Chapter Two

Approaches to Argentine State Formation

Introduction

The long season of violence and fragmentation in the Río de la Plata that shaped the emerging Argentine national state drew to a close only in the 1870s, following the disastrous War of the Triple Alliance. An important turning point was reached in the 1850s, however, when the rulers of Buenos Aires province gained access to new material resources for state-building and when less-militarized ways of gaining and holding political power were essayed among *porteño*[1] political elites. Buenos Aires in turn served as the keystone in the emergence of a central state that came both to harmonize and to dominate the fractious Argentine provinces.

As against earlier works rooted in Marxist and/or dependency paradigms, which derive Argentine state formation and the accompanying political conflicts more or less directly from changes in the political economy, this dissertation argues that the practices and choices of political elites mattered significantly to the outcome. At

the same time, in contrast to recent works that stress changes in practices and discourse to the near-exclusion of political economy, this dissertation holds that the material changes of the epoch, both local and global, were also crucial, both because they provided would-be statebuilders with important new resources and because they diminished the comparative advantages of older, more militarized political practices while facilitating the emergence of new ones located in or directed towards an emerging "public sphere."

Fragmented sovereignty, caudillo rule

The *pampas*, the vast grasslands surrounding the Río de la Plata estuary where the Uruguay and Paraná river systems converge (see Map 2.1), were in late-colonial times the scene of intense rivalry between the Spanish and Portuguese empires. What was to become the Argentine political space emerged from the Independence wars politically fragmented into multiple quasisovereign entities. Multiple sovereignty and rule by warlords (*caudillos*) were rooted in the institutional geography of Spanish colonialism, in the specific historical features of the Independence process, and in the postcolonial evolution of the region's political

economy.

Conquered, colonized and settled in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the region's principal function in

Map 2.1. The Río de la Plata region, ca. 1820-1870

Source: Bethell 1993: 5

the early colonial period was to provide semiclandestine contraband routes for illicit trade in precious metals from Upper Peru (present-day Bolivia), slaves from Brazil and Africa, and manufactured goods from northern Europe. (Gelman 1987; Moutoukias 1988) Spanish power and population were concentrated in Buenos Aires and a dozen or so lesser urban centers dispersed along the major rivers and overland trade routes linking the Plata with the mines of Upper Peru. Between the colonial cities stretched vast, sparsely populated expanses of pampa, desert, and high mountains (*sierra*). The near-total lack of paved roads, and even of navigable interior waterways to the west and south, accentuated the isolation of the urban centers one from another. Seminomadic bands of indigenous people resisted encroachments by the Spanish and *criollos* (American-born colonists), making intercity travel still more difficult and dangerous.

By the third quarter of the eighteenth century, the Spanish Crown's heightened strategic concern over perceived Portuguese and British threats to the wealth of Upper Peru via the Río de la Plata necessitated a search for more

robust means of supporting Buenos Aires than irregular subsidies of Potosí silver. While the port was the main military bastion of the Viceroyalty of Peru, the Crown was unable to staff, arm and fortify it adequately due to lack of resources and difficulties in governing long-distance from Lima. The sparsely populated hinterland of Buenos Aires offered no adequate basis for fiscal extraction of the necessary funds, and colonial prohibitions on free trade meant that the deficit could not be offset from customs duties either. (Céspedes 1947: 100-04)

The opportunity for a decisive shift came in the 1770s: with Britain fully committed to the war against its rebellious North American colonies, Spain calculated that Portugal would be unable to secure adequate support from its powerful ally. Plans were set in motion for a major military blow against Brazil. To provide the base of operations for what was expected to be all-out war, the Crown created a new Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata, headquartered at Buenos Aires. To assure the necessary resources for the military effort, the new administrative unit would encompass not only the port's hinterlands but

also the Audiencia of Charcas in Upper Peru, site of Potosí's silver mines. (Céspedes 1947: 111ff.)[2]

But the military conflict was over quickly. The Portuguese accepted a ceasefire, ceded their enclave at Colônia do Sacramento, negotiated treaties of commerce and friendship, and remained neutral when Spain went to war against Britain in 1779. Still, the viceroyalty remained in place: "the new political unit, created on the basis of immediate and transitory needs of a military type, persisted without undergoing any changes in its territorial expanse; it now had different aims and permanent features." (Céspedes 1947: 115; see also Alden 1978)

The population of the backwater port turned vice-regal capital now burgeoned, amid a booming economy based not only on trade in precious metals and slaves but increasingly upon the export of locally produced cattle products such as hides and tallow. The latter goods were harvested by hunting down and slaughtering the wild cattle of the pampas, which ranged freely in vast herds. (Céspedes 1947; Halperín Donghi 1975; Brown 1979)

The geopolitics of Argentine independence reflected the

colonial-era dispersal of power and population. Independence was catalyzed by Napoleon's invasion of the Iberian Peninsula in 1808 and the consequent disruption of Spanish rule. The first of a series of juntas or directorates dominated by *criollos porteños* -- lawyers, merchants, and military officers -- seized power in Buenos Aires in May 1810. (Bushnell 1987: 103ff.; Lynch 1986: 41-57) The *Primera Junta* asserted sovereignty over the entire vaguely defined territory of the viceroyalty. Enforcing this soon proved to beyond the porteños' power, however. Ties with Upper Peru and with Paraguay were quickly broken, as Spain regained temporary control in the former and a separatist regime under Gaspar de Francia seized power in the latter. Even so, regimes in Buenos Aires continued to claim sovereignty over these polities for several decades.[3] (Nevares 1987; Escudé 1988)

Across the Plata estuary, a rural-based revolt began in 1814 and spread westward from the *banda oriental*. Led by a former commander of the Spanish border militia (*blandengues*), José Gervasio Artigas, the uprising demanded land reform and the replacement of centralized rule from

Buenos Aires with a confederation of the sovereign "peoples" of the Plata. (Reyes Abadie 1986; Demicheli 1971) Artiguista federalism soon engulfed much of Buenos Aires's own hinterland. Seeking to forestall the spread of rebellion into Brazil's unruly southern province of Rio Grande do Sul, the Portuguese crown sent troops into the *banda oriental* and annexed it as the Cisplatine Province. Buenos Aires initially acquiesced, but in 1825-28 fought a war against Brazil to recover the *banda*; military stalemate and British diplomatic pressure led to the creation of Uruguay as an independent buffer state in 1828. (Seckinger 1984: 59-73, 131)

As Spanish colonial rule collapsed throughout the viceroyalty, the porteño authorities called upon the cities of the interior to send delegates to constituent assemblies that made several stillborn attempt to organize a central state. The repeated foundering of such efforts (in 1813, 1816-19, and 1824-26) owed largely to the interior cities' resistance to the restoration of viceregal centralism sought by Buenos Aires. In the course of the ensuing civil wars, urban *cabildos*[4] asserted sovereignty over their respective

rural hinterlands. Subsequently, rural powerholders gained representation in legislative assemblies and the cabildos were suppressed. The assemblies in turn designated governors. The resulting quasisovereign units came to be known as *provincias* (provinces). (Halperín Donghi 1972; Chiaramonte 1983, 1993)

Warfare repeatedly pitted Buenos Aires against upriver and interior power centers, centralists against proponents of autonomy and confederation, constitutionalists against caudillos, and rural people against town dwellers. Conflict in the 1820s was spurred especially by the efforts of the Buenos Aires-centered Unitarian party, which was headed by Bernardino Rivadavia and supported principally by the foreign merchants and financiