and methods of exploitation, Sanz collided with the vested interests inextricably linked to the particular productive context of the famous high-altitude silver paradise. The *azogueros*, Potosí elites formed by mine owners and providers of mercury, were too jealous of their economic privileges and rents, and an overall reform of the system of leasing and exploitation seemed unviable. Therefore, Sanz aligned his interest - and therefore the Crown interest, with the ones of the *azogueros*. Accordingly, the only way to increase the productive and fiscal output was to extend the *mita* system and the surplus value extracted from coerced labour.

This was a prominent aspect of Sanz's plan, expressed also in the new *Código Minero* which was composed by his main collaborator in Potosí, Pedro Vicente Cañete. However, the expansion of the

⁵⁹ Radaelli, *Memorias*, 29.

⁶⁰ AGN, 1277, f. 27.

⁶¹ AGN, 1277, f. 33.

⁶² Caballero Campos, *De moneda a mercancía del Rey*, 408.

mita faced multiple opponents, who found a talented speaker in a Fiscal of the Audiencia de Charcas, Victoriano de Villava (1747-1802).⁶³ He was born in Zaragoza, and studied law at the University of Huesca, Aragon, where he also became professor and dean. Villava holds a prominent place in Spanish history of economic thought. He participated in the creation of the Real Sociedad Económica Aragonesa de Amigos del País, and he was the teacher of Lorenzo Normante, the holder of the first Spanish chair in political economy. However, he is mostly known for his works as a translator. In fact, thanks to his efforts the works of the Neapolitan Enlightenment began to circulate in Spain, as he translated part of the *Scienza della legislazione* by Gaetano Filangieri and *Lecciones de comercio o bien de economía civil* by Antonio Genovesi.⁶⁴

Indeed, Villava wrote in 1793 his *Discurso sobre la mita de Potosí*.⁶⁵ Portillo had rightly put this text in relation with Villava's read of the Italian Enlightenment, arguing that the *Discurso* "is written with Filangieri in one hand and Genovesi in the other".⁶⁶ The *Scienza della legislazione* is echoed in the overall conception of the role and nature of legislation: the wide jurisdictional powers that the *Código Minero* would grant to the Intendente of Potosí and the Gremio de Azogueros horrified Villava, as these powers would not have any other check; second, the Fiscal believed that the absence of working *ethos* among the Natives was due to the detrimental legislation under which they lived since Spanish conquest.⁶⁷ Additionally, he shared the pristine constitutional culture developing in Spain as a logical consequence of the widespread circulation of political economy.⁶⁸ These elements made him a strenuous opposer to the jurisdictional logic which allocated rights and privileges to individuals according to their belonging to particular social bodies in favour of the belief in general universalistic principles to be applied to humankind.

Sanz was instead the exponent of the practical incarnation of Bourbon reformism: his first-hand experience in Spanish American made him realise the impossibility of reforming Spanish polycentric

⁶³ The opposition to the *mita* expansion was related to an overall opposition to the *Código Minero*, as the other Peruvian mining centres were excluded from exploiting indigenous labour through the *mita* system. Buechler considered it the heaviest *expediente* that ever crossed the Atlantic, stating that different sections of Potosí elites were against whatever innovation, favouring of the status quo. See Buechler, *op. cit.* The *expediente* was the typical administrative procedure of the Spanish monarchy from the 18th century onward. It consisted of the reunion of the documents involved in a determinate matter, allowing every administrative unit to know the information produced around a matter and make them circulate easily. See Sierra Valenti, 'El expediente administrativo'.

⁶⁴ Portillo Valdés, *Victorián de Villava*; Astigarraga and Usoz. 'La traducción española de las Lezioni'.

⁶⁵ Ricardo Levene offered an influential study of the *disputa sobre la mita*. However, his perspective was heavily influenced by methodological nationalism and the strive to find forerunners of Argentine nationalism in Enlightened Bourbon reformism. See Levene, *Vida y escritos*.

⁶⁶ Portillo. *Victorián de Villava*, 37.

⁶⁷ According to Villava, "the enlightenment in this century" abolished "the words *compelling* and *commanding*, in favour to *encouraging* and *stimulating*" in legislative texts because "governments know that leaving as much freedom as possible, and taking away as little independence as possible, helps to strengthen the moral ideas of the body politic". *Ivi*, 21

⁶⁸ Portillo Valdés, 'Constitucionalismo antes de la Constitución'.

monarchy from one day to another, fainting the Enlightened aspiration of rational government. Corporate and local interests were too entrenched in local political and economic networks that the only way to made them contribute to the overall project of economic expansion was to co-opt them. In fact, what he tried to do in Potosí conformed to the model of “Bourbon corporate centralisation”, a conceptual tool that better describes the persistence of the corporate structure of the monarchy notwithstanding the attempts of centralisation.⁶⁹

In his lengthy reply, Sanz refuted his opponent’s points thanks to extensive arguments and his first-hand knowledge of Potosí and the Viceroyalty. Nurtured by the ideas of an integrated Spanish commercial empire, Sanz highlighted the importance of Potosí extraction for the economic system of the entire South America. Replying to Villava on the poverty of the mining town, the Intendent noted how it was “a wellspring that does not retain its riches but spreads them throughout the Kingdom”.⁷⁰ The fiscal resources produced there were transferred throughout the monarchy, and the secondary economic activities generated by silver extraction and silver trade represented a considerable portion of the overall economic wealth produced in the region. Sanz was adamant in defending the necessity of the *mita*, as Potosí extraction would be uneconomical without coerced labour and a general decline in every region whose economy was connected with the Alto Peru would result from the stop to its activities.⁷¹

In addition, Sanz considered the *mita* as a convenient system to turn the indigenous population into useful vassals because, beside sustaining wealth creation through labour, coerced labour was necessary as the experience had taught that Peruvian natives resisted the incorporation into Spanish commercial societies and the adoption of commercial and thus civil manners.⁷² In the case of Potosí, where the only viable productive activity for participating into a commercial society was silver mines exploitation - that did not allow the distribution of property, coerced labour was the only way to turn Natives into useful vassals. After ten years in the region, Sanz noted that even if surrounded by Spanish commodities, the Peruvian Natives “do not move to desire them”.⁷³ Indigenous communities stuck to their customs, and even wealthy members of their communities were not animated by the

⁶⁹ See the section ‘The Establishment of the Trade Consulate’.

⁷⁰ Cortes Salinas, ‘El discurso de Francisco de Paula Sanz’, 194.

⁷¹ Although it is not the purpose of this analysis, it is interesting to note how Sanz’s ideas on the economic structure of the Viceroyalty reflect Sempat Assadourian’s pioneering studies of the development of American internal economies. Although obviously, Sanz justified the *apropiación del excedente colonial*, the surplus value extracted from American territories to metropolitan Spain.

⁷² As shown in Chapter 1, the concept of property played a vital role in the Spanish political economy in stimulating individual labour maximisation and creating new useful vassals. Sanz considered the *mita* as another instrument to reach the same goal, which was increasing local productive population.

⁷³ *Ibidem*.

acquisitive and commercial spirit which was the sign of civilisation. The intendant agreed with Villava that individual desire of emulation and indirect means were the best ways to soften backward customs, but the Peruvian Native seemed irreducible to Spanish culture, as “a greater earning does not reduce him to the regular class of other men”.⁷⁴

A dismissive attitude toward work was not considered an acceptable feature for Spanish vassals according to Sanz’s political economic mindset. He believed that “if the wealth of a state is nothing else than the product of the labour of men, it is necessary that the government should incline and even oblige them to such work that can be profitable to themselves and to the nation”.⁷⁵ Sanz sustained his claim quoting Antonio Genovesi, an author well-known by his opponent, arguing that the fundamental social pact consisted that “there would never be in the civil body someone who is not useful for something as being fit for it”, the government being the guarantor of this agreement. Therefore, it was legitimate to force Peruvian Natives to work, as it seemed the only way to turn them into useful vassals and to continue the exploitation of the mining centre whose activities were sustaining the economic system of the region.

The ideas of Sanz were totally in line with Spanish economic reformism, therefore what were the ideological origins of the *disputa sobre la mita*? His participation in Spanish Enlightened culture dismisses the old interpretation that considered Sanz as a defender of backward mercantilism against the liberal Villava. Going back to the first epistolary exchanges between Sanz and Villava, it is possible to discover their mutual appreciation, as they were sharing an Enlightenment-inspired political economic mindset.⁷⁶ However, Villava’s participation in a pristine constitutional culture is the linchpin to understand the difference between the two.⁷⁷ As noted, recent literature has highlighted the connection between natural law, political economy and constitutionalism. While this development had incredibly advanced our understanding of the roots of modern constitutionalism and the liberalism of rights, the rhetorical character of political economy and the possibility of conceiving intellectual history as an “history of problems” leave room for further exploration of the ways in which political economy provided arguments for supporting monarchical state and power.

Both Sanz and Villava believed that a commercial society was the most advanced model of human society, and that reforms should stimulate its institutionalisation. However, they disagreed on the

⁷⁴ *Ivi*, 149. Interestingly, Sanz recognises differences among indigenous groups, as he states that “Patagonian *indios*”, when they went to Buenos Aires for trade, developed a taste and desire for European consumer goods, even if they usually went back to their land because of “his incontinence with freedom”. See Chapter 5.

⁷⁵ *Ivi*, 191.

⁷⁶ González Pizarro. ‘Reexamen de una polémica’, 201-203.

⁷⁷ Portillo Valdés, ‘Constitucionalismo antes de la Constitución’.

ways to govern the individual economic actors inhabiting it. According to Villava and to the following liberal tradition, participation into the market generated individual rights that should be defended by rapacious monarchs through a written constitution. According to Sanz, the Crown was allowed to infringe the individual rights of his subjects for the sake of the common good, that meant the expansion of imperial production, wealth and power, if framed in political economic terms. While those positions had opposed political implications, they shared the same social abstractions regarding individuals inhabiting a commercial and capitalist society. While under the umbrella of the monarchy, this tension intrinsic in the use of political economy as a science of government produced confrontations regarding the best ways to attain the common goal of economic prosperity, after 1810 this contradiction will explode. The absence of the sovereign opened the possibilities to challenge monarchical authorities, a challenge that was again framed in political economic terms. What was the better form of government to ensure wealth and power? Now we know that in Latin America, republicanism was the winning answer, but it turned out to be so only after years of fierce wars against their political enemies, and even important patriots (such as Manuel Belgrano and José de San Martín) were, at first, supporters of the monarchy.

5. Creole Economic Reformism in the Río de La Plata

Even if Sanz was born and raised in the peninsula, he was an exponent of “Creole economic reformism”, as both Creoles and *peninsulares* believed in the necessity to improve the productivity of the Spanish American economy. These reformers shared a focus on how to develop a particular local context within the imperial framework, trying to maintain the harmony and balance between its constitutive parts.⁷⁸

However, Sanz met with resistance in every place he visited. While some confrontations had deep political roots such as the *disputa sobre la mita*, others were based on the introduction of new institutions in Spanish America, and their clash with the older ones. Indeed, the increasing importance that the government of the economic sphere assumed for the wealth and power of an empire generated contradictory positions regarding who was eligible to decide and enact what were the best provisions to favour economic growth, and those frictions were expressed in political economic terms. Moreover, at the end of the 18th century, the option “I obey but I do not comply” was not available anymore to American authorities, as the new governmental power strived for an increased effective government, and the government of the economic sector was a fundamental aspect of this turn. In the late colonial period, the growing rivalries between *americanos* and *peninsulares* did not determine radically

⁷⁸ Piqueiras and von Grafenstein, *El pensamiento económico*.

different opinions regarding the economic future of the monarchy, as the Spanish American economic mentality fits into the goals of Bourbon economic reformism.⁷⁹

The history of economic thought in Latin America had not been a traditional topic for historians. Regarding Argentina, the years following World War II produced a first wave of studies, concerned with analysing the ideas of specific thinkers, and their influence on the events of the May Revolution.⁸⁰ The economic liberalism of figures such as Belgrano, Vieytes, Lavardén or Villava was considered a proxy for their opposition to the Spanish monarchy, in an epoch when political dissent was not permitted. This interpretation was rooted in methodological nationalism, producing a nuanced version of the *Máscara de Fernando* thesis: as Spanish censorship did not allow to attack the imperial political constitution, Spanish American intellectuals expressed their discomfort with the *vínculo colonial*, through the exposure of local economic backwardness rooted in Spanish governance and plans for economic improvement.

José Carlos Chiaramonte has been the first scholar offering a nuanced view of Spanish American economic ideas in the late colonial time. Not surprisingly, he had also greatly contributed to a fresh understanding of the political culture that inspired and sustained the separation of the *pueblos rioplatenses* from the sovereignty of the Spanish monarchs, exposing the inconsistency of nationalistic interpretations of the wars of independence.⁸¹ In his research on the Spanish American Catholic Enlightenment, Chiaramonte observed that the focus on economic matters was an important aspect of the *crítica ilustrada de la realidad* (enlightened critique of reality) of the late 18th century, and that Spanish Americans were in constant dialogue with their European counterparts.⁸² This intellectual movement was not contesting the legitimacy of Spanish rule, but it aimed at employing observation, experimentation and rational reasoning in order to conform civil laws to the natural laws of motion of society. The renovation was to be carried out through a constant dialogue with metropolitan interest and trying to harmonise American and European ones at the benefit of the whole monarchy. Talking about the economy was not a way to elude Spanish censorship and to sneak revolutionary ideas in the minds of young Creoles, but

⁷⁹ This distinction played indeed a role in shaping local conflicts in the context of late colonial politicisation, as it is masterfully described in Sergio Serulnikov's study on 18th century Chuquisaca, where shackled by the resentment over the decisions to appoint Spanish troops and administrators to serve in the city shackled loyalty toward the Crown. The city developed a strong culture of resistance to royal authority, and Sanz was unable to implement the tobacco monopoly when he visited Chuquisaca due to local opposition. Serulnikov, *El poder del disenso*.

⁸⁰ Levene, *Vida y escritos*; Belgrano, *Escritos económicos*; Lavardén, *Nuevo aspecto del comercio*; Vieytes, *Antecedentes económicos*. Besides that, the bibliography around Belgrano is enormous because of his prominent place in the pantheon of the founding fathers of Argentina. The first study fully devoted to his economic ideas is Gondra, *op. cit.*

⁸¹ Chiaramonte, *Fundamentos intelectuales y políticos*.

⁸² Chiaramonte, *La crítica ilustrada*.

Chapter 2

Economic reflection, on the other hand, constituted one of the most natural steps forward along the path of the ideas of the century, since it was in this field of thought that sectoral claims were to be based and through which a real permeation was made in the scientific, rational, utilitarian mentality, the spread of which is one of the greatest effects of Enlightenment thought.⁸³

The participation in economic debates enabled Spanish Americans to discuss and adapt the new economic and social European ideas to the critique of their surrounding reality aiming at its improvement. In the previous chapters the participation of Spanish intellectuals to pan-European debates in political economy have been demonstrated, as well as the constitutive transnational character of this science. Therefore, other linguistic traditions (British, French, Italian) were channelled in the direction of the Americas through Spanish authors and ideas.⁸⁴

However, Chiaramonte's interest in the American circulation of economic ideas remained an isolated voice for some time, as he too turned more to the study of political ideas and Spanish natural law and constitutional tradition. Recently, historians had renewed their attention to this topic, thanks to a new preoccupation with tracing the trajectories, circulation and influence of texts and ideas, as well as due to the described developments in the history of political economy.

Piqueiras and von Grafenstein had recently edited a volume which collects important contributions to the debate, clarifying the state of the art and providing a useful point of departure for further investigations.⁸⁵ In Spanish America, the 18th century was an age of economic expansion, which relied on the Crown stimulus aimed at a twofold goal: increasing fiscal revenues and favouring individual wealth production. This process accelerated in the second half of the century, thanks to the Atlantic conjuncture of wars and commercial expansion, up until the commercial crisis generated by the conflicts with the British started in 1797 in the context of the Revolutionary Wars. Spanish American economic efflorescence was predicated upon the expansion of commercial agriculture and the increase in productivity. The new interest for agricultural development was perceived as an epochal break as contemporaries saw the traditional Spanish economic policies dominated by a fever for precious metals, an anxiety that led to the neglect of agriculture, now considered as the "source of true wealth". The authors rightly point out how this aspect had been usually simplified as an adherence to physiocracy, an oversimplification determined by the prominent place it held in the canonical history of economic thought. Actually, Spanish American agrarianism was influenced by a similar focus on agricultural development of peninsular authors, albeit with some differences in the

⁸³ Chiaramonte, *Pensamiento de la ilustración*, XXII-XXIII.

⁸⁴ Astigarraga, *A Unifying Enlightenment*.

⁸⁵ Piqueiras and von Grafenstein, *op. cit.*

analysis of the causes and remedies of agricultural backwardness. Indeed, Piqueiras and von Grafenstein defined the Creole economic reformism as

a state of opinion weaved out of new economic ideas borrowed from “liberal mercantilism” and agrarianism, which are adopted, adapted and also reworked and enriched in the light of the conditions of colonial America, corporate practices whose interests are expressed in representations and memories, and controversies about the economic policies dictated by the monarchy.⁸⁶

This foundational moment determined the birth of political economy in Spanish America, therefore the birth of the economic reflections aimed at the reform and improvement of the existing commercial reality.

6. Circulation of Information and Newspapers

As in mainland Spain, some institutions helped and fostered the circulation of economic texts and therefore ideas, especially newspapers, economic societies and trade consulates, through the positive evaluation of useful (economic) knowledge in the form of treaties, articles and commercial information.⁸⁷ Actually, even before the establishment of a printing press in Buenos Aires, the thirst for information was widespread in the city. Spanish and European newspapers were circulating, together with manuscript gazettes, informing the locals about political events in Europe, the outbreak of wars, or the signing of peace and trade treaties. Indeed, a manuscript periodical appeared in Buenos Aires as early as 1764. The *Gazeta de Buenos Ayres* was a monthly manuscript gazette whose structure is strikingly similar to the one of the first newspapers: it included commercial, administrative, military or religious information; data on vessels entering and leaving the port and on weather conditions; excerpts of poetry; satirical comments on what was happening in the city. The *Gazeta* was directed to the local public, whose members were turning more and more interested in local economic and administrative news. Indeed, during the 17th and 18th centuries the majority of

⁸⁶ *Ivi*, 26.

⁸⁷ Concerning Spanish America, it is necessary to mention the scientific explorations. Even if they were an old feature of the Spanish plan of conquering the Americas, expeditions multiplied in the 18th century thanks to a renewed thirst for knowledge, through which the monarchy wanted to increase the profit extracted from overseas possessions. In the case of the Rio de la Plata, the Malaspina expedition had a catalysing role in collecting and processing naturalistic, social and political information on the local contexts. See Dameto Zaforteza, *La economía política*.

information was flowing from Europe to America, a situation that started to reverse at the end of the century.⁸⁸

In fact, the flow of news between Europe and Spanish America was accelerated by the thirst of economic information needed for lubricating the gears of the Spanish empire of trade. For instance, the *Real ordenanza de Intendentes* provided instructions regarding how intendants had to send annual reports to the Crown providing all sorts of useful information regarding the territories under their jurisdiction, a task in which they were assisted by the *subdelegados* - as the report on Potosí by Pino Manrique shows. In 1792, Eugenio Larruga and Diego Maria Gallard obtained the patronage of the Minister of Treasury Diego Gardoqui for the creation of the *Correo Mercantil de España y sus Indias* that wished to publish information coming from every corner of the monarchy.⁸⁹ In Buenos Aires, the Trade Consulate was the place in which information from the other provinces were being directed, filtered and then sent to the *Correo* editors in Madrid. This flow of reports represented “the first serious attempt to gather and publicly disseminate reliable information on a changing economic reality since the not-so-distant *comercio libre* regulation”.⁹⁰

Additionally, the creation of the Viceroyalty was followed by the establishment of the first printing press in the city, as Viceroy Vértiz bought from Córdoba a printing machine in 1780, part of the goods confiscated to the Jesuits. It was placed in the recently founded Casa de Niños Expósitos (orphanage) and it started to be known as the Real Imprenta de Niños Expósitos. Initially, it was mainly used to spread official and administrative announcements and news, but at the turn of the century it published the first local newspapers: the *Telégrafo Mercantil, Rural Político y Económico e Historiográfico del Río de La Plata*, edited by Francisco Antonio Cabello y Mesa (1801-1802), the *Semanario de Agricultura, Industria y Comercio*, run by Juan Hipólito Vieytes (1802-1807), and the *Correo de Comercio*, founded by Manuel Belgrano (1810-1811).

Those three publications were similar to each other and were part of the same Enlightened project of diffusion of useful knowledge directed at the education of the population.⁹¹ During the

⁸⁸ Mariluz Urquijo, *La gazeta de Buenos Ayres*. The author of the *Gazeta* is unknown, but Mariluz Urquijo identifies Juan Baptiste de Lasalle (1729-unknown) as a possible candidate. He was a middleman and administrator linked to the local commercial elites. Only four numbers of the *Gazeta* have survived.

⁸⁹ This publication soon gained an official character, as the trade consulates were ordered to remit the information to be published, and it turned into the official source of information for a new branch of the Ministry of Hacienda, the Secretaría de la Balanza. See Mariluz Urquijo, *Noticias del Correo mercantil*.

⁹⁰ *Ivi*, 20. The importance of information for the economic integration of the monarchy is also signalled by the Malaspina expedition, which was based on the collection of useful and first-hand information carried on during those years.

⁹¹ The first newspapers of Buenos Aires have been widely studied by Argentine scholars, mainly thanks to the new political history and conceptual history that has turned newspapers into a privileged primary source. Calvo and Pastore noted that economic reflections in the pages of the “anticipate the construction of a «public space» in which a varied set of ideas, projects and proposals circulate and are debated, all of which have in common their enlightened economic character”.

Enlightenment, political economy was not anymore reserved only for private communication and proposals between administrators and the Crown but was considered a useful science to be diffused among the population. Actually, this opening of a pristine “public sphere” generated anxieties regarding the level and the kind of economic education that the population was supposed to receive, to prevent a seditious use of this new knowledge.⁹² As their titles already indicate, the newspaper had a prominent economic character and their editors wished to contribute to the creation of useful vassals thanks to the dissemination of new economic knowledge, mainly practical one, even if some theoretical reflections were also put forward - especially in the *Correo*.

In the vehement prospect of his publication, Cabello y Mesa recalls the patriotism that inspired his project “to report to the Readers all the objects, progress and new discoveries of the History, the antiquity, the natural productions, the Arts, the Sciences and the Literature of this pleasant, virgin, rich and fortunate Country”.⁹³ The diffusion of knowledge renders man “diligent and useful”, against the old “barbaric” teachings of Scholasticism. The prospectus of the *Semanario* expresses similar ideas, as the periodical was the instrument to spread “from one Province to another the knowledge most necessary for our agriculture and industry”. The noble purpose of the publication was indeed to “inflame the heart of the farmer by reminding him of the lethargy into which his inactivity has plunged him” and become “the organ through which the useful ideas of enlightened compatriots who wish to take part in this enterprise will be transmitted to the *Pueblo*”.⁹⁴ The *Semanario* was mainly directed to farmers, as Vieytes was considering agriculture the most important economic sector for promoting overall economic growth, as well as the one which needed more support in the region.

This idea will be surpassed by the *Correo*, which aim was to “extending enlightenment to the lowest classes”, publishing piece of news useful for the “Trader”, the “Farmer” and the “industrious one”, given that the “three classes must be twinned, and proceed side by side; for one without the other they cannot possibly achieve more than ephemeral advances”.⁹⁵ The articles and extracts published in these newspaper were based on original articles written by the local Enlightened elites (besides the editors, people like Manuel José de Lavardén, Pedro Antonio Cerviño, Félix de Azara) or translations,

See Calvo and Pastore, ‘Ilustración y economía en el primer periódico’, 461. An analysis of the economic ideas informing the *Semanario* is to be found in Martínez, ‘El pensamiento agrario ilustrado’.

⁹² Chiaramonte, *Ciudades, Provincias, Estados*, 49-54.

⁹³ *Telégrafo Mercantil*, n. 1, 1 April 1801.

⁹⁴ *Semanario*, Prospecto, August 1802.

⁹⁵ *Correo de Comercio*, n. 1, 3 March 1810.

adaptations or plagiarism of Spanish and European journals and books, a typical feature of Enlightened reformism.⁹⁶

Another way in which books and ideas were reaching the Americas was through private libraries. For instance, José Celestino Mutis (1732-1808), corresponding member of the Real Sociedad Bascongada de Amigos del País and the most important botanist of New Granada, owned almost eighty books related to economic matters, among which the works of Campomanes, Ward and Arriquibar; practical manuals of agriculture, husbandry and industry; the memories of the Economic Societies.⁹⁷ In the Río de la Plata, private libraries held especially Spanish and Italian economic works.⁹⁸ Francisco de Ortega y Monroy, head of the Customs Guard of Montevideo, held one of the largest documented libraries of colonial Montevideo, comprising 878 volumes.⁹⁹ He owned books concerning natural science, physics, law, geography, history, literature, mathematics, politics, legislation and religion. As expected, the library comprised major works of political economy, such as Biefeld's *Instrucciones Politicas*, Muratori's *Della felicità pubblica* (in French), Mirabeau's *L'ami des hommes* (in Spanish), Macanaz's *Nuevo sistema* (hand-written and printed), and Ward's *Proyecto económico*. Indeed, Ortega y Monroy was not an exceptionally educated bureaucrat, but a standard exponent of the Spanish administrative machine, therefore he participated in his contemporary Enlightened culture, where knowledge, reason and education were highly praised, together with the new science of political economy, needed for the economic and political government of society.

Finally, the Academia Carolina and the Universidad de San Francisco Xavier de Chuquisaca were “the main centre for the promotion of new ideas”, among which political economy played an important role: in Chuquisaca, it was possible to read the most updated French, Spanish and Italian works on philosophy, politics and the economy, as professors held important libraries that escaped the control of the Inquisition and were at the disposal of students.¹⁰⁰ A prominent figure of Spanish history of political economy as Victoriano de Villava influenced the academic life of the city, and many of the “lawyers of Chuquisaca” would participate in the Spanish American revolutions ignited from 1808 onwards, such as Mariano Moreno, Bernardo de Monteagudo and Juan José Castelli, or characters who will appear in the following pages like Manuel José García or Tomás de Anchorena.

⁹⁶ Maggio-Ramírez. ‘La circulación de saberes’.

⁹⁷ Bohrquez. *Luces para la economía*, 41-50.

⁹⁸ Fernández Armesto, ‘Lectores y lecturas económicas en Buenos Aires’.

⁹⁹ Fernández Labeque and Villa, *Bibliotecas coloniales*, 190.

¹⁰⁰ Thibaud, *La Academia Carolina y la independencia de América*, 75.

In the Río de la Plata, political economy was therefore considered the necessary science for the renovation and improvement of local society, through the productive exploitation of local natural resources. The pages of the *Semanario* clearly expressed the guiding lines of the project for the creation of a society of useful and productive vassals. Juan Hypolito Vieytes, the editor, praised his times, in which “the spirit of domination and conquest” was not anymore the main mover of people and kings, and European nations discovered that agriculture was the most noble activity for men, “foundation of societies” and the origin of “wealth and abundance”. The diffusion of economic knowledge was the mean through which states increased their economic capacity and the wellbeing and happiness of their subjects. However, it was necessary to enlighten the population with useful knowledge, as peasants and farmers would stop following “the routine he learned from his elders without taking a single step forward”.¹⁰¹

The publication of his newspaper was the best way to achieve his goal of economic education. Even if he lives in one of the most fertile region of the world, Buenos Aires worker “is entirely ignorant of every kind of industry; he works only that small portion which he considers necessary to his subsistence; and what is worse, *he is entirely ignorant of that desire inherent in men to increase their comforts and possessions*”.¹⁰² The *Semanario* and the ideas it expressed would awaken workers from their hibernation, and stimulate for the improvement of their household economic output through the deployment of the newest techniques of farming and husbandry, as well as with the introduction of rural forms of household industry.

The incentive to labour aims at extending commodity production insofar wealth proceeds from the export of the locally produced goods. Commerce was a necessary engine to economic growth, because it “encourages men to give new forms to the productions which the earth offers us by the sweat of the honest Peasant. The concurrence increases its price, and alongside the revenues and the resources of the Nation increase”.¹⁰³ The natural environment of Buenos Aires was full of “imponderable advantages” for turning the city in a wealthy export driven port: it was surrounded by fertile lands that “similar to a sea form a continuous horizon in their extension”, it held woods providing the finest timber, its countryside was replete of cattle and other valuable goods, and it was

¹⁰¹ *Semanario*, Prospecto, August 1802.

¹⁰² *Ibidem*. Italic in the original.

¹⁰³ *Semanario*, n. 14, 22 December 1802. Don Cipriano Orden Betoño, an anagram for Don Pedro Antonio Cerviño, signed this article. Cerviño was part of Buenos Aires intellectual elites and was the first director of the Escuela Nacional de Náutica, founded in 1799 thanks to the efforts of the Trade Consulate. There, he taught courses on geometry, hydrography and drawing.

placed “at the centre of the commercial world”.¹⁰⁴ On 6 July 1803, Vieytes restated the commercial advantage of the Río de la Plata.

Placed at the centre of both worlds, we are almost equally distant from Asia, Africa, Europe, and the most northerly part of our America: the fruits produced by this fertile soil are of indispensable necessity everywhere; the abundance which a vigorous trade could extract from them is almost incalculable.¹⁰⁵

Therefore, it was necessary to sustain the development of agriculture, husbandry and rural industry, as “once the farmer is sure that he can subsist with the sale of his surplus, he will tirelessly apply himself to work”.¹⁰⁶ Commercial commodity production was the best way to stimulate peasants to work harder aiming at enhancing public wealth through individual enrichment.

7. The Establishment of the Trade Consulate

Such as in peninsular Spain, institutions that promoted the circulation of political economy were established throughout Spanish America. Economic societies were founded in Manila, New Granada, Santiago de Cuba, Lima, Guatemala and Bogotá. For instance, the archbishop of Guatemala Caetano Francos y Monroy mentioned the desirability of a local economic society in 1784, in his *visita general*. Learned men could have applied the contemporary knowledge to take advantage of the Guatemalan flourishing natural landscape, which was lying unexploited because of the lack of official patronage. The society was approved a decade later, and its members saw it as “a catalyst for improvement in the name of Enlightenment”.¹⁰⁷ In Buenos Aires, Francisco Cabello y Mesa proposed the establishment of a “Sociedad Patriótico, Literaria y Económica del Río de la Plata”. This society would help in gathering economic texts to be published in the *Telégrafo Mercantil*. However, this remained a project on paper as peninsular authorities did not patronise the initiative, probably due to multiple factors among which the state of permanent war and Cabello y Mesa’s lack of local connections.¹⁰⁸

However, another fundamental institution had been established the previous decades in Buenos Aires, the Trade Consulate (1794). Consulates were corporative institutions that gathered local merchants, acting as commercial courts as well as advising central authorities about the best ways to organise

¹⁰⁴ *Semanario*, n. 5, 20 October 1802.

¹⁰⁵ *Semanario*, n. 42, 6 July 1803.

¹⁰⁶ *Semanario*, n. 8, 10 November 1802.

¹⁰⁷ Brockmann, *The Science of Useful Nature in Central America*, 59.

¹⁰⁸ Lafit, ‘Crónica de una frustración ilustrada’.

and stimulate trade.¹⁰⁹ The foundation of Spanish American Consulates was part of the “soft imperialism” policy enacted by Gálvez’s successors in order to stimulate American economic growth and include its elites in the formulation and enactment of commercial policies.¹¹⁰ In fact, even if Spanish Americans had requested the establishment of consulates since a long time, their petitions were officially accepted only between 1793 and 1795, when official approval was granted to Caracas, Guatemala, Buenos Aires, Havana, Veracruz, Santiago de Chile, Guadalajara and Cartagena de Indias.

These institutions were also important hubs for the production and dissemination of economic knowledge. In 1801, the Veracruz Consulate wrote this instruction to his agent in Spain Pedro de Mantilla:

This Consulate also needs for the use of its employees and for the instruction of all its members the best works on political economy, in all the branches most pertinent to the prosperity of the Monarchy in general and to the institution of the Consulates; but as it may be necessary, in order to spend advantageously the money they cost and to be sure in their selection, to consult educated and well-informed persons in the Court, you will kindly approach those who may possess these qualifications and obtain from them a list.¹¹¹

In Buenos Aires, Manuel Belgrano (1770-1820) was appointed secretary of the local consulate. Son of a prominent merchant of Genoese origins, Belgrano moved to Spain to study at the University of Salamanca, exactly during the years in which Ramón de Salas y Cortés was promoting the study of political economy (1786-1787).¹¹² Indeed, he was one of the main contributors to Buenos Aires economic debates through his translations, his articles in the *Semanario* and *Correo de Comercio*, as well as his annual speeches to the Consulate. He represented a prominent voice which tried to conciliate the local aspirations of economic improvement with the Crown desire of integrating Buenos Aires in the wider Spanish commercial machine, and he contributed to turning the local consulate into “a space to promote the new concerns of Political Economy readapted to the local reality”.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ In this section, the focus is on the Consulate’s activities for local economic improvement. Its function as a commercial court was crucial in the economic life of the city port, and it was maybe the long-lasting colonial institution, operating until the 1850s. See Adelman, *Republic of Capital*. During colonial times, it also represented an important source of fiscal revenues. See Kraselsky, ‘Las Corporaciones mercantiles de Buenos Aires’.

¹¹⁰ Tavárez. ‘Colonial Economic Improvement’:

¹¹¹ Quoted in Leonard and Smith, ‘A Library for the Merchant Guild of Veracruz’, 1801’.

¹¹² Pastore and Calvo. ‘Cultura colonial, ideas económicas y formación superior’. Other Buenos Aires intellectuals such as Manuel José de Lavardén (1770-78) and Gregorio Funes (1775-79) resided in Spain to study. The attraction of Spanish American in peninsular institutions was part of the Bourbon strategy of creating an integrated imperial elite. See Ricketts, *op. cit.*, 23-28.

¹¹³ Adriana Milano. ‘Entre influencia ilustrada europea’.

Belgrano has been regarded as a prominent figure in the diffusion of Physiocracy in the Spanish world. He provided the first Spanish translation of François Quesnay's *Maximes générales du gouvernement économique d'un royaume agricole* in 1794, and published a compendium of texts appeared in the *Ephémérides du citoyen*, the periodical in which *les Économistes* spread their ideas, as *Los principios de la ciencia economico-política* (1796), described as “the first text on economic theory printed in the Río de la Plata”.¹¹⁴ Ernest Lluch has also proposed that his political view in support for monarchical regime - evident in the proposal of establishing an Inca monarchy (1816) - might be influenced by his readings of Quesnay.¹¹⁵ Nevertheless, even if he believed in the necessity to reform civil law according to economic natural laws, he also understood that different countries needed a different economic governance according to the specific geographical and political circumstances - an opinion that came from Genovesi and the Spanish tradition. He valued the *Maximes générales* because represented a crystal-clear expression of economic axioms, but he did not share the theory of knowledge of the physiocrats, nor their belief in the convenience of large property (quite the opposite indeed).

As Secretary of the Consulate, he gave annual programmatic speeches (*memorias*) in front of the members of the institution. The first one is a clear economic program for the future development of the region. Right from the start, he made clear the duty of the Spanish elites of “promoting Agriculture, encouraging Industry and protecting Commerce”.¹¹⁶ The most local pressing issue was the development of a flourishing agricultural sector through the civilisation of the manners of the rural population. In this respect, education holds a prominent place to turn idles into useful vassals, accomplishing the moral and economic goal of increasing the active population. Belgrano is a perfect example of Spanish economic reformism, and he promoted the project of a commercial empire, in which the overseas territories would economically develop through the production of raw materials to be trade with mainland Spain as well as through the fostering of manufactures that would exploit local natural resources - the plan sketched in the *Nuevo sistema*.

We must wake up from this lethargy, we must think and meditate on the most sovereign art in the world, agriculture. It is this that will provide us with all our comforts, the population will increase, the wealth will be distributed, and the *patria* will be happy; the metropole will also make its part, to whom, in return for the security it offers us, we will have to offer all our raw materials so that it can give them to us manufactured and ready for our service [...] but not for this reason it should

¹¹⁴ Fernández Lopez and del Valle Orellana. ‘Belgrano y la Fisiocracia’, 360.

¹¹⁵ Lluch, ‘Manuel Belgrano’.

¹¹⁶ ‘Memoria que leyó el licenciado Don Manuel Belgrano, etc’, 15 July 1796. See Belgrano, *Escritos económicos*, 63.

be believed that we have to abandon these arts and industries, which are already established in the countries we know, on the contrary, it is necessary to give them all possible protection.¹¹⁷

In fact, his second *memoria* is entirely dedicated to the promotion of the cultivation of flax and hemp, because those are considered appropriate plants to differentiate farmer production, and then to give a useful occupation to women in processing raw fibres into threads and yarns.¹¹⁸ Again, Belgrano recalls the benefits that this improvement would bring to Buenos Aires, as well as to the metropole, highlighting once more that local happiness and wealth was interconnected with the happiness and wealth of Spain.

Similar concerns are expressed in the 1802 *Memoria*. It dealt with the promotion of tanning factories, as it was the best industry to exploit cattle hides, “the most abundant fruit that we possess to this day, and with which Nature seems to have wished to favour these Countries”. It was necessary to bring master tanners from Europe, as to promote the increase of labour application in the local population. In this way, “we would get them to develop a love for labour (*amor al trabajo*), which would banish the cruel plague of idleness [...] from which would result the promotion of population”.¹¹⁹ He then turned to describe the efforts in finding a new method for preventing hide moths, a problem that the Consulate was actively trying to solve as it was testing a new method that, if successful, would have granted his inventor Domingo Patrón a monetary prize.¹²⁰

Indeed, the diffusion of useful knowledge was one of the indirect initiatives promoted to foster local productive development, together with projects for the establishment of commercial companies, creation of statistical series, discussions over prices regulation or custom duties, infrastructural projects for the improvement of the routes of the Viceroyalty. In his *memorias*, Belgrano expressed the necessity of fostering the establishment of educational institutions in the region, maybe the most important means to spread knowledge among the population. Reflecting on the miserable state of the countryside, he proposed the creation of “free schools to which the unfortunates could send their children without having to pay anything for their education, in the schools they could be taught good principles and instil in them the live for labour”.¹²¹ Similarly, he was convinced of the necessity of schools of agriculture, schools for women, and wool spinning schools, as education was instrumental

¹¹⁷ *Ivi*, 76-77.

¹¹⁸ ‘Utilidades que resultan a esta Provincia y a la península del cultivo del lino y cáñamo’, 1797. See Belgrano, *Escritos*, 83-97. Article 57 of the *Real ordenanza* ordered intendants to stimulate those same fibres.

¹¹⁹ ‘Memoria sobre el establecimiento de fábricas de curtiembres en el Virreinato de Buenos Aires’, 14 June 1802. See Gondra, *op. cit.*, 213-222.

¹²⁰ Tjarks, *El Consulado de Buenos Aires*, 939.

¹²¹ Belgrano, *Escritos*, 79.

to the refinement of the customs of Buenos Aires population. Education indeed was intended as education to labour. Public happiness could be achieved only thanks to the individual efforts of every vassal that had to be turned into a useful one, one that was taking part in the productive development of the local economy. As the sole origin of wealth was human labour, it was necessary to “inspire love for labour” to the population, and even “further force them to apply it” with the incentive of prizes. The goal is the creation of useful vassals, through the soft means of education. In fact, “in order to make men happy, it is necessary to place them in the practice of work, which prevents idleness and laziness, the origin of the dissolution of customs”.¹²²

The vicissitude of the Nautical School and the Drawing School that were established in the Consulate expresses in a nutshell the contradictory character of Spanish American economic reformism. Belgrano was again the instigator of these projects that materialised in 1799. In March, the Consulate approved the proposal submitted by Juan Antonio Gaspar Hernández for a school of “Geometry, Architecture, Perspective and the other kinds of Drawings” claiming that “the idea cannot be more beneficial, nor more advantageous to the Industry” as it was responding to the duty of the Consulate concerning the support to “Agriculture, arts and commerce”.¹²³ Dosio has noted how Belgrano considered this discipline the “popular science and industry matrix”, as well as necessary for state experts such as judges and land-surveyors.¹²⁴ Belgrano and Hernández were designated to sketch the study plans and organisation of the school, but the Crown suspended it in 1800 considering it an unnecessary spending in a time of war.

A similar fate was reserved to the Nautical School, sponsored by Belgrano together with Félix de Azara, Pedro Cerviño and Juan Alsina. It opened in the halls of the Consulate in December 1799, and it was meant to train captains, pilots and sailors to be employed in oceanic voyages and the navigation of internal rivers. In the inaugural speech, Cerviño praised the school, the basis for the creation of a local navy, because it would stimulate trade and therefore production, offer education and employment for the local population and strengthen the army. The school “will disseminate a multitude of knowledge able to enlighten and make happy many who would be indigent without it; industry will expand its activity, and it will discover new paths that will fill the country with wealth”.¹²⁵ Then, he summed up the program, and placed the stimulus to trade in the wider context

¹²² *Ibidem*.

¹²³ Trostiné. *La enseñanza del dibujo*, 13-14.

¹²⁴ Dosio, ‘Un saber en tensión’, 66. In the same years, many administrators pointed out that the lack of professional land surveyors was among the causes of the rural disorders in the Banda Oriental. The Escuela de Dibujo also responded to this practical problem concerning land measurement.

¹²⁵ Cerviño, Pedro Antonio. ‘El tridente de Neptuno es el cetro del mundo’. See Chiaramonte, *Ciudades, Provincias, Estados*, 304.

of the economic improvement of the Viceroyalty, together with other necessary measures such as the increase in local population, or the compilation of statistics and maps. The school functioned until 1806, when it was suspended by royal decree. The autonomy of the Consulate in establishing it without consulting the Navy Commander of the Río de la Plata, as well as the polemical discourse that Cerviño pronounced on the inaugural day were among the reasons adduced for the stop.

Why did Madrid promote the productive development of the overseas territories, but at the same time it was stifling local initiatives directed to the same goal? To provide a nuanced answer, it is mandatory to take into account temporality, as well as political culture. In fact, the discussion up until now has proven the interest of the Spanish government in developing the economy of the overseas territories, among which the Río de la Plata had been extremely favoured. However, the beginning of the Revolutionary Wars against Britain (1796-1802, 1804-1808) endangered the commercial bonanza which had stimulated Buenos Aires growth. As signalled by Adelman, the disruption of the Atlantic commerce pushed alarmed debates among local elites in search for remedies, as the absence of the stimulus of trade would produce negative consequences on rural production.¹²⁶ The Crown issued a general permission to trade with neutrals, but the terms of the opening were discussed locally by commercial elites. This added a new layer to the increase of local governmental powers that had followed Bourbon reformism and institution-building. Obviously, the intendants were meant to represent the royal will, but at the same time the value of local knowledge for effective government was highly praised, notwithstanding Bourbon attempted standardisation of governing methods. Local corporations had been strengthened and they were continuously trying to implement and expand their respective jurisdictional powers, generating conflicts with central authority and among each other. The closure of the Schools of the Consulate was pushed by war-related financial constraints, as well as by a new conservative orientation in imperial policy from Madrid, meaning the will to better control colonial development instead of delegating it to local elites.¹²⁷

Indeed, the economic consequences of prolonged Atlantic warfare would prove the final cause of the definitive shackling of the “imperial equipoise” between metropole and colonies.¹²⁸ In fact, the 18th-century political culture had been affected by the emergence of political economy, and therefore by a conceptual turn that elevated the increase in individual and public wealth as the prime source of legitimation for rulers. If the ruler could not ensure the condition for economic growth, vassals started to feel legitimised to manage their economy by themselves. During this crucial conjuncture, the

¹²⁶ Adelman, *Sovereignty and Revolution*, 163-171.

¹²⁷ Manuel Godoy's government and the French Revolution's breakthrough were a turning point.

¹²⁸ Adelman, 'Iberian Passages'; in the case of Buenos Aires, the British invasions 1806-1807 were another pivotal moment that exposed the inadequacy of metropolitan rule.

rhetorical and ambivalent character of political economy was evident. On the one hand, it was the science for the economic government of society, employed to craft plans to strengthen the economic ties between colonies and metropole and to achieve the increase in power and wealth of the empire as a whole. On the other, it provided arguments with which local groups advocated their place in governing the local economy, challenging rival proposals, as well as metropolitan decisions. The fact that 18th-century European empires' legitimacy was inherited by the independent nation-states allowed for the nationalistic interpretation of Spanish American reformers, as their call for imperial economic regeneration was seen as a form of early nationalism.

8. Reforms, Social Segmentations and Conflicts

The Consulate was a product of local advocacy for having an intermediate body representing to the King the local interests and desires regarding economic development. The Buenos Aires elite wished to turn it into a platform for the diffusion of economic education, through the circulation of new ideas and practices, as well as for actively shaping economic policy through the tentative regulation of external trade and other activities. Gradually, local society was realising the necessity of economic governance for the wellbeing of the community, and it was segmenting in different groups according to their common interests in shaping that governance, thanks to the channels provided by the Spanish institutional architecture, or even trying to create new jurisdictional or intermediate bodies. A richly detailed article by Jumar and Kraselsky describes the different strategies that *hacenedados* and *comerciantes* employed in the second half of the 18th century in order to open new channels of communication with the Crown, in an attempt to directly represent their interest to the King, as the Cabildo was losing its effectiveness and the establishment of the Viceroyalty added another layer to the corporate structure of the monarchy.¹²⁹ Interestingly, not only the elites were affected by social segmentation and by the attempt of creating formal representative bodies, as witnessed by the creation or the attempts to create the *gremios* of shoe-makers, bakers, silversmiths and farmers (*labradores*).¹³⁰ This social segmentation was perceived by contemporaries which tried to define it. For instance, Belgrano, in his preface to the *Máximas generales del gobierno económico*, explained that “the word *Labrador* means one who cultivates the land”.¹³¹

The Consulate was also a byproduct of what Javier Kraselsky defined the “Bourbon corporate centralisation”: given the limited governmental power in the Americas, the Spanish Crown co-opted

¹²⁹ Jumar and Kraselsky, ‘Las esferas del poder’.

¹³⁰ Johnson. *Los talleres de la revolución*, 123-161.

¹³¹ Fernández López and del Valle Orellana, *op. cit.*, 356.

local elites to collaborate to the imperial reforms of the 18th century.¹³² The metropole did not have the governmental power to administratively govern the monarchy, therefore tried to take advantage of the composite nature of Spanish political system. While government should be inspired by metropolitan-sanctioned common principles, local interest groups were in charge to enact them. These were co-opted allocating corporate or regional privileges, in a new political-economic shape of the traditional Spanish economy of grace.

Political economy intersected into Spanish political culture. The new source of political legitimacy for European rulers became the productive development of the territories under their jurisdiction, a process that implied the territorialisation of state powers, together with the creation of new administrative structures and centralised intermediate powers. Those intermediate bodies coalesced around the new economic interests strengthened by 18th-century Atlantic commercial expansion, and they eagerly looked for the Crown's protection in exchange for economic privileges to sustain their recent rise to economic prominence. The "corporate centralisation" was an additional strategy to reach a deeper imperial integration, as the co-optation of local corporate interests provided a preferential channel of communication with Spain that was used in a bilateral direction: local elites hoped to influence governmental policies, while the Crown wanted the elites to effectively govern according to metropolitan wishes.

Indeed, a new interest group, the *hacendados*, organised in the Gremio de Hacendados in the 1770s, but their influence and bargaining power over legislation and government was extremely lower compared to the merchants.¹³³ In fact, the city was traditionally governed by a merchant elite, and only recently husbandry and land ownership were starting to generate enough profit to elevate the local social recognition of the rural producers.¹³⁴ However, the *hacendados* quite rapidly were able to challenge merchant's supremacy: the Cabildo approved on 12 March 1790 a project for the establishment of a Hermandad de la Mesta, an association which would debate and put forward solution to the problems of the countryside (rustling, indigenous attacks, stray dogs, land litigation) and to the increasing depletion of the cattle stock. It aimed at being a "comprehensive response" to

¹³² Kraselsky, *Las estrategias de los actores*, 29-35. The following analysis of the Consulate is based on this work. A similar process shaped the late colonial history of the Audiencia of Quito. See Morelli, *Territorio o nación*.

¹³³ The term *hacendado* defined who owned some *haciendas* (cattle) and did not differentiate between small or large producers. The new Gremio tried to define different categories of *hacendados*, allocating different rights according to the size of the productive activities. During this study, the term *hacendados*, when not specified, defines the interest group of the prominent landholders and rural producers.

¹³⁴ The work of Kraselsky offers a detailed and nuanced analysis of the differentiation of Buenos Aires' productive elites into different interest groups. Besides the division between merchants and *hacendados*, the two groups were divided into sub-groups whose interests were sometimes opposed. The *hacendados* had been able to regulate the local market through the Cabildo since the 17th century, but they were stripped of their recently acquired power during Bourbon reformism. These matters will be touched in the next chapter in the discussion around the advancement of the southern frontier.

the problems of the countryside, as the Viceroy and the Cabildo were not able to solve them.¹³⁵ In fact, Buenos Aires countryside was experiencing similar problems to those that were affecting the Banda Oriental and that prompted the formation of the *expediente* of 1784. The difference was just quantitative, not qualitative, as most of the rural population and productive establishments were located in the Banda Oriental. If the Cabildo favoured it, the Viceroy stopped the project as it would confer extensive jurisdictional power to the rural producers - especially the power to repress vagabond population - that the Spanish state was not willing to give up. In their *Representación* to the Viceroy in January 1793, they provided the definitions of different kinds of rural producers according to their scale of operations, and only the *hacendados criadores* owning at least 2,000 heads of cattle would be admitted in the Hermandad.¹³⁶

The *hacendados* were finally included in the ranks of the Consulate in 1797, creating what Kraselsky has called the “expanded Consulate”, as a response to the tension generated by the unbalanced social representation in the new institution.¹³⁷ Belgrano cheered this development, as he was the mediator of the different interests inhabiting the new institutions, trying to harmonise them at the benefit of the common good of the city port and the monarchy. After exposing the mutual interdependence between agriculture and trade, the Secretary praised the relevance of associationism in informing political rule and governance, as every improvement “is only due to the gathering of its inhabitants, landowners and merchants, in assemblies, boards, academies, societies and companies, etc., where, knowing the mutual dependence of their interests, they have endeavoured by all possible means to promote them”. The reunion of interest will create “one single family”, where “each one working for himself, will contribute to the general good” and everyone “will educate their fellow citizens by educating themselves, and will enrich the *patria* by enriching themselves”.¹³⁸

The rivalry between *comerciantes* and *hacendados* was only one of the conflicts generated by the combined effects of economic growth, urbanisation and institutional reforms. For instance, after Sanz was appointed Intendant of Potosí in 1788, the Superintendency was eliminated until 1803 because of the endemic conflicts of attribution between him and Viceroy Loreto.¹³⁹ The most notable one resulted in the incrimination (*quiebra*) of the Administrator of the Custom House Francisco Ximénez de Mesa in September 1788, because of mismanagement of public revenues, an issue that involved notable members of the local elite as the merchant Domingo Belgrano Perez - father of Manuel, and

¹³⁵ Mir, ‘Mesta e intereses ganaderos’, 9-28.

¹³⁶ RAE, ML, Tomo XIX, ff. 14-31. ‘Representación de los hacendados al virrey’. Buenos Aires, 29 January 1793.

¹³⁷ That decision came in the context of the *pleitos de frutos*, a severe conflict over the trade exceptions granted by the Crown to some prominent slave traders. Palombo and Igarzábal Clause, ‘El «grande expediente»’.

¹³⁸ Belgrano, *Escritos*, 102.

¹³⁹ Lynch, *op. cit.*, 90-113.

the Commander of the Watchers Francisco de Ortega de Monroy, a close collaborator of Sanz.¹⁴⁰ Few years later, the city was shaken by the “*grande expediente*” *del pleito de los frutos*, when local merchants vehemently protested against the permission given to Tomás Antonio Romero to export local goods worth 250,000 pesos in exchange for the introduction of African enslaved people.¹⁴¹

Rivalries among different sectors of the local productive elites were also fuelled by the wider confrontation between Buenos Aires and Montevideo. The spectacular growth of the port in the Banda Oriental - the sole Atlantic port of the river basin, nurtured by its rich rural regions, alarmed merchants of the viceregal capital, while the *orientales* appealed to the Crown to extend their privileges.¹⁴² The polemics around the habilitation of new ports in the Río de la Plata that appeared in the first issue of the *Semanario* was a mirror of this continuous confrontation.¹⁴³

Belgrano’s desires of creating “one single family” remained thus on paper, as the Revolutionary Wars put under heavy stress the Spanish imperial commercial machine, until its final crisis in 1806-1810. The inadequacy of Spanish rule was exposed by the British invasions in 1806-1807, which proved the inefficiency of local military forces. Additionally, metropolitan response to the crisis was inadequate or absent - given also the severe domestic crisis in Spain. In any case, the processes generated by the reformistic efforts of the Crown were a self-reinforcing circle of contradictions, that did not have the time to conflagrate by itself because of the Napoleonic wars and the dissolution of the imperial power. During the 18th century, the Atlantic world witnessed an important commercial expansion, based on the reactivation of the silver and sugar commodity chains that affected local agricultural production, industry and trade. Alongside this process, European empires sought to strengthen their governmental and administrative powers, and the revenues needed were provided by the economic groups that were being favoured by the economic growth. To co-opt local elites, the Spanish Crown distributed cooperative privileges, favouring some groups in respect to others. In this way, the metropole strengthened the jurisdictional powers of local elites, but antagonised other groups, which deepened their efforts to gain the Crown’s favour. This process feed local conflicts and confrontations that took place under the political umbrella of Spanish political culture. Before 1808, it was highly improbable that the conflicts spilled into instances of political independence from the Crown, even if the calls for a “constitutional reform” of the monarchy increased. In fact, contemporary, such as Victoriano de Villava or Alessandro Malaspina, were realising that the

¹⁴⁰ Vaccani. ‘La Real Aduana y la quiebra’.

¹⁴¹ Palombo and Igarzábal Clause, *op. cit.*

¹⁴² Prado, *Edge of Empire*, 83-106.

¹⁴³ Lavardén, *op. cit.* As Montevideo developed in a flourishing commercial entrepôt, it gradually challenged Buenos Aires dominance.

strengthening of local interest and their will to participate in imperial power would have reached a critical level if the Crown would not find a way to accommodate local aspirations.¹⁴⁴

Political economy was the language in which those instances of reforms and aspirations for an improved economic future were being expressed. It was a language that could be rhetorically employed to support economic desires with a normative aspiration. In fact, every proposal was uttered in the name of the “common good” and using the theoretical framework of the natural law, therefore aiming to amend human laws in accordance with natural ones. The 1790s witnessed other economic proposals stemming from local interest groups and aimed at counselling the metropolitan power about economic governance, documents that will be analysed in the next chapter.

9. Conclusions

The chapter has focused on late 18th-century attempts to raise the overall productivity of the Río de la Plata provinces. The contemporary economic turn convinced Spanish administrators of the necessity of economic reforms to create an integrated commercial empire predicated upon exchanging locally produced manufactures and primary goods. This movement was coupled with the desire to rationalise the government of the centre on the peripheries, while actively promoting local economic development. The balance between Spanish American development and economic extractivism toward Spain was constantly discussed. The genuine desire to better the economic conditions of the American provinces must not obscure the persistence of colonial subordination. The introduction of an intendency system, with its officials reuniting the jurisdictions over fiscal, economic and military matters, was the new institutional setting aimed at materialising the reformers’ desires. This system was an attempt to rationalise and centralise economic government, untying the executive power (the *potestad oeconomica*) from the jurisdictional constraints of the traditional Spanish culture of government. Their administrative duties were inspired by political economic assumptions regarding the effective economic governance of a territory. As it has already been highlighted, the appearance of intendants did not mean the extinction of the old jurisdictional logic - a long and contested process, but it signalled the movement toward the tentative institutionalisation of the rule of law against legal pluralism. The survey and distribution of free public land was an instrument through which intendants were invited to perform their economic functions. However, the consolidation of imperial property through the territorialisation of state power was the most important aspect of their duties regarding

¹⁴⁴ Malaspina believed in the necessity of a political reform of the monarchy, based on the autonomy of three American Kingdoms. The observation in the course of his voyage confirmed this previous conviction. See Pimentel, *La física de la Monarquía*. This idea was well known in governing circles, as it had already been proposed by Count of Aranda to Carlos III in 1783.

property. Surveying and measuring lands and providing economic information to the centre were centrepieces of the economic government of the imperial commercial society that reform sought to create.

Reforms were generally welcomed in the Río de la Plata, as they were effective in exploiting the favourable economic conjuncture and stimulating local economic developments. Local elites were sharing Spanish economic reformism, and they tried to take advantage of metropolitan attention regarding the economic government of the region. Notwithstanding the shared desire for economic improvement, conflicts sparked soon. In fact, reforms in imperial and local government impacted the Río de la Plata alongside the severe Andean Revolutions (that were contesting imperial governance), the commercial expansion brought by the extension of the *comercio libre* and the following war-related trade disruptions. These events impacted local societies in different degrees, and political economy inspired different and contrasting positions on how to gear reforms to effectively materialise a flourishing commercial society amid war and crisis. Economic growth and institution-building concurred in exacerbating the proliferation of conflicting positions over the ways to attain a prosperous future of economic wealth and prosperity. While those conflicts were managed under the umbrella of Spanish political culture, it has been signalled how political economy fed the development of a pristine public opinion and constitutional culture, paving the ground for future conflicts that would be generated by the Napoleonic crisis. The conflict between Sanz and Villava signals that new constitutional ideas were gaining ground in the Spanish American political culture, and politico-economic arguments could accommodate both staunch supporters of the monarchy and progressive reformers who envisioned a constitutional empire. In fact, while economic discourses might be deployed to support the natural rights of individuals and communities in respect to each other and a sovereign, they could also be employed to strengthen the arguments supporting the duties of vassals to obey their legitimate sovereign.

Conflictive ideas surrounding the desired economic future circulated in Buenos Aires too. Commercial expansion pushed the pristine segmentation of local society according to economic interests and created the rivalry between Buenos Aires and Montevideo. New institutions, such as the Trade Consulate, staged fierce confrontations on local economic governance that reflected concerns wider than favouring some interests over others, as these debates touched upon different politico-economic development strategies for the interconnection of the local economy to the wider Atlantic capitalist markets. Did metropolitan or local authorities have jurisdiction over economic matters? Should local development be subordinated to the metropolitan one or not? How was it possible to accommodate new lucrative activities, such as the slave and cattle trade, and old commercial patterns?

Chapter 2

These questions arise following the Crown's desire to improve Spanish American productivity through the stimulus to production and exchange. The desire for the stimulus of local agricultural production and husbandry was widespread, as everyone understood that human-labour, rather than silver and gold, was the true source of wealth. However, the wealth of Buenos Aires and the Río de la Plata was still based on silver export and the international context was still shaped by conflicts and confrontations among mercantilist empires – meaning empires which mostly excluded foreigners from the enjoyment of their economic output. Wealth derived from Potosí silver was not comparable with any other activity, and the lucid analysis of Sanz in the context of the *disputa* explained it perfectly. Therefore, even if the world of ideas was pushing the protagonists of this story toward the belief in the primacy of agricultural production as the true wealth of a state in contrast to extractivism, the reality was different, and the process of socio-economic change and reform was constellated with conflictive ideas. Notwithstanding the common goal of the imperial elites remained increasing wealth through the institutionalisation of a commercial society, the ways to materialise it created a continuous and sometimes violent intellectual debate.

CHAPTER 3

Frontier, Production and Property during the Late Colonial Times

This chapter aims to analyse the discourses on property and its relationship with the issues of economic development, disclosing the different views that were structuring debates over land reforms and economic growth in the late 18th-century Buenos Aires and Montevideo. The narrative illustrates the arguments revolving around property, commodity frontier advancement and the institutional organisation of the countryside, crossing from one side of the Río de la Plata to the other. In this way, it is possible to show the centrality of property in structuring the institutional and economic development of both Buenos Aires and Montevideo. This introduction provides the necessary socio-economic and legal context of the intellectual debates analysed in the following sections.

During the late colonial times, the countryside of Buenos Aires and the Banda Oriental offered a patchwork of socio-economic actors strongly influenced by the local geographical context. For some decades, the old view of a rural landscape dominated by the latifundia and populated by a scattered population of *gauchos* and families on the move had been replaced by a nuanced appreciation of the varieties of economic actors inhabiting the region.¹ Small nuclear families were the basic productive units, as land availability permitted independence for young couples. Those *campesino* (farmer) households were devoted to agricultural production, husbandry, or a mix of the two, a production directed to subsistence consumption or the market. The expansion of the *campesinado* (peasantry) was complemented by the proliferation of the *estancias*, a productive unit specially dedicated to cattle raising for the export market, albeit characterised by some diversification.² Their scale of operation was predominantly modest, and the workforce was based on slave and wage labour. The seasonality of husbandry complemented the seasonality of wheat harvesting, and thus *campesinos* usually worked for some months of the year in the *estancias*. Seasonality and land availability determined high labour cost, as *campesinos* and independent workers might easily migrate from one province to another or to different regions of the same province looking for better wages.

Finally, the late 18th-century economic expansion impacted the countryside, as demand for agricultural commodities increased and powerful urban merchants or landowners gradually accelerated the process of land appropriation, usually at the expense of local actors characterised by an inferior social power. The result was an increasing commercialisation of the countryside, as rural

¹ Garavaglia and Gelman, 'Rural History of the Río de la Plata'; Garavaglia and Gelman, 'Mucha tierra y poca gente'. For a more recent historiographical balance, see Santilli, 'La saga continua'.

² Amaral, *Capitalism on the Pampas*.

households sold their surplus production to *mercachifles* or *pulperos volantes*, petty merchants traversing the countryside to sell and buy agricultural commodities and consumer goods.³ Those merchants connected rural production with external markets (both Atlantic and American) through mainly a single commodity: cattle hides, whose commercialisation's importance has been known for long. A contemporary observer noted in 1773 that "at pray time is often given meat for nothing, as in the slaughterhouses, because every day many cattle are slaughtered, more than the people need, just for the sake of the hide".⁴

Indeed, Argentinian historians engaged in a productive debate over the causes of late 18th-century economic development to assess the relative weight of endogenous or exogenous factors. The discussion revolved around the role of the *Reglamento de Comercio Libre* (1778) in creating or just following endogenous developments in the productive process and the importance of Atlantic markets or local urban ones in stimulating the increase in rural production.⁵ To sum up some of the conclusions, the increasing demand during the War of Spanish Succession and the following British *asiento* trade affected hide production and trade, generating a new level of exploitation of natural resources. In the second half of the century, administrative reforms and an increased demand from industrialising Europe deepened the effects of the *Nueva Economía del Cuero* on the countryside, affecting the lives of rural producers through increased market pressure, conflicts over the control of natural resources and administrative attempts of regulating production and exchange.⁶

Most families carried on their productive activities without a written property title, as land availability determined extremely easy access to land. In addition to that, the figure of the *agregado* was a very typical character of the region. Those were individuals or families permitted to live on other people's land in exchange for labour services, remunerated or not, or simply paying rent.⁷ However, the increasing pressure to appropriate lands over the last quarter of the 18th century, coupled with the authority's efforts to render the rural socio-economic context more legible, determined more petitions for obtaining written property titles. Therefore, rural litigiousness increased as the *ancien régime* legal pluralism clashed with Bourbon attempt of advancing the legitimacy of Crown-issued written law against different legal and customary sources. Indeed, the *agregados* were targeted by colonial authorities as an illegitimate social practice, as is evident in the *Bandos de buen gobierno* of the late

³ Gelman, 'Los caminos del mercado'; Carrera, 'Pulperías rurales bonaerenses'.

⁴ Concolorcorvo, *El lazarillo*, 44.

⁵ For an informed review of the debate see Camarda, 'El comercio ultramarino'.

⁶ Hides were fundamental for the industrialising leather and textile industries, and European demand exceeded its local supply. See Camarda, *op. cit.* and Llorca-Jaña, *British Textile Trade in South*. For the concept of *Nueva Economía del Cuero*, see Moraes, *Las economías agrarias*.

⁷ Fradkin, 'Ley, costumbre y relaciones sociales', 151.

18th century.⁸ Nevertheless, the customary conceptions of legitimate possession remained very important in mediating rural social relations, as the persistence of the concept shows.⁹ Instead of being a legitimate title *per se*, peaceful possession increasingly became a relevant argument for claiming a written property title.

In the Río de la Plata, there were three main ways to obtain a property title over free land: the *merced*, the *moderada composición* and the *remate*. The *merced* was a donation, usually because of some service rendered to the Crown. The claimants started the proceedings to obtain a legal property title through a *moderada composición*. Occupants had to request the parcel of land from the governor, who passed the file to the Audiencia and then to local officials to verify that the land was not already occupied, and to survey and measure it. Finally, a group of *vecinos* acted as witnesses of the operations, contributing to fixing the price of the land and confirming the antiquity of the possession of the claimants. The *remate* worked similarly, but the sale was realised through a public auction, where the claimants declared the price they were willing to pay, and other applicants had thirty days to make their bids. Banzato has shown that most application files during the colonial era started after establishing the new frontier line in 1780.¹⁰

A 1754 *Real Instrucción* was the legal framework which tried to regulate land appropriation in the Río de la Plata. It was an attempt to provide Spanish Americans with smoother legal proceedings, as well as to favour land exploitation through the prism of law, as many fields were laid “without cultivation” and farmers without a legitimate property title were squatting lands “without giving them on the cultivation all the corresponding labour for fear of being denounced and prosecuted”.¹¹ As early as the 1750s, the problem of the dispersed population without a fixed residence and property peeps out from the sources. The *Instrucción* identified the Viceroy, Presidents of the Audiencias or Governors as the authorities enshrined with the jurisdictional powers to distribute lands through *merced*, *venta* or *moderada composición*.¹² It was ordered that “any persons possessing public land” (*Realengos*) should present to the authority to receive the legitimate property title on pain of eviction.

⁸ Tau Anzoátegui, *Los bandos de buen gobierno*. The criminalisation of the *agregados* went hand in hand with the construction of the “vago” as a criminal character. See Alonso, et.al., *op. cit.*

⁹ Nowadays, the relevance of the concept of *possession* in the early modern world is well known. Herzog has shown the extent to which it structured the formation of local identities and political borders. Recently, Bastias Saavedra pointed out the epistemological gains implied in placing it at the centre of the research agenda of local historians as a way of ‘provincializing European law’. In the context of Buenos Aires, Fradkin and Poczynok have shown the widespread use of claims based on rights derived from possession in land conflicts. See Herzog, *Frontiers of Possession*; Bastias Saavedra, ‘The Normativity of Possession’; Fradkin, ‘Ley, costumbre y relaciones sociales’; Poczynok, ‘Los procesos civiles como fuente’.

¹⁰ Banzato. ‘La herencia colonial’.

¹¹ ‘Real Instrucción’ (1754), 6.

¹² Before that moment, land transactions should always be approved by metropolitan authorities, while after 1782 the intendants shared the jurisdiction over land issues with other institutions.

Throughout the document, the term *poseedor* is used to address who is enjoying the use of land without a written title, as the primary goal of this piece of legislation seems to be the inscription into a legal framework of the practices of land appropriation. Although some normative pretensions are present, the *Real Instrucción* is more concerned with an attempt to render legible to the state the ongoing practices on the ground, as to prevent litigations and to create a safe social environment apt for economic expansion.

This economic landscape materialised during the 18th century when the surge in maritime trade determined an increasing pressure over the most valuable natural resources, the herds of feral cattle (*vaquerías*). The administrative and institutional developments described in the previous chapter represented a Spanish attempt to govern and deepen the endogenous economic efflorescence, aiming at extracting increasing value from its overseas territories through territorialising state power and institutionalising a commercial society. Political economy provided a set of ideas and arguments meant to direct this institution-building process and channel private interests toward the public good. In the Spanish political economy framework, this meant the increase of useful vassals who were expanding their individual wealth through their market-oriented economic activities. In this way, they contributed to enhancing public wealth and state power.

In the region, the territorialisation of state power implied the advance of the southern frontier of Buenos Aires and the tentative drawing of a stable northern frontier line with Portuguese lands. Then, it was possible to establish an ordered market society through legislation and police. The chapter also seeks to understand to what extent the problem of frontier expansion and property distribution contributed to the crisis of Spanish rule in the region. Notwithstanding the crucial role of Napoleonic invasion in the collapse of Spanish imperial power, the double effect of economic expansion and Atlantic war segmented local society into conflictive interest groups, whose dissonant voices contributed to the jurisdictional, monarchical and imperial crises that followed one another in the 1790s and 1800s. We aim to understand what conflicts were arousing around property and what was their influence in strengthening or loosening Spanish American loyalty to the metropole and its institutions.

1. Early Attempts of Frontier Expansion and the Vértiz's Line

Local elites formulated the desire to secure the countryside of Buenos Aires from indigenous raids, as well as to expand the territory controlled by Spanish Americans, even before the metropole posed its gaze on this imperial peripheral region. In 1752, the Cabildo of Buenos Aires created three battalions of sixty horseback militiamen each, responding to the grievances of local rural producers

complaining about the dramatic increase in indigenous raids. The endless flatlands south of Buenos Aires were inhabited by different indigenous groups, oscillating between a sedentary and a semi-nomad lifestyle.¹³ During the 18th century, the exploitation of feral cattle increased because of the higher demand for hides in the internal colonial economy, as already in 1718 the Cabildo of Buenos Aires was complaining about the extinction of the *vaquerías*.¹⁴ In the second half of the 18th century, the Southern Pampas experienced a migration-driven demographic growth, articulating a complex frontier society based on cooperation and conflicts, where interethnic violence was “bidirectional and multi-causal”.¹⁵

María Eugenia Alemano provided a detailed analysis of how the Cabildo of Buenos Aires became a relevant political actor following the attempts to solve the problems of the frontier. The creation of the Blandengues de la Frontera de Buenos Aires was an autonomous initiative carried on with local revenues, independent from metropolitan support. Those were stationed in the frontier forts (Luján, Salto and El Zanjón), and the Cabildo established a new branch of local revenue collection (*Ramo de Guerra*) under its direct administration to pay for the new troops. This military body progressively grew in importance to represent the 40% of regular troops in the entire Viceroyalty.

The proactive policies toward the frontier thus opened a space of confrontation between the Cabildo and metropolitan power. Fernando VI did not appreciate its decisional autonomy, and he ordered the suppression of the Blandengues, in favour of establishing “defensive *pueblos*” on the frontier, an order that was disregarded by local authorities.¹⁶ As recalled in Chapter 1, ideas regarding agrarian colonisation were circulating in the Spanish court, and it was deemed the best solution for Buenos Aires, regardless of the immense revenues needed to carry on such an initiative.

Indeed, in the context of the Ceballos expedition against the Portuguese, Carlos III gave permission for the existence of the Blandengues (1760) as a temporary measure until the creation of the “defensive *pueblos*”. In 1768, the king asked Governor Bucareli to report on the fulfilment of his order, but it was only four years later that Governor Vértiz replied to the inquiry, admitting that any new settlement had been founded. Vértiz expressed a reason and a remedy for this situation. The old plan was not viable anymore, “because the inhabitants have spread much further out, [...] so that the

¹³ Mandrini. ‘Procesos de especialización regional’.

¹⁴ Weber, *op. cit.*, 62-68.

¹⁵ Alemano, *El Imperio desde los márgenes*, 90. Conflicts over resources were endemic since the previous century, as Europeans were entering *tierra adentro* (the indigenous territory) to exploit feral cattle, extract salt from Salinas Grandes and enslave indigenous people. See Roulet, *Huincas en tierra de Indios*, 36-40.

¹⁶ Creating agrarian colonies as a strategy of colonisation was a feature of Bourbon reformism, as similar projects were being carried out in California and Patagonia (beside the Sierra Morena). See de Paula, *op.cit.*

forts do not effectively shelter those borders”.¹⁷ Therefore, he proposed to establish two towns next to the *sierras* (hills) south of Buenos Aires. It would allow provincial troops to intercept indigenous raids and appropriate a wider area to be put into production. Carlos III sanctioned this project in a 1774 Real Cedula, where he recommended the Cabildo to entrust its realisation to someone outstanding in “experience and knowledge of the country”.¹⁸

Indeed, local authorities had already begun the collection of information needed to create the necessary knowledge to be used for the conquest of the countryside. In 1768, governor Bucareli had ordered an expedition to the South aimed at “providing suitable means of dividing the forces of the *indios*, and to bring them into discord”.¹⁹ It was formed under the command of Manuel de Pinazo, who was able to sign treaties with the “Aucas” and fight against other groups. This mission also produced the first diary of an expedition to the southern countryside: Captain Don Juan Antonio Hernández sketched a daily report comprising geographical information of the territory and ethnographic observation on the indigenous customs and society.²⁰ The Cabildo, in the person of the Sindico General Manuel de Basavilbaso, had reiterated the necessity of establishing new towns in the southern frontier, needed to shelter Spanish territory from indigenous menace as well as to unite the dispersed population of the countryside into an urban and civil society.²¹

As Hernández’s diary lacked topographical information and measurement, another *reconocimiento* (survey) of the territory was needed. Basavilbaso had warned that the success of the project was predicated upon the correct choice of sites for founding towns, and it was necessary to order “one or two experienced subjects” to sketch “maps with information about the location of the hills, distances, rivers, mountains and other information that is necessary to master physical knowledge”, because the authorities lacked good geographical knowledge, “apart from some news from people who are dumb in these matters”. The Cabildo agreed that “to deliberate with knowledge in the matter, a detailed survey of the territory should be made [...] appointing some educated geographer”, which had to draw topographic plans and maps.²² The Teniente del Rey Diego de Salas, the interim substitute of

¹⁷ The independent occupation of lands beyond the frontier line suggests that families were responding to the growing market incentives brought by commercial expansion. The rate of land appropriation in 1772 was not high enough to drive out families from the public land inside the existing borders.

¹⁸ The Reales Cédulas of 1768 and 1774 are reproduced in Quesada, ‘Documentos para servir a la historia’. The *sierras* are nowadays Sierra de Tandil and Sierra de la Ventana, about 400 and 500 km away from Buenos Aires.

¹⁹ Bucareli y Ursua, ‘Memoria’, 292.

²⁰ Hernández, *Diario* (1770).

²¹ In his report to the Cabildo, Basavilbaso noted that ‘it is not only useful, but absolutely necessary that the project of establishing the aforementioned settlements will be realised from now on [because] the fields will be cleaned from these abandoned families by reducing them to a Christian and civil conduct, gaining for God many souls and for the King many who will truly be his vassals’. Quoted in Canedo, ‘Fortines y pueblos’.

²² *Ivi.*

Governor Vértiz, agreed to the municipal authorities' requests, and Don Pedro Pablo Pavon guided a new expedition in October 1772.



Fig. 3. *Carta de las Costas Magallánicas según las más modernas observaciones del año 1745 y 1746*. AGN, Colección Mapoteca. Detail. The detail shows the *sierras*, the territory crossed by the feral herds and the lands inhabited by “indios infieles”.

Two *pilotos* (maritime pilots), Ramon Eguía and Pedro Ruiz, accompanied him. They sketched plans, measured distances and reported topographical information. The final product was a report describing “the places that are most appropriate for the purpose of fortifying and populating”, a document that contradicted the original Vértiz plan of creating towns next to the hills.²³ That territory lacked natural defences against the enemies' attacks, and natural resources such as wood and water were scarce. Its distance from Buenos Aires rendered colonisation very costly, as the surrounding lands did not appear incredibly fertile. Even if the occupation and colonisation of the *sierras* would be extremely beneficial to the Crown, the cost involved in the conquest and the creation of a vast line of forts for the defence of the acquired territory would be enormous. Eguía and Ruiz proposed instead to populate some territories closer to the actual frontier line because of their fertility and the possibility of better defending them from indigenous raids. The project did not materialise, but the interest in settling the problem of the frontier remained central for Buenos Aires inhabitants and authorities. A few years later, the *alcalde provincial* Diego Mantilla y los Ríos presented two more proposals to advance the existing forts and create new towns.²⁴

²³ Eguia and Ruiz, ‘Relación individual’.

²⁴ Barba, *Frontera ganadera*, 40.

Canedo has signalled that although local and metropolitan authorities tried actively to establish new towns, “the *pueblos* autonomously materialised - being sustained by the presence of the settlers - rather than were founded”.²⁵ In those decades, the Cabildo and the Crown expressed a strong interest in creating an economic sealed space in the Southern Pampas. Local authorities proved proactive toward the expansion and consolidation of the frontier, and the Crown tried loosely to direct these efforts but finally relied on local initiatives and expertise, according to the valorisation of empirical knowledge in the administration of the monarchy. Notwithstanding official desires and aspirations, the configuration of frontier fort towns was finally articulated by its inhabitants. The access to land and the salary of the Blandengues attracted migrants that created an “idiosyncratic” frontier political culture.²⁶

Following the establishment of the Viceroyalty, Spanish imperial authorities assumed a new protagonism toward the defence of the southern border. The first Virrey, Pedro de Ceballos, asked the Cabildo for a solution to the problem, which materialised in a plan sketched by Manuel de Pinazo, the “main proponent of advancing the guards”.²⁷ Pinazo proposed the creation of two new forts and the advance of the three already existing ones, echoing the plan of Ruiz and Eguía, which he had accompanied during their *reconocimiento*. However, Ceballos was more interested in realising a large-scale military attack against the Southern Natives. In the *memoria* to his successor Vértiz, Ceballos recalled the necessity of securing the countryside and offered Vértiz his plan for the new frontier, “which can also serve as a light for a large-scale invasion (*entrada general*)”.²⁸

Indeed, Viceroy Vértiz entirely devoted himself to the socio-economic development of the newly administrative unit, discarding Ceballos’ plan and opting for the coveted realisation of the defensive *pueblos*. In his memory, he openly states that, after the creation of the Viceroyalty and the following sanction of legal trade with the Interior, “was thought more seriously” about securing the commercial routes from the indigenous menace.²⁹ The politics of colonisation was central in Spanish attempts of strengthen its grip on the southern imperial fringes: Vértiz promoted plans for the exploration and colonisation of Patagonian coasts (as to counter Anglo-French incursions and promote fishing and salt collection), and for the foundations of new frontier towns in the Banda Oriental and in the Buenos Aires region. On 1 June 1779, he ordered the creation of a military frontier line on the banks of the Río Salado, formed by eleven military posts (five *fuertes* and six *fortines*). The *fuertes* were supposed

²⁵ Canedo, ‘Fortines y pueblos’.

²⁶ Alemanno, *op. cit.*, 207.

²⁷ Radaelli, *op. cit.*, 146.

²⁸ *Ivi*, p. 9. Different positions shaped the ideas of Spanish administrators toward the ‘indigenous problem’.

²⁹ *Ivi*, 145.

to become urban centres, and Vértiz sent there Spanish families that had arrived a few years later in the region to populate the Patagonian coast, a project that had proved unfeasible.³⁰ This plan was based on a new *reconocimiento* carried on by Coronel Francisco de Betzebé that had handed over to Vértiz a “comprehensive and enlightened diary”, and on an inspection of the territory by the commanders of the frontier Juan José Sardén, Pedro Escribano and Don Nicolás de la Quintana.³¹ The recent work of María Eugenia Alemano describes Vértiz’s swinging attitude concerning local authorities. While he followed the suggestions of the commanders of the militias in discarding the option of a large-scale expedition in *tierra adentro*, he later disregarded a plan for a new frontier line delivered to the Minister of the Indies by the same local officials, considering it too ambitious.³² Actually, Vértiz accomplished the centralisation of local resources in the hands of the new viceregal institutions, taking advantage of local disputed interests on how to advance the frontier line.³³

While the project for the new line was being carried on, indigenous groups launched the most severe raid (*malón*) of the epoch (1780), reaching Luján with 1.200 warriors. Spanish forces had not been able to prevent or stop it, which signals the weakness of the defensive forces and the inability to seal off such a vast and scattered populated territory. The Luján invasion proved once again the vital necessity of infrastructural investment for guaranteeing the security of Buenos Aires frontiers, and the creation of new populated towns was the only option available to limit the cost of establishing new forts, as the development of productive activities would generate revenues to finance the military defence of the new line. Similarly, the Viceroy realised the necessity of peace treaties with the indigenous groups, starting successful rounds of peace talks that culminated in the 1790 peace signed by his successor Loreto.

In October 1780, Vértiz published a *bando* where ordering to speed up the politics of colonisation. The commander of the frontier had to translate the families “settled in hazardous locations” next to the military forts and present to the Viceroy a census of the new inhabitants to distribute “individual parcels and lands appropriate for communities and individuals, and provide or the order, police and government required for civil life and the administration of justice among the *Vecinos* and *Pobladores* (settlers)”.³⁴ The Commanders of the Frontiers were enshrined with the authority of distributing

³⁰ The already mentioned work of De Paula is the only comparative study about Bourbon politics of colonisation, and it provides detailed statistics about the Spanish families translated first to the Patagonian outposts and then to the frontier of Buenos Aires and the Banda Oriental.

³¹ *Ivi*, 147.

³² Alemano, *op.cit.*, 268-295. The term *tierra adentro* referred to indigenous lands.

³³ He stripped the Cabildo of the management of the revenues branch financing the Blandengues, placing it and the battalions under the control of the Viceroy.

³⁴ Quoted in Canedo, ‘Fortines y pueblos’.

lands.³⁵ It was, therefore, the final step to create those new establishments on the frontier line, a measure aimed at creating a social order where Spanish authorities had not seen one.



Fig. 4. *Plano que manifiesta la Frontera de las Pampas de Buenos Ayres, que se reconoció por orden del Excelentísimo Señor don Juan Joseph de Vértiz Virrey y Capitán General de estas Provincias* (1779). AGI, Buenos Aires 120.

People have already started to follow the advance of the frontier guards. Those families established *chacras* and *estancias*, producing wheat and cattle for self-consumption and market exchange. In the words of Carlos Mayo, “they were all squatters without property title of the land they exploited, i.e. they were typical frontier producers before the generalisation of land claims”.³⁶ Living in the frontier was difficult, as the clashes with indigenous groups were widespread and the exploitation of wild cattle was a contested issue. Vértiz tried to give some order to this world. However, the results were limited as the families settled beyond the defensive line well into the 19th century to escape from authority or pushed out of their lands by the increasing rate of land appropriation by wealthy individuals.³⁷

Regarding populating the frontier, Vértiz noted that the reunion of families in the new settlement was carried on with “a lot of work, and disgust”.³⁸ These words hint at the customs and way of life of the rural population, which apparently was not conforming with the political economic ideal of Spanish

³⁵ It was a novelty, as before this innovation, the Viceroy and the Audiencias had jurisdiction over land issues.

³⁶ Mayo and Latrubesse, *Terratenientes, soldados y cautivos*, 39.

³⁷ Popular resistance to the order reunion in towns was just one of the many ways the rural population challenged state authority. Desertion was quite high in the ranks of the Blandengues and toward municipal duties such as the participation in the expeditions to Salinas Grandes. See Mayo, *Vivir en la frontera*.

³⁸ Radaelli, *op. cit.*, 151.

officials. Indeed, it is possible to further this insight through their negative description offered by the Viceroy. In explaining how the indigenous people were confident in the complacency of the rural Spanish American population during their raids, he lashes out at them, as

refusing to come to a town, many of them subsist in very unhappy and despicable huts, their families being exposed to be killed or taken captive by these enemies just for enjoying their freedom of conscience, keeping themselves in idleness, living on theft, without continence, nor fulfilling for many years the Easter precept, the mass, nor anything that indicates anything Christian and civil, because they are in all their parts of abominable customs.³⁹

Reading these words, keeping in mind the specific politico-economic ideas inspiring Spanish officials' ideology stresses the violent and coercive operations implied in the institution-building process of modern capitalist states. The territorialisation of state power, the push for establishing the rule of law, the attempt to govern the population turning it into a "useful" asset for state goals and the institutionalisation of the necessity of economic expansion were coercive projects carried on by elites through softer or harder means against subaltern classes. This statement did not stem from a romantic view of the pre-modern past but rather from the necessity of reconsidering the origin of the contemporary system of capitalist states bound together and legitimised by politico-economic abstractions. The language of the law is and was the language that legitimised state projects, as it tentatively regulated the form of legitimate land access and tenure.

However, before this territorialisation may occur, a preliminary collection of information was necessary. The numerous expeditions and *reconoscimientos* stand for the difficulty of the operation: the absence of technical expertise and instruments, the little formalisation of land-surveying and measurement, and the conflictive relationship with the indigenous world prevented Spanish authorities from expanding Buenos Aires territory at their will. When enough information was collected, the newly established viceregal power deployed its coercive ability to materialise a new frontier line and the frontier society that should defend it and sustain it. The violence was directed toward frontier communities that had autonomously developed, responding to market and demographic incentives, as their pristine political culture was not in line with the desire of Bourbon desire to govern their dominions rationally. Despite the Spanish effort, the Vértiz's line proved a short-lived solution, as peace with the indigenous was based on successive negotiations more than on military might and the new forts were progressively abandoned, and their maintenance was neglected.

³⁹ *Ivi*, 149. The despise of 'custom' was a shared trait of the Spanish Enlightenment. For a source-based discussion, see Fradkin, 'Entre la ley y la práctica'.

2. Sagasti and Land Tenure Reform

The establishment of Vértiz's line and the beginning of peace talks with indigenous groups offered the newly viceregal institutions the possibility of addressing what was starting to be perceived as obstacles to the rural productive development. Indeed, the countryside of Buenos Aires and Montevideo were being transformed by the Atlantic demand-driven commercial expansion, as after the end of the War of American Independence, the *comercio libre* came into full effect. The new *economía del cuero* was affecting the local economic system, especially in the fields of the Banda Oriental, where property rights over *vaquerías* were being disputed. Those were the sources of the bulk of hide for export, and Montevideo *hacendados* were challenging the rights of the *pueblos* of Misiones to exploit the wild cattle north of the Río Negro. Cattle and land appropriation increased on both banks of the Río de la Plata.⁴⁰

In front of this new pressure over natural resources, the 1754 legislation started to be considered detrimental. The grievances toward the *Instrucción* became widespread, as it was believed to favour land accumulation in few hands - a typical concern of Spanish Enlightened agrarianism. In those years, the most important and influential project of land reforms was sketched by Juan José de Sagasti. He directed a *representación* to the Superintendent in September 1782. However, the following year he addressed directly the King, stressing that nothing had been made to improve the situation besides some sterile discussions on the best method for measuring land.

Juan José de Sagasti's *informe* of 1782 was a vehement defence of individual land distribution and small property. As highlighted in the first chapter, land property was praised for its stimulating effects on production and trade, and its civilising role in spreading the appropriate working *ethos* for participating in a political community. In addition, the transferability of property among different generations guarantees a long-term productive stimulus. According to Sagasti, the 1754 legislation and the following commercial expansion had the unintended consequence of awakening "ambitious minds" and "Mighty ones, who without being Farmers, aspire to the ownership of immense fields". The common good was harmed by an excessive number of non-proprietors as

⁴⁰ Moraes provides a socio-economic description and analysis of the problem in her essay introducing the publication of the sources on the *arreglo de los campos de la otra Banda*. Most primary sources discussed in the following pages are part of this collection. See Moraes, *El arreglo*.

It is certain that if they had the ownership of one or half a league, they would sow, build and improve the land as a Heritage that they would pass on to their children, and these immense fields would not be seen anymore full of itinerant people rather than real Farmers.⁴¹

The text was the most ambitious project for reforming the tenure system and it was divided into three arguments. First, Sagasti believed that all sales of large estates were detrimental to the Treasury, as corrupted land surveyors were reducing taxation in accordance with the petitioners. Additionally, the calculation of the price for huge extensions implied an intrinsic “geometrical error”, which lowered public revenues even more. Second, those sales damaged the public good “in temporal and spiritual matters”.⁴² The appropriation of large estate was motivated by speculation more than the desire to expand production, and farmers were left landless, lacking means of subsistence and the moral stimulus of property and labour. Therefore, the result was that

If the same land is sold to a powerful man, an infinite number of poor farmers wander about, lacking temporal comfort and spiritual pasture, and cannot be counted as part of civil society except for harming it with death, robbery and other vices brought about by idleness, whereas they could occupy themselves honestly on the same land.⁴³

Sagasti’s third proposition was that those sales were against the King’s will because “the intention of the Sovereign can never be to foster private greed to the detriment of the common good”.⁴⁴ The argument stresses how Spanish legislation aimed at stimulating population and agriculture, and to achieve this goal, it was necessary to favour poor and landless vassals in what concerned land distribution. Interestingly, this last point suggested some solutions to the landless families’ lack of economic resources to buy land, namely the possibility of selling at *census* or distributing it in *emphyteusis*.⁴⁵

Private and public concerns were entangled in this story, as the goals of Sagasti were to benefit the public good and provide arguments for an ongoing land dispute against a man called Don Domingo Mazó. He elaborated a project for an institutional reform through arguments in political economy to advocate for his private interests. In this epoch, this was the common schema entailed in the communication between authorities and vassals (being them individuals, corporations or

⁴¹ ‘Copia del informe dirigido al Intendente de este Virreinato firmado por Juan José de Sagasti’. Buenos Aires, 8 May 1783. See Moraes, *El arreglo*, 154-155. The units of measurement are based on Garavaglia ‘¿Cómo se mide la tierra?’, 27-30. The *vara* equals 0,8666 metres, the *legua* (league) 5.199,6 metres, the *legua cuadradas* 2.700 hectares.

⁴² *Ivi*, 147. Underlined in the original.

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴ *Ivi*, 150.

⁴⁵ Even if Sagasti did not mention this specific contract, he discusses the possibility for the King to retain the property of public land in exchange for an annual canon by the recipients. *Ivi*, 152.

communities), in the epoch when economic concerns were considered fundamental for the well-being of the political body. The emphasis on the economic losses (fiscal and productive) was effective, as when the report arrived at the Crown, the imperial machine was put into motion. The report kicked off the heavy *expediente* regarding the Banda Oriental countryside - analysed in the following pages, and Viceregal local authorities evaluated Sagasti's proposal.

The *informe* was circulated among local Cabildos to gather opinions and reactions that could direct political deliberation. Another typical feature of the Spanish imperial machine is evident here: its sloth-like ability to respond, as the consultation was carried on between 1790 and 1791. Besides offering interesting insights about the meanings local Cabildos attached to this concept - as Sagasti's ideas were met with very different reactions, this analysis gives some hints on the Spanish model of governance and how local powers might try to use communication with the metropole for their personal goal.⁴⁶

The *capitulares* of Salta were enthusiastic about the project, as the distribution of land in "moderate parcels" was a way to guarantee subsistence for many vassals and populate the frontier effectively. Some doubts were only placed on the area of the *suerte* to assign, as local geography might suggest different sizes. They took advantage of the report for asking the Royal validation of property titles assigned in the last decades, as the 1754 *Instrucción* had not been locally implemented and proprietors were afraid of losing their rights in the case of a comprehensive reform: an open channel of communication with the metropole was being used to address central power with local grievances, hoping for a fast Royal legitimation to local practices of governance. The Cabildos of Asunción and Córdoba expressed similar favourable opinions.

On the other hand, "the City of Corrientes argues in the very opposite direction", defining Sagasti as "reckless" and "the cause of *pueblos*' unhappiness". The proposal was described as "a means to tyrannise the republics".⁴⁷ There has never been a limit to land appropriation of His Majesty's vassals, the *capitulares* of Corrientes believed, and the spirit of the proposal worked against the economic destination of local fields, that was, "populating *estancias* and starting up livestock breeding ranches".

⁴⁶ RAE, ML, XIX, 'Extracto del Expediente formado en la Junta Superior de R.l Hacienda á virtud de lo resuelto por R.l orn de nueve de Mayo de 1784, sobre la representacion, que con fecha de ocho de dicho Mayo del año precedente hizo a S.M. D.n Juan Josef de Sagasti, etc.', ff. 315-335.

⁴⁷ *Ivi*, f. 319.

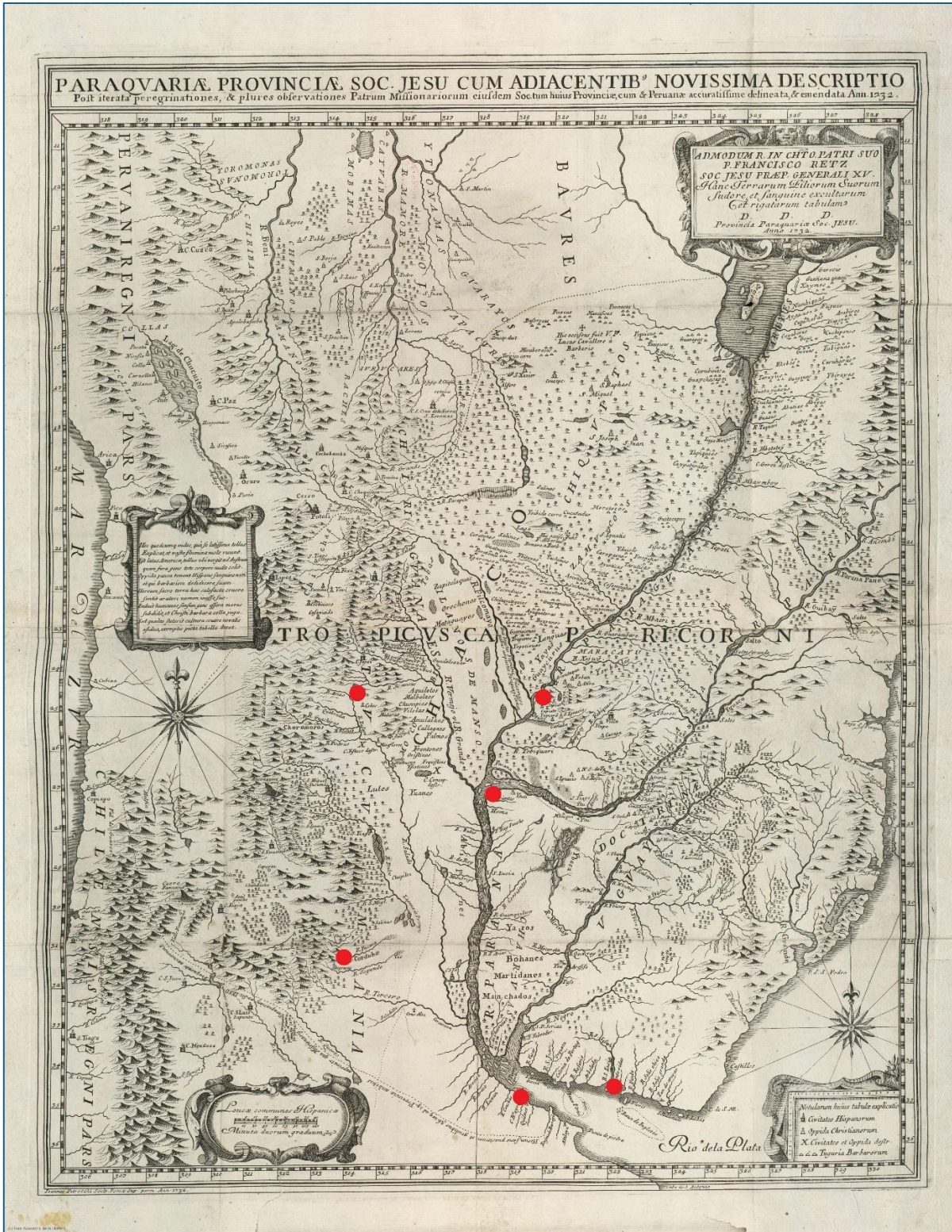


Fig. 5. Library of Congress Geography and Map Division Washington, D.C. *Paraguariæ Provinciæ soc. Jesu [etc.]*, 1732. The Cabildos that commented on the *informe* are highlighted. Personal elaboration.

The distribution of small property might suit agricultural land. However, the city was already well provisioned, and the expansion of agriculture was un-economical as external demand was not

lucrative enough. Husbandry had to be stimulated, and husbandry needed huge swaths of lands. In addition to that, Corrientes authorities recalled their particular geography, whose dense vegetation makes much land unusable, and cited the special legislation granted to Solis, a town in the Province of Cartagena (nowadays Colombia), as to cope with similar problems. They asked for a similar special treatment, putting forward their merits in defending the King's land against the indigenous enemies.

The local authorities of Buenos Aires agreed that there was little point in limiting the size of the *tierras de pastoreo* (pasture lands). The Sindico Procurador noted that even if the proposal seemed reasonable, at a closer scrutiny it was based on "pure speculation".⁴⁸ The argument about the geometric progression was discarded. In contrast, the others were counteracted, referring to the characteristics of the local socio-economic context: agricultural production was sufficient for urban supply, and there was no external demand for further commercialisation. Therefore, it was necessary to stimulate husbandry, "which is the soul of these Provinces". To do so, it was better to prohibit the subdivision of land between heirs and enforce an obligation to populate the land.⁴⁹ The Cabildo agreed with the Sindico, noting that the size Sagasti proposed, and the land allotment used by the colonisation of the Sierra Morena did not fit the necessity of local productive development. They ended with an enumeration of the proposal's critical points, that has to "be neglected, and perpetually despised". Buenos Aires elites compared the *informe* with similar historical experiences and the local context, showing a real commitment and interest for the issue.

The confrontations among contrasting arguments reached their peak in Montevideo. The Sindico Procurador, Francisco Zufriategui, penned the most fervent defence of wealthy vassals and their claims, while the Cabildo attacked his ideas in the name of the rights of the "poor farmers". To back his argument, the Sindico offered some reflections on human nature and the essence of the monarchy as a system of government. Firstly, abuses and irregularities were routine in law enforcement, as if the opposite would be true, "the Judges would not be men, but Angels".⁵⁰ Second, he passionately defended the division of social classes that the Providence had determined for the vassals of the Crown as

The Powerful and rich men are the decoration of the Crown, their wealth is the support for the Magistrates and of the State, and the Poor found help in them, as God himself wanted them to live dependent on the former for their work, and the former on the latter for their money.⁵¹

⁴⁸ *Ivi*, f. 329

⁴⁹ *Ivi*, f. 332r.

⁵⁰ *Ivi*, f. 321r.

⁵¹ *Ivi*, f. 322.

After these premises, he argued against Sagasti's three prepositions, mainly focusing on the role of wealthy individuals and large investments in stimulating overall growth. In order to meet the sovereign's desire ("that his Vassals would occupy lands, cultivate and populate with cattle"), it was impossible to give preference to the poor for land distribution, as they lacked the capital to establish new productive and lucrative activities.⁵² On the contrary, large landholdings created a "community useful to commerce", because they brought order to the disordered countryside, as they populated lands with overseas (*capataces*) and wage workers (*peones*), in addition to the families of *agregados* that settled in the land with the permission of the landowner in exchange for a small rent. Therefore, it was oddity to consider large property detrimental to the public good because

he who wanted to apply himself to the work, labour, and culture of the land, little did he care whether it was his own land, or that of others, caring only to have application and love for it, and to suffer the discomforts to which human life is subject.⁵³

Civilised customs were responsible for the inclination to work, not property. Many poor people lacked it and preferred to live in idleness and semi-nomad ways. Therefore, the government cannot limit itself to property redistribution, but it was better to enact reforms to spread industrious customs among the population. In this confrontation, we can appreciate the supporters of the old hierarchical and God-inspired social order fashioning arguments to counter the reform impulse brought about by economic expansion and politico-economic thought. As we would later appreciate, the conflictive character of political economy lies in the possibility of resorting to it to defend different political orders while arguing for economic growth and development.

However, the Cabildo of Montevideo had radically opposite ideas and "completely detached from the preceding opinion [...] which may have been inspired by someone on whom the supervision of the Mighty Ones (*los Poderosos*) could have depended".⁵⁴ Indeed, the Sindico, "shutting their ears to the moans of the Poor", was overlooking how the rich were hoarding the land, leaving it uninhabited and unproductive despite the many landless families. In addition, the *vecinos* of Montevideo suffered from the division of their original properties among heirs, now every family had to live with a very tiny parcel, and no other lands were available because of the detrimental practices of wealthy individuals. Those *vecinos* were the ones that defended the city and its territory "with the plough in

⁵² *Ibidem*. This argument resonates with physiocracy. Francois Quesnay believed that the best agricultural productive units were medium and large-scale farms, as their owners had the necessary capital to invest in their activities' productive development and strive to increase their *produit net*. For a concise but on-point discussion on this topic, see Sewell, *Capitalism and Civic Equality*, 285-290.

⁵³ *Ivi*, f. 323r.

⁵⁴ *Ivi*, f. 325r. '*Infundir a alguien algo inmaterial, como un sentimiento o una idea*'.

one hand, and the Sword in the other” in dangerous times. The King needed to recognise this service and remunerate it. The main goal of public land distribution should be “the common good, and that of the Poor, in particular of the Farmers”. If landless families did not have enough capital to buy land, the rent with redemption proposed by Sagasti was a perfect solution to guarantee productive colonisation.⁵⁵ In doing so,

the fears that the said lands would be left uncultivated (*valdías*) will be extinguished, in a short time, the number of useful vassals will increase, cattle breeding and the cultivation of fields will be incredibly stimulated, trade will flourish, and celibacy will be defeated in many places, public happiness will reign, and that city will become respectable in the eyes of the enemies of the Crown.⁵⁶

The *expediente* was completed by the report of Ortega y Monroy, the document on which Francisco de Paula Sanz formed his opinion on the matter in 1784. While he agreed with many denounced abuses, he was also critical of some proposed solutions. He believed that some large properties were detrimental but refuted Sagasti’s geometrical argument, pointing out that the real issue was the lack of professional land surveyors. Anyhow, Ortega y Monroy believed that attaining equal land distribution in a monarchical state was impossible and counterproductive because this was not coherent with its political nature, and there was no legal basis to dispossess current proprietors. Nevertheless, he established an appropriate property size (maximum 216,000 he). Frontier parcels, instead, should not exceed eight square leagues (21,600 he). He worried about fixing a maximum limit to land appropriation, albeit it was extremely high compared to whatsoever European context, given the impressive land availability in the Río de la Plata. Anyhow, the difference between frontier and interior lands is evident. Large possessions could not guarantee the appropriate defence of the Viceregal economic space.

Additionally, he pointed out the non-existence of the social class that was supposedly exploited by big landowners, the individual tenants, because small-scale agricultural production was uneconomical in the local socio-economic context: the scarce rural population can easily earn subsistence from small-scale husbandry instead of harvesting crop which had an infimum price in the local urban market. Therefore, it was necessary to foster economic education among rural producers to teach them how to diversify their production and increase their individual economic output. Ortega y

⁵⁵ The Cabildo proposed the contract called ‘censo al quitar’. It sanctions that the tenant pays an annual rent, which over time pays for the property’s value.

⁵⁶ *Ivi*, f. 327.

Monroy pointed out that the lack of education rather than the scarcity of land was responsible for the local agricultural underdevelopment.

The commercial-driven economic development of the second half of the 18th century and the viceregal institution-building process generated new practices and aspirations regarding land appropriation and its productive use. This process fed different opinions on the best legal provisions to guarantee and stimulate sustained economic growth. During the described decades, ideas regarding land legislation were shaped by different opinions regarding the best incentive to maximise individual production. If individual interest was a sufficient stimulus to work, distributing land in property would have been enough. On the contrary, people who were more sceptical regarding human nature and its laws of motion believed that a more proactive attitude from authorities would realise local dreams of economic prosperity.

Theoretical and empirical considerations shaped the debate. Indeed, local responses to Sagasti pointed to an inescapable reality: the geographical extension of the Viceroyalty and its different socio-economic contexts meant that elaborating comprehensive land legislation was not only complex but also detrimental. The optimal tenure system to sustain the path to economic growth and wealth, the common goals of local elites, differed according to the most profitable economic activity (agriculture or husbandry), the different land-to-people ratio, and the proximity of the imperial frontier. Those claims might have a critical rhetorical character. In the case of Montevideo, it is evident how individual or corporate interests might shape arguments in political economy. Sagasti's smallholding ideology was as grounded in rational legal and moral reasoning (through the language of natural law) as in his personal interest. Indeed, the dramatic rate of economic expansion and commercialisation of the Banda Oriental multiplied the conflicts around natural resources, pushing authorities to try to intervene in that respect.

3. The Banda Oriental Organisation

While Sagasti's proposal was discussed, another heavy *expediente* regarding the organisation of the countryside (*arreglo de los campos*) of the Banda Oriental was created. As already noted, the Banda Oriental was the region where economic exploitation of natural resources accelerated most, given its convenient natural landscape, the relatively easy access to Atlantic markets and the increasing urban demand from Buenos Aires and Montevideo. The problem of increasing the economic output of the Río de la Plata implied several property-related issues. The rules governing land distribution and appropriation were discussed in the administrative course Sagasti started. At the same time, the

expediente sobre el arreglo concentrated on the legitimation of property over *vaquerias*, the issue of order and security in the countryside and the one of contraband.

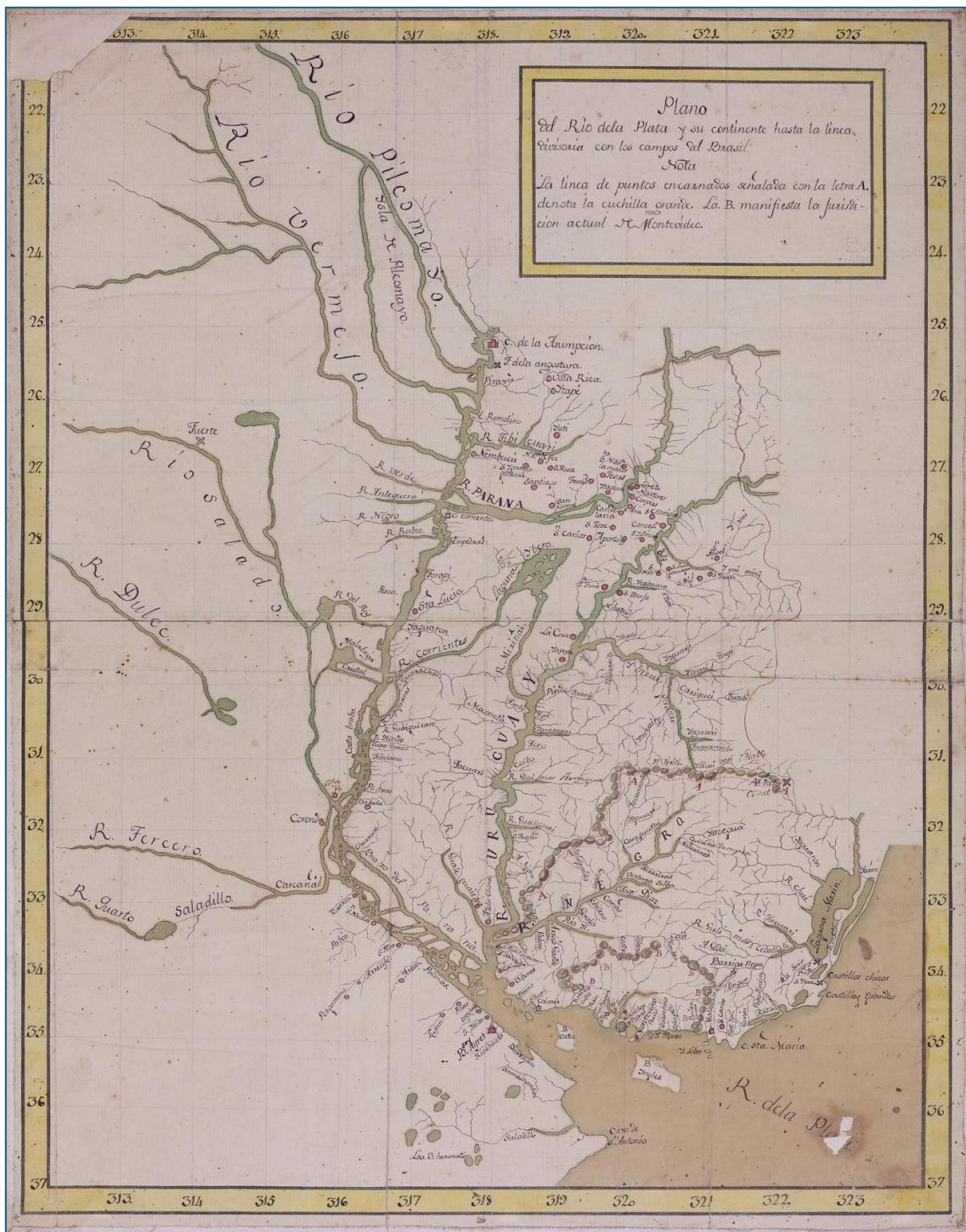


Fig. 6. *Plano del Río de la Plata y su continente hasta la línea divisoria con los campos del Brasil*. (1790s). Biblioteca Nacional Mariano Moreno, Buenos Aires. The water supply of the Banda Oriental, very evident in this map, rendered it perfect for cattle grazing.

Economic actors were complaining about the disorder governing not only the rights over land but especially and more urgently over wild cattle, as hide production was still based on the exploitation of *vaquerias*, alongside the growing number of *estancias*. For a long time, local customs adjudicated the usufruct of these natural resources according to a jurisdictional framework.⁵⁷ As wild cattle were the object of the avidity of economic actors wanting to take advantage of the favourable Atlantic conjuncture, prominent *hacendados* were already filing petitions for appropriating large territories to claim the right to exploit the wild cattle roaming in their immense estate. In particular, a conflict between the *hacendados* of Montevideo and some Guaraní towns over the exploitation of *vaquerias* located between the rivers Negro and Yí kicked off the *expediente*. The parallel reordering of property on cattle and on land was necessary to favour the productive and balanced economic development of the region. Overexploitation might lead to the depletion of cattle stock and the extinction of the most valuable local natural resources.⁵⁸

The outbreak of the jurisdictional clash between Superintendent Sanz and Viceroy Loreto shaped the issue. Indeed, the first intervention of the Ministry of Indies concerned the respective jurisdictional attributions of the two authorities: the Superintendent should prevent and suppress smuggling, while the Viceroy oversaw the repression of crime and disorder. Sanz was also in charge of collecting the relevant documents concerning the issue and translating them to the Junta Superior de la Real Hacienda in Buenos Aires, which should finally provide a resolution.

Sanz's opinion on the matter is expressed in a letter to Loreto, where he outlined his plan to bring order to the countryside based on the information he had personally collected or received from trustworthy informants.⁵⁹ One more time, Sanz stresses the need for first-hand knowledge of the local context to clarify the origins of the issue and the best remedies. However, he realised he could not obtain a clear picture of the situation, as every informant he interrogated was too involved in the issue and was trying to push his personal interest instead of the common good. Everyone involved in the *economía del cuero* was guilty of some abuse, even if Sanz notes that the *hacendados* of Montevideo were probably more guilty than others, as they had benefited from illegality more than others. The goals of the authority's efforts were stated clearly:

⁵⁷ The *vaquerias* were considered a public good. Therefore, their property was in the hands of the Crown that ceded the usufruct to communities and individuals. In 1609, the Cabildo of Buenos Aires created a register containing the name of the *vecinos* who had the right to exploit feral cattle, as they were heirs of the city's founders. The Cabildo kept on tentatively regulating this activity. Storni. *Investigaciones sobre historia del derecho*, 145.

⁵⁸ For instance, killing calves and pregnant cows was prohibited to guarantee the natural reproduction of the cattle stock.

⁵⁹ The letter heavily draws on the ideas of Ortega y Monroy.

protecting as much as possible the Frontier to prevent our Neighbours from exploiting the precious product which is the Cattle: keeping it for us as it should be: meditating on the means of preserving it in sufficient numbers so that the procreation will sufficiently ensure the continuation of the Hide Sector (*Ramo de Cueros*), the only fruit up to now of this Province and the only line of Cargo more valuable for the return of our Ships: establishing a rural Police capable of embracing all these objectives, and those of cleansing those Fields of the countless vagabonds, Outlaws and Smugglers of which it abounds and has always abounded.⁶⁰

Sanz sketched a plan for establishing new forts on the border with the Portuguese, placed in strategic points from where it would be easier to prevent the extraction of hides to Brazil or Montevideo. Commercial expansion pushed more pressing official anxieties for a fixed territorialisation of the sovereign power. If the Banda Oriental natural resources were acquiring so much value on the Atlantic markets and their economic exploitation was the main wealth of the province, it was necessary to seal this source of prosperity from the incursion of foreign powers.

To ensure continuous and long-time exploitation of natural wealth, the education of the *hacendados* was of pivotal importance: in the present situation, they “they do not know until now more profit from their *Estancias* than what the Cattle provide”, but the local fertile territories were able to produce many more products. Economic diversification would allow the increase in exportable commodities and stop the overkilling of cattle endangering their survival. Sanz did not mention how the government had to patronise the economic education of its subjects. However, his anxiety for the diffusion of useful knowledge was a common trait of Spanish Enlightened reformism. The expansion of sheep breeding would increase the number of exportable commodities, such as the cultivation of flax and hemp.⁶¹

If Sanz did not mention what politics could have done concerning education, he did devote many pages to describe how to establish a “perfect Police adapted to the state of the Country and of the Countryside” in charge of repressing and preventing crimes and illicit activities.⁶² An effective patrolling of the territory would prevent Portuguese extraction of hides, the indiscriminate slaughtering of other proprietors’ cattle and the ongoing spread of illegality. Besides guaranteeing a safe environment for honest producers, efforts to suppress lawfulness were directed at turning

⁶⁰ Francisco de Paula Sanz to Marquis of Loreto. Buenos Aires, 4 August 1785. See Moraes, *El arreglo*, 82.

⁶¹ As we have seen, this provision was present in Macanaz’s *Nuevo Sistema* and the *Real ordenanza de intendentes*. Additionally, it will be the object of one of Manuel Belgrano’s *Memorias* to the Trade Consulate.

⁶² *Ivi*, 105.

criminals and idles into useful vassals, the best way to increase the productive and legitimate members of the political community.

Sanz and the other administrators must “all do our utmost to make this class of people, pestilential to society as a whole, individuals useful to it, by reducing them to Population, and by applying them to know and practise the true obligations of Christians and Vassals”.⁶³ Establishing new towns was part of implementing order and police in the chaotic rural landscape, and Sanz did not include instructions regarding this aspect in his letter because those were already present in Loreto’s proposal. Finally, the last additional administrative reform was the creation of a “Commander of the Countryside” in charge of the new police units and the jurisdictional authority over offences committed in the countryside.⁶⁴ Enlightened economic reformism inspired Sanz’s ideas: education and religion will contribute to developing commercial and civil customs, together with the energetic action of state power.

Viceroy Loreto was more inclined to deploy coercion and control to solve rural problems. He urged for the repression of the social groups responsible for crimes and disorder, albeit some provisions were impractical, to say the least.⁶⁵ In his letter to Sanz, he enumerated a long list of issues which authorities should strictly regulate: cattle slaughtering should be permitted only in particular slaughterhouses (*mataderos*); the introduction of a new rural tribunal; the collection of information about the rural socio-economic landscape; the organisation of military draft for vagrants; a new regulation of rural markets. Regarding property titles, Loreto suggested forcing proprietors to present their titles and withdrawing the ones concerning suitable lands to establish new towns.

In any case, the relevant documents were delivered to the Junta Superior in 1787. However, the *expediente* did not progress until 1792, when the metropolitan power solicited a resolution, which, again, never was. Three years later, the Minister of Treasury Gardoqui returned to the issue. In June 1795, he ordered Viceroy Melo de Portugal to finally solve “as quickly as possible” the problems of the Banda Oriental, whose *expediente* of the previous decade had remained unfulfilled.⁶⁶ This time, the prominent members of the Audiencia produced two erudite reports on the matter, whose plan of reform “went farther and further in this area than the enlightened agrarian reform of Campomanes,

⁶³ *Ivi*, 114.

⁶⁴ This suggestion recalls the process of detachment of the *potestad oeconomica* from jurisdictional control described in the previous chapter. See Casagrande, *op. cit.*

⁶⁵ Loreto proposed to prohibit edged weapons and strictly control the knives distributed during cattle slaughtering, a measure impossible to enforce for the little presence of state agents in the countryside and the utmost importance of knives in the everyday life of the *gauchos*.

⁶⁶ Diego de Gardoqui to Pedro Melo de Portugal. Aranjuez, 6 June 1795. See Moraes, *El arreglo*, 435.

Olavide and Jovellanos”, according to María Inés Moraes.⁶⁷ It is interesting to note the first intervention of this newly-established institution on the matter, mainly because the Audiencia held jurisdiction over land issues. Manuel de Herreras, Fiscal del Crimen y Protector General de Naturales, issued a report attacking the proposed rigour in fighting smugglers and thefts in favour of land and cattle privatisation. The distribution of public lands in “individual *Dominio*” meant that “each individual will look after his Estate as he sees fit.”. In this way, the government had just to “be watchful” because

those, and other restrictions which have been established against the private domain under the pretext of public utility, are generally considered, as reason and experience thought, harmful to the public as well as to the private individual.⁶⁸

Herreras was against the rigorism of some previous proposals (especially Loreto’s), as indirect means were more useful to incline the population to improve their economic and therefore moral habits. In addition, he recognised that the state did not have sufficient governmental power to seal off Spanish territory from smuggling with the Portuguese, discipline its vassals and punish every rural crime. Herreras also shared the Enlightenment humanism that we already found in another Protector de Naturales, Victorián de Villava, as his preference for soft governmental means rather than coercive practices attests. His ideas regarding the property rights of indigenous communities represent an interesting point, as noted by Moraes. He defended their communal right over *vaquerias*, as it was more in line with their mode of cattle exploitation. Even if he saw individual property as the most rational and efficient type of land property, the socio-economic and cultural differences mattered in delineating effective policies. His opinion regarding the difficult balance between theory and practice is evident in his comment on Sagasti. The Protector de Naturales believed that “although its numbers are evident in Theory, in practice the proposed benefit will never be realised”, and thus he discarded his project.⁶⁹

The Oidor Francisco Garasa offered a report on a similar line concerning the privatisation of natural resources. However, his proposal partly relied on a significant state effort to suppress illicit trade, establish criminal courts in the countryside, and expel the Portuguese residing in the Banda Oriental.

⁶⁷ Moraes, *el arreglo*, CXXVI. The text of Herrera and the Anonimo of 1794 were recently studied to analyse the ideas regarding property rights on land, which guided reformistic attempts in the Río de la Plata. Moraes and Arillaga note that Herrera and the Anonimo, despite their differences, shared the preference for privatising public lands, albeit with exceptions and restrictions - some of which were far more radical than the peninsular reformist thought. This chapter aims to deepen their findings. Moraes and Rodríguez Arrillaga, ‘Propiedad comunal y propiedad individual’.

⁶⁸ Francisco Manuel de Herreras to the Junta Superior de Hacienda. Buenos Aires, 30 May 1796. See Moraes, *El arreglo*, 445.

⁶⁹ *Ivi*, 453.

Again, it is evident the extent to which the Spanish Enlightened governing elite believed in the central role of individual interest in stimulating individual labour maximisation. In contrast, the limits of the state governing action were a debated subject. Garasa also offered interesting comments on land measurement and sale. He noted that confusion reigned supreme until 1785, mainly because the jurisdiction on land sales was attributed to the Audiencia of Charcas. The establishment of the Audiencia in Buenos Aires was a step forward, even if it still needed more power, authority and expertise to regulate the land markets and the privatisation of public lands. Therefore, it was necessary to nominate “a well-trained and gifted Commissioner, who is a law professor, honest, practical, and intelligent, as an Inspector (*Visitador*)”, who was in charge of revising the transactions in land of the last ten years, as well as to supervise the future ones, together with new *Jueces Subdelegados* and land surveyors, to be created in each district of the countryside.⁷⁰ Garasa considered state administrative power to be a *conditio sine qua non* in ending the current abuses in land appropriation. Finally, he agreed with Sagasti, and he believed that land should be distributed in *suertes de estancia* and in *censo redimible*, so that “the poor will be able to acquire holdings and estates, to the settlement and cultivation of which it is to be hoped that they will devote themselves with more care and effort than others”.⁷¹

A voice from the frontier echoed these preoccupations. The Commander of Cerro Largo Agustín de la Rosa wrote in 1794-1795 to the Viceroy Arredondo and Melo de Portugal denouncing the detrimental ways in which the colonisation of the fields north of the Río Negro was being carried on. Few individuals were appropriating an immense territory for exploiting cattle, while the establishment of towns and the distribution of smallholdings to landless families would have increased the useful population and created soldiers to defend Spanish territory from Portuguese contraband or aggression.

Religion and property were necessary to stimulate individual interest and the development of civilised customs in the dispersed population of the countryside. Indeed, de la Rosa suggested that Melo de Portugal appoint a “commissioner”, granting him the powers to establish a new town on the frontier. The official would have the jurisdiction for congregating dispersed families and granting them land, helping them in building houses and ranchos, and overseeing their participation in religious services, “leading them at the same time to the knowledge of their true interests, the management of their breeding and herding and the improvement of their possessions”.⁷² The Commander acknowledged that the proposal was against the established legislation concerning land distribution and sale, but the

⁷⁰ Francisco Garasa to the Junta Superior de Hacienda. Undated. See Moraes, *El arreglo*, 492.

⁷¹ *Ivi*, 500.

⁷² Agustín de la Rosa to Viceroy Melo de Portugal. Buenos Aires, 7 May 1795. See Azcuy Ameghino, *El latifundio y la gran propiedad*, 184.

“local conditions” required the creation of this powerful “commissioner”, a figure which strikingly resembles the Intendant of the Nuevas Poblaciones. The idea to solve the countryside security issues thanks to the crude deployment of an absolute *potestad oeconomica* would reiterate in the following decades, and it will suddenly materialise in the late 1820s, when Juan Manuel de Rosas would establish a new southern frontier line.

As the breakthrough of war against the British in 1797 prevented the reorganisation of the countryside from being carried on, the flux of petitions did not stop. During the first years of the 19th century, administrators and frontiers commanders sketched other plans and reports that were directed at similar goals: the promotion of agricultural production and social order through the distribution of land, the registration of titles, the regulation of the size of the parcels, the colonisation of the frontier zone and the appointment of an authority in charge of the reform of the countryside.⁷³

4. Opinions on the New Institutions and Further Proposals

After analysing this chorus of multiple voices, it is necessary to step one moment aside and sketch some preliminary remarks. Economic development in the regions of Buenos Aires and Montevideo accelerated during the 18th century thanks to the Atlantic demand. It provided the economic incentive for increasing the exploitation of wild cattle for hide production. The new pressure on natural resources generated different kinds of property-related conflicts: confrontations between Buenos Aires producers and Pampa groups that pushed local authorities to establish a locally financed permanent militia and to prepare the future extension and defence of the southern frontier; calls against the rate of land appropriation by wealthy individuals contrasted by proposals for a state regulated land distribution; the development of a disordered and dangerous rural landscape in the Banda Oriental, where jurisdictional conflicts prevented an effective patrolling and administration of justice by the state.

Spanish political economy and Bourbon reformism were the intellectual framework from which the ideas to solve those issues were drawn. All the participants in the discussion believed that economic growth was based on improved agriculture, the expansion of rural industry and a vibrant commerce. The creation of a territory, its effective exploitation, and the appropriation of more land were ways to enhance local and Spanish power and wealth, thanks to the valorisation of local natural resources in the Atlantic markets. The discussion revolved around the best means to reach this end. Alongside the

⁷³ Pivel Devoto, *Raíces coloniales*, 60-69. Felix de Azara and Miguel de Lastarria offered their observation, as well as the commanders Jorge Pacheco and Joaquin de Soria.

world of ideas, however, lied the individual interests of the actors involved: small producers wished for a fair administration of justice that favoured their possession rights and prosecuted criminals; some wealthy merchants turned to land appropriation and wanted to have their new property rights secured against old customary claims; others hoped that the non-definition of land rights should continue, as to keep on profiting from illegal economic practices; the Cabildos of Buenos Aires and Montevideo tried to expand their jurisdiction to govern economic expansion and exploitation on their behalf. Individual interests, diverging ideas regarding economic policies and the limited reach of governmental power contributed to the difficult enforcement of economic reformism.

Besides strategic and military reasons, the creation of the new Viceroyalty responded to the urgency of promoting Spanish American economic development, and it was followed by the establishment of new institutions with economic jurisdiction as the Suprema Junta de la Real Hacienda, the Audiencia, the Superintendency, and Montevideo custom house. The extension of the *comercio libre* to Buenos Aires included the region in the economic benefits resulting from a further increase in Atlantic trade. At a local level, Spanish authorities sought to control the territory by establishing a government framework created by religious, judicial and military power.⁷⁴ The *pueblos* were the places (*loci*) of authority represented by *alcaldes*, *curas* and militia commanders. The fact that these officials were usually part of the local communities (especially the *alcaldes*) hindered the state project of establishing non-consuetudinary and impartial local power. Indeed, the end of the 18th century represents the beginning of the territorialisation of state power which will eventually conclude at the end of the following one.

Although the economic growth rate during this period was impressive, it cannot be argued that it only resulted from institutional innovation. The new institutions tried to govern a flourishing economic landscape driven by external demand generated by silver, urbanisation and individual interest. They did it effectively for what concerns growth rate, as the economic expansion did not stop until the halt to international commerce following Spain's entrance into the Revolutionary Wars. However, they were far less effective in harmonising local interests and in conciliating the metropolitan with the local ones.

While growth and prosperity marked Buenos Aires and Montevideo's daily life, new ideas for the economic development of the region and an evaluation of what had already been done were expressed to authorities, notwithstanding the unresolved problems generated by commercial expansion. As noted in the previous chapter, urbanisation and growth generated processes of social segmentation

⁷⁴ Barral and Fradkin, 'Los pueblos y la construcción'.

among the local population, and those groups expressed their common interest regarding the local economic future.

In November 1793, the *labradores* of Buenos Aires directed to the King a *representación* advocating for the inclusion of wheat trade in the *comercio libre*, to increase revenues and stimulate production. Trade in staple food has been always heavily regulated by European central authorities, to prevent shortages and famines. However, some Enlightened reformers attacked those old customary practices in the name of the new economic ideas of individual liberty in the market. During the 1760s failed attempts of deregulation in Spain and France pushed popular revolts and the reforms were in the end repealed. The issue was central also in intellectual debates, as it is signalled by the discussions surrounding the publication of *Dialogues sur le commerce des bleds* (Paris, 1770). In the book, the famous “economist” Ferdinando Galiani refuted in a satirical and dialogical way the physiocratic ideas about the deregulation of the wheat trade.

The *Representación* opened by placing its requests in the context of the *comercio libre* implemented in 1778 and other Royal provisions that repealed custom duties from enslaved Africans, working instruments and salted meat, a manifestation of the “royal benevolence, aimed at the promotion of agriculture in these countries”.⁷⁵ The *labradores* expressed enthusiasm for the recent season of economic reforms and they wanted it to continue. The Río de la Plata was “a poor country, as it has no other mines than the fruits the earth produces, and it would be the richest if their export would be encouraged”.⁷⁶ Therefore, it was necessary to stimulate external trade in agricultural commodities to promote local production, as lower prices would increase their demand. The abundance of natural resources meant that the spectre of famine - the main argument of the advocates of staple food regulation - should not be scaring local authorities, as well as the experience of other European countries that had successfully implemented trade deregulation.

The petition was built in the Spanish political and economic framework, where “the real wealth of a country are the fruits that the cultivation of the land produces, and in this consists the subsistence, the increase and the power of the people and the sovereign”.⁷⁷ The adjective “real” (*verdadera*) signals that agricultural commodities were the first form of wealth, as they were necessary for subsistence and industry in the form of raw materials to be later processed.⁷⁸ Indeed, agriculture, industry and

⁷⁵ ‘Representación de los labradores’, 173.

⁷⁶ *Ivi*, 177.

⁷⁷ *Ivi*, 185.

⁷⁸ The traditional misinterpretation of the influence of physiocracy has already been pointed out. In this text, it is evident that agriculture was considered the “real” wealth for its generative power, but it was not considered the “only” wealth, as it would have been in the words of the physiocrats.

trade were obviously considered interdependent, and the well-being of the sovereign and the population were going hand in hand. The expansion of agricultural production, therefore, meant the increase in a country's wealth, and this should be reached through an economic governance that would favour the free expression of individual interest.

The profit that those who work the land find is the spring that enlivens them, and this desire is what makes agriculture flourish, everyone toils for their own interest and benefit [...] In order for the sources from which the wealth of individuals and the community flow not to dry up, the profit of those who work must be promoted, and this will never be great if grains do not have free circulation [...] This freedom produces circulation, circulation produces profits, and profits produce industry [...] This truth, although so clear and evident, has not been recognised in Buenos Aires, and for this reason, efforts have been made to hinder and restrict the wheat trade instead of promoting it.⁷⁹

The *labradores* of Buenos Aires firmly believed in the axiomatic economic law, which stated that “the desire for profit is the most lively stimulus to stimulate men to work”, that in an agricultural country meant the need to deregulate trade in agricultural commodities, especially wheat.⁸⁰ They argued that the stimulus to agricultural production would turn many vagrants and criminals into useful vassals, thus solving a chronic local rural issue. Again, economic expansion and prosperity were fundamental to stimulate a virtuous morality. Therefore, they welcomed the institutional innovation that followed the Viceroyalty's creation and asked for an additional privilege to continue on the pathway to prosperity.

Similarly, the *hacendados* of Buenos Aires and Montevideo directed to Minister Gardoqui a memorial suggesting the best provisions to increase trade and wealth in the Río de la Plata.⁸¹ The document resonates with the *Representación de los labradores*, when it recalls the recent season of commercial reforms that proved the Royal desire to favour the region's economic development. Here again, institutional innovations are welcomed as they contribute to the increasing prosperity of the region. The *Memorial* then describes the local manifestations of the five “fundamental arts of any state” (hunting, fishing, husbandry, agriculture and metallurgy) to discover the best activities to be promoted by governmental means. Given the resourceful natural landscape, agriculture and husbandry are

⁷⁹ *Ivi*, 184.

⁸⁰ As was evident in the analysis of Sanz's ideas, the belief in the importance of individual interest was widespread despite different opinions circulating on the role of governmental action in stimulating its development.

⁸¹ Interestingly, the *hacendados* of Buenos Aires and Montevideo signed the *Memorial*, notwithstanding the growing rivalry between the two city-ports.

considered the basis for building the region's wealth, but the latter gains the authors' preference.⁸² The great Atlantic demand for hides and meat, and the abundance of cattle turned husbandry into the economic activity that could better develop local economic potential. If the application of labour was based on the prospect of individual gain, it follows that the favoured activity was the one that could guarantee the best marginal gain.

The *Memorial* describes in detail how to improve the production and trade of salted meat, an activity that had started under governmental protection during the 1780s to economically exploit the cattle meat being wasted in the commercialisation of hides.⁸³ The recommendations included, among others, the provision of the experts needed for the industry (Irish salted-meat producers, Spanish master coopers), the creation of a joint-stock company, the increase in security in the countryside, and the establishment of prizes for innovative productive techniques. The development of the meat industry would be the catalyst for the promotion of other industrial branches, and "the increase in population, the acquisition of wealth, and the natural and civil happiness of this province would soon materialise".⁸⁴ Through the analysis of a single industry (meat), the documents illustrated the interdependence between primary production, industry and trade that formed the basis of Spanish political economy. Husbandry indeed provided the raw materials for subsistence and industry. The latter is defined in an illuminating manner:

Under the generic rubric of industry, we understand all the opportunities that our soil offers in whatever product it yields that are capable of receiving some new form, improvement or benefit through the work of man [...] Industry is the master key to opulence [...] by setting agriculture, industry and traffic in motion, the Royal Treasury will prosper [...] In order to direct this branch correctly, the science of economics and commerce is very necessary.⁸⁵

Indeed, there is no contradiction between the *Representación de los labradores* - that defined agriculture as the "true wealth of a nation" - and the above-quoted praise of industry. The promotion of trade in salted meat and agricultural products (especially wheat) could go hand in hand, as some paragraphs later, the *Memorial* states that it was necessary to facilitate trade in "the fruits of which the country abounds, and the goods that are made from them". Trade opening would generate "an

⁸² 'Memorial de los hacendados' (1794), 15. In the section dealing with local agricultural development, the author expresses his support for liberalising grain trade and adherence to the previous year's *Representación de los labradores*.

⁸³ Montoya, *Cómo evolucionó la ganadería*.

⁸⁴ *Ivi*, 31.

⁸⁵ *Ivi*, 39.

enthusiasm for trade”, pushing more and more economic actors to participate in the lucrative activities as “the profit that they foresee raises their hopes, and these give greater vigour to the work they do”.⁸⁶

In 1794, another comprehensive writing on the economic state of the Río de la Plata appeared, but this time, the anonymous author offered some reflections in contrast with the previous proposals.⁸⁷ The text was directed to the Viceroy, and it was aimed at offering solutions for the disordered state of the Banda Oriental countryside and trade, offering a plan to seal off the *rioplatense* economic space from external menace, as it could be economically exploited only by Spanish vassals and to the benefit of Spain.

The fundamental difference between the Anonimo and the two previous petitions is their opinion regarding the 1778 *comercio libre* and its effect on the Spanish imperial commercial machine. While the petitions praised it for having incredibly incremented the volume of trade with beneficial effects on local production, the Anonimo believes that 1778 inaugurated an “era of decadence” and devoted half of his work to augmenting this claim in detail. Here, his European point of view is clear, as he denounced how the *comercio libre* favoured the enrichment of American producers at the expense of Spanish merchants. The sole goal of the reform seemed, “to better the fortunes of the American and annihilate the Europeans”.⁸⁸

The text is a brilliant example of Gálvez’s “tutelary colonialism”. Indeed, the organisation of the Montevideo countryside was not a goal *per se*, but it was considered a means to increase royal revenue and re-establish a sufficient profit for the Spanish merchants that were trading in *rioplatense* commodities. The Anonimo devotes many paragraphs to condemning an economic actor that appeared in Montevideo after the boom in hides demand following 1778, the *comerciante hacendado*.

Those wealthy individuals were vertically integrating the hide commodity chain, as they were merchants that acquired land titles to claim property rights over wild cattle. The Anonimo provided an extensive socio-economic critique of the wealthy merchants that appropriated land for the sake of the cattle pasturing in it. They enjoyed an enormous rate of profit as they were obtaining the raw material (hides) at a lowest price, then selling them directly in the European markets thanks to their attorneys in Spanish ports. Spanish merchants, instead, paid higher prices for hides in the Montevideo markets, and their profits in the Southern Atlantic trade were reduced to the freight contracts. This

⁸⁶ *Ivi*, 33.

⁸⁷ Moraes and Arillaga discuss the possible dating and authors of the 1794 Anonimo. The document was found in the Colección Mata Linares, and it is possible that the same Benito de la Mata Linares was the author, given the style and “colonialist” beliefs that were expressed. See Moraes and Rodríguez Arrillaga, *op. cit.*

⁸⁸ Martínez Díaz, *Noticias sobre el Río de la Plata*, 149.

situation was new, and abuses were inspired by European hide demand and the non-definition of property rights in the Banda Oriental.

He then provided an interesting genealogy of the property rights in local natural resources. In the aftermath of the colonisation of the Río de la Plata, the scarce population could easily enjoy the endless natural resources,

as cattle abounded, and were little esteemed, the pronouns mine and thine were not brought into the country; and it would have been a grievous tribute in those times to have given men a special dominion over cattle, having them all in common, without the expense and care which it costs to keep what is owned in particular.⁸⁹

After the trade expansion following the foundation of Montevideo and the Ceballos expedition, the absence of adequate provisions to “regulating property and usufruct” endangered the flourishing natural resources and the lack of state authority in creating an institutional framework for a balanced economic extraction.⁹⁰ The exploitation of cattle skyrocketed, but “was planned without rules and guided by each individual interest, without the government taking the lead in this important enterprise”.⁹¹

The Anonimo is sceptical regarding the possibility that individual self-interests could autonomously coordinate to allocate economic resources perfectly. The lack of a centralised and regulated tenancy system meant that proprietors reclaimed the property of whatsoever head of cattle they found roaming in their lands, a practice that resembled what the Ancient Romans called the right of *adluvio*.⁹² Given that it was widespread that the animals escaped from their owners’ lands, proprietors felt legitimate in claiming the property of a number of heads equal to the ones they lost, in case the cattle passed through their lands, irrespective of their origin. This economic practice, dictated by the context, gave rise to new customs despised by the author in a passage worth quoting:

As there was no higher power to circumscribe the powers of this body [of powerful landowners], each individual believed himself entitled to pursue justice in his own cause; [...] And thus, by a tacit consent and reciprocal convenience of that uncivil republic, theft became a proper title of

⁸⁹ *Ivi*, 61.

⁹⁰ *Ivi*, 69-70.

⁹¹ *Ivi*, 83. Here, the idea of ‘tutelary colonialism’ found a crystal-clear expression.

⁹² It is the right to appropriate any increase in rural property due to the gradual and constant deposit of debris by a river along its bank.

dominion, creating a kind of municipal law (contrary to the natural law of God and of nations), the most original and barbarous that men have ever used.⁹³

The abuses of the wealthy individual encouraged the abuses of the population, and an increasing number of people dedicated themselves to illicit killings of cattle to sell their hides. Those *changadores* were so numerous as to form a “corporation” (*Gremio*), in the Anonimo’s words, and they were among the worst causes of the distress of the countryside, as they were feeding thefts and contraband. The Anonimo describes this republic as “uncivil” because the Law of Nations was subverted by pernicious practices, whose diffusion elevated to the rank of customs and therefore right, even if “original and barbarous”. Here, the Enlightened distrust for pre-modern legal pluralism is evident, as the author recognised that practices might be turned into normative right if the community widely accepted them. However, the absence of the rule of law and state power regulation meant that uncivil practices might become common sense and accepted even if they were against natural law.

Remedies to this situation are twofold and are based on the actions of the state and religion. First, it was necessary to implant order and a shared law in the countryside to secure individual property rights over land and cattle and better regulate the hide market. Second, the foundation of rural chapels was necessary to bring religion to those desert lands and increase the morality and respect for the law among the scattered population. The introduction of secure property rights and religion were the provisions through to which “all nations have been civilised, great cities have been formed, barbarians have been tamed, infidels have been conquered and the world has been connected”.⁹⁴ The application of this recipe for growth and civilisation had already proved fruitful, as it turned the agrarian colonies of the Sierra Morena into “the most eternal monument to the august memory of the Señor Don Carlos III”.⁹⁵ Agricultural colonisation and the expansion of the commodity frontier were considered pivotal remedies for the moral and economic regeneration of the local community.

The three documents put forward different proposals for further economic expansion. While the *Representación* and the *Memorial* petitioned to expand the unfolding political economy based on agricultural and processed goods, the Anonimo was more concerned with conservative measures meant to attain a balanced but long-lasting development. In this respect, he stressed the importance of the state regulation of land access and legitimate property titles. However, enforcing a rational tenure system was not a way to promote local economic expansion, the Anonimo argued, but it was

⁹³ *Ivi*, 84.

⁹⁴ *Ivi*, 129.

⁹⁵ *Ivi*, 130.

meant to restore the profit rate of Spanish merchants against the illegal practices of the *comerciantes hacendados*.

5. New Advocates for Smallholding

During the same years, property issues continued to generate debates in the Río de la Plata. Local administrators put forward new proposals for individual land distribution and the rural world started to participate in this conversation through the voices of local authorities (militia commanders or rural priests) and legal cases that tried to resist land appropriation.

In 1795, a new *expediente* was formed to address the issue of advancing and populating the southern frontier, following a *representación* of the “*hacendados* of the countryside of this shore (*banda*)” and the Cabildo.⁹⁶ Local authorities have been asking for the advancement of Vértiz’s line since 1786, and the proposal for the establishment of the Hermandad de la Mesta included the foundations of new *pueblos*.⁹⁷ The document manifests their dissatisfaction with how the settlement of Vértiz’s line had been carried on, as it had a purely military scope. While the protagonists of the original plan were soldiers meant to be “*vecinos* and settlers”, the new guards were instead created by “foreigners who are only interested in their wages, so that they do not love the landscape, nor do they take care to improve it, nor do they form *pueblos*”, because the Blandengues did not have “lands in property”. It was necessary to distribute it at the condition of populating it within one year, granting tax exemptions for ten years and avoiding the distribution of large estates, as the principle of population should be the guiding line of the project.

Indeed, Viceroy Pedro de Melo took charge of the situation and assigned Félix de Azara, a distinguished member of the local Enlightened elite, to survey the southern countryside and sketch a new frontier line. Geographer and topographer, Azara had been working in the Banda Oriental since the previous decade, drawing maps and writing colonisation plans for the Spanish-Portuguese frontier. He was born in Barbuñales, Aragon. After studying philosophy and law at the University of Huesca, he opted for a career in the military and moved to Barcelona to study engineering at the Academia de Matemáticas. Imperial rivalries shaped his life course. In 1781, he was ordered to sail for the Southern Cone to participate in the geographic expedition to fix the new frontier between South American Portuguese and Spanish territories, as sanctioned by the Treaty of San Ildefonso (1777). He stayed in the region until 1801, and in those two decades, he took part in many

⁹⁶ RAE, ML, XIX, ‘Representación de los hacendados del Campo de esta vanda’, ff. 32-34. This is the only document mentioning this 1795 *expediente*.

⁹⁷ Alemán, *op. cit.*, 310.

geographical expeditions aimed at measuring and mapping the territories of the Crown, exploring them and collecting as much useful information as possible at the orders of the Viceroy of the Río de la Plata. Azara was accompanied by representatives of the segment of Buenos Aires population interested in the advancement of the frontier: members of the Enlightened elite (the geographers Pedro Cerviño and Juan Insiarte), frontier authorities (the commanders of the Blandengues Manuel de Pinazo and Nicolas de Quintana), and urban merchants (the Teniente de Dragones Carlos Belgrano Pérez).⁹⁸ Indeed, María Eugenia Alemano noted that the proposal put forward by Azara “crystallised previous consensuses and ones yet to be built on the border issue”.⁹⁹

Azara’s *informe* stated very clearly that “I think it is undoubtedly convenient to advance the frontier, because with this we gain more land, and in it we secure many hides for trade, meat and bread for the capital, and mules for Peru, and our present *estancias* will be safe, where the *Indios* will not be able to penetrate”.¹⁰⁰ The extension of the commodity frontier was needed in order to expand the production of commodities (hides and mules) destined to the most important economic partners for Buenos Aires (the Atlantic overseas markets and the silver-producing region of Potosí), and to feed the growing urban demand of the city port. Azara offered a detailed plan of the new frontier line, drawing on his experience in Paraguay and the Banda Oriental and providing a precise project for building the forts as they would be the most effective for resisting indigenous raids.

The best defensive measure, however, was to populate them, following the example of the “Portuguese and other foreigners”, who enacted a policy of frontier population distributing lands in individual property “because they know that property right which they are given not only animates to build up, but is also a chain which binds men for ever”.¹⁰¹ The power of property to fix people to land was a recurrent topic in local discourse. In the same year, Captain Sebastian de Undiano y Gastelu sketched a proposal that coupled the expansion of the frontier to the Río Negro with securing communication between Chile and Buenos Aires to achieve “the peaceful conquest of *seventeen thousand square leagues of land*, situated on the best soil in the universe”.¹⁰² A central aspect was the distribution of land to the Blandengues and to the families living in the frontier, “in full property and

⁹⁸ Belgrano, brother of Manuel, was a military man, but also part of a prominent merchant family.

⁹⁹ *Ivi*, 315. In the past, intellectual sharing liberal ideas such as him were considered intellectual pioneers who tried to modernise the region notwithstanding the social and political backwardness. However, their better contextualisation revealed that they were voicing shared ideas.

¹⁰⁰ Azara, *Diario de un reconocimiento de la frontera*, 36.

¹⁰¹ *Ivi*, 39.

¹⁰² Undiano y Gastelu, *Proyecto de traslacion de las fronteras*, 3. Emphasis in the original.

for free, whereby they would be seen to build, cultivate and improve possessions, this being a chain that binds men for ever and ever”.¹⁰³



Fig. 7. José Espinosa y Tello. *Carta Esférica de la parte Interior de la América Meridional para manifestar el camino que conduce desde Valparaíso a Buenos Aires*, 1794 (1810). Biblioteca Nacional de España (Madrid), Sala Goya. The focus on internal communication is evident in this map realised in the context of the Malaspina expedition (1789-1994).

The Blandengues were central also in Azara’s colonisation plan, as they had to represent the first settlers of the new frontier, “not only because they defend them and secure them as soldiers, but also because they are native and reliable settlers, and their offspring will be, giving them land and places to settle”.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, a legitimate property right and its title allows goods to be inherited from fathers to sons, creating this perpetual movement based on family sentiments: fathers would work hard and improve their property to pass it to their descendants allowing their future subsistence. Azara admitted it was possible to “gather people with the force”, but he opted for “doing it with soft means”, which includes the distribution of lands, tax exemptions and credit to start productive activities.¹⁰⁵ He also

¹⁰³ *Ivi*, 7.

¹⁰⁴ *Ivi*, 40.

¹⁰⁵ Besides a reference to the discussion regarding the soft or hard governmental means to reform population and society – a debate that characterised Enlightened economic reformism, Azara was probably referring also to the coercive measures employed by Vértiz to create the southern line of forts.

noted that indigenous families were welcomed to populate Spanish frontier towns. Obviously, he touches upon the problem of large estates. He pointed at the damage of granting huge swaths of lands to wealthy individuals, as they would expel the settlers that were autonomously populating the land, doing nothing more than “enslaving the real inhabitants, without increasing livestock, nor a single *vecino*”.¹⁰⁶

The outbreak of hostilities against the British (1797-1802) and the Portuguese (1801-1802) diverted resources from the project. However, once the conflicts ceased Azara’s ideas resonated with Buenos Aires press. Cerviño published in the *Semanario* a comprehensive project for extending the Viceroyalty frontier and distributing empty lands.¹⁰⁷ He started from the centrality of knowledge to obtain power and wealth from the exploitation of the natural resources of the Viceroyalty. First, Spaniards should explore and get to know American nature to be able to craft a system of trade in which each region would get richer exchanging their natural products. While trade increased the value and demand for products, agriculture and husbandry were the most important activities, as they provided the natural products to be transformed and exchanged. Therefore, extending Spanish territory would gain more land to be valued in the market and increase private and public wealth.

He was another partisan of the free distribution of empty land, and he proposed to send a petition to the King asking for permission to proceed, as

our population would advance in one year, perhaps more than in the previous hundred years. Let there be no limit to the amount of land to be given. The aim is to populate. Everyone should be given as much as he asks for without any other condition than to populate it within the year with 300 cows for each square league of land.¹⁰⁸

The examples of the Sierra Morena and the Patagonian coast were remembered as a sound success vis-a-vis an almost complete failure. In any case, these previous state-sponsored colonisation plans proved the Crown’s interest in the matter. Therefore, the King would hopefully listen to the pleas of his vassals, who needed His Majesty’s support to develop the region’s full economic potential. Vieytes also considered the distribution of empty lands in property as an important way to improve the

¹⁰⁶ *Ivi*, 41.

¹⁰⁷ ‘Carta de D. Cipriano Orden Betoño, en la que se proponen los medios de hacer útiles los terrenos desiertos que nos rodean’. It was published under a fictional name in the numbers 14, 26, 27, 28, and 29 of the *Semanario*, between December 1802 and April 1803.

¹⁰⁸ *Semanario*, n. 28, 30 March 1803.

economic profitability of the Río de la Plata. Given the convenience of legislative reforms aimed at stimulating growth, it was necessary to

give [a man] land in property to settle on it. His possession must not be subject to any dependence: a precarious possession is not possession: what fuels a man is the certainty that all that he possesses, and all the improvements he made to it, will inviolably pass to his children and grandchildren.¹⁰⁹

He underlined the convenience of distributing empty lands for free instead of selling them. Recipients would have the only duty to populate the land within one year otherwise their title would be revoked. In addition, Vieytes complained that the southern frontiers were shamefully receded, and the conquest of more land would “grant a secure property to the many that wish to settle in the countryside”, as well as it would guarantee greater farming space for the numerous herds of cattle already inhabiting it. Again, the distribution of legal title was necessary, as “only property, this deity to whom men gladly sacrifice their sweat [...] would bring out of inactivity some hundreds of men, who do not want to surrender their liberty at the service of some other, being too fond of their independence”.¹¹⁰ The land distribution project was stated more than once in the pages of the *Semanario*, as another article in November 1804 pushed for the grants of land in property to peasants that, in this way, could provide for their subsistence and improve their individual condition through a steady application of labour.¹¹¹

Education was the key to shake the rural world from its immobility. In this respect, Vieytes published in the *Semanario* a series of letters to his brother Anselmo, a priest in the Buenos Aires countryside, which together resulted in a manual for rural economic education. The first letter made clear the aims of those writings, as people are blessed when “their shepherds, after having shown them the way to eternal happiness, describe to their eyes the springs of abundance, and let them know that it alone, when it is the fruit of honest and virtuous labour, can give the only happiness that is granted to the earth!”.¹¹²

The eleventh letter is dedicated to property, and, at the very beginning, property is defined as “the greatest incentive to fix man in a country and to determine him to the productive agricultural work”. Vieytes sees this statement proved by the fact that land property has, for a very long time, been offered as the prize for colonisation of desert lands. However, a more recent example could be used to prove his point: the United States were advancing economically and socially thanks to their policy of

¹⁰⁹ *Semanario*, n. 23, 23 February 1803.

¹¹⁰ *Semanario*, n. 42, 6 July 1803.

¹¹¹ *Semanario*, n. 114, 21 November 1804.

¹¹² *Semanario*, n. 164, 6 November 1805.

distribution of small plots of land in property. If the Río de la Plata economy was not growing as fast as its natural resources might allow, due to the “lack of property” that stops peasants from introducing the improvements needed to increase their productive output. Land distribution would push landholders to extract as much wealth as possible from it.¹¹³

Property distribution stimulated individual labour, and “the fruit of this labour, and the liberty to dispose of it, must therefore belong exclusively to him who has acquired it by his industry and toil”. Therefore, the sacred right of property should be respected, and the state had to provide a safe social environment through fixed laws and the social strength to enforce them and grant order and security in the countryside. Wealthy states are the ones whose regulations and laws are based on such a “precious” right. The respect of property rights includes freedom of commerce and prices: the state should protect the individual right to use property and what it produces in whatever way the individual decides, following his natural desire “to extract as much benefit as possible from [the fruit of one’s man sweat]”.¹¹⁴

It was not by chance that the local voices advocating for the convenience of smallholding multiplied from the 1790s. If political economy was providing economic and moral arguments in support of it, the material reality that was unfolding thanks to Atlantic market incentives warned against the risk of land appropriation and economic speculation. The desire for land of an expanding export-oriented economy coupled with the interest in appropriating the rising value of natural resources multiplied the call for a stricter market regulation, which would favour a balanced exploitation and economic valorisation of the landscape.

While Azara was penning his report, Buenos Aires countryside woke up the greed of the wealthy individuals in the capital, a process like the one in the Banda Oriental in the previous decades. Economic affluence increased pressure on natural resources, which was made more severe by the limited extension of Buenos Aires’ territory. In November 1797, the Commander of the Frontier in Chascomús, Nicolas de Quintana, wrote to the Real Junta the Hacienda and the Audiencia, alarmed by the increased pleas for large estates. In his first letter, Quintana spoke against Manuel Izquierdo, as granting him the land he was petitioning for would determine depopulation, the reduction of the commodity frontier and dangers for social order, as the frontier would remain unarmed against indigenous attacks and landless families would turn into thieves and criminals. During his defence of smallholding, he quoted Azara and his suggestions in his report of the previous year because “the

¹¹³ *Semanario*, n. 208, 3 December 1806.

¹¹⁴ *Semanario*, n. 211, 24 December 1806.

above-mentioned establishments [large estates] were contrary to the advancement of the forts of this frontier, and that for this reason it would be wiser to distribute the royal lands to their neighbours in small parcels”.¹¹⁵

The Commander expressed the same ideas in a letter to Benito de la Mata Linares, President of the Audiencia, aiming at stopping the sale of a huge estate in Chascomús to Don Antonio Obligado, one of the wealthiest landowners and merchants of Buenos Aires. The Audiencia probably asked for his opinion about the Obligado’s plea. Quintana recalled that the first settlers received lands from the Reales Cédulas establishing the new forts during Vértiz’s time. The grants that had been effective as settlers cultivated the land and grazed cattle, albeit authorities did not register the titles. In addition, Chascomús population had increased, because the high rate of land appropriation in the area closer to Buenos Aires pushed many families to move to the frontier after being expelled by the lands they were occupying. Therefore, accepting “the disproportionate possession that [Obligado] pleads” was a “declared wreck” because those families would have to start paying rent, and experience taught that large landowners were used to gradually increase rents up to the point of forcing families out of their lands.¹¹⁶

It seems that these kinds of large estate claims were increasing, as Quintana mentions other wealthy individuals doing the same: Don José Antonio de Otarola had expelled families from his 16-18 square leagues (43.200-48.600 he) *estancia* in Areco, and Don Pedro Dias de Vivar did the same. Similarly, others were filing petitions for frontier lands, such as Don Juan de Almeyra in Chascomús and José Caldevila in Lobos and Samborombon. Even the heirs of Manuel Pinazo, the ex-commander of the frontier, were trying to appropriate lands.¹¹⁷ However, in Quintana’s opinion, these practices were against the principle of population, as the distribution of property titles to individual families would instead allow them “an honest livelihood”, improving husbandry and providing the city with wheat. The outcomes of the accumulation of property in few hands would be that landless people would resign “to the fact that their sweat and labour are spent for the profit of those Mighty Ones (*Poderosos*)” or they would leave civilised life and create a “group of bandits”, detrimental to the agriculture and husbandry of the region.¹¹⁸ Quintana attached to his report the instructions Vértiz

¹¹⁵ Nicolás de la Quintana to the Junta Superior. Frontera de Luján 18 November 1797. See Azcuay Ameghino, *El latifundio y la gran propiedad*, 210.

¹¹⁶ RAE, ML, XIX, ‘Informe del Com.te de frontera D.n Nicolas Quintana sobre lo util que es dejar a los Pobladores, y no vender tierras á Obligado, ni á otros’. 30 November 1797, f. 57r.

¹¹⁷ Being a Commander of the Frontier did not directly lead to a preference for distributing small-scale individual property. Pinazo turned into a large landowner, was the *alcalde* of the Cabildo of Luján and one of the main promoters of the Tribunal de la Mesta (see Chapter 2). Mir, *op. cit.*, 18.

¹¹⁸ RAE, ML, XIX, ff. 59-59r.

directed him, ordering the settlement of Galician families in 1780 and the census of the landless population of the frontier in 1781, a preliminary measure before their definite settlement. Those documents were aimed at proving the antiquity of their possession, as to supplant the absence of a lawful title that Spanish authorities never conceded to the inhabitants of the frontier outpost.¹¹⁹

6. The Resonance of Colonial Property in the Rural World

Frontier commanders asserted their leading role in frontier communities, representing rural interests to urban and colonial authorities. They were representative of the Spanish power in the foremost limit of its extension, and they should act in the light of the common good of the monarchy. However, they were also part of the frontier communities and had their personal interest bonded with the flourishing of the settlement they were overseeing.¹²⁰ Their role as an intermediate between rural vassals and the Spanish power, as well as their socio-economic interests, pushed them to advocate for the ban on the sale of large estates. Again, their education gave them political and economic arguments to formulate rural frontier communities' desires and aspirations for their socio-economic future.

However, colonial subaltern classes had other means to express their claims against the pretensions of proprietors or administrators: the recourse to justice. Interrogating judicial sources provides insight into the ability of the rural world to resist and shape the decisions that the colonial or the urban power wanted to impose on it. This study has highlighted how the early modern juridical culture gradually shifted toward forming a political culture, which would find an important turning point in the introduction of participatory political practices, like elections, after 1810.¹²¹ This pristine political culture was indeed based on the colonial apprenticeship of judicial practices through which resist and shape the pressures the political system imposed on the rural world at different times. The end of the 18th century was an age where those pressures dramatically increased because of the double effect of economic expansion and the state's urge to take advantage, govern and further the process of development. It impacted the rural world because of the appropriation of natural resources and the attempt to control labour through its mobilisation or immobilisation.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Local authorities had solicited for the distribution of lawful titles to the first settlers in 1786 and 1787, without receiving any response. Banzato and Quinteros, 'La ocupación de la tierra en la frontera', 57-58.

¹²⁰ Banzato, 'El poder de los comandantes'.

¹²¹ Fradkin, 'Cultura jurídica y cultura política'.

¹²² Mobilisation might include the forced migration of Galician families and the congregation of families operated by Vértiz. On the other hand, the distribution of property or the vagrant laws aimed at immobilising the rural population.

This juridic and political culture was strongly based on customary practices and ideas, which provided arguments for resisting dispossession or the proprietors' attempts to impose an "absolute" understanding of property rights.¹²³ In this respect, the concepts of "ancient and peaceful possession", "fair price" and "usury", "tyranny" and "despotism" proved fundamental. As evident in Quintana's letter, the antiquity of possession, which included the improvement and labour over land, represented the guiding principle sanctioning the legitimacy of land occupation in the Spanish colonial world. In the case of Buenos Aires countryside, this possession should not be immemorial, as the settlements were recent, and migrants that moved there were easily incorporated into the local communities, soon acquiring the status of *vecinos* through colonising empty lands.

Fradkin provides a telling example of the strength of rural claims around the validity of productive possession. In 1803, two tenants filed a complaint against the Convento de los Mercedarios when the religious men decided to lease the field to someone else. They claimed that they had always fulfilled the productive requirements of the contract ("the agreed six *fanegas*"), and they presented their leasing contract as an emphyteusis one, as "as long as the agreed annual pension is paid, the Lord of the *dominio directo* cannot evict the *emphiteuta*".¹²⁴ On the other hand, the legal representative of the Convent pointed out that the institution can autonomously decide how to use its property and to whom to lease it. Anyhow, the widespread legitimacy of the concept of "ancient and peaceful possession" generated a rhetorical transformation where a leasing contract changed into an emphyteutic one, thus implying the perpetuity of possession.

Other ways of resisting proprietors' pressure were the recourse to the dichotomy "fair price" and "usury" to denounce economic practices infringing the moral bounds of solidarity and justice that should sustain every political community. Proprietors and wealthy individuals should conform to Christian values and aid the poorest *vecinos*, and there were forms of land contract that formalise this moral obligation, such as the "*gracia*" and the "*ayuda*".¹²⁵ A similar rhetorical device was the charge of "despotism" and "tyranny" against the powerful who attempted to impose their economic claims against the population. In this case, the hubris of the proprietors' ambitions lay not in a moral sin, but rather in the attempt to subvert the political order, disrespecting the existing judicial authorities and social norms sustaining the social fabric.

¹²³ Fradkin defines it as a conception where the owner might possess his goods without the interference of other actors that had some right to the same good, as in the tradition of legal pluralism.

¹²⁴ Fradkin, 'La experiencia de la justicia', 96.

¹²⁵ Fradkin defines them as practices that "involved a verbal agreement and a personal commitment between landlord and tenant, which functioned as a loan based on the guarantee of trust". *Ivi*, 101.

Powerful individuals and zealous administrators deployed different strategies to cope with subaltern resistance and agency. The two following court cases might help illustrate the various claims and interests that revolved around land propriety during the colonial economic expansion and the easiness with which big property might find rhetorical arguments and political leverage to win claims based on the moral and economic desirability of smallholding. In both cases, the confrontation between a wealthy individual and a community is resolved in favour of the former, appealing to, among the others, arguments revolving around land property. Their proximity to power mattered when two valid politico-economic arguments confronted over a legal issue. Indeed, the wealthy merchants tried to disqualify the suing communities, noting that their members did not own any land therefore their rights over it could not be valid. In addition, it is possible to observe the extent to which a rural community was not able to resist external claims over land, if it was not constituted into a town. This issue would be relevant in the discussion of the frontier Cabildos of the Banda Oriental.

In the context of his request for state patronage for establishing a large scale *saladero*, the wealthy merchant Francisco Medina was granted in 1787 with the concession of an *estancia* in Rosario del Colla, Banda Oriental. The procedure had been lengthy, as it was shaped by the contrasting opinions of Viceroy Loreto and Superintendent Sanz regarding the opportunity to support Medina's request.¹²⁶ After he began salted meat production, he denounced the inhabitants of the settlement of Nuestra Señora del Rosario del Colla, as he claimed that "those who call themselves *vecinos*" were in reality vagrants and *agregados* who earned a living killing others people's cattle to sell their hides.¹²⁷ Superintendent Sanz inspected the area and investigated Medina's claim. He interrogated the local *alcalde* and found out that the settlement was formed by "people scattered around this Countryside" up to 15 leagues away (around 78 km), that only six *vecinos* lived in the original site, and that they did not own any land.

After disclosing the current state of the settlement, he reconstructed its history.¹²⁸ He found out that Don Benito Herosa petitioned Spanish authorities in 1774, asking for permission to establish a *población* together with 59 other *vecinos* of the *partido* of Rosario del Colla. The proposal was accepted, but only the land for the houses, *plaza* and *ejido* (the commons) was granted for free. Individual plots of land were not distributed to the *vecinos*, who in turn never petitioned the Real

¹²⁶ Montoya, *op. cit.*

¹²⁷ RAH, CML, Tomo VIII, 'Estancia del Colla p.a salazon de carnes: Auto del Intendente Sanz, 28 Diciembre 1787', ff. 289-292.

¹²⁸ RAH, CML, Tomo VIII, 'Sobre establecim.to de salazón de carnes en la estancia del Colla, 29 Abril 1788', ff. 293-302.

Erario for the sales of the lands they were working.¹²⁹ The same land had been the object of other legal cases, and the *vecinos* gradually dispersed in the countryside. In its current state, the settlement did not meet the standards to be considered a political community, as the state of the chapel, left “in indecency, fetidness and impurity”, signalled. Therefore, Sanz granted a “perfect donation” of the disputed land to Medina, he extinguished every other right over these lands, and he prohibited further appeals in the case, as the *saladero* might bring a more significant increase in the local population thanks to the multiplier effects on economic activity, rather than a settlement devoid of honourable *vecinos*.

Fifteen years later, another legal case involving a wealthy merchant and a local community was started on the shores of the Banda Oriental. Casimiro de la Fuente, priest of Víboras, petitioned the Viceroy in the name of 22 parishioners for the permission to translate their *pueblo* to nearby land. Because of its inconvenient geographical location, the settlement lay in a miserable state, and only by moving it closer to a navigable waterway would it have been possible to avoid “its total ruin”.

The petition of the *vecinos* was then accompanied by a letter in which de la Fuente extensively argued in favour of their claim.¹³⁰ The point of departure was the Recopilación de Castilla, which stated that “is the Population [...] the sole and principal foundation of the Republics, and to which the greatest care must be taken for its preservation and improvement”. However, Víboras had not progressed since its foundation because its wrong location prevented it from enjoying the benefits of trade. Indeed, “a *pueblo* considers itself to be all the happier, the greater its progress in trade and commerce”. Starting from the premise that the source of the lack of morality and religion is economic decadence, de la Fuente extensively demonstrates the convenience and the progress that the new location would bring in terms of economic incentives and the civilisational effects. In the end, it will be possible to persuade to live “under the cross and the bell” who were then detrimental vagrants and turn them into “men useful to themselves, their land, the Church and the State”. Easy access to the river would improve the industry of the *vecinos*, push them to congregate and permit their education and evangelisation, thanks to the incentives of economic profit. Indeed, de la Fuente asked to himself, “how can there be any love for labour, when no profit is expected, on which any rest or relief can be justly based?”.¹³¹

¹²⁹ As Banzato reveals, the same happened in Chascomús. Therefore, Azara and the others were right in denouncing the high cost involved in land acquisition. On the other hand, it is possible that land availability prevented settlers from having an interest in formal land appropriation.

¹³⁰ Di Stefano, ‘Pastores de rústicos rebaños’. He rightly noted the relevance of the fact that de la Fuente represented community interests through Enlightened political and economic arguments, turning thus into the intermediary between the community and this intellectual world. Through him, the *vecinos* got closer to political economy.

¹³¹ AGN, 2993. Casimiro de la Fuente to Viceroy Del Pino. Buenos Aires, 3 Abril 1802. ff. 2-7

The main obstacle to the project was that an *estancia* of Don Melchor Albín already occupied the requested land. According to de la Fuente, he did not own any legitimate title over those lands, as he never showed it to the community. Spanish authorities notified Albín of the complaint, but his reply came only the following July. He was the director of the local branch of the Correo, and he also dedicated to export-oriented production. His main point was to highlight that the priest had exceeded his prerogatives, as his duty was to provide religious service to rural inhabitants, not to dedicate to the temporal government of the community. Second, he claimed that de la Fuente was speaking in the name of twenty-two *vecinos* out of eighty, and the petitioners were *pulperos* and petty merchants who were not the most honourable members of the *vecindario*. The fact that those individuals spoke in the name of the community was an inversion of the social order, in addition to the fact that “in politics it is right, more often than not, to consult the convenience of the Rich, because the livelihood of the Poor depends on them”.

The first argument put forward by Albín concerned the legal status of the settlement of Víboras. In his opinion, it cannot be qualified as a *ciudad*, *villa*, or even a *pueblo* or an *aldea*. It was just a *capilla rustica*, founded by a landowner “so that families would not be left without Mass because of the discomfort of the roads”. In this way, he countered de la Fuente’s right to represent a community, as a political community did not exist in Víboras. Then, he turned to the description of the spiritual and temporal drawbacks resulting from the petition of translation. Finally, he defended his property right from a legal perspective, recalling that only the “superior Power” can force someone to sell his property to the Church in the case of “moral necessity”. Albín claimed to be the rightful owner, as he bought it in 1778 from the former possessor for 884 pesos. As de la Fuente’s proposal was useful but not necessary, it was unlawful to force him to sell his *estancia*, or to empty it, given that the petitioners did not have the capital to afford it. The fact that it was a flourishing establishment and a source of sustenance for him and his family was an additional argument. In the end, de la Fuente’s request was rejected.

This case differs from the previous one, but it is possible to find parallels regarding how social status might help in the face of court cases concerning property. In both cases, community demands were discredited, denying their status as political community and appealing to the principle of economic utility. Property was thus central to defining the existence of a political congregation of individuals with communal and individual rights. As those rights were inherently linked to participation in the community, their non-existence led to the decadence of petitioned rights. However, it is evident that sufficient land property to define political existence exceeded the portions of land dedicated to its fundamental institutions (the *plaza*, the church and the commons), and included the properties of

individual families. If the *vecinos* were not landowners, they were associated with vagrants and therefore excluded the possibility of being part of a local community and even considered detrimental vassals of the Crown. Landowning was an issue that determined the inclusion or exclusion from the political world and, therefore, the attribution of rights. These concepts were fashioned according to the categories of Spanish political culture but signals the centrality of property in defining the characters and identities of individuals and groups. The *vecinos* of Rosario del Colla and VÍboras were guilty of not having finalised the constitution of a political community through the acquisition and economic valorisation of land.

Second, the principle of economic utility was employed to evaluate the relative convenience of two different proposals. In the case of VÍboras, de la Fuente and Albín argued in favour of their respective economic interests, highlighting their superior utility for the increase in local wealth. The lack of the final resolution from the Viceroy impedes the evaluation of the relative weight of the different legal, economic or social arguments put forward by the contenders in the resolution of the case. On the other hand, the legal victory of Medina was firmly based on the superior utility of the *saladero* for the wealth and power of the monarchy. The possibility of generating additional economic activity surrounding the large-scale plants contributed to the convenience of the project vis-a-vis the claims of a dispersed group of rural producers. In the words of Medina, his project was meant to give a political increase to the local population, “trying to eradicate all disorder and laziness and make useful those individuals who, either through indigence or idleness, live and spend their time without being identified or having any proper occupation”.¹³² Sanz’s final resolution echoed these ideas, as the Superintendent ruled in favour of the wealthy merchant, “considering the high regard deserved by this patriotic vassal and his project, whose effects are immediately transcendental to the service of the Crown, of the Nation and of all the cattle breeders, and to the active trade of this province” and because the *saladero* had the potential to “attract people who can congregate and reduce themselves to a political society”.¹³³

Medina and Albín could discredit their opponents by providing arguments in line with Spanish political and economic thought. Besides their rhetorical strategy, however, their socio-economic status mattered. Medina was one of the wealthiest individuals of the Río de la Plata, owner of a number of contracts for urban and military provisioning, and had collaborated with Sanz since when he was the Director of the Tobacco Monopoly.¹³⁴ As already mentioned, Albín was the director of the

¹³² RAH, ML, Tomo VIII, ‘Estancia del Colla’.

¹³³ RAH, ML, Tomo VIII, ‘Sobre establecim.to de salazón’.

¹³⁴ Montoya, *op. cit.*

Correo - a fundamental institution of Bourbon economic and administrative reformism, and he had a strict relationship with Domingo de Basavilbaso, a prominent merchant and holder of various positions in local government. Proximity to power was instrumental in shaping the institutional response to land issues in a context where the porosity between local administration and the merchant community was very high. Notwithstanding that a fraction of the local elites was trying to build support for smallholding as the most desirable land tenancy arrangement, another one was practically and intellectually questioning small property, elaborating a criticism that was also in line with Spanish political economy.

Rural communities and individual families are considered partisans of smallholding. Their arguments were rooted in Spanish judicial culture and customary practices, but they were also increasingly exposed to new ideas drawn from political economy, as the case of Víboras attests. However, they had little chance of winning a case against a wealthy opponent, and it can be argued that many were not even interested in doing so, given the high cost of the procedure and the relative ease of migrating and finding another land to occupy. The institutional context was not stimulating farmers to consolidate their possessions according to the desires of imperial authority, and they mostly reacted to dispossession attempts. Regarding the ease of migration, Albín offers us an unintentional testimony when he describes how the first settlers of Víboras independently moved from the original site up down the river, “as all the settlers of our Countryside have no other resource than the pastoral activity, they sought the shores of the creeks for the benefit of the watering points”. Moving was, however, a temporary solution, as the rural population increased, and the process of land accumulation gradually eroded the amount of free land available and generated conflicts among settlers and proprietors.¹³⁵

7. Property and Crisis on the Two Shores of the Río de la Plata

How did the conflicting conceptions over land property exacerbate the growing tensions shaping the Río de la Plata from the 1790s onwards? In providing a reply, it is necessary to differentiate between Buenos Aires and Montevideo, as land issues had very different urgency in the period, notwithstanding the geographical and institutional proximity and the similar socio-economic configuration. As described at the end of Chapter 2, the double effect of Bourbon reformism and economic expansion increased local social tensions, as economic and political interests started a

¹³⁵ Moving continued to be a strategy of peasant families to resist state pressure well into the 19th century. See Salvatore, *Wandering Paysanos*.

process of segmentation according to socio-economic activities and aspirations. How did the question of property fuel or not the proliferation of conflicts?

In the case of Buenos Aires, the question seems relatively straightforward, as land property did not seem to be a burning issue. As described, the consensus among metropolitan power and different segments of local society regarding the necessity of frontier expansion was widespread. The war prevented authorities from dedicating to the issue, but it does not seem that local economic elites harboured major resentments because of it. Other problems were more pressing, and the absence of the indigenous menace thanks to the 1790 peace treaties meant that the possibility of migrating and occupying new land reduced the rural social conflicts generated by land appropriation. Even if some communities were petitioning for protection from the abuses of wealthy individuals, those cases were not endemic, and rural litigiousness would increase only in the following decades, up to the point of representing a social threat.¹³⁶

Land property remained indeed central in development plans. In February 1803, Cristóbal de Aguirre, Procurador Sindico, had offered a report on the new settlements in the southern countryside. Even if the project remained on paper, Aguirre was confident that this was the right time to carry it on, as an increase in geographical knowledge dispelled previous hindrances to the advance, and the increase in trade had brought unprecedented revenues to finance the project. The project was predicated upon the maxim according to which

a wise government should extract every possible advantage from its possessions, by incessantly promoting their population and cultivation; for the power of a monarchy is not measured by the vast deserts it possesses, but by the number of its inhabitants and wealth.¹³⁷

Buenos Aires economic elites continued to be interested in expanding the southern commodity frontier. However, the indifference of Spanish power in this respect did not generate dangerous grievances. For instance, the opposition to the demands of the Buenos Aires *hacendados* for introducing the Hermandad de la Mesta did not bring about such a wave of opposition as to delegitimise the authority of the metropolitan power. The growing tensions between merchants and landowners were managed and resolved by incorporating the *hacendados* to the Trade Consulate. In

¹³⁶ According to Fradkin, rural tensions would increase throughout the 1810s and 1820s due to the war-related pressure in terms of human and economic resources, as well as the beginning of a new cycle of conflicts with indigenous groups. See Fradkin, *Le ley es tela*.

¹³⁷ 'Memorial sobre establecer poblaciones al Sur' (1803), 369.

this way, they obtained the chance to have a direct communication channel with Viceregal authorities and the Crown, as well as an institutional setting to confront the merchant faction.

On the other hand, the issue of land property was more pressing in Montevideo, as the *expediente sobre el arreglo* and the polarised opinions regarding Sagasti had already shown. In the Banda Oriental, the settlement policy was way more effective than in Buenos Aires countryside: Spanish authorities had promoted the foundation of 23 new settlements between 1778 and 1801.¹³⁸ Some of them never developed into towns (such as the described case of Colla and Víboras), but others soon became important jurisdictional actors, especially on the frontier. The jurisdictional powers of the Cabildos configured them as important actors in regulating land access, property distribution and the policing of the countryside. Therefore, conflicts over land reached an incredible degree of complexity, as they were shaped by changing and not-predetermined alliances and clashes among local councilmen, leaders of the militias, poor settlers, farmers, indigenous communities, wealthy urban proprietors and their employees, and finally viceregal authorities.¹³⁹

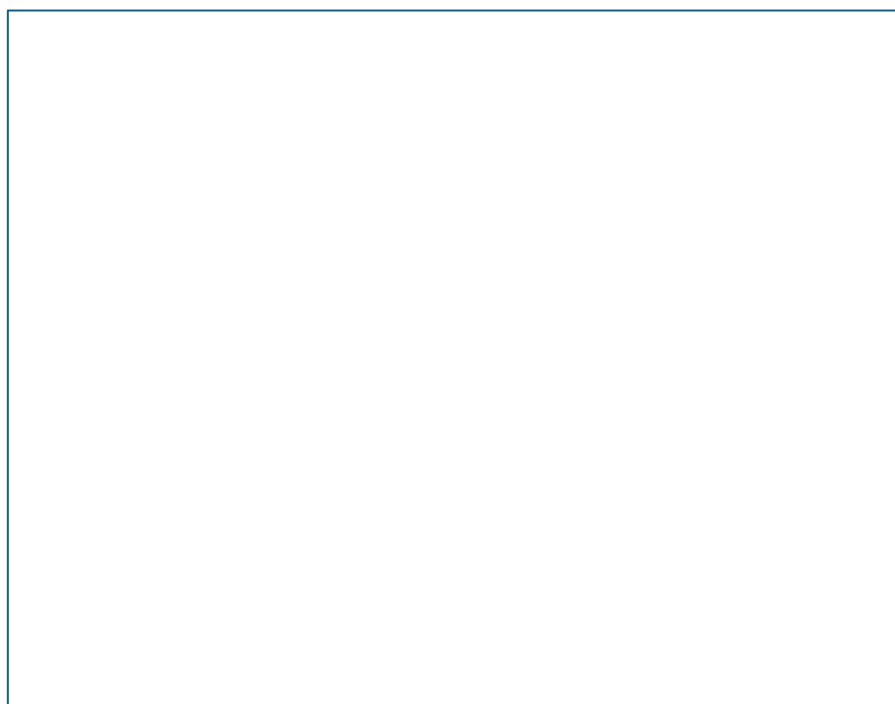


Fig. 8. *New town and pueblos established in the Banda Oriental*. See Djenderedjian, “Roots of Revolution”, 648.

Those forts and towns proved ineffective at defending Spanish territory during the short War of the Oranges against the Portuguese (1801-1802). According to Djenderedjian, this was the end of Viceregal settlement policy, as the military defeat showed that agrarian colonisation of the frontier

¹³⁸ Djenderedjian, ‘Roots of Revolution’, 648. In the Buenos Aires countryside, the only other Cabildo was Luján (1757).

¹³⁹ *Ibidem*.

managed by frontier towns failed to create a class of soldier/cultivator that could defend their land in times of war and contribute to productive development in those of peace. However, he failed to consider the resolutions of 1804-5, when the settlement policy was proposed again in an attempt to end the lengthy *expediente sobre el arreglo*. Colonial authorities tried to take control of the productive colonisation of frontier land instead of delegating its realisation to frontier Cabildos.

The end of the hostilities against the Portuguese pushed the *hacendados* of Montevideo to establish their *Gremio* (March 1802) to influence rural policies. They proposed a Countryside Regulation and a military expedition against the Native groups and the Portuguese who had taken advantage of the war to occupy and pillage Spanish territory.¹⁴⁰ In order to show the consensus around their ideas, they promoted a survey among rural authorities. In addition, the Cabildo agreed on the necessity to re-establish order and security in the rural world and expressed the best solution in a nutshell:

The Cabildo believes positively that the terrible evils that have been announced, whose proposition is demonstrated by a certain outcome of the first principles of civil economy, will never cease as long as the populations of the countryside are not increased, and the establishment of *Villas* in the interesting points is promoted; which cannot happen until the lands are given free of charge to those who wish to populate them.¹⁴¹

At the end of 1804, Viceroy Sobremonte authorised the military expedition and appointed Don Francisco Javier de Viana as its commander. The choice of Viana responded perfectly to Bourbon aspirations concerning the government of the Americas, as well as to local desires. Born in Montevideo in 1764, he was the son of the city's first Governor. He translated to Spain to study Nautic, responding to metropolitan desires of creating an integrated imperial elite.¹⁴² Between 1789 and 1794, he was an important member of the Malaspina expedition, where his cartographical expertise was put at the service of the imperial goals. He was then appointed Governor of the Malvinas islands. However, he remained in the archipelago only one year, as it was back in Montevideo to take charge of the countryside of the Banda Oriental. Once again, the interrelation between the plans for the colonisation of the Patagonian coast and the countryside of the Río de la Plata is evident, as well as the centrality of expertise for an effective economic government of society: Viana was an expert maritime pilot and therefore cartographer. Indeed, this was the same expertise needed to measure

¹⁴⁰ Pivel Devoto, *Raíces coloniales*, 70-74.

¹⁴¹ 'Expediente de hacendados de la Banda Oriental', 42

¹⁴² Ricketts, *op. cit.*

land, as maritime pilots were entrusted to survey lands before the figure of the land surveyors emerged.

While Viana was preparing the expedition, colonial authorities legislated to end the *expediente sobre el arreglo* finally. After decades of reports, proposals and surveys, the highest stage of colonial justice gave its opinion. The statement of the Junta Superior de Real Hacienda (22 June 1804) fully embraced the main ideas behind Spanish Enlightened agrarian reformism: the act of rendering land productive would create useful vassals, increasing particular and general wealth through the stimulus of agriculture, industry and trade.¹⁴³ Therefore, the first necessity was to sell or distribute “*realengos* and *valdios* lands to persons who, in the tillage and ownership of these lands, ensure for themselves and their descendants the fruit of their labour by cultivating, fertilising and cleaning them of the excesses that have motivated this *Expediente*”. The best way to ensure the fulfilment of this goal was to entrust the evaluation of each specific case to *Jueces Subdelegados*, who would act according to an *Instrucción particular*. The Junta Superior would appoint them, in an attempt of centralising the regulation of land distribution.

After some months, the Real Audiencia issued the instructions for distributing public lands.¹⁴⁴ The legislation tried to answer the two main goals of state authority: the increase in rural productivity and the securitisation of the countryside and the frontier line. Indeed, the Audiencia recognised that land should be allocated in different ways according to its proximity to the Portuguese possessions, and the resolution created two regimes of land tenancy. The first one encompassed the frontier line, aimed at creating the notorious defensive cordon populated by small producers and new towns. In fact, lands up to 12 leagues (ca. 60 km) from the frontier should be divided into small *suertes de estancia* (1x1.5 leagues, 4.050 he) and distributed *con pleno dominio* to landless families. Even if the legislation assigned them in property, those lands were nevertheless subjected to conditions, such as the population clause, a twelve-year prohibition of selling it, a ten-year exemption from paying taxes on it. If any “plots of incredible extension” would be present in the defensive cordon, the owner should be expropriated and indemnified in money or through an equal amount of land. In the same 12-league cordon, new towns had to be established and the *acuerdo* gave accurate instructions in this respect. Lands in those new foundations had to be distributed first to the Blandengues, then to the rural bandits (which would benefit from a general pardon) and finally to the Spanish families that had arrived to populate the Patagonian Coast, to “form in the same *Villas* an industrious and active *Vecindario*”.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ ‘Auto en relación al arreglo de los campos. Buenos Aires, 22 June 1804’. See Moraes, *El arreglo*, 504-506.

¹⁴⁴ ‘Acuerdo Real Ordinario de Justicia sobre el arreglo de los campos de la Banda Oriental que se pasa a consulta a Sobremonte. Buenos Aires, 4 April 1805’. See Moraes, *El arreglo*, 510-521.

¹⁴⁵ *Ivi*, 514.

A fund for the new settlement would be created by selling public and uncultivated land to new petitioners (at the conditions that they already own an *estancia*) or to the current possessors lacking a legitimate title. This resolution armed merchant urban interests, even if many wealthy ones had already acquired land.

A second tenure regime governed the distribution and selling of the internal ones: authorities should proceed to sell every land “that lacks individual Owner” (giving preference to current possessors), assigning them in plots not exceeding four leagues (ca. 20 km) in width and twelve leagues (ca. 60 km) in depth. In the article containing the instructions for measurement, the Audiencia remembered Sagasti’s proposal (used as an example not to follow), proving the echoes that his *representación* and the following debates had in the region. The allocation of property titles was entrusted to a Commission formed by the Governor of Montevideo, the Chief Commander of the Countryside and the other Commanders of rural towns (Santo Domingo Soriano, Colonia, Maldonado, and Santa Teresa). The ultimate authority in charge of the carry on the project was, again, Francisco Javier de Viana, to which the respective jurisdictions in civil and criminal cases were transferred, together with the other faculties needed to foster “the Security, Population and / or promotion of Agriculture in the vast Campaigns of the Eastern Bank of this Río de la Plata”.¹⁴⁶

As metropolitan power was trying to regulate access to land and the land market more strictly, these resolutions were met with resistance. Frontier Cabildos complained about the limitations of their jurisdictional powers, followed by the creation of the Viana Commission.¹⁴⁷ However, it was in Montevideo that the main resistance was organised. In fact, wealthy urban merchants were deprived of the chance of acquiring frontier land, could not buy land if they did not already possess an estate, and had to pay for it, while up until then, they could profit from land basically for free.

The complaints started when some *hacendados* asked for the reunion of a Junta concerning the Viana expedition, as “it may be somewhat burdensome in some way to our rights and interests”.¹⁴⁸ Others opposed the proposal, as the reunion could delay the expedition. This conflict among different factions of the Gremio revolved around the suspicious actions of the Representatives, and it was found out that the Viana expedition was financed by a loan of 15.000 pesos on the Buenos Aires financial market, mortgaging the Gremio fund. It was the only way to finance the expedition and the foundations, as the Viceroy clarified that the Treasury did not have enough liquidity. The investigations made clear that Sobremonte imposed the contribution to the Representatives of the

¹⁴⁶ *Ivi*, 520.

¹⁴⁷ Djenderedjian, ‘Roots of Revolution’, 664.

¹⁴⁸ Pivel Devoto, *Raíces coloniales*, 83.

hacendados, and the opposing factions called for a meeting of the Gremio to approve the contribution and elect new Representatives, given the shady actions of the ones in charge.

The meeting was celebrated on 16 December 1805, and their deliberations “were markedly revolutionary in character”.¹⁴⁹ In fact, they decided the suppression of the Gremio and the creation of a Junta Económico Directiva del Cuerpo General de Hacendados de la Campaña, composed of thirteen members, whose attributions were the same as the old corporation. Following the elections of the members, they ruled that the contribution asked by the Viceroy was illegal and that they refused to contribute to the Treasury’s needs. Sobremonte was enraged, as the new establishment was carried on without official permission, and he suppressed the Junta Económico Directiva.

The British invasion interrupted the Viana expedition, as the viceregal military forces had to concentrate on expelling the invaders. When the crisis was over, Viceroy Liniers asked Jorge Pacheco, a frontier commander close to the *hacendados*, for a new plan for organising the countryside.¹⁵⁰ The innovation was focused on the necessity of creating *reducciones* of the *Indios Charruas*, incorporating them into Spanish commercial society, and rendering them useful against Portuguese invasions. Pacheco expressed very harsh opinions about the vagrant population that should be forced into public works without a trial. Lastly, an interesting point is the proposal for introducing a yearly contribution for the possessors who did not want to legalise their title over land. It was a solution that recalled the annual canon of the emphyteutic contracts, one that highlighted once again the main imperatives behind the impulses to reform land tenancy in the Río de la Plata and the Spanish Atlantic world: the will to increase agricultural production, finding the best legal arrangements that might fix the population to the land and force them (through softer or harder means) to maximise each producers individual labour input, for the sake of the increase in the wealth and power of the Spanish monarchy. The small canon seemed a good option for Montevideo *hacendados* who wanted to profit from rural production without regularising their land title.

During the years of crisis (1806-1810), the regulation of Atlantic trade rather than land property precipitated conflicts between Buenos Aires, Montevideo and metropolitan authorities, as it was the primary source of fiscal revenues together with the Potosí *situado*. The 1797 permission of trade with neutral nations and the British invasions determined an increasing interdependence with Portuguese and British markets, and a growing rivalry among competing factions of the local commercial elites. The defeat of British invaders did not bring peace and stability, as accusations of favouring smuggling

¹⁴⁹ *Ivi*, p. 93.

¹⁵⁰ Published in Pivel Devoto, *Raíces coloniales*.

and a despotic style of government chased the new Viceroy Santiago de Liniers.¹⁵¹ As he was also trying to limit Montevideo's commercial pretensions, his extant attitude in swearing loyalty to Spain's Supreme Junta, created after Bayonne, caused the reaction of the Governor of Montevideo, Francisco Javier de Elío, who supported the creation of a local Junta, to back metropolitan authorities and opposed Buenos Aires.¹⁵²

The metropole, which was facing the Napoleonic invasion, responded with the appointment of a new viceroy, Baltasar Hidalgo de Cisneros, who was soon confronted with a dramatic shortage of revenues due to the rebellions in the Alto Peru and the reduction in Spanish Atlantic trade.¹⁵³ In a desperate attempt to collect public revenues, Cisneros opened trade to foreign vessels following the request of two British merchants.¹⁵⁴ This decision did not stop revolutionary tendencies, as when the news of the fall of Seville to the French army reached Buenos Aires in May 1810, the local Cabildo called a *cabildo abierto* that ruled for the creation of a government autonomous from Spain, the Primera Junta.

If the authorities of Buenos Aires were among the first in Spanish America to create an autonomous government, Montevideo responded, turning into the bastion of loyalism in the region between 1810 and 1814. Elío repudiated Buenos Aires claims of sovereignty in the region, and a *cabildo abierto* decided for the creation of a Junta loyal to Seville. Finally, "it was the political crisis caused by the British invasions and the Napoleonic wars that allowed the city's elites to effectively pursue autonomy in relation to Buenos Aires, and monarchism was the preferred political option".¹⁵⁵ Rivalry became open conflict in January 1811, when Buenos Aires refused the authority of Elío, who had been appointed Viceroy. Montevideo's war declaration against Buenos Aires, as well as the oppressive fiscal policy inaugurated in May 1810, sanctioned the breakthrough of the Oriental Revolution, a rural upheaval that transformed into the most important federalist political movement of the region, opposing the centralist Buenos Aires.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵¹ Besseghini, 'The Unofficial Vicereine'.

¹⁵² Fabricio Prado, *op. cit.*

¹⁵³ Two different rebellions broke out in Chuquisaca and La Paz in 1809, causing the flow of silver in the direction of Buenos Aires to almost completely stop.

¹⁵⁴ Mariano Moreno's *Representación de hacendados* was produced in this occasion. For a long time, the *Representación* had been considered a fundamental document in the Argentine history of economic thought, seen as the first appearance of liberal economic concepts (such as free trade) against the backward Spanish mercantilist tradition. From our perspective, this document is placed alongside the hundreds of other texts advocating for local economic reforms without gaining theoretical prominence. His political relevance remains intact as the economic expression of the political factions that would govern Buenos Aires since May 1810. Critical appraisals of the relevance of Moreno's text are, however, not new. See Molinari, *La Representación de los hacendados*. For a nuanced analysis of the issue, see Schlez, 'Un fatal golpe'.

¹⁵⁵ Prado, *op. cit.*, 158.

¹⁵⁶ Sala de Tournon, et al. *Artigas y su revolución*, 50.

The issue of land was central in rural revindications. *Hacendados*, *agregados* and rural Cabildos hoped that a new political course might stop the aggression of wealthy urban individuals toward rural properties. In addition to the growing tensions of the previous decades, Montevideo loyalist authorities ordered the *hacendados* and rural possessors to present their land titles or pay for their legalisation, to collect fiscal resources for the conflict with Buenos Aires. Vigodet reiterated the request in October, but it was met by a widespread resistance that mixed social, legal and jurisdictional claims. The opposition was based on the local tradition of ignoring royal disposition regarding land issues and the fact that wealthy individuals obtained titles over lands possessed by others in one month, while usually the procedures might take years.¹⁵⁷

In February 1811, these grievances exploded in the open opposition of rural Cabildos to the authorities of Montevideo and their loyalty to Buenos Aires under the leadership of José Gervasio Artigas. In a communication to the Junta of Paraguay the following year, the General remembered that “it was not the audacious peasants, nor those who owed their existence to their wages or salary, who alone made the move; settled *vecinos*, possessors of good fortune and all the comforts that this country has to offer, were those who suddenly became soldiers.”¹⁵⁸ The greed of wealthy individuals, the increase of insecurity linked to commercial expansion and the Spanish inability to provide social order fed rural rebellion in the most feracious soil of the Río de la Plata.

8. Conclusions

This chapter demonstrated the centrality that land property assumed in late colonial Río de la Plata, contributing to increase social conflicts brought by war, reform and commercial expansion. Atlantic economic efflorescence pushed the interest in advancing local agrarian commodity frontier even before Carlos III decided to turn Buenos Aires into the main actor of the economic reform of the South Atlantic. Local authorities established a new branch of fiscal revenues for addressing the issue of frontier advancement and defence, a move that was not welcomed by the metropole. Even if Spanish administrators agreed on the goal of advancing frontier guards, they should decide how to do it, not the local Cabildo. However, the lack of geographical and topographical information, as well as knowledge of the sovereign Native communities prevented a successful southward advancement, as well as severe clash between Buenos Aires and Spanish authorities.

¹⁵⁷ Duffau, *Breve historia sobre la propiedad privada*, 61-62.

¹⁵⁸ *Ivi*, 53.

The new centrality of land property inspired a series of ideas to rationalise the tenancy system, most notably Sagasti's *informe*. The replies to his proposal by Viceregal Cabildos signal the multiplicity of opinions and arguments that backed or contrasted the attempt to provide new rules to regulate land appropriation and economic exploitation. The more polarised ideas were to be found in Montevideo. The Banda Oriental was the region that suffered the most for the hectic commercial expansion following 1778, as the countryside turned in a dangerous place inhabited by group of smugglers looking for cattle hides and agricultural goods. Viceregal and imperial authorities addressed the matter, but they could not provide a solution, nor even a palliative. Why was Spanish rule unable to secure property rights over land, a right that contemporary economic and political thought was considering sacred and fundamental?

Replying to this question is complex because the motivations should be found in the co-optation of the state by opposing economic interests, the scarce institutional (softer or harder) means to reach the countryside and rural economic customs that considered possession a sufficient title rather than a written one. Many economic actors profited from the indeterminacy and arbitrariness of land access and property distribution in a time of economic efflorescence, and the negative externalities of the situation were felt mainly by rural population rather than the economic elite. This fact would feed the resentment of the Oriental rural population following the breakthrough of the imperial crisis, therefore preventing them from remaining loyal to Spanish metropolitan power. However, an additional element seems very relevant.

The Río de la Plata region went through a very fast and very profound process of economic growth and commercialisation in the second half of the 1700s. As mentioned, this case presents itself as one of the greatest successes of Bourbon economic reformism, as Buenos Aires went from being a small smugglers' port to one of the richest and most important cities in Spanish America in just a few decades. Land ownership indeterminacy did not disturb this growth, as it is proven by local and general studies on the region.¹⁵⁹ If the Crown's objective was to create a commercial empire in which the increase in local production would lead to the general enrichment of the sum of its parts, it seems that the development of the Río de la Plata responded to this pattern. Therefore, despite serious problems of insecurity, a solution to the distribution of land was not agreed upon, as the constant economic expansion meant that the issue did not reach a critical degree that would disturb the growth itself. The problem was not solved since it did not impact economic growth and did not seem to hinder the materialisation of a commercial society (apart from the moral problems generated by uncontrolled

¹⁵⁹ The settlers of Chascomús developed an expanding rural production despite not having title deeds and living on the frontier with the indigenous populations. See Banzato and Quinteros, *op. cit.*

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growth pointed out by some historical actors), which were the main objectives of the Spanish monarchy and its political economy. When in 1804-1805 the *expediente sobre el arreglo* reached a conclusion, the region had already entered the final crisis of colonial rule. Nevertheless, the breakthrough of the Oriental Revolution showed that property issues might generate severe rural tensions and ignite revolution. This fact would make local economic elites aware of the need to address the grievances of the rural populations, an awareness that would gradually increase as the Revolution would turn urban and rural masses into a fundamental actor of local republican politics.

CHAPTER 4

Pedro Andrés García and Buenos Aires Agrarian Republicanism

The May Revolution accelerated the necessity of expanding Buenos Aires commodity frontier. The retroversion of sovereignty to the *pueblo* and the consensus around the export-led economic model allowed the Primera Junta to dedicate itself to the issue immediately. The task of drawing up the programme of agrarian colonisation fell to Coronel Pedro Andrés García, a military engineer and merchant with good connections among the patriot elites. A biographical study provides a nuanced interpretation of the reasons that moved the Primera Junta to designate him for such an essential duty. He produced many reports and diaries for urban authorities, which encapsulated his political and economic model to improve the wealth and power of Buenos Aires. As this agrarian utopia is close to the concept of “agrarian republicanism”, the discussion pays special attention to the conceptual twists which allowed this model to fit with the local socio-economic and geographical context.¹ “Agrarian republicanism” is therefore considered a politico-economic ideal structured by fundamental concepts (commercial society, rural production, wealth generating character of human labour, notions of economic and political virtue) and materialised in specific practices (maximisation of individual labour, participation in republican politics, subordination to established authority). The ideal sketched by García and reconstructed in this chapter would then be twisted by the unitarian and federal governments of the following decades, adding new meanings to its conceptual core and configuring it as a conflictive concept. The correlation between ideas and practices is fundamental, and republicanism might become nothing more than a rhetorical construction when the discrepancy between the world of ideas and material reality widens too much. As we will see, the emptying out of this ideal occurred in the second half of the 1830s, when the Rosas government became decidedly authoritarian and despotic. Finally, the attempt to evaluate the role of economic ideas in structuring

¹ This concept was mainly employed to interpret the ideas inspiring the North American Revolution and their link with civic humanism or physiocracy. See Albertone, *National Identity and the Agrarian Republic*. It pays a tribute to the line of investigation inaugurated by John G.A. Pocock. See Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*. However, studies on North Atlantic republicanism tend to neglect their South European or South Atlantic connections. Therefore, the development of an agrarian republicanism ideology is here interpreted alongside Spanish monarchical republicanism and Enlightened reformism: agrarianism was an essential part of the economic ideas which should inspire the political regeneration of the monarchy; virtue was praised as a quality of the useful vassals to tame individual interests; the development of a commercial society was desired; Catholicism provided a set of value coherent with the promotion of the common good and economic expansion. See Aguilar and Rojas. *El republicanismo en Hispanoamérica*; Entin, ‘Catholic Republicanism’. A new interest in alternative republican experiences is developing in recent years. See Sábato, *Republics of the New World*; Miller, *Republics of Knowledge*; Isabella, *Southern Europe in the Age of Revolutions*. Since the 1990s, Argentine scholars have renewed the study of local 19th-century republicanism. See Roldán, ‘El republicanismo y sus significados’.

the institutional construction following May 1810 is not new, although little travelled by Argentine historiography and the chapter contributes to this literature.²

In what follows, we provide a nuanced interpretation of García's thought thanks to a careful socio-economic contextualisation. He tried to practically implement his ideas thanks to the institutional building process sponsored by the new autonomous institutions of the city, and the two axes which guided him were the desire to reform agrarian legislation and to extend the southern frontier of Buenos Aires. The chapter discusses his activities thanks to his writings and archival materials, assessing his vision's centrality in inspiring local agrarian policy.³ Buenos Aires hegemonic position in the attempts of national organisation of the old Viceroyalty shaped its political and economic project. General congresses among the Río de la Plata provinces tried to formulate a new political pact in the language of constitutionalism. Property was enshrined as a fundamental right in constitutional talks. However, the ideal of agrarian republicanism did not prove strong enough to provide a solid basis for inter-provincial union. Following the failure of the Assembly of the Year XIII, the Directorio resumed to some of García's ideas around agrarian colonisation, trying to gather the support of urban capitals and rural population for the enterprise. The attempt was partially successful, as new settlements and productive activities were established south of the Río Salado. However, the advancement contributed to an increase in interethnic violence and rural insecurity. This development coupled with the increasing attempts of appropriating and accumulating lands by wealthy individuals would increase social tensions in the countryside, as war and revolution were crafting an unprecedented political protagonism for rural masses. Finally, the chapter introduces the fundamental role that sovereign Native groups played in shaping Buenos Aires frontier policy.

² Álvarez, *Las guerras civiles argentinas*. It was the first book to provide an economic analysis of the post-1810 civil wars, published in 1914. The story of its reception attests to the reluctance with which the Argentine historical canon included socio-economic studies. See Videla. 'Historia de un consenso'. The other significant book, which places economic causes at the centre of its analysis, was written by a U.S.-based scholar. See Burgin, *Aspectos económicos federalismo argentino*. Since the 1980s, the situation has changed, mainly due to the historiographical turn the works of Tulio Halperín Donghi favoured. Some of his seminal studies incorporate the economic element in interpreting the revolutionary years and in the formation of the governing elites of the independent state. See Halperín Donghi, 'La Expansión Ganadera'; Halperín Donghi. *Guerra y finanzas*. Argentine historians have produced remarkable studies on local socio-economic history. Garavaglia and Gelman, 'Rural History of the Río de la Plata'. However, the only work that studied the intellectual world of the epoch in connection with European history and historiography was not followed by further research. See Myers. *Orden y Virtud*.

³ The fundamental primary source employed is a report handwritten by García in July 1819. The document was directed to Cornelio Saavedra, his old friend, who had just returned to Buenos Aires from exile and was appointed as commissioner of the government for the defence of the Buenos Aires frontier in Luján. García composed a compendium of the decrees and orders he had received concerning frontier agrarian colonisation, collection of topographical information and indigenous diplomacy. He alternated the transcript of official documents with his comments. Notwithstanding its relevance, the document has, until now, been neglected. AGN, 2307, ff. 176-204.

1. A Spanish Official at the Service of a Republic

Right after his installation, the Primera Junta directed his attention to the long-lasting issue of the rural economy's productive development and the southern frontier's organisation. On 15 June 1810, Pedro Andrés García was ordered to inspect the frontier forts and to collect information on the state of the countryside, with the goals of "reporting on ways to improve them" and "improving our fields". Among the instructions, the Junta included a description of the rural tenancy system on the ground and proposals on the best ways to distribute lands, "without the hindrances hitherto used".⁴ García is a central character of this chapter, as during the 1810s, he incessantly dedicated himself to the problems of the territorial organisation of the province of Buenos Aires, sketching plans for agrarian colonisation, informing the government on rural matters, guiding topographical and diplomatic expeditions and drawing topographical plans for new towns.⁵

Besides the considerable array of sources he produced on rural issues, he represents a privileged point of view to discuss the problems that the government of Buenos Aires faced in the 1810s because he re-shaped the ideas of Bourbon economic reformism at the service of a republic under construction. He was born in Cantabria in 1758 and arrived in the Río de la Plata in 1776 as a lieutenant of the Real Cuerpo de Ingenieros following the Ceballos expedition.⁶ Between 1778 and 1781, he participated in the colonisation of the Patagonian Coast under the command of Francisco de Biedma, drawing the topographical plans of Puerto San José, one of the new settlements established. Back from Patagonia, he joined the newly created Blandengues of Mendoza. There, he gained diplomatic experience in dealing with Native sovereign groups, as Commander Juan Francisco Amigorena signed a series of

⁴ *Registro Oficial. Tomo 1 (RORA)*, 36.

⁵ The only monograph dedicated to him collects important biographical data but suffers from methodological nationalism. See Nicolau, *Pedro Andrés García*. García is cited in works that reconstruct the history of "Argentine" geography and cartography. See Martínez Sierra, *El mapa de las Pampas*; Zweifel, *Medir lo inconmensurable*. Recently, new studies have provided more rigorous insights into his activities, albeit from different points of view. Gelman published García's writings and highlighted his defence of small property in the context of the Argentine debate over the origins of the latifundia. He sees him as a "faithful servant of the interests of the State". Gelman, *Un funcionario*. Navarro Floria interprets him as a revolutionary who saw the end of Spanish rule as the opportunity to create a state utopia through the creative force of laws and establish a new social order. In this context, he points out his ideas regarding the relationship between Creole and indigenous societies and how he wanted to dissipate interethnic confrontations by developing a commercial society through which the indigenous people would "civilise". Navarro Floria, '«Formar patria»'. Finally, Roulet returned to García in the context of her studies on the frontier and the Creole construction of indigenous identities in the late colonial period. The Coronel is placed in the tradition of explorers who collected knowledge about Native territory and customs to serve expansionist projects. Roulet, *Huincas*, 305-346.

⁶ Bianchi Vilelli, et al. 'Una genealogía de los planos históricos'.

peace treaties with the *Pehuenches* from Malargüe between 1781 and 1783.⁷ It will not be the last time Bourbon reformism employed his expertise. In a frontier plan of 1812, García hints at some engineering work he carried on in the provinces of “Yuracaré, Moxos, Chiquitos and Cordillera”.⁸ Those were ex-Jesuit Missions in the Intendancy of Cochabamba, where Francisco Biedma, the commander under which García served in Patagonia, had been promoted Intendant in 1785. Albeit the source did not reveal other details over his stay, he probably participated in some plans of economic improvement promoted by Biedma to stimulate the economy of the ex-Missions, which were left in a miserable state after the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767.⁹ The Coronel served Bourbon economic reformisms in different Río de la Plata contexts.

Besides the military career, García tried other ways to integrate into Spanish American society. In 1784, he moved to Buenos Aires, where he married Clara María Ferreyra de Lima, daughter of a Portuguese official, and looked for some bureaucratic appointment.¹⁰ Alongside his public offices, he forged relationships with the local commercial elites - as it was common in Spanish America - and ventured into a few commercial activities. His marriage provided him with a connection to the Portuguese community - the most vigorous foreign merchant community at that time.

Moreover, there are traces of a strict relationship with at least two prominent merchants of Buenos Aires. In an 1801 note where the Viceroy del Pino described the members of a “gang” of smugglers and their illicit connections with the Spanish administration, García is defined an “associate” (*socio*) of Tomás Antonio Romero.¹¹ As mentioned in the earlier chapter, Romero was maybe the most prominent merchant of the period and the one who better exploited slave trade concessions. Because of that, he was a fierce enemy of the monopolist merchants who constantly lamented his illicit practices. Besides that, García was a relative of Jaime Alsina i Verjés, a wealthy monopolist merchant. Alsina was the godfather of García’s eldest son, Manuel José, and the Garcías would represent an

⁷ Amigorena proved a successful frontier commander after learning about indigenous political culture from Native captives. It happened during the years García was serving under his command. Roulet, ‘Guerra y diplomacia en la frontera’.

⁸ AGN, 94, f. 136.

⁹ Morgan, ‘Funcionarios borbónicos y espacios de frontera’.

¹⁰ He was an administrator of the high court fines and the Tobacco monopoly, and a public notary in a few public offices. With time, he was in charge of more important duties, up to his appointment as *asentista* of the *situado* of Potosí in January 1809, a critical office during a time of dramatic fiscal scarcity. Most of the biographical data are collected in Garau, *Pedro Andrés García*. Marrying into a local family was a common strategy to integrate in the local commercial elite. See Socolow, *The Merchants of Buenos Aires*.

¹¹ Caillet-Bois, ‘Un informe reservado’, 77. The *informe* deals with the period of trade with neutrals during the Napoleonic Wars, where the regulation of neutral trade was more than ever tricky, as the authorities were caught between the needs of the treasury, the necessity of granting the regular operation of trade and the changing metropolitan regulations.

essential connection for the Alsina family after 1810, when the Buenos Aires commercial and political context became dangerous for Spanish merchants.¹² Manuel José became a central political figure in Buenos Aires during the 1820s, serving as Minister of the Treasury during the governments of Martín Rodríguez and Juan Manuel de Rosas.¹³

The British invasions represented a pivotal moment in García's political career. He distinguished himself in the defence of Buenos Aires, leading the 3rd Regimiento de los Cantabros. From this moment onwards, he fully entered Buenos Aires politics, playing a role in the repression of the Alzaga conspiracy (1809) and participating in the events of May 1810. He was among the men who built a fast political career out of their military proceedings in time of crisis. Garau detailed how García consolidated a strong influence over the politics of Buenos Aires between 1806 and 1810. During a time of numerous political changes (three Viceroys in four years), he became a reference for Spanish power, but he also played a crucial part among the insurgent elites, participating in the conspiracy against Cisneros. Martín Rodríguez later remembered that "this man exercised a great influence on C. Saavedra, who did not separate himself from García's opinion."¹⁴

His successive economic ventures render his character even more complex. In 1809, he solicited for a *merced* of 80 square leagues to Viceroy Liniers (216,000 he), declaring that he wanted to start agricultural activities and livestock farming, increase the local population and establish a chapel. To do so, he needed the property title to avoid future litigations. The Viceroy conceded him land in Morón.¹⁵ He probably invested the capital created from his commercial activities into rural production, a path that others were increasingly following. Later, he participated in a request of emphyteusis in 1826 with Juan Pedro Aguirre, Manuel José de Haedo y José María Roxas.¹⁶ Interestingly enough, their plea for an *estancia* in Balcarce may be the most significant concession in emphyteusis of the epoch, as it comprised a territory of 100 square leagues (270,000 he). Finally, the year before, García was in Potosí as a representative of Buenos Aires and British merchants, who sought to obtain - and almost did - concessions for exploiting every single silver mine in the region.¹⁷

García's life illustrates in a nutshell the broad processes that are being analysed in this dissertation. Educated as a military man, he acquired the technical knowledge of drawing and engineering, which

¹² Dalla Corte, *Jairne Alsina i Verjés*, 485.

¹³ See Chapter 6.

¹⁴ Garau, *op.cit.*, 51.

¹⁵ *Ivi*, 57.

¹⁶ Galmarini, *Los negocios del poder*, 240

¹⁷ Lofstrom, *Dámaso de Uriburu*, 38. The fact that Manuel J. García had good connections with important British merchants has been noted. See Besseghini, *Commercio britannico e imperialismo informale*.

he employed at the service of the Spanish monarchy and the autonomous and independent governments of Buenos Aires. As we will see, he fully participated in the Enlightened culture where political economy represented the necessary science of government to increase the wealth and power of the state if state legislation conformed to the laws of nature. He actively tried to put his political economy-inspired beliefs into practice. I did so at first serving Bourbon aspirations and later drawing colonisation plans and topographical maps to strengthen Buenos Aires in times of revolution. He represents the bridge that links Spanish imperial economic reformism with the republican politics of Buenos Aires, through the language of political economy.

At the same time, he had personal economic interests besides ideas. He had arrived in America as a low-ranking military official with no connections. After 25 years, he was fully integrated into the economic elites of Buenos Aires, thanks to commercial (licit or illicit) partnerships that provided him with conspicuous capital. He invested part of his commercial capital in land the year before becoming the drawer of Buenos Aires agrarian politics. If his readings rendered him a supporter of smallholding, his personal experience and material interests suggested him that a correctly managed large *estancia* was not harmful to the rural customs and agrarian productivity. His direct experience of the material reality which he sought to transform enabled him to craft a political and economic model for local economic development, blending multiple ideas discussed in the wider Atlantic.

Recently, Gelman offered an effort to place his ideas in the ideological and socio-economic context of the epoch.¹⁸ He saw it as a “faithful servant of the State”, sponsoring smallholdings in the face of the growing attempts to accumulate lands. While he was right in stressing García’s agrarian republicanism and support for the small property, he failed to detect his strong connections with the mercantile and landowner elites, of which he was part. In what follows, I will go back to his writing, exposing the blend of agrarian republicanism imagined by García on the shores of the Río de la Plata: the materialisation of a commercial society made of small and large proprietors, at the state’s service through their productive activities. The state was the central force behind this project, as it was the entity which would lead the process of socio-economic development through the transformative power of law.¹⁹

Thanks to his polyhedric profile, the Primera Junta appointed García to the 1810 expedition. From a technical point of view, the experience gained in geographical explorations and colonisation missions

¹⁸ Gelman, *Un funcionario*.

¹⁹ The belief in the “government of legislation” was an integral part of Enlightenment economic reformism, especially in the influential work of Gaetano Filangieri. García would copy some Filangieri’s passages in his reports. See Ferrone, *Politics of the Enlightenment*; Morelli, ‘Filangieri’.

was crucial, as he could measure distances, draw maps, and evaluate the engineering state of the frontier forts. Even if he never served in the Buenos Aires countryside, his years under the command of Amigorena provided him with some knowledge of the customs of the inhabitants of the Pampa, crucial for successful interethnic diplomacy. Regarding his social standing in Buenos Aires elites, his profile seemed perfect: he had proven an undisputed patriotism during the British Invasions, he was very close with Cornelio de Saavedra - the Junta's secretary, and he had multiple connections with the commercial elites. He was the man who might represent the local consensus for agrarian colonisation following 1810, and Manuel Belgrano, the leading local expert in political economy, suggested his appointment for the Salinas mission.²⁰

2. The Agrarian Colonisation Consensus

This mission did not come out of the blue. The previous chapter discussed the centrality of land property in the plans of economic improvement and reforms during the late colonial period. The breakthrough of the Revolutionary Wars impeded the further realisation of these plans, which included the advancement of the frontier in collaboration with indigenous leaders. Colonial elites started investing in the countryside, even if silver still played a prominent part in the Buenos Aires trade. Wars and revolutions had hampered the ambition to appropriate new virgin lands rather than a lack of interest in the enterprise due to a backward economic mentality.

The authorities of Buenos Aires had already collected data, maps and plans on the Pampa region for some decades, and García built on this previous experience to prepare the expedition. For instance, Sebastian de Undiano y Gastelu sent Garcia the map he composed in 1804, hoping that it could be helpful in the mission of “bringing the geography of the *pampas* out of the current shameful obscurity”.²¹ The collection of new geographical information to be turned into useful knowledge was central and the Cabildo assigned the *piloto* Francisco Mesura to the Salinas expedition.

To support the project, Belgrano was actively promoting agrarian colonisation from the pages of the *Correo de Comercio*. In August 1810, he stated that “the fields occupied by a multitude of men under the name of farmers, should be the attention of the government” and that “it is absolutely necessary to have a practical experience, an immediate knowledge of the character of the local people of the country in which we are and an equal knowledge of the fields”.²² Belgrano dedicated various articles

²⁰ Nicolau, *La reforma económico-financiera*, 188.

²¹ Sebastian Undiano y Gastelu to Pedro Andrés García. Cuartel, September 1810. See Barros, *Fronteras y territorios federales*, 281-284.

²² *Correo de Comercio*, n. 23, 4 August 1810.

to agriculture and the ways to locally promote it. Regarding land tenancy he had quite progressive ideas. In his opinion, “the lack of ownership of the land occupied by the farmers” was “the great evil from which all their unhappiness and misery come from”. He praised the power of property to fix families to land across generations, because the “powerful incentive of property” pushes the farmer to improve his possession through the maximisation of individual labour and accumulate a capital he can transmit to his offsprings in the form of an inheritance.

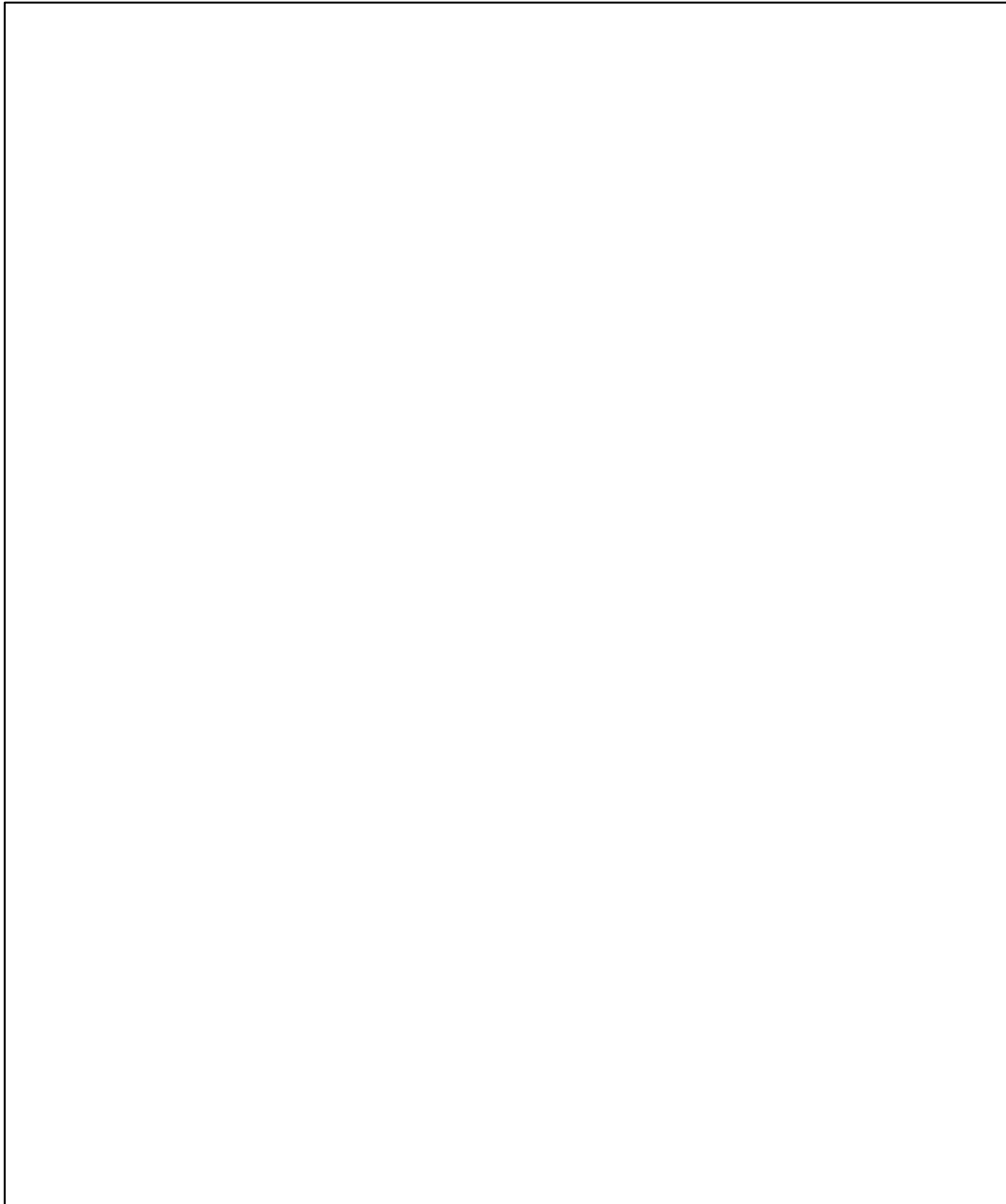


Fig. 9. *Mapa de la zona de operaciones en la época colonial. Anexo n. 1. Detail.* See Walther, *La Conquista del desierto*.

If during the late 1790s he was advocating for the combined development of agriculture, industry and trade, the rebellions in Alto Peru and the collapse of Spanish imperial sovereignty called for the improvement of local production: Buenos Aires could not base anymore its wealth on being the

southern commercial hub of an empire of trade, but it should further develop agriculture and rural industry. Belgrano always spoke about market-oriented agriculture. In fact, he considered commerce and agriculture so interrelated and mutually dependent that “agriculture can only flourish when it is seen as an object of trade”.²³ According to him, history provides the raw material to test his theoretical claims as the societies that have relied on subsistence agriculture have been chased by misery, while the ones that developed commercial agriculture enjoyed abundance. If subsistence would have been the only incentive to work, “peoples would still be in their infancy, and their unorganised societies would be scarcely distinguishable from the primitive state of wild and wandering man”.²⁴

The progressive side of Belgrano lied in the fact that he was theoretically in favour of the expropriation of absentee landowners. However, he recognised that the measure had a shaky legal legitimation, but “as there is no right to take lands away from those who have them, at least they should be distributed in emphyteusis”. Government should force the landowners who do not work their lands to lease them out in emphyteusis, “which we all know is almost like a *dominio directo*”. In this way, farmers would work harder and improve their economic activities, thanks to the “powerful incentive of property”. Besides lacking individual property, Belgrano pointed out that the frontier settlements lacked common land to progress and expand, as enormous and non-productive properties surrounded them. This situation must change.

The desire to stimulate individual wealth through agricultural labour and property was an aspiration of administrators and reformers for some decades, but the May Revolution rendered it more urgent. The political disarticulation of the ex-Viceroyalty determined the possible separation between Buenos Aires and Potosí, its primary source of silver and fiscal revenues. As “the precious metals that I was seeing”, García noted, “as well as the Peruvian commodities, perhaps will disappear in this region. And with what shall we fill the void they leave in our commerce? Which agent shall we substitute them with to accelerate our turnovers and vitalise the State?” The solution was to extract value from Buenos Aires lands through industry and commerce, and open new “wellsprings of true wealth”.²⁵ This way, the stream of fiscal revenues from customs duties would sustain public finance, as the *situado* had already stopped since 1808.

Agrarian colonisation needed export markets, but this did not mean that indiscriminate free trade policies were applied. Commercial policies were a vital part of the local political economy and will

²³ *Correo de Comercio*, n. 36, 3 November 1810.

²⁴ *Correo de Comercio*, n. 32, 6 October 1810.

²⁵ García, *Diario á Salinas Grandes*, XXII.

be a constant subject of debate. The May Revolution legalised trade with British merchants, but it did not sanction an acritical adoption of free trade policies. From 1809 onwards, the British represented the commercial partners the city sought - even if they were not the only ones. Spaniards could still connect Buenos Aires with the wider Atlantic markets and North American merchants increasingly visited the Southern Atlantic. After May 1810, the government of a pro-British faction granted them prominence in Buenos Aires foreign trade. Juan José Cristóbal de Anchorena expressed the anxieties of local merchants in an 1814 petition to the Trade Consulate. Pointing out the excessive privileges enjoyed by the British, Anchorena dismissed the free trade arguments put forward to legitimise Buenos Aires trade regulation. Authorities wished to please the British to gain political support against Spain, “as if Britain would level its national interests to the private gain of four businessmen who have come up to take instant advantage of our ignorance and lack of foresight”. However, this was destroying local industry and commerce, and it was against the historical example of “the major trading powers”, which have always supported the “principle of freedom and equality of trade”, albeit “by issuing laws and regulations adapted to the circumstances of each State”.²⁶

In 1817, Director Pueyrredon finally published a new custom house regulation which considerably increased duties on maritime imports, hoping to solve the pressing fiscal necessities and favour local industry. Robert Staples, the informal British consul in Buenos Aires, immediately protested on behalf of his fellow nationals that notwithstanding the natural tendency of the government to favour national industry, “no necessity can justify a step for which there is no example in the practice of any nation in the world”.²⁷ The Comisión Económica de Arbitrios caustically countered Staples’ exaggeration, noting that government provisions were totally in line with international practice in economic regulation, and it discarded the British petition. Therefore, commercial regulation and the participation of British merchants in local trade were an essential and debated topic in the 1810s. At the same time, independence wars were still ongoing and different forms of national organisation were attempted in the Río de la Plata.

The commercial opening to foreign ships in 1809 provided Buenos Aires and Montevideo with market incentives for expanding agrarian colonisation and the fiscal resources needed to sustain autonomous governments. Trade was central to the subsistence of the cities, a mantra of the political economy that most clearly materialised when the revolutionary turbulences endangered the fiscal resources of Alto Peru, the system that the Spanish monarchy had built to sustain its integrated American commercial empire. If trade was central, marketable goods were central, too. During the late colonial time,

²⁶ Mariluz Urquijo, *Estado e industria*, 9-12.

²⁷ *Ivi*, 19-24.

administrators felt the urgency to promote agricultural exploitation to stimulate local development and increase export commodities, as the trade balance with Spanish products was based on the silver from Potosí, which was not a local commodity. From the point of view of the history of economic thought, the role of precious metals in promoting economic growth was despised in favour of the belief of the fundamental wealth-generating character of human labour. Notwithstanding this shared belief, the exploitation of Potosí was highly profitable for the Crown as well as for Spanish and Spanish American merchants, and it could not be stopped, quite the contrary, as evidenced in the opinion of Sanz regarding the *mita*.

In May 1810, important sectors of the elites were in favour of expanding the Buenos Aires jurisdiction for stimulating agricultural production: local *hacendados* were seeing their desires finally backed by the government, and the merchants tied to foreign markets would obtain goods to be exchanged with their Atlantic partners (especially the British). Opposition came from the merchants who were most tied to Spanish interests, but it was not an opposition to the colonisation project *per se*. It was an opposition to the political revolution that transferred the sovereignty from the Viceroy to a local *junta* made of their economic rivals, as the Alzaga conspiracy (1812) and its immediate repression would soon make clear.²⁸ Merchants linked to the Cádiz route lost their profit margins after the commercial opening and, following the “necessity” of saving their economic activities, had to gradually adapt to the new rules of the political and economic games, where rural investments gradually became inescapable.²⁹ In a seminal article, Tulio Halperín Donghi highlighted the economic reasons that pushed Buenos Aires capitals toward the countryside following 1810, stressing the rapid and radical transformation in respect to colonial times.³⁰ In contrast, our study highlighted that the interest in land property and rural production was higher than previously believed during the last decades of Spanish rule. However, the collapse of Spanish sovereignty speeded up this economic tendency, which was already unfolding, as economic groups interested in fostering rural production raised to prominence in local politics, and the maintenance of control on the Alto Peru seemed difficult.

²⁸ Schlez, ‘Un fatal golpe’.

²⁹ Fernández de Agüero, the last attorney of Cádiz Consulate in Buenos Aires, fought strenuously to defend Spanish monopoly during the imperial crisis before 1810. During the 1820s, he heavily invested in the Banco de la Provincia de Buenos Aires and in the countryside. See Schlez, *La necesidad es ley suprema*.

³⁰ Halperín Donghi, ‘La Expansión Ganadera’.

3. The Salinas Expedition and Agrarian Republicanism

The Salinas expedition was thus carried on between October and December 1810, and the Coronel complied with the orders, collecting information and providing salt for the city. On his return, he delivered to the Junta Grande a detailed diary, which included important geographical information and the content of his negotiations with various *caciques*. The diary was followed by an *Informe* (November 1811), where García sketched his political and economic proposal for Buenos Aires and proposed the agrarian republicanism model on which further political and economic development should be based.

The diary had a typical Enlightened style: it empirically described reality and then proposed solutions to reform it. It starts with comments on the Guardia de Luján and the frontier settlements. García's tone is straightforwardly bleak while noting the ruinous state of the buildings, fortifications, and the lack of population. "Nowadays, you see nothing but ruins", he commented, while he linked the prosperity of the past with the ability of the former commander Francisco de Balcarce. Indeed, the remedy was a new local military leadership, who had to reunite the military and civil power to economically govern the frontier settlement, as "there is no need to demonstrate the advantages that the military order gives to the civilian one, in order to make the authorities respectable, as they are notorious".³¹ In what follows, García describes the disordered frontier society, where indigenous and Creole people were mixing in commercial but vagrant life, escaping from the administrative control of state authorities because "they prefer their own vile self-interest to the general one".³²

The diary continues with a description of the covered route, the surrounding territory, and the content of the *parlamentos* with different *caciques*.³³ The description is highly informative about the difficulties in carrying on intercultural diplomacy and the different alignments and sentiments of the indigenous people concerning the expedition. The favourable inclination of some *caciques valdivianos* was indeed fundamental, as they were very interested in García's mission.³⁴ Influenced

³¹ He believed that *potestad oeconomica* conferred to a military leader would rapidly materialise a good local economic government. García, *Diario á Salinas Grandes*, 12.

³² The moral influence of commerce could generate a double effect: when directed by the state, it works as a moralising force that stimulates the development of civil customs. Conversely, commerce feeds private vices when guided by individual passions. This dichotomy was also presented in the discourses circulating on the *arreglo* of the Banda Oriental. The main point seems that a sedentary life is necessary to enjoy the moralising effects of trade, as it allows socialisation and the spirit of emulation that promotes civilisation, a point central in the *Nuevo sistema de gobierno económico*.

³³ See Chapter 5 for the crucial role of indigenous *caciques* in the formulation of frontier policy. The *parlamentos* were diplomatic meetings between sovereign Native American *caciques* and Spanish authorities.

³⁴ They came from the area next to the Chilean city of Valdivia.

by their opinions, the Coronel would propose an ambitious new frontier line, centred in a new town in Salinas, inhabited by Creole and indigenous people.

In November, García elevated to the Junta the report where he analysed the rural problems, their remedies, and the plan for a new frontier line in agreement with the *valdivianos*. The ambitious new frontier would go from the confluence of the Río Colorado with the Atlantic to the Fuerte San Rafael over the Río Diamante, the new settlement of Salinas being the central point of it. Forts and new settlements would cover the frontier to defend it from non-subjugated indigenous groups. This idea resonates with what Azara proposed fifteen years before.

In the *Informe*, he offers an erudite and detailed proposal backed with the usual political and economic arguments of the Spanish Enlightenment. In fact, he expressed his gratitude for the appointment because it was the most honourable one, given that “the prosperity of agriculture and population, the power and wealth of society” were based on the foundations of new towns and the productive development of the rural economy, because “a thousand flourishing *pueblos*, in the midst of the now deserted fields, will be a more glorious monument than any that the vanity of the *conquistadores* has erected”. Notwithstanding the local natural resources, the productive assets were underdeveloped because until recently, “ignorance of economic science” reigned supreme, and the Spanish did not know “their real interests”. The wise reforms of Carlos III changed the situation, but, unfortunately, the new wealth of Buenos Aires was still based on trade rather than on land, “the only factor capable to strengthen the happiness of a state”. Now, the revolution allowed American provinces to finally economically exploit their natural resources, which would fill the void left by Peruvian silver.³⁵

The analysis starts with the enumeration of rural problems whose origins coincided: the disorder. The absence of the state and the increasing demand for rural commodities turned commerce into a pernicious force that fuelled individual interests and vices; lands designated to agriculture and the ones dedicated to husbandry were mixed and underproductive; people were occupying lands without a legitimate title and lived a semi-nomad life; crimes and thefts were left unpunished. The *agregado* is the symbol of the ruinous productive state, and these are defined as “the moth of the honourable farmers”, “vagrants” and “detrimental farmers”. García was sure that “the honest farmer and the useful landowner cannot prosper as long as they are surrounded by such enemies”. Albeit the *agregados* dedicated to husbandry and agriculture, the activities on which Buenos Aires’ wealth should be based, the fact that they did it outside the state institutional framework rendered them a

³⁵ *Ivi*, XXII.

reason for disorder and insecurity rather than prosperity. Obviously, the state goal would be to turn those prejudicial individuals into “virtuous, dedicated and industrious citizens”.³⁶

The plan for the new countryside settlements was summarised in four steps: an accurate measurement of lands, its division and distribution, the foundation of towns, and the securitisation of the frontier zone. An exact knowledge of the territory is fundamental, knowledge that should be collected in a topographic plan.

This will be the solemn document which will secure the patrimony of our common family; it is on this plan that Your Excellency will set forth the greatness and power of the republic. This way, Numa dictated the laws on the uncultivated fields of Latium that made Rome the head of the world and the model of empires.³⁷

Then, the congregation of families and the distribution of properties would create an industrious and prosperous commercial society, thanks to state law, individual interest, and social emulation. He believed that “to establish towns and encourage agriculture and industry in them is to create a homeland for men who do not have one”.³⁸ Indeed, urban life was equalled with life in a society because the proximity of many families would push the spirit of emulation, generating civilised and industrious manners, while a rural and isolated existence accustomed families to live like barbarians, caring only for subsistence and immediate passions. García agreed with the ideas of his contemporaries about society, considered as a sum of individuals linked together by the mediating role of labour, whose interrelation generated civilised customs brought by emulative consumption.

Farmers, hardened by the weather, accustomed to a simple and frugal life, nobly proud with the feeling of their own strength, independent of their property, from which they derive their subsistence and their fortune, they will be the true citizens, who do not need to beg their maintenance from the state, nor sell themselves cheaply to anyone who can give them a job or provide them with an income.³⁹

Individual property is a means to materialise a future productive utopia for Buenos Aires. The state’s action was fundamental to reaching this goal, as it has the force of the law at its disposal. Law-based coercion was crucial because people do not know their true interests, and vices and passions might misdirect them. However, the knowledge of economic laws guided state administrators who should

³⁶ *Ivi*, III-IV. Following 1810, the term ‘citizen’ substituted ‘vassal’.

³⁷ *Ivi*, V.

³⁸ *Ivi*, VII

³⁹ *Ibidem*.

adjust civil legislation to natural economic laws. In a utopian world, coercion will not be necessary because the materialisation of commercial society - the optimal form of human society - will naturally develop,

But if the sad human condition compels the government to use its authority to force men towards their own good [...], this measure can be softened by the incentive of interest and ownership.⁴⁰

Property was thus an incentive for the state to persuade the individual interest of dispersed families. For this reason, it was necessary to include the obligation to populate the distributed lands in the colonisation plan, “in order that the stimulus to work be greater”. Even if someone might point to this disposition as tyrannical, urban life represented the true interest of the population, so the government was allowed to force the congregation of rural inhabitants. Coercion was directed also against large landowners, as it was planned to expropriate their land to found new settlements. However, García believed that those wealthy individuals would rapidly understand the advantages of stimulating the rural economy, albeit at the expense of their property rights, “so that, far from opposing these measures, they will strive for the preference of their lands for *pueblos*”.⁴¹

Given the lack of population, the government should attract “settlers from all over the world”, as well as modern agricultural techniques.⁴² In order to foster the economic education of the population, an economic society should be founded on the Dublin model. Here, García clearly expressed the role he thinks political economy should play in the education and betterment of the population. He believed that British agriculture had reached an impressive stage of development thanks to the elites, who worked to spread economic knowledge among the population, creating a particular “spirit” inclined to economic improvement. The government of Buenos Aires should give a “similar movement” to the “opinion of our citizens”, convincing them that human labour creates true wealth. Ideas mattered for economic prosperity, García believed.

If these principles, authorised by a paternal government, are spread and vulgarised, they cannot fail to enervise a population who do not spare sacrifice when they consider it useful to the *patria*.

⁴⁰ *Ivi*, VIII.

⁴¹ This consideration resonates with the ideas of Manuel Sisternes y Feliu described in Chapter 1. We do not know if García read him, but the fact that similar ideas were thought at similar times in different part of the globe signals how historical actors were rationalising the economic and political problems they faced through similar economic abstractions.

⁴² This early advocating for foreign immigration to Buenos Aires was followed by a September 1812 decree granting civil rights and land to the foreign families that would settle in Buenos Aires. See *Gazeta ministerial del gobierno de Buenos-Ayres*, n. 22, 4 September 1812. Bernardino Rivadavia signed the decree and will be the man who tried to organise British immigration during the following 15 years. It is interesting to note that García never mentions the inclusion of Native sovereign groups to increase the rural working population, such as others did and will do, and he preferred to sponsor foreign immigration.

I can already see them rushing to the promotion of agriculture and industry with the same enthusiasm with which they have always flown to offer their goods and sacrifice their lives for the common security.⁴³

The diffusion of political economy among every class of the population would materialise a commercial utopia in which a society of individual producers would exploit the abundant local natural resources for the sake of their economic prosperity. Commerce will be the stimulus for local production, and the government should improve communications, establish fairs, and sanction free trade with the Atlantic markets. The model of agrarian commercial republicanism, which emerges from García's writing, resonates with similar Atlantic experiences in the valorisation of individual labour, political participation, common good over individual interest, and rule of law.

However, it was comprised of other elements that rendered it an original formulation, mainly the liceity of large estates to promote economic growth instead of a restricted focus on smallholding and the centrality of the state in the materialisation of the republican commercial utopia. The beliefs in the moral and social advantages of small property stood hand in hand with his appreciation of large-scale productive activities. This interdependence is explained in his plan for the establishment of new rural settlements. The new towns' population was to be divided into three classes: landlords, landowners and proletarians. The government had to enact a law forcing landless masses to live in town to be able to work in the *estancias*.⁴⁴ Small- and large-scale agrarian exploitation might exist alongside each other. In fact, the profitability of husbandry and hide trade meant that this sector had to further develop alongside smallholding farming.

Advocating for strong state interventionism might fall into the support for despotism, and García worried about dispelling this association: the action of the state was needed as, unfortunately, the level of civilisation and education of the rural population prevented them from knowing their true interests. The elites governing the state, instead, knew what it was better for the future development of a wealthy community. They know it thanks to political economy, the science of modern state governance. Political economy, therefore, constituted the rhetorical justification for promoting a strong developmental state, which might trump individual liberty and reveal the true interest of its citizens: the participation in a modern and market-oriented commercial society. Ideological tradition and the socio-economic reality determined these torsions of the republican agrarian ideal. Spanish

⁴³ García, *Diario á Salinas Grandes*, X. The Coronel was referring to the recent British invasions and May Revolution, characterised by an unprecedented political participation from urban population and masses.

⁴⁴ *Ivi*, VI-VII.

political economy advocated for a strong state - necessary to catch up with the most advanced empires - and for the Bourbon-style energetic economic government. At the same time, the land abundant context and the profitability of extensive husbandry inspired the convenience of large properties. García, indeed, owned one.

Finally, he recalled the necessity of collecting information to create the statistical register (*razón estadística*) and decide better where to establish the new forts, thanks to which he would prepare a prospectus of the costs involved in the foundation of the settlement in Salinas. To assure the Junta regarding this matter, he noted that the *hacendados* of the southern countryside would be more than happy to contribute to this project, given the enormous advantages that would follow from a new and secure frontier line. The interplay between government and the increasingly powerful landed interest will be crucial in the history of property and frontier advancement in Buenos Aires. At this point, García expressed a state-led commercial utopia, which, according to him, encountered the favour of landed interests.

4. Colonisation Plans in the Epoch of Buenos Aires Hegemony (1811-1815)

García's ideas were well received in the governing circles. Even if the formation of a new executive power, the First Triumvirate, ended for some years the political career of Saavedra, the new authorities immediately showed signs of appreciation for the work of the Coronel - signalling the widespread belief in the convenience of his mission. He was already working to materialise his projects, as he had delivered a budget plan to maintain a permanent frontier militia formed by 600 men on 20 November 1811.⁴⁵ The Triumvirate wrote to him on March 1812 that his plan for the frontier militia "has earned him the highest consideration" and will be proposed at the next general congress.⁴⁶ However, during the same month, the Cortes of Cádiz sanctioned the 1812 Constitution, marking a crucial moment for the new Río de la Plata authorities, as its refusal would determine a fundamental clash with the metropole. The arrival in the city of José de San Martín and Carlos María de Alvear coalesced a new political faction aiming at independence from Spain. It reunited in the Logia Lautaro, a political secret society that tried to coordinate the new southern American governments in favour of independence.⁴⁷ The Logia soon managed to informally take control of Buenos Aires executive

⁴⁵ AGN, 2307, f. 189r.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁷ The emergence of lodges was a process of "military sociability" that took place throughout the territories of the Spanish monarchy. It permitted the coordination of military and political actions in far-flung localities and coordinated the political efforts of the nascent liberal elites. See del Solar, 'Masones y Sociedades Secretas'. For the analysis of this process in the context of Buenos Aires new forms of sociability, see González Bernaldo, 'La Revolución Francesa y la emergencia de nuevas practicas'.

power, favoured by the anti-Spanish sentiments developing in the city, which touched their highest peaks during the bloody repression of the Alzaga revolt (July 1812). The ability of García to survive the changing political tides is striking as he gradually got closer to Alvear, entering the Logia Lautaro, while at the same time maintaining his connections with Spanish merchants, as the protection he and his son Manuel granted to the Alsinas revealed.⁴⁸

Notwithstanding political instability, Buenos Aires authorities maintained a favourable attitude toward the problems of the countryside. In May, Vicente López y Planes praised in front of the Cabildo the project of a statistical record of the countryside, addressing García as a “philanthropic mind” and “patriot”. In an erudite rhetorical speech to the Cabildo, he described the lack of morality, religion and order in the rural areas, because of the scarce application to labour and the lack of men due to the civil wars, notwithstanding the local prosperous natural resources. Stimulating the population as much as possible through the distribution of public land and the application of “wise economic principles” was necessary to increase the state’s power and wealth. This way, a future of opulence will materialise, thanks to the unfolding of the natural economic laws put into motion by the wise action of the state. Statistics and topographical knowledge were the inescapable basis of economic and social development, and the *razón estadística* by García was “one of the greater works that might be impulse for the happiness of Buenos Aires” and “most in line with the interests of the Community”.⁴⁹

In July 1812, the First Triumvirate finally ordered García to begin, “without losing time”, the creation of the *razón estadística* of the countryside of Buenos Aires and of the topographic plan signalling the best locations for the new frontier forts.⁵⁰ The decision was published in the *Gazeta Ministerial*, where it was communicated that the goal was

distributing to the sons of the country, free of charge, adequate *suertes de estancia*, and *chacras* for sowing grains, under a political system, which will ensure the establishment of settlements and the happiness of so many patrician families, who, being victims of the greed of the powerful, live in destitution and misery with scandal of reason, and to the detriment of the true interests of the State.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Dalla Corte, *op. cit.*, 514.

⁴⁹ AGN, 1753.

⁵⁰ AGN, 2307, f. 190.

⁵¹ *Gazeta ministerial del gobierno de Buenos-Ayres*, n. 22, 4 September 1812. The *suerte de estancia* was land destined to husbandry, while *chacras* were reserved for agriculture.

García began immediately to carry on the project, together with the geographer José Sourriere de Souillac and the land surveyor José María Manso, and they collected statistics and drew the topographic plans of the localities surrounding Buenos Aires, such as San Fernando, Las Conchas, Pilar, San Isidro, Morón, Flores and Socorro.⁵²

Besides carrying on his official duty, he advanced in his plan for the new frontier line centred on the future settlement in Salinas, writing some instructions directed to the Provinces of the Interior to advance frontier guards. This document is very detailed and stands for his engineering expertise, as García described the best construction techniques according to the different geographical contexts.⁵³ In addition, it reveals his commitment to a unified political and economic future for the different provinces of the ex-Viceroyalty, with Buenos Aires at its forefront.

Meanwhile, a new change of executive power occurred, and the Second Triumvirate assumed power, two out of three members being part of the Logia Lautaro. Soon, it was decided to reunite a general congress formed by representatives of the provinces. The main goal was to draft a constitution for the ex-territories of the Viceroyalty, with the informal goal of creating a legitimate political body to proclaim independence from Spain. On 31 January, the Assembly of the Year XIII started its reunions in Buenos Aires, and a month later it assigned to García the duty of collecting information and preparing the project for the advancement of the frontier of the United Provinces because his previous *informes* and *memorias* had proved his expertise and knowledge on the matter.⁵⁴

During 1813, García produced some preparatory works for this broader plan. In April, he sketched a report focused on the Western countryside of Buenos Aires and the importance of dividing agricultural lands from those dedicated to husbandry. The current disorder was detrimental to production and led to an increase in crime and illicit practices. He reiterated the proposals of the *informe* of November 1811 and cited nine other plans and three reports that he had presented in the past January, asking for their approval and for the promulgation of “invariable rules” to regulate the land distribution and productive exploitation.⁵⁵

In July, he offered a project to make navigable the Río Tercero between Córdoba and the Río Paraná, inscribing it in a plan for improving the terrestrial and water communication between the provinces. The document is filled with arguments regarding the importance of commerce and communication

⁵² AGN, 2307, f. 190r.

⁵³ AGN, 94, ff. 135-139.

⁵⁴ AGN, 2307, f. 191. On 13 August 1814, the Assembly ordered him to realise a topographic map of the United Provinces.

⁵⁵ García, ‘Informe 9 de abril’, 112.

for the productive development of political communities. García described in detail the extent to which the economy of every province would benefit from improved communications.⁵⁶ Again, the Coronel shows a strong commitment to a unified political and economic future of the nascent United Provinces. In August, he indeed presented to the Triumvirate a “Geographic Plan” of the territories of the old Viceroyalty, accompanied by a prospectus of the navigable rivers and other reports written by various explorers. His goal was to convince it of the necessity of “break down these hitherto impenetrable barriers to our ephemeral and costly domestic trade”, and to stimulate the political unity of the provinces through their economic integration. Such as individuals are guided by their (economic) interests, García believes that awakening each province’s interest through the betterment of internal communication would naturally unify them “in an unbreakable way” to Buenos Aires, the gate for exporting provincial productions to the external markets.

Because, by giving each [Province] value and outlet to its productions by exporting them from their countries by means of navigation to the capital, [commodities] would go out from this Central point of the Globe to the four parts of the earth, building their incalculable riches, and Provinces would be by this means so united that no external force would be able to break in upon them.⁵⁷

Not everyone in the ex-Viceroyalty shared this vision of a unitary future for the provinces under the guidance of Buenos Aires. Already in the months following the May Revolution, some regions had refused to respect the new authority of the Primera Junta (Alto Peru, Paraguay, Banda Oriental), and the interprovincial conflicts had been exacerbated due to the aggressive centralisation of Buenos Aires power, especially since the dissolution of the Junta Grande in 1811.⁵⁸

While these conflicts were nurtured, García continued his work in the countryside. In 1813, he produced two reports that highlighted different but equally pernicious problems. In September, he was sent to Chascomús - the province’s last southern outpost - to evaluate José Dominguez’s claims over a large estate. When he arrived, he understood that multiple families were occupying and cultivating José Dominguez’s lands, and they were afraid of being evicted. In this frontier context, García firmly stated that “whatever the rights of a landowner may be, they can never prevail over those of a *pueblo*, nor can the interests of one individual precede those of more than 250 useful

⁵⁶ García, *Memoria sobre la navegación del Tercero*.

⁵⁷ AGN, 2307, f. 193r. The image of Buenos Aires placed at the centre of the commercial world was already expressed by Vieytes in the pages of the *Semanario*, on 6 July 1803.

⁵⁸ See Chapter 5.

arms”.⁵⁹ Chascomús *vecinos* had presided, economically and militarily, over these lands for three decades, and their *antigua posesión* was more legitimate than the written property title that a wealthy merchant of the city had just requested to the authorities.

Interestingly, García changed his mind regarding the *agregados*. While his previous writings expressed a harsh condemnation of the disorder and crime generated by land squatters, the suffering and sacrifices of the inhabitants of the frontier changed his judgment. He reported to the government the reasons local farmers were compulsorily translated there in the epoch of Vértiz and dedicated to rural development since then, notwithstanding the frequent attacks by indigenous people. In sum, García described them as “peaceful and useful citizens, and the most important portion of society”, and therefore, the state should favour them, being the increase in the useful population the increase in state power and wealth. Creating a cadastre and a register of properties was the solution so as not to incur any more in these kinds of conflicts.

The following month, he proposed a plan for establishing of a permanent militia on the frontier, given that revolutionary wars were beginning to break frontier peace.⁶⁰ Civil wars were affecting the rural population, as conscription for the patriot armies took useful hands away from cultivating the fields. The document also testifies that the realisation of the topographic plan was running, as the Coronal had sent the authorities a first version, and that the *hacendados* were willing to contribute financially to the creation of the rural militia.

During 1814, the military defeats in Peru and the increasing influence of Artigas in the Banda Oriental challenged Buenos Aires’ hegemony, and the Logia Lautaro directed a further concentration of power. The Director Supremo replaced the Triumvirate as the highest executive power.⁶¹ Director Posadas urgently asked García to present a frontier defensive plan to face the growing indigenous menace.⁶² The Coronal suggested reuniting a frontier militia thanks to a pardon for deserters, promising land in the new settlements in exchange for the enrolment, as they should be “soldiers and *vecinos*”.⁶³ The new dangerous situation inspired him to devise a single solution for two problems: the distribution of land property in the new line would increase the provincial useful population and provide soldiers to defend its territory. The new line created in collaboration with the *valdivianos* would start from the

⁵⁹ García, ‘Informe sobre Chascomús’, 116. In addition, García noted that the property title of José Dominguez was based on an illicit sale.

⁶⁰ García, ‘Informe sobre fronteras y milicia’.

⁶¹ Ossa and Rabinovich, ‘Directores, Dictadores y Protectores’, 23-24.

⁶² The fall of patriot Chile (1814) determined the invasion of the Pampas by royalist indigenous groups which attacked the Buenos Aires frontier. See Bechis, ‘De hermanos a enemigos’.

⁶³ AGN, 2307, f. 194.

southern hills to be better defended against attacks by the “Chilean” Natives.⁶⁴ Their opinion was crucial in changing the Coronel’s mind. Finally, he suggested admitting frontier land pleas by wealthy individuals but limiting the extension of the concessions to prevent speculation. If government should lead colonisation, the support of the *hacendados* was needed.

Alvear and Posadas accepted the plan, and García started to organise the expedition to conduct diplomatic talks and establish the first new fort. The Director Supremo seemed very interested in the economic development of the United Provinces, as in April, he issued a decree inviting the Governor Intendants to send him proposals and plans “for the promotion of agriculture, industry, arts, commerce and all that can lead to the prosperity and improvement of each *pueblo*”.⁶⁵ Again, the attitude of Buenos Aires with respect to the economic government of the ex-Viceroyalty shows strikingly resemblances with the Bourbon model: the centre (Buenos Aires) asked for information from the peripheries in order to sketch the legislation that should then be implemented.

In this respect, some official instructions on establishing new *pueblos* were finally published in September 1814, concerning mainly the regions of the Littoral.⁶⁶ The decree provided precise indications for planning new settlements from scratch, measuring and dividing building plots starting from the main square and reserving the surrounding lands for agriculture. The instructions were unambiguous in the necessity to foster agriculture in the *pueblos*, as the distribution of land in property or in exchange for a rent was based on putting it into production. Indeed, landowners that did not want to cultivate their properties “shall be obliged to sell or lease them at current prices and on advantageous terms to the settlers”. The recipients had to put land into productive use within two years. Interestingly, this legal formulation does not seem to distinguish between landowners and possessors, as the spotlight is placed upon the necessity of guaranteeing the productive use of lands, notwithstanding the legal status that determined the ownership.⁶⁷

The new foundations were entrusted to a commission formed by the local judge, the priest and two *vecinos hacendados* that had to supervise the project, fund it if necessary, and sketch a “Police Regulation”, in direct communication with the Governor Intendant. Finally, Article 11 clearly stated

⁶⁴ We generically refer to “Chilean” groups when speaking of indigenous partialities who were arriving in Buenos Aires from the other side of the Andes. They might adhere to different ethnic or regional groups. We use this generic and imprecise term (found in the sources) to indicate newcomers pushed by civil and independence wars.

⁶⁵ *RORA. Tomo 1*, 271. The system of intendancies was maintained by Buenos Aires, generating resentment in the provinces because the Triumvirate or the Directorio chose the Governor Intendants, who were then sent to their respective provinces.

⁶⁶ *Ivi*, 284.

⁶⁷ Article 8 states that this privilege applies to “every farmer (*labrador*), landowner (*propietario*), holder (*poseedor*) or settler (*colono*)”, when deliberating tax exemptions over agricultural products.

that the successful foundation of these new agricultural settlements would be taken into special consideration for the future career in the administration of the members of the Commission in charge of it. Similarities with Bourbon planes are evident, albeit the Directorio, in theory, aimed for a more intrusive government of land properties, as proved by the article that forced proprietors to cultivate their land. However, it seems that the decree had little effect.

In the meanwhile, García was negotiating with the Cabildo on where to find the revenues to establish the frontier militia, and it was proposed to increase the tax on the export of cattle hides, using the revenues of the same *Ramo de guerra* that had financed the creation of the Blandengues during the past decades. The revenues collected from agro-industrial production would again form the fund for advancing the commodity frontier. The expanding export-oriented sector was sustaining its further expansion. However, the financial situation of Buenos Aires was dire, and the Sindico Procurador refused to permanently increase tax on export trade, opting for allowing García to ask for a voluntary contribution from the *hacendados* that wanted to participate in the project.⁶⁸ The Coronel collected the necessary revenues, and his connections with the Buenos Aires economic elites were probably crucial for his success.

In October, the preparations speeded up, and the government assigned to the expedition Francisco Menaya, the best “draftsman and Geographer who was known”, and other experts to collect geographical and topographical information on the landscape. Building materials and weaponry were reunited and sent to the *estancia* of Don Joaquin Suarez, south of the Río Salado, where a deposit for the expedition was created. At this point, García could not hold back emotions in describing those days:

It is not easy for me to describe the expectation and [pleasure] of the *Hazendados* and *Labradores* of the countryside: in great number they offered themselves to provide transport for free [...] Everyone aspired to own property and to contribute to the Settlements, such importance had already been attached to this Journey, that the wealthy Citizens wished to have a share in the wellspring of wealth which they considered it would bring, this rapid movement had awakened in all classes of the state a virtuous greed.⁶⁹

The desire to obtain fertile lands was widespread among the rural population. As far as the narration of García could be exaggerated by his involvement and by the goal of this document, the Coronel was aware of the avidity that land was exciting among Creoles. In November 1814, he had directed a note

⁶⁸ AGN, 2307, f. 198.

⁶⁹ AGN, 2307, ff. 201r-202.

to the government asking for precise instructions on distributing frontier lands so as not to leave the new settlers uncertain of their possessions as it had happened with the families he met in Chascosmús. He repeated his ideas concerning the obligation to populate the distributed lands, the ten-year tax exemptions, and the necessity to give lands only to those who contribute to the colonisation, as well as to include into the plan the indigenous families who wanted to settle down and participate in Creole society.⁷⁰

It was at this point that, for García, the catastrophe occurred. A military rebellion in Fontezuelas (Buenos Aires) led to Alvear's immediate resignation on 15 April 1815, and the executive power was assumed by the Cabildo of Buenos Aires. The Assembly of the Year XIII dissolved without achieving the two goals of sanctioning a constitution and declaring independence from Spain. News of the imminent arrival of the Morillo expedition, thanks to the support of the Portuguese government in Rio de Janeiro, and the defeats against Artigas and the *Liga de los Pueblos Libres* precipitated Buenos Aires into fear.

García woke up in his camp surrounded by insurgent forces. He was taken prisoner, and the expedition ended abruptly before it even started.

On that fateful day, the State lost everything that the Government's efforts had brought forward in the work to which it aspired, wiping away the tears of the inhabitants of the countryside by securing for them property, lives and cattle, which at the cost of much bloodshed were barely surviving.⁷¹

The Coronel was confined in Morón, even if he declared that he would have been willing to continue his work under whatever political regimes, given its fundamental importance for securing a bright and prosperous future for the Province of Buenos Aires, and for some years, he was not going to participate in the projects of agrarian colonisation. This was a problem for the *valdivianos* and *pampeanos* groups, as personal relations were the basis for their diplomatic contact with the government of Buenos Aires. They lost the first "bridge" between them and the Creole society, a pattern that would repeat throughout the 19th century and that would be highly detrimental to the positive outcomes of interethnic diplomacy in the long run.⁷²

⁷⁰ García, 'Informe sobre poblamiento de frontera'.

⁷¹ AGN, 2307, f. 202.

⁷² Bechis, 'Fuerzas indígenas en la política', 317.

5. The Constitutional Dilemma and Property in the Centralist Constitutions

García believed that the ideal of Buenos Aires agrarian republicanism and the resulting economic wealth might become the basis for the political unification of the region. If the desire for economic prosperity was widely shared among provincial elites, the disagreement on the political concepts on which to base the new supra-provincial institutions prevented them from successfully concluding constitutional talks, resulting in the fall of the Directorio (1815). During the Age of Revolutions, written constitutions emerged as the legal instrument for creating and legitimising a new political course or reforming an already existing one.⁷³

Recently, Linda Colley has provided an effort to disentangle the appearance of written constitutions from the usual Atlantic tale of revolution, republicanism and democracy.⁷⁴ Warfare was also central in the emergence of this “protean and volatile pieces of political technology”, that sanctioned the beginning of an interplay between rulers and ruled, where rights and franchises were exchanged for political support and increasing fiscal pressure and military participation. Given their textual materiality, constitutions had a communicative role in internal and international politics, as they served to create allies or enemies. Sanctioning a written constitution would communicate to the exterior the participation in the concert of the modern nations and to the interior the beginning of a political course based on new principles of political representation and participation. For instance, in September 1818, Director Pueyrredon had urged the deputies of the general congress to sanction a constitution in line with the political principles of European powers, informing them that

For the knowledge provided to me by the course of foreign relations, all the powers of Europe are in the most anxious expectation to see the final result of the Constitution, which Your Sovereignty will give to the peoples. This will be the guide of their subsequent operations in the part they can take in our affairs, calculating from it the state of our enlightenment, our customs, our aspirations, in a word, our judgement.⁷⁵

In the past decades, the study of Spanish American constitutionalism has generated much attention and a fruitful debate. Traditionally, this constitutional experience had been discredited due to its sound

⁷³ Spanish reformers such as Jovellanos or Foronda hoped for the promulgation of a written constitution in late 18th-century Spain. The absence of a written text did not mean the absence of a “constitution” intended as the fundamental laws of the state. However, the written form might give an order to early modern legal pluralism and provide more certain limits to sovereign power. See Lorente and Portillo Valdés, *El momento gaditano*.

⁷⁴ Colley, *The Gun, the Ship, and the Pen*.

⁷⁵ ‘Oficio reservado del Director Supremo al Congreso’, 732. After the constitution was sanctioned, it was translated into English. See ‘Advertencia a la edición inglesa de la Constitución de 1819’, 728. The footnote from the editor provides abundant information about the text’s circulation in the British and French newspapers.

failures, with respect to North American and European constitutionalism or simply because it was characterised by some degree of difference.⁷⁶ Regardless of the old reticence of historians, constitutionalism was a crucial development in Spain and its overseas territories after 1810.⁷⁷ Hundreds of constitutional texts were debated, approved or rejected to provide a legislative response to the monarchical crisis and later on, to create a new institutional framework for the new independent polities. This process led to the fragmentation of old jurisdictions (especially the intendancies) and the emergence of new sovereign bodies that acted as independent “states”, albeit within the horizon of a future union or confederation.⁷⁸ It produced a horizontal fragmentation of sovereignty in addition to the vertical one between Spain and its American territories.⁷⁹ Indeed, the study of the texts that proliferated in the Río de la Plata after the beginning of the monarchical crisis is worthwhile as long as they reveal the laboratory of political ideas and give an approximation of the shared (or conflictive) concepts structuring the political cultures of the insurgent elites.

Notwithstanding the new wave of studies, the Río de la Plata keeps on representing a “paradox” in the words of Geneviève Verdo.⁸⁰ In theory, the proclamation of popular sovereignty necessitated a written text to legitimise the new political regime, as grounding its legitimacy in tradition and the “ancient constitution of the Kingdom” was not a viable option.⁸¹ In practice, the congresses in 1813, 1816 and 1826 did not produce shared constitutional texts; provincial constitutions proliferated after 1820 (Buenos Aires being the most notable exception, as it approved the first provincial constitution in 1854); and multilateral pacts regulated inter-provincial relations until the proclamation of the Argentine Constitution in 1853, the most important one being the Federal Pact of 1831.

In order not to see the lack of a written constitution as proof of “political incapacity”, Verdo has advanced the hypothesis to define “*provisoriato*” this style of government based on “provisional texts”, being them, legislative regulations, inter-provincial treaties or national laws sanctioned by the

⁷⁶ The non-development of politically stable and economically prosperous nation-states was considered a failure. In particular, the fact that the constitutional and liberal years (1812-1814 and 1820-1823) were a parenthesis between absolutist and conservative regimes discredited Cádiz constitutionalism for a long time. The proclamation of Catholicism as the state religion in the 1812 Constitution prevented Anglo-American scholars from recognising its liberalism for a long time; see Breña, ‘The Cádiz Liberal Revolution’.

⁷⁷ The Atlantic circulation of the Cádiz Constitution highly impacted local constitutional processes, see Eastman and Sobrevilla Perea, *The Rise of Constitutional Government*. In the Río de la Plata, albeit the 1812 constitution was refused, it remained an important model, see Ternavasio, ‘Hispanic Constitutionalism in the Río de la Plata’.

⁷⁸ Chiaramonte, *Ciudades, Provincias, Estados*.

⁷⁹ Annino and Ternavasio, ‘Crisis ibericas y derroteros constitucionales’, 28.

⁸⁰ Verdo, ‘El dilema constitucional’.

⁸¹ Even if, in practice, the “ancient constitution” continued to be a reference for day-to-day government and structure the judiciary system well into the 19th century. See Chiaramonte, ‘La Antigua Constitución’.

constitutional congresses. Provisional legislation proved fundamental as the constitutional process was ridden with conceptual and political dilemmas. Who was entitled to be the sovereign power? Was it possible to divide sovereignty among multiple political bodies? What form of government best suited local political and economic configurations and could better grant the enjoyment of municipal and individual rights and freedoms?



Fig. 10. “República Argentina 1867. Delineado sobre la base de V. Martín de Moussy e impreso en Buenos Aires en 1934 por Saint Hermanos”. AGN, Mapoteca. Detail.

Indeed, Noemí Goldman has highlighted that the Creole elites faced a problematic conundrum regarding the institutionalisation of the sovereign power: “the dispute over the definition of the

subject of attribution of constituent power”.⁸² The Law of Nations admitted the coexistence of multiple sovereign bodies (towns, republics, provinces, kingdoms). Therefore, following the crisis of sovereignty of the Spanish monarchy, multiple institutional actors contended the role of fundamental subjects in the institutionalisation of the new sovereign power. Besides that, the indivisible or plural understanding of sovereignty carried critical political implications.

Anyhow, the dissolution of the Assembly of the Year XIII determined the failure of the first attempt to write a shared constitution in the Río de la Plata, and it was one of the many turning points of the revolutionary years. The tentative of the Buenos Aires government of establishing its power over the other provinces was a significant hindrance to the constitutional process. This orientation has been defined as “centralist”. The partisans of centralist constitutions believed that sovereignty should reside in the “nation”, considered as the expression of the general will of the people inhabiting the region. This way, the interest of each *pueblo* was subordinated to the general interest of the nation, formed by the sum of the *pueblos*, meaning the sum of the *vecinos* of the local communities. On the other hand, the federal movement, which will be analysed in the following chapter, believed that sovereignty resided in the *pueblos*. Therefore, the supra-provincial executive should have much fewer attributions and power over its constitutive parts.

What was the role of property in the centralist constitutions, which were the documents attesting to the Buenos Aires attempt to guide the process of national organisation? The 1811 *Decreto de seguridad individual*, drafted in Buenos Aires and sent to the Cabildos, defined individual security as a “sacred right”, “core of civil liberty” and “principle of all social institutions”.⁸³ The respect of individual properties was included in this principle. As the *Decreto* was more concerned with establishing legal individual guarantees against the possible excesses of abusive executive powers, it did not include any “economic” definition of property. In the memorandum that ordered its implementation to the Cabildos, the rights of property, security and freedom are defined as “the first three rights of man”.⁸⁴ The First Triumvirate sent it to the Cabildos of the ex-Viceroyalty, who accepted the text. It provided a basis of shared principles that would regulate the relations between Buenos Aires and the other provinces as long as a general congress did not define a shared written constitution.

⁸² Goldman, ‘Constitución’, 39.

⁸³ ‘Estatuto provisional’, 603.

⁸⁴ ‘Circular a los Cabildos y Juntas de las provincias’, 606.

In the following years, different constitution projects were drafted.⁸⁵ The *Proyecto de la Sociedad Patriótica* and the *Proyecto de Constitución de 1813* did not withdraw from the formulation of the *Decreto*, albeit better detailing its economic content. Property was “the right to undisturbed enjoyment of its property, revenues and industrial products”, and the texts defined the conditions in which this right might be lost.⁸⁶ It could happen due to political reasons (obtaining another nationality) or socio-economic ones, among which being a wilful debtor, a waged domestic worker or “have no property or lucrative employment”.⁸⁷ These articles excluded beggars and vagrants from enjoying individual rights, as well as free people of colour, given that they were the majority of domestic workers.⁸⁸ It means that one of the conditions for being a citizen was being a productive individual from an economic point of view. This formulation differed linguistically and not conceptually from the Spanish definition of a useful vassal, one who contributed to the well-being of the community through his or her individual labour. Similarly, the formulation created differential regimes of citizenship according to ethnicity.

Besides these conditions for losing the “sacred rights of men”, the draft constitutions included other exceptions. For instance, the “Proyecto de 1812” defined individual inviolability as part of the “Rights of the Citizen”, not of man. It excluded Spaniards from citizenship as long as the war between the former metropole and the United Provinces would not end, as the majority of them had proven unfaithful to the government of the United Provinces. The 1813 draft instituted a separate property regime for indigenous communities. While stating that the natives had equal compared to other citizens, the draft introduced the condition of productive labour to grant them property rights over land. It was believed that they needed time and guidance to reach the “level of the other civilised classes”, an apprenticeship based on order, *policia* and emulation in labour and industry.⁸⁹ These examples highlight the malleability of fundamental political concepts to face the “rule of fate” (*imperio de las circunstancias*) during the 1810s. While Creole elites sought to establish some basic liberal concepts as the new fundamental laws of the state, their supposed universalism was

⁸⁵ A special commission formed by Luis José Chorroarin, Valentin Gomez, Manuel José García, Nicolas Herrera, Pedro Somellera and Pedro José Agrelo drafted a constitution in 1812 (‘Proyecto de 1812’); the Sociedad Patriótica - an expression of the Logia Lautaro - prepared another project in 1813 (‘Proyecto de la Sociedad Patriótica’); another anonymous draft circulated in 1813 (‘Proyecto de Constitución de 1813’).

⁸⁶ ‘Proyecto de 1812’, 616.

⁸⁷ *Ivi*, p. 617. In the 1813 draft, the formulation was ‘not having an employment, art or profession which ensures the subsistence in an independent and recognised way’. ‘Proyecto de Constitución de 1813’, 624.

⁸⁸ The criminalisation of the *vago*, which started in colonial times and accelerated in Buenos Aires after the 1780s, was partially translated into the new constitutional texts. See Alonso et al., *op. cit.* On the growing black population of Buenos Aires and its occupational status, see Johnson, *op. cit.*, 61-72.

⁸⁹ ‘Proyecto de Constitución de 1813’, 633.

undermined from the beginning by war-related necessities or the inheritance of Spanish racial differences.⁹⁰

After the fall of the Assembly of the Year XIII, the situation mainly remained the same. The *Estatuto provisional*, sanctioned in May 1815 by the Junta de Observacion that replaced the government of Alvear, proposed the same definition of property right and granted it to every man in the territory of the state, local or foreign, citizen or not.⁹¹ The new general congress that reunited in Tucumán in 1816 sanctioned the same principles.⁹² The text of the Constitution of 1819, approved by the general congress but then rejected by the provinces, placed property among individual rights, but it did not specify its content. There was no article regarding the loss of these rights, but it still presented the paternalistic view regarding indigenous communities.

In the centralist constitutional drafts, the issue of property was not a burning one, as the colonial consensus about the desirability of a productivist understanding of property was widespread among local elites. The texts elevated property as a fundamental right of men. However, they delineated the conditions for losing this right and expressed normative pretensions around the ideal type of the new republican citizenship. The centralist constitutions tried to define the model of the new citizen in terms of an active and industrious economic actor. This normative pretension inscribed into the fundamental laws of the state was not present in the federal constitutions drafted in the Banda Oriental and guided by different concepts of political participation and sovereignty, as it will be described in the next chapter.

Finally, the sanction of differential citizenship regimes recalled the Spanish system where ethnicity conferred different rights, albeit partially replacing blood with property. The constitutions attempted to reform the early modern jurisdictional nature of political power in favour of positive law. This is evident in the ephemeral administrative regulation for the government of the Guaraní Missions that Belgrano wrote during the Paraguayan campaign.⁹³ However, the universalising aspirations of liberal constitutionalism would not meet these expectations, and it would further limit the indigenous possibility of appealing to justice through law.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Free people of colour were explicitly discriminated against in the 1812 Cádiz Constitution. See Morelli, 'Race, Wars, and Citizenship'.

⁹¹ 'Estatuto provisional del Estado', 639.

⁹² 'Reglamento provisorio', 684.

⁹³ Belgrano, *Reglamento para el régimen político*.

⁹⁴ The process started under Bourbon reformism. See Owensby, *New World of Gain*, 293-297.

The economic normative definition of property expressed by the centralist constitutions was widely shared by the participants to the general congresses. The shared property-based economic definition of citizenship was based on an idea of the economic local future like the one structuring García's ideal of agrarian republicanism. However, the common aspiration to create a new political regime based on a commercial society of economically active citizens was not enough to flatten the interprovincial conflicts around the creation of a new sovereign body, in an epoch when the economic government of a polity was considered the basis for the prosperity of a political entity.

6. Land Distribution and Frontier Advancement in the Years of the Directorio

As agrarian republicanism was not an ideal model robust enough to soften provincial political divergences, the same happened among Buenos Aires elites. Chapter 3 described the segmentation of local elites into different interest groups following economic expansion and Bourbon reformism. This process continued and deepened pushed by revolutionary politics and expansion of rural production.⁹⁵ During the first years of the Revolution, political confrontations revolved around the adherence to the patriotic cause, but in the following years, economic matters shaped domestic Buenos Aires politics once again. From his exile, García wrote a new frontier plan, where he tried to revive the ideal of agrarian republicanism and denounced the forces working against the productive advancement of Buenos Aires commodity frontier.

The Coronel opened the text by copying a section of Gaetano Filangieri's *Scienza della legislazione*, which stressed that the “political and economic laws are the primary objects that make states flourish”. A powerful and modern state should promote industry, commerce and the arts, as labour-based wealth “do not corrupt *pueblos*” but were the basis of their power.⁹⁶ García, therefore, denounced that the city had not advanced its commodity frontier in the past decades, even if that should have been its primary goal. Whether the enterprise was stopped by “the ambition of the inexperienced”, “the envy of the greedy” or “an evil genius, and destroyer of our common happiness”, it was now time to establish new productive settlements. The Coronel called the local merchant elites to participate in the project and increase their rural investments: he recognised that “a purely mercantile *pueblo*” should not further develop rural industry if they do not bring ready profit.

⁹⁵ The formation of a capitalist/bourgeoise class in relation to the development of dependent capitalism has been a classical debate in historical sociology. A critical survey of the main authors (Wallerstein, Skocpol, Gunder Frank, Stanley and Barbara Stein, Cardoso and Faletto) and the application of their ideas to early 19th century Buenos Aires is provided in Monsma, ‘Dominant Class and Statemaking’. Apart from Halperín Donghi, Argentine scholars preferred to tackle the problem with an empirical approach rather than building a dialogue between their case and sociological theories. See Halperín Donghi, *La formación de la clase terrateniente*; Banzato, et al., ‘Expansión de la frontera’.

⁹⁶ See García, *Nuevo plan de fronteras*, 1; Filangieri, *Scienza della legislazione*, 20-23.

However, Buenos Aires merchants, he believed, “have had the status of rooted (*arraigados*), and they could not ignore the fact that their roots grow as the province progresses in its establishments”. In his opinion, the 1778 trade opening changed the model of local economic development, as the city stopped being only a mercantile emporium. Trade stimulated rural production, where the true local wealth laid.

Local elites should contribute to the advancement of the productive frontier as it was a disgrace that rural industry had to come to terms with indigenous peoples to develop, as progress was always in danger of being destroyed by their attacks. Then, García repeated his state-led agrarian republicanism model of economic development. He stressed again the necessity of interethnic diplomacy and welcoming Native groups into the new settlements: they could participate in military defence, and they would gradually assimilate into Creole society thanks to the civilisational influence of commercial society. In contrast with past errors, the distribution of property was a centrepiece of his plan, as it was the basis for creating the new republican citizenship. Because of the lack of property, rural inhabitants were now victims of the abuses of the wealthy, as he witnessed in Chascosmús. In what followed, he provided a step-by-step description of the appropriate way to create the new settlements and described it as a state-led project.

The state, however, lacked the resources to carry on such a plan. After the crisis of 1815, Juan Martín de Pueyrredón was elected Director Supremo, and dedicated himself to fighting the Liga Federal and organising a new general congress in Tucumán. The congress sanctioned independence from Spain in July 1816, and the need to create international support for the United Provinces absorbed the authorities’ attention. However, Pueyrredón understood the necessity to foster productive development and defend the southern frontier, which was increasingly exposed to “Chilean” attacks.

The Director Supremo enacted “several projects outlined in previous years” and devised new ways to try to co-opt wealthy merchants and *hacendados* to the government’s plans.⁹⁷ In January 1816, the Directorio sanctioned a new regulation for land distribution. Donations were meant for wealthy individuals and could comprise 12, 24, 48 or 96 square leagues.⁹⁸ However, they were conditioned by colonisation clauses according to their size: the recipients of 12-leagues donations must establish two settlements in two years, or land rights would be forfeited. In addition, the new settlements should maintain weapons to face indigenous raids. This decision departed from García’s ideas as the donations enshrined the *hacendados* of the responsibility of carrying out colonisation policies rather

⁹⁷ Infesta, *La Pampa criolla*, 81.

⁹⁸ Equals to 32.400, 64.800, 129.600, and 259.200 he.

than the state. However, this was probably a way to co-opt them and use their capital to sponsor the rural policies for which the government lacked resources. The distribution scheme did not gather the hoped-for support, as Infesta signals that few donations were made, and the conditions were mitigated.

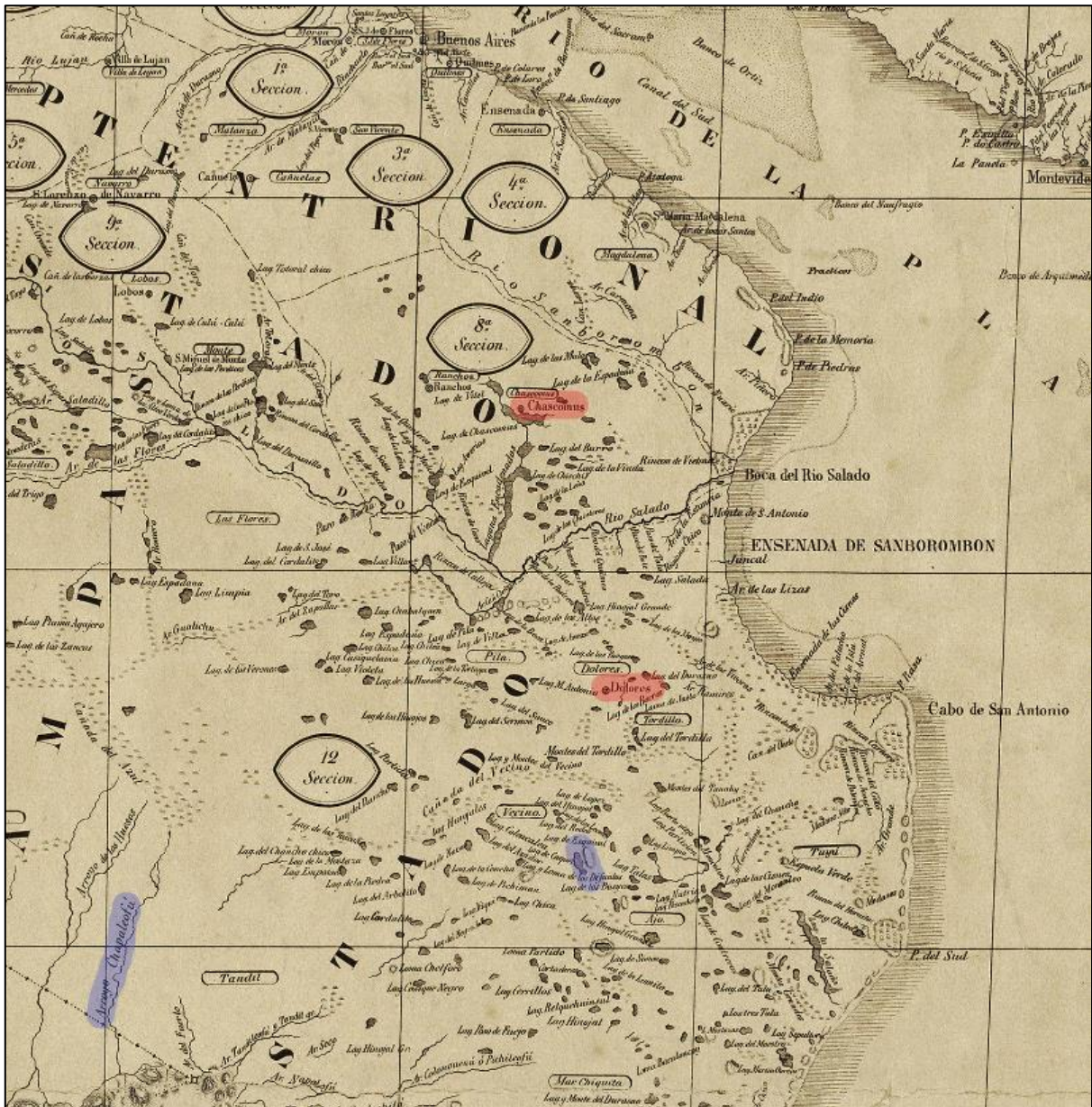


Fig. 11. *Carta del el Estado Argentino de Buenos Aires* (1858). AGN, Mapoteca. Personal elaboration. Detail of the southern countryside highlighting Chascomús (red), Dolores (red), Kaquel Huincul (blue) and the Chapaleofú river (blue).

At the same time, Pueyrredón appointed Juan Ramón Balcarce as the new Commander of the Frontier “with the same attributions Coronel Pedro Andrés García had”.⁹⁹ The regiment of militias stationed in the frontier was elevated at the rank of a veteran company of Blandengues, “given the advantages

⁹⁹ Comando General del Ejército. *Política, 1750-1819*, 519.

reported by the inhabitants of the Chascomús frontier brought by the troops stationed south of the Salado [...] which covers their positions from the irruption of the unfaithful *indios*".¹⁰⁰ The insecurity brought by the unstable relations with Native groups and the desires of advancement resulted in an increasing militarisation of the frontier.

The government indeed sanctioned a new start in the politics of frontier advancement. The official statement in the *Gazeta de Buenos-Ayres* recalled how the project became central since Buenos Aires undertook the process of socio-economic development based on the promotion of agriculture and husbandry. Therefore, the government wanted to materialise the long-lasting desires of "industrious families" and the "distinguished *gremio de hacendados*", hoping for their material support.¹⁰¹ The following day, every land plea was suspended until a general plan for land distribution was proposed.¹⁰²

Buenos Aires did not reiterate the errors of Montevideo, which aggravated rural disorders by admitting land pleas in an epoch of institutional uncertainty and frontier advancement. Most specifically, it seemed that they wanted to avoid the process of land appropriation by wealthy urban-based capitals, as the experience of the Banda Oriental had taught the political dangers implied in the growing tensions around property that might be nurtured in a countryside far away from political control. At the same time, they wished to co-opt urban capitals following the state-set rule for land donations and agrarian colonisation. Buenos Aires tried to reform the local tenancy system and to promote commodity frontier expansion, holding together the interests of rural populations, whose possible unrest they feared, and urban capitals, whose wealth was needed.

Balcarce offered the government a project for frontier land distribution in October 1816. García heavily influenced him, as the regulation included the free concession of land to veterans, the obligation to populate, rules for promoting both agriculture and husbandry, the regularisation of *agregados*, and rules to avoid land concentration.¹⁰³ The new Commander of the Frontier did not propose anything new besides the considerable jurisdictional powers of the commission entrusted with land distribution. It resonated with the 1792 attempt to create a Tribunal de la Hermandad and

¹⁰⁰ *Ivi*, 500.

¹⁰¹ *RORA. Tomo I*, 352.

¹⁰² *Gazeta de Buenos Ayres*, n. 47, 16 March 1816.

¹⁰³ Comando General del Ejército, *op.cit.*, 519-525. The text summarises Balcarce's proposal, but I was not able to consult it in the archive, unfortunately.

with other plans to transfer the jurisdictional control of the countryside to a *junta de hacendados*, which will be put forward in the following decades.¹⁰⁴

In May 1817, few days after the general congress moved from Tucumán to Buenos Aires, it gave the Director Supremo the faculty of distributing land in property to the settler of the new frontier line “to encourage new settlers by granting them ownership of the land on which they would move”.¹⁰⁵ The following July, Pueyrredón issued two decrees in this respect. The first one was directed at the “wealthy *hacendados*”: the government asked for their material support for the realisation of the advancement of the frontier, given that they were among the main beneficiaries. The new settled land was to be distributed in “absolute” property, and “those who assist this expedition with their people and donations will be preferred in the concession of the grants agreed upon for the appropriation of the said lands”.¹⁰⁶ The second deliberation had a very different target, and it was directed at the unemployed veterans stationed in Buenos Aires. Because of the lack of new employment and the absence of revenues for paying out their services, the government offered them frontier land, ruling that “the aforesaid officers, who wish to devote themselves to establish productive activities on the new frontier line to be extended, should be given preference in the distribution of free land, and aided with a certain amount of money to begin their activities”.¹⁰⁷

The government attempted to channel military resources toward the project of agricultural colonisation. At the same time, it made clear the interests they wished to co-opt in the project of commodity frontier expansion: the wealthy urban elites and the army. Again, comparing this decision to the 1805 plan of *arreglo* proposed in Montevideo is interesting. At that time, Viceregal authorities had been faced with strong opposition from the local wealthy *hacendados*, who were asked to finance the project of frontier settlement without any personal advantage. Ten years later, the Buenos Aires government was aware that this project had to be approved by the local economic elites. Thus, they offered them a cheap but valuable asset: the property of newly settled lands.

Similarly, they wished to control the militarised population through their transformation into productive and useful citizens. As mentioned, state-led agrarian colonisation did not gain the wished support: donations transferred to private hands around 23% of the provincial territory. However, they

¹⁰⁴ In his first reports, García never proposed the creation of intermediate jurisdictional bodies. Following Filangieri, he believed in the state-sanctioned rule of law, not in jurisdictional fragmentation. His opinions would eventually change.

¹⁰⁵ *RORA. Tomo 1*, 417.

¹⁰⁶ *RORA. Tomo 1*, 429.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibidem*. This decision resonates with Artigas’s plan for land distribution, which prioritised former militiamen. See Chapter 5.

were mostly “old settlers” or members of the urban economic elites rather than veterans, and the petitioned land was not in frontier areas. It was distributed in medium and large parcels, promoting husbandry or salted meat production. Banzato, Infesta and Valencia noted that wealthy urban and rural capital took advantage of the state aspiration of expanding the agrarian frontier through land privatization.¹⁰⁸ At the same time, land availability allowed the persistence of small and medium property.

The government organised the first official crossing of the Río Salado. The advancement was directed at the southern countryside, as García’s plans had suggested, and private support was sought, as the financial situation was dire.¹⁰⁹ The fort of San Martín would become the military outpost of this area of the southern frontier. Balcarce proposed to establish it in Tandil or Kaquel Huincul, and in September 1818, a *junta* of military leaders and local *hacendados* reunited to discuss the matter.¹¹⁰ The decision fell upon the lagoon of Kaquel Huincul, 150 km south of Chascomús, where the fort was founded. During 1817, in the same area was established the prison of Las Bruscas, an “Estancia de la Patria” (to provision the fort and the prison), and a new settlement, Dolores, known as the *Primer pueblo patrio*, being the first foundation of independent Buenos Aires. Fradkin and Ratto noted that the foundation of the prison in the area was not by chance.¹¹¹ It was strategically close to a crucial indigenous circuit of exchange, and it was an area known for being the shelter of deserters and vagrants. The prison might serve as a state outpost for pacifying the area and expanding the frontier thanks to the coerced labour of convicts, a necessary resource in a time of chronic shortage of workforce due to the civil wars.

No *parlamento* with local *caciques* was convened to discuss the new settlements. It is a central paradox of this phase of frontier advancement: authorities knew the necessity of interethnic diplomacy to deal with Native sovereign groups, and they were aware that their support was needed for establishing new settlements and defending the existing frontier. If García was not the direct inspirer of official policies, his ideas resonated in the initiatives of the Directorio. However, no official diplomatic mission was organised. A possible explanation, which, however, is not yet supported by archival evidence, is that the Directorio unofficially delegated interethnic diplomacy to Francisco

¹⁰⁸ Banzato, et al., *op. cit.*, 143-144.

¹⁰⁹ The financial resources for the project were so scarce that in July 1817, Balcarce asked the ecclesiastic Cabildo of Buenos Aires to allocate the tithe of Chascomús to frontier policy. The request was denied. See Comando General del Ejército, *op. cit.*, 528-529.

¹¹⁰ *Ivi*, 530-531. García, who had been pardoned, was part of the *junta* with some southern *hacendados*. However, most of the participants were military men.

¹¹¹ Fradkin and Ratto, ‘El presidio de Santa Elena’.

Ramos Mejía, an *hacendado* who had autonomously established an *estancia* south of the Salado, buying a large estate from local *caciques*.¹¹² Dolores and the guard in Kaquel Huincul were built on his land, and this explanation would solve the paradox, as Buenos Aires executive knew too well how crucial indigenous allies were during a time of severe civil and independence wars. Additionally, a private could forge successful diplomatic relations with *caciques* even better than a state official in the indigenous world populated by independent, semi-independent or temporary coalitions of groups. Personal relations were crucial in the interethnic relationship, and a charismatic individual might gain the trust of an indigenous leader better than a state commissioner, which might suddenly change in the turbulent revolutionary politics. Anyhow, the southern advancement did not rest on solid basis, and the 1820s would witness the most severe phase of interethnic violence in the frontier, due to Buenos Aires strategic errors and the raids of royalist Native groups.

7. Private Initiatives at the Interstices of State Regulation

The chapter has focused on the attempts of Buenos Aires autonomous governments to lead frontier advancement and agrarian colonisation. Notwithstanding the widespread consensus surrounding the enterprise, state authorities did not manage to gather the necessary resources to carry on the initiative. Meanwhile, private economic actors did not wait for central authorities and devised some strategies to appropriate new lands or try to. Strategies were different as the *hacendados* did not constitute a homogeneous social group, even if attempts were made to create intermediate bodies representing their interests.¹¹³ The main ways in which privates participated in the increasing attempts of appropriating lands were following government's regulations, autonomously advancing south of the Río Salado in agreement with local *caciques* or enacting colonial times strategies for land appropriation, trying to take advantage of the confusion surrounding rural property rights.

We have already noted that the Directorio colonisation policies could have been more successful. Not many merchants and *hacendados* responded to the 1817 government's offer to distribute frontier lands, as a new decree was issued the following year. This time, the Director Supremo would grant land to everyone interested in settling around Kaquel Huincul on the condition of populating it in four months. Again, privates did not follow state offers as much as the authorities wished. For instance,

¹¹² Enrique Ramos Mejía reports that Francisco Ramos Mejía conceded his land (bought to the *caciques pampas*) for the foundation of the Fort San Martín in Kaquel Huincul, without providing archival evidence. Ramos Mejía, *Los Ramos Mejía*, 62. The following chapter expands on the matter.

¹¹³ Ratto, *La frontera*, 67-118. Ratto carefully describes the development of the southern *hacendados* interest group. The first formalisation of the group took place in 1819 to discuss the creation of a regiment of frontier militia and the government's request to pay for it.

only two large concessions were granted in Dolores in 1819 and 1820 to don Santos Calvento and don José Ellauri.¹¹⁴ Other seven concessions were granted around Monte (the average size was nine square leagues), and four more in Mar Chiquita (average size twenty-two square leagues).¹¹⁵ The endemic frontier interethnic conflict fuelled by “Chilean” raids generated more requests for military defence rather than desires for expansion.¹¹⁶

Besides the state’s urgency to further southern agrarian colonisation and military defence, the decree provides interesting information on an additional strategy for land appropriation, as Pueyrredon referred to settlers beyond the official frontier. They have woven peaceful relations with local indigenous groups, gaining “the benefit of not being bothered by them”. The Director Supremo believed in the necessity to foster this kind of initiative to enhance the “degree of sociability that these [Natives] are already acquiring” and materialise a near future where they assimilated into European commercial civil society.¹¹⁷

These advanced Creole *estancias* were mentioned by authorities a few months later when the new commissioner for the southern frontier, José Rondeau, asked the general congress if the settlers beyond the official line were to be considered among the beneficiaries of the previous decision to distribute land grants. The reply made clear that those settlers could not enjoy state military protection, but it was mandatory to state-sanction their property rights, because “not so much as a title of grace, but as a title of rigorous justice, he [the southern settler] is the rightful owner of the land which he has been able to appropriate”.¹¹⁸ If the government was worried about framing their initiatives legally, their number was significant, and authorities welcomed these initiatives as they informally advanced Creole influence over the Natives’ territory.

Who were these autonomous settlers in Native lands? Francisco Ramos Mejía was the prominent one, and his case will be detailed in the next chapter, as he built an excellent relationship with the local *caciques* in his *estancia* of Miraflores. However, others followed his steps, given the success of his enterprise, but the sources in respect are scarce.¹¹⁹ For instance, Juan Manuel de Rosas also obtained land south of frontier. He was becoming one of the wealthiest landowners in the area and starting to

¹¹⁴ Mascioli, ‘Caminos de acceso al usufructo y propiedad’, 75.

¹¹⁵ Infesta, *op. cit.*, 87.

¹¹⁶ Ratto, *La frontera*, 75-76.

¹¹⁷ *RORA. Tomo 1*, 480.

¹¹⁸ *Ivi*, 487.

¹¹⁹ Ratto, *Indios y cristianos*, 46-52.

be known as he participated in the controversy surrounding the ban to salted meat export between 1817 and 1819.¹²⁰

Urban capitals were trying to appropriate land in the southern frontier because the northern part of the province was too dangerous, and the old colonisation region was mostly privately owned. We already discussed García's mission to Chascomús and how he defended farmers lacking a state-issued property title. A legal case started in 1817 and involving Antonio Obligado and some *vecinos* of Chascomús provides us with fundamental insights into the ideas that sustained attempts to accumulate lands and the arguments for resisting it.

On 31 July 1817, Tadeo Almada denounced to the Governor a small estate (1.5 leagues x 1.5 leagues, 6.075 he) near the *Laguna salada de los Blandengues* in the jurisdiction of Chascomús. He declared that he had possessed the *estancia* for four years and was dedicated to horse breeding. Almada wanted to obtain purchasing preference or the “perfect property” of the *estancia*, “in recognition of being the first one populating it”.¹²¹ He was a wealthy *vecino* as he already owned land in Chascomús, albeit not as wealthy as Obligado.¹²² In October, the Fiscal conceded the petitioner the *moderada composición*, because of his right of possession and the services he rendered to the state. The following administrative steps were a local authority declaration confirming that land was public, and the appointment of a commission made of a land surveyor and two *vecinos* to measure and tax it.

After three months, Almada protested that the *alcalde* of Chascomús, Mariano Fernández, did not comply with “any of the ordered actions”.¹²³ Instead, the *alcalde* produced documents reporting that Antonio Obligado owned the land already. Almada vehemently protested the “arbitrariness, illegality and insincerity” of the reports, which were the result of a conspiracy against him by the *alcalde*, the land surveyor José de la Peña y Sazuela, Joaquin Campana y Campusano and other *vecinos*. As Fernández did not show any document proving Obligado's possession, Almada asked for a new commissioner to carry on the legal proceedings.

The request was accepted, and the Alguacil Mayor of Buenos Aires, don Miguel Mansilla, arrived in April to Chascomús to investigate whether the petitioned land was public or not. He interrogated three *vecinos* (don Pablo Santiestevan, don José Roque Quintero and don Mariano Olivares) who provided the same answer: the parcel was public land, not possessed by anyone else. Thirty years before, don

¹²⁰ Fradkin and Gelman, *Rosas*, 50-63.

¹²¹ AGN, 7330, f. 6r.

¹²² Banzato, ‘De ocupantes a propietarios’.

¹²³ AGN, 7330, f. 15

Antonio Obligado had tried to denounce it as part of an enormous petition for 80 square leagues, which was not completed because at least fifty families already possessed the land. It was the same land plea against which Manuel Quintana strongly protested in 1797.¹²⁴ Therefore, Mansilla appointed a new land surveyor (Francisco Mesura), who measured the plot the following day.¹²⁵ The price was set at 55 pesos per square league, and the litigation seemed over.

However, José Julian Obligado wrote to the governor the following September to oppose the decision. The disputed land had been denounced and possessed by his father since 1796; therefore, Almada's request should be invalidated. Antonio had measured and populated it with cattle, but over time, the overseers had gone or died, and cattle were stolen or dispersed. José Julian added that he had already acquired new cattle to re-populate the *estancia*. However, he was waiting to translate them there because of the dangerous state of the countryside and his service to the state deserved more praise than Almada.¹²⁶ He offered to pay for the land and asked for more time to find the written title proving their rightful property.

His request was accepted, but Almada presented other evidence to win the litigation. The testimony of the land surveyor Mesura is illuminating with respect to many issues discussed until now. He confirmed that the disputed land was a tiny part of the “monstrous (*disforme*) plea” made by Obligado in 1796. “*Disforme*” is an appropriate adjective as it measured 140 square leagues (378.000 he) and included 70 *estancias* and *chacras* in the territory of Chascomús and Ranchos. Recalling the opposition of rural communities to this plea, he confirmed that the two parties started a litigation that was never concluded because Obligado's measurement was not confirmed “for the great harm it caused”, nor was the land sold to the settlers. Therefore, “there is no doubt that this is State-owned land”.¹²⁷

The *agrimensor* extensively described the economic and moral damages following Obligado's attempt to appropriate land. Since then, the families have lived “without roots and unwilling to improve themselves, and they live in free lands without owning it”. This situation characterised all the nearby areas. Mesura stressed the consequences of it.

¹²⁴ See the previous chapter.

¹²⁵ He was an official land surveyor from 1804 and accompanied García in the 1810 expedition to Salinas. Between 1805 and 1835, he made more than 200 measurements. Recalde, *Los que marcaron el rumbo*, 33.

¹²⁶ This argument resonates with the one expressed by Montevideo *hacendados* in their clash with Artigas in 1813. See the next chapter.

¹²⁷ AGN, 7330, f. 48.

These lands are vacant because, as I said, those who occupy them do not own them, but if they were the owners, they would settle perfectly, cultivate the land, plant trees, and other things, which they do not do, fearing that Obligado or others will buy the land, and evict them, as happens every day.¹²⁸

If land denounced by Obligado would be measured and distributed in parcels like the one denounced by Almada, 93 families could be granted land in property for their subsistence and commodity production. Mesura also calculated the revenues the state could gain from the operation, something like 50.000 pesos. Given that the territory was north of the Río Salado, these lands were not included in the distribution scheme sanctioned the year before; therefore, the government should take advantage of this fiscal resource. Finally, the denunciation of large estates should be permitted only for what concerned desert lands, “because there, instead of causing harm, it is beneficial”. On the contrary, in the regions where agrarian colonisation had already started, large concessions damaged producers as this practice “would dispossess them of a property they wish to purchase as soon as each of them might be able to”.¹²⁹

Almada won the litigation. The testament of Antonio Obligado did not mention any land in the southern countryside, as the only rural possessions he left to his heirs were in San Pedro and Arrecifes.¹³⁰ Notwithstanding being part of the upper class of Buenos Aires economic elite, the Obligados could not gear justice in their favour.

Additionally, the character of the *alcalde* Mariano Fernández stands out. When Almada’s file arrived in his hands, Fernández informed Obligado and stopped the administrative procedure, as denounced by the same Almada. Why did he do so? According to Almada, he was part of a conspiracy by some *vecinos*, but what were they fearing? It is possible that they wanted to prevent the landless *vecinos* from imitating Almada, denouncing their possessions and therefore securing their property rights before the law.¹³¹ Fernández was an important rural producer with local influence and connections with the landowner elites. Son of Manuel Fernández, Commander of the frontier and among the first settlers of Chascomús, Mariano was a relative of Martín Rodríguez through his wife, and in 1816, he was the Commander of the Militia Regiment n. 5, where also Juan Manuel de Rosas entered

¹²⁸ AGN, 7330, f. 48r.

¹²⁹ AGN, 7330, f. 50. Mesura’s ideas coincided with García in admitting both large and small estates. The two had collaborated, as the land surveyor accompanied the Coronel in the Salinas expedition.

¹³⁰ Pieretti-Bravo, *De comerciante a Apoderado*, 16-17.

¹³¹ Banzato showed that most land denunciations in Chascomús were filed in the period 1818-1822. The *moderada composición* was the legal instrument through which 50 parcels were distributed, and the right of possession was the best argument to obtain the land. Banzato, ‘De ocupantes a propietarios’.

service.¹³² His brother Juan Nepomuceno Fernández became one of the wealthiest landowners of the region and a supporter of Rosas from the 1820s onwards.¹³³

We have the contours of an interest group connecting Buenos Aires and the frontier that directed his ambitions toward the land of the province before the 1820s when many others would do the same. They tried to accumulate frontier land, as the jurisdictional fragmentation that followed May 1810 rendered the acquisition of land outside of Buenos Aires a risky venture: the situation in the Banda Oriental was more than chaotic, caught in between the *artiguista* agrarian reform and the Portuguese invasion; the provinces of the Littoral (Entre Ríos, Corrientes and Santa Fe) were the fiercest enemies of Buenos Aires since 1815-16. Therefore, they hoped that rural provincial inversions would prove profitable. Albeit the lack of order and security in the countryside due to vagrancy and indigenous raids, the economic ideas circulating among the elites stressed that true wealth was generated in rural activities and local natural resources seemed at the disposal of economic growth. Conflicting networks of urban merchants, landowners and rural *vecinos* consolidated in the attempt to successfully bend local and central legislation to their will. While they were only partially successful, the period 1770s-1820s represented the first cycle of land appropriation and accumulation in the province, where the first large family patrimonies were created.¹³⁴ Appropriating land started to be a necessary but not sufficient factor to consolidate one's own wealth and influence in Buenos Aires society and politics.

Notwithstanding Buenos Aires governments enacted what had been defined as an “erratic frontier policy” and García's plans were mostly frustrated, the ideology of agrarian republicanism influenced governing elites enough to impede that a single interest group co-opted the government for favouring their particular economic interests.¹³⁵ However, the dispute proved that “the *hacendados* of the time were far from being a homogeneous social group and even among the main ones on the southern frontier there was competition and contradictory views”.¹³⁶ The one thing that united everyone was the demand for more security and policing of the countryside because the rural population was very difficult to govern, and this endangered the property and efforts of producers.

The government had shown an active concern toward frontier expansion and consolidation since the beginning of the Revolution. Notwithstanding the turbulent political confrontation, the war against

¹³² Galarza, ‘¿Quiénes son las autoridades?’.

¹³³ Banzato, ‘Grandes estancias en Buenos Aires’.

¹³⁴ Banzato, et al., *op. cit.*

¹³⁵ Ratto, *La frontera bonaerense*.

¹³⁶ Fradkin and Gelman, *op. cit.*, 52.

the realist forces and the civil war against the other provinces, both the Triumvirates and the Directorio actively tried to shape a rural and frontier policy that wanted to create a sealed and expanding economic space based on the economic exploitation of the rural landscape. This project alternated successes and failures. Beside state initiatives, independent families looking for means of subsistence and free land on the frontier have started a process of land appropriation which was gradually joined by an increasing number of wealthy families aiming at economic diversification.

The discussed case manifests that the provincial government could provide justice when local authorities were accused of being directed by private interests. The fact that Obligado's appeals were listened to and Almada had to provide witnesses multiple times shows that proximity to the (local and provincial) governing spheres was an essential factor in stimulating the responsiveness of the judicial authority to private claims. Wealthy individuals might try to bend rules to their advantage, but their success was not always certain.

Indeed, Obligado's request was daring, at least. We have seen that arguments regarding the desirability of small property for promoting agrarian colonisation were widespread in the region since at least the 1780s, arguments based not only on the moral influence of property over customs but also on the positive economic effects of smallholding. If the goal was the political increment of population, the detrimental effects of large properties were well known, even if small property might present some inconveniences, such as the lack of capital for rural inversion. However, to claim 140 square leagues of populated land was too much, even if, as stated by Mesura, large parcels were appropriate when colonising the territory outside Creole jurisdiction.

Additionally, rural populations continued to resist the attempts of land appropriation. The centrality of customary conceptions of property based on the right of possession persisted and structured small-scale agrarian activities.¹³⁷ Moreover, service to the Revolution became an additional argument to successfully defend land possession. Land started to be donated in compensation for military service, as sanctioned by the decree of July 1817. However, the state conceded militiamen the permission to occupy land sometimes without issuing the respective titles. In 1822, Antonio Obligado's heirs tried to measure the land his father left them in San Pedro, on the way to Santa Fe. The operation was followed by an order of eviction for the families occupying these lands. The judicial quarrel was long and difficult because the farmers resisted eviction, advocating their rights of possession and military service as a legitimate title to stay. For instance, the militia lieutenant Francisco Antonio Reynoso declared that "the Government itself had put them there and that lately the Government needed them

¹³⁷ Fradkin, *La ley es tela*.

more than they needed the Government, and with this he said goodbye”.¹³⁸ The politicisation and militarisation of urban masses also affected the modalities and legitimisation of land access, increasing the chance of conflicts in the following decades.

Here lies the main difference between Buenos Aires countryside and the Banda Oriental: the possibility to divert the developing hunger for productive lands outside the territories of old colonisation - therefore limiting land litigations between possessors and new claimants with a written title in their hand - and to “free” land south of the Río Salado avoided the escalation of rural litigiousness that heavily contributed to the breakthrough of the Oriental Revolution. In Buenos Aires, rural tensions were also increasing alongside the rate of land appropriation. However, the rural population would become a relevant political actor only in the following decade. While preserving for a while the social balance between the different Creole groups inhabiting the countryside, the increasing unilateral appropriation of indigenous land opened a season of frontier violence that would last throughout the 1820s.

8. Conclusions

Frontier expansion and land property rights were central in the policy of Buenos Aires during the 1810s. The discussion highlighted the originality of the political and economic ideology inspiring the efforts of the first autonomous governments, through a careful reading of the Pedro Andrés García’s writings in connection with the previous Spanish Enlightenment economic thinking and other Atlantic experiences. García crafted a kind of agrarian republicanism apt for this corner of the South Atlantic: it was centred on the necessity to expand rural production, establish new settlements, and promote trade. The state should lead this process, as the power of the law would provide an ordered legal and social environment to favour the productive exploitation of local natural resources, as well as incentives to individual labour maximisation. Individual property was the greatest among these incentives, an institution able to “create a homeland for men who do not have one”. The participation into an ordered commercial society through individual labour would contribute to the development of civilised customs among the rural population, and property distribution was a way to do so. However, it was not the only one. Contrary to the intellectual constructions of other agrarian republicanism, García believed that smallholding was one component of the future local commercial society, but it was not to be the only mode of productive exploitation: husbandry yielded the highest profits, and Buenos Aires had more land than men. Therefore, large-scale exploitations sat alongside the promotion of family farming in the writings of the Coronel. For this ideal to work and materialise,

¹³⁸ Fradkin, ‘«Facinerosos» contra «Cajetillas»’, 9.

economic and political republican virtues were essential. Labour was the most fundamental one, as it fostered morality and increased individual and public wealth. A good legislation was indeed required to inspire civil economic customs to the population. Consequently, an active and productive life would bear moral results and strengthen republican sentiments. García crafted a blend of republicanism through which Buenos Aires and its geographical context might be incorporated into the Atlantic capitalist market, the source of power and wealth for modern states.

Rural policies during the 1810s were not “erratic” as the final goal was quite straightforward: the materialisation of a flourishing export-led commercial society. Instead, they changed when external factors (civil and independence wars, interethnic conflicts and diplomacy) impacted on the social and political environment that the government of the local economy was trying to transform: changing interethnic alliances inspired new projects for expanding the frontier; the experience of the Banda Oriental taught to divert large land concession to indigenous territory rather than Creole one; an instrumental preference for the legitimacy of the right of possession was inherited from Spanish legal culture and it was instrumentally put forward depending on the level of rural unrest. Practical experience also contributed to innovate policies as García changed his original plans following indigenous diplomatic talks, or the discovery of the numerous of productive families which were to be evicted in Chascomús.

Rural policies always tried to find the right means to reach the desired goal of economic prosperity according to the changing contexts in insecure revolutionary times. The fact that the constitutional formulation of property rights did not dramatically change throughout the 1810s texts stands for the clear final goal of political and economic regeneration: the creation of a modern and commercial republic of working industrious citizens, being them individual producers, landlords, merchants, or wage workers. The constitution tried to tailor this model to a determinate racial ideal as well.

The role economic elites should play in this process changed during the 1810s. At the beginning, García was too optimistic on the ability of the state to embark on the policies of agrarian reform and commodity frontier expansion. However, his ideas changed at the end of the decade, as the state needed urban capitals to support its policies. In addition, economic and governing elites overlapped, rendering the border between private and public interests sometimes blurred. The interplay between the state and private initiatives was crucial. Increasing interest in land appropriation was moved by the continuous influence of external markets (where the British replaced the Spanish ones following 1810), and local economic mentality inherited from colonial times, where land was considered the sources of true and durable wealth. The governments tried to lead to process, but it lacked the

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governmental power to do so. Therefore, privates had a considerable agency in advancing agrarian colonisation and settlement of indigenous territory, and they did so in opposition or in agreement with the Natives. They tried to appropriate lands, but the state stopped them when the attempt included the expropriation of too many productive families. This pushed more wealthy individuals to direct their ambitions toward the territories behind the frontier, exacerbating therefore conflicts with indigenous groups. Finally, this period also witnessed the fraction of the *hacendados* consensus, as export-led agrarian development coupled with war generated divergent visions surrounding the economic government of commercial expansion. Who was to gain most from the economic and social development of the new republic, and who was entitled to decide over it? These questions would continue to shape Buenos Aires history throughout the following decade.

CHAPTER 5**Challenging Hegemony: The Native Sovereign Groups and the Federal Movement**

The collapse of Spanish sovereignty led to the emergence and consolidation of new political and economic centres of power in the Río de la Plata, a development based on the Spanish political tradition of municipal government and natural law. Buenos Aires attempted to lead a centralising movement seeking to restore the political unity of the region, trying to subordinate the particular sovereignties of the *pueblos* to its jurisdiction. In this process, central authorities promoted a new and shared conception of land property linked to the ideal of agrarian republicanism through domestic policies and constitutional talks. Economic ideas and practices were an integral part of the republican political ideology championed by the city. However, they encountered solid resistance and finally failed. The opposition to the city was fought on political and military grounds, but it also included alternative conceptions of land property and commercial society. This chapter analyses the economic ideas which informed the politics of two main Buenos Aires antagonists: the indigenous sovereign groups of the Arauco-Pampean area and the federalist movement of the Banda Oriental led by José Gervasio Artigas. The Natives had established a deeper economic interdependence with Spanish American and Atlantic markets during the last decades of the 18th century. When the Revolution started, they got enmeshed between civil wars and Buenos Aires expansionist plans in an attempt to strengthen the commercial society they were developing through the long-distance exchanges within and beyond the Arauco-Pampean area.¹ On the other hand, late colonial tensions around land property fed the Oriental federal movement. Following a rural uprising, the Liga Federal o Liga de los Pueblos Libres tried to materialise an alternative political and economic development model in opposition to the one centred in the ex-Viceregal capital.

Traditionally, national historiographies overshadowed the role of these historical actors in shaping the economic and political history of the region, as they were forms of resistance to the creation of an Argentine national state, considered the natural political expression of the pre-existing nation. Regarding Artigas, the question is more complex as he was progressively elevated to a symbol of the early expression of an Uruguayan nation, an image that was created picking the aspect of his historical

¹ The Arauco-Pampean area, *Wallmapu*, was the region stretching from the Pacific to the Atlantic coasts, inhabited by different indigenous groups and characterised by a high degree of mobility and ethnogenesis. Between the 18th and the 19th centuries, the relations with the developing Creole states profoundly shaped indigenous patterns of mobility and territorialisation. De Jong et al., 'Pensando la tierra adentro'.

experience that fitted best in the invention of a national tradition.² In recent decades, however, new studies questioning national spatial and political categories partially corrected the traditional silence surrounding these historical experiences.³ The analysis and contextualisation of ideas surrounding land property expressed by the Native groups and the federal movement seek to integrate these historical experiences into the history of capitalism, not as subjects who passively receive or resist the dynamics and abstractions of Western capitalist modernity, but as active subjects who participated in its development and institutionalisation, bearers of alternative ideas and practices, not incongruent with the progressive expansion of a commercial society.⁴

The opposition of Artigas or the Pampean *caciques* to Buenos Aires was not based solely on political considerations regarding the origin of revolutionary sovereignty or atavistic ethnic oppositions between Native Americans and Creoles. Instead, it also originated in the desire to control or participate in the formulation of policies for the economic governance of the commercial society that was developing in the Southern Cone, driven by the exogenous growth of the Atlantic and Pacific markets and the endogenous processes of expansion of the commodity frontier and urbanisation. The chapter brings together the discussion of these different historical experiences, united by their traditionally subordinate place in historical and economic narratives.⁵ Similar to the “wandering *paysanos*” studied by Ricardo Salvatore, they fashioned ways to resist or exploit the developing Buenos Aires-led market economy.⁶ Their inclusion into this story contributes to enrich our narratives thanks to “the roads that have not been travelled and that have lost the battle for legitimacy”.⁷

In addition, they represented an expression of the process of cultural change “pan-hemispheric”, “pan-Atlantic” and “driven by local variables” which characterised the early modern Atlantic, a process that created long-lasting or short-lived “mixed communities”.⁸ Artigas was supported by an alliance of “castes of all sorts”, among which the forces of the former Jesuit Guaraní missions, led by

² The memory of the *Reglamento* was excluded by the institutionalisation of Artigas as a hero of Uruguayan independence. Juncal Pérez, ‘José Artigas y los descendientes’. The work of Duffau offers an illuminating narrative on how the issue of land property structured the political history of Uruguay throughout the 19th century. See Duffau, *op. cit.*

³ Chiaramonte, *Ciudades, Provincias, Estados*; De Jong, ‘Entre el malón, el comercio y la diplomacia’; De Jong, et al., *op. cit.*; Frega, *Pueblos y soberanía*.

⁴ The existence of alternative commercial societies helps to understand the causes of their progressive disappearance during the 19th century, which was linked to the emergence of an integrated international system of nation-states bound by European-sanctioned commercial rules.

⁵ Argentine historiography had already coupled the federal movement and sovereign indigenous people to include subaltern groups into historical narratives, following the influence of British socio-economic Marxism. See Fradkin (ed.), *¿Y el pueblo dónde está?*; Salvatore, *La Confederación Argentina*.

⁶ Salvatore, *Wandering Paysanos*.

⁷ Cerutti, ‘Who is Below?’, 951.

⁸ Sidbury and Cañizares-Esguerra, ‘Mapping Ethnogenesis’, 184.

Andresito Guacurari, were an essential element.⁹ The Pampean indigenous groups, on the other hand, were formed by different populations and ethnicities, joined by an increasing number of Creoles following the beginning of civil wars. The chapter will contribute to complicating the image of white European capitalism that is still too often implied in historiographical discussions.

The study of the role played by subaltern subjects in general, and indigenous communities in particular, in creating the modern Atlantic world is experiencing an overall renovation. From the second half of the 18th century, popular movements and rebellions pushed the reorganisation of the commodity chains that were structuring Atlantic and global capitalism, the silver and sugar ones.¹⁰ European empires were not the only political formation taking advantage of the increasing profitability and wealth creation of the Atlantic economy, as indigenous polities and even empires developed their strategies to participate in it.¹¹ These experiences were not confined to the “peripheries” of the Atlantic world or interstices of imperial exchanges but had directed connections with the core of Atlantic capitalism and the most successful example of 19th century capitalist development, the United States.¹² The increasing global economic interdependence fuelled local social change and the adoption of political-economic abstractions to describe, give meanings, facilitate or contrast such transformations. Therefore, analysing the meanings that land property assumed for the federal movement and Pampean sovereign groups helps construct a global intellectual history of political economy.¹³

1. The Socio-Economic Configuration of the Arauco-Pampean Area

At the beginning of the 19th century, the Natives were a “daily presence” in the frontier forts of the Viceroyalty and even in Buenos Aires and other towns.¹⁴ Contacts with indigenous populations started as soon as the Europeans arrived in the region and continued throughout the following centuries. The relationship between them and the Spaniards, however, evolved with time: at first, the Natives were seen as barbaric, faithless, and violent, unwilling to submit to the Christian religion. Because of this, European settlers could not exploit their workforce, and interethnic relations were based on outright

⁹ *El protector nominal de los Pueblos Libres*, 25. The Directorio entrusted Pedro Feliciano Sáinz de Cavia with the writing of this *pamphlet* to discredit the figure of Artigas.

¹⁰ Tutino, *Making a New World*.

¹¹ White, *The Middle Ground*; Hämäläinen, *op. cit.*

¹² British capital markets and diplomacy had direct connections with indigenous forms of commercial development. See Clavel, ‘The Rise and Fall’; Llorca- Jaña, ‘Of «Savages», Shipwrecks and Seamen’. New research stresses the early participation of Native communities in North American capitalism. See Carlos and Lewis, ‘Native Americans and Exchange’.

¹³ Sartori, ‘Global Intellectual History and Political Economy’.

¹⁴ Roulet, *Huincas*, 53.

conflict. However, on the eve of the May Revolution, alongside the persistence of this old image - which survived due to the Spanish inability to attain extermination or religious assimilation - the perception of the Native as *homo oeconomicus* and *homo politicus* had now become entrenched.¹⁵ Due to closer diplomatic and commercial relations woven throughout the 18th century, the Spaniards were well aware that the indigenous peoples were avid consumers of European products, exchanged for furs, hides and textiles, as well as members of different political groups with their alliance bonds and conflicts, and their specific objectives and means of achieving them.

What were the socio-economic and ethnic characteristics of the population living in the Arauco-Pampean space during these centuries? The Pampas, Araucanía and Patagonia were inhabited by multiple groups of different languages and customs but with a similar socio-political structure, formed by several lineages (*parcialidades*) led by a *cacique* that were reunited under the authority of a *cacique principal*. The prestige and social status of the *caciques* were based on the reciprocal distribution of resources to the group members. Reciprocity and trade were also the basis for horizontal alliances with other groups. The Natives got their subsistence from hunting and gathering and lived in a semi-nomadic state, as some groups developed forms of agricultural exploitation of natural resources. However, they did not congregate in towns, as their settlements (*tolderias*) were itinerant according to resource availability and seasonality. Their pace of mobility increased through the adoption of horses and cattle. The warriors soon became unrivalled horsemen, as they spent most of their existence on horseback. Its adoption permitted better domestication and hunting of other animals, and it became the principal staple food for many *parcialidades*. A similar fate occurred to cattle, and the hides were used to craft almost every instrument necessary for everyday life. According to Palermo, however, the most crucial innovation brought by the new animals was that indigenous groups incredibly promoted their circulation and exchange, integrating different regional markets thanks to the increasing amount of exchanged goods.¹⁶

Roulet had tracked the progressive increase in interethnic contacts, studying the changing labels with which Spanish sources identified different indigenous groups.¹⁷ At first, the labels were relatively

¹⁵ Ivi, 55. During the 18th century, the Spanish monarchy inaugurated a new attitude toward sovereign indigenous people surrounding the imperial possessions, increasing contact and commerce. See Weber, *op. cit.*

¹⁶ Palermo, 'La innovación agropecuaria'.

¹⁷ Roulet, *Huincas*, 57-80. The following reconstruction will provide the reader with an example of the high fluidity of ethnic identities in the Arauco-Pampean space. Creoles employed the analysed ethnic labels. However, they did not reflect "discrete and crystallised ethnic identities", because the formation of alliances of indigenous chiefdoms on a territory was instead shaped by the attempts to gain and maintain access to natural resources. Those were used for the groups' subsistence and for the insertion into the wide system of economic exchanges, on which, in turn, the rise to political prominence should be based. See de Jong, et. al., *op. cit.*

simple: the people living in the grass fields south of Buenos Aires were called *Pampas*, while the ones coming from mountain regions (the Andes or the Sierras de la Ventana and de Tandil) were known as *Serranos*. During the 18th century, the labels changed based on geography, bellicose or peaceful attitudes and the discovery of indigenous names. Even then, the situation was highly fluid given the migrations from Chile to the cattle-rich Pampas. Spanish knowledge was very scarce, and the Natives manipulated ethnic designation to their advantage. There was usually great confusion surrounding the Native populations of the Arauco-Pampean space.

The label *Pampas* remained and designated the mostly peaceful groups living in the territory of the current Province of Buenos Aires. The *Aucas* were groups originally from Chile (*Araucanos*) and were famous for their bellicosity. However, they settled in the Pampas and were divided into three sub-groups: *Picunches*, *Pehuenches* and *Huilliches*. Former *Serranos* groups started to be called *Tehuelchús*, thanks to the knowledge collected in the Jesuit Missions in the Pampa, and they became critical diplomatic partners of Buenos Aires in the second half of the century. Finally, the label *Ranquelches* also appeared at that time, referring to new “Chilean” groups that settled in the territory between the Andes and Salinas Grandes. They were famous for their bellicosity, to the point of being defined as “the scourge of Buenos Aires”.¹⁸

The increasing interdependence between Spanish American and Native societies was predicated upon expanding commercial contacts. The indigenous populations adopted European-introduced animals and cultivations in different forms and degrees, and this cultural exchange determined the progressive emergence of new economic practices. Mandrini identified two different “economic circuits” which were sustaining the indigenous economy: the “cattle circuit” and the “domestic circuit”.¹⁹ The former included the long-distance cattle trade between the Pampa and Chile; the latter was based on subsistence-oriented activities whose surplus was exchanged on a closer scale. The two circuits were interrelated and integrated with Spanish American markets (Buenos Aires, Chile and Potosí). Reflecting on the “agro-livestock innovation” and the expansion of mercantile contacts with Spanish Americans and other indigenous societies, Palermo noted that Native groups became progressively dependent upon this trade, as their economic system could not reproduce some goods acquired from European markets, such as iron tools, *yerba*, tobacco and indigo.²⁰

¹⁸ Roulet, *Huincas*, 77.

¹⁹ Mandrini, ‘La agricultura indígena’.

²⁰ Palermo, ‘La compleja integración hispano-indígena’, 169. Europeans were in turn dependent upon indigenous trade in some enclaves (for instance Carmen de Patagones, Valdivia and Chilloé).

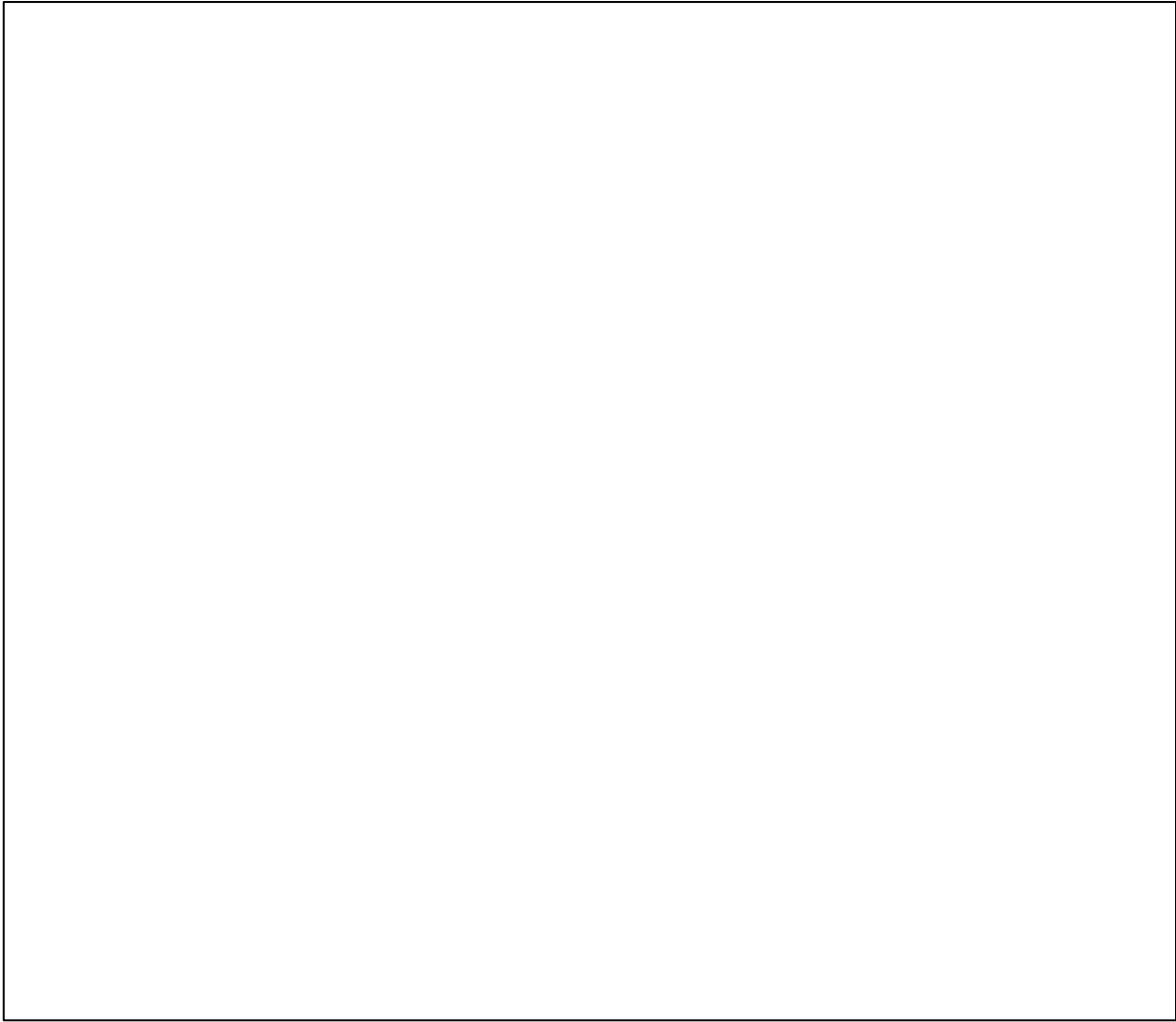


Fig. 12. “*Wallmapu* como sistema territorial (1870-1880)”. See De Jong, et al., *op. cit.*, 26. The map highlights indigenous territorial identities, Buenos Aires frontier advancements and relevant localities for our discussion.

The complexity of these circuits of exchange pushed the development of early forms of economic specialisation and division of labour. For instance, the *Pehuenches* settled in the region of Salinas Grandes and became salt providers for the surrounding regions. When other groups contested the control of the Salinas, the alliance with the Spaniards permitted the *Pehuenches* to maintain their hegemony and organise and manage complex trade networks that connected Northern and Southern Chile, the Pampas, and Northern Patagonia. Exchanges took mainly place in the annual fair in the region of Maule (Chile), where they would bring “very white salt, wool, horses, hides, plates of wood of all sizes, plaster, and many other trifles; all of which they exchange for wheat, barley, bridles, spurs, and knives”.²¹

²¹ Gomez de Vidaurre quoted in León Solís, *op. cit.*, 111. The fairs held in Chapelofú, south of the contemporary Province of Buenos Aires, were another important commercial hub.

Besides these products, textiles indigenous goods (*ponchos* and *mantas*) were exchanged for alcoholic beverages, especially wine and *aguardiente*. While it is impossible to evaluate the real impact that this productive specialisation had on indigenous societies, Solís affirms that the magnitude of the exchange suggests that the territory of the Araucanía was covered by “small manufactories (*obrajes*)”. They produced goods “in a regular and intensive way” for the inter-regional markets controlled by “genuine entrepreneurs”, who provided the producers with raw materials and connected them with consumers.²² The economic development supported the creation of new political units surrounding the *caciques* who acquired status and wealth through the control of production and exchange.

At the same time, hubs of agricultural production were developing on the other side of the Andes. It seems that agricultural activities had been brought there by *Aucas* groups, who settled down and began producing wheat, corn, and cereals for subsistence and exchange.²³ However, agriculture did not develop at the same pace as trade and textile production, even if it remained an essential activity for different groups throughout the century and it greatly expanded in the following one.

Commercial expansion impacted interethnic frontier relations, but notwithstanding the Enlightenment faith in *doux commerce*, violent clashes and confrontations did not spontaneously lead to peaceful trade relations. The continuous interplay between peace and war would instead characterise frontier and interethnic diplomacy. Why was it so? If, before the 1740s, interethnic clashes were mainly motivated by direct aggressions, the competition for the natural resources of the Pampas (*vaquerías*) increasingly became a matter of concern. The first *estancias* appeared in the southern Buenos Aires countryside thanks to the Atlantic demand for hides, and the indigenous trade between Chile and the Pampas flourished.²⁴ Therefore, competition over feral cattle fed interethnic violence in the frontier. Additionally, local and imperial visions clashed over the defence of the southern frontier from indigenous menace, as imperial authorities were trying to weaken Buenos Aires local power in favour of an imperial centralisation, and the Cabildo was trying to resist it, appealing to the fear of indigenous attacks to maintain control of local financial revenues.²⁵

Anyhow, the southern countryside became an insecure place between the 1740s and 1780s, as violence led to more violence in a spiralling way. Spanish expeditions aimed at “punish and

²² *Ivi*, 114. It is interesting to note that Spaniards were selling raw materials (wool and indigo) to indigenous producers and then bought the manufactured products.

²³ Mandrini, ‘La agricultura indígena’.

²⁴ Amaral, *Capitalism on the Pampas*.

²⁵ The causality of the increase in frontier violence is not clear, but it seems that it might be due to the instrumentalization of the indigenous menace by the authorities of Buenos Aires, in their attempt to retain space of autonomy against the centralising Bourbon reforms. Vassallo, ‘La guerra contra los «indios infieles»’.

discipline” the Natives only increased the resentment they nurtured toward them, rendering *malones* and attacks to the frontier *estancias* increasingly common.²⁶ Moreover, as described in Chapter 3, local and imperial authorities wanted to expand Spanish American territory and their expeditions in *tierra adentro* were not welcomed.

Treaties were signed in the 1740s as part of the new imperial strategies toward sovereign indigenous groups. However, the first pacts were highly volatile, mainly because the arrival of new groups in the Pampas soon rendered the existing ones obsolete as the recently arrived did not feel bound to respect them.²⁷ The political system of the Arauco-Pampean communities, segmented into a complex matrix of horizontal alliances and conflicts, worked against the diplomatic contact with the Spanish monarchy.²⁸ If competition among *caciques* was an obstacle to maintaining the pacts, a similar process could be observed on the other side of the frontier: the jurisdictional and fragmented nature of the Spanish monarchy meant that imperial power did not have absolute power over its jurisdictional components, that, therefore, might enact an informal independent policy toward frontier issues.²⁹ Frontier commanders or Spanish Cabildos (Buenos Aires, Córdoba and Mendoza) could infringe pacts according to their goals. However, the following increase in interethnic violence then reverberated in other frontier contexts. In addition, mutual ignorance of the cultural norms regulating political and economic practices rendered a durable peace agreement very hard to maintain. Anyhow, the peace treaties always included some clauses reserved to the regulation of interethnic trade, and sometimes the clarification of property rights over cattle or land.

The situation changed in the 1780s, when successful treaties started to be signed and respected, following the highest peaks of confrontations - the 1780 *malon* over Luján and Cevallos’ idea of a massive military expedition *tierra adentro*. During the 1780s, viceregal authorities tried to achieve a durable peace. However, this desire will materialise only a decade later, as the impossibility of including every *cacique* of the Pampas in the negotiations conspired against a favourable resolution. However, the Captain of the Blandengues Juan Antonio Hernández signed in May 1790 a treaty which promised to be durable with the *cacique* Calfurqui (Lorenzo). In the words of Hernández to the Viceroy, it accomplished “a fact that has not been achieved for many years, attracting to our side the expressed *cacique* whose head is the principal of all this Pampas”.³⁰ The treaty regulated commercial

²⁶ Villar, ‘Las poblaciones indígenas’.

²⁷ Weber, *op. cit.*

²⁸ The alliance with the Spanish was instrumental in strengthening one group’s position in indigenous politics, and the *caciques* competed to earn the favours of Spaniards. See Levaggi, *Paz en la frontera*, 118-125.

²⁹ Alemano, *op. cit.*

³⁰ Quoted in Levaggi, *Paz en la frontera*, 133.

activity and the mutual political obligations of Natives and Spaniards. In the text, the *parcialidades* following Calfurqui were expected to conform to a commercial society of permanent settlers south of Spanish possessions. The first article of the complementary treaty sanctioned that they had to settle between the Sierras and the Río Salado,

choosing the most suitable sites in these places to raise their cattle, and to have something to sustain them [...] taking care that all [...] apply themselves to this object, to facilitate their dealings and trade with the Spaniards in this Capital, where they will come to sell their goods, to provide themselves with what they need.³¹

During the 17th and 18th centuries, a complex economic system developed in the vast Arauco-Pampean space based on the exchange of cattle and horses. This indigenous economic system was interconnected and interdependent with Spanish American commercial societies, which emerged through deeper contacts with Atlantic (and Pacific) markets. Economic interdependence generated conflictive political relations. At the end of the century, a balance in interethnic diplomacy was found, and the indigenous assimilation to a European-style commercial society was one of the conditions. However, this seems less a Spanish imposition than an indigenous concession to European politico-economic abstractions for the sake of diplomatic relations. Spaniards could not determine from Buenos Aires the economic system of their indigenous allies, and they were just interested in stable commercial relations and a peaceful frontier context, which were necessary conditions for the expansion of agribusiness activities within their territory.

2. Commercial Expansion in the Buenos Aires Frontier

The treaty with Calfurqui brought a peaceful stability to the southern frontier. Simultaneously, the region's inclusion in the Spanish free trade system accelerated the expansion of the internal commodity frontier and export-oriented agricultural production. Peace and increased Atlantic demand fuelled interethnic trade during the early 1790s. Viceroy Arredondo mentioned that Natives of the *caciques* Calfurqui, Toro, Gayquilef and Quintuin were “frequently” coming to Buenos Aires, spending a few days in the city to trade their goods.³² They could be housed at the Esquina de los Pampas, a trading post run by Blas de Pedrosa, a semi-official interpreter who turned into “the most

³¹ *Ivi*, 135.

³² Radaelli, *op. cit.*, 398.

successful Indian trader in Buenos Aires”.³³ He even tried to use his political connections to obtain a monopoly over interethnic trade, but the Viceroy did not grant his request.

The mutual advantages of interethnic trade were so evident that indigenous partnerships started to feature in the new projects for further commercial expansion. The goals of increasing provincial wealth and incorporating new groups into the Spanish civilised commercial life went hand in hand. In February 1803, the *Semanario* proposed the creation of a commercial company to trade with the Natives of the Chaco through the rivers Pilcomayo and Bermejo. The increase in interethnic trade would “civilise these Savages” and “turn them into real consumers” of Spanish goods. Additionally, the company could better connect Buenos Aires with the markets of Alto Peru.³⁴

The same year, Feliciano Chiclana sketched a proposal to contract salt provision from Salinas Grandes to the *Ranquelches*, as they were “genially disposed to interest”, showing a prominent “commercial inclination”. It was a way to attract Natives to the civilised and commercial life, as the trade-based peace had proven more effective than frontier guards to stop interethnic violence and advance Spanish territories in agreement with frontier *caciques*. Again, the final goal was not pacific coexistence but the increase of the Spanish “useful” population, and therefore wealth and power, through the incorporation of sovereign indigenous groups, obtaining “these rich, fertile and vast territories, which they occupy without settling or cultivating them”. Indeed, Chiclana believed that “to become absolute masters of them” Creoles must provide “whatever it takes to advance and strengthen these new ideas”.³⁵

Increasing indigenous participation in Spanish American commercial society determined innovation in their commercial practices, and local authorities saw their hopes regarding their future assimilation into modern commercial civilisation materialised. In May 1802, a member of Buenos Aires Consulate described interethnic commerce in the monthly report over the progress of trade.³⁶ The note opened in an enthusiastic tone, as it states that “trade with the *Indios*, to whom the name of *Pampas* is generically given, has increased indescribably with us and promises further progress every day”.³⁷

³³ Weber, *op. cit.*, 221-223.

³⁴ *Semanario*, n. 22-23, 16 and 23 February 1803.

³⁵ ‘Feliciano Antonio Chiclana to Virrey Sobremonte. Buenos Aires, 19 December 1804’. The petition was signed by future Creole promoters of the May Revolution, such as Cornelio Saavedra, Nicolás de la Quintana, Miguel de Azcuénaga, Francisco Antonio Escalada and Francisco Belgrano.

³⁶ Given the Enlightened ideas expressed regarding the civilisation effects of trade, it is likely that Belgrano penned the report. The Consulate reports contributed to providing imperial authorities with the necessary commercial information for the government of the Spanish empire of trade. See Chapter 2.

³⁷ AGI, Buenos Aires, 383.

The Natives were consuming more and more European commodities, especially clothes and tools. In addition, they were not interested in bartering their products with Spanish ones, as “they like the *peso fuerte* so much that they do not want to exchange their goods for ours, even if they have to buy them back with the same money”. The increasing monetisation of interethnic trade stands for the expansion of the scale of operations and their growing interconnection with the international markets (Atlantic and Pacific, via their trade with Chile).

The writer commented with satisfaction on the Natives’ commercial evolution, as they “are dedicated to adding value to the natural products of the Countries they inhabit” more than before because the prices of their goods had increased. The indigenous ability to hunt and process hide is praised, as “in the end it is a labour of whatever kind it may be, and it will gradually reform their barbarous customs, and make them citizens useful to the state”.³⁸ The expansion of indigenous trade is considered a development instrumental to the broader project of increasing the wealth of the Spanish commercial empire and its power with respect to foreign competitors. Although they were living at the fringes of Spanish sovereignty, Native communities were considered potentially useful vassals through their participation in the expanding commercial society, an idea in line with the plan that the *Nuevo Sistema* had sketched.³⁹

Members of the Consulate were interested in indigenous commercial and productive expertise. The report mentioned that indigenous trade between the Pampas and Chile was carried on through Andean crossing points unknown to Spaniards, and in the following years, the Consulate promoted several expeditions to find these commercial routes. Local *caciques* saw these projects in an ambivalent way.⁴⁰ For instance, as already mentioned Captain Sebastian de Undiano y Gastelu sketched in 1796 a proposal that coupled the expansion of the frontier to the Rio Negro with the securing of communication between Chile and Buenos Aires. Seen in the light of the existing indigenous trade, this was a plan proposing to conquer it for the sake of Spanish benefit. After sketching the plan for advancing and securing the frontier, Undiano y Gastelu depicted the commercial utopia he was prospecting.

³⁸ Here, the definition of “labour” is wide enough to comprehend hunting, considered a profit-oriented activity which legitimated Native occupation of their land. However, narrowing the definition will allow Creole to formulate arguments which would not qualify indigenous labour as generating property rights on land.

³⁹ Regarding this point, allied indigenous communities were already seen as Spanish vassals, given that accepting the terms of the peace treaties implied the recognition of the superior sovereignty of the Spanish king. Anyhow, the *caciques* mobilised their vassal status according to their political agenda, especially following 1810.

⁴⁰ See Roulet, *Huincas*.

We would see the countless convoys of mules, cows and goats, walking from fort to fort, and from Chile to the markets; [...] Then our ships would reach the now deserted Patagonian coasts, in search of hides, tallow and wool, [...] and supply the whole of Europe with these so important commodities.⁴¹

The fact is that such a trade was already existing, but it was firmly in the hands of indigenous intermediaries and merchant groups. A few years later, the Consulate of Buenos Aires actively engaged with the matter, when don Santiago de Cerro y Zamudio presented a project for a new route between Buenos Aires and Talca (Chile) in 1803.⁴² This proposal responded perfectly to the ideas that were being discussed in the Viceregal capital, as he quoted the project for advancing the frontier to the Rio Negro that Cerviño had expressed from the pages of the *Semanario* only three months earlier.⁴³

The plan was approved, and the Consulate gave him instructions for the mission to find the new trans-Andean route. They minutely detailed the knowledge he had to gather: geographical observations; information about indigenous people, their number, their customs, their trade and their alliances or rivalries; an economic description comprising observations on the economic potential of lands and the best spot to establish towns and forts or the availability of resins, feral cattle and camelids (llamas, alpacas, vicuñas, and guanacos). This last point is highlighted: Cerro y Zamudio had to discover how Natives bred camelids, as their wool was highly profitable. This trade could provide a sounder basis on which to build relations and attract indigenous people to a civilised and commercial way of life.⁴⁴ The attitude of Buenos Aires elites toward the sovereign indigenous groups and their commercial practices did not seem very different from the competitive emulation that was guiding the commercial and intellectual relations among European empires: a commercial peace during which attempts to steal and emulate the secrets of economic affluence were made.

⁴¹ Undiano y Gastelu, *op. cit.*, 8.

⁴² The explorations of Cerro y Zamudio are described in detail in Roulet, *Huincas*, pp.113-172. She masterfully describes the different interests involved in opening a new way from Buenos Aires to Chile, the numerous explorations, and the swinging Spanish attitude regarding indigenous groups. While peace treaties were invoked to allow explorations, the same treaties were based on the Spanish promise not to advance the frontier. Additionally, Roulet points out how this project responded to the organic state plan for the advancement of the Spanish frontier, aimed at the incorporation of new lands to be put into capitalist production, and the peace of 1790 was the necessary conditions to allow Christians to explore indigenous territories.

⁴³ AGN, 2651, f. 622r. Cerro y Zamudio to the Viceroy. Buenos Aires, 6 June 1803.

⁴⁴ AGN, 2651, ff. 646-647. 'Instruccion q.e dá el R.l Cons.do de Buenos Ayres á D.n Josè Santiago de Cerro y Zamudio'. Buenos Aires, 30 June 1803.

As Spaniards ventured *tierra adentro*, *caciques* started to visit more Buenos Aires to renew the peace treaties and to sell their goods. Visits were already increasing in the 1780s if one of the treaty's clauses with Calfurqui established a procedure to prove the status of indigenous visitors, as many were pretending to be *caciques* to obtain gifts from the government. It seems that the Pampas groups progressively gained a better understanding of Spanish political culture, obviously trying to bend it to their goals (obtaining good terms of trade with Buenos Aires and securing a powerful political ally).⁴⁵ After all, there were similarities in the vital place that reciprocity played both in the Spanish economy of grace and in the indigenous political system.⁴⁶ According to both political cultures, political loyalty was based on a pact of reciprocity between a leader and some subordinates, sanctioned by reciprocal material or immaterial exchanges.⁴⁷

The good relations between Buenos Aires and the indigenous groups became evident following the dramatic days of the British invasions when *caciques Pampas* and *Tehuelchús* offered the Cabildo their military support against the “reds who still seem to want to bother you”.⁴⁸ Indigenous delegations went to Buenos Aires in August, September and December 1806, but their help was always refused. Why was it so? Traditionally, historians have believed that Buenos Aires elites feared the presence of a huge indigenous army so close to the city - as the *caciques* offered 20,000 warriors. However, it is possible to provide a nuanced answer considering the political culture of reciprocity, which structured the political ties between Spanish and Pampean groups.

What would the *cacique* have wanted or expected in exchange for their help? Sources are notably silent in respect, but the text of their final offer can give us some glimpses of indigenous motivations. In between rhetorical formulations, the speaker mentioned that “our gratitude for the convenient terms that you grant to our fruits, and the free export of what we need is enough to reward us for this small service”.⁴⁹ The *caciques* expressed their satisfaction with the terms of trade in their exchanges with

⁴⁵ If one sees political motivations behind the decisions of indigenous leaders, it is possible to give historical dignity to their actions, avoiding falling into Eurocentric assumptions or psychological-based explanations. Old interpretations of indigenous politics as guided by opportunism and mischief are now surpassed, thanks to nuanced studies around indigenous royalism. See Echeverri, *Indian and Slave Royalists*, 1-18. Although the case of the Pampa groups is different, as they were sovereign allies of the monarchy and not subordinated to the payment of the tribute, the same methodological concerns are relevant here.

⁴⁶ The inclusion of indigenous groups throughout the Americas into the Spanish imperial system stands for the compatibility of European and indigenous American political cultures. See Weber, *op. cit.* Owensby provides a detailed study of reciprocity's role in successfully establishing Jesuit Missions among the Guaraní communities of Paraguay. Owensby, *New World of Gain*.

⁴⁷ In the Spanish case, vassals should pay a tribute for protection and justice provision. In the indigenous case, the direction of the material exchange was the opposite, as leaders distributed goods in exchange for political subordination.

⁴⁸ Levaggi, *Paz en la frontera*, 141. The prediction was true as the British tried a new invasion in 1807.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

Buenos Aires markets. The implicit assumption was that they did not want that the commercial regulation which gave them access to Atlantic markets would change. Highlighting the centrality of trade in the diplomatic relations between the Spanish and Natives allows us to interpret the *caciques*' actions as an attempt to preserve their external markets from an invader, who might offer worse terms of trade than the Spanish ones. Additionally, a central role in defending the city might generate future indigenous requests to the Spanish local government, according to the pact of reciprocity that bound them. Eventually, local elites might not want to commit to such a possibility with the acceptance of the *caciques*' offer.

Buenos Aires resisted the second British invasion without indigenous support, and peaceful and commercial relations with the Arauco-Pampean groups continued until 1815, albeit these started to be affected by the Revolution. Indigenous leaders were aware of what was happening, and some tried to take advantage of the unfolding situation to strengthen their position within indigenous politics, challenging the existing hierarchy. The patriots of Buenos Aires were doing the same. Martha Bechis, reflecting on both Chile and Buenos Aires, noted that the Revolution - especially the early division of the Spaniards into two fluids but irreconcilable factions, "brought with it a certain disruption of the forms of sociability that the two societies had so painstakingly built up over the past centuries".⁵⁰ In Buenos Aires, it meant the gradual dissolution of the flourishing interethnic trade just described and the increase in frontier violence. García's time as leader of Buenos Aires frontier policy was an attempt of reviving the development of an interethnic commercial society as the basis for political alliance and the future indigenous assimilation to Spanish American society. However, the manipulative practices of revolutionary politics were already structuring García's mission and finally led to its failure.

The creation of new settlements in collaboration with indigenous groups was the centrepiece of Buenos Aires frontier and interethnic policy during 1810-1815. As described, a group of *caciques valdivianos* proposed to Garcia the creation of a settlement near Salinas in an attempt to ally with the Creoles against rival groups.⁵¹ These were the *caciques* Epumer, Victoriano, and Quintelau, who had been inhabiting the region between Salinas and the Sierras for some decades after their arrival from

⁵⁰ Bechis, 'De hermanos a enemigos', 147. In Chile, the abolition of interethnic institutions had greater magnitude, as Spaniards and Natives had developed a deeper interconnection.

⁵¹ It is possible that the *valdivianos* knew from Spanish informants that the idea was circulating in Buenos Aires. The foundation of new cities in the Pampa featured in the plan of Azara (1796) and in the petition of Chiclana regarding the salt trade (1803). During García's mission, Epumer mentioned that he was in favour of the foundation of new Christian settlements without him having asked his opinion on the matter.

the region of Valdivia (Chile).⁵² The *Ranquel* leader Carripilum was instead the opponent of the mission, as he saw it as challenging his authority and the existing pacts sanctioned between him and the Viceroy. García did not worry about informing them of the recently evolved political situation - the disappearance of the Viceroy. This fiction continued when the *valdivianos* arrived in Buenos Aires in October 1811 to solicit the creation of the new settlement. In the welcoming speech, Feliciano Chiclana praised the *caciques*, depicting a future in which Creole and Natives would integrate “a single family”, leaving aside war in favour of the shared economic exploitation of the feracious local natural resource. The town was going to be the place “where [the Natives] can settle in order to enjoy the advantages of society and secure themselves from the evils which are intrinsic to the wandering life”.⁵³ Chiclana never mentioned the change of government and invoked the generosity of the “Catholic Kings” during his speech.⁵⁴

The *valdivianos* did not notice, or were not interested, in the evolving Creole domestic politics and continued to support the project actively. In January 1812, they were in Buenos Aires, and Epumer offered land to build a fort in the region of the Sierras on the way to Carmen de Patagones. In May, Quintelau returned to the city at the government’s request, announcing that he was promoting the “happiness of cultivating the land” among his group with good results. The government gifted him with money and agricultural tools, “to increase the inclination towards agricultural activities, the powerful principle of civilisation and man’s well-being”.⁵⁵ He returned to his *tolderia* with the promise of celebrating a *general parlamento* between the *Pampa* groups and Buenos Aires, represented by García. During 1813, Quintelau maintained contacts with the Coronel and told him not to organise any expedition to Salinas, as the Pampa was dangerous due to the arrival of royalist indigenous groups from Chile.⁵⁶

These developments pushed García to modify the project, as the frontier line centred in Salinas was no longer an option. Instead, four new forts in the Sierra del Volcán, Sierra de Tandil, Sauce Grande

⁵² In the Valdivia region, interethnic contacts were highly developed. Not by chance, *caciques* from this area formulated the proposal of founding new Creole-Native settlements. See Bastias Saavedra, ‘The Lived Space’. Additionally, the Natives inhabiting the region in the 18th had considerably developed agriculture and thus permanent settlement. See Alcamán, ‘Los mapuche-huilliche del Futahuillimapu’.

⁵³ *Gazeta de Buenos-Ayres*, n. 70, 10 October 1811. The source depicts indigenous people as convinced of the superiority of European urban life, but the *caciques valdivianos*’ request was moved by the menace of the *Ranquelches*. They were trying to use the Creole desire for expansion to their benefit.

⁵⁴ Bechis, ‘De hermanos a enemigos’, 146.

⁵⁵ Comando General del Ejército. *op. cit.*, 446-447; Mandrini, ‘La agricultura’, 17.

⁵⁶ The patriot defeat in Chile generated the attempt of the realist forces of using indigenous groups against Buenos Aires. These groups passed the Cordillera and moved to the Cuyo and Pampa regions, attacking local indigenous partialities and the frontier of Buenos Aires. See Bechis, ‘De hermanos a enemigos’.

and Río Colorado would initially form the frontier. These settlements would gradually be constructed in agreement with the indigenous population. Before every new foundation, it was necessary to celebrate a *parlamento* with the local caciques, “treating Natives the way they want to be treated” and accepting their conditions.⁵⁷ The Coronel offered the Directorio to organise the first negotiation, looking for an agreement to establish the first new guard in the Sierra del Volcán. This way, stable interethnic relations would be guaranteed, and indigenous families would be welcomed in the new settlements. The project was gradual, and García estimated that the new line could be ready in eight years.

The diplomatic effort of the *caciques valdivianos* shaped the opinion of García. The fact that the southwestern frontier was turning dangerous due to the invasions of the “Chileans” convinced the Coronel that the best option to increase Buenos Aires territory was a southern advance toward the Sierras. The attitude of the *caciques* was indeed crucial: they offered land to build a fort, and they seemed more than willing to conform with the European model of agricultural commercial society. The prospects of a peaceful expansion of the commodity frontier with the full support of indigenous groups looked very promising. Alvear and Posadas accepted the plan, and García could start the arrangement for the *parlamento*, which never materialised because of the fall of Alvear.

This event was a turning point in interethnic diplomacy. García had tried to co-opt some Pampean groups to his expansionist plans, counting on their alliance to legitimise the incorporation of new territories under Creole power. This decision was inspired and supported by the favourable attitude of the *valdivianos*, and the plan changed according to the evolving situation in the Pampa. However, the failure of the 1815 expedition determined the loss of the last indigenous allies of Buenos Aires and the beginning of an area of intense frontier violence that would continue for the following years, fuelled by the realist indigenous groups arriving from Chile and the superimposition of civil and interethnic conflicts.⁵⁸

3. Interethnic Commercial Society in the Years of Superimposed Conflictivities

The ephemeral alliance between Buenos Aires and the *valdivianos* based on the foundation of new towns in the Pampas represented the centrality that land appropriation had assumed in Buenos Aires politics. The republican state-in-formation had tried to lead the advancement through the diplomatic activities of García, but in vain. Meanwhile, private Creole economic actors had started to surpass the

⁵⁷ AGN, 2307, f. 194.

⁵⁸ Bechis, ‘De hermanos a enemigos’; Fradkin and Ratto, ‘Conflictividades superpuestas’.

old frontier to occupy new land, pursuing different strategies. The case of Francisco Hermógenes Ramos Mejía, who was the most influential of the settlers beyond the Río Salado, manifests the possibility of alternative institutional settings and balance of power between the Creole and the Natives in the agrarian colonisation of the Southern Pampa.⁵⁹ The previous chapter discussed the crucial role of private initiatives for southern advancement in 1816-1820, and the fate of Ramos Mejía attests to the controversial relationship between the state and individuals during revolutionary times. At first, Buenos Aires co-opted his successful interethnic diplomacy for advancing Creole settlements beyond the old frontier line, later it destroyed his experience of interethnic commercial society during a new phase of severe frontier violence.

Son of a patrician family of Buenos Aires, he studied law at Chuquisaca, where in 1804, he married María Antonia de Segurola y Rojas, daughter of the Governor Intendant of La Paz. They moved back to Buenos Aires in 1808, when Ramos Mejía bought an *estancia* in the village of La Matanza, in a very strategic position on the way to Luján and Córdoba. After May 1810, he participated in the autonomous governments with various appointments. The following year, he travelled to the locality of Monsanto, south of the Río Salado, and he started some successful negotiations with the indigenous communities to establish an *estancia* there, which he would call “Miraflores”. The assistance of José Luis Molina, *baqueano* and interpreter, proved fundamental in travelling the Pampa and communicating with the *caciques*. In 1814, he denounced to Director Posadas the occupation of this land, petitioning for the priority to buy it. Very unusual for the epoch, he recognised that two sovereign authorities were present in the region, and he asked both for permission to occupy the land.⁶⁰

During the same year, the arrival of bellicose groups from Chile turned Buenos Aires countryside into a dangerous place and Ramos Mejía sent a highly interesting plan for the frontier organisation to Posadas.⁶¹ His writing is based on the refusal to force indigenous people out of their customs, as “any plan whose prospect directly attacks the usages and customs of men, however barbarous they may be, in an abstract way, must be enforced by force, not by education”. The plan is divided into four points: the creation of a regiment of *gauchos* (*Tropa Arreglada de Gauchos*) out of the dispersed rural population; the foundation of towns in collaboration with the principal indigenous leaders; the stimulus of interethnic trade and the creation of a state monopoly on wine and *aguardiente*; and

⁵⁹ Ratto, *Indios y cristianos*. 47-52. The bibliography surrounding Mejía is fragmentary. Most sources and information can be found in his two biographies: Ricci, *Francisco Ramos Mejía* and Ramos Mejía, *op. cit.* See also Pico, ‘Cuando los místicos van al desierto’, and Pico, ‘Los Tapiales’.

⁶⁰ It was an unusual practice in Buenos Aires, while it was very common in the frontier regions of Chile. See Bastias Saavedra, ‘The Lived Space’.

⁶¹ Pico, ‘Cuando los místicos van al desierto’.

finally, the distribution of land in exchange for a small redeemable canon. The *caciques* should participate in the realisation of the project and the government of the new settlements, as “it is therefore advisable, as a means, to permit more and more the Rule of the *Caciques*; and even that they take some part in our government”. The Directorio did not welcome the interethnic partition of sovereignty in frontier government, and Posadas discarded the proposal.

In April 1816, Ramos Mejía finally bought the right of occupation from the *caciques*, and he moved to the *estancia* Miraflores with his family. He gained the respect of the Native groups, which participated in the works of the *estancia* and obtained knowledge about agricultural production. His example pushed other *hacendados* to settle in the area, given the peaceful relations that sustained this interethnic context and the fact that this area was safe from the civil wars that were taking place on the frontier between Buenos Aires and Santa Fe. However, he was also depicted as an example not to follow, primarily because of his heterodox religious opinions and practices, which he disseminated among the Natives working and living in “Miraflores”.⁶² He was not alone in highlighting the convenience of a friendly interethnic attitude, necessary to avoid cattle thefts and provide the *estancias* with the seasonal workforce. Juan Manuel de Rosas championed similar ideas in two *memorias* for the government in 1820-21, voicing this opinion in the name of other southern frontier *hacendados*. The inclusion of indigenous workforce was instrumental in strengthening Creole commercial society, in which Natives would ultimately assimilate.

Civil wars, however, continued to influence the expansion of the interethnic commercial society in the countryside of Buenos Aires. Since the battle of Rancagua (1814), groups of royalist “Chileans” had invaded the territory of the United Provinces in the name of Ferdinando VII, bringing violence to Pampean groups and Creole frontier *estancias*, while the fall of Alvear and the growing influence of Artigas had started civil wars among the provinces. The frontier region between Santa Fe and Buenos Aires has been characterised by instability and rising confrontations between the armies of Buenos Aires and the federal ones. Fradkin and Ratto had defined the process as the emergence of “overlapping conflicts”, in order to stress the participation of indigenous groups and the complex fabric of changing alliances and rivalries between them and the Creoles.⁶³ The forces of Buenos Aires had to face the raids from Santa Fe and Entre Ríos, whose governors Estanislao López and Francisco Ramírez were the main allies of Artigas, as well as the arrival of the *cacique* Pablo Levnopán from Chile. Various emissaries were sent to the *caciques* *Ranquel* to obtain their help against the “Chileans”

⁶² A detailed source-based reconstruction of the “*Ley de Ramos*”, and the reactions it sparked in Buenos Aires Catholic establishment is provided in Ceriani Cernadas, ‘Inventando una tradición’, 66-69.

⁶³ Fradkin and Ratto, ‘Conflictividades superpuestas’.

and the anti-directorial forces, but Creoles did not manage to build a stable alliance, albeit local *vecinos* and *hacendados* offered their knowledge of indigenous networks to the Directorio.⁶⁴

The fall of the Directorio in Cepeda was a crucial moment for the southern frontier. Manuel de Sarratea, the first Governor after the defeat, ordered Ramos Mejía to sign a peace treaty with the *caciques pampas*, as the government feared that they could engross the forces of another enemy of Buenos Aires, José Miguel Carrera. Notwithstanding his heterodox religious ideas and his suspicious relationship with the Natives, the provincial government now needed his privileged relationship with the *caciques*. On 7 March 1820, Martín Rodríguez and Ramos Mejía (representing indigenous leaders) signed the treaty in Miraflores.⁶⁵ Article 3 sanctioned that the actual estancias formed the frontier line, and that no Creole would enter indigenous land from that moment onward. The *Pampas* committed to returning stolen livestock, while the *hacendados* would permit them to enter their land to hunt nutrias and other animals. The government of Buenos Aires would ensure “to recommend to his subjects the best conduct towards the Natives in their commercial transactions”. While Martín Rodríguez unilaterally broke the treaty after a few months, many critical points were already present in its short text. The *hacendados* opposed the article regarding the permission to hunt in private lands, as they were trying to put forward an absolute conception of property rights that excluded customary use rights.⁶⁶ Ramos Mejía refused at the very moment of signing Article 9, which compelled the *caciques* to surrender deserters and criminals to Creole authorities.

However, the treaty did not provide peace. The hectic political landscape of civil and interethnic war, as well as the different opinions surrounding indigenous diplomacy, rendered impossible to formalise stable frontier relations between the Creole and indigenous world. The invasions of *Ranquelches* and “Chileans” did not stop and at the end of the year, Commander Balcarce ordered Ramos Mejía to “sweeten” the indigenous people to avoid raids in the southern frontier, as happened in Salto and Navarro. However, his reply was very harsh, and he lamented the hypocrisy of the request, as both Creoles and the Natives were responsible for the state of war. His ideas regarding the future society that he imagined for Buenos Aires and the United Provinces were relatively straightforward, as he

⁶⁴ The government did not allocate enough economic resources to the matter. See Ratto ‘¿El norte también existe?’, 296.

⁶⁵ *RORA. Tomo 1*, 544.

⁶⁶ In 1825, Rosas wrote a booklet with his instructions for the economic government of the *estancias*. It expressed this “absolute” conception of property against customs, such as the right to hunt. See Rosas, *Instrucciones a los mayordomos*, 17.

believed that “there is no *Patria* for the Christians without the *Indios*, nor for the *Indios* without the help of the Christians”.⁶⁷

The new authorities did not welcome this attitude, as the new Governor Martín Rodríguez would soon become one of the supporters of “liberal agrarian republicanism”, a violent frontier policy which refused any form of Native incorporation into Creole commercial society.⁶⁸ Rodríguez invaded the territory of the *Pampas* and attacked their *tolderias* as a retaliation for a severe *malón* on Salto by the *Ranquelches*, infringing Miraflores treaty and bringing violence to groups not responsible for attacking Creole settlements. On his way back to Buenos Aires, Rodríguez decided to raid Miraflores and take prisoner the indigenous people living there, claiming that they were passing the information around Creole military operations to indigenous enemies. Francisco Ramos Mejía was confined in his *estancia* near Buenos Aires, because “has demonstrated such a close friendship with the savages that he prefers it to that of his own fellow citizens against whom he has this time behaved scandalously”.⁶⁹

Ideas about the incompatibility between Creole society and the “savage” Natives circulated in the Buenos Aires since colonial time, and Rodríguez was a strenuous supporter of a violent solution to the issue. He was against every form of peaceful interethnic cohabitation, and in favour of the military option aimed at their “extermination”. Referring to the “most philanthropic minds” that believed in the “possibility to stimulate their civilisation and industry”, Rodríguez totally discarded their ideas and was convinced that “the civilised *pueblos* will never be able to take any advantage of them”. The only remedy to their never-ending raids and devastations was “considering them enemies to be destroyed and exterminated”.⁷⁰

While a considerable portion of Buenos Aires elites recognised the necessity of Native collaboration for expanding and strengthening the prospected agricultural commercial society, indigenous participation in it should be subordinated to their assimilation to Creole customs and practices. Martín Rodríguez had blatantly infringed diplomatic pacts and attacked a private citizen with little legal justification. However, no one complained about Ramos Mejía’s fate, as his relationship with the indigenous groups and his insistence on advocating for their territorial rights were considered an

⁶⁷ Ricci, *op. cit.*, 11. The letter to Balcarce is the only primary source from which it is possible to reconstruct Ramos Mejía’s socio-political ideas.

⁶⁸ The following chapter deals with this political and economic ideal.

⁶⁹ AGN, Sala VII, 1041. This folder is part of the Fondo Biedma, collecting the documents of José Juan Biedma, and it collects the hundreds of official documents transcribed by him in preparation for the second volume of his *Crónicas militares: antecedentes históricos sobre la campaña contra los indios* (1923).

⁷⁰ Rodríguez, *Diario*, 67-68.

obstacle to the expansionist projects of the other *hacendados* of the southern countryside: in their vision, the Natives would integrate in the expanding rural commercial society as seasonal workforce or frontier militias, and they would not participate in the economic government of the countryside. They could participate in Creole society only in a subordinate position.

4. Pampean Property Rights and Commercial Regulation

As we have seen, indigenous Pampean groups reacted and resisted Creole expansionism. What were the ideas that inspired their resistance to the attempt of appropriation of their territory? Unfortunately, the sources to reply to this question are scarce, and it is necessary to rely on documentation produced by Spanish and Creoles, such as peace treaties and the accounts of expeditions and diplomatic rounds. Ethnohistorical studies provide us with a starting point, thanks to the appreciation of the specific ideas on territoriality structuring the patterns of land occupation of the Arauco-Pampean groups: they occupied a territory to sustain the group participation into the commercial and political circuits extending over *Wallmapu*. This territory was therefore strategic for controlling circuits of trade or resource extraction (feral cattle or salt, for instance), but the strategic relevance of each territory might change over time, as well as the particular group goal concerning land occupation.⁷¹ As Greer noted, “property formation” had a processual character and it was shaped by local ecologies and contexts.⁷²

Concerning our case, it seems that the centrality of land appropriation and occupation changed for both Spaniards, Creoles and Natives after the 18th-century commercial expansion. Chapter 3 described the increasing desire of expanding the frontier southward. However, it was nothing more than an aspiration given the scarce knowledge of indigenous territory, and Creole expansionism was not yet an issue shaping frontier diplomacy. While the independent governments of Buenos Aires tried to obtain permission to expand their frontier, this aspiration was not a central frontier issue during colonial times. The diplomatic treaties signed with Pampean groups from the 1740s onwards tried to settle other conflicting points: rules to enter Spanish and indigenous territories, commercial regulation, jurisdiction to punish interethnic crimes, the Spanish attempt to render some *caciques* accountable for the actions of other groups, the restitution of captives.⁷³

⁷¹ De Jong, et. al., *op. cit.*

⁷² Greer, *Property and Dispossession*.

⁷³ Levaggi, *Paz en la frontera*. During the 1740s, the main ally indigenous leader was the *cacique* ‘Bravo’, and a recently discussed PhD dissertation provides us with new insights into his political alliance with Buenos Aires. See Vassallo, *La defensa de la llave*, 446-459.

However, during the 1780s, the attempt to regulate land-use rights rose to prominence, alongside the increasing pressure over natural resources brought by the demand of Atlantic markets. In June 1782, the *cacique* Pascual Cayupilqui proposed to Buenos Aires a treaty that would allow his groups to hunt feral cattle on the fringes of Spanish territories, preventing at the same time the *Ranquelches* from doing so. A *junta de guerra* conceded him the right to exploit cattle south of the frontier forts of Chascomús, Ranchos, Laguna del Monte and Luján, as “the extension of this countryside is vast, and offer its usefulness to all the Native nations that populate it without prejudice to our habitual land, as long as they confine themselves in the territories that are destined to them”.⁷⁴ The treaty tentatively regulated the matter, but it did not reach a fixed settlement between the two parties. However, it was an expression of the process of “property formation”, as Cayupilqui tried to create an indigenous common for his group through interethnic law.⁷⁵

The treaty of 1790, which guaranteed 25 years of peace, elevated the *cacique* Calfurqui to “*cacique principal* of the entire Pampa, and head of this new republic”. He was held responsible for overseeing the compliance to land use rights sanctioned by the treaty: every Native needed his permission to “*potrear*”, the expedition for exploiting cattle cannot be formed by more than twelve members, and they can do it at the distance of two walking days from the Spanish frontier. Every expedition that would break these terms would be considered enemies and attacked by Spanish frontier forces.⁷⁶ The treaty recognised indigenous land use right to tentatively regulate cattle exploitation - whose stock was rapidly depleting. This attempt was also based on the necessity to distinguish between raids against the Spanish *estancias* or against *vaquerias*, and, in this way, to diminish frontier conflicts brought by the common exploitation of local nature. This regulation granted a durable peace based on the mutual respect of territorial and land use right: the Natives recognised Spanish land rights and complied to a regulation to enter it; Spanish authorities did not advance their frontier (even if they were planning to). A durable peace did not prevent the occurrence of small-scale interethnic conflicts.

Indigenous diplomacy started a new course with the 1810 García expedition, and land issues progressively gained relevance. Again, the *caciques valdivianos* employed concepts drawn from the

⁷⁴ Levaggi, *Paz en la frontera*, 127.

⁷⁵ Law did not regulate indigenous common property, as their migration patterns were based on natural resources availability. Competition for resources pushed these forms of common property formation. Greer, *op. cit.*

⁷⁶ Levaggi, *Paz en la frontera*, 135-137. *Potrear* meant taming and capturing wild horses (or cattle).

law of nations to legitimate the right of Creoles to establish a settlement in Salinas and counter the pretensions of the *Ranquelches*.⁷⁷ In support of the project, Epumur declared that

The Laguna de Salinas was not created by God for specific men, but for all as part of their sustenance, and so was the land, for it was for men and their animals; and therefore, if in this place I [Pedro Andrés García] wanted to build a palace, I could do it, and no one could prevent me. And if your King (so he spoke with much respect), and if your King wished to create cities, this pleased him [Epumur] a lot.⁷⁸

In the following days, the *caciques Ranquel* joined the *parlamento*, and during their talks against the *valdivianos* they called themselves “owners of the lagoon”.⁷⁹ Against them, Quintelau stated “that no one had exclusive *dominio* over the lagoon, that it was common, and that all should enjoy it, that any *cacique*, without committing violence and breaking the peace treaties with the Spaniards, could bother them”.⁸⁰ The *Ranquelches* based their claim on the fact that their leader, Carrupilun, had signed an important peace treaty with Commander Amigorena in 1799, who recognised him *cacique gobernador*. Indeed, Carrupilun believed that “the lagoon was his, the land ruled by him, and no one, without being violently chased away, could go there; [...] he was the Lord, the Viceroy and the King of all the *Pampas*”.⁸¹ García firmly stated his reasons, declaring that he “was not going to contest his vicereignty, nor the legitimacy of his properties”, but that the Spaniards had the right of use the Salinas, as “God had created [the Salinas] for men, and no one could put a price on them, nor deprive other men of them without offence”.⁸² Two different conceptions of the commons clashed in this case: Carrupilun considered the lagoon a common property of his groups, which had exclusive rights over it thanks to the sanctioning of Spanish law, while the *valdivianos* (who had arrived from Chile not long before) saw it as an universal common that every human can enjoy.⁸³ Both were indigenous understanding of property, and each one mobilised the idea that fitted better with his scope.

The foundation of the settlement in Salinas never materialised. However, the question of land rights resurfaced when the Creole entrepreneurs and Buenos Aires government started the expansion south of the Río Salado. In this new phase, the focus was on occupation rights. The treaty of Miraflores

⁷⁷ It is impossible to establish if Natives appropriated natural law concepts, if they instrumentally used them, or if they were the tentative translation of Native concepts during negotiations, as interethnic diplomacy was based on translators. Anyhow, they provided a platform to bargain over land appropriation.

⁷⁸ García, *Diario á Salinas Grandes*, 21.

⁷⁹ *Ivi*, 32.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁸¹ *Ivi*, 34.

⁸² *Ivi*, 35.

⁸³ Greer, *op. cit.*, 241-254.

stated that the current frontier limited the two jurisdictions and Creole could not enter indigenous lands. In the same period, another round of diplomatic talks in the northern frontier concerned land occupation. In 1819, Director Rondeau appointed Feliciano Chiclana to celebrate a peace with the *Ranquelches* in the context of the civil wars and the fear of a Spanish expedition. The points to discuss included the guarantee that they would not ally themselves with the “European Spaniards”, the “Chileans”, or Artigas-led Liga Federal. Buenos Aires’ last request was a permission to advance the frontier guards, and at this point, the *caciques Ranquel* recalled that the old treaty already fixed the matter, reserving to the Creoles the north bank of the Río Salado. After a lengthy discussion, they agreed to concede the advancement, but only of the forts and some *pulperia*. The establishment of new *estancias* was not included in these terms.⁸⁴ The issue of land occupation was assuming a central place in interethnic diplomacy, as the long-lasting Creole desires for advancement were being backed by action. The Natives understood this and resisted it, putting forward legal arguments in peace talks and recurring to military attacks against Creole *estancias* and settlements, both legitimate practices in their understanding of frontier diplomacy.

The issue of indigenous property was not confined to diplomatic talks but surfaced in Buenos Aires public opinion.⁸⁵ In the austral spring of 1821, the *Boletín de la Industria* commented on the indigenous invasions, and advocated for a diplomatic and peaceful resolution, as “justice, on the other hand, demands that they be paid for those leagues of land of which we have lately taken possession, and constitute the primary source of their resentment”. It continued noting that “they know that the land is theirs, and it is not surprising, therefore, that they claim it with arms, if it has been taken away from them by force”. Justice and civilisation demanded monetary reparation, as the *porteños* should not be associated with the barbarous practices of the Spanish *conquistadores*.⁸⁶ The same topic resurfaced in January when the *cacique* Cayupiqui arrived in Buenos Aires to stay there as captive until negotiations were concluded. This was a common practice in interethnic diplomacy. A newspaper close to the government reported that “it seems that the intention is to acquire lands by paying Natives their value as is the case in much of the United States”.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Levaggi, *Paz en la frontera*, 175-178.

⁸⁵ Ratto has noted that newspaper published much news regarding the war against the Natives, mostly untrustworthy. The fact that governments manipulated information on the frontier stands for the centrality of this matter in domestic political life. See Ratto, *La frontera*.

⁸⁶ *Boletín de la Industria*, n. 8, 19 September 1821.

⁸⁷ *El Argos de Buenos Aires*, n. 3, 26 January 1822. This source reveals an interesting point Weber noted: the historical experience of interethnic diplomacy during the Spanish monarchy fell soon into oblivion in favour of looking abroad for models. As we briefly noted, the practices of interethnic diplomacy were highly developed in Chile, as there Spaniards had dealt with powerful sovereign indigenous groups for a long time.

This was the context of García's expedition to the Sierra Ventana in 1822, and the issue of land played a crucial role during his diplomatic talks. On 28 April, *cacique* Avouné replied to the peace the Coronel offered, that the *Aucas* and the *Tehuelchús* were in favour of peace and commerce, and they had always respected the pacts. On the other hand, the Creoles had been the ones breaking the peace, "led by mischievous and ambitious men, who could not look on them with indifference as possessors of lands and estates".⁸⁸ The Natives had just tried to "defend their properties, and the soil which nature give them to sustain themselves and inhabit". Now they understood that "they would never be able to live in peace, because they were the possessors of a country that the ambition would create excuses to snatch it away from them". The *cacique* made clear that their raids into Creole lands were moved by the "just retaliation for seizures of their land, and ongoing violations of their property and interests". Indeed, his talk excited the indigenous people that were present.

The speaker of the meeting had not yet finished when the entire assembly became alarmed upon hearing the words «for seizures of their land, and ongoing violations of their property». Then everyone began loudly addressing the meeting of their *caciques*, recalling the times when they had suffered such outrages: in these memories, distressing for their inflamed imaginations, they became so enraged that they loudly demanded reparations for these evils and losses, calling for punishment. An elderly man of gigantic stature, one of the most eloquent, who stood out in his complaints above all others, said that he had been the owner and possessor (*dueño y poseedor*) of a considerable portion of land on the coasts of the Salado, in the area known as del Toro, from which he had been expelled by the Christians, to the severe detriment of his interests and exposed to perish in foreign lands due to indigence; finally asking to return it. Another stated at the same time that he had had his establishment near the Kakelhuincul guard and had been forced to emigrate a long distance to escape the outrages suffered at the hands of the Christians. A multitude of others echoed these same grievances, as it seemed to them that the time had come for them to be compensated for all they had lost, and that the treaties should provide for their indemnification.⁸⁹

The centrality of land property is evident. The account does not mention the activities carried out in the stolen lands. However, the Natives were definitely practising husbandry and hunting, and there is the possibility that they had dedicated themselves to some agricultural production, as that region of the Pampa had very convenient water resources and was an old region of indigenous settlements.

⁸⁸ García, *Diario expedición 1822*, 93-94.

⁸⁹ *Ivi*, 94.

What is clear is that these people had a clear understanding of their right to possess these lands, as they were the source of their subsistence.

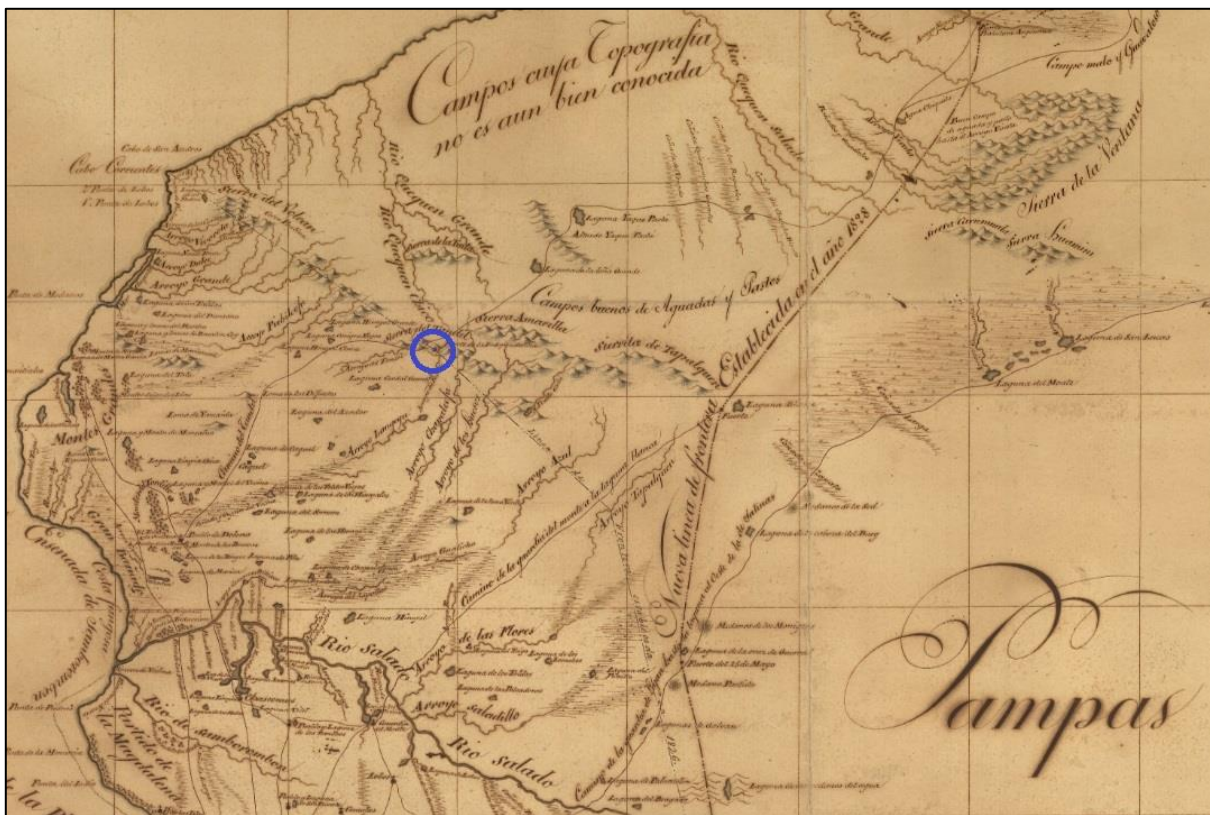


Fig. 13. *Carta Geográfica de la Provincia de Buenos Aires* (1829). Archivo Histórico de Goedesia y Catastro (La Plata). Detail. We highlighted in blu Fuerte Independencia (Tandil). See the note on the blank upper part: “Fields whose Topography is not yet well known”.

In this region, it seems that some form of individual rights over land have been developed. The “elderly man of gigantic stature” presented himself as “dueño y poseedor” of land. The fact that he did not mention that the land was shared with his family group might imply his individual right. However, it is also possible that these details had been lost in the translated talk, or in the successive redactions of the diary. Anyhow, what is signalled by this episode is that indigenous understanding of property rights was shifting toward a labour theory of property, as they thought that land use was generating property rights, while in the treaties of the previous century they just seem interested in the use of natural resources, not in the property of land where the resources were located.⁹⁰ The difference was that the individual conception of land property excluded others from enjoying its natural resources, being them Creoles or Natives, while previous concepts of indigenous territoriality did not include any exclusive use.⁹¹ The final conditions the Natives wanted to impose in the treaty

⁹⁰ This conceptual change was probably driven by the transformation in the indigenous mode of production, as numerous groups gradually increased agricultural production and the rate of sedentarization. Mandrini, ‘Las transformaciones’.

⁹¹ De Jong, et. al., *op. cit.*

were the destruction of Carmen de Patagones and Creole retreat from the territories south of the Río Salado, “land which was of their individual occupation, and which they had been evicted from, advancing the new guard of Kakelhuincul with the intention to setting up others which they would not tolerate”.⁹²

In what followed, the *caciques* advanced conditions for regulating interethnic trade. They wanted the permission to trade with every frontier fort, while García wanted to authorise it in just three of them. Besides that, they wanted to fix the purchase prices of their goods and asked for a new regulation of the ranches where cattle trade was taking place in the city. The Coronel noted that they “spoke so favourably to their advantage that from the Sierra de la Ventana they wanted to impose the law on the merchants of the capital”.⁹³ The conditions were not accepted by García, but he assured the *caciques* that the friendship and peace will be maintained. As the diplomatic talks did not obtain any result, he noted that a military expedition would extinguish “the pride with which they believed themselves to be superior to us”.⁹⁴ The *caciques* aspired to impose their commercial regulation on Buenos Aires traders, and this fact demonstrates the centrality that Atlantic commerce had achieved in their socio-economic system and political imagination.⁹⁵

The expedition took place less than a year later, achieving the foundation of the Fuerte Independencia in Tandil. During a round of negotiations in which Governor Rodríguez offered to buy indigenous lands, the *caciques* Lincon and Cayupilki refused, claiming that this decision could only be made during a general *parlamento*, because “the lands were owned in common” and “their value should be distributed to all”.⁹⁶ This negotiation never took place, and the expedition built the new fort in indigenous land. The sources indeed do not allow us to determine to what extent the Natives were sharing an individual conception of property, as the communal understanding of land property (a lineage possessing land in common for its subsistence) was probably still the prevalent one.

The *caciques* remembered the hypocrisy of Buenos Aires diplomacy. In February 1825, the commander of Carmen de Patagones ordered Mateo Dupin to carry on diplomatic talks with *Aucas* and *Cheuelches*, as the settlement needed indigenous trade for its survival, notwithstanding the ban on it. When Dupin met the *caciques*, they denounced that Creoles did not respect treaties: after

⁹² García, *Diario expedición 1822*, 95.

⁹³ *Ivi*, 96.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁵ In turn, Buenos Aires's ultimate weapon in facing periods of intense conflicts with the Natives was the prohibition of trading with them.

⁹⁶ Rodríguez, *op. cit.*, 63.

García's mission, they informed Buenos Aires of the hostile intentions of *Ranquelches* and "Chilenos" and sent to Buenos Aires their traders. However, "in return for our warning, he [Martín Rodríguez] had our merchants imprisoned, confiscated their goods, entered in arms our territory and built a fort that seized our best lands".⁹⁷ Therefore, they demanded the destruction of Fuerte Independencia, "built on our lands which the supreme being has given us to live on and which no human power has the right to take away from us".⁹⁸ Additionally, they asked that the representatives of Buenos Aires for signing the peace should be Francisco H. Ramos Mejía. This attests once again to the persistence of the personal element in these interethnic relations, as well as the fact that Ramos Mejía was perceived by the indigenous groups of the Southern Pampa as the only Creole who could be trusted.

5. Contested Sovereignty and Federal Constitutionalism

The centrality that land assumed in the expanding commercial society of Buenos Aires province added a crucial layer of conflict between Creole and the sovereign indigenous groups. Similarly, the fight to control land use and distribution fuelled resistance to centralist authorities in the Banda Oriental. In Chapter 3, we described how the tensions revolving around land property contributed to the breakthrough of a rural movement opposing the royalist Cabildo of Montevideo. In 1811, the Oriental forces organised under the command of Artigas, whom the Primera Junta had recognised as their military leader and part of the patriot army.

At that point, Artigas was a well-known figure in the Oriental countryside. Descendant of one of the founders of Montevideo, he spent his youth in the family *estancia* and got acquainted with rural life. There, he took part in smuggling activities. He lived a life between legality and illegality, like most of the Oriental rural population, pushed by the economic affluence and commercial expansion during the 1790s.⁹⁹ In 1797, he joined the recently created regiment of Blandengues of Montevideo, which would face the Portuguese menace ignited by the conflict with Great Britain and distinguished itself for his contribution in the fight against smuggling. Therefore, he had a deep knowledge of the Oriental countryside and its varied social composition, whose economic practices often verged on the border of legality. In April, he was ordered to join Felix de Azara, who began his frontier agrarian colonisation project in Batoví. Azara's Enlightened utopia did not last long, as the Portuguese

⁹⁷ 'Diario que redactó Mateo Dupin', 69.

⁹⁸ *Ivi*, 71.

⁹⁹ 'D. Agustín de la Rosa to Pedro Melo de Portugal'. Artigas took advantage of the general pardon for rural crimes that preceded the creation of the Blandengues. Buenos Aires government instrumentally used his past to discredit him during the civil wars, laying the groundwork for future historiographical interpretations that emphasised his relationship with disorder and *barbarie*. See footnote 9 in this chapter.

destroyed the settlement in 1801. However, during this time, Artigas had the chance to come into contact with the ideas of Spanish Enlightenment agrarianism and the central role of labour, property and wealth in the moralisation of customs and the improvement of the material conditions of the *pueblos*.¹⁰⁰ He was thus a man of action, who had as well the opportunity of approaching the most advanced ideas of social and economic improvement that were circulating in the region.

His biography, coupled with a charismatic personality, determined his quick rise to command of the patriotic insurgent forces in the Banda Oriental, which soon scored several victories against the royalist troops of Viceroy Elío. When the Portuguese army invaded the region to help the Spanish forces, the Orientales retreated to Ayuí (Entre Ríos), a journey of hundreds of families from October 1811 to June 1812, the *Éxodo Oriental*. There, the insurgent army turned into a radical political movement.¹⁰¹

The “Artigas experience” was indeed “the most radical of the period in the region”, given the popular mobilisation which supported it and the critical participation of indigenous groups.¹⁰² Radicality was fed by the popular and rural character of Artigas’ followers. The political culture of the *pueblos*, based on autonomy and self-government, was now free to fully develop its radical potential, as the higher authorities had disappeared. The federal cause was supported by the rural population of the Banda Oriental, a heterogeneous mix of small and medium independent producers, *peones*, wage workers and enslaved people, whose ethnic origins varied greatly. However, very different segments of local society supported Artigas, as wealthy patriot *hacendados* (such as Tomás García de Zúñiga, Juan José Durán, or Nicolás Herrera) were important, if recalcitrant, protagonists of the federal movement. The widespread calls for good government, security and order during previous years and the allegiance to the revolutionary cause made the support for the federal cause appealing even to elite members.

¹⁰⁰ The *expediente* on the foundation of Batoví is a perfect expression of the Spanish agrarianism described in chapter 3. See ‘Fundación del pueblo de Batoví’.

¹⁰¹ The *Éxodo* was a crucial experience because it contributed to the formation of a “consciousness of community”, based on the wartime shared experience. The attitude of the Buenos Aires government during the time in Ayuí, especially of Manuel de Sarratea, disillusioned the Orientales in respect of elites, both Spanish and Creole. Therefore, the local and social character of their fight radicalised. See Frega, ‘Caudillos y montoneras’, 14.

¹⁰² Di Meglio, ‘La participación popular en la revolución’, 440. As the Revolution gave a chance to bring forward old revindications, the Guaraní communities of the ex-Missions gradually revindicated their autonomous government, and Andresito Guacurarí emerged as their leader. In 1815, Artigas appointed him commander of the Missions. The revindication of communal government in the Missions sat well with the federal allegiance to the particular sovereignty of the *pueblos*, even if indigenous participation in the federal army was a matter of concern for contemporaries, as well as an argument of the Buenos Aires-led anti-Artigas propaganda.

Proprietors and non-proprietors joined together to support the patriot cause and advocate for their political and economic rights in the face of Spanish misrule and Buenos Aires hegemonic attitude.

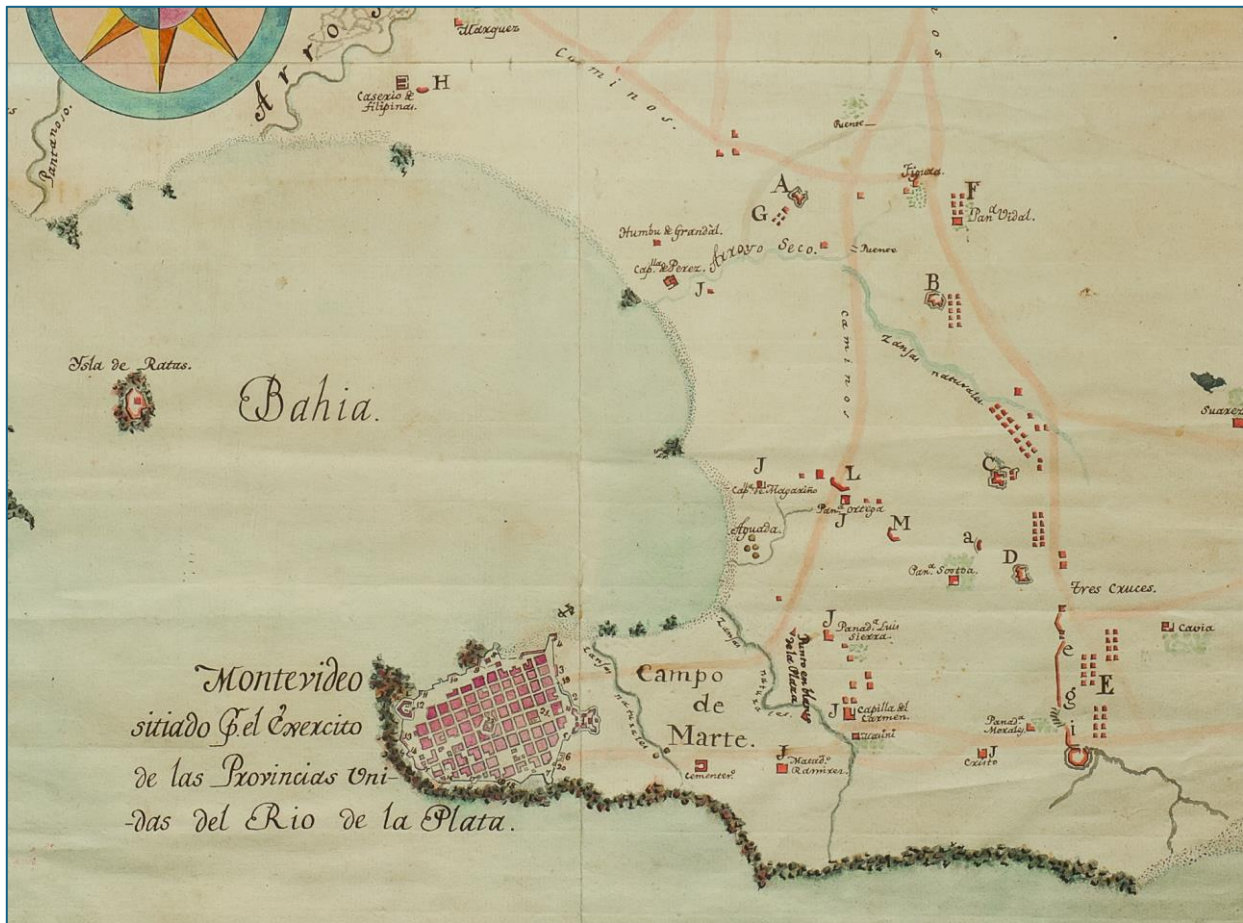


Fig. 14. Bartolomé de Muñoz, *Plano del sitio de Montevideo por el ejército de las Provincias unidas del Río de la Plata*, 1813 (detail). Source: Wikimedia Commons. On the right, the junction of Tres Cruces, where the Orientals reunited in congress.

The radical character of the Oriental forces manifested when they joined the second siege of Montevideo in 1813. In April, they reunited in congress at the military camp of Tres Cruces, in front of the besieged city, proclaimed the establishment of the Provincia Oriental, and drafted some instructions to be given to their representatives to join the general congress in Buenos Aires. The royalist Montevideo Cabildo commented on the fact, noting that “the *Revoltosos*, who are besieging this city, are so powerful that they dare to impose conditions on Buenos-Ayres”.¹⁰³ Those were quite strict, including, for instance, the declaration of independence from Spain, confederation between provinces as the only acceptable new form of government, the jurisdictional autonomy of the provinces, and the prohibition for the central government to reside in Buenos Aires. This federal

¹⁰³ Quoted in Frega, ‘Las Instrucciones de los diputados orientales’, 1. See also Caetano and Ribeiro, *Las Instrucciones del año XIII*.

intransigence was born out of the political culture of the *pueblos* and the attitude of Buenos Aires since 1810. Especially in the last months, Manuel de Sarratea, a member of the Triumvirate, had tried and partly succeeded in fracturing Artigas forces during their retreat in Ayuí, generating resentment in the forces that remained loyal to the *Protector*.¹⁰⁴ Finally, the Assembly of the Year XIII - where the centralist leadership of Buenos Aires and the Logia Lautaro was at its peak - did not allow the Oriental deputies to join the congress.

The opposition was based on the same political premises that inspired the creation of the Primera Junta. These were perfectly expressed by José Manuel Pérez Castellano (1743-1815), an old priest that would contribute to the federal movement, when he participated to a congress called up by Buenos Aires general Rondeau in an attempt of delegitimising Artigas' authority. Buenos Aires representatives did not receive well his words. Castellano pointed out that “this *Banda Oriental* has the right to withdraw from the government of Buenos Aires, as Buenos Aires had this same right to subtract itself from the government of the metropole in Spain”. As the King (“the bond that united and subordinated us all”) was gone, “the *pueblos* have been left without a sovereign (*acefalos*) and with the right to govern themselves”.¹⁰⁵

Local circumstances shaped the reactions toward the *vacatio regis* and the understanding of fundamental political concepts. For instance, the high level of social tensions that developed in the countryside around the issue of land property strongly influenced the constitutional response of the Banda Oriental. As the previous rivalry between the two city ports determined Montevideo's loyalty to the Spanish Junta, the rural population and the Cabildos rebelled against urban authorities wishing to regain the jurisdictional control over land that had been eroded in the previous decades. Julio Djenderedjian has correctly highlighted how the tradition of local jurisdictions created a platform for the later development and success of the Oriental Revolution.¹⁰⁶ Therefore, it is not by chance that federal tendencies in the Río de la Plata manifested first in the region where local instances of autonomous government were more robust, even if it was a political option also discussed elsewhere and even in Buenos Aires.¹⁰⁷ Portillo has noted how the constitutional opposition between Buenos

¹⁰⁴ Sala de Touron et al., *op. cit.*, 59.

¹⁰⁵ ‘Crónica del Congreso de Maciel’, 257.

¹⁰⁶ Djenderedjian, ‘Roots of Revolution’.

¹⁰⁷ Chiaramonte, ‘El federalismo Argentino’; Herrero, ‘Buenos Aires en tiempos de Revolución’.

Aires and Montevideo was a paradigmatic case of the process that divided the (European as well as American) territories of the Spanish monarchy following 1808-1809.¹⁰⁸

While the Oriental representatives did not participate in the general congress, they nevertheless promoted their institution-building and constitutional process. The fact that the Cabildo of Montevideo, the legitimate jurisdictional authority, had sworn loyalty to the peninsular government and that Buenos Aires authorities had shown worrying authoritarian tendencies pushed the *pueblos orientales* to create new institutions more aligned with their interests. The Congress of Tres Cruces established an economic government for the Provincia Oriental (Gobierno Económico de Canelones), which governed the jurisdiction of Montevideo until the city's conquest in 1815. In addition, they drafted a constitution *de caracter federal* for the United Provinces and a constitution for the Provincia Oriental, two complementary documents.¹⁰⁹ In fact, the first one sketched a federal system of government with a high degree of autonomy between the provinces and the central power, while the second one was the provincial constitution that regulated the domains in which the provinces were considered free to legislate. In the words of Ana Frega, the constitution *de caracter federal* was “an agreement between *pueblos* and not between individuals”.¹¹⁰

The texts heavily drawn upon the Constitution of the United States and the Massachusetts one, as some fundamental articles were a plain translation of the North American charts. After 1812, the circulation of those texts in the Río de la Plata is well documented thanks to Spanish translations, in particular, the work *La independencia de Costa Firme* by Manuel García de Sena.¹¹¹ Published in Philadelphia in 1811, it was dedicated to the people of Tierra Firme in order that “it may serve as a justification for your praiseworthy and generous conduct” against metropolitan authorities.¹¹² The book reunited the translation of a text by Thomas Paine, the Constitution of the United States and the Constitutions of Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Virginia. It had a wide circulation in the region and contributed to disseminating the ideas and political practices of the

¹⁰⁸ Portillo Valdés, ‘En principio todo fue Banda Oriental. Another significant federal case in the region is the province of Paraguay which refused the authority of Buenos Aires and promoted an isolationist policy. In this way, it did not participate in the civil wars after the failed 1811 campaign of conquest led by Belgrano.

¹⁰⁹ Felipe Santiago Cardozo wrote the constitution *de caracter federal* in 1813 and presented it to the Assembly of the Year XIII. See ‘Plan de una Constitucion’. The constitution of the Banda Oriental dates 1813. It was signed and approved by the representatives of the *pueblos* of Canelones, Piedras, Pando, Minas, Maldonado, San Carlos, Rochas, Santa Teresa, Santa Lucia, Pintado, San José, Colla, Colonia, Espinillo, Vivoras, Santo Domingo Soriano, Mercedes, Porongos, Paysandú, Cerro Largo and Belen. See ‘Proyecto de Constitución para la Provincia Oriental (1813)’.

¹¹⁰ Frega, ‘La virtud y el poder’, 127.

¹¹¹ Bauso, ‘Sobre dos traducciones’.

¹¹² Paine, *La independencia*, 33

United States of America, which were considered an important example of colonial emancipation followed by a successful process of economic development.¹¹³

Did the federal draft constitutions endorse alternative understandings of property than the centralist ones? In the *Constitucion de caracter federal*, the second article states that every province would retain its “sovereignty, liberty, or independence, and all power, jurisdiction, and law” which the constitution did not attribute to a general congress. The issue of property and its regulation is not discussed, and there is no declaration of individual rights. According to this draft, sovereignty is multiple and resides in the *pueblos*. The fundamental rights were only the rights of the *pueblos*, i.e. the “common good, protection, security, prosperity”. In the end, it is mentioned that each province should draft its own constitution, “appropriate to its territory, customs and manners of its natives, economic Government, the rule of the *policia*, commerce and other points connected with its location, the happiness of its inhabitants and its prosperity”.¹¹⁴

The constitutional definition of property rights was not an attribution of the general congress. However, it fell into the jurisdiction of each province and its *pueblos*.¹¹⁵ Indeed, the constitution of the Banda Oriental placed property among the natural rights, such as in the centralist texts (together with life, liberty, security, and happiness). It was a requirement to be elected to the representative bodies. The draft assigned the judicial power under each *pueblo*'s jurisdiction, which entailed the authority over land issues. The federal legislative power would write the instructions regarding the administration of justice, but the *pueblos* would continue to apply Spanish legislation to land matters. This formulation meant that the concept of property over land was not constitutionally set. However, its content should be defined by each *pueblo*, as long as it complied with the instructions for the administration of justice that the federal legislative power would enact. The central power was to provide an administrative regulation which local powers would conceptually fill.

Federal constitutionalism did not endorse alternative conceptions of property, as, such as the centralist constitutionalism, was based on Spanish notions of property, labour and political participation. However, there was a relevant difference concerning the distribution of power – an issue that impacted on the distribution of property. The federal sovereign body was multiple, as it was the confederation

¹¹³ Noemí Goldman, ‘Lecturas de *La Independencia*’. The fact that the North American constitutions provided an example for the constitutional processes in Spanish America does not mean that the North American Revolution was among the causes of the emancipation from Spain, see Rodríguez O., ‘Sobre la supuesta influencia’.

¹¹⁴ ‘Plan de una Constitucion’, 302.

¹¹⁵ The constitution *de carácter federal* promoted the establishment of new Cabildos - the political and jurisdictional expression of a *pueblo*, favouring, therefore, the proliferation of local powers.

of the different *pueblos*, while the centralist one was the “nation”, a unified political entity that was not self-evident and should be identified. Indeed, the centralist constitution tried to define who was part of the political body and who was not. The concept of property had a performative function to regulate the inclusion or exclusion of individuals from enjoying political rights and political participation.

The case of the federal constitutions was different: political rights were assigned according to the inclusion or not into local communities, a decision usually based on local customs mediated with Spanish political culture at large. If property was usually considered a sign of respectability, it was not a necessary one. Participation in the community was considered more important, and a fundamental way to do it was through labour. Therefore, in the specific local socio-economic context, this meant that an *agregado* might be considered a legitimate community member if it was considered morally honourable and thus economically active. In the end, the agency of local power might determine more inclusive definitions of participation in the political community and, therefore, the possibility of devising inclusive institutions to regulate land access, distribution and economic exploitation.¹¹⁶ The egalitarian character of the federal movement will indeed become manifest in the *Reglamento* of 1815.

6. Property and the Economic Government of the Liga Federal

Even if these constitutions were never enforced, it is possible to partially evaluate the federal economic system at work through the functioning of the Gobierno Económico de Canelones. First, it tried to stimulate rural production after the terrible years of war, as well as to guarantee provisions for the patriot armies besieging Montevideo.¹¹⁷ For what concerns property, the government ordered the Cabildos a survey of the properties left behind by Spaniards or “emigrates”, families or individuals that left because of the war or because they were loyal to Montevideo’s authorities. Lands must be turned productive, and the government pushed local communities to lease them to indigent families in exchange for a small canon and the obligation to work the land.

Research on this period is scarce, but it is possible to retrieve a glimpse of the ideas guiding the Oriental government through the words of Pérez Castellano. In June 1813, the Gobierno Económico invited the old priest to write a manual of agriculture to be distributed to the *pueblos* “for how much

¹¹⁶ While Spanish political culture of local government might be inclusive in theory, it does not mean that it was. The Spanish monarchy promoted the institutionalisation of racial difference through the doctrine of *limpieza de sangre* (blood purity). See Hering Torres et al. *Race and Blood*; Schaub, ‘La mácula como recurso político’.

¹¹⁷ ‘The Gobierno Económico to the Soberana Asamblea General Constituyente. Guadalupe, 8 May 1813’.

they can serve the development of that [...] by putting into some method these matters”.¹¹⁸ The work offered instructions regarding the correct cultivation of grains, vegetables, fruit trees, and other agricultural productions (oil, wine, vinegar). The manual had a prominent practical character, but toward the end, Pérez Castellano inserted some more general reflections regarding the desirable economic government of the countryside under the section “La agricultura implora proteccion de la justicia”. There, the writer lamented that the property rights of farmers were usually not respected because of the favourable treatment of husbandry with respect to agriculture. The rentability of the hide trade and the appearance of the *saladeros* expanded husbandry to the point that lands destined for agriculture were filled with heads of cattle and horses, grazing in whatever land and destroying or damaging agricultural production.

Pérez Castellano recalled when, at the end of the colonial era, some *vecinos* of Miguelete denounced the damage they suffered from the expansion of intensive cattle grazing. The governor, however, ordered the Cabildo not to accept the complaint, which fell into oblivion, and he thus “obtained a complete victory against agriculture”.¹¹⁹ The new government had to prevent repeating the errors of Spanish authorities and to guarantee the protection of farmers’ property rights. Indeed, they “ask for nothing more in their favour than the observance of these first principles of natural law”.¹²⁰ The federal movement was not reclaiming anything revolutionary, according to Pérez Castellano. Local communities and individuals wanted their property rights respected and defended by the political authorities; a protection that has been denied to them in the last decades.¹²¹

The implementation of federal rural policies gained momentum in 1815, when Artigas defeated Buenos Aires’ armies in the battle of Guayabos, and the federal forces finally controlled both the Banda Oriental and Montevideo. The war-related devastations and the migration of Spaniards had turned the countryside into an abandoned and dangerous place. Even if Artigas’ leadership was endangered by the opposition of the *hacendados* of Montevideo - who feared his radicalism, both shared the desire to bring order to the rural world and reactivating production.

When in June 1815, the *Protector* ordered Otorgués, his general in Montevideo, to distribute abandoned land to “those industrious men who would like to cultivate them for themselves, giving them a parcel suited for starting a good business”, the patriot *hacendados* reunited in a *junta* in August

¹¹⁸ Pérez Castellano, *Selección de escritos*, 5.

¹¹⁹ *Ivi*, 185.

¹²⁰ *Ivi*, 193.

¹²¹ Many different political revindications and ideas animated the federal movement. See Sala de Tournon et al., *op.cit.*; Frega, ‘Caudillos y montoneras’.

hoping of being able to affect the rural politics of the *Protector de Los Pueblos Libres*.¹²² In their opinion, order and security were needed to reestablish agricultural production, not land distribution. In this respect, they complained about the growing power of militia commanders and local rural powers - the backbone of Artigas' support, pointing at their excesses and responsibility for many abuses. The Cabildo and Artigas quarrelled over the matter until September, when the Protector issued the *Reglamento Provisorio de la Provincia Oriental para el Fomento de la Campaña y Seguridad de sus Hacendados*, in which unilaterally sanctioned the agrarian policy to be implemented, provoking the final clash with the patriot *hacendados*.¹²³ Who was entitled to land jurisdiction? This was the fundamental conflicting issue.

Recently, Duffau pointed out that the attempt by Artigas to create a “revolutionary right” based on the productive exploitation of land as the basis for the legitimacy of land possession, following traditional work by Nahum.¹²⁴ Conceptually, this was nothing but revolutionary, as it was the same principle structuring the Spanish right of possession, as well as many proposals for the *arreglo* of the countryside, put forward in the previous decades. However, the fundamental revolutionary measures were the expropriation of uncultivated land, as even the most radical Spanish reformers never thought about it, given that there was no legal basis to do so, and the decision to consider illicit the land sales of the 1810-1815 period, from which many patriot *hacendados* had benefited. The revolutionary idea was to link economic improvement measures with social justice. Through it, Artigas tried to strengthen the social basis of his support, rewarding its supporters and punishing its enemies, as well as to reactivate the agrarian economy of the Banda Oriental through a more equal tenancy system. The *Reglamento* tried to finally solve the tenancy problem in the Oriental countryside. However, his revolutionary solution was the final blow to the support of the local wealthy elites, who had been used to disregard political attempts to regulate rural property rights. Artigas tried to implement the *potestad oeconomica* at the detriment of Montevideo's ruling classes, an attempt that gained him and his supporters the labels of “*anarquistas*”, because they were subverting the society's natural hierarchy and refusing to subordinate to higher powers.

¹²² Quoted in Sala de Touron et al., *op. cit.*, 129.

¹²³ The issue of the expropriation of uncultivated properties determined the irreconcilability of their positions: Artigas wanted to redistribute and put them under production, while the *hacendados* argued that many landowners did not want to reactive production given the extremely dangerous rural situation. A contemporary observer noted that the Cabildo always looked at the *Reglamento* with ‘cold and stilted approval’. *Ivi*, 145.

¹²⁴ Duffau, *op. cit.*, 63. The revolutionary character of the *Reglamento* is more evident in the link it established between revolutionary justice and social justice, sanctioning the preference for land distribution to the subaltern classes. See Azcuy Ameghino, *Historia de Artigas*, 318.

The *Reglamento* systematised the politics of the Gobierno Económico through a more rigorous and comprehensive regulation.¹²⁵ The *Reglamento* invested the *alcalde provincial* with the jurisdiction over land issues in agreement with legislation enacted by Montevideo. The egalitarian spirit guiding it is manifest, as the *alcalde* should distribute uncultivated land “taking care that the most unfortunate will be the most privileged”, a definition comprising free people of colour, *zambos*, indigenous people and poor Creoles.¹²⁶ The recipients must form a ranch and two corrals within two months if they want the donation to be effective, and they were not allowed to alienate their property. The *Reglamento* included articles about the *policia* of the countryside, one of the most pressing problems, that were very similar to Spanish legislation on the matter. Another similarity was the central concern of the piece of law: reactivating and expanding rural production. The social revolution promoted by land redistribution was not a goal in itself, as it was the best way to guarantee the expansion of rural production and wealth circulation necessary to provide revenues for the war.

The Cabildo of Montevideo retarded the application of the *Reglamento*, but it nevertheless reached the countryside and left durable marks. In the department of Colonia, for instance, it created a long-lasting predominance of smallholding, assigning lands to at least 41 different recipients, most of them being militiamen close to Artigas.¹²⁷ The distribution was used to strengthen political support and pay military salaries in a time of dire public revenues – indeed the Directorio did the same. Besides the licit redistribution, it seems that the promulgation of the *Reglamento* legitimised even more families to occupy and work over someone else lands, a practice that was widely diffused since decades as we already discussed.¹²⁸ The radical faction of the Oriental Revolution welcomed the new agrarian legislation, that contributed in turn to fracture even more the adherence to the *causa artiguista*.¹²⁹

At its apex, the *Liga de los Pueblos Libres* included the Provincia Oriental, Corrientes, Entre Ríos, Santa Fe, Córdoba and the Guaraní Missions. It was a considerable territory, and Artigas tried to economically govern it to support his struggle against the Directorio and the Portuguese. As the promotion of trade was central for the reactivation of the local economies and the provision of fiscal

¹²⁵ It is important to note the provisional character of the *Reglamento*. The war prevented the *pueblos* from governing by themselves, and Artigas’ *potestad oeconomica* would give laws to the *pueblos* until peace was achieved.

¹²⁶ In addition, the *Reglamento* stated that no recipient could obtain more than a *suerte de estancia* and established a maximum size of the parcels. The text is reproduced in Sala de Touron et al., *op. cit.*, 151-156.

¹²⁷ Frogoni Laclau, ‘A 200 años del Reglamento’.

¹²⁸ For some evidence of the phenomenon, see Sala de Touron et al., *op. cit.*, 245-253.

¹²⁹ Frega sketched the traits of the radical political culture that developed in the Banda Oriental during the Revolution. Frega, ‘Caudillos y montoneras’.

revenues, he created a unified economic zone to foster intra-provincial trade, and he sanctioned a commercial regulation which discriminated trade with Buenos Aires.

At the same time, he wished to attract British merchants, as they wanted to take advantage of the war, buying hides from the best bidder. Indeed, Robert Staples, the informal British consul in the Río de la Plata, was in contact with Artigas, and they signed a commercial treaty in August 1817, a move that the British government disavowed.¹³⁰ Commercial policy was thus an integral part of Artigas's program, as he understood its centrality in stimulating rural production and in providing fiscal revenues. The Instruction of the Year XIII included some articles dedicated to commercial policies, delineating it as a constitutional matter. The government of the Banda Oriental dictated new commercial regulations and customs duties to discourage traffic with Buenos Aires and Brazil in favour of the provinces of the Interior or foreign merchants.¹³¹



Fig. 15. Mapa de la Liga de los Pueblos Libres, también llamada Liga Federal. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

¹³⁰ Besseghini, *Commercio britannico e imperialismo informale*, 307-308.

¹³¹ Azcuy Ameghino, *Historia de Artigas*, 221-240.

The economic regeneration program promoted by Artigas favoured husbandry over agriculture. Notwithstanding the calls for the protection of agriculture of characters such as Pérez Castellano, the profitability of hide trade was too attractive in the conjuncture of war. Some initiatives in that direction were attempted, but they were unsuccessful. For instance, the Cabildo of Guadalupe sent to Montevideo a project of agricultural improvement, aiming at expanding the production of staple food and reducing the necessity of food imports. The proponents were alarmed by the distressed economic state of the countryside and believed in the necessity to support agriculture, as “it seems fair to prefer the increase of men after more than eighty years in which it was only about the multiplication of animals”.¹³²

However, Artigas postponed the project to more favourable time, as “the province must vigorously pursue the breeding of the cattle”.¹³³ Even in the federal camp, conflictive models of economic development clashed among each other. The war economy pushed Artigas to subordinate the reactivation of agriculture to the stimulus of husbandry, as the British, the Orientales main commercial partners, were hungry for hides, and the federal armies were hungry for weapons and fiscal revenues.

The analysis of the economic government of the Banda Oriental during Artigas leadership revealed that land property was again a means to reach the goal of economic and commercial expansion. The entanglement of war, revolution and social context rather than radical new economic ideas shaped the peculiar features of Oriental economic policies. The commitment to racial and social justice was based on the necessity to strengthen the masses’ support of the Liga de los Pueblos Libres, as well as on the deep knowledge that Artigas had of the rural socio-economic contexts, problems and years-long grievances against the inability of the Spanish power to provide justice. After 1811, justice meant social and racial justice for most Oriental rural populations, even if everyone did not share political radicalism.

Artigas represented a radicalisation of the Enlightenment social and economic regeneration project that had inspired Spanish and Creole administrators over the past thirty years. His paternalistic view of the incorporation of the Native groups into the expanding rural commercial society of the Banda Oriental is another element which supports his connection with the world of the Enlightenment. Indigenous troops were an essential backbone of the federal army since the beginning of the Oriental

¹³² ‘Fomento agricultura de Guadalupe’, 34.

¹³³ Azcuy Ameghino, *Historia de Artigas*, 365.

Revolution. However, Artigas did not consider them cannon fodder, as they were included in the confederal project as legitimate *pueblos* of the association.

Andresito Guacurari was the Guaraní *cacique* who granted the Natives' support to the federal army through his close relation with the *Protector*, who became his father-in-law. The Comandante General de Misiones was in charge of promoting the economic and commercial expansion of the Guaraní *pueblos*, especially between 1814 and 1817. The correspondence between the two reveals the goal of incorporating the ex-Missions into the commercial system of the Liga, centred in the headquarter of Purificación, placed in a strategic position at the confluence of the Paraná and the Uruguay rivers - the geographical and economic core of federal territories. Artigas wrote him in 1816,

I recommend to you very much to inspire those Natives the desire to activate their commerce and sell their fruits. To that end, have them build their carts: to cut woods to sell; to promote their cultivation of tobacco, cotton, and other fruit, as well as the benefit of the *yerba*. No matter how slowly they begin these works, here there are ready cash, which they can employ in other utilities that are more necessary for those *pueblos*. This way, the needs will be remedied, and the *Naturales* will be instilled with a love for labour. Then they will see their advancement as it happens among us, and from that product is where we will buy weapons and everything necessary.¹³⁴

The need to instil “love for labour” to the *Naturales* was the same preoccupation that animated the reformers' desire to increase the Spanish useful population through the incorporation of the indigenous group into the developing Spanish commercial society.

Artigas tried actively to increase the working population of the federal territories, promoting the settlement of *Guaicuruses* and *Abipones* sovereign groups in the province of Corrientes. He invited the local government to indicate where the newcomers could settle down and contribute to improving the productive forces with “their labour, industry and stimulus”. Indeed,

The Natives, although savages, are not ignorant of the good, and although they have to work hard, they will finally bless the hand that leads them to the bosom of *happiness by changing their religion and customs*. This is the first duty of a magistrate who intends to consolidate public happiness.¹³⁵

The government of Corrientes met the decision with resistance, as they had been at war with these indigenous groups. However, Artigas highlighted the patriotic duty of supporting the rights of the

¹³⁴ *Ivi*, 267.

¹³⁵ *Ivi*, 273-274. Emphasis in the original.

Natives and the utility that they could bring to the province. In June 1816, 400 *Abipones* arrived at Purificación, and the *Protector* wrote to Montevideo asking for agricultural working tools and seeds necessary to help “these unfortunate people to form their settlements and start their work”.¹³⁶ Sovereign indigenous groups were welcome to join the federal cause as long as they would integrate and homogenise into the Creole commercial society based on the interdependence between agriculture, industry and trade.

While Artigas was promoting the economic development of the *Pueblos Libres*, various forces were conspiring to stop him and his “*anarquistas*”. The authorities of Buenos Aires assured via Manuel García (Pedro’s son) that their armies would not confront the Portuguese ones in the case of an invasion of the Banda Oriental. Therefore, the Portuguese troops invaded the Banda Oriental in August 1816, and war and devastation again occurred in the region. The loss of Montevideo represented a deadly blow to the federal cause, and Artigas’s leadership would finally end in 1820 when the defeated *caudillo* exiled himself in Paraguay.

7. Conclusions

Buenos Aires hegemonic politics was met with resistance. The Liga Federal was the most strenuous opponent of the ex-viceregal capital, and it proposed a constitutional alternative based on the respect for the individual sovereignties of the *pueblos*. However, Artigas promoted a model of economic development in line with Bourbon and Buenos Aires ones, favouring export-oriented husbandry with respect to commercial or subsistence agriculture: the necessity of fiscal revenues to sustain the war economy coupled with the high profitability of Atlantic-driven hide trade. While constitutionally, the economic government fell under the jurisdiction of local authorities, war-related provisionality pushed Artigas to authoritatively implement the *potestad oeconomica* in the government of the *Liga*. His understanding of the role of indigenous communities reflects Enlightenment utopias of economic reforms: they should join the useful population of the political community through the application to market-oriented labour.

On the other hand, the Arauco-Pampean Native communities had voluntarily increased their commercial interdependence with the Spanish and Atlantic markets for some decades, and the Revolution caught them during a time of commercial efflorescence. The increasing entanglement of their socio-economic system with the capitalist markets pushed a process of social change as they fashioned new economic activities, consumption patterns or political alliances to take better

¹³⁶ *Ivi*, 275.

advantage of the conjuncture. After 1810, they attempted to maintain or better their position in the expanding commercial society, forging changing alliances with Creole patriots or royalists. They got enmeshed in civil wars because of their will to maintain their Atlantic economic connections, and the Creole active attempt to co-opt their alliance.

What meanings did the concept of land property assume in the wake of revolutionary politics and confrontations? In the case of Artigas, the economic content of property seems similar to the ideas discussed in the late colonial period and on the other bank of the river. Land property is considered the best stimulus for increasing individual production and the overall wealth of the polity. These goals were instrumental in reactivating the local economy after years of destructive civil war and resisting the assault of Buenos Aires and the Brazilian Empire. The radical innovation in the Banda Oriental was the link between property, social justice and adherence to the revolutionary cause. In a particular moment of the conflict, the *Reglamento* promoted an agrarian reform that tried to forge a new population of productive proprietors whose adherence to the federal cause was more important than received ethnic or socio-economic categories. The direct attack on traditional social hierarchy was not well received by the wealthy patriot *hacendados*, who soon ceased to support Artigas, contributing to the demise of the Liga Federal. The high degree of social tensions and violence was linked to the vertiginous rate of economic exploitation of the previous decades. Rural population saw their source of subsistence endangered and responded supporting a radical popular movement. The constant interdependence with Atlantic markets and the tensions around land property inherited from colonial times contributed to configuring land ownership as a crucial political and economic issue during the independence and civil wars in the Banda Oriental and surrounding Littoral provinces.

Regarding indigenous sovereign groups, their ideas surrounding land property had changed since the second half of the 18th century, gradually following their deeper integration into Spanish American, Pacific and Atlantic markets. The process of social change impacted their productive activities, consumption patterns, and circuit of exchange in light of their propension to ethnogenesis brought by the high degree of social and geographical mobility even before their increasing contacts with capitalist markets. The transformations of their socio-economic system started to impact their economic ideas. Some groups of the Pampean area, probably influenced by their previous life in the interethnic Chilean commercial society, became more interested in permanent settlement and devised intellectual arguments to support their proposal to ally with Buenos Aires. Some years later, similar arguments would then be re-fashioned to resist Creole pretensions over indigenous lands. Concepts pertaining to the tradition of natural law resonated in the words of indigenous leaders and individuals: the antiquity of possession, land use rights and a pristine labour theory of property. Albeit the scarcity

of primary sources did not permit a clear picture of the multiple indigenous meanings attached to property, the central idea discussed in this study was not shared by the Native economic culture: property as the best stimulus to guarantee the expansion of economic production and development. While the Pampean groups believed that individual labour was one of the ways to generate property rights, labour was destined for subsistence (which included some production for the market). However, the link between property and individual labour maximisation to increase production, identified in the Atlantic debates over political economy, was not among the arguments employed during interethnic diplomacy.

Finally, how did resistance impact the construction of a republican system in Buenos Aires? It proved that new social actors had gained power following the collapse of Spanish rule. Rural masses and Native groups were crucial referents for whatever project for the economic government of the region, as they voiced claims on land property that should be addressed. The rural populations championed leaders coming from their social backgrounds, such as Artigas, who were capable of understanding the political and economic requests of this new and fundamental political actor. The ideology of republicanism and the repertoire of political practices that accompanied it rendered impossible to disregard rural masses when projects of economic government of the countryside were enacted.

Similarly, interethnic diplomacy became central to any project of commodity frontier advancement, and the issue of Native rights on land acquired a new centrality compared to colonial times. During the 1820s, two political and economic models (liberal agrarian republicanism and federal agrarian republicanism) battled for political supremacy in the province. Eventually, the winners will be those who could best relate to the rural populations and indigenous groups. Claims over property and use of the *Pampas* and *Tehuelchís* territory would hold a crucial place in future political negotiations.

CHAPTER 6**Liberal Agrarian Republicanism and Provincial Institutional Innovations**

The chapter reconstructs the model of liberal agrarian republicanism, which guided the agrarian and frontier policy of the provincial government of Martín Rodríguez (1820-24) and the national government of Bernardino Rivadavia (1826-27). The differences with the economic ideas of the previous governments were minimal but significant. The agricultural sector maintained the role of the activity upon which the wealth of Buenos Aires was to be based, driven by cattle farming and enlivened by an expanding commercial agriculture. However, the provincial government had more financial resources to realise the project thanks to the end of civil wars and the disappearance of the danger of the Spanish reconquest. Therefore, Rodríguez pursued an aggressive policy for advancing the southern frontier, promoted new institutions to create and educate citizens for a republican commercial society, and sought to implement numerous economic development projects in collaboration with foreign entrepreneurs, especially British ones. The chapter opens stressing how the new government's program was rooted in political economy, and then discusses how some institutional innovations (the establishment of the University and the Topographic Department) contributed to creating useful knowledge for advancing the frontier line and reforming the tenancy system. Then, the frontier policy of "liberal agrarian republicanism" is presented. The main innovation was a higher degree of frontier violence and the refusal of interethnic diplomacy. This aggressive attitude was among the causes of the fall of Rivadavia-led national executive in 1827.

Bernardino Rivadavia and Manuel J. García (Pedro's son) played a fundamental role in Rodríguez's government and coalesced a significant consensus. However, the unresolved issue of a land property rights was threatening to erode provincial harmony of interests. In fact, local *hacendados* opposed the project and the provincial government was not able to approve any new land legislation, limiting itself to the establishment of an institution (the Topographic Department) aimed at mapping and administering existing rural properties (1824). Two years later, the national congress finally sanctioned a national Emphyteusis Law, while the legislative assembly of the province of Buenos Aires was suppressed, limiting in this way the opposition from the powerful landholding class. This fact would strengthen their opposition to the national government.

During the national congress (1824-1827), the fracture between two factions (*federales* and *unitarios*) had become unreconcilable, and different orientations in political economy mattered too. A common and shared political economy characterised the years of Martín Rodríguez, but several conflicting issues emerged during the general congress. The *unitarios* promoted an aggressive frontier policy

which did not contemplate any alliance with the Natives (not even instrumental); following the trade treaty with Great Britain, they sponsored many Atlantic partnerships to attract British families and to exploit local mines; they wished to turn Buenos Aires into a free port jurisdictionally disconnected to its countryside. The *federales* were more inward looking: they wished for a frontier policy of militarised peace based on strategic alliances and their economic power heavily relied on the agribusiness sector, therefore on the vertical integration of rural production and commercialisation of their agricultural goods. While they were conscious that foreign commercial partnerships were crucial, they were firm opposers of indiscriminate free trade policies. While the differences might have been conciliable, the breakthrough of the war with Brazil in the Banda Oriental exacerbated them, as the national government was left with no revenues due to the blockade of Buenos Aires and an inflationary crisis hit strong the developing export-led economy.

The chapter defines the unitarian political economy “liberal”, but some caveats are necessary. The adjective “liberal” does not mean that this political economy adhered to a normative ideal type of liberalism. Instead, liberal agrarian republicanism refers here to the local political economy whose peculiar characteristics were the incentives for foreign capitals to participate in national development and an aggressive frontier policy caused by an extreme intolerance for alternative kinds of commercial societies, such as the local Native groups. These aspects opposed the liberal to the federal orientation in political economy. During 1820s political debates, the *unitarios* stressed that “liberal principles” guided their politics, while the *federales* accused them of adhering in words but not in deeds to the principles that had inspired the Revolution. One political faction tried to appropriate a term who in the 1810s had a vague conceptual identity and associate it with its practice of government. The result was a proliferation of conflicting meanings that will continue until the 1850s, when a new consensus around the term “liberal” was built.¹ To sum up, “liberal agrarian republicanism” was a political economy based on the promotion of agriculture and husbandry that aimed to institutionalise a commercial society of market producers composed of a homogenous (white) population. The main implication was that there was no space for the Natives to participate into it. This ideal would guide frontier and agrarian policy during the provincial government of Martín Rodríguez (1820-1824) and the national one of Bernardino Rivadavia (1826-1827).

¹ Fabio Wasserman provided a careful historiographical discussion of the use of “liberalism” in the interpretation of Argentine history, and a detailed conceptual analysis of the term “liberal” in early 19th-century Río de la Plata. See Wasserman, ‘Entre la moral y la política’.

1. A *Feliz Experiencia* Grounded in Political Economy

The so-called *fatídico año '20* ended in October 1820, when the recently elected Governor Martín Rodríguez neutralized yet another coup attempt thanks to the crucial support of the rural militias commanded by Juan Manuel de Rosas. The government started a season of provincial institution-building with the creation of the *Sala de Representantes*, the sanctioning of an electoral reform and the suppression of the Cabildos of Buenos Aires and Luján.² While during the 1810s Buenos Aires had invested his political efforts in the supra-provincial organisation, now this season was over. In his 1822 message to the legislation, Minister Bernardino Rivadavia announced that Buenos Aires had to “to fold in upon itself; improve its internal administration in all its branches; inspire order to the *pueblos hermanos* by its example; assume that importance with which it should present itself when the desired opportunity to form a nation should arrive, thanks to the resources it has within its limits”.³ While the desire for a national organisation has not expired, it was better to persuade the other provinces through emulation rather than war.

To lead the provincial institution building, Rodríguez appointed two men who had served the Revolution in the previous years through fundamental diplomatic appointments, Manuel José García and Bernardino Rivadavia. He believed that that they had been less affected by factional struggles, and they could embark on the process of institutional reorganisation without being touched by the private goals of interest groups. The opposite was true as the fierce political confrontations in the press and in the legislative assemblies during the following years would lead to the emergence of the two political factions whose conflict (at times even military) would mark the political history of Buenos Aires and the United Provinces: the *unitarios* and the *federales*.⁴

Rivadavia was thus nominated Minister of Government and External Relations. As a member of the First Triumvirate, he promoted export-led economic growth and the increasing interdependence with

² Ternavasio, ‘La supresión del cabildo’. The suppression pushed a reform of the judicial system. Instead of the Cabildos, the administration of justice was entrusted to five lettered judges (*jueces de primera instancia*) and to one *juez de paz* in every parish. The latter reunited jurisdictional and police functions, and it was appointed among the *vecinos honrados*. See Casagrande, *op. cit.*, 191-195.

³ Mabragaña, *Los mensajes*, 189.

⁴ Zubizarreta, *Los Unitarios*. This study masterfully discusses the old historiographical misconceptions regarding early 19th-century political factions, based on the superimposition of modern categories over the political practices. At that time, politics was the confrontation between individuals who tried to create factions in their support, through the practice of government. The progressive development of public opinion and parliamentary confrontation gradually determined the emergence of political factions which built a political identity through the negative identification with their opponent (*federales* against *unitarios*). The formation of the two camps was shaped by ideas, personal interests as well as networks. The contours of the political factions were very fluid during the years 1821-24, and the government of Rodríguez was supported by some of the future leaders of the future federal faction (such as Manuel Moreno, Juan Manuel de Rosas, the Anchorena’s brothers and others). The consensus during the early 1820s was defined the *Partido del Orden*.

Atlantic markets.⁵ From 1814 onwards, he travelled to France, Spain and Great Britain, looking for international support for the South American republics. During this time, Rivadavia got acquainted with numerous intellectuals, such as Antoine Destutt de Tracy, Dominique De Pradt, Jeremy Bentham, and James Mill. These encounters probably strengthened his beliefs in economic liberalism, as the influence of utilitarianism in the legislation he promoted manifests.⁶

In addition, he approached European merchants and investors to convince them of the promising economic prospects of the new republics. Besides political support against Spain, they might provide the United Provinces with capital, expertise and partnerships that an export-led economy desperately needed. In an 1818 letter to Pueyrredón, Rivadavia suggested establishing a precise regulation for European immigration, as it was then possible to circulate it throughout European developing nations to find people and capitals interested in the venture. He believed that “population growth is not only the first and most urgent need for this State [...] but also the most effective means [...] to create a *homogeneous*, industrious and moral population, the only solid basis of Equality, Liberty, and consequently of the Prosperity of a nation.”⁷ Foreign-assisted economic regeneration was to be an important building block of the new South American republic.

The Minister of the Treasury was entrusted to Manuel J. García, elder son of Pedro Andrés. Educated in Chuquisaca, he defended Buenos Aires during the British invasions, and after 1810, he was appointed to minor bureaucratic positions. In September 1812, he became the director of the *Gazeta de Buenos Ayres*, and participated in the draft of a constitution. A member of the Logia Lautaro, his political career was very fast. In 1813, he was appointed Secretario de Hacienda, and the following year he was part of the State Council under Posadas.⁸ In 1815, Alvear sent García to Rio de Janeiro, the fulcrum of South American diplomacy, with a crucial diplomatic mission aimed at finding international support for the United Provinces in an epoch of growing anxieties due to Spanish plans for a military expedition to the Southern Cone. After the fall of the Director in April 1815, he remained

⁵ Bagú, *El plan económico*, 121-126. The work of Bagú is a classic, and it was the first in delineating the economic ideas guiding the centralist governments of Buenos Aires. However, it suffers from a static understanding of political factionalism, which attributes excessive coherence and rigidity between the world of ideas and political practices.

⁶ Gallo, ‘Jeremy Bentham y la «Feliz Experiencia»’.

⁷ Rivadavia to Pueyrredón. Paris, 9 September 1818. See Bagú, *op. cit.*, 130. Emphasis added. The association between “homogenous”, “industrious” and “moral” stands for the racial intolerance which would characterise liberal political economy during the 1820s.

⁸ When in charge of the economic government of Buenos Aires, he manifested his creative and heterodox economic thinking, proposing for instance a development plan based on the free exploitation of mineral resources - as agriculture could not provide the short-term revenues needed during civil wars, and promoting ambitious fiscal reforms. See Nicolau, *La reforma económico-financiera*, 57-71.

at the Portuguese court as *Embajador Plenipotenciario* of the United Provinces until 1820. In a brilliant article, José Mariluz Urquijo noted that he was

one of the most subtle men of his generation, one of the most lucid to perceive reality under the guise of myths, one of the most spirited to confront problems without glossing over or masking them, one of the boldest to seek drastic remedies.⁹

García was a prominent voice in advocating for moderation in the political discourse after April 1815, when the masses erupted dangerously in Buenos Aires politics, a plan conducted through his correspondence with the leading political figures.¹⁰ However, glacial political realism was concealed under the veils of moderation, as García played a fundamental role in convincing Pedro I of Brazil to invade the Banda Oriental: the fears of Artigas' *anarquistas* and their alternative political project convinced him about the necessity of the foreign invasion of a territory that was considered part of the future United Provinces.

He had a strict relationship with his father, proved by their correspondence, especially during Pedro Andrés confinement. Besides emotional attachment, it seems that father and son shared similar ideas concerning political economy. Manuel José was the designer of numerous important measures together with Rivadavia and the other members of what Sergio Bagu has called the "Rivadavian group": the reform of rural justice, the introduction of an individual tax on revenues, the organisation of the Banco Nacional, the creation of a Topographic Department, the new tenancy system (Emphyteusis Law), and numerous projects for economic development. However, the focus here is on his ideas regarding land property, which were not dissimilar from his father's. He shared the belief in the centrality of property in creating new citizens for the republic. For instance, in an epistolary discussion of electoral law (1816), he established a direct link between property and voting rights to tame possible excesses of the masses. He believed that the landholding classes should have an increasing space in the republic's government. He expressed these ideas when the Directorio was about to sanction the new regulations for land distribution and frontier agrarian colonisation.¹¹ His proximity with the landholding interest groups will eventually drive him away from Rivadavia.

If Rivadavia and García were the most influential ministers and the leading minds behind the project of institutional reorganisation, Martín Rodríguez was the Governor of Buenos Aires between 1820 and 1824. Although his character is usually obscured by Rivadavia, he was the man behind frontier

⁹ Mariluz Urquijo, 'Manuel José García', 434.

¹⁰ In his letters, he copied entire passages by Benjamin Constant to support the necessity of limiting electoral franchise. His father too usually resorted to sheer plagiarism to support his claims.

¹¹ *Ivi*, 437-438.

politics between 1821 and 1824, responsible for an aggressive turn that permitted the foundation of the Fuerte Independencia (Tandil) in 1823. He was the son of Fermín Rodríguez, captain of Chascomús, and founder of a prosperous family of *hacendados*. Therefore, he knew very well the socio-economic context of the southern countryside and frontier. Traditionally, the aggressive frontier policy of the centralist governments had been explained through their little knowledge of rural issues, as this political faction was mainly created by urban-based interests bonded to Atlantic connections. However, the fact that the merchant urban class and foreign interests sustained the government of Rodríguez does not imply that also some networks of rural producers supported it.¹²

What were the characteristics of the social faction that supported the *Partido del Orden*? In a traditional study, Sergio Bagu described the early 1820s as the epoch in which the “Rivadavian group” finally assumed power and enacted the socio-economic plan that they had been trying to advance since the previous decade. He defined it as an interest group directed by the Minister of Government, linked with commercial and British interests and guided by an economic ideology inspired by classical political economy. They saw the economy as a natural and self-regulated mechanism directed by individual interests, in which the state acted as an occasional tool for stimulus or correction. In what follows, we will provide a nuanced interpretation of this interest group, in line with the new centrality that landed interests had assumed in our understanding of the state-building story under analysis. The government of Martín Rodríguez was indeed a “feliz experiencia”, as it balanced to harmonise the commercial and landed interests governing the developing local commercial society. The administrative and financial reforms were welcomed, as they tried to organise a modern administrative machine less reliant on the merchant class for financial revenues; rural police and the judicial system were reformed and aimed at advancing the rule of law and individual security; the expansion of the frontier and the administration of rural issue through the Topographic Commission were seen favourably by the landed interests, even if the aggressive interethnic diplomacy generated tensions as violent indigenous reaction followed it.

Martín Rodríguez’s government managed to hold together the *civilización* and the *barbarie*, to use Sarmiento’s dichotomy, or the interests of the federal and the centralist factions that were developing in Buenos Aires during the 1820s. The Buenos Aires government served landed interests in their expansionist desires, adopting a violent and bellicose attitude toward the indigenous issue: it broke peace treaties, it maliciously turned a diplomatic mission into an exploratory expedition, and it unilaterally appropriated indigenous lands. The belief in the inferiority of the Natives and the disbelief

¹² Zubizarreta, ‘Rauch versus Rosas’.

in the possibility of an interethnic frontier commercial society, considered a hallucination of “philanthropic minds”, sustained this new attitude.

On the other hand, the government was also supported by the most “enlightened” sector of Buenos Aires society, imbued with European culture and values and these years witnessed the flourishing of a republican cultural life, which gained the city the title of “Athene of the Plata”. The expansion of educational and cultural establishments, the development of an informed public opinion, and the belief in the fundamental role of knowledge in the emergence of modern civilised customs and manners were values and ideals highly praised in these years and actively supported by government and elites. They believed to represent a faithful expression of Latin American republicanism, in contrast with the conservatism, which was governing the old continent, trying to cancel the achievements of the Age of Revolutions.¹³

Vicente Fidel López left us with a vivid description of the atmosphere in the *tertulia de Luca*, the cultural gathering closest to the government, where men and women reunited to read together the works of the Abbé de Pradt, Benjamin Constant and Jeremy Bentham, to listen to the discovery of naturalists, to be entertained by theatre, poetry and satirical verses. Summing up, “in Luca’s salon, they followed the so well-known and delightful fashion of European salons”.¹⁴ Politically, this faction supported “the governmental and moderate spirit of Pueyrredón’s epoch”. Against the excesses of the federal factions which had endangered Buenos Aires during the civil wars, they wished for order and administrative reconstruction “to unleash and put into action the innumerable resources of prosperity, advancement and wealth which our territory, open to European civilisation and trade, possessed in germ”.¹⁵ Political economy was an intellectual field that permeated cultural life and was highly praised by the governing circles. There, Avelino Diaz and Felipe Senillosa were debating their statistical and topographic knowledge at the service of the economy while Santiago Wilde and others were discussing the ideas of Spanish and British political economists, in line with the heterodox tradition that was taking shape on the shores of the Río de la Plata.

This cultural and socio-political project found its institutional expression in the creation of a Sociedad Literaria. It organised cultural activities and promoted the publication of two periodicals (the *Argos de Buenos Aires* and the *Abeja Argentina*), which actively supported the governments, providing endorsement and knowledge-based explanations of the reforms that were taking place. It functioned as an economic society, organising essay competitions on economic themes, and it inherited the

¹³ Sábato, *op. cit.*

¹⁴ Fidel López, *Historia de la República Argentina*, 31.

¹⁵ *Ivi*, 35.

consultive function of the Trade Consulate.¹⁶ The 1820s indeed witnessed the flourishing of new forms of sociability in the city.¹⁷

The political and economic plan of the new government was expressed in the first article of the *Abeja Argentina*. In the *Vista político-económica de la Provincia de Buenos Aires*, Manuel Moreno sketched a program for local economic development, a plan integrated by the two successive articles about the history of the southern frontier and the improvement of agriculture. His reflection began with an attack against the rigid stadial theory of economic development, a “metaphysical mania” that was ill-suited for a practical science such as political economy.¹⁸ Indeed, Buenos Aires was and should be considered a pastoral, agricultural and commercial nation because it constituted a single economic space together with the other provinces of the ex-Viceroyalty, which were providing the necessary goods for local development and overseas trade. While the disintegration of this space following 1810 might be seen as a fatal blow, the perspective of an “unlimited extension” toward the South compensated it.

The article then describes local geography and natural resources, stressing the promising development perspectives if guided by the right ideas and principles. For instance, the United States is seen as an example not to follow because they gave too much importance to commerce.¹⁹ From this moment onward, an extensive argument against commercial-led development and the Ricardian theory of comparative advantages is presented, alternating sociological, economic and fiscal arguments. The point, however, is not to disqualify the positive and multiplier effects of trade but to advocate for development based on the “immense riches that are scattered in their fields”, which would provide products to industry and commerce.²⁰ Then, Spanish explorations and Patagonia colonisation attempts are described, noting with regret that these projects were mostly unsuccessful. The discussion provides arguments sustaining the necessity to better connect Carmen de Patagones, the sole Patagonian settlement that survived, with Buenos Aires and Chile. In conclusion, the author hoped that the southern outpost would advance to “that place that belongs to it”, turning into the southern limit of the province, comprising the territory between the Ocean, Salinas Grandes and Buenos Aires.

¹⁶ The Consulate maintained jurisdiction over commercial matters and functioned as a commercial court until the 1850s. See Adelman, *Republic of Capital*, 141-150.

¹⁷ González Bernaldo, ‘Sociabilidad y opinión pública’.

¹⁸ *La Abeja Argentina*, n. 1, 15 April 1822, 5. The theory of stadial development emerged in Europe alongside the concept of “civilization” opposing contractual theories of the social pact. See Monnier, ‘The Concept of *civilisation*’.

¹⁹ Moreno had a first-hand knowledge of the United States, having lived there between 1817 and 1821. He believed that their agrarian political economy had been coopted by commercial interests. Myers, *op. cit.*

²⁰ *La Abeja Argentina*, n. 2, 15 May 1822, 47. Moreno builds his argument on the distinction between commerce (positive) and trade (negative). The latter had a negative impact over political development as it created interest groups distinct from the common good and public goals.

The article describes the prospected future of Buenos Aires as one of a flourishing and extended province whose wealth was based on the improvement of agriculture and husbandry, which would produce the goods interconnecting it with the Interior and the Atlantic markets.

The editors refused to establish a hierarchy among the two primary activities. A following article on “agriculture” expanded on this point, illustrating the different ways to improve production in *chacras* (agriculture) and in *estancias* (husbandry), stressing the necessity of their combined development.²¹ The government of Martín Rodríguez and, later, the national government of Rivadavia tried to shape the countryside into an ordered landscape of agricultural towns surrounded by *estancias*, in line with Pedro García’s ideas.²² The article ends with an accusation toward landlords that reinvest their profits in the city rather than in their rural properties. Anyhow, national progress and opulence was based on “peace and the advancement of husbandry”. Interesting observations regarding the local rural workforce are made. The article defended the working habits of the rural population: while their progress was necessary, they had proved aptitude for labour and possessed unsurpassed skills for husbandry. However, they were not used to obeying orders and subordinating to authority because of their freedom of movement and the fertile natural environment. Therefore, the spread of education and agricultural knowledge would be sufficient to turn the population of *gauchos* and migrating families into a disciplined and useful working population on which local economic progress should be based.

The same piece devoted more than half of its words to advocating for the necessity of expanding the southern frontier, thus signalling how the two issues were intrinsically intertwined. As the southern territories had been the object of the productive stimulus of the “individual interest” following the war-related devastations in the Banda Oriental, the government should guarantee the security of the productive activities. The editors added that purchasing land from the *caciques* was convenient because it represented a “moral force” and a “reason for division among the infidels”. In the previous number, an article recalled the history of the southern frontier, and the issue was defined as “one of the most important issues”.²³ The author stressed the desire for expansion during colonial times and the incapacity of the Spanish power to concretise the project and guarantee safety and respect for rural properties. The very detailed narration ends with the 1796 report by Azara, which was not

²¹ *La Abeja Argentina*, n. 3, 15 June 1822, 91.

²² Beside the reform in the tenancy system, which will be soon discussed, the governments enacted a series of decrees to regulate the agricultural exploitation in the towns of old colonisation (north of the Salado). These included the privatisation of the *ejidos*, reserving them for agriculture; the ban on the free grazing of cattle in the *ejidos*; the creation of new institutions for agricultural education. See Bagu, *op. cit.*, Doc 15-66-72-119-131.

²³ *La Abeja Argentina*, n. 2, 15 May 1822, 55.

followed by any initiative. The message of this text is very clear when it clearly states that “we will make little progress if we do not give the frontier issue the highest degree of importance”. However, the government in charge had shown a “keen interest” over the matter, and this should give the best hopes for a bright and prosperous future.

The *Abeja* was not the only publication supporting the government. During the reformistic season that opened in 1820-21, new periodicals appeared, commenting and debating local and international life, favoured by the climate of political tolerance and promotion of the public debate.²⁴ While in the words of political leaders the press should be a space of freedom of speech and rational arguments, governments instrumentally used it to advance their political agenda, and the debates taking place in the press contributed to the formation and self-understanding of the political factions in Buenos Aires. Several periodicals supported the government during the years 1821-24, such as the *Argos de Buenos Aires*, *La Abeja Argentina*, *El Centinela* and *El Nacional*.²⁵

2. Political Economy and Law at the University of Buenos Aires

The end of civil war against the Liga Federal and trade expansion permitted the government to plan important institutional innovations, in line with the promotion of republican culture and institutions announced in the 1821 message. New institutions would help to strengthen local republican spirit and communicate the European powers that Buenos Aires participated in the concert of modern and civilised nations. The government therefore enacted reforms in the administration of justice, religious hierarchy, public finance and the educational system.²⁶

The centrepiece of the educational reform was the creation of the University of Buenos Aires, in August 1821. The project was entrusted to Doctor Antonio Sáenz, and the university was meant to become the organising centre of “all education in the province”.²⁷ Its establishment had been a long-lasting desire of local elites that had not yet materialised. The curriculum was divided into *Estudios Preparatorios* and *Facultades Mayores* (Jurisprudence, Medicine, Natural Sciences and Theology). The formers were compulsory for every student and included humanities, science and political

²⁴ The ideal of an objective and super-partisan public opinion was partly frustrated by the fact that editors of the periodicals and public administrators often overlapped. Noemí Goldman, ‘Libertad de imprenta’.

²⁵ Lescano, ‘El Argos de Buenos Aires (1821-1825)’; Mariano di Pasquale, ‘Un estudio de La Abeja’. The editors of these publications were closely associated with the government. *Argos*: Santiago Wilde, Ignacio Núñez and the Sociedad Literaria; *Abeja Argentina*: Antonio Sáenz, Gregorio Funes and the Sociedad Literaria; *El Centinela*: Florencio and Juan Cruz Varela and Ignacio Núñez; *Mensajero Argentino*: Juan Cruz Varela, Agustín Delgado, Valentín Alsina and Francisco Pico. These people were members of the Sociedad Literaria and participated in the new administrative institutions of the province. See Zinny, *Efemeridografía argirometropolitana*.

²⁶ Ternavasio, ‘El trienio bonaerense’; Miller, *op. cit.*

²⁷ Goldman, ‘La Universidad de Buenos Aires’, 14.

economy courses. The centrality of political economy was a real novelty, as the chair was established in 1822 and was the second in the Americas. In the decree that sanctioned its existence, Rivadavia praised the role of this science in modern economic and political development and made clear that the chair was expected to foster “the application of the theory of this science to the practice of such new countries”, as the principles governing more advanced countries were different.²⁸

Notwithstanding the government’s enthusiasm, the chair had a troubled existence, as two different professors alternated in the first years (Vicente López y Planes and Pedro José de Agrelo), the course was suppressed in 1825 and re-established the following year. In 1826, a very young Dalmacio Vélez Sarsfield was appointed to the chair. He moved the course from the *Estudios Preparatorios* to the Faculty of Jurisprudence and changed the textbook. Vélez Sarsfield, however, did not dedicate much to teaching, as he had other official duties.²⁹ The apparent neglect of teaching political economy did not prevent students from developing an increasing interest in the subject, as more than one-third of the dissertations discussed an economic topic between 1827 and 1830.³⁰

Three textbooks were or wished to be employed in the courses of political economy during this first decade: Jean Baptiste Say’s *Traité d’économie politique* (1803), James Mill’s *Elements of Political Economy* (1821) and Destutt de Tracy’s *Traité d’économie politique* (1823).³¹ The influx of classical political economy and of the *ideologie* is evident (Say and Destutt de Tracy were both part of the group), and probably the European connections that Rivadavia had during his diplomatic voyage in the 1810s mattered a lot. Also, these texts had a prominent didactic goal. Mill’s *Elements* - which was translated into Spanish for the occasion by Santiago Wilde - was based on the walking classes that he was dictating to his son John Stuart, therefore presenting Ricardian political economy to the ears of a teenager.³² Say’s *Traité* was a bestseller of the epoch, and the Spanish translator of the 1816 edition assured that the book was directed “for those who are not yet initiated in it [political economy], and who ought to understand it, because this knowledge is useful to everyone”.³³ The work of Destutt de

²⁸ ‘Decreto fundando una cátedra de economía política’ (28 November 1823). See de Angelis (ed.) *RLDBA*, 536.

²⁹ Gallo, ‘Cátedra de economía política’.

³⁰ The dissertations were fourteen in total. The ones dedicated to economic themes are: Ignacio A. Martínez, ‘Los contratos en general’ and Angel Navarro, ‘El derecho de propiedad’ (1827); Florentino Castellanos, ‘Disertación sobre bancos’, Gorgonio Dulce, ‘Disertación sobre impuestos’ and Fabian Ledesma, ‘El comercio libre’ (1828); Lucas Gonzalez Pena, ‘Utilidad del Comercio libre’ (1829). See Candiotti, *Bibliografía doctoral*. To my utmost disappointment, the thesis by Angel Navarro is the only one missing in the folder of the Sala del Tesoro of the Biblioteca Nacional Mariano Moreno (Buenos Aires).

³¹ Fernández López, *Economía y economistas argentinos*, 81-94.

³² Gallo, ‘Cátedra de economía política’, 55.

³³ Say, *Tratado de economía política*, VIII. The book was used in other Latin American countries, as Say “was read as a republican working out how to adapt enlightenment principles derived from small-state models to a large, modern country”. Miller, *op. cit.*, 168.

Tracy had a similar fame.³⁴ What could these works offer to the province, which was developing an export-led economic sector based on agricultural goods and agrarian colonisation of new land? Besides an accessible exposition of the basic principles of political economy, analysing some of the fundamental concepts of these works helps clarify the models that inspired the institutional building in Buenos Aires and the heterogeneous sources of its political economy.

Out of the three of them, Say is the one providing a definition of property, and it is a very telling one. Property is equalled to a sentiment, a disposition of the soul leaning toward material improvement of one's condition. According to the Frenchman, "political economy only considers property as the most powerful incentive to the multiplication of wealth".³⁵ If property is secured, the discipline does not care about its legal origins or legitimacy. However, law and the state mattered a lot, as if state law does not protect it, it does not exist, and the economic cycle based on production, land, capital and industry cannot be put into motion. In what follows, Say stated that "industrial skills" are the highest property, and they

create therefore a preferential right in respect to landowners, because land property is originally a dispossession, as it impossible to assume that a land could have been legitimately transmitted from the first occupier to the present day.³⁶

While legal documents might not be reliable for what happened in the past, a state-sanctioned legal system was the basis to guarantee the respect of property rights and the possibility of economic expansion, as no nation has reached opulence "without having been placed under regular Government".³⁷ Finally, the cultivation of political economy "leads very much to justify and corroborate this legislation", as the "beneficial effects" of this science are more evident "the more they are guaranteed by the political constitution".³⁸

Say provided an economic definition of property in line with the ideas the local elites of Buenos Aires had received from the Spanish Enlightenment: the main advantage of property was its effect on the possessors, the stimulus to the maximisation of individual labour aimed at increasing private wealth. Albeit the Frenchmen did not provide legal arguments, he expressed his preference for a labour theory of property - the intellectual legitimacy of the *derecho de antigua posesión*, and he firmly stated the central role that the State as the guarantor of law had in creating that same world expressed by the

³⁴ De Tracy, *Principios de economía política*, LXXXII.

³⁵ Say, *op. cit.*, 150.

³⁶ *Ivi*, 153.

³⁷ *Ivi*, 157-158.

³⁸ *Ivi*, 159.

abstraction of political economy. Through positive law, the state should sanction the labour theory of property according to which the industrious workers were entitled to own the land they were working. Property does not exist without the state, and without property, economic growth cannot occur.

Mill's work provides an original discussion about territorial rent, a fundamental issue in Buenos Aires developing economy. He discussed the effects of capital applied to lands with different degree of productivity, looking for the best combination to balance high yields with high profits. During his argumentation, he noted that uncultivated land yields any value, therefore, "any man may have it, who undertakes to render it productive".³⁹ Again, the labour theory of property finds a confirmation. The section "Taxes on rent" was probably the one that interested most Buenos Aires elites, as the 1826 Emphyteusis Law aimed at establishing a new tax on land possession. The British economist argued that in countries where "land had not yet become private property" the rent of land was "a source peculiarly adapted to supply the exigencies of the government".⁴⁰ He believed that this tax would not harm the industry of the country because the profit from land depended on the capitalist labour over it. It was "a matter of perfect indifference whether he pays the surplus, in the shape of rent, to an individual proprietor, or, in that of revenue, to a government collector".⁴¹

The ephemeral appointment of Fernández de Agüero to the chair in 1829 stands for another intellectual influence in the university and in the cultural life of Buenos Aires during these years: the *ideologíe* of Destutt de Tracy. Rivadavia had met him in Europe, and Fernández de Agüero had already dictated one course in 1823 based on his work *Principios de Ideología*. However, the course was suspended because rector Sáenz denounced the heresy of Agüero's teaching. As signalled by Goldman, the *ideologues* were against the theory of natural law and rights. They believed that republican regimes should ground their legitimacy and legal principles within their institutional setting, not appealing to metaphysical natural rights.⁴² Natural law was indeed still a very influential current of thought as it had infused 18th-century political thought, providing the ideological basis for the legitimacy of the process of Spanish American political emancipation.⁴³ Regarding political economy, Destutt de Tracy did not distance himself much from British and French Classical political economy, but he grounded it into his sensualistic theory, whose absence of any positive reference to religion was distrusted by a considerable sector of the Buenos Aires elite. His sensualist political

³⁹ Mill, *Elements of Political Economy*, 31.

⁴⁰ *Ivi*, 243.

⁴¹ *Ivi*, 242.

⁴² Goldman, 'La Universidad de Buenos Aires', 16.

⁴³ Halperín Donghi, *Tradición política Española*; Chiaramonte, *Fundamentos intelectuales*.

economy was built around the concept of individual property, whose origin was a natural result of the existence of individual subjectivities, structured around the act of “willing”.⁴⁴

Therefore, the university was a hub for the reception and institutionalisation of new ideas, which faced the persistence of old schools of thought, resulting in a creative and heterodox mix. This dichotomy was evident in the law department, the other intellectual field which reflected on property and property rights besides political economy. Indeed, the different approaches to law by the two professors of the university, Antonio Sáenz and Pedro Somellera, soon resulted in a clash.⁴⁵ In February 1823, a reader of *El Centinela* defined Sáenz’s lectures on the law of nations “a fabric of the ridiculous theories that have reigned in Europe since the 12th century”, ideas that were not in line with the “respectively sublime degree of enlightenment” of Buenos Aires. Additionally, this doctrine seemed a direct attack on the “principles of the sublime Bentham” taught in Somellera’s civil law course.⁴⁶ The article criticised the school of natural law which formed the core of Sáenz’s course, even if the same ideas infused 18th-century political thought and legitimised Spanish American emancipation. On the other hand, the course by Somellera pretended to establish the basis of civil law on the principle of utility and rational reasoning rather than natural or divine law. How were the issues of property and property rights framed in the courses by Sáenz and Somellera? Were their ideas so different on this issue?

The latter did not mask his utilitarianism at the beginning of his chapter “De la propiedad”. While jurists have spent tons of ink arguing about the meaning of “property” and “*dominio*”, Somellera believed that “we should not waste time on useless matters”, as the two terms were not distinguishable in their promiscuous use.⁴⁷ According to him, property was “the hope based on the persistent expectation of being able to derive some advantage from the thing according to its nature”.⁴⁸ In his emotional definition, similar to Say’s one, the sentiment of hope was based on the law, which was meant to guarantee that everyone could safely enjoy their goods. The foundations of society rested upon this sentiment, and it generated artistic and scientific progress and social and individual prosperity. Clearly expressing a labour theory of property, Somellera argued that “its primitive

⁴⁴ Moravia, *Il pensiero degli Idéologues*. The link between individual faculties and social rights, bridged by human senses, also inspired John Locke to formulate his famous labour theory of property.

⁴⁵ Besides being the dean of the university, Sáenz was ‘one of the most prestigious lawyers in the *foro porteño*’ and he was in charge of the chair of Natural Law and the Law of Nations. Instead, Pedro Somellera had been the first student to graduate in law from the University of Córdoba in 1797. In the 1820s, he discovered the work of Jeremy Bentham and was appointed to the chair of Civil Law. Candiotti, *Un maldito Derecho*, 134-148.

⁴⁶ *El Centinela*, n. 30, 23 February 1823.

⁴⁷ Somellera, *Principios de derecho civil*, 115.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*.

foundation is the labour of man, which adds to things a particular value or quality that they did not receive from nature”.⁴⁹

In the section about the ways to obtain ownership, he went back to the law of nations. The fundamental one was the *ocupacion originaria*, and he provided a rational demonstration based on utility. While he recognised that the same right had been presented as a natural one (“these reasons have at all ages occurred to the spirit of all men”), he expressed it with “a new anchoring to the principle of utility”.⁵⁰ In the following sections, he carried on the same operation: Somellera took the doctrine about property inherited from the natural law, the law of nations and Roman law and provided it with a utilitarian foundation based on rational demonstration. Through this operation, he was not fashioning a new right or a new system of laws but providing a new principle of legitimacy to the received tradition.

From his course in natural law, Sáenz expressed similar ideas, thus grounding them on different principles, such as Catholic theology. According to him, property was based on self-preservation because God had conceded men to appropriate the goods they needed for their subsistence, if they would not infringe on divine law and self-preservation of others. Before the reunion of men into society, goods lied in a state of “negative communion”, and everyone could occupy and use anything “that someone else has not yet occupied”.⁵¹ Then, he enumerated the natural ways of obtaining property, the faculties implied in the right to property and the obligations of the owners, which are nothing more than using “the goods and fruits of the earth with sobriety, without harm to their fellow men, and without offence to the supreme author of the universe”.⁵²

In teaching the law of nations, Sáenz too returned to property issues. Nations had the faculty of acquiring property in the ways natural and civil law prescribed. Their first property was their territory, a space men delimited for their subsistence, preventing other nations from enjoying it. This right split into the *dominio pleno*, that is the faculty of using it and deriving “all the usefulness he can” from it, and the *imperio*, the right to govern.⁵³ In order to acquire new land, the occupation should be “rightful and rational”. Since the arrival of the Europeans in the Americas, the right of “pure occupation” has been regulated by natural justice.

⁴⁹ *Ivi*, 116-117.

⁵⁰ *Ivi*, 120.

⁵¹ Sáenz, *Instituciones elementales*, 24.

⁵² *Ivi*, 26.

⁵³ *Ivi*, 179.

Given that the earth was created for men to cultivate it, and that sufficient land for the subsistence of every nation exists, men have the right “to occupy it and distribute it in moderation and justice, without harm to others”. Two rules are derived from this natural principle. First, nations can occupy the amount of land that can populate and cultivate. Second, and highly relevant for our discussion, nations that are “narrowed within their borders” are allowed to occupy “some land which is uncultivated and deserted among savage tribes, who neither need it, nor cultivate it, nor occupy and possess it permanently, or with fixed residence”.⁵⁴

This was the principle that legitimised the occupation of the territories outside the old frontier by the Buenos Aires government and inhabitants, as the “wandering tribes of savages” claimed them without permanently settling down, without cultivating the land and therefore just living by pillaging Buenos Aires *estancias*. Sáenz added that the justice of the expansion was confirmed by the fact that the Natives opposed to the foundation of new settlements and productive activities, nor did they accept the payments offered by Creole in exchange for land “which have no use or cultivation”.⁵⁵ Differing from older natural law arguments, Sáenz considered agriculture as the only activity that generated property rights on land, disregarding others, such as hunting. This way, he did not believe that use rights might generate property rights in land. Notwithstanding the conflict between natural law and utilitarianism, the legal culture taught in the university halls was based on the received Roman and Spanish legal traditions. Eventually, natural law was becoming more intolerant, a development that might have been due to the specific context of frontier conflict. The labour theory of value and a limited definition of productive activities permitted Sáenz to ground arguments for the dispossession of the Natives in natural law, even if the same doctrine had provided legitimation for the independence of American nations from the Spanish monarchy, through the refusal of the right of conquest as creator of property rights.

3. The Creation of the Topographic Commission

Besides education, the reformist efforts promoted other innovations in the provincial economic government, including the creation of a regulated and accountable administration, a fiscal reform aimed at eliminating forced loans and reducing the dependence on custom revenues, the consolidation of public debt and the establishment of a provincial bank.⁵⁶ This way, the province might increase its fiscal revenues to be invested in expanding and consolidating the frontier. A new tenancy system was the last piece of economic reorganisation that would provide a convenient institutional framework

⁵⁴ *Ivi*, 181.

⁵⁵ *Ivi*, 182.

⁵⁶ Nicolau, *op. cit.*, 93-128.

leading to the expansion of rural production. Its implementation was projected since 1822 when a decree stopped the distribution of public land, “until the enactment of a land legislation” (*ley sobre terrenos*).⁵⁷

During the last months of Rodríguez’s government, a Topographic Commission was finally created. It became a fundamental institution for implementing the “liberal and enlightened system” promoted during the 1820s.⁵⁸ Through the Commission, the state tried to create an administrative structure at its service to regulate rural exploitations and property rights. It was meant to standardise the territorialisation of provincial *pueblos*, collect and legalise land measurements and titles and draw detailed maps of the province, visualising its topographical and geographical characteristics. Indeed, this was the culmination of a long-lasting desire to institutionalise the land surveyor’s administrative role at the state’s service. In fact, the government noted that “ownership in the Province’s farmlands has so far been a source of legal disputes”, and the creation of the Commission would stop this state of things, promoting instead

The protection of the inhabitants of the Countryside, with great a concern to provide their property with all the guarantees to which it is possible to aspire in a country where it has been necessary to create everything and consequently to sustain a vigorous fight against bad habits.⁵⁹

Additionally, this institution was felt even more necessary as economic expansion was rapidly affecting the countryside. In their last joint message to the Sala, Rivadavia and García assured the deputies that the government had taken measures to sustain the rapid progress that was affecting the rural industry, “as land values rise, there is a growing need for radical measures to put an end to the demarcation disputes that are ruining families and hurting the countryside”.⁶⁰ A variable economic abstraction (land value) was directly affecting local institution-building.

Indeed, it was pointed out the necessity of “public servants” to intervene in land issues. Since the 1790s, the lack of these professionals has been enumerated among the causes of the disorder of territorial properties. The creation of the Drawing School had responded to such desires, and after 1810, new projects followed the one Belgrano and Cerviño had promoted. In 1816, two new schools of mathematics and geometry were created, directed by Manuel Herrera and Felipe Senillosa, a newly

⁵⁷ ‘Decreto declarando inagenables los terrenos públicos’ (17 April 1822). See De Angelis, *RLDBA*, 352. This decision had a direct link with the reports Pedro Andrés García was sending to Buenos Aires from the countryside. See Nicolau, *op. cit.*, 195. Moreover, the government was negotiating a loan on the British financial markets and public land would be the collateral of public debt. See Amaral, ‘El empréstito de Londres’.

⁵⁸ Poczynok, ‘La implementación del sistema liberal’.

⁵⁹ The government to the *Sala de Representantes*, 15 July 1825. See Esteban, *El Departamento Topográfico*, 27-28.

⁶⁰ Mabragaña, *op. cit.*, 207.

arrived Catalan engineer who had been part of the Napoleonic armies.⁶¹ Following the creation of the university, the Trade Consulate school was transformed into the Cátedra de Dibujo de la Universidad.⁶² Topographic drawing was the most valued technique taught in the course if the reorganisation of the chair in 1828 was centred around it, and classes should take place in the halls of the Topographic Department.⁶³

The first members of the Commission were Vicente López y Planes, Felipe Senillosa and Avelino Díaz. They were immediately set to work on fixing the program and the regulations of the Commission. They needed to draw the reference meridians for all subsequent measurements, establish the instructions for land surveyors, collect all the necessary instruments, create an archive of the existing plans and maps, establish rules concerning the milestones of rural properties, and draw plans of the cities and maps of the province, which will be used to decide “all appropriate locations for the establishment of new settlements”.⁶⁴ The work was massive, but they carried it on steadily.

As noted by Garavaglia and Gautreau, this administrative institution was nevertheless significantly based on private support, as it relied on the citizens to collect information over land properties and landowners paid land surveyors for their services.⁶⁵ In 1825, a decree obliged proprietors to send their title to the Commission, to have them registered and archived. Similarly, the decree that established the ways for presenting a land plea made clear that it had to contain every relevant topographic information of the demanded parcel.⁶⁶ This way, the Commission might receive information needed to construct maps, saving on their efforts, given the scarce resources for this important matter.

While the members of the Commission knew the local desires for increased security of properties and needed the cooperation of the landowners, they were aware of the risks involved in the operation. The tone of the official communication inviting landowners to present their property titles was extremely cautious. The Commission reassured *hacendados* right from the start that the collection of titles would not alter existing properties nor involve any cost or damage for them. It then described their plan for drawing the province map stressing the benefits of the work for national wealth and rural morality. The result would be highly beneficial for rural industry as

⁶¹ Poesa Marcilla, ‘Conocer, medir y dibujar’, 158.

⁶² Trostiné, *La enseñanza del dibujo*, 50.

⁶³ *Ivi*, 79-80.

⁶⁴ Esteban, *op. cit.*, 32.

⁶⁵ Gautreau and Garavaglia, ‘Inventando un nuevo saber estatal’. The same reliance on private citizens to carry on administrative duties is evident in the working of the Comisiones de Solares.

⁶⁶ ‘Decreto prescribiendo el modo de redactar las denuncias’ (27 September 1825). See De Angelis, *RLDBA. Volume 2*, 681.

Their former uncertainty will be converted into security; their troubles and lawsuits into peace and harmony; and the sums wasted in these lawsuits and repeated measurements will be used to increase the capital and industry of each *vecino*, thus obtaining for the inheritance of their children a security and advancement that they had not enjoyed until the present day.⁶⁷

The response was not bad, if during the first year they received 76 measurements and 255 denunciations. The Commission created the first sketch of a map thanks to the documents already present in the state archives (23 city-plan, 120 topographic and chorographic maps and 23 hydrographic plans) and new measurements carried on by the land surveyors in Morón, Quilmes, San Pedro and Guardia de Luján.⁶⁸ As rightly noted by Gatreau and Garavaglia, creating an archive of geographical and topographical knowledge was a fundamental achievement of this institution in the early phase of its existence and the basis of its future authority over territorial issues.⁶⁹ Instead, they did not link the bottom-up construction of topographic knowledge with Buenos Aires republicanism. Advocating for the participation of citizens into local economic government can be seen as a form of republican politicisation, rather than as the failure of institutionalising modern Weberian bureaucratic machine. It was one of the many republican experiments attempted in the region.⁷⁰

In the relation sent to the government after one year of operation, it is possible to perceive the urgency of their work to classify and territorialise properties. The Commission noted that the absence of a provincial map would produce increasing damages “the more the value of the land increases”.⁷¹ However, the works were advancing. The new measurements had already helped the Treasury “with the discovery of new Public lands”, and the operations were stimulating the desires of the “land possessors without a legitimate title” of petitioning them in emphyteusis. The realisation of a map would represent an achievement that combined “private and public interest and the progress of science”.

During the first year of activities, twelve land surveyors obtained the title of *Agrimensor público*. They were civil servants because they were subordinated to the Commission or the judicial power in their activities - they could not measure private lands without express permission, for instance, in the case of a judicial case. However, they were not paid by the state - even if their remuneration was set by law - because of the insufficient revenues of the provincial state of Buenos Aires in formation. They had to adhere to the strict instructions sketched by the Commission, or the measures would be

⁶⁷ AHPBA, DT, 49-2-1-21. ‘La Comisión Topográfica a los señores propietarios’ (1825).

⁶⁸ AHPBA, DT, 49-2-1-41. ‘The Topographic Commission to the Government. Buenos Aires, 23 March 1829’.

⁶⁹ Gatreau and Garavaglia, *op. cit.*, 93-94.

⁷⁰ Sabato, *op. cit.*

⁷¹ AHPBA, DT, 49-2-1-41. ‘The Topographic Commission to the Government. Buenos Aires, 23 March 1829’.

invalidated. These received the government's approval and were linked to a new regulation concerning the use of milestones for delimiting territorial properties.

A last significant development was the creation of a Comisión de Solares in every *pueblo* of the province.⁷² The decision in January 1825 was linked to the suppression of the *juzgados de primera instancia* in the countryside, related to the overall judicial system reform. These commissions were formed by the local *juez de paz* and two *vecinos propietarios*. Their first duty was to collect the property titles of the *solares*, the urban parcels for edification, verify them, and draft a list of the unassigned ones to be distributed in property, giving preference to the possessors. Property titles should be collected in a register so they can be easily accessible. The Comisiones de Solares would be subsumed under the jurisdiction of the Topographic Department in February 1827, and they would be in charge of distributing in emphyteusis free parcels of the *ejidos* to those who want to use them for agricultural activity.⁷³ This was an additional example of the co-optation of private citizens in the administrative government of the province, a feature that characterised the institutional building of the provincial state of Buenos Aires for the decades to come. The appointments in the Comisiones de Solares generated “a network of power relations within the *pueblos*” which could decide to whom to assign petitioned land.⁷⁴

The institutionalisation of the Topographic Department and its regulation was a development that linked the provincial governments' desires for administrative and economic reforms with the aspirations to order rural properties inherited from colonial times.⁷⁵ This innovation was related to the belief in the positive role of land property in the overall process of economic development and institutionalisation of a commercial society, inspired by the ideal of agrarian republicanism influencing Buenos Aires rural policies. The role of Manuel J. García as Minister and the influence of his father's ideas stands for this link. Pedro Andrés' overall impact on the ideas that inspired the legislation should be already manifest. However, he did not just inspire the general plan. Instead, the smallest piece of legislation seems to have a precedent in Coronel's writing. For instance, in the *informe* of November 1821, he partly sketched the regulation which was translated in the instructions of the Comisiones de Solares a few years later, highlighting the importance of creating an archive of property titles.⁷⁶

⁷² The *solares* were the parcels of urban land.

⁷³ The Topographic Commission changed its name to Topographic Department in 1826, by decision of the ephemeral general congress. The *ejido* was the common land of each *pueblo*, reserved for agricultural activities.

⁷⁴ Barcos, 'Los ejidos de los pueblos'.

⁷⁵ Aliata, 'La acción del Departamento Topográfico'.

⁷⁶ García, *Diario expedición 1822*, 27. Others have noted his direct influence, see Barcos, *op. cit.*

The establishment of the Topographic Commission arrived at a crucial moment of frontier advancement. When Rodríguez aggressive frontier policy stopped, giving room to defensive concerns and interethnic diplomacy, the state organised the administrative structure meant to regulate the agrarian exploitation of the old and the new land. The cautious tone of the *primera circular* stands for the necessity of private collaboration to realise this project. The relationship between the state in construction and private interests developed as a constant and prudent bargain on each other's side. The two parties shared some goals that aligned their interests, sustaining private support to public policies: social order, territorial appropriation, and agro-industrial expansion. However, two matters divided the opinions of private actors and governments. Who was to provide the resources to implement the expansionist plan and the defensive system? Consequently, who was enshrined with the jurisdictional powers to regulate land appropriation and exploitation?

Different answers to these questions, in the end, fractured the consensus that Rodríguez, Rivadavia and García had generated. Tensions especially revolved around the conduct of interethnic diplomacy and frontier expansion, and thus configured as a growing conflict between the supporters of an aggressive policy (Rodríguez and Rivadavia) and the Minister of Hacienda, closer to the factions of landowners in favour of a diplomatic solution to expand provincial frontiers.

As attempts to expand the fiscal basis and strengthen public credit were ineffective in reducing the share of revenues obtained from trade, subjecting its reliability to the rhythms of war and peace, public authorities still needed the help of the wealthy classes. Therefore, Manuel J. García took part in the new government led by Gregorio de Las Heras (1824). They gradually shifted the political agenda to align it with landowners' interests, who were asking for more jurisdictional powers and order and security in the countryside since a long time.⁷⁷ The regulation of the Comisiones de Solares went in this direction, as well as a new reform of the rural justice system. On 18 March 1825, the *Circular a los Jueces de Paz de Campaña* announced the suppression of the Comisarias de Campaña, and it reunited police and judicial power in the hands of the *jueces de paz*. The text made clear that "the administration of rural justice has been entrusted entirely to its own inhabitants, and their zeal must provide all that is indispensable for the correction and punishment of criminals".⁷⁸ The legal system was now reflecting the aspirations of the landowner class, their desire to administer justice and to distribute and legitimise rights over land. However, no reform of land legislation has been yet enacted.

⁷⁷ The shift toward "federal agrarian republicanism" is described in the following chapter.

⁷⁸ *Manual para los jueces*, 22. Casagrande places this development in the history of the construction of jurisdictional and police power, and their progressive identification. Casagrande, *op. cit.*, 245-247.

Backed by the support of a good number of landowners, the Las Heras-García government proposed an emphyteusis law to the legislative assembly in the austral spring of 1824.⁷⁹ The bill included the inalienability of public land destined for husbandry and their distribution in emphyteusis for ten years. The canon was fixed at 3% of land value, which varied according to the proximity to the frontier. Land in the area of old colonisation was taxed at 60 pesos per year, while the territories south of the Salado at 24 or 6 pesos per year. The text clearly stated that “the right of possession shall be respected”, sanctioning the preference for working families rather than wealthy individuals or landowners in distributing new titles. The editors of the *Argos* supported the project, which aimed at providing a secure framework for the “investors in ranching” who wanted to employ their capital in the sector. They also manifested the convenience of retaining land property in the hands of the state, “the most general opinion being in favour of the non-alienation of land at present”. It was meant to prevent that foreign capitals would direct toward the principal wealth of the country, appropriating it for speculation and not production, thus damaging national industry and wealth.

Some deputies proposed modifications to the project, but the discussion was finally suspended and never resumed. Why did this happen? Nicolau suggests that some *hacendados* might have opposed the payment of a canon for land exploitation.⁸⁰ However, a few years later the sanctioned project of national emphyteusis fixed an 8% canon on land value and was approved without provoking major complaints from landowners. Therefore, the motivation should be found elsewhere. The article on the right of possession probably motivated the opposition to the reform.

In the countryside of Buenos Aires, the rural population continued in fact to exploit land without written property titles, and the right of possession continued to be a fundamental customary right.⁸¹ The fact that it might be sanctioned by state law as the basis for the new agrarian legislation represented a severe restriction to the possibility of appropriating new land or finally evicting the *agregados* living in between the *estancias*. On the contrary, García tried to balance the expectations of the wealthy urban class of having a secure legal framework for rural investments with the aspirations of small producers for obtaining the recognition of their customary rights to continue their exploitations without the risk of dispossession. The attempt eventually failed, but it was a demonstration that the government was interested in bringing social peace and order to the

⁷⁹ *El Argos de Buenos Aires*, n. 88, 30 October 1824. Probably, Manuel J. García was the crucial figure behind the proposal as he had a great influence in government. According to Tomás Iriarte, García ‘cunning and resourceful man’ conquered Las Heras’ favour and was the ‘head of the Administration’. Quoted in Zubizarreta, *Los Unitarios*, 37.

⁸⁰ Nicolau, *op. cit.*, 201.

⁸¹ Poczynok, ‘Los procesos civiles’.

countryside, that has been devastated by indigenous raids in the previous years, due to the costly aggressive frontier policy Rodríguez and Rivadavia sponsored.

4. A New and Violent Course in Frontier Policy, and Its Critics

The government of Martín Rodríguez started a new course in frontier policy, reacting to the troublesome situation developed throughout 1820 and informing policies with the racist liberal ideas that wished for the extermination of sovereign Native groups. In fact, the problematic enactment of the Miraflores treaty became clear a few weeks after its celebration, as Rodríguez complained that the *caciques* did not respect the pacts. Again, the war against the provinces of the Littoral and the proliferation of “superimposed conflicts” between different indigenous and Creole factions prevented the pacification of the countryside.⁸²

Pursuing a diplomatic solution continued to be the goal of the governments during the hectic year of 1820. General Miguel Estanislao Soler proposed some military reforms in March 1820 to address this problem. The governor Ildefonso Ramos Mejía ordered Pedro Andrés García to evaluate the plan, sanctioning his official return in elaborating frontier policy.⁸³ In the erudite reply, García reflected upon the development in the interethnic frontier relations: he provided the usual account of the different frontier strategies enacted during the Spanish era, highlighting the convenience of friendly commercial relations that had permitted the foundation of Carmen de Patagones, regular expeditions to Salinas and the advancement of *hacendados* south of the Salado. He agreed with Soler about the necessity of a permanent frontier militia - a proposal he had already expressed in 1814 and 1816. However, he highlighted that diplomatic relations should continue in order to “discuss appropriate points that combine peace and the advancement of our populations”.⁸⁴

Natural law and experience inspired the necessity of diplomacy, as Creole violence was the only factor that permitted the union of the *caciques* to face their common enemy. Not giving them a pretext to form a defensive alliance could help Creole expansionist plans. However, given that the advancement of Buenos Aires frontier was “absolutely essential”, the most useful men were the “peace-making minds who know how to win the trust of the *indios* in order to get the desired benefit”. The *hacendados* of the frontier would lead interethnic diplomacy and counsel the government about the best spot to establish the new forts in accordance with the *caciques*. Then, García repeated his

⁸² Ratto, *La frontera bonaerense*, 32-34. Conflict was increased in 1820 by the forces of the ‘Chilean’ *cacique* Pablo Levnopán and of José Miguel Carrera, a Chilean Creole who was at war with Buenos Aires.

⁸³ Comando General del Ejército, *Política, 1820-1852*, 122-141.

⁸⁴ Pedro Andrés García to Ildefonso Ramos Mejía. Buenos Aires, 15 June 1820. See Barros, *op. cit.*, 71-78.

1816 proposal for the establishment of a new line based on the progressive construction of forts, starting from the Sierras. The necessity of an advancement led by the interethnic diplomacy seemed to be the favourite in the governing circles. His personal experience, his links with the landholding class and the successful private-led southern expansion during the previous years convinced the Coronel to advocate for expanding the jurisdictional powers of frontier *hacendados* - a strategy that his son Manuel would enact in the following years, as we just seen.

The Soler plan was never implemented, as the turbulent vicissitude of Buenos Aires politics continued until October 1820, when Martín Rodríguez was appointed governor and the federal opposition within Buenos Aires was defeated. However, the new governor barely had time to install when a force of *Ranquelches*, “Chileans” and José Miguel Carrera’s troops launched a terrible *malón* on Salto. In the statement denouncing the attack, Rodríguez pledged to God “to chase that tiger [Carrera], and revenge”, calling for the military enrolment of the rural population to help him in his mission.⁸⁵ He then started to prepare an expedition directed to the Southern Pampa, toward the Sierras. The recent attacks and his personal attitude toward the Natives convinced the Governor to disregard the supporters of a diplomatic way to solve frontier issues.

His resolution alarmed Rosas and other *hacendados*. The province had suffered from years of civil war and invasions, and now that the pace with the Littoral provinces had been reached, the *hacendados* did not want to open another season of violent interethnic clashes. Additionally, Rosas was the guarantor of the peace with Santa Fe, as he promised to send 25,000 cattle heads to the province on his account. On 8 December, he wrote to Rodríguez that the *Ranquelches* were responsible for Salto’s attack, not the *Pampas*, whose territory should not be invaded in accordance with the treaty of Miraflores. He was not listened to, and after some months, he sent a *memoria* to the government expressing his opinion around the frontier policy. The ideas of García resonated in it. The *hacendado* firmly stated that war and military expeditions in the indigenous territory should be avoided, as the province had not recovered yet from the recent attack and was still suffering from civil wars. Instead, “peace is what suits the Province. Treaties to secure it would bring civilisation, population and commerce; they would be the balm that heals the wounds”.⁸⁶ His proposal was not original: advancing the frontier guards in accordance with the *caciques*, hiring the Natives in the *estancias*, creating a commission of frontier landholders enshrined with jurisdictional powers, and

⁸⁵ *Gaceta de Buenos Aires*, n. 32, 6 December 1820.

⁸⁶ Saldías, *Historia Confederación*, 281. The *memoria* is very detailed especially where it deals with the military organization of the veteran and militia regiments. Rosas saw militia service as a way to educate rural population.

establishing one new veteran regiment and two militia ones. Once again, Rosas was not listened to and retired to his *estancias* until 1825, refusing every public appointment offered to him.

Rodríguez started the march to the south on 15 December 1820. He wanted to reunite the *cacique amigos* and pretend their help in castigating the responsible for Salto's attack. The military force arrived at the slopes of the *sierras*, blatantly infringing the terms of Miraflores, and Rodríguez sent emissaries to the indigenous settlements, urging them to join his forces against the *Ranquelches*. The *caciques* did not respond positively, and after some skirmishes, the expedition went back to Kaquel Huincul without, apparently, any tangible result besides reigniting frontier: after a few time, José Luis Molina, *capataz* and *baqueano* who had worked for Ramos Mejía, led a force of 1,200 warriors which defeated the troops at Kaquel Huincul, destroyed the settlement of Dolores and stole thousands of cattle from *estancias* in the area, in revenge for the arrest of Ramos Mejía and the destruction of Miraflores by Rodríguez's troops.

Meanwhile, Manuel José García had joined Rodríguez government, and he probably helped in including his father in the official rural and frontier policy of Buenos Aires. In November 1821, Pedro Andrès was asked to provide a new plan for frontier advancement. The report started by noting that notwithstanding the recent civil wars and the indigenous attacks, the agriculture and the rural activities of the province had never been "as flourishing and as lively as at present".⁸⁷ Indeed, the positive stimulus of external Atlantic markets and the feraciousness of local nature had generated a positive economic expansion, even if conflicting times were not over.

García offered the usual account of frontier policy since colonial times, and he praised the recent Rodríguez expedition. While it did not result in a victory against the Natives, it had collected the "knowledge" over the geography and the topography of the southern countryside, which would be "the first step of happiness, which presages that the future fortunes of our frontiers will necessarily take a most favourable and advantageous course for the Province".⁸⁸ Such as in colonial times, collecting knowledge was central to expansionist plans.

The Coronel was inclined to a prudent advancement, not igniting interethnic conflict. Meanwhile, indigenous diplomacy should not stop but be aware that "they are never animated by a principle of good faith or unselfishness".⁸⁹ In the report, the judgement around indigenous people seems different from those expressed during the previous decade. The belief in an interethnic future based on the

⁸⁷ García *Diario expedición 1822*, 6.

⁸⁸ *Ivi*, 9.

⁸⁹ *Ivi*, 17.

civilising effects of trade and commercial society gives room to a general distrust toward the Natives, which inspired a Janus-faced diplomacy aimed at building peaceful relations to exploit them and appropriate indigenous land in the future. The *informe* continued with the usual recommendations: the creation of a *razon estadística* of the countryside, the basis for the distribution of free land and the identification of landless families to be sent to the new frontier settlements; the creation of a veteran regiment whose members would receive land in property; the creation of a *junta de hacendados* to govern agrarian colonisation.

While the government was sketching his frontier policy, some *caciques* Pampas offered to start new diplomatic negotiations, and Pedro Andrés was ordered to organise a diplomatic expedition. This was the perfect occasion to enact the new disguised diplomatic course, aimed at collecting information for future advancements rather than settling a durable peace. In the diary, he made clear that “the only advantage proposed by the Commission, and even by the Government [was] to recognise their [the Natives] intentions, their physical forces, their fields, the population of their different tribes, their general statistics and industry, with less doubt and obscurity than we have hitherto had”.⁹⁰

In the mission between March and June 1822, García employed his interethnic diplomatic knowledge at the service of Buenos Aires expansionist plans once again. The expedition scrupulously respected Native diplomatic customs, while “the Commission wasted no time in acquiring geographical and statistical knowledge of the land and population”.⁹¹ García meticulously detailed the topographic operations, highlighting that they had to acquire the new knowledge “unseen” (*sin ser vistos*).⁹² Indigenous people were suspicious of Creole topographic practices. One night, while the engineer officer was drawing a map of the recently observed territory in his tent, one indigenous soldier entered suddenly and asked what he was doing. The officer contested that he was reproducing a drawing he saw in Buenos Aires, but the first thing he did was “to cover the marring pin with a piece of paper, so that he could not see it and be surprised or think that we were casting a spell (*gualicho*), or something bad”.⁹³ As discussed in the previous chapter, García did not reach any diplomatic goal because indigenous conditions were against Buenos Aires expansionist projects. However, the real goal of the expedition was a sound success: thanks to the geographical and topographical observations made, García and Reyes drawn the most detailed map of the province, that they defined “the first monument

⁹⁰ *Ivi*, 96.

⁹¹ *Ivi*, 88.

⁹² *Ivi*, 63.

⁹³ *Ivi*, 68.

of this nature made in the country [...] thereby succeeding in shedding light for the subsequent invasion projects in the desert”.⁹⁴

The collection of information changed García opinion around the pace of Creole southern advancement. In the last pages of the diary, he offered a new plan based on the establishment of two fortified settlements in the Sierra del Volcán and in the Sierra de Tandil, a goal once considered too ambitious. The first-hand experience of the deep South had convinced the Coronel that Creole forces were able to materialise the long-lasting desire of the establishment of a settlement in the Sierras, a proposal expressed for the first time by Juan José de Vértiz to King Carlos III in 1772.

When García and Reyes delivered their diary in February 1823, Governor Rodríguez was already preparing the new military expedition to the South. It was carried on between March and July, and it resulted in the establishment of the Fuerte Independencia (Tandil) on the slopes of the longed-for Sierras. The expedition had already been planned, and the governor was waiting for García’s return and the new topographical and geographical knowledge of the southern lands. While announcing the construction of the fort, Rodríguez declared that it would become the “first and foremost wealth of Buenos Aires” as it was surrounded by “places favoured by nature for all branches of agriculture”.⁹⁵ However, “many of the countless families wandering in the Province without resources” had to move there, as the sole military garrison would not be enough to defend it. His ministers assured him they were calling for a *junta de hacendados* to contribute to the translation of families, “to settle them so that they will become productive”, as the government lacked revenues. Soon after that, Rivadavia postponed the reunion of “families who wander in the countryside without property” to the next spring, as he feared the unpopularity of the measure.⁹⁶ In a frontier settlement plan of the following August, Miguel Estanislao Soler restated the concept, proposing that local judges could contribute to the creation of a census to identify “families that are scattered around the countryside without property.”, which would be sent to the frontier, persuading them with property and tax exemption.⁹⁷ Political elites were aware that rural masses were a relevant political actor and were not at the entire disposal of the government’s economic plans. They cannot be forced to follow the government; they must be convinced to do so.

⁹⁴ *Ivi*, 172.

⁹⁵ AGN, Sala VII, 1042.

⁹⁶ The doubts concerning the feasibility of the translation of rural families to the new frontier influenced the projects of state-sponsored British migration, notwithstanding the huge costs involved. In the austral spring of 1823, Rivadavia accelerated the projects to foster European immigration. See Bagu, *op. cit.*, Doc. 78, 79, 80, 81 and 82.

⁹⁷ AGN, Sala VII, 1042.



Fig. 16. *Carta Esferica de la Provincia de Buenos Aires, 1822*. Archivo Histórico de Geodesia y Catastro (La Plata). The description says “constructed, corrected and augmented with new observations and discoveries made lately in the interior of the South by a commission guided by to the S.r C.l D.n Pedro Andrés García. Created by the Engineer Officer D. José Maria de los Reyes, who dedicates it to the above-mentioned Sir as a lover of the Sciences and their Prosperity”.



Fig. 17. *Carta Geográfica de la Provincia de Buenos Aires* (1829). Archivo Histórico de Goedesia y Catastro (La Plata). Juan Manuel de Rosas, Felipe Senillosa and Juan Lavalle participated in a topographic expedition to the southern countryside in 1825-26. The advancement in topographic knowledge in respect to the 1822 are evident. The fact that North and South are reversed can be explained by the practical use of these maps during military expeditions.

The new foundation resulted in “unprecedented level” of frontier violence.⁹⁸ Indigenous groups attacked Buenos Aires settlement from North to South, and a new military expedition made of 3,000 soldiers in January 1824 did not stop the raids. The ultimate resolution of Buenos Aires was a decree in November 1824, which prohibited interethnic commerce, the city’s last resort to arm the Natives. Notwithstanding the state of conflict, trade had indeed never stopped, as both Creole and indigenous groups needed it. Advanced settlements such as Tandil and Carmen de Patagones could only subsist with cattle provided by indigenous traders, and the Natives could not obtain *yerba*, alcohol or silver without recurring to Creole markets.⁹⁹ The continuation of trade during interethnic conflicts also produced unintended and tragicomic outcomes, as cattle stolen from southern *estancias* were then sold to Patagones, and their hides re-entered Buenos Aires markets, producing vehement protests by local *hacendados*.¹⁰⁰ The centrality of interethnic commerce had indeed emerged during García’s 1822 expedition.

Rodríguez aggressive policy was failing to bring peace to the province, and it sparked contrasting reactions in the public opinion of Buenos Aires. Newspapers provide us with a hint of it. In December 1822, *El Centinela* published a *suplemento* dedicated to the recent indigenous raids. The articles described the invasions in the north and the south of the province, and how the frontier military forces reacted. While in the north the militias and the *hacendados* were able to recover stolen cattle, the forces in the South were taken by surprise because of bad weather and lack of contribution of the local *hacendados* to the defence.¹⁰¹ Two weeks later, the *Argos* published a piece that presented the conflicts with the Natives as a constant menace throughout Buenos Aires history, except when the benevolent influence of commerce had convinced them of the necessity of peace to obtain the consumer goods they desired. In what followed, the author described Viceroy Vértiz’s defensive plan to show to his readers the progress that had been made since then.¹⁰²

The *Abeja* joined the chorus with an informative piece that discussed the reasons why the southern forces had not been able to counter indigenous raids. The main point was the discordance between the militia and the southern *hacendados* already denounced by *El Centinela*. The two parties formulate reciprocal accusations: the landowners pointed out the inactivity of the military forces and their inadequate number, while the army attacked the rural producers because they did not provide any help to them, as “every *hacendado* would like to see the public treasury consumed only in defence

⁹⁸ Ratto, *La frontera bonaerense*, 41.

⁹⁹ Ratto, ‘El fuerte de Carmen de Patagones’.

¹⁰⁰ A very interesting court case involved Rosas, who started an unsuccessful legal proceeding to obtain the property of his stolen cattle sold to Carmen de Patagones. Alioto, *Indios y ganado*.

¹⁰¹ *Suplemento al Centinela*, n. 22, 24 December 1822.

¹⁰² *El Argos de Buenos Aires*, n. 2, 4 January 1823.

of his own property, as they do not help each other, and often the destruction of a neighbour is looked upon with indifference and perhaps with pleasure”.¹⁰³ The government used the press to put pressure on the *hacendados* who were not contributing enough to the most crucial enterprise to guarantee peace and economic development.

The following month, the *Abeja* published the conclusion of 1822 García diary, which contained their proposal for a new frontier line, just on the same day that Martín Rodríguez was leaving for the expedition that would try to realise the plan outlined in that document.¹⁰⁴ The same number hosted the call for participating in the essay contest the Sociedad Literaria promoted for the following May. The topic was a historical survey of the indigenous groups of the Río de la Plata and the influence of the European arrival over their customs and civilisation. Participants should provide a study of their customs and the profits that the Creole could gain from them in the form of commerce or population.

The last question to be answered was if they should be treated “as independent nations or are they to be recognised as enemies to be destroyed?”.¹⁰⁵ This was the main issue that shaped Spanish and Creole attitudes towards Native sovereign groups, and the announcement of this essay competition stands for the centrality of this problem in local intellectual life. Rodríguez and Rivadavia represented the prominence of “liberal agrarian republicanism”, supporting the destruction of the Natives. Their opponents wished for the Native incorporation into Creole rural commercial society, at the condition of their “civilisation” and the transformation of their customs and culture.

The factional confrontation in Buenos Aires politics was fought in the pages of the newspapers, and the government’s preoccupation with having friendly voices supporting it stands for the centrality that the frontier issue had at the beginning of the 1820s. While the city was experiencing a cultural renovation and an export-led commercial expansion that was bringing it closer to European culture and to what was considered modern civilisation, one of the main topics of discussion and political confrontation was the delineation of the best measures to promote rural development. The political forces that, according to Sarmiento, waved the banner of *civilización* had to necessarily come to terms with the rural *barbarie* if they wanted to advance in the institutionalisation of a flourishing commercial society.

¹⁰³ *La Abeja Argentina*, n. 10, 15 January 1823. The article ‘Indios y medios de defensa’ opens denouncing who criticised the government as being responsible for the failure of frontier defence. While they denied being “defenders of the authority”, they seemed to play exactly this role.

¹⁰⁴ *La Abeja Argentina*, n. 11, 15 February 1823. One week later, another article supporting Rodríguez’s expedition appeared. See *El Centinela*, n. 30, 23 February 1823, p. 113.

¹⁰⁵ *Ivi*, p. 82.

However, after the countryside had been devastated by the indigenous reactions to Creole hostilities, the newspaper that had supported the aggressive policy changed their tone. The *Argos* described the *rioplatenses* provinces as sieged by indigenous forces and in desperate need of finding a shared policy to deal with the danger.¹⁰⁶ The solution should be diplomatic. The author recalled the period of peace following Loreto's rule, an interethnic coexistence that was stopped only by the civil wars and the Creole attempts to co-opt indigenous forces. The mutual understanding between Creole and indigenous people should be based on recognising the latter's love for freedom and independence, the same value that inspired rebellion against Spanish power.

The change of perspective from the previous May is striking, and the article went as far as recognising that the Creole expropriated indigenous land when it rhetorically asked, "with which rights we would like to enter into their most remote possessions, whose ownership they have demonstrated by culture or other labours?". The publication continued to express preoccupation with the indigenous menace, presenting an article that described the reasons for indigenous hostilities against the Spanish and the Creole.¹⁰⁷ While the first hostilities were born out of the desire for revenge after the Spanish conquest, in recent times the hate for the Christians increased because of "the province's desire to extend its frontiers by occupying free land which it believed to possess".

Eventually, the *Argos* implicitly recognised the failure of an aggressive frontier policy, as Creole forces could not secure their possession from indigenous raids. However, Rodríguez prepared his third and last mission to the South in 1824, wishing to drive the Natives south of the Río Colorado and to gain new land for the province.¹⁰⁸ The expedition was a sound failure. It started in January, and it was aimed to wage war on the indigenous groups of the Southern Pampa, as well as establishing a new fort in Bahía Blanca. The battles were few and sporadic, bad knowledge of the territory prevented the new foundation, and on April 24 the army started the march back to Buenos Aires. The government was entrusted to Las Heras, who was going to inaugurate a new phase of diplomatic efforts thanks to Manuel J. García and Juan Manuel de Rosas.

¹⁰⁶ *El Argos de Buenos Aires*, n. 80, 4 October 1823.

¹⁰⁷ *El Argos de Buenos Aires*, n. 88, 1 November 1823.

¹⁰⁸ *El Argos de Buenos Aires*, n. 96, 29 November 1823.

5. The 1826 Emphyteusis National Law

As mentioned, the short Las Heras government (1824-1825) nevertheless inaugurated important changes in frontier policy, following the pristine ideal of “federal agrarian republicanism”. However, the reunion of a new general congress in 1824 and the creation of a national executive led by Rivadavia revamped for a short time “liberal” republicanism. The renovation of constitutional talks was prompted by the period of peace among the provinces and international circumstances. Buenos Aires sought international recognition, and only a national authority could celebrate a trade treaty with Great Britain. At the same time, diplomatic relations with the recently established Brazilian Empire were escalating, and the prospects for an armed conflict over the control of the Banda Oriental called for a national authority to coordinate war efforts. Therefore, the general congress was reunited.

Overall, the province was experiencing a vigorous economic efflorescence driven by external trade, and the perspectives were promising.¹⁰⁹ Growth was based on husbandry, sustained by the favourable cycle in the global economy, driven by industrialising Britain.¹¹⁰ The lowering of British import prices and the increasing estimation of Buenos Aires products (mainly hides and salted meat) supported the expansion of the economy.¹¹¹ The value of land increased dramatically from 1815, given the greater value of rural production, and economic efflorescence would stop only in 1825-26 due to the hyperinflation caused by the British financial markets crisis and the blockade of Buenos Aires port. Finally, the 1824 trade treaty with Great Britain contributed to expanding Atlantic commerce and foreign inversions while similar developments took place in the South American continent.¹¹²

In February 1826, the Ley de Presidencia created a permanent national executive power, and Rivadavia was elected President. From this moment, the tensions between *unitarios* and *federales* increased, and the Ley de Capitalización in the following March aggravated the situation. This decree sanctioned the nationalisation of the city of Buenos Aires and the division of the former province into two different jurisdictions. The government of the ex-province was transferred to the national executive, as well as the revenue from the customs house. The supporters of federalism in Buenos Aires were enraged. They organised an opposition to the law, claiming that the economic interests of the province were highly harmed by the dissociation of the countryside from the city port.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Djenderedjian, ‘La economía’.

¹¹⁰ Tutino, ‘The Americas’.

¹¹¹ Llorca-Jaña, *The British textile trade*; Francis, ‘Argentina’s Expansion’.

¹¹² Brown and Paquette, ‘Introduction’.

¹¹³ Monsma, *op. cit.*, 17-26. Rosas and Anchorena led the federal opposition.

In this hectic context, the general congress wished to solve the property issue in the countryside and began the discussion of the national Emphyteusis Law in May 1826. In the words of the government, the project represented “a fortunate combination of what circumstances allow, of what the needs of the treasury demand, and of what could be thought of to promote with greater success the progress of rural industry”.¹¹⁴ Public lands were inalienable by law, as they provided the collateral for the national public debt, so the emphyteusis had been chosen as the best way to distribute lands, increase national wealth and, therefore, public revenues. Besides being mortgaged, their value was miserable, and their sale would have been a bankruptcy for the state given the pace of their rising value. Julián Segundo de Agüero, Minister of Government, clarified that the law aimed to promote the rural industry and create a stable rent to pay back the interest on public debt.

While the consensus regarding the necessity of the emphyteusis contract was widespread, the discussion had to sanction the clauses of the contract, mainly its length and the annual canon amount. The latter problem was more complex, because national lands significantly differed in their value, and the canon should be balanced with justice and equality. As fixing it by law was highly complicated, the government decided to entrust this duty to local popular juries. Each time an individual would ask for a parcel of land, a reunion of five landowners in the surrounding area was supposed to set its value and the respective canon. The annual canon was fixed at 8% on value for lands destined for husbandry and 4% for the *tierras de pan-llevar* (agriculture). Agüero openly stated that the canon was high, but two factors would lower it. First, popular juries would undervalue lands because of the natural solidarity among proprietors. Second, the incredible economic expansion experienced by Buenos Aires countryside in the past ten years ensured that “the value of all land assets must have a growth and an improvement that cannot be subject to quantification”.¹¹⁵ Also, the decision to fix emphyteusis length at ten years was shaped by the expectations regarding the rising value of lands.

However, this clause caused the first relevant disagreements among the deputies. Ten years seemed an excessively short term for a contract called emphyteusis (which was perpetual according to legal tradition). Manuel Antonio Castro (Buenos Aires) called for an extension of the contract length to stimulate the productive labour of the usufructuaries thanks to the security of their possession. Indeed, “since circumstances force us to distribute the land without making owners, which is the best advantage for a state, we must take care that this contract is as close as possible to ownership”.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Ravignani, *Asambleas Constituyentes. Tomo 2*, 1197.

¹¹⁵ *Ivi*, 1200.

¹¹⁶ *Ivi*, 1204.

Félix Ignacio Frías (Santiago del Estero) agreed about the necessity to secure possession for a long time, proposing to extend the contract to twenty years. Along the same line, Juan José Paso (Buenos Aires) proposed that emphyteusis would last as long as the recipient would pay the annual canon because “the first issue for the republic to look at” was to “populate its lands and to populate them by the system and in the way that will create the best and richest population possible.”. The assembly partially met those requests, and the length of emphyteusis was settled to “at least” twenty years.¹¹⁷

However, a lengthier discussion revolved around the annual canon. The debate lasted three full days, standing for the complexity involved in finding an equitable way to proportionate the canon to land value: besides deciding how to fix value, land profitability differed significantly in the geographical contexts of the United Provinces. Disagreements sparked soon. For instance, Francisco Acosta (Corrientes) proposed to value each parcel according to the sale price of land in their respective province and to fix by law a maximum price for a unit of land. Minister Agüero, instead, opposed governmental regulation of land prices because it was an arbitrary decision which could not consider the very different quality and agricultural profitability of public lands. For instance, while lands on the banks of the rivers Plata, Uruguay and Paraná “have acquired an enormous value in proportion to the large profits produced by capital invested in livestock breeding”, agricultural lands were lagging behind, as well as the ones in the provinces of the Interior.¹¹⁸ The difference between Buenos Aires and the Interior regarding economic development and profitability was indeed a severe point of contention.

Finally, various deputies argued against the amount of the canon, considering it excessive and lacking the Minister’s confidence regarding the undervaluation of the popular juries. For instance, Castro wanted to establish it at the 2% and 4% on value. He was not animated by the desire to support the individual interest of usufructuaries; rather, he believed that this measure would favour public prosperity. Rural industry represented “the wellspring of our wealth and our inexhaustible and precious mineral”, and protection of this sector should be the “primary concern of the government”. If convenient rules were sanctioned, settlers would put into production as much land as possible to expand the nation’s wealth, thus creating “the true rent and profit for the government”.¹¹⁹ Economic growth was the best way to increase state finances. In the end, the article was approved only for one vote. This stands for the very different opinions the deputies had on several questions, among which the pace of the progressive valuation of public lands, the different outcomes the law could have on

¹¹⁷ *Ivi*, 1213.

¹¹⁸ *Ivi*, 1222-1223.

¹¹⁹ *Ivi*, 1230.

the provinces, or the doubts concerning the viability of the popular juries for valuing lands and their operations.

The law's enactment also impacted the Topographic Commission, which was transformed into the Topographic Department with a national scope. The judicial powers were expanded, as the Department should act as "Tribunal Topografico" when needed, providing its opinion and expertise to the judicial authority.¹²⁰ The government published the new rules for presenting a land plea in the national territory, which were the plain transplant of the provincial legislation to the other Río de la Plata provinces. Subaltern offices of the Department should be created in the national territory to regulate better and archive every land plea, which would then be transmitted to the principal office. This was in charge of creating a national register of emphyteusis and topographic and geographical maps of the national territory. Additionally, the Department had to transmit to the local Comisiones de Solares the instructions to distribute in emphyteusis the free land of the *ejidos*, promoting therefore the privatisation of public land managed by local communities.¹²¹ The Tribunal Topografico became the judicial authorities aimed at overseeing the bottom-up process of property formation in the hands of the local Comisiones de Solares. As had happened in the Province of Buenos Aires, the national government tried to implement a particular administrative system that was based on the active participation of private citizens in the administrative government of local communities. This national structure, however, never materialised.

The national government had sanctioned the agrarian reform that the provincial legislature had not been able to approve two years before. The main difference between the two drafts was that the national law did not mention at all the right of possession, the article that probably prevented the approval of the provincial agrarian law. An additional element stresses the continuity between the 1824 draft and the 1826 national law, as both were preceded by a decree that obliged the possessors without title to regularise their right over land through the emphyteusis.¹²² The executive wished to institutionalise a framework for rural exploitation, promoting land appropriation on a national scale.

The nationalisation of an emphyteusis system was not a radical break with the past. In the provinces of Catamarca, Córdoba, Salta and Tucumán, the emphyteusis contract had already been used, and

¹²⁰ 'Decreto estableciendo un Departamento de Topografía y Estadística' (26 June 1826'. See De Angelis, *RLDBA, Volume 2*, 797.

¹²¹ 'Decreto detallando las obligaciones de las Comisiones de Solares' (3 February 1827). See De Angelis, *RLDBA, Volume 2*, 832.

¹²² 'Decreto obligando a los que ocupan terrenos del Estado a pedirlos en enfiteusis' (28 September 1824). See De Angelis, *RLDBA, Volume 2*, 616; 'Decreto mandando desalojar los que ocupan sin título terrenos del Estado' (15 April 1826). See De Angelis, *RLDBA, Volume 2*, 766.

other provinces followed the instructions of the ephemeral national congress in the following years (San Juan, Tucumán, Corrientes, Santa Fe, Jujuy).¹²³ As we discussed, the contract was well known by Spanish political economists, and it was valued because it was orientated toward sponsoring production: it permitted to “burden” the propriety with conditions of use aimed at increasing agricultural production, and it allowed to distribute lands that were immobilised by backward legislation or indolent landowners.¹²⁴ Indeed, the *Ordenanzas de Intendentes* mentioned it as a useful contract to expand cultivation. If the Spanish tradition suggested the convenience of the contract, the revolutionary one was doing the same, as the opinions of Manuel Belgrano suggest. In the debate in the general congress, the anxiety of the deputies in creating a contract as close as possible to “ownership” was evident, signalling that they shared the emotional understanding of property: it should be a stimulus to increase individual labour maximisation.

Ideas supporting the emphyteutic contract were also being drawn from the tradition of classical political economy, whose influence was shaping Buenos Aires economic culture. James Mill’s *Elements* suggested the convenience of retaining land property in the government’s hands in land-rich countries of new colonisation and using it as a source of public rent. Say’s *Traité* made clear that property was nothing less than a powerful stimulus to increase production. Therefore, a production-oriented agrarian contract was a choice coherent with his thought.

In addition, J.C.L. Simonde de Sismondi, another influential “economist”, provided a more rigorous defence of the contract, and it is almost certain that Rivadavia came into contact with him or his ideas during his stay in Europe in 1824-26.¹²⁵ The Creole leader had probably found them attractive for the prominent republicanism of Sismondi’s political economy.¹²⁶ In his *Nouveaux principes d’économie politique*, Sismondi dedicated a section to the discussion of emphyteusis, defining it as an “half-ownership” (“*demi-propriété*”) because it creates a class of peasants “as industrious, as happy, and as attached to their homeland as small landowners”.¹²⁷ These words resonated with Pedro García’s 1811 report.

¹²³ Levaggi, *La enfiteusis*, 235-237. The dissolution of the national authority in 1827 meant that these provinces adopted the emphyteusis believing in the convenience of the system, not due to external impositions.

¹²⁴ The emphyteusis contract characterised Southern Europe in the early modern period, and it was valued for its versatility and flexibility. See Congost and Luna, *Agrarian Change and Imperfect Property*.

¹²⁵ In Paris, Sismondi was a close friend of Pedro de Angelis, a Neapolitan intellectual who Rivadavia recruited while in the French capital to edit a periodical in Buenos Aires dealing with political and economic topics (*Crónica política y literaria de Buenos Aires*, 1827). De Angelis would work together with José Joaquín Mora, a Spanish liberal linked to the press of Rudolph Ackermann, and after 1829 he would support the federal governments.

¹²⁶ Romani, ‘The republican foundations’.

¹²⁷ Sismondi, *Nouveaux principes*, 237.

Sismondi is an important source, until now overlooked, of the economic ideas that inspired Buenos Aires land legislation. He had a very practical understanding of political economy and was highly suspicious of theoretical reasoning and universalising theories. His first work was the *Tableau de l'Agriculture Toscane* (1801), in which he described the different agricultural systems employed in a Tuscan valley and their practical outcomes. His reflection on agriculture and wealth, which he fully developed in his *Nouveaux principes*, was based on the difference between net income and gross product, a distinction that allowed him to stress the discrepancy between the interest of the landowner class and public interest. In fact, the state aimed at increasing the agricultural gross product, meaning an increase in the overall living standards or a demographic expansion. In contrast, the agricultural net income, whose increase was the goal of landowners, was nothing more “the income of the idle rich”.¹²⁸ This distinction between national and landowners’ interests sounded appealing to Rivadavia and his clique, as they were trying to counter the growing power of the landed interests in Buenos Aires, who in turn wished to co-opt the state for their personal advantage. However, as already recalled, the question was not a clear-cut dichotomy, and the secret for successfully leading Buenos Aires politics lied in finding the right balance between curbing and indulging in landowners’ pretensions.

A peculiar anonymous paper encountered in Rivadavia’s private papers offers additional arguments backing the centrality of public land ownership for countering what the document defines as “the despotism of the owners”.¹²⁹ The argument develops from the Catholic natural law arguments of the original communion of goods. If every man is born free and with equal rights to enjoy nature to satisfy his or her needs, no one has the right to appropriate land, preventing someone else from doing the same. Therefore, “justice does not admit land property” because the extreme consequence of privatisation would be that every land on the globe would be appropriated, creating a situation in which owners might prevent non-owners from acquiring the means for their subsistence. In this way, natural law would be infringed because the “principle of equal freedom for all” would not be respected. While political confrontation in the press was fierce, it is possible that these notes were too radical to be published. Thus, they remained in Rivadavia’s private papers until Bartolomé Mitre discovered them.

¹²⁸ *Ivi*, 154. Sismondi was a strong supporter of the role of the state in curbing the negative outcomes of economic expansion and competition. He did not believe in the efficiency of the law of competition, and this rendered him a heterodox classical political economist, who would be estimated by socialist economic thought, later in the century. According to Sismondi, the goal of economic policy should be to attain the greater economic well-being for the majority of the population.

¹²⁹ Bagu, *op. cit.*, 509-510.

The *unitarios* voiced their opinions on public land ownership from the press, in an attempt to direct public opinion in their favour. The desire to build political support through the press persisted during the years of the general congress (1824-27). While on a diplomatic mission in Europe, Rivadavia recruited intellectuals to contribute to forming a republican public opinion.¹³⁰ For instance, Pedro de Angelis and José Joaquín Mora moved to Buenos Aires and started disseminating political and economic ideas from the pages of *La Crónica Política y Literaria de Buenos Aires* (1827).¹³¹

On 15 June 1826, an article published in *El Mensajero Argentino*, a newspaper supporting the unitarian government of Rivadavia, described the Emphyteusis Law as best arrangement for distributing land according to the experience of the civilised countries as well as the ecological and political context of the United Provinces. It did so by copying a paragraph from the *Nouveaux principes* by Sismondi.¹³² The article reported the passage in which the Genevan “economist” stated that “the ownership and use of land is a gift of society and not a natural right that precedes man in society”.¹³³ Starting from this principle, the appropriation and use of land had to be based on the principle of public utility, and, therefore, society can impose conditions for directing territorial wealth exploitation. Emphyteusis was the best contract to regulate agrarian exploitation in the United Provinces as well as for every country “which has a vast territory, a small population, and little capital”. It allows recipients to enjoy every advantage of property (long-term possession which stimulates application to labour, the development of civilised manners, and the possibility of inheritance) while it guarantees a fixed rent to the proprietor - society, in the name of the common good.

The conflict between the national government and Buenos Aires *hacendados* is evident in some decrees sanctioned in May 1827, two months before the fall of the congress. A new regulation for distributing frontier land to landless families was issued, anticipating the establishment of the new line the following spring, and it comprised the usual incentives aimed at convincing families to move there. However, the jurisdiction on land distribution was given to frontier military commanders, and

¹³⁰ Rivadavia sponsored an editorial effort for strengthening international support for Buenos Aires against Spain and Brazil in collaboration with the London editor Rudolph Ackermann. See Roldán Vera, *British Book Trade and Spanish American Independence*. Beside political goals, the venture was based on the economic interest of the promoters. Munilla Lacasa, ‘El Museo Universal’. The main outcome of their collaboration was the 1825 publication of *Noticias Históricas, políticas y estadísticas de las Provincias Unidas del Río de la Plata* by Ignacio Núñez, a long-time Rivadavia collaborator. The book was edited following the 1825 of the Anglo-Argentine commercial treaty to strengthen public opinion support around it.

¹³¹ Astigarraga, et al. ‘Political Economy for Hispanic America’.

¹³² Sismondi, *op. cit.*, 160-161.

¹³³ *Mensajero Argentino*, n. 50, 15 June 1826.

not to local *hacendados*.¹³⁴ The deputies probably believed that they would better represent the national government's interest.

After a few days, some limits to emphyteusis were also set. In fact, hundreds of emphyteusis petitions had been filed between 1826 and 1828.¹³⁵ The *British Packet* commented that the decree wanted to regulate distribution because “we believe the whole of State Lands are rented to individuals” as “since the commencement of war, they have been taken with unusual avidity”.¹³⁶ Noting that the current legislation generated abuses and accumulation for speculation rather than production, the executive decided that the Topographic Department should provide the executive power with information over the land already owned by every emphyteusis petitioner. The government would decide whether to approve the request according to the information received.¹³⁷ Instead of countering the landowners influence, the legislation seemed to strengthen their grip on provincial wealth, the main at the government's disposal.

The Emphyteusis Law had an ephemeral existence. The national government fell in July 1827, the provincial institutions of Buenos Aires were reconstituted, and a new emphyteusis law was sanctioned. However, the fact that the general congress sanctioned the reform highlights that behind the surface of the early 1820s “progress of rural opulence” and the seemingly broad consensus over the necessity of emphyteusis, tensions around the distribution of the new export-generated wealth were being nurtured.¹³⁸ An alliance of old wealthy landowners and urban capitals was asking for the government's intervention to provide order and security in the countryside. This included rural police and expansion and defence of the frontier. On the other hand, this interest group wished to be entrusted with jurisdictional authorities over sever rural issues, including property allocation, a long-lasting desire first formulated in the 1790 petition of the *Gremio de hacendados*. This faction supported the reform programme of the early 1820s, as it included the expansion of the commodity frontier and economic policies aiming at promoting agricultural exports and strengthening public finance.

However, the support was not unconditional, as the failure of the 1824 emphyteusis law attests. Even if a man very close to rural interests promoted it (Manuel J. García), the sanction by law of the right

¹³⁴ *RORA. Tomo 2*, 187.

¹³⁵ Infesta, *op. cit.*, 58. Since 1822, the possibility to petition for land was suspended, and after the approval of the law a great number was filed.

¹³⁶ *The British Packet and Argentine News*, n. 41, 12 May 1827.

¹³⁷ *RORA. Tomo 2*, 189.

¹³⁸ Gelman had indeed argued that discussions around property rights during the 19th century were not about which rights could foster economic growth – that was assured by the rising Atlantic demand for commodity- but rather it was a conflict regarding the distribution of the profits resulting from this growth. Gelman, ‘Derechos de propiedad, crecimiento económico’.

of possession, a measure that defended small property, determined the failure of the reform. This is not, however, a black or white story, but the shades of grey are predominant: if landowners wanted to increase their possession through new acquisitions, they were aware of the necessity to populate the countryside and the role that property or quasi-property could play in that. The necessity of population was sanctioned by its centrality in economic thought, but also, in more prosaic terms, *hacendados* needed seasonal workers for their *estancias*, and only farmers - or the indigenous population, could provide the needed flexibility. Anyhow, the national law was approved because it did not include any reference to the right of possession, as the Topographic Department was the administrative body entrusted with the regulation of conflicts over property, nor did it sanction a limit to the extension of petitioned land, a decision that some later commentators will harshly criticise.¹³⁹

Given that so many tensions revolved around land property, one might ask why the national executive promoted the discussion of agrarian legislation, as this decree might have further increased the dissatisfaction of Buenos Aires *hacendados* while they were fighting against the partition of the province. After all, the tenancy system in place had proven effective in supporting a major agricultural expansion despite all its imperfections. Understanding the urgency of the national government requires us to bring the international context into the picture. As mentioned, “liberal agrarian republicanism” included the promotion of foreign immigration to increase the local useful and productive population. In previous years, Rivadavia sanctioned partnerships with foreign entrepreneurs and promoted publications to attract foreign workers.¹⁴⁰ For instance, the government signed a contract with John Thomas Barber Beaumont to introduce British families, and the Robertson brothers established a Scottish agrarian colony in Monte Grande.¹⁴¹ The commitment of the unitarian faction to foreign agrarian colonisation is evident in a series of articles that *El Tiempo*, a unitarian newspaper, published between August and September 1828 to call for the (federal) government support to the Scottish colony, as “the habits, customs, knowledge and industry of the countries

¹³⁹ Emilio Coni especially highlighted the ‘mistakes’ of Rivadavia. See Levaggi, *La enfiteusis*, 118-119.

¹⁴⁰ Núñez’s work included a statistical appendix aimed at provisioning European “speculators” with first-hand information about the climate and the economic activities of each pueblo of the United Provinces. The region currently lacked *brazos y capitales*, but there were many potentialities for their productive application to local nature. Here, Núñez inserted a telling exhortation to European workers, directed at “any man of this class, of sound morals, with a good disposition for the employment of his industry”, and offering “an untouched, virgin and fertile territory, [...] to foreigners who aspire to save themselves from mendicity”. At the end of the appendix, additional information for migrants about the convenience of the local tenancy system for foreigners are offered. It was portrayed as really convenient indeed: the emphyteusis system rendered very low the fixed costs for starting an activity, as migrants did not have to spend their capital for buying land. In this way, a good rate of profit was assured. Similarly, dependent workers could enjoy plenty of employment opportunities and wages way higher than in Europe. Buenos Aires authorities did not care about the nationality or the religion of a migrant, as “it is enough that he is a man, and that he is a moral, active and industrious man”. See Núñez, *Noticias históricas*, 156 and 282.

¹⁴¹ The initiatives were frustrated by numerous factors, and Barber Beaumont’s son published a book to denounce the hypocrisy of Buenos Aires government. See Barber Beaumont, *Travels in Buenos Ayres*.

advanced in agriculture are rooted there”.¹⁴² Therefore, sanctioning a national tenancy law would provide an additional incentive for increasing foreign immigration, a fundamental aspect of liberal agrarian republicanism. Again, the communicative and performative function of law is highlighted: the outward-looking national government decided to sanction an agrarian law aimed to increase foreign interdependence, at the cost of generating discomfort among provincial landholders. A secure and state-sanctioned agrarian law would represent an additional guarantee to foster European immigration in Buenos Aires.

6. Conclusions

The chapter focused on Buenos Aires political economy during the 1820s. The decade opened with a shared consensus around the model of agrarian republicanism, Rodríguez government tried to put it into practice by building new institutions, such as the university and the topographic department. In these places, economic ideas on the role of property in stimulating economic expansion were discussed, and new currents of thought reached the city, such as utilitarianism and British political economy. The new ideas were adapted to the needs of local agrarian republicanism, strengthening the consensus around fostering market-oriented rural exploitations (agrarianism), including both agriculture and husbandry, and bottom-up and representative institutions (republicanism).

However, economic expansion and frontier conflicts soon provoked the formation of two opposite political factions (*unitarios* and *federales*), whose political divergences were also expressed in economic terms, in the ideal of the liberal or federal agrarian republicanism. The distinction becomes clear if we consider frontier policy, the sponsorship of foreign immigration and the national question. The violent approach to frontier expansion and the refusal of interethnic diplomacy would generate an incredible wave of violence and destruction in the countryside that alienated the support of rural masses and landed interests to the *unitarios*. The radical negation of the possibility of the incorporation of the Natives into Creole commercial society is described in the following chapter when President Rivadavia dismissed the *negocio pacífico* (peaceful negotiation) with the Native groups inaugurated by Rosas and García in 1825. The refusal of the possibility of commercially “civilising” the Natives was the intellectual foundation of this position, which had supporters in public opinion.¹⁴³ However, the recent story of frontier diplomacy, the knowledge gained during the diplomatic and geographical expeditions and the practical experience of some *hacendados* strengthen the support for a peaceful approach to the frontier question that would be expressed in the federal

¹⁴² *El Tiempo*, n. 82 (9 August 1828). Other articles are published in the numbers 79, 88, 113 and 116.

¹⁴³ The *unitarios* were envisioning a homogenous and white nation, therefore they promoted European migrations, as the same distrust toward the Native population was directed to rural Creole masses.

agrarian republicanism. Even if Rodríguez established the Fuerte Independencia in Tandil, this success was not enough, as human and economic costs were extremely high.

During the national congress, tensions were exacerbated when the executive sanctioned measures that directly harmed the interests of the federal faction, especially the division of the province and nationalisation of the capital. In this period of growing political tensions, the *unitarios* tried to rationalise the provincial tenancy system, implementing the national emphyteusis law. They tried to turn it into a conflictive issue, highlighting the importance of public land ownership on an intellectual ground, as it could temper the ambition of individual interests. In addition, multiple strands of political economy supported the contract: the Spanish tradition saw it as a way to foster production, avoiding a disruptive property redistribution and maintaining a passive role of the state in shaping the conditions for usufruct; classical political economy highlighted the convenience of not alienating public land in resource-rich developing contexts, and it considered property a stimulus to maximising production; a heterodox classical political economist such as Sismondi, stressed the adherence of the contract to the republican tradition. These different shades of political economy praised emphyteusis for multiple reasons. However, there was a common point: the convenience of the contract for improving production and, therefore, supporting the expansion of a commercial society through increasing its useful and economically active population.

However, the *unitarios* sinned in idealism and lack of political realism. They failed to understand that the state needed to have a central role in directing individual interests, instead of just tempering them, in the context of the early institutionalisation of commercial society. The problem was both intellectual and political. On the ground of ideas, they trusted too much the power of individual interest in directing passions: the national emphyteusis law did not include any conditions for population, and it soon resulted in unproductive land appropriation. On the political ground, they did not understand that in a context of scarce governmental capacity, the state should rely on the elites to govern rural exploitation. Influential citizens and wealthy *hacendados* of the province were the social sectors that could help the state realise the agrarian utopia. However, the same sector was irreconcilably distancing from the *unitarios* and strengthening the opposition to the national executive. When in the austral autumn of 1827, Rivadavia tried to regulate better emphyteusis allocation, the jurisdiction was given to military commanders, not to rural *hacendados*. However, it was too late to save the national government which fell because of the peace with Brazil negotiated by Manuel J. García.

Chapter 6

The failure of Rivadavia paved the way for the rise of power in the federal faction. The new government, guided by Manuel Dorrego, resumed the frontier policy inaugurated by García and Rosas under Las Heras in 1825. However, tensions did not dissipate and would explode at the end of 1828, when the execution of Dorrego by the unitarian general Lavalle ignited a provincial civil war. The following chapter describes how the success of federal frontier policy and the alliance with Native groups proved fundamental for winning the civil conflict and building a consensus toward federal agrarian republicanism which would last until the 1850s.

CHAPTER 7

Juan Manuel de Rosas and Federal Agrarian Republicanism

During the 1820s, factional politics and a steady export-led economic growth agglutinated local economic interest into the formation of a federal faction. The chapter delineates their ideal of agrarian republicanism, which differed from the liberal one in a small but significant detail. Crucially, the federal proposal was based on interethnic diplomacy and the incorporation of Natives into Creole commercial society, as some Spanish reformers and Pedro A. García had already proposed. On the contrary, liberal republicanism looked at them just as enemies, or military allied, did not admitting the possibility of the commercial “civilisation” of their customs. In the following pages, the history of the rise to power of the federal faction and the progressive consolidation of Juan Manuel de Rosas as its leader is read through the centrality of interethnic diplomacy and the realisation of the ideal of federal agrarian republicanism. A political economy centred on the promotion of agriculture and husbandry, the expansion of small-scale farming and the incorporation of Native groups to the rural commercial society were prominent features of their political agenda, and agglutinated consensus around the character of Rosas, following his successful proceedings in the economic government of the countryside. Jorge Myers inaugurated the study of the relationship between the federal faction and classical republic ideals in his seminal *Orden y virtud* (1995).¹ This chapter builds on his intuitions and analyses ideas and practices that informed federal frontier and agrarian policies until the end of the 1830s.

Considering Rosas’s successful economic government of the countryside as central to his rise to power is not a new insight. However, this argument is now supported by an extensive body of literature in rural social history and anthropology. A better understanding of the historical context in which Rosas forged his influence among the rural masses allows for a relativisation of the exceptionalism of his figure, thus understanding how his rise to power was based on the network of relationships he was able to weave with different segments of Creole and Native society. The Creole elites appreciated his ability to ensure order and security in the countryside through peaceful negotiation and the advancement of the frontier line. The rural masses valued his understanding of their everyday needs in a conjuncture of drought and civil war. Above all, the support of the militia was central to strengthening his influence among the Creole population.

¹ Although Myers’ work is widely cited, few studies have addressed his insights, and no one analysed the intellectual history of federal republicanism. This fact is even more curious considering that *Orden y virtud* is an introductory essay (about one hundred pages) to an anthological collection and not a comprehensive study on the topic.

However, the fundamental element for his political ascent was his ability to forge a lasting alliance with the Natives. The instability of interethnic relations has been described, but Rosas was able to create a stability not seen since the peace of Loreto in 1790. The *caciques* Chanil and Cachul, and their descendants, were fundamental allies of Rosas from 1826 to Caseros, thanks to the personal relationship the *Restaurador* was able to establish with them. This alliance enabled the fortification and defence of the frontier in an effective manner, extending the commodity frontier and ensuring the security of rural productive establishments, the basis of provincial wealth. Finally, his indigenous allies were crucial contributors to the defeat of the *unitarios* in 1829.

The ideal of federal agrarian republicanism accompanied and legitimised the political action of Rosas and his faction and was based on the institutionalisation of a commercial society in the Buenos Aires countryside. This was inhabited by small Creole producers, large *estancias*, and Natives who linked to the market through small-scale livestock and agriculture or wage labour. Given the instability of the frontier, from 1828 Native groups settled along the frontier and became key to the defence of the province's rural wealth. The chapter details how this ideal was mobilised during the *negocio pacífico* and frontier advancement, in parliamentary debates and publications in support of the federal cause. Property was central to the federal plan. Provincial property should be expanded, appropriating new lands to be valued on the market, distributing them in emphyteusis or individual plots.

The chapter thus describes frontier policy, and the colonisation plans promoted by Rosas and the federal faction, the strengthening of the *negocio pacífico* and its implication for the development of an interethnic commercial society and the discursive construction of the image of Rosas as the perfect leader of the agrarian republican commercial society developing in Buenos Aires countryside. The last paragraph illustrates the wane of this ideal, the growing opposition to Rosas and an alternative economic proposal put forward by a young Esteban Echeverría. The chapter details the progressive discrepancy between the federal government's ideas and practices between 1825 and the end of the following decade.

1. The Beginning of the *Negocio Pacífico* (1825-1828)

The 1820s opened with some years of economic prosperity thanks to the end of civil wars and the European demand for agricultural goods. The 1824 British Consular Report spoke about “extraordinary prosperity”, “very rapid increase of the population”, “dissemination of industrious habits among the mass of the people” and “rapid commercial aggrandizement of this part of South

America”.² Even if the report was exaggerated for political purposes, data shows a sustained commercial expansion, based on the betterment of the terms of trade between Buenos Aires exports and European imports.³ However, the situation reversed from 1825-1826 onwards due to the Brazilian blockade of the port, and a severe drought in the countryside.⁴ The negative economic cycle hit urban and rural masses more than the elites, who resorted to differentiation of their economic portfolio to face the times of crisis.⁵ High inflation and drought worsened the standards of living, and popular dissatisfaction played an important role in the 1829 rural uprising.⁶

The expansion occurred notwithstanding the aggressive frontier policy of Rodríguez’s government. However, his 1824 expedition fuelled a new period of intense frontier conflict that culminated with a ban on interethnic trade in November. In parallel, events in Chile precipitated Buenos Aires countryside into chaos once again: the Treaty of Taphue (1825) sanctioned peace between the republican government and the royalist *cacique Wenteches* Francisco Mariluán, but it did not disarm every royalist group operating in Chile.⁷ Therefore, the royalist forces of the Pincheira brothers crossed the Andes. They brought war to Buenos Aires, allying themselves with local groups that had opposed the Creole government, such as the *Ranquelches* and the *Boronganos*. New attacks on the frontier *estancias* and the prospects of war against Brazil for the control of the Banda Oriental convinced the Las Heras government about the necessity of peaceful relations with the Southern Natives and the strengthening of the frontier.⁸

While a first diplomatic mission entrusted to the Oyuela brothers was unsuccessful, Manuel J. García convinced Juan Manuel de Rosas to return to political life and lead official frontier policy. The Creole goals of collecting geographical information to fortify the new line and signing peace treaties with the Natives entangled. In October, the government appointed Rosas, Felipe Senillosa and Coronel Juan Lavalle to lead an expedition to survey the territory between the Sierra del Volcán and the Atlantic. They had to find the best spot to establish new frontier guards and the new settlement and port of Bahía Blanca. In the instructions, the government made clear that the importance of the “enlargement of the province” and the high costs of the project demanded a meticulous preparation,

² ‘Report on the trade’, 34.

³ Francis, *op. cit.*

⁴ Djenderndjan, ‘La economía’.

⁵ Irigoien, ‘Inconvertible Paper Money’.

⁶ Schmit, ‘Los precios’, 16; González Bernaldo, ‘El levantamiento’.

⁷ Herr, *Contested Nation*; Varela Carla Manara, ‘Particularidades de un modelo económico’.

⁸ Ratto, *La frontera bonaerense*, 46-47.

as “it is necessary to proceed with all the knowledge required for such an undertaking”.⁹ Once again, the centrality of geographical knowledge for commodity frontier expansion is manifested.

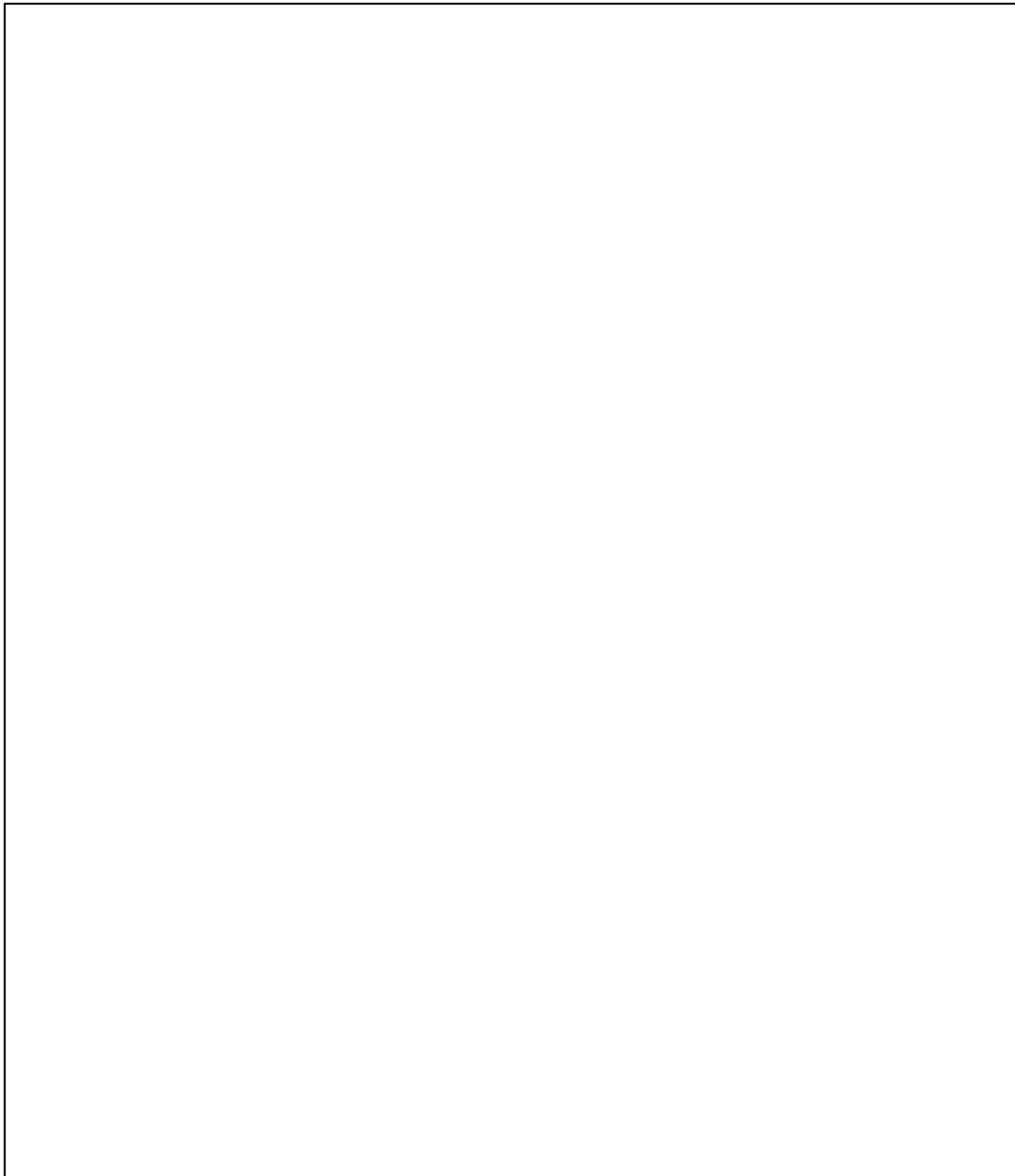


Fig. 18. “Avance de la frontera en el lapso 1810-1828”. In Juan Carlos Walther. *La Conquista del desierto* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires, 1970), *Anexo n. 2*.

Interethnic peace was paramount to advance the guards. Rosas thus also received the instruction to establish the “peaceful negotiation with the *indios*” (*negocio pacífico con los Indios*), signed by Manuel J. García. The text opens with the recognition that no one was better than him for the appointment. Why did the provincial government believe it so? The Minister supported the inclusion of landholders’ interests in the government agenda and was convinced of the crucial importance of interethnic peace to guarantee social order and economic expansion, influenced by his father’s ideas.

⁹ Rosas, *Diario de la Comisión*, 5.

Therefore, he offered this duty to a man with good interethnic diplomacy experience and strategic connections to the developing federal faction.

Rosas was in the mid-1820s “a relevant political actor in the countryside”, even if he did not have the influence he would strengthen in the following years.¹⁰ A 1823 US consul report noted that he was the “idol of the rural population” and that someone was proposing him to replace Martín Rodríguez to counter a possible election of Manuel Dorrego, considered a dangerous radical. He was therefore a man of order, not revolution. Through this appointment, urban politics recognised the countryside’s political relevance, which needed an influential rural character to lead interethnic diplomatic talks.

A treaty titled *Reforma de campaña* (1823) confirmed the central place that the countryside began to occupy in Buenos Aires politics. The anonymous author, “Joven P. Ramirez”, depicted the growing factionalism developing in local political life based on the dichotomy between the city and the countryside. In this confrontation, he took sides with the federal faction, which he considered the expression of rural interests. It opened mocking the unitarian leaders and their missions to Europe in search for ideas and resources: while the author was about to sail to Europe - as they did, he cancelled his trip, and he instead dedicated to “rural and peasant work, while at the same time observing the way in which rural activities are governed”.¹¹ The experience convinced him about the necessity to reform rural customs and guarantee rural justice, as the countryside enclosed the main wealth of the province, and it was the “powerful lever” sustaining the “*patria*” during the Revolution. Buenos Aires was not an isolated case because “in every time and in every nation, the countryside has been the city’s most precious resource”, a belief that the author proves with examples spanning from Ancient Roman history to the modern agricultural development of England and the United States. History, however, did not offer ready-made lessons, and it was necessary to adapt moral general principles of government to Buenos Aires “malice and corruption”.¹²

The reform he proposed resonates with the model of agrarian republicanism we encountered in the writings of Pedro A. García and Rosas’ *memorias*: the necessity of order and the security of property, rules for land appropriation and distribution favouring the productive exploitation of natural resources, the role of the state to counter the accumulation of unproductive lands and provide order and justice. To do so, the “*joven Ramirez*” advocated for a strong government that reunited the legislative and the executive power. While the division of powers was preferable, the local population

¹⁰ Fradkin and Gelman, *op. cit.*, 147. The authors stress that while Rosas was an important political character, other prominent *hacendados* disputed his power and influence over rural politics.

¹¹ *Reforma de campaña*, III. I thank María Elena Barral for providing me with a copy of this work.

¹² *Ivi*, 13.

was not politically adult, and it should be guided with a firm hand during their civilisation. Given that the countryside offered the means of subsistence to the city, “as it is superior, it must be its legislator”.¹³ The implication is that the author believed that a strong government guided by experts in rural matters, the *hacendados*, would secure a bright future for the city and its countryside.

The *feliz experiencia* during the first years of Rodríguez government had been based on the harmony between urban and rural interests, and García tried to recreate this situation, showing that the government had a great interest in frontier security and asking an important *hacendado* to guide state policy on the matter. This turn would mark a distance with the disastrous aggressive frontier policy of the past years. The Minister identified in Rosas the right man to regain the support of both wealthy landholders and rural population. It does not seem that the two had connections before 1825. Anyhow, they soon developed a relationship of friendship and esteem, as manifested by their correspondence.¹⁴

The November 1825 instructions represent the direct link between García’s agrarian republicanism and Rosas, an exponent of the vigorous rural elites that gradually strengthened its influence over local politics since the last decade of the previous century. The document expressed old Bourbon aspirations of political and commercial alliance with Native groups, integrated by the years-long practical experience on indigenous diplomacy gained by García and Buenos Aires authorities. The new policy’s goal was a durable peace, and it was based on a series of mutual obligations, the exchange of prisoners and the regulation of interethnic trade and commercial society. First, interethnic trade was allowed in Tandil and two more guards. There, the Creole government would build warehouses for Native goods, and the price of furs, a crucial Native good, was set at a convenient price for the sellers. Second, the instructions regulated Native labour and settlement in Creole lands: those who wished to move had to request permission from a “protector *hacendado*” (*Patrón*), who was then in charge of the indigenous families living in his *estancia*, and “will also care for them as for poor children and provide for their welfare”. Third, Creole unilateral land appropriation following Tandil establishment was recognised, and Rosas was authorised to compensate “the true owners of the lands of Volcán, Tandil, Arroyo Azul y Tapalquén”.¹⁵

¹³ *Ivi*, 14. In the current situation, Buenos Aires has more political power than its surrounding countryside. According to the 1821 electoral law, the city designated twelve representatives, while the countryside had eleven.

¹⁴ Rosas usually referred to García calling him ‘my good friend’, and he asked the Minister to visit his wife, doña Manuela, on his behalf when the Commissioner was away from the city. See Nicolau, *Correspondencia inédita*. Actually, it is possible that Rosas and García knew each other, as the Minister had attended the University of Chuquisaca with Tomás de Anchorena.

¹⁵ ‘Instrucciones que deberán [...] Coronel d. Juan Manuel Rosas en la Comisión [...] confiado por el Gob.no’. AHPBA, FI, doc. 3.

The instructions institutionalised a common diplomatic practice: gift exchange. It was a fundamental ritual in interethnic relations, as it was impossible to negotiate with the *caciques* without distributing gifts. The ritual was meant to sustain and consolidate a relationship, whereas failing to comply with this obligation might endanger the possibility of interethnic communication. While the symbolic meaning was paramount, the Natives also obtained trading goods in the exchange, and they often sought to exploit this practice.¹⁶ The instructions standardised gift exchange, an innovation which would be the basis of the successful frontier policy during the years of the *rosismo* (1829-1852),¹⁷ as that ritual exchange should be renewed every six months or every year at the anniversary of the peace treaty to support Natives “in their needs” and remember them “government generosity”.

When Rosas received the orders, he sent his emissaries to the *caciques Pampas* and *Tehuelchús*, appointing some Natives that were living and working in his *estancia* Los Cerrillos.¹⁸ The *lenguaraz* (interpreter) Manuel Baldebenito, his wife and an indigenous woman called Tadea were crucial in convincing the *cacique* to reunite in Tandil and listen to Creoles offer. They received precise instructions regarding what to say to them.¹⁹ First, they should assure them about Creole good intentions: Buenos Aires wished to sign treaties “not for a year, not for two, but for a lifetime”, the government would comply with what would be agreed, and the emissaries were referring the words of the government “word by word”, speaking with clarity as not to deceive them.

Regarding the new frontier, Rosas clarified that Tandil would not be destroyed because its establishment costed a lot, and the *pueblos* that participated in the enterprise would rebel.²⁰ However, the Natives that owned the surrounding land would be compensated. The new guards would set the boundaries between Creole and Native lands forever, turning into stable trade hubs equipped with warehouses for interethnic trade. He made clear that Creole *estancias* would not surpass the frontier, contrary to what had happened in the past. Finally, Rosas’ instructions reproduced the government’s ones, but with some additions proving his knowledge of Native customs. For instance, during the yearly exchange ceremony, the *caciques* had to offer Creole authorities a *quillago* (guanaco skin cape), “as a sign of the preservation of friendship”. Indeed, reciprocity structured symbolic gift exchange, which was, therefore, bilateral.

¹⁶ Since the beginning of the negotiations with sovereign Native groups during the late colonial times, Natives had tried to manipulate the definition of *caciques* to obtain more gifts, while Spanish and Creole authorities had to evaluate the status of petitioners carefully. Rosas expressed the need to establish fixed rules to designate who was a *cacique* and who was not. See Juan Manuel de Rosas to Julian Segundo de Agüero. Buenos Aires, 28 April 1826. AHPBA, FI, doc. 28.

¹⁷ Ratto, ‘Una experiencia fronteriza exitosa’.

¹⁸ Rosas, ‘Memoria (1828)’, 302.

¹⁹ ‘Instrucciones por las quales deberá arreglarse Manuel Baldebenito para hablar á los Casiques’. AHPBA, FI, doc 4.

²⁰ During unsuccessful negotiations the year before, the Oyuela brothers promised the destruction of the fort to *caciques*.

It was not easy to convince the *caciques* about the government “good faith”, but eventually, an influential cacique, Chanil, went to Los Cerrillos, representing the main *caciques Pampas* and all the *Tehuelchús*. Rosas reported that the negotiations were difficult and lengthy, as winning over Native resentment against the Creoles. However, they were finally successful thanks to “my former acquaintances and the esteem I had among them”.²¹ The *negocio pacífico* was central in Las Heras-García agenda, and Rosas reported to the Minister in February on the negotiations. Even if the news about the *Ley de Capitalización* was endangering the existence of the provincial government, García was worried about the state of frontier diplomacy. Rosas confirmed Native willingness to establish an alliance with the Creoles, signalled, in his opinion, by the “strong objections to the government’s proposals” during the negotiations.²² If they were not interested in peace, they would not put much effort into negotiating it. His only recommendation for a successful outcome was to comply with what was proposed and continue entrusting the negotiations to a single individual.

The negotiations were finally successful, but Rosas referents in Buenos Aires changed: the provincial government was suppressed and replaced with the Rivadavia-led national executive. Replying to a detailed report on the state of the negotiations, Rivadavia approved “in all parts” the conditions agreed between Rosas and the *caciques* and invite him to continue his mission “until a settlement is reached which [...] will secure for ever the mutual peace and security of lives and property in the territory of the province”.²³ Minister Agüero approved the expenses incurred by Rosas during the negotiations (9,607 pesos and two reales), confirmed that they would be reimbursed and permitted him to spend the necessary sums without asking for government approval, but bearing in mind that public revenues were limited. As the government would reimburse him later, the fact that Rosas was an affluent *hacendado* was a necessary condition for successful negotiations, as the dire state of the Treasury forced him to use his capital for public purposes.

Having received national government approval, the Commissioner continued his work and prepared a provisional budget for the next expenses. The document also reveals his vision about the long-term goals of the *negocio* and his diplomatic strategy.²⁴ The frontier trade warehouses should be built soon and filled with goods: the Natives “shall see” that Creoles were working to comply with their obligations. Rosas also reported the miserable state in which the *Pampas* and the *Tehuelchús* were laying. They lived in the “greater indigence”, “they lack everything”, and were forced to steal not to die of hunger. Creole gifts were not only symbolic exchange but also fundamental to their subsistence,

²¹ Rosas, ‘Memoria (1828)’, 303.

²² Juan Manuel de Rosas to Manuel J. García. Los Cerrillos, 8 February 1826. See Nicolau, *Correspondencia*, 15.

²³ Julian Segundo de Agüero to Juan Manuel de Rosas. Buenos Aires, 18 April 1826. AHPBA, FI, doc 23.

²⁴ Juan Manuel de Rosas to Julian Segundo de Agüero. Buenos Aires, 28 April 1826. AHPBA, FI, doc. 29.

as the period between 1827 and 1832 was to be known as the “Great Drought”.²⁵ The Commissioner highlighted that helping them would increase their dependence on Creole and their obligation toward them, in addition to permitting them to resist the raids of *Ranquelches* and “Chileans”.²⁶ The government should continue supporting his missions, as it was lengthy. In fact, “trust must be earned in degrees”. At first, “the useful industry will replace the habit of stealing”. With passing of time, “a better occupation than that of war” and the “the praises of society” would seduce indigenous people to abandon their semi-nomad lifestyle. Present spending for gifts would be repaid in the future through the indigenous inclusion into Creole commercial society. Indeed, the prospected costs of the *negocio* were considerable (74,200 pesos).

Notwithstanding the national government assurances, Rosas would never receive any reply to his requests. Meanwhile, the bands of the Pincheira brothers, allied with *Ranquelches* and the *Pampas* who did not enter the *negocio pacífico*, raided Buenos Aires *estancias*, especially Rosas’ ones.²⁷ The national government’s reaction to the renewed phase of frontier violence is very important for our overall argument: Rivadavia appointed Federico Rauch, a German general of the Hussars regiment, to lead punitive expeditions to *Pampas* and *Ranquel tolderías*. This violent response resonated with Rodríguez’s attitude, but there was a significant difference: Rauch expeditions included the *indios amigos* that had, in the meanwhile, entered the *negocio pacífico*. The *baqueano* Molina and the Native warriors accompanied Creole forces, guiding them to the enemies’ *tolderías* in indigenous land. It was the first time that Creoles carried on successful military expeditions in Native territory, and it was possible only thanks to the participation of the warriors of the *caciques Tehuelchús* Negro, Tetruel and Chanil and the *Pampas* Catriel, Califao, Pichiloncoy and Antuan.²⁸

The national government pursued an aggressive frontier policy inspired by their liberal ideas and political circumstances. Ideologically, liberal agrarian republicanism did not include indigenous participation, as Rivadavia did not grant any resource to the *negocio pacífico* that stopped in the winter of 1826.²⁹ Politically, they wished to harm the federal faction and Buenos Aires landholders,

²⁵ The August 1826 correspondence between Rosas and the Commander of Tandil, Ramón Estomba, details the difficulty in provisioning the Natives with meat because of the drought and the war. At the same time, Rosas made clear the crucial importance of assisting them. AHPBA, FI, doc. 47 and 48.

²⁶ In Chapter 5 we detailed the existence of extensive Native trade circuits connecting the Arauco-Pampean area. Unfortunately, studies on the impact of the wars on Native long-distance trade are still lacking. It is possible that the *Pampas* and *Tehuelchús* suffered from a combination of trade disruption, enemies’ raids, and severe drought.

²⁷ Ratto, *La frontera bonaerense*, 50-53; Juan Manuel de Rosas to Julian Segundo de Agüero. Buenos Aires, 31 August 1826. AHPBA, FI, doc 37. Rosas’ *estancias* may have been especially targeted because of his role in negotiating interethnic peace.

²⁸ Rosas, ‘Memoria (1828)’, 305. Rosas reports that eighteen *caciques* and 600 warriors participated in the expedition against the Pincheiras.

²⁹ In the same period, the first European migrants contracted by the government arrived in the city.

as Rosas was increasingly becoming a central political figure. Therefore, they exploited the indigenous allies won by him to carry on a successful violent frontier policy. However, it was just a military alliance, as the establishment of the annual gift exchange, the construction of trade warehouses or a new regulation on frontier trade did not follow it. The expeditions were successful, but peace would not have lasted long without Rosas maintaining friendly relations with the *Pampas* and the *Tehuelchús*.³⁰

Rosas's resentment over the unfolding political situation is expressed in a letter to Manuel J. García in January 1827. While happy for the successful outcome of the expeditions, he was deluded to see that

as the government of the province prepared the land and sown it with so much skill and success, taking care of the sowing until the fruit was obtained and out of all peril, it has been ordered that someone else reaped it.³¹

He would not accept other official duties from the national government, which asked him to integrate an immigration commission. However, he was privately continuing the *negocio pacífico*, as he mentions in the 1828 *memoria*.³² He knew very well about the necessity not to stop gift exchange so as not to endanger Native trust in Creole “*buena fe*”, and he knew as well that he was building a political capital that could be crucial in the future, as the federal faction was consolidating in opposition to the unitarians. However, this decision was not the result of an individual political strategy. In the same letter, Rosas communicated García that he wanted to see him to discuss about “our peaceful work (*obra pacífica*) and its results” and he paid homage to him as the “chief in this matter”.³³ This allusion points to García being the grey eminence behind the *negocio pacífico* while the national government was not supporting it. Rosas was inserted into a thick network of social relations, and some crucial hubs of influence and power (García and the Anchorena brothers for instance) permitted to progressively climb local political hierarchies.³⁴

³⁰ Literature has yet to appreciate the centrality of this moment since frontier policy and the possibility of an interethnic frontier society had not been moved at the centre of Buenos Aires political factionalism. Ratto discovered and detailed the importance of the *negocio pacífico*, but it did not consider it a distinct feature of federal politics in contrast with the unitarians. See Ratto, *Una experiencia fronteriza exitosa*. The decision to appoint Rauch is considered a simple reaction to a new wave of raids against Creole *estancias*. See Ratto, *La frontera bonaerense*, 51. On the contrary, Zubizarreta reflected on the two frontier strategies, trying to detect whether they differed or not, and successfully countered the traditional claim about the unitarian neglect of frontier issues. However, he failed to include a nuanced understanding of frontier diplomacy in his arguments, thus minimising the difference between the successful federal policy and the unitarian one. See Zubizarreta, ‘Rauch versus Rosas’.

³¹ Juan Manuel de Rosas to Manuel J. García. Los Cerrillos, 27 January 1827. See Nicolau, *Correspondencia*, 16.

³² Rosas, ‘Memoria (1828)’, 306.

³³ Juan Manuel de Rosas to Manuel J. García. Los Cerrillos, 27 January 1827. See Nicolau, *Correspondencia*, 16.

³⁴ Reguera, *El mundo relacional*

As soon as Vicente López y Planes replaced Rivadavia as President of the United Provinces in July 1827 and a federal provincial government was about to be created, Rosas wrote to the new executive asking for instructions. He made clear that while he believed that the national government was not interested in the continuation of the *negocio pacífico*, he decided “not to express his belief to the *Indios*”.³⁵ Now, he wanted to know if his mission should continue. The following day, the national executive confirmed his appointment and promoted him General Commander of the Countryside. The re-established provincial government of Manuel Dorrego fully supported interethnic diplomacy and rural politics, allocating massive resources for the new line in October 1827 and sanctioning a new provincial Emphyteusis Law in April 1828.

2. Frontier Advancement and Emphyteusis in the *Sala de Representantes*

The war of opinions against the unitarians, which accompanied the inauguration of the Dorrego government in 1829, included recrimination for their neglect of frontier issues.³⁶ In October, the executive presented the project and the budget for the establishment of the new frontier guards to the *Sala de Representantes*.³⁷ Rosas was the author of the plan, which included the foundation of a guard (Fortaleza Protectora Argentina) and a port in Bahía Blanca, as well as three more guards (Laguna Blanca, Cruz de la Guerra and Potroso). The provisional cost was almost 500,000 pesos, and a new tax on every head of livestock (cattle and horses) in the *estancias* of the province would help raise the necessary funds. Presenting the project, Dorrego highlighted that it was possible to build a new line thanks to the military victories against the Natives and the peaceful negotiations, stressing the effectiveness of a frontier policy that included both approaches, as Pedro A. García had first suggested. The new frontier should be secured as urban capitals needed new territories to exploit and Creole geographical knowledge had permitted to determine the best spots for the new guards. Finally, creating a new port was needed to face possible blockades of Buenos Aires, as it was currently happening during the Brazilian War.

The parliamentary discussion took place the following month, and the supporters of the project prominently recurred to the tropes of federal agrarian republicanism. General Ángel Pacheco was the first speaker, stressing that the “*gremio de hacendados*” was petitioning for frontier expansion for thirty years, when rural production was not developed yet. Now that “the livestock industry

³⁵ Juan Manuel de Rosas to Vicente López y Planes. Buenos Aires, 1 August 1827. AHPBA, FI, doc 40.

³⁶ Dorrego denounced the misgovernment of the national executive to the re-established *Sala de Representantes* on 24 September 1827. The unitarians immediately published an extensive response to it, stressing that Native raids prevented the national government from realising the prospected frontier advancement. Both documents are reproduced in Bagú, *El plan económico*, doc. 161 and 163.

³⁷ *Diario de sesiones*, n. 25, 6 October 1827.

constitutes the opulence of the country: is it not a necessity to encourage it?”. Southern lands were as good as the ones in the Banda Oriental, given their rich water resources, and unproductive urban capitals could value this territory and make it profitable. Then he sketched the agrarian utopia resulting from appropriation and productive development of new lands, as it was possible to “providing land for the fatigued farmer”, “populating these deserts with rural settlements” and “see them bushy in fruit trees and other groves”.³⁸

The Natives were part of the new productive landscape, and Pacheco stressed the utility of attracting them to Creole society so that “associated with our customs mitigate their barbaric ones”.³⁹ Additionally, the new line would favour better knowledge of Patagonian territory and trade with the flourishing Native societies inhabiting those lands. Increasing commercial contacts with the Native circuits of commerce would allow Buenos Aires to economically fight the Pincheira brothers, which were now Patagonia main commercial partners and were supposedly establishing a settlement in the Pampas.

The Minister of Government Manuel Moreno addressed then the Sala, providing finer intellectual arguments. Starting from an economic history of the Spanish Viceroyalty, he noted that the *pueblos* were founded on the “route that was made toward the mines”.⁴⁰ Because of that, Spaniards neglected the colonisation of the surrounding territories, which significantly harmed the province of Buenos Aires, which now lacked the necessary territory to welcome the population it deserved. However, the province had the opportunity for a “peaceful acquisition, not by conquest, of a vast amount of territory”, a project worthy of an “enlightened *pueblo*”, who do not resort to “injustice schemes and criminal excesses” to increase the territory under control. The republican ideology of Buenos Aires, in line with Enlightenment thought, refused the right of conquest as a legitimate title for appropriating new land. Labour was instead the legitimate title Buenos Aires had for occupying southern lands. In fact, that territory was “possessed by no one” and “in abandonment”, and Creole were “the only ones capable of cultivating it and giving it value, which is the only origin of ownership”.⁴¹

The Minister of War Marcos Balcarce drew upon his family and personal experience on frontier matters. He was the son of Francisco Balcarce, renewed Commander of the frontier whose leadership provided rural inhabitants peace, order and prosperity. He mentioned the impressive number of documents on the matter held in the “frontier general archive”. This archival knowledge and his

³⁸ *Diario de sesiones*, n. 37, 7 November 1827, 2.

³⁹ *Ivi*, 3.

⁴⁰ *Ivi*, 6.

⁴¹ *Ivi*, 8.

practical experience suggested that the moment for setting and securing a new frontier was appropriate. He presented military arguments on the necessity of a new defensive system in which Native allied groups would play a prominent role. Balcarce concluded by remembering the sacrifices of frontier settlers: after they resisted indigenous raids, they fought wealthy individuals' attempts to appropriate frontier lands. It was mandatory to prevent this disgrace from happening again through legislation favouring settlers.⁴²

If everyone agreed on the merit of the project, some dissonant voices expressed their opposition. The federal faction was not a homogeneous block commanded by the *hacendados* interest group. The war with Brazil was absorbing financial and human resources, and, in general, the province lacked the necessary population to colonise the new territory, some representatives believed. Manuel H. Aguirre asked for more details about the colonisation of the new guards. Should it be carried on by regular troops or militias? Was it planned to distribute land to the soldiers? Balcarce did not offer a straightforward reply but pointed at the necessity of waiting for the peace in the countryside to bring its fruits. "The population is the work of time, it is the work of tranquillity and peace with the savage *indios*", the Minister believed.⁴³ The necessity was to military advance the frontier and organise an effective defensive system. This way, settlers would move to the new guards, and militiamen would petition for frontier land. The Minister proposed distributing land to the veterans as a prize for their service, and the possibility of offering land to landless rural families was discussed. Félix Alzaga concisely expressed the shared attitude toward the vagrant rural population, asking the other representatives,

Is there anyone who possesses four leagues in the province who does not have within their land a portion of intrusive families that are harmful to them, and that are being tolerated there out of a sort of compassion and nothing more, because they have nowhere else to go? And can all these families not be sent to these points, coaxing them and even compelling them?⁴⁴

Additionally, Juan José Viamonte raised doubts about the alliance with the Natives, as experience thought that "there can be no security with this kind of man".⁴⁵ Moreno's reply expressed, in a nutshell, the goals of the federal frontier diplomacy, an orientation shaped by local ideas and foreign examples.

⁴² While Balcarce accused Spaniards of being responsible for these abuses, Creole did the same. Manuel Obligado was a deputy and was present at the reunion.

⁴³ *Diario de sesiones*, n. 38, 8 November 1827, 6.

⁴⁴ *Ivi*, 15.

⁴⁵ *Ivi*, 8.

It is a very important point of policy in a country that has borders with savages, to know the moment when these borders can be advanced, taking from the savages all the portion that can be taken, to make it useful to mankind in the hands of civilised men who cultivate the land, which is the true title, because nature has destined it to men for this; and thus it is not true that the lands belong to the *Indios*; they belong to the first who occupies them, and who cultivates them. We were also born in the territory, and as more civilised and more cultivators we have better titles and are in a better position to possess them than they are, whose customs and lack of civilisation and culture put them outside the sphere in which the right of property can be found.⁴⁶

The alliance with Native groups was instrumental to the goal of land appropriation, based on the labour theory of property and on the idea that European commercial society was the highest form of human society, responding to the canons of modern civilization. Valuing natural resources through labour and the resulting property right on land were the yardsticks of modern commercial society and civilisation, the *Sala* believed. Land appropriation was configured almost as a duty of “civilised” men, as stripping it from the control of unproductive indigenous labour was equalled to “making it useful to humankind”. Natives were welcomed in Creole commercial society as long as they conformed with the civilised standard of a rural occupation and permanent settlements.

Moreno recurred to the United States, where he resided some years, to argue in favour of frontier peaceful relations. North American frontier policy was based on the principle according to which “the prudent use of force to contain the ferocity of these savages, is taking advantage of the triumphs achieved over them, to seize the lands they do not cultivate, and add them to the civilised part”.⁴⁷ Appropriation can be pursued through war or peace treaties, but advancing frontier guards was necessary to defend the conquered land, populate it and later establish settlements and towns. If military conquest was not a legitimate title of possession, Moreno believed that it was a legitimate way to expand the territory under the jurisdiction of a civilised state whose duty was to populate the land, value it and render it economically productive and exploitable.

The following day, the representatives approved the extraordinary contribution to finance the new line. While some dissonant voices emerged, the assembly agreed that the *hacendados* should provide the needed revenues. It was no novelty, as since the establishment of the *Ramo de Guerra* in the 1750s, revenues for frontier defence had been collected by taxing rural wealth. Finally, the project

⁴⁶ *Ivi*, 8-9.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*.

was approved, and Rosas continued to work for the foundation of Bahía Blanca and the advancement of frontier guards, confident of the government's support.

The federal executive was really convinced to populate the frontier with settlers, and Rosas coincided with the idea. At the very end of the debate, Balcarce repeated his ideas on protecting from abuses and favouring frontier settlers, as they were the most useful citizens. In the draft of a letter, the Commander of the Countryside noted that "it is highly desirable to provide incentives to attract people to the new guards".⁴⁸ A regulation offering land and assistance for starting rural exploitation should be published in every rural parish, addressing poor rural families, and soldiers and militiamen should be offered the same opportunity.

Rosas and Balcarce's desires were partially backed by law. A reasonable limit was set for new land petitions in the recently acquired territory.⁴⁹ In January, Tomás Anchorena presented a bill on frontier land distribution to soldiers and militiamen.⁵⁰ It proposed to reserve these lands for who had contributed to the establishment of the new settlements, exempt them from the emphyteusis canon for forty years and grant them the right of preference for buying the land at the end of the period. However, the assembly approved a more general regulation for distributing *solares* and *chacras* in the new guards.⁵¹ The jurisdiction over land distribution was conferred to the Commander of each guard. Albeit the law did not establish a preferential treatment for frontier settlers, commanders would, in theory, favour settlers rather than urban speculators.

After approving the advancement of the frontier, the *Sala* discussed a new provincial emphyteusis law. The general congress had sanctioned national legislation in 1826, but the re-establishment of provincial institutions called for a new provincial law. The debate lasted one month, proving the centrality of the issue.⁵² Among the project's supporters, Felipe Senillosa and the Anchorena brothers were among the strenuous ones, and they were also the people closer to Rosas. The initial points of the debate strongly echoed the discussion that took place two years earlier: some deputies (Viamonte, Valle) complained about the duration of the emphyteutic contract (10 years), which they considered too short to start a profitable, productive activity in an insecure territory. Then, some participants argued against the taxation, as the law set the annual canon at 2% of land value (which was set at

⁴⁸ Juan Manuel de Rosas to a Minister (draft). Buenos Aires, 10 September 1827. AHPBA, FI, doc 95.

⁴⁹ 'Decreto sobre la denuncia de terrenos en la nueva línea de frontera', 26 November 1827. See Muzlera. *Recopilacion de leyes, decretos y resoluciones*, 73-74. The limit was twelve square leagues (32.400 he).

⁵⁰ *Diario de sesiones*, n. 57, 3 January 1828, 3-4.

⁵¹ 'Decreto designando en los Fuertes de la nueva línea de frontera, el terreno para las poblaciones y tierras de pan-llevar', 28 April 1828. See Muzlera, *op. cit.*, 78.

⁵² The discussion lasted ten days of parliamentary works, from 22 January 1828 to 16 February 1828.

3,000 pesos per square league in the north of the Río Salado and 2,000 pesos per league in the South). After ten years, the *Sala* would set a new canon.

However, the project soon departed from the model of the national emphyteusis. Viamonte proposed the addition of a new article, namely, the obligation to populate the land within eight months, under penalty of losing emphyteutic rights. According to him, “the article proposes to provide revenue to the state, but very particularly to increase the population, [...] because this is what gives the country its real wealth”.⁵³ The proposal gave rise to an intense debate around the possibilities and limits of state intervention in the economy.

The first reactions were favourable, provided that the deadline for settlement was extended and a more precise definition of what it meant to populate the land productively was set. However, deputy Benites expressed strong opposition to the article, as “it is contrary to the most general principles of political economy”.⁵⁴ Such significant state intervention in economic regulation would negatively distort the natural course of economic laws. At the same time, from a more practical point of view, he raised doubts about the ability of landless families to have the knowledge and capital necessary to create productive estates. Furthermore, he questioned the existence of the speculative capitalists since, in his opinion, anyone who invested a sum to pay the emphyteutic rent would necessarily put the land into production. His arguments resonated ideas that opposed the Sagasti reform back in the 1780s, connecting economic growth with large property and minimum state intervention in economic matters.

Benites’ intervention sparked heated emotions and discussion. Although all speeches were against his market fundamentalism, there were still several knots to untie regarding the best way the law could stimulate the rural population and productive development. For example, the *Sala* was divided between those who thought that promoting small property would provide productive employment to idle families in the city and the vagabonds of the countryside and those who did not believe that only the obligation to settle would induce these people to abandon their way of life. Deputy Costa summed up the crux of the matter well when he exclaimed, “here it is a question of looking for a way of compelling settlement to be promoted, [...] the means to do it is what we are looking for”.⁵⁵ Additionally, the opportunity to use coercion to stimulate a productive population was never

⁵³ *Diario de sesiones*, n. 69, 30 January 1828, 22.

⁵⁴ *Diario de sesiones*, n. 70, 31 January 1828, 11.

⁵⁵ *Diario de sesiones*, n. 71, 7 February 1828, 10.

discussed. Everyone knew too well that rural masses were not docile subjects at the government's disposal, and violent conscription would be a danger to rural social order and stability.

Thus, Tomás Anchorena explained the reasons that had led the government to opt for emphyteusis and why, given the nature of this contract, it was legitimate to impose rules to promote the production of public lands. Emphyteusis had a dual objective: increase fiscal revenues and population development. For the first goal to be permanent, the lands needed to become productive so that their value would increase and, consequently, the taxes collected from the annual canon. According to him, the law always has the power to ensure that recipients fulfil the contract stipulated with the state; the nature of the emphyteusis contract implies “that the land be improved, whether for cultivation, by cultivating it, or for husbandry, by populating it with cattle; and the law has the power and authority to see that these purposes are not evaded or circumvented”.⁵⁶ For these reasons, he believed, Viamonte proposed an entirely legitimate clause; in fact, it was necessary to “progress more on this point” to encourage population growth further.

That is why he proposed the *Sala* a new bill with more precise indications regarding the conditions for settlement in emphyteutic lands. It was an addition to the original project. He referred to these conditions as “*trabas*”. However, he did not consider them obstacles to the progress of the countryside but rather guarantees to ensure compliance with the contract between the state and the recipients. The deputies welcomed the proposal, and articles regarding the timing for settlement and necessary cattle heads were approved relatively quickly. The most heated debates revolved around fixing a limit to land accumulation (twelve square leagues, 32,400 he) and excluding foreigners from accessing emphyteutic lands.

Alerting the assembly on the risks of land appropriation, deputy García de Zúñiga pointed out that the law did not prohibit the transfer of emphyteusis rights, thus permitting the accumulation of more than twelve square leagues. Senillosa provided a precise response on this point, noting that the law limited the extent of land that could be denounced but could not limit individual accumulation, as this would infringe upon individual initiative and industry. In fact, “why should an individual be deprived of purchasing with the sweat of his labour, and by what right can he be forbidden to progress in his industry? He was also concerned that emphyteutas were not in a decidedly disadvantageous position compared to landowners because then no one would want emphyteutic lands, to the detriment of the goal of increasing the province's population.

⁵⁶ *Ivi*, 15.

In two lengthy speeches, Anchorena reiterated the dangers of land accumulation, reflecting on the relationship between the political system and the distribution of property. If there had not been a limit placed on individual ownership of new lands, there would have been a risk that in the future, wealthy urban merchants would direct their investments to the countryside, hoarding vast expanses of land and thus becoming “lords of the country”. In this way, the newly established “liberal system” would give way to an aristocratic and then monarchic one, annihilating the sacrifices of the revolutionary wars. Anchorena, in fact, did not consider accumulation compatible with the republican system, a political system that in Buenos Aires was still based solely on “opinion”, while “reality and customs are not in harmony, they have to be moulded”. The law should try to transmit republican values to citizens.

Here, the tropes of federal agrarian republicanism find a clear expression. The whole debate revolved around increasing the local productive population and enriching the state through productive development. This point of contention introduced an additional point already discussed in Pedro A. García’s writings: the role of legislation in shaping republican customs – in this case, economic productive customs. It was a desire rooted in Enlightened economic reformism, widely expressed by local economic elites since colonial times, translated from Filangieri to García and finally Tomás Anchorena, which argued in favour of the transformative role of legislation during a parliamentary assembly that was indeed crafting new laws for Buenos Aires countryside.⁵⁷ The shared goal of institutionalising a flourishing commercial society is the fundamental concept that bridges Enlightenment and republican thought.

The article was finally approved, but multiple criticisms were raised. Among the critical voices, it is worth mentioning that Senillosa was the deputy who fought the most against this article. Again, the existence of the Buenos Aires landholding class as a homogenous entity with clear-cut interests is discarded. Even among Rosas’s closer supporters, opinions diverged regarding the best ways to reach the desired and shared goal of economic prosperity through commercial society. Additionally, Tomás Anchorena and his brothers Juan José and Nicolás, were among the wealthiest merchants in the city in 1828 and had been directing their attention to rural investments for some years, in part thanks to the advice of their cousin Juan Manuel. Given their political and economic trajectory, the defence of the incompatibility between great fortunes and the republican system was probably a way to limit the

⁵⁷ Pedro de Angelis revealed the connection between Anchorena and García in the prologue of the diary to the Sierra Ventana: “We have taken these notes from an autographic notebook, which has been sent to us by Dr. Tomás Manuel de Anchorena, to whom those who are interested in the good name of Colonel García should be grateful for the preservation of these writings with which we present him to the public esteem”. García, *Diario expedición 1822*, VII. The “autographic notebook” is probably the same source through which we reconstructed García’s activities in Chapter 4.

possibility of accumulation, thus maintaining political and economic power in the hands of the families that already formed the local economic elite.

Excluding foreigners from the distribution of emphyteusis went in the same direction, as local merchant elites were aware of the capital that the British had at their disposal. Their father, Juan Esteban de Anchorena, had tried to defend local economic interests against foreign traders since the first years that followed the May Revolution. The article would establish a severe restriction on foreigners' access to emphyteutic lands: they could petition for it only if they resided in the province and married to "a woman born and bred in the territory of this Republic".⁵⁸ At the beginning of the debate, José María Roxas y Patrón, Minister of Finance, expressed firm opposition to the article on behalf of the government, as it opposed attempts to attract foreign capital and labour and risked breaking the terms of the Trade Treaty signed with Great Britain in 1825. The central point of the debate was whether to promote only agricultural colonisation by citizens of the United Provinces or also to admit foreigners to enjoy these lands. This dividing issue between unitarian and federal agrarianism was now discussed in the *Sala de Representantes*.

One argument referred to the moral superiority or not of foreigners. Some deputies emphasized the benefits of a foreign population coming from economically more advanced European countries, which was more accustomed to labour and individual economic initiative than local workers, upon whom the negative influence of Spanish domination and American geography exerted significant pressure (Aguirre, Wright, Alzaga, Costa). The supporters of Anchorena, on the other hand, denied this moral superiority and turned the argument upside down, describing how the countryside had become more insecure due to the large number of foreigners (Arana, Grela). In fact, those who arrived in Buenos Aires were the lowest and most abject classes of European peoples, "the most immoral, the most vicious and the most corrupt people".⁵⁹

Another problem concerned frontier lands. Arana pointed out the contradiction between the treaty with Great Britain (which excluded British citizens from military service) and the fact that frontier landowners and emphyteutas had the duty to defend the frontier from Native invasions.⁶⁰ Anchorena himself emphasized that his proposal only referred to the new lands recently incorporated into the province thanks to the blood shed by the "sons of the country" and that the inability to enjoy emphyteusis did not prevent foreigners from buying or renting other lands, as well as being hired as wage labourers. However, after three days of intense debate, the article was rejected, and the new

⁵⁸ *Diario de sesiones*, n. 71, 7 February 1828, 17.

⁵⁹ *Diario de sesiones*, n. 74, 14 February 1828, 19.

⁶⁰ *Ivi*, 6.

emphyteusis law was published in the Official Gazette. A closer look at this debate confirmed the fact that while agrarian republicanism was a shared political and economic ideology that represented and clustered local economic interests, it did not translate into unconditional support for the model of federal republican agrarianism proposed by the government and the elite faction closer to Rosas.

3. Rosas, the Frontier and the 1829 Rural Uprising

Sanctioning a provincial emphyteusis law was not a small achievement. As we detailed during this study, the elites of the Río de la Plata were quite unresponsive to the state call for rationalization of the land tenancy system since the late colonial time. To be fair, almost everyone shared this reformistic urgency, but the heterogeneity of the interests at stake prevented a solution, and everyone opted for exploiting the existing legislation (or the lack of it). The 1824 attempt for a provincial emphyteusis law had failed, and only the suppression of the provincial powers had permitted the national assembly to act upon property rights. Therefore, the 1828 provincial emphyteusis law was an important achievement for the federal government.

However, successful frontier and agrarian policies were not enough to grant Governor Dorrego strong support and dissipate the nurturing tensions in the city and countryside. The unitarian opposition was the staunchest critic of the government. As mentioned, the federals inaugurated the war of opinions, which publicly denounced the mismanagement of the unitarian national government a few days after assuming power and continued throughout the year. In winter, the freedom of the press was restricted. As they were not a homogenous ideological bloc, opposition to Dorrego was growing. Even if he was not participating in urban politics, Rosas was considered a better candidate to lead the federal faction.⁶¹ Tensions between the Governor and the Commander manifested, and the latter renounced to his appointment, only to retrace his steps after the reassurance of the government's support for his management of the frontier advancement and the *negocio pacífico*.

The war against Brazil worsened the situation, and the peace treaty signed in November precipitated it. When the army returned to Buenos Aires from the Banda Oriental, the unitarian general Juan Lavalle organised a coup on 1 December 1828, took the power, and executed Dorrego. Notwithstanding the turbulent local political life following 1810, it was an unprecedented event and the province plunged into the chaos of civil war.

⁶¹ Fradkin and Gelman, *op. cit.*, 175.

While the city supported the new unitarian executive, the rural masses erupted in “the largest and most violent rural uprising in the province of Buenos Aires since the beginning of the revolutionary cycle”.⁶² The civil war following the coup permitted to “reunite and channel” pre-existing local disputes generated by the pressure of military conscription, the state attempts to govern the countryside and reform rural customs, the pattern of land appropriation and the problematic interethnic cohabitation promoted by the *negocio pacífico*. For a long time, Rosas was considered the active instigator of the rural rebellion, but González Bernaldo demonstrated the autonomy of the uprising from any direction from above: multiple actors joined the rebellion independently from each other, a decision moved by the tensions that crossed the rural world.⁶³

However, why did the 1829 rural rebellion have a prominent federal character? Again, the answer is not univocal, but the *federales* understood the prominent political relevance of rural masses earlier than unitarians and successfully politically co-opted them.⁶⁴ Ideological and conjunctural elements contributed to this, and the proceedings of Rosas as Commander of the Countryside consolidated an unintended consensus around him as the best character to solve long-time rural tensions and revindications. The following section provides source-based evidence of the good economic government of the countryside, interethnic relations and frontier advancement that contributed to the strengthening of rural support for Rosas. While he zealously served the state and the public goal of a new frontier, the unintended consequence of this activity was expanding his personal influence over rural masses and indigenous peoples.⁶⁵

Rosas deployed his managerial skills in the organization of the construction of the new frontier guards. He resided for nine months in Buenos Aires to form the budget and reunite the materials needed for the foundations, sketching meticulous instructions for each new fort commanders. Besides his personal qualities, the knowledge of the countryside accumulated since the mid of the previous century assisted him.⁶⁶ If Gelman interpreted Pedro A. García as a “officer looking for a state”, Rosas found a state fully supporting his diplomatic work, trying to provide him with the resources he asked for, at least until autumn 1828. The provincial government was in a dire economic situation; therefore, it did not directly finance the project but employed its “infrastructural power” to reunite the necessary

⁶² Raúl Fradkin, ‘Algo más que una borrachera’.

⁶³ González Bernaldo, ‘El levantamiento’.

⁶⁴ There were no elective affinities between the federals and the rural population, and clientelism is not a sufficient explanation. Unitarians, and especially Lavalle, recognised the need for a rural policy too late. See Zubizarreta, ‘La intrincada relación’.

⁶⁵ He had obviously a strong personal interest in expanding and securing the frontier, and probably this was the main motivation for his acceptance of the official duty.

⁶⁶ Juan Manuel de Rosas to Manuel Moreno, no date. AHPBA, FI, doc 88. He asked for the documents held in the Secretaría de Gobierno around frontier advancement, including everything García produced.

capital and labour.⁶⁷ It offered its developing governmental apparatus to mobilise the population through the actions of the police department, the judicial power and even parishes.⁶⁸

First, it was necessary to “communicate the owners and inhabitants” of the province that the time to establish the new frontier had finally come.⁶⁹ Thus, they had to “cooperate” to the operation if they wanted to be deemed “good sons of the Province”. The mobilization had a specific goal: finding enough cartwheels and workers. Rosas ordered the police commissioner Pedro Tobal to “comfortably gather all the *Alcaldes* and *Tenientes*” from Quilmes, Ensenada and Magdalena and asked them to “individually” communicate to cartwheel owners the government request of fleeing their transport. The state officials also had to circulate the employment conditions the state offered to work in the new line, as it was looking for day labourers, tillers, ranchos-makers, bricklayers, cobblestone cutters and carpenters.

Besides free wagers, state officials helped in the provision of forced labour. In August 1827, Rosas was authorised to dispose of the Brazilian war prisoners, who should be sent to Tandil and relocated from there where needed. The inspection found out that 192 prisoners could be used in the frontier.⁷⁰ Their labour was even more necessary as the harvest season was approaching: it was the period when more workforce was needed in the countryside, and it would have been difficult to find day labourers between December and January. Rosas knew the rhythms of rural work very well, and in October was asking to temporarily relocate the war prisoners occupied in public works to the frontier guards.⁷¹ In his 1828 report, he stressed his merits in establishing the new line “without causing significant discomfort to rural inhabitants at the time of harvesting.”⁷² Forced labour permitted reducing state demands over rural inhabitants, in an epoch when rural dissatisfaction and rebellion were increasing.⁷³

Native participation in Creole commercial society and the establishment of the new line was another crucial result of the *negocio pacífico*. Following the first diplomatic talks in late 1825, the groups of Catriel and Cachul moved to the *estancia* El Cerrillo. It was a welcomed development, as the proximity would “inspire them with a love of labour”. Indeed, the Natives participated in the rural economy:

⁶⁷ Mann, ‘The autonomous power of the state’.

⁶⁸ Barral and Fradkin, *op. cit.*

⁶⁹ Juan Manuel de Rosas to Pedro Tobal. Buenos Aires, 31 October 1827. AHPBA, FI, doc. 100.

⁷⁰ Juan Manuel de Rosas to Pedro Tobal. Buenos Aires, 7 January 1828. AHPBA, FI, doc 114.

⁷¹ Juan Manuel de Rosas to Unknown. Buenos Aires, 30 November 1827. AHPBA, FI, doc. 387.

⁷² Rosas, ‘Memoria (1828)’, 307.

⁷³ Fradkin, *La historia de una montonera*.

Men were hired in branding and herding cattle, other hunted otters for their hides, and there are also many who work in our brick furnaces. The women shear the sheep, and weave garments and ponchos. Undoubtedly our proximity and example will accustom them to feel new needs, and to employ lawful means of satisfying them.⁷⁴

Similarly, they engrossed the ranks of the workers, as attested by a *papeleta de conchabo* for Natives and Rosas correspondence.⁷⁵ More importantly, they collaborated in geographical surveys to spot the best locations for the new settlements and defended the new guards from the attacks of the Pincheira bands. In March 1828, the *cacique* Venancio Coñuepán accompanied the naturalist Alcide d'Orbigny to explore the surroundings of Bahía Blanca, finding the best spot to build the fort and sketching the layout to start the construction.⁷⁶ Coñuepán, a long-time ally of Bernardo O'Higgins, participated in the war against royalist forces in Chile and just arrived in Buenos Aires countryside to face the Pincheira brothers.⁷⁷ Rosas included him in the *negocio* and became a crucial ally in the years to follow.

The alliance between Native groups and the federals was so crucial that it fed the factional rhetorical confrontations after December 1828. The *Pampero*, the main newspaper supporting Lavalle's government, considered that "the fight is no longer between *federales* and *unitarios* [...] the fight is between *indios* and assassins and civilised and peaceful citizens".⁷⁸ In Santa Fe, where Rosas was reorganising the federal forces, a *pamphlet* appeared debunking the accusations and highlighting to what extent the allies of Creole forces were "*indios*, but not savages". In fact, they were just ethnically Native people, as "for many years they have been engaged in labour or military service and are perfectly accustomed to the life and customs of our peasants".⁷⁹ The Native allies fit the Creole model of interethnic society, where indigenous people entered into commercial society in a subordinate position, and they were expected to abandon their cultural traits and assume the habits of civilised and industrious republican citizens.⁸⁰

The unintended consequence of Rosas frontier policy was to incredibly strengthen his personal influence over the rural and Native populations.⁸¹ We describe it as "unintended" to stress how it was

⁷⁴ Rodríguez, *op. cit.*, 83.

⁷⁵ AHPBA, FI, doc. 78.

⁷⁶ D'Orbigny, *Viaje a la América Meridional*, 647.

⁷⁷ Cutrera, *Subordinarlos, someterlos y sujetarlos*, 56-63.

⁷⁸ Zubizarreta, 'Rauch versus Rosas', 106.

⁷⁹ Quoted in Ratto, *Indios y cristianos*, 101-102.

⁸⁰ Local elites were expecting a similar social change from the Creole rural masses. See Fradkin, 'Ley, costumbre y relaciones sociales'.

⁸¹ We are speaking of "strengthening" instead of "creating" because Rosas was already a well-known figure in the Buenos Aires rural world from 1820 to 1824.

a not-planned result of his official duties nor the consequence of a deliberate plan for climbing the power ladder. Recent studies surrounding Rosas and his rule assessed that his grip over Buenos Aires politics and the rural masses was not as strict as traditionally believed. First, multiple Rosas existed, and it is necessary to carefully place him in the right temporal context.⁸² Second, the landholder class and the federal faction were very fragmented, and it was impossible to unilaterally guide it.⁸³ Third, subaltern classes (rural masses and indigenous groups) had a considerable agency in determining and manipulating their relationship with him, whether a contractual or a political one.⁸⁴ Therefore, it is now untenable considering him as an all-powerful rural landlord that transferred his social and economic prominence and influence into the political realm. However, his personal influence and diplomatic and managerial skills mattered a lot.⁸⁵

His personal qualities were crucial in the successful negotiations with the Natives. As we noted, interethnic relations were necessarily based on a direct personal relationship because indigenous non-statal political system was based on charismatic leadership. Therefore, it was obvious that the Natives were loyal to him and not to the government. It is revealing that, few days after conquering power, Lavalle urged to capture the loyalty of the indigenous allies of the province “making them understand that it is not Rosas who feeds them, but the state”.⁸⁶ However, this was almost impossible. The reason was the specific indigenous political system, not Rosas’ genius. Anyhow, he understood better than other how to carry on a successful interethnic diplomacy, thanks to his family heritage, rural experience and the accumulated knowledge of interethnic diplomacy conserved in the “frontier archive”.⁸⁷

Similarly, his commitment to frontier advancement activated a process of creation of personal loyalty with respect to rural masses. As mentioned, he prepared the new frontier establishment, carefully respecting the seasonality of rural works and avoiding coercive practices. In their recent biography, Fradkin and Gelman stressed how we have to look at the consensus he generated among the militia

⁸² Fradkin and Gelman, *op. cit.*

⁸³ Ratto, *La frontera bonaerense*

⁸⁴ Cutrera, *op. cit.*; Salvatore, *Wandering Paysanos*; Gelman, ‘Un gigante con pies de barro’.

⁸⁵ The following argument tries to hold together the new studies that provided a contextual analysis of the “Rosas phenomenon” with an appreciation of the relevance of his individuality in the unfolding of this story. Ternavasio had recently pointed out the risks that an excessive contextualisation might dilute the specificity of his character in Buenos Aires history. See Ternavasio, ‘Rosas y el rosismo’. Our micro-analysis wants to show how the context was crucial for his rise to prominence, as well as his proceedings with respect to the economic government of the countryside. The focus on his relationship with the concept of federal agrarian republicanism wrap up the necessity of both ideas and practices to govern a modern commercial society.

⁸⁶ Zubizarreta, ‘Rauch versus Rosas’, 118.

⁸⁷ We documented how he was an early advocate for peaceful negotiation with Native groups, a belief nurtured during his family experience and rural management. However, the detail that better illustrates this is that Rosas composed a dictionary of the “Pampa language”. See Juan Manuel de Rosas, *Gramática y diccionario de la lengua Pampa (pamparanquel-araucano)* (Buenos Aires: Theoria, 1995).

for discovering the source of Rosas' leadership.⁸⁸ Additionally, he mobilised his personal resources for the successful outcome of the project and everyone in the countryside knew that he was the Commissioner for the new frontier, and that the interethnic peace was due to his successful negotiations.

His action strengthened the image of charismatic and paternal authority, which rural "collective representations" conferred him and coalesced the consensus around his leadership.⁸⁹ After years of conscription and forced contributions, Rosas guaranteed that the province would immediately pay the services it was asking to its citizens. In the instructions to Pedro Tobal, he declared that he was about to anticipate freight costs for the cartwheels, adding that if someone was dissatisfied with the proposed price, he could personally negotiate with him.⁹⁰ As a result, he anticipated 42,290 pesos during the first months of the mission, as the province lacked financial resources. In the 1828 report, in which he was asking the sum back (without any interest rate), he stressed that he was able to lower the provisional budget "through the resources provided by being in charge of a great number of *estancias*, where almost all the *indios* who have settled in our fields are working."⁹¹ His activity as manager of *estancias* provided him with the necessary capital to advance resources for public goals. However, he repeatedly asked the government to guarantee a constant stream of revenues at his disposal. The requests were not always thoroughly answered, worsening his relationship with Dorrego. As Fradkin and Gelman noted, Rosas understood that the key to the success of his mission was "the credibility of his word among the rural population", but the risks at stake were high: his social and economic capital were linked to the mission, therefore the lack of resources for the *negocio* or the frontier advancement risked terminating with his political career but also private fortune.

The events of December 1828 precipitated the situation. Following the coup, Rosas, counselled by the Anchorena, left the province and sheltered in Santa Fe. Few days after Dorrego's execution, the news of the rural uprising multiplied and reached the city. Different rebel bands declared that Rosas was the only authority they would recognise. The fact that the rural masses and the Natives were rebelling alarmed the local elite, both unitarians and federalists. Nicolás de Anchorena asked Rosas to issue a declaration urging the rebels to surrender their weapons, but he refused. At the end of April, he returned to Buenos Aires province, reunited some of the rebel forces and defeated the unitarians thanks with the help of Santa Fe governor Estanislao López. It is possible that during this crisis he

⁸⁸ Fradkin and Gelman, *op. cit.*, 178.

⁸⁹ González Bernaldo, 'El levantamiento'.

⁹⁰ Tobal had to convince the owners "under the assurance that the freight will be well paid by me and on the most regular terms". Juan Manuel de Rosas to Pedro Tobal. Buenos Aires, 31 October 1827. AHPBA, FI, doc. 100, f. 3r.

⁹¹ Rosas, 'Memoria (1828)', 308.

came to fully appreciate his political “potential”, as he diverged from the Anchorena brothers’ counsels and actively pursued personal power.

Despite his individual aspirations, Rosas knew that he was the only one who could ensure social order and peace in the countryside. When he entered the province, he did not attack Buenos Aires, but instead laid siege to the city. Peace negotiations, which lasted from June to August, were essentially a pact among the wealthy elites to prevent social revolution. The fear of a rural rebellion sparking a wider revolution was palpable, as expressed by Díaz Vélez to Lavalle, noting that “this countryside will become chaos if it is abandoned. [...] This is how the Banda Oriental began”.⁹² Rural rebellion had the potential to ignite a wider social revolution, as it had happened on the other shore of the Río de la Plata. Fortunately for the governing elites, the “Artigas of Buenos Aires” was a member of their class and was more interested in restoring order than exploiting the revolutionary potential. In August, Rosas and Lavalle agreed to establish a provisional government led by Juan José Viamonte, Tomás Guido, and Manuel J. García.

4. The Attempted Realisation of an Ideal

The support for federal agrarian republicanism was based on the provision of peace and security. The distribution of public land in emphyteusis to militia families and the incorporation of Native groups into Creole commercial society were the two pillars on which turning the ideal into reality. It attempted to provide the countryside with “order and virtue” through the action of law. Land distribution was meant to demobilise the militias and pay back their service, attempting to co-opt them into the federal political project. On the other hand, the *negocio* would secure peace for developing flourishing rural activities, as a solid alliance with Natives was the only way to obtain it. Alongside emphyteusis, federal agrarian republicanism actively promoted the multiplication of smallholdings through plans for land distribution on the advanced frontier guards.

In September 1829, Viamonte assumed power and a plan for frontier land distribution was among the first acts of the new executive. Given the dilapidation of rural wealth caused by war and drought, government offered a “paternal arm” to the indigent rural population, a way to “to turn their labour into the protection of the same frontiers” and “accelerate and consolidate the restoration of peace”.⁹³ Sol Lanteri rightly noted that the conditional donations represented a specific federal land policy

⁹² Quoted in Fradkin and Gelman, *op. cit.*, 189.

⁹³ *RORA. Tomo 2*, 244.

because the reduced size of parcels and their concentration in Azul represented a novelty.⁹⁴ The plan consisted of distributing a *suerte de estancia* (0.5x1.5 leagues, 2,025 he.) in the new frontier of the Arroyo Azul to *naturales* and residents of the Province. Land property was conferred after recipients would move to the new land, populate it with at least 100 cattle heads within one year, and build a corral and a well. In exchange, settlers and their families were exempted from military service besides frontier defence. Following his attitude toward frontier issues, Rosas centralised the jurisdiction on this matter on himself, as he was responsible for admitting the land pleas, deciding where to send the settlers and registering the distributed land. The Commander resorted to the unlimited *potestad oeconomica* that conferred absolute power in front of jurisdictional checks given the urgency of populating and defending frontier lands. In the following years, he will assume a similar attitude toward provincial executive power that will be concentrated in the figure of the Governor with the “extraordinary faculties”.⁹⁵

The *Lucero*, a recently established federal newspaper, considered the colonisation plan “an organic measure, which will have a strong influence on the development of the population and the industry”.⁹⁶ In fact, land distribution to rural families was the way to solve the long-lasting problem of frontier defence, as they would form “a chain of settlements” sealing the provincial territory from indigenous raids. Pedro de Angelis, the editor, stressed that it was meant to reward rural citizens who suffered from the civil war, and protecting them from land grabbing by wealthy individuals, as the obligation to populate “oppose legal obstacles to this concentration [of ownership]”. The resonance of Spanish and republican agrarianism is straightforward.

The following December, Rosas was appointed Governor, and the organisation of the settlements in Azul and Tapalqué intensified. The message to the legislature expressed the centrality of settlement policy, as it was the “solid foundation of the province’s wealth and prosperity” and the “the Government’s first thought”.⁹⁷ Rosas expressed the urgency of finding resources for populating the frontier in a long letter to his “dear friend” Manuel J. García. The plan required considerable capital as the state should assist settlers to colonise the lands. The Governor regretted that they were not taking advantage of “the enthusiasm of the peasants to go and populate the Arroyo Azul” and asked his Ministers to find a way to obtain money. In the same letter, he urged to not stop his weekly budget

⁹⁴ Lanteri, ‘Estado, tierra y poblamiento’, 261. Similar schemes in Chacarita, San Andrés de Giles, San Miguel del Monte and Luján followed the donations in Azul.

⁹⁵ The “extraordinary faculties” were an institution inherited from classical republicanism. In case of imminent danger, absolute power was conferred to an individual for a fixed period. See Chiaramonte, ‘Facultades extraordinarias y antigua constitución’.

⁹⁶ *El Lucero*, n. 12, 21 September 1829.

⁹⁷ Mabragna, *op. cit.*, 248.

of 30,000 pesos as “it is necessary to pay the militiamen, and not to abandon in any way the *negocio pacífico*”, the two pillars on which the legality and legitimacy of the federal government rested.⁹⁸

The colonisation policies in Azul and Tapalqué were successful. Lanteri demonstrated that 296 plots were distributed to 305 individuals, transferring in private hands 617,625 ha of public lands. This land was put under production, but the written property titles were not usually registered and issued - a fact that had crucial implications, and an informal land market soon developed, notwithstanding the government prohibition to alienate donated lands. The settlement of Azul prospered, as the distribution of smallholdings promoted demographic growth. At the same time, land availability did not impede the formation of large *estancias*, which coexisted alongside smaller productive units. Donations benefited different social sectors, such as landless families, medium producers and wealthy *estancieros*, strengthening political support to the federal faction. Lanteri highlighted, however, that Azul represented a context where small property played a prominent role, but different patterns of property concentration characterised other localities. The settlement also grew thanks to the contribution of the Natives settled in the surrounding area, which represented most of the population compared to Creoles.⁹⁹

In June 1830, the donations were confirmed if the population conditions had been met. However, the government urged recipients to proceed to a legal declaration of their possession followed by the official measurement by the Topographic Department. The law aimed at legalising donations and issuing written property titles, but only some small producers complied with it. Witnesses had to confirm the possession in front of a *Juez de Primera Instancia* in Buenos Aires. Eventually, very few settlers travelled the 300 km from Azul to the provincial capital to do so.¹⁰⁰ Peasants' indifference to this law might be explained by material constraints and rural customs, according to which possession and labour were enough to generate property rights. The number of frontier settlers was increasing, and the following year the government dictated better instructions for populating the frontier guards and tracing the *éjido* of each of them. The non-legalisation of territorial rights did not generate major conflicts until 1852 when the authorities that replaced Rosas tried to enact a new legislation concerning territorial rights.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Juan Manuel de Rosas to Manuel J. García. Villa Luján, 30 March 1830. See Nicolau, *Correspondencia*, 27.

⁹⁹ Lanteri, *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁰ In September 1829, Rosas was given jurisdiction over frontier land, but later decrees transferred it to the judicial power. However, Lanteri reports that many donations were not registered even if settlers complied with the population conditions. Lanteri, ‘Estado, tierra y poblamiento’, 266.

¹⁰¹ Lanteri et al. ‘Territorialidad indígena y políticas oficiales’.

Azul was a successful federal experiment that was not replicated elsewhere. While the sanction of settlement legislation was welcomed, the *Sala* was not willing to agree on allocating more fiscal resources to the plan for populating the frontier, notwithstanding the government insistence. In 1831, Ministers Balcarce and Anchorena advanced the request of 1 million pesos to the *Sala*, pointing out that a “great number of families” wished to settle in the new lands. Native groups too would participate as “those in Los Cerrillos have asked for a temple to establish a *pueblo*, professing Christianity”. The future was bright because “everything heralds that they are advancing in civilisation”.¹⁰²

Rosas urged his ministers to convince the *Sala* in allocating the budget, and “if tomorrow they were giving it to me, I would populate the three guards in two months”.¹⁰³ In the same letter revealing the Governor’s urgency to advance frontier population, Balcarce depicted to Anchorena a vivid description of the federal agrarian utopia that the new frontier’s security, defence and population would materialise. The settlements would protect rural wealth and appropriate new lands. Expanding the commodity frontier in the fertile southern lands would improve and enhance the province’s agribusiness potential because it was now widely known that cattle grazed there was fatter, the hides therefore more robust. Improving the quality of agricultural goods would increase foreign demand and enrich local producers and the state.

Increasing the province’s wealth passed through the allocation of additional funds to the frontier. The money was needed to move militias and their families to the guards. Rural landless families would turn into useful republican citizens and these new settlers

would serve as a basis for many other settlements in which these same arms will be employed in the labours fertile lands offer them, thanks to which their needs are filled by their output, leaving the surplus to assist the rest of their population.

Balcarce attached a redistributive ideal to the expansion of rural productive forces, a traditional topic of republican rhetoric. The *indios amigos* contribution was part of this harmonious landscape, as they would join the new settlements “as it is already happening”. Once again, Native participation in the Creole commercial society is subordinated to transforming their customs through the regenerative role of labour. Their active economic life will represent “a useful and advantageous improvement for the population”, if persuaded to settle down and abandon their erratic way of life.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Mabragaña, *op. cit.*, 254

¹⁰³ AGN, Sala VII, 1042.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibidem*.

However, the deputies did not share the executive's urgency. The following year, Balcarce and Anchorena reiterated the request. Recent raids by "Chileans" and *Ranquelches* had severely hit rural establishments because of the lack of resources, and even the *grupos amigos* sacked Creole *estancias*, "since, due to lack of funds, they cannot be provided with the most essential necessities for their subsistence".¹⁰⁵ The solution was to populate the frontier guards as to increase security and rationally use the few resources available. While the population of the Fuerte Federación and Cruz de la Guerra progressed, the same should be done in the other guards. The *estancias* were advancing because the drought "has revealed the fertility of the fields outside the Salado, and the permanence of their water sources".¹⁰⁶ The message also reveals that the *negocio pacífico*, even if successful, did not dissipate interethnic tensions and conflicts that had always characterised the frontier, as Balcarce denounced cattle thefts by *indios amigos*.

Finally, the organisation of a military campaign against Native sovereign groups in collaboration with other provinces allowed the executive to ask the *Sala* for new resources. The new government led by Juan Ramón Balcarce presented to the assembly a project to request a loan of 1.5 million pesos in February 1833.¹⁰⁷ The interests would be paid thanks to a new tax of twelve reales on each cattle head destined for public provision and salted meat production. Senillosa explained that an "voluntary loan" was the only way to rapidly collect capital, which the new tax would pay back. The dire financial situation prevented authorities from asking for a loan earlier, but a military expedition was a good reason to do it, as it was a big responsibility for the assembly to negate the authorisation.

The discussion in the assembly was animated, as deputies resisted the introduction of a new tax on rural wealth. Anchorena, at the end of his talk, put it very simply: "the Commission has not taken any other course of action because it has not found one".¹⁰⁸ The deputies resisted the project, and the executive gathered before the *Sala* to stress the inescapable necessity of financing the expedition, framing it as a provincial, but especially national, goal. Eventually, the permission to negotiate a loan was granted to the executive. The possibility of mortgaging public lands acquired with the recent frontier advancement was the turning point to obtaining parliamentary permission. The inter-provincial expedition against sovereign Natives reacted to the increasing raids from *Ranquelches* and groups linked to the Pincheiras. Rosas had planned it in 1832, and it was based on the coordination of three divisions which would simultaneously attack enemy *tolderias* from the Río Nequén to the

¹⁰⁵ Mabragaña, *op. cit.*, 263.

¹⁰⁶ *Ivi*, 264.

¹⁰⁷ *La Gaceta Mercantil*, n. 2911, 6 February 1833. The project ignited a heated debate, but the funds were finally granted. The turning point was the possibility of mortgaging the recently acquired southern lands as collateral for a new public loan.

¹⁰⁸ *La Gaceta Mercantil*, n. 2912, 7 February 1833.

Rio Negro and Colorado. It further expanded the territory under Creole control and improved the communication with Carmen de Patagones.

While overall successful, the control and discipline of Native allies and friend groups was complex and took a long time to resolve.¹⁰⁹ A related problem was that the *negocio* rested on the expectation for the future Native assimilation into Creole commercial society. However, this process was slow, and if some groups manifested a gradual transformation of customs, others did not – pointing at the difficult coexistence between a capitalist and the Native commercial society. Deputy Baldomero García resumed effectively the issue, stating that “there is no doubt that there is a growing number of these men who were once savages, and are now in an intermediate state [...] and are gradually becoming more civilised”.¹¹⁰ In Chapter 5, we noted that the Native groups of the Arauco-Pampean area had a fluid and particular relation with their territory, based on a cosmological vision of the relationship between man and nature. However, alongside the 18th-century commercial expansion, some groups started a process of territorialisation and adoption of agriculture. The relative acquaintance that some Native groups had with agricultural and sedentary life played a role in their successful incorporation into the *negocio pacífico*, as settlement within provincial territory was a necessary condition to become *indios amigos*.¹¹¹

The *caciques* Catriel and Cachul were the most loyal allies of Rosas and became his representatives to negotiate with other groups.¹¹² They had been among the first to join the early *negocio* in 1825, and they soon moved to the *estancia* Los Cerrillos. Their groups, the *Pampas* and *Tehuelchús*, had adopted some form of agriculture some decades earlier, as the region they inhabited was particularly favourable to agriculture and close to the important commercial fairs in Chapaleofú. Therefore, their fixed territorialisation and alliance with Rosas did not undermine the authority of the *caciques*. In 1832, their groups were translated from Los Cerrillos to Tapalqué, aggregating around 2,000 people. The *cacique* Venancio Coñuepan was another crucial actor of the *negocio*, easily incorporating into it as he was coming from Chile and was used to interethnic alliances.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Cutrera, *op. cit.*

¹¹⁰ *La Gaceta Mercantil*, n. 2922, 21 February 1833.

¹¹¹ We do not want to conflate our voice with the one of historical actors and resume a stage model of social development. However, the increasing incorporation into Creole and capitalist markets promoted a process of social transformation and economic specialisation, whose unintended consequence would be to favour or halt interethnic coexistence. The goal is to highlight the relevance of economic practices in shaping interethnic political alliances.

¹¹² Ratto, ‘Una experiencia fronteriza exitosa’, 209. Cutrera, *op. cit.*, 47-56. The *negocio* stimulated important transformations in the indigenous use of the territory. In fact, the system permitted the reproduction of the indigenous social system, but it was subordinated to Rosas geopolitical strategies. See Pedrotta et al., ‘En busca de la tierra prometida’.

¹¹³ Cutrera, *op. cit.*, 56-63.

During 1828, Buenos Aires press had highlighted the savagery and barbarism of the indigenous allies of the federals, but the tone changed from September onwards. The *British Packet* gave us a vivid description of Catriel and Cachul's participation in the public funeral of Manuel Dorrego, the first *fiesta federal* which inaugurated Rosas' government. The article notes with surprise that "in their appearance and behaviour there was nothing to denote ferocity", and their faces "even possessed considerable intelligence and good nature". Comparing them with the image that the word "Indian" usually conveys for the British public, the author believed that "nothing can be more dissimilar, compared with the copper coloured complexion of the *Pampa* Indian".¹¹⁴

In August 1830, Catriel and Cachul participated to a feast organised in honour of the Comandante de Armas of Santa Fe, Pascual Echagüe, in the context of the negotiations to sanction the Federal Pact against the unitarian provinces.¹¹⁵ The writer in a typical Creole paternalistic tone noted that their participation in those events "can contribute to the rapid civilisation of our indigenous people". In his toast, Catriel highlighted the difference between Creole and their Spanish forefathers, as they "already belong to the land, and must live together with the *indios* to sustain their independence.", while the latter "set foot on this land to enslave it". He hoped their union would be "as firm as a mountain". Cachul wished that more Native groups would enter the alliance, as they "do not yet know the path to happiness". In the language of the Enlightenment, happiness was related to material progress and wealth, and Cachul was probably referring to the progressive incorporation into Creole commercial society when speaking about the "path to happiness".

How did the *indios amigos* incorporate into the Creole economic system? Rosas appealed to the relationship of reciprocity with the *caciques amigos*, as they had some obligations after entering the *negocio*. For instance, the government provided them with instruments and expertise to undertake agricultural activities. In the Fuerte Federación the attempts were quite successful, as around 250 families had small *chacras* where they cultivated maize, pumpkin, cotton, walnuts and peaches. The *cacique* also owned 300 cows, 100 horses, 500 sheep and 300 goats.¹¹⁶ Working obligations represented another way of inclusion, as even if configured as compensation for entering the *negocio* the Natives were paid in exchange for their labour.¹¹⁷ They were hired in constructing new forts, employed as *chasques* (horseback fast messengers), and worked in salt marshes and brick ovens. As

¹¹⁴ *The British Packet and Argentine News*, n. 175, 26 December 1829. This journal addressed the British public.

¹¹⁵ *La Gaceta Mercantil*, n. 1978, 19 August 1830.

¹¹⁶ *La Gaceta Mercantil*, n. 3206, 3 February 1834.

¹¹⁷ Ratto, 'Una experiencia froneriza exitosa', 205.

labour was considered a civilising force to transform the customs of Creole idle population, the governing elites wished that the same could happen to the Natives.

If the *Pampas* already had some experience with agriculture and the associated fixed territoriality, this attempt at social transformation conspired against other groups' social cohesion, especially the *Peuenches-Ranquelches* led by Santiago Llanquelén. The *cacique* left his settlement among the *Ranquelches* and entered the *negocio* in 1831. His group settled around Fuerte Federación, but he represented an example of the difficulty of managing interethnic relations under the umbrella of the *negocio*.¹¹⁸ Rosas had to intervene, assisted by his *caciques mayores* Catriel and Cachul, to remember to Llanquelén his obligations. However, he did not manage to hold the balance between showing Rosas his loyalty, convincing his groups to perform the *negocio*'s duties and preserving an authoritative leadership. In 1838, he was betrayed by his people, and abandoned by the provincial forces, permitting the *Ranquelches* to capture and behead him. Cutrera highlighted that performing the obligations to return Creole captives and patrol Buenos Aires countryside against hostile Natives undermined his authority.

In addition, Rosas tried to sponsor the adoption of agriculture among his group, but it did not work out well. In August 1831, the interpreter José Antonio Cornejo was ordered to visit Llanquelén's *tolderia* and teach them the cultivation of cereals. Cornejo should find an expert in agriculture to reside in the *tolderia* for the time needed and offer to the *cacique* eight oxen, four ploughs, different kinds of seeds, working instruments and some gifts (*yerba*, sugar and a barrel of *aguardiente*).¹¹⁹ There is no information about the progress of agriculture in Llanquelén's *tolderia*. However, his fate suggests that the experiment did not end well.

Interethnic diplomacy was the key for a successful advancement of the commodity frontier. Buenos Aires diplomatic strategy was indeed proposed as a model for other provinces to secure their territory and expand their productive activities. In 1833, José Arenales published a plan for the exploration and colonisation of the Rio Bermejo and the Chaco region.¹²⁰ In the work, he proposed to do what Buenos Aires authorities were doing since the previous century: organising expeditions to collect geographical and topographical knowledge, establishing peaceful relations with the Native groups, finding the best locations for frontier settlements and buying land from the *caciques*. Arenales framed

¹¹⁸ Cutrera, *op. cit.*, 70-77 and 162-175.

¹¹⁹ AGN, Sala VII, 1042.

¹²⁰ Arenales, *Noticias sobre el Chaco*. He was the president of the Topographic Department, and he composed his work thanks to the geographical and topographical knowledge held in the Department's archive. Since the late colonial time, the improvement of internal fluvial navigation was a state aspiration, and the Bermejo was crucial to connect the Northern provinces (Jujuy, Salta and Tucuman) with the Littoral.

the project to foster the political union of the United Provinces, such as Pedro A. García did twenty years earlier. The work provided a colonisation scheme with precise rules for attracting settlers (thanks to the distribution of land in property) and Natives (thanks to trade). Arenales expressed a model of federal agrarian republicanism on a national scale, and it was based on the assimilation of Native groups to Creole commercial society as it was happening in Buenos Aires.¹²¹



Fig. 19. Nicolas Descalzi. *Plano del Río Bermejo*. Buenos Aires: Litografía del Estado, 1831. Biblioteca Digital Luso-Brasileira.

The *negocio*, despite its limitations, successfully incorporated Native groups into the Buenos Aires commercial society, ensuring 20 years of frontier stability and economic expansion. However, the Natives were incorporated into the society, but not assimilated into it. A distinct legal regime, reminiscent of colonial legal pluralism, sanctioned interethnic frontier life. The Natives were under

¹²¹ Discussing how to distribute lands to the new settlers, Arenales commented on the 'plan economico' for distributing public free land enacted in Buenos Aires. He believed this experience would guide similar plans. *Ivi*, 325.

the jurisdiction of their *caciques* and frontier commanders, who had the power to punish crimes.¹²² In most cases, Native issues were not dealt with by local judges or police officers. In addition, they were not granted political rights to participate in Creole political and communal life. These issues have been extensively studied, particularly in the second half of the 19th century, as historians have recognized the significant shift in Creole-Native relations following Rosas' defeat in Caseros in 1852.¹²³ The years of the *rosismo* represented an intermezzo of interethnic coexistence sustained by a particular model of legal pluralism.

Looking at this issue from the point of view of territorial rights might illuminate some differences between Rosas and post-1852 frontier interethnic policy. Legal pluralism governing interethnic life between 1829-1852 respected Native customs and ideas of territoriality, up to a certain point. The government did not impose on the *caciques amigos* to acquire property rights over the territory they occupied next to the frontier forts. It preserved good interethnic relations, as the Natives shared different conceptions of territory and territorial rights linked to a religious and cosmological vision. Even if Chapter 5 discussed the possible transformation of Native ideas concerning land, we stressed that this was a gradual process, and traditional ideas persisted alongside a pristine conception of a labour theory of property. Indeed, the Natives settled around frontier guards but continued their semi-itinerant pastoral mode of production, an issue that generated tensions with Creole settlers. *Caciques* and frontier commanders favoured Creole or Native claims during legal litigations according to each case.¹²⁴ Indigenous families possessed frontier lands through its use, but when the liberal state would irrupt into the frontier daily life, the absence of written title would become a problem, and Creole unwillingness to provide *caciques* with written titles would be manifested.

The development of this regime of territorial property was not an intentional one, as it was the result of Rosas's knowledge of indigenous customs and ability to maintain interethnic alliances based on diplomacy. Rhetorically, the interethnic policy was sustained by arguments stressing the future Native assimilation into Creole commercial society. However, an analysis of the policies on the ground reveals that this was not the final goal, as Rosas never thought about distributing property rights to the *caciques*, proving that he was not interested in sharing with the Natives individual and exclusive rights on land. This solution worked well until Rosas was the governor of Buenos Aires, as interethnic policy was based on personal agreements between him and the *caciques*. The radical break with the former frontier policy sanctioned by Urquiza and the State of Buenos Aires determined a war between

¹²² Cutrera, *op. cit.*

¹²³ Quijada, *De los cacicazgos a la ciudadanía.*

¹²⁴ Ratto, *Indios y cristianos*, 140-156.

provincial forces and a coalition of Native groups led by the main *cacique Ranquel* Calcufurà. In this period, some groups tried to legalise the possession of their land and obtain written property titles. However, the process was mostly halted by Creole unwillingness to include the Natives in the developing republican agrarian society.¹²⁵ Rosas frontier policy was based on the rhetorical assimilation of the Natives into Creole commercial society, and it worked out well because it did not pretend to realise the ideas on which it was based.

5. Building Consensus during the First *Rosismo*

Printed representations of property and power developed a cultural sphere that strengthened the consensus surrounding the federal governments. In their more mundane or practical existence, these objects tried to realise the tropes of agrarian republicanism or contributed to creating a representation of it. Studies on the political culture of *rosismo* have established how the *Restaurador de las Leyes* succeeded in creating a plebiscitary and unanimous republic by employing political technologies inherited from the republicanism of the May Revolution.¹²⁶ This section will contribute to this literature by highlighting how modern technologies (topography, cartography, lithography, and printing) contributed to the representation and attempted realisation of the federal political and economic utopia. The deployment of a federal print and visual culture was fostered alongside the expansion of the state apparatus of coercion that targeted proprietary classes, but especially subaltern groups.¹²⁷

Cartography and topography were two central forms of knowledge during Rosas' first government and at least until 1839. However, as Canedo rightly pointed out, a thorough study of the Topographic Department's activities during the years of *rosismo* is still lacking.¹²⁸ Scholars have reached a relative consensus that it was only at the end of the 1830s that the activities of the Department significantly declined, paralleling the onset of the more autocratic phase of Rosas' government following the

¹²⁵ De Jong, 'El acceso a la tierra'.

¹²⁶ An important starting point was questioning the fundamental political categories received from the tradition, such as the concept of *caudillo*. See Goldman and Salvatore, *Caudillismos rioplatenses*. The influence of the "new political history" was fundamental in pushing new studies on the *rosismo*. For a recent appreciation of the advances and ways forward, see Ternavasio, 'Rosas y el rosismo'. Here a partial list of works which study the political repertoires and visual culture fostered during the years of Rosas. Acree Jr, *Everyday Reading*; Marino, 'Impresos para el cuerpo'; Munilla Lacasa, *Celebrar y gobernar*; Myers, *op. cit.*; Salvatore, 'Fiestas federales'; Ternavasio, 'Hacia un regimen de unanimidad'.

¹²⁷ Salvatore, *Wandering Paysanos*; Garavaglia, 'La apoteosis del Leviathan'. After the 1839 rebellion, repression was directed against wealthy *hacendados* as well. See Gelman and Schroeder, 'Los embargos a los 'unitarios'.

¹²⁸ Canedo, 'El « restablecimiento »'. The desire to "restore" the Topographic Department after the dark years of tyranny was shared by the new authorities that emerged after Caseros, who denounced the arbitrariness that, instead of law, guided federal land policy. However, during these years, the Tribunal Topografico continued its activities, providing legal advice when requested.

Revolution of the Free Southerners (*Revolución de los Libres del Sur*) and the French blockade (1838-1840).¹²⁹ Before this moment, the accumulation of topographic information to create geographical and cadastral maps remained a central concern of the federal governments.¹³⁰ Shortly after the announcement of the 1827 frontier advancement, Dorrego requested the Department a project for the new guards and another for the distribution of provincial lands. Indeed, the Department's surveyors actively participated in the foundation and layout of forts, commons (*ejidos*), and surrounding buildings. In June 1828, it offered the government a new map of the province constructed by Felipe Senillosa, proposing to send it to London for serial reproduction, as there were no lithographic shops in Buenos Aires.

In September 1830, the Department presented the government with the first graphic record (*registro gráfico*), which highlighted provincial public and private lands according to information in the topographic archive. It was the first cadastre of the province, albeit in cartographic form, a peculiarity of the state's process of building territorial knowledge of the region.¹³¹ The graphic record used different colours to indicate land ownership regimes: carmine for lands under emphyteusis, yellow for lands of unknown ownership, green for lands whose measurement had yet to be recorded, and white for private property. The president of the Department, José de Arenales, warned that it was a work in progress, but the government expressed great appreciation for it. This appreciation was further evidenced a few years later when the graphic record was printed in series at the Bacle lithography, which had meanwhile opened in the city.

The Department also assisted the government in its military endeavours. Rosas requested maps to better prepare for the war against the unitarian Liga del Interior (1829-31) and the interprovincial expedition against the sovereign Natives (1833-34). Thus, cartography aided the territorial consolidation of the Buenos Aires provincial frontier, and these same expeditions gathered new geographical and topographical information, as a land surveyor and a naturalist accompanied Rosas. This science was indispensable for making progress in creating a sealed economic space and in defining the property of the Buenos Aires province, an aspiration that had motivated local officials and administrators since the late colonial period. Commenting on the matter, Melisa Pesoa highlighted that “in short, it was a matter of drawing the territory over which it was intended to govern, a characteristic of the modern state”.¹³²

¹²⁹ Gautreau and Garavaglia, *op. cit.*; Pesoa Marcilla, ‘Conocer, medir y dibujar’.

¹³⁰ See Martínez Sierra, *op. cit.*, 118-135.

¹³¹ Gautreau and Garavaglia, *op. cit.*; Pesoa Marcilla, ‘La necesidad de un mapa’.

¹³² *Ivi.*



Fig. 21. Francisco Guerrin, *Registro gráfico de los terrenos de propiedad pública y particular de la Provincia de Buenos Aires*. Buenos Aires: Litografía del Estado, 1833.

Analysing ideas alongside government practices reveals the extent to which first federal governments were urgently trying to materialise an agrarian republican utopia in Buenos Aires countryside. The problematic realisation of this project, or the impossibility of redirecting individual passions to contribute to general interest and the common good, to put it in other terms, determined, with time, the waning of a genuine republican commitment in favour of a residual form of republicanism, manifested in redundant rhetoric against the *salvages unitarios*.

The wide use of visual culture to sustain the federal republican project was an addition to the repertoires of political practices the faction inherited from local political culture. As mentioned, Bacle's lithography became a crucial workshop for strengthening or creating political support around the federal faction.¹³⁴ The Swiss man arrived in the city in 1828 and established the first lithographic shop with his artist wife Adrienne Pauline Macaire. The technique had been recently invented in Germany and soon became a fundamental technology for the serial reproduction of texts and images, sustaining the upsurge of visual and consumption goods that played a fundamental part in the republic political culture born out of the Age of Revolutions.

Right after the unitarian coup in December 1828, the lithographic shop was commissioned to print Dorrego's last letters, which were to be distributed at his funeral. Authorities stopped the project, but when the federal faction regained power, new works were commissioned to Bacle. Dorrego's letters appeared in the *Album de homenaje al Coronel Don Manuel Dorrego*, which also included four lithographs depicting the ex-Governor and scenes from his funeral. In the following years, the *Litografía del Estado* produced portraits of Rosas and other prominent political leaders, printed federal symbols and slogans on everyday consumer goods and contributed to the attempt to craft virtuous republican citizens in this "Republic of the New World". The importance of this establishment for Rosas' first government was fundamental, and a few months after its opening, it took the name *Litografía del Estado*. However, relations between Bacle and Rosas were complicated and ended tragically with the Swiss lithographer's death in the Buenos Aires prisons.

The lithographic shop also manufactured printed goods that facilitated the development of local commercial society. The centrality of maps had been already mentioned. However, other more mundane objects played a similar if minor role, such as samples of contracts, property rights titles, bills of exchange or maritime patents. However, the work that better represents lithography's contribution to the government of local commercial society is the *Colección General de Marcas de*

¹³⁴ Steardo, 'A Maker of Useful Images'.

Ganado de la Provincia de Buenos Ayres.¹³⁵ Branding cattle was the only way to assert animal property rights in the local land-abundant context. The practice was regulated by law, as only branded animals and hides could enter urban and overseas markets. Abuses were widespread, and the Las Heras government had decided to print every year the list of authorised *hacendados* brands to be distributed to police and local judges. This project became possible thanks to the lithographic shop and the same Bacle offered to the government to realise the collection in September 1829 - right after the end of the provincial civil war. The work was impressive as it reunited 10,000 brands divided according to each countryside jurisdiction. The realisation was, however, very difficult as Bacle had to fight with the authorities to obtain enough subscriptions to pay for the huge production costs. In addition, the work was based on the contribution of the local *hacendados*, who were asked to send their brand to Bacle. In January 1831, *El Lucero* published a letter where the Swiss pleaded the *hacendados* to contribute to the publication, as “despite our repeated requests, very few owners have accepted our invitation”.¹³⁶

Another foreigner was Rosas’ most important collaborator in creating and strengthening a wide consensus around him and the federal faction. Pedro (Pietro) de Angelis was a Neapolitan intellectual who arrived in Buenos Aires in 1827, contracted by Rivadavia to publish a newspaper supporting the national government. The *Crónica Política y Literaria de Buenos Aires*, edited in collaboration with the Spanish José Joaquín de Mora, did not survive the fall of the national congress. De Angelis looked for new employments and took over a printing house that soon received state patronage and was named *Imprenta del Estado* (1829). The Neapolitan passed from serving the unitarians to support the federals, and his opportunism and association with Rosas relegated him to a marginal position in the intellectual history of Buenos Aires for a long time. However, his polyhedric character has been rediscovered, and scholars have deepened our understanding of his activities as a collector, historian, journalist, editor, economist and fossil dealer.¹³⁷

His editorial work in Buenos Aires is impressive, editing and publishing newspapers, essays, and the first collection of historical sources on the history of the Río de la Plata. For instance, *El Lucero*, edited in collaboration with Tomás Anchorena, appeared in September 1829, just when the Viamonte government assumed power. From this platform, de Angelis popularised useful sciences (especially political economy) responding to the Enlightenment urgency of popular education. At the same time, he put these sciences at the service of the federal faction, contributing to the creation of an image of

¹³⁵ Acree, *op. cit.*, 47-59.

¹³⁶ *El Lucero*, n. 389, 15 January 1831.

¹³⁷ Sabor, *Pedro de Angelis*; Crespo, ‘El erudito coleccionista’; Baltar, *Letrados en tiempo de Rosas*; Podgorny, ‘La febbre dei fossili’.

Rosas as “the ideal leader of the commercial society developing in the province”, an instrumental use of the press that had characterised Buenos Aires since 1810.¹³⁸ In what follows, the analysis of the *Ensayo histórico sobre la vida dell'excmo sr. don Juan Manuel de Rosas* (1830) and the prologues to some documents he published in the *Colección de obras y documentos relativos a la historia antigua y moderna de las provincias del Rio de la Plata* (6 vols., 1836-1837) provide new evidence for the rhetorical construction of the image of the *Restaurador de las Leyes* as the perfect republican leader for the interethnic federal commercial society.

De Angelis had already published a biography of Napoleon in Buenos Aires, and he was thus acquainted with the genre. It is possible that he himself suggested to Rosas or other federal leaders the instrumental use it could have, as his years in Paris had accustomed him to the modern media technologies and political republican practices.¹³⁹ What we do know is that the publication of Rosas and Estanislao López’s biographies was a conscious political act. In March 1830, Rosas informed Manuel J. García that López had sent him the requested notes on his life. The Governor thought that “in this situation it seems to me that with this we can obtain several benefits by writing the work and publishing it”, such as directing the local and foreign public opinion in favour of the federals. He thus asks his Minister to publish the work in the form he prefers, “to circulate it everywhere”. Finally, the Governor asked for the Minister’s opinion on the matter but urged him to publish something on López in any case, not to make a bad impression on the powerful ally.¹⁴⁰

Shortly after, the *Imprenta del Estado* published the biography. This short booklet mainly narrates López’s military career, showing his loyalty to republican values and respect to established institutions. The story ends with his crucial role in assisting Rosas against Lavalle, and the last pages sketch a portrait of his government of Santa Fe. Thanks to him, the city “has achieved a degree of prosperity that other *pueblos* envy.”¹⁴¹ It was possible because he stimulated agricultural production to substitute the flourishing trade with Paraguay, ruined by civil wars. He was compared to Cincinnato, as the Governor of Santa Fe supposedly alternated governmental duties with agricultural activities.¹⁴² Finally, his last merit was to establish peaceful relations with the Natives, which “live under the obedience of the government; they subsist by the sale of their textiles, and by the produce

¹³⁸ Steardo, “En las páginas de El Lucero”.

¹³⁹ Ternavasio, “Rosas y el rosismo”, 93.

¹⁴⁰ Juan Manuel de Rosas to Manuel J. García. Villa Luján, 30 March 1830. In Nicolau, *Correspondencia*, 26-27.

¹⁴¹ *Noticias biograficas del Exmo Estanislao López*, 22.

¹⁴² The image of Catilina was a recurrent federal republican agrarian trope. See Myers, *op. cit.*

of their agricultural work”.¹⁴³ The role of López in stimulating the development of an interethnic and flourishing commercial society is stressed as the main feature of his government.

This work was coupled with Rosas’ biography. In the text, political servility and propaganda reached an unprecedented peak, as it was claimed that a fourteen-year-old Rosas was entrusted to manage his father’s *estancias*, doubling their economic value in a few years. However, the work is fascinating in that it helps us understand the image the federal faction wanted to convey to local and international public opinion. Since the first pages, it became clear that the main focus of the booklet was to highlight Rosas’ merits in bringing interethnic peace to the province of Buenos Aires, mixing historical facts, exaggerations and lies. The story begins with narrating how his family had been traditionally successful in dealing with the Natives, “that our oppressors, [the Spaniards] in their foolish pride, looked down as inferior to the human species”: his great uncle was the first to establish peaceful relations with the *Pampas* before being transferred to Chile and his grandfather was an influential Commander of the Countryside of Buenos Aires.¹⁴⁴ His father continued the tradition of frontier diplomacy, and we are told that while he was captive among the *Pampas*, he suggested them to sign peaceful agreements with the Spanish authorities, guaranteeing the late colonial period of interethnic peace.

Then, Rosas’ description is centred on his early commitment to an industrious life, and he is portrayed as a young Triptolemus, fostering local agriculture and introducing a new kind of industry (salted meat production).¹⁴⁵ Again, his figure is compared to Cincinnato, who left his rural activities to save the republic in times of need. The events surrounding the 1820 crisis are narrated, followed by the problematic relationships with Rodríguez and Rivadavia’s executives. The booklet states that Rosas urged Rodríguez not to attack the *Pampas* in 1820, as they were “the most docile, and the most willing to associate with us”, but his opinion was not heard.¹⁴⁶ The Natives directed raids against Creole *estancias*, especially Rosas’, but his industriousness soon made up for the losses, as “equally skilled in herding and farming, he populated his *estancias* and sowed crops”, and in only three years his establishments were the most flourishing of the province.¹⁴⁷

Finally, he is portrayed as the mind behind the project for advancing the frontier guards and the inauguration of the *negocio pacífico*. Only his “creative mind” could imagine how to conciliate “two

¹⁴³ *Noticias biograficas de Estanislao López*, 23.

¹⁴⁴ *Ensayo historico sobre Rosas*, 3.

¹⁴⁵ Triptolemus was the Greek god who introduced agriculture to mankind.

¹⁴⁶ *Ivi*, 19.

¹⁴⁷ *Ivi*, 25. His ability in manage agricultural activities is especially highlighted, to stress his adherence to a more popular version of agrarian republicanism.

such incompatible undertakings, namely occupying the Native lands, and soliciting their alliance”.¹⁴⁸ The innovative aspect of this policy was the attempt to “colonise” the Natives, and it was extremely successful, as the development of a harmonious interethnic commercial society attested:

The *indios*, led by their *caciques*, moved to our *estancias* and *chacras*, where they occupied themselves in tilling the soil, branding and herding cattle, hunting otters, and making bricks. The women tamed sheep, spun yarn, wove cloth, and abandoned their natural laziness to participate in the tasks of an active and industrious life.¹⁴⁹

The Spanish ideal of turning their indigenous American vassals into a useful population of market producers seemed realised in the countryside of Buenos Aires, thanks to the economic leadership of Juan Manuel de Rosas. This accomplishment had been possible thanks to the republican values of the *Restaurador*, mainly his economic industriousness that influenced the development of superior moral qualities, the perfect combination to make up a republican political leader.

This representation of Rosas shines through the most important works edited by de Angelis. From the pages of *El Lucero*, he fostered this same image of Rosas through in the editorials and responding to attacks by local and European journals.¹⁵⁰ The instrumental use of print culture is evident also in the edition of historical works the Neapolitan edited. The *Colección de obras y documentos relativos a la historia antigua y moderna de las provincias del Rio de la Plata* was a six-volume edition of historical, geographical and ethnohistorical works on the region. It represented an unprecedented effort of collection, edition and publication of sources to reconstruct local history, whose importance was perceived by contemporaries and persisted until present time. De Angelis took advantage of local archives, libraries and private collections to copy or buy relevant works, an effort that granted him estimation but also accusation of archival mismanagement and theft. The work was dedicated to the “*Santa Federación*” and his leader, Rosas, and it had considerable success if it reunited almost 500 subscribers, an incredible number for the epoch.¹⁵¹

The *Colección* published the documents that were part of the so-called “frontier archive”, making available to the public the accounts of the first expeditions to the Pampas and the projects for the

¹⁴⁸ *Ivi*, 27. This narrative of the beginning of the *negocio* provides new evidence for the role of Manuel J. García as the grey eminence behind Buenos Aires frontier policy and Rosas’ rise to power. The Minister collaborated with the publication of the *ensayo*, and he probably agreed to describe the Coronel as the designer of the *negocio*, considering it instrumental in strengthening the political support to the federal faction and the beginning of an era of peace, order and prosperity in the province.

¹⁴⁹ *Ivi*, 28.

¹⁵⁰ Steardo, ‘En las páginas’.

¹⁵¹ Crespo, *op. cit.*; Schell, ‘Bajo los poderosos auspicios’.

advancement of local commodity frontier. A prologue, where de Angelis commented and contextualised the text, preceded each published piece. This way, the Neapolitan portrayed the recent expedition against the Natives (1834-35) as the culmination of this long-awaited desire to increase the territory under Buenos Aires jurisdiction.

A place of honour is reserved to Pedro A. García, as de Angelis provided the readers with a short biography of the Coronel, which stressed his tireless work for the expansion and improvement of Buenos Aires commodity frontier. Introducing Pedro A. García's 1816 text, the Neapolitan highlighted that it constituted "a colonisation programme rather than a frontier plan", whose principles "belong to the modern school" that praised the wealth generating character of human labour.¹⁵² In fact, the Coronel wanted to populate the countryside until the Río Colorado, and "sought in the love of property the principle of adhesion of these new families".¹⁵³ Following his advice, it was time to establish new settlements populated by *soldados agricultores*, as it was happening in other European contexts (Russia, Hungary and Transylvania). It was possible thanks to the positive outcome of the recent expedition against the Natives, and settlements might be established "in the shadow of the Argentine flag that flies triumphantly on the banks of the Río Negro and Colorado",¹⁵⁴ an accomplishment of the "enterprising and persevering mind of Sr. General Rosas".¹⁵⁵ De Angelis also alluded to Rosas in the introduction to other documents from colonial times. The most explicit comment is included in the preface to the frontier advancement project by Sebastian Undiano y Gastelu. As this was centred on the necessity to occupy the Choelechel island to prevent Native invasions of Buenos Aires countryside, the Neapolitan exclaimed that if someone would not notice that it was an old document, "one would think that this memoir was an apologetic commentary on the last campaign of General ROSAS".¹⁵⁶

The trope of federal agrarian republicanism permitted de Angelis to place Rosas in a temporal framework where he was the architect of the final victory against Pampean geography and Native savagery. Again, fiction and reality mixed in building the printed representation of the *Restaurador de las Leyes*. During the 1833 expedition, he wrote to Manuel J. García offering his condolences on the recent death of his father Pedro.¹⁵⁷ In the reply, the ex-Minister confessed that the good news about the success of the expedition relieved him from his recent loss, as his father's "favourite thought

¹⁵² García, *Nuevo plan de fronteras*, I.

¹⁵³ *Ivi*, III.

¹⁵⁴ García, *Diario á Salinas Grandes*, III.

¹⁵⁵ García, *Diario expedición 1822*, VI.

¹⁵⁶ Undiano y Gastelu, *op. cit.*, 1.

¹⁵⁷ Juan Manuel de Rosas to Manuel J. García. Río Colorado, 29 May 1833. In Nicolau, *Correspondencia*, 61.

until death was that great enterprise".¹⁵⁸ Few days before, Manuel José was able to get his father's last smile while describing him Rosas' operations in the "desert", and Pedro, on his deathbed, had found relief in thinking that "at last his wishes would be fulfilled". He asked Rosas to name some geographical element of the Pampa after his father, to celebrate his memory in the best way possible. However, the *Restaurador* never did it, as the ideal of federal agrarian republicanism, so central in his coming to power, was eventually waning, turning soon into a rhetorical device devoid of any adherence to reality.

6. Conclusions: The Sudden Waning of the Ideal of Federal Agrarian Republicanism

Notwithstanding the popular consensus which accompanied the rise to power of the federal faction and the deployment of print culture to strengthen the support for the political and economic model of federal agrarian republicanism, Buenos Aires authorities resorted to a great dose of violence and coercion to maintain peace and order in the city and in the countryside.¹⁵⁹ Rural and urban population actively resisted state attempts of discipline and authoritarian government. Neither provincial elite represented a monolithic bloc supporting the *Restaurador de las Leyes*. The federal faction experienced severe conflicts among its leaders during 1833: Juan Ramón Balcarce, the new Governor, and the Minister of War Enrique Martínez organised an opposition to Rosas, who was trying to lead Buenos Aires politics from his role as Commander of the Countryside. Two opposed federal lists were presented at the legislative elections, and the *cismáticos* gained control of the *Sala*, trying to sanction a provincial constitution to resist Rosas' aspirations. However, the so-called "Revolución de los Restauradores" re-established the political prominence of the *rosista* federal faction, now supported by the Sociedad Popular Restauradora, the armed wing of their political terrorism.¹⁶⁰ These events led to the new election of Rosas as Governor of the Province in 1835, and he would not resign until the military defeat in Caseros in 1852. The "Revolution of the Free Southerners" (1839) was the last attempt of provincial elite to challenge his supremacy, and it tragically ended with the execution of the revolt's leaders and the embargo of the property of their supporters, among which wealthy *hacendados* played a prominent role.¹⁶¹

The *rosismo* was also questioned on the ground of ideas. A new generation of young intellectuals emerged (the "Generation of '37") and tried to shape a new political (and economic) proposal distant

¹⁵⁸ Manuel J. García to Juan Manuel de Rosas. Buenos Aires, 19 June 1833. In *Ivi*, 71-72.

¹⁵⁹ Salvatore, *Wandering Paysanos*.

¹⁶⁰ Ternavasio, *Historia*, 184-189.

¹⁶¹ Gelman and Schroeder, *op. cit.*

from factional politics.¹⁶² They were the sons of Buenos Aires Atlantic republicanism: they were educated in the University of Buenos Aires, some of them thanks to scholarship directed to student from the Interior, and then voyages to Europe (especially Paris) permitted them to get acquainted with the most recent intellectual trends of the epoch. The climate of associationism and republican intellectual freedom sustained their education and their cultural proposal, until the inauguration of the authoritarian era of the *rosismo* forced them to exile.¹⁶³ This intellectual movement included some of the future founding fathers of the Argentine Republic and Argentine liberalism (Alberdi and Sarmiento). However, the leading figure of the Sal3n was Esteban Echeverr3a.

Highly influenced by Saint-Simon and the following French economic and social thought, Echeverr3a returned to Buenos Aires from Paris in 1830. His reading provided him the intellectual argument to attack the economic individualism characterising liberal thinkers, as well as the abstract universalisation of Benthamite legal thought. His economic ideas, sketched in his *Segunda lectura*, were directed at the future Argentine nation, which would be created by the intellectual endeavours of the new generation.¹⁶⁴

As national consciousness was in infant state compared to European civilisation, Echeverr3a wanted to show how it could progress, and he started sketching the ways to improve the “industrial element”, the first constitutive part of the “humanitarian civilisation”.¹⁶⁵ The building blocks of a civilisation were universal, but the ways to stimulate them were particular to each geographical and historical context. It was possible to discover how each civilisation might progress through the study of its history, geography and current state of society, as “industry is always related to the needs of a *pueblo*”.¹⁶⁶ As the Argentine nation lacked “hands and capitals”, already existing activities were to be stimulated to favour capital accumulation and productive diversification. Therefore, Echeverr3a wished to foster “agricultural industry and husbandry”. Only this way it was possible to take advantage of local natural endowments at full. While recognising that rural industry was progressing, the processing of raw material should be further encouraged, as to exchange industrial products on the international markets, alongside the abundant local raw materials, “is the way to strengthen the sphere of our industry, using the resources that we have at hand”. The wealth of the Argentine nation should be based on increasing export added value. The state should assist the improvement through

¹⁶² The inauguration of the Sal3n Literario in 1837 by Marcos Sastre was the highest point of this intellectual experience in Buenos Aires. A few months later, it was close because the radical intellectual proposal did not win the favour of the local elite, and the *rosismo* was gradually closing the space for dissidence. Tarcus, *El socialismo rom3ntico*, 126-132.

¹⁶³ Gonz3lez Bernaldo, *Civilidad y pol3tica*, 112-138.

¹⁶⁴ The intellectual proposal of the Sal3n Literario included the creation of a library and a reading room and organising lectures. It was part of the plan to create a national cultural consciousness. See Weinberg, *El Sal3n Literario*.

¹⁶⁵ Echeverr3a, ‘Segunda lectura’, 169.

¹⁶⁶ *Ivi*, 172.

infrastructural projects aimed at bettering communication and market integration, as “if individuals cannot, it falls to governments as being instituted for the common good and prosperity”. Echoing Enlightened Spanish reformists, Echeverría believed in the necessity of state intervention to stimulate individual interest, which was the main engine supporting economic progress. The elements leading to industrial prosperity were “freedom, guarantees, protection and encouragement”.

The young Echeverría wished to establish “a truly Argentinean economic science” and the first step was to collect information and data about local economic history since colonial times. This way, it was possible to carefully study local economic development and understand better how to progress further. In fact, European economic science was constructed through the analysis of European history, therefore its principles cannot be valid for South American republics. What was the goal of a national economic science?

Preventing mistaken economic policies which would damage the working population, such as had been happening since 1810. The novelty of his economic thinking was exactly the inclusion of the social question in the ideas inherited from the local tradition. Denouncing indirect taxation as it mainly falls on the subaltern classes, Echeverría noted that successive governments had never favoured the productive classes, and while they sacrificed their lives for national independence “they are still heavily taxed, their industry is hampered, they are not allowed to enjoy their labour, the only property they have while the rich enjoy leisure”.¹⁶⁷ The solution was a legislation protecting rural producers, distributing free public lands, organising migration flows, establishing prizes for innovation and production.¹⁶⁸ This was the path to follow, one that it was not taken by Rosas’ federal agrarian republicanism, as Echeverría denounced that the government represented a counter-Revolution, rather than the realisation of May aspirations.

Federal agrarian republicanism was the apex of Buenos Aires republican economic thought, and it proved a contradictory ideal in its practical realisation. It praised the character of the individual producers, and it was mobilised to bring order and stability to the rural world through the distribution of frontier lands and the institutionalisation of Native inclusion into frontier commercial society. In theory, the colonisation plan of Azul was to be replicated on a provincial and national level, and the resulting opulence would become the basis of political union and social stability. In practice, the result was the development of an interethnic commercial society based on legal pluralism, that did not resist the fall of Rosas administration. The tenancy system promoted during Rosas’ years was an

¹⁶⁷ *Ivi*, 177.

¹⁶⁸ Echeverría probably dedicated a section to territorial property, but the only manuscript of his *Segunda lectura* abruptly interrupted while he was dealing with the topic.

institutional basis solid enough to guarantee the expansion of rural production and market relations and loose enough to informally include alternative conceptions of property (the persistence of rural customs and Native land use). If an inclusive understanding of property rights fed interethnic and social stability in the countryside, it did not shelter subaltern classes (both Creole and Native) from the increase of social inequality brought by the progressive land accumulation in few hands, a process that would deepen throughout the 19th century, each time the Argentine state would appropriate new lands from sovereign Native groups.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹ Gelman and Santilli, 'Las paradojas de la Libertad'.

CONCLUSIONS

This research offered an intellectual history of the economic debates, especially around land property, which generated from, accompanied and favoured the Atlantic conjuncture of reform, war and revolution in Buenos Aires and its surrounding regions. Land property was configured as an instrument to increase the overall productivity of the Spanish commercial empire during the late Bourbon reforms; notions of imperial property informed the attempt to territorialise imperial power in Buenos Aires and the Banda Oriental, in the context of a socially disruptive economic expansion; the new ideas on the wealth-generating character of human labour turned land property into a fundamental concept to sustain the early advancement of the local commodity frontier, generating tensions within Spanish American society, and beyond it, as the growing frontier interethnic conflicts for land use and control attest.

The collapse of Spanish rule generated new layers of meanings surrounding property, which rivalled or sat alongside old ones. The role of land property in stimulating the political increase of the imperial productive population re-branded into a fundamental means to craft virtuous republican citizens, who must defend and expand the productive frontier of their homeland. A population of settled market producers would bring order and stability to the rural world shaken by dramatic commercial expansion and civil conflict. However, the collapse of the traditional power structures also determined the emergence of new crucial actors in local politics, who put forward additional ideas surrounding the relationship between men and land. The rural population was a fundamental one: the analysis of the federal movement of the Banda Oriental attests to the relevance that the Spanish tradition of local government and republicanism had in shaping revolutionary politics. The economic content of land property did not change, but a new association between property distribution and social justice would now have an essential antecedent in Artigas' *Reglamento*. In the eyes of Buenos Aires elites, land property represented the desired economic stability and order. The civil war against the Liga Federal showed that it could also mean the subversion of the established and hierarchical order, that was equalled to the spectre of anarchy.

Buenos Aires politics understood the necessity of including republican citizenship in plans for socio-economic expansion to face these dangers. The *unitarios*, however, stuck to an idealistic program which soon clashed against reality. They sponsored education and foreign immigration to craft a republican and modern society thanks to the influx of European culture and individuals (thanks to the promotion of incoming European migration), and, at the same time, inaugurated a costly and aggressive frontier policy that alienated the support of the majority of the rural population. On the

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other hand, the *federales*, and especially some early leaders of this faction such as Manuel J. García, Manuel Moreno and Juan Manuel de Rosas, understood that an alliance with frontier Native groups and the co-optation of the rural and urban masses was crucial to govern the early republican Buenos Aires. Land property was, again, an end and a means to strengthen the institutionalisation of a federal commercial society, as land was appropriated thanks to the alliance with the *caciques* Chanil and Cachul, and it was then distributed to reinforce adhesion to the federal cause through emphyteusis or conditional donations. The conceptual core of the relationship between property and economic growth did not change in the transition from Spanish imperial administrators to Creole political leaders: land property was valued as an instrument to attract a greater number of individuals into a modern and civil commercial society, guaranteeing a prosperous and stable social order. However, the constellations of meanings surrounding this conceptual core changed significantly. At the beginning of our story, land property, economic growth, and commodity frontier served the politics of power of an imperial hierarchical entity. At the end of it, the same concepts were mobilised in favour of a republic based on popular sovereignty and representation. The economic structure of society and the economic ideas it generated were strikingly similar when comparing the Spanish monarchy and the Province of Buenos Aires. However, the political ideas surrounding these economic concepts changed dramatically.

Our focus on land property permitted us to appreciate how interethnic diplomacy was a crucial issue for Buenos Aires at the dawn of independence. The security of provincial territorial property and the appropriation of new lands inevitably passed through clashes or alliances with the *Pampas*, the *Tehuelchús*, the *Pehuenches* and the *Ranquelches*. This material necessity was reflected in the discursive construction of federal agrarian republicanism, which predicated the Native incorporation into Creole developing republican commercial society. Arguments surrounding the civilisational effects of trade, or the stage theory of economic development, were drawn from the Spanish Enlightenment tradition of political economy and put forward to build a consensus around the need to create an interethnic frontier society. However, no notion of equality informed these intellectual debates. The Spanish Catholic tradition and a hierarchical conception of the social order loomed large, and the new republican discourse imagined a polity composed of equal citizens drawn from the upper caste of the Spanish order: white people of European descent.

Similarly, early Atlantic liberalism shared the same intolerance for racial difference, as evident in the discussion of the politico-economic arguments of Rivadavia and his supporters. The difference was that early liberalism and its faith in the rule of law and legal equality prevented from accommodating

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differences through legal pluralism. Therefore, the only solution to the “indigenous problem” was their complete extermination. These ideas inspired a failing frontier policy that paved the ground for the ascent of the federal faction and their solution of interethnic commercial society. As we repeatedly stressed, Native incorporation was based on their assimilation to Creole commercial and productive customs and the loss of their cultural traits that did not fit into the model of a modern and civil commercial society. It was, for sure, a form of violence, more subtle than military confrontations but equally coercive in its intention to deploy state power on individuals. Buenos Aires and the Argentine Republic resorted to open violence against Pampean Native groups in the 1870s and 1880s, conquering the territory until the Magellan Straits and realising the aspirations of liberal agrarian republicanism. Further research is needed to detail why and how the possibility of an interethnic commercial society was finally discarded, especially regarding the Native attempts to accommodate to a commercial way of life during and after the era of Rosas. Additionally, our discussion opens up the possibility of evaluating the institutional building of the Argentine Republic as a form of settler colonialism alongside the case of the United States, Canada or Australia, for instance.

The concept of land property and its association with economic development influenced Buenos Aires institutional construction in the period under study. During the late colonial period, new institutions emerged to promote economic expansion, scoring good results in connecting the local economy with flourishing Atlantic markets. The notion of the wealth-generating character of human labour elevated land property as a fundamental economic concept and institution, as it was believed it was a crucial instrument for establishing a commercial society. The economic expansion pushed the progressive formation of new interest groups in Buenos Aires, which sought to speed up the pace of land appropriation and rural productivity. This new collective actor gradually gained prominence in local politics and influenced local institutional trajectory. However, our approach carefully contextualised economic arguments and debates and proved that the rise to prominence of a determinate faction of the Buenos Aires landowner class was a progressive and gradual process that did not respond to fixed laws of historical development. The push to Native land appropriation and economic improvement was a by-product of the colonial era. However, the political dominance of a rent-seeking landowner elite was not.

The seizure of power by Rosas and the federal faction and the inauguration of a federal commercial society in Buenos Aires was one of the many global manifestations of the material and intellectual social change promoted by the accelerated global interdependence within a capitalist economy during the Age of Revolution. Rosas proved the individual who reunited the best skills to guide a developing

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agrarian capitalist economy in the early 19th-century Atlantic: he had prominent entrepreneurial skills and capital; he was inserted in a powerful local network; he managed to use printing technology to support his republican political agenda; he was an expert in interethnic diplomacy and agrarian labour relations. Personal and contextual factors contributed to his rise to power. His rule lasted until the Río de la Plata's provincial forces did not grow dissatisfied with his management of external political but especially economic relations. Concerning local Argentine history, our global approach to the history of Buenos Aires tried to offer an alternative and balanced account to counter the ideological excesses and teleological constructions which might structure national history, both in the liberal and the revisionist forms.

What is the role of political economy in this story? It was the language through which our historical actors were able to imagine their desired economic and political future, and, at the same time, it expressed normative abstract concepts regarding the laws governing the economic and political world they inhabited. This double dimension determined the conflictive character of debates in economic matters. Political economy expressed the desires of productive augmentation of late imperial administrators or their goals of imperial constitutional reforms; it informed the petitions of Spanish Americans for deeper economic integration with their metropole or a radical break of the colonial nexus; finally, it inspired different kinds of republican agrarian utopias. The relationship between Buenos Aires and the outside world, or better, the external markets, was a constant element of these debates, and political economy rationalised the economic and political processes that the historical actors were experiencing while suggesting possible futures and alternative paths to follow.

In the period under study, everyone welcomed the interconnection with the capitalist market as it was seen as a crucial engine for local economic growth. However, the rules governing the interconnectedness were constantly debated, as petitions and memoranda to favour some export activities over others were filled starting in late colonial times and continuing throughout the period under analysis and beyond. As stressed, a specific model of growth based on the export of agricultural raw and processed commodities emerged from these discussions. Land property was central to it, but, again, it assumed different meanings: it was the property of the province that should be defended from outsiders and reserved for the economic enjoyment of its citizens; it was the small property of individual households, which, especially in the frontier regions, had to contribute to the provincial wealth and power through their labour; it was the large property of the *estancieros*, who should foster an efficient government of the rural economy attracting individuals to Creole commercial society via

wage labour. Other meanings and concepts gravitated around this conceptual core and determined tensions between the groups disputing political power in the province.

The story narrated here bears implications for the wider global history of capitalism. In fact, Buenos Aires and its inhabitants were not just passive participants but active contributors in institutionalising an interconnected global market populated by commercial societies of a different kind. The city port was the head of a provincial republic and an ephemeral confederation of republican polities whose institutional setting was shaped by the desire to participate in the same global market. Economic abstractions structured or inspired their institutional construction. As political economy became the inescapable science of government for European and Atlantic polities, the state (imperial or republican) began to be shaped by economic abstractions and, in turn, shaped the construction of local commercial societies and the wider global market. The institutions of the provincial state of Buenos Aires were structured to guarantee the inviolability of property and individual security, an ad-hoc tribunal regulated commercial matters, and the rules governing land distribution favoured market-oriented exploitations over alternative land use. As these concepts informed the institutions, they gained a normative dimension because Buenos Aires citizens actively followed them to reproduce their existence within the republican polity. The 1853 Constitution of the Argentine Republic was based on similar economic abstractions.

As this process invested multiple global localities in different times and spaces, the early institutionalisation of market societies and capitalism was characterised by an incredible degree of flexibility and heterogeneity rather than monolithic concepts such as “private property”, “wage labour”, or “economic freedom”. This is the reason why we discovered a patchwork of different ideas and practices surrounding land appropriation and exploitation, as well as the institutionalisation of an “imperfect” form of property, the emphyteusis. In the specific context of Buenos Aires, where hands were scarce and credit was dear, the emphyteusis responded to the need of retaining land in public hands, allocating it among the population and imposing conditions for its use. When Rosas understood that it was a crucial time to foster the productive settlement of the southern frontier, a new institutional setting was proposed (the conditional donations), and it sat alongside the emphyteusis and the residual appropriative practices that inhabited the countryside. Stressing heterogeneity of economic ideas and practices rather than uniformity allows us to approach a non-Eurocentric framework to study capitalism and the social change favoured by this market-oriented economic system. This consideration is a fertile point of departure to investigate the dynamics and reasons behind the disappearance of heterogeneity in favour of increasing uniformity and universalisation of

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economic ideas and practices, a process that started in the 19th century but is still awaiting the deserved scholarly attention.

We hope this research demonstrated the fruitful results of analysing economic ideas considering their historicity and context of enunciation. The reliance on alternative historical sources for studying them permitted a better approximation to the historical meanings of fundamental economic concepts in a given historical time, and their mobilisation by historical actors. Newspapers, petitions and political debates have given us a nuanced image of how much the society of Buenos Aires was structured by debates in political economy, as this “science” was extremely diffused in the city since the late colonial time. While we focused on economic elites, our findings open up the possibilities to pursue a similar approach to investigate the economic ideas of popular classes, notwithstanding the inescapable difficulties entailed in the availability of primary sources. The juxtaposition of many stories of economic ideas would provide us with a clearer picture of the concepts and arguments that accompanied the progressive construction of an interconnected global capitalist market and how different people in different times favoured or contrasted the socio-economic change that the advent of economic modernity necessarily entailed.

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AGN, Archivo General de la Nación Argentina, Buenos Aires. Collection: Sala VII. Leg. 94, 1041, 1277, 1753, 2651, 2307, 7330.

BN, Biblioteca Nacional de la República Argentina Mariano Moreno, Buenos Aires. Collection: Sala del Tesoro.

RAH, Real Academia de la Historia, Madrid. Collection: Mata Linares. Tomo VIII and XIX.

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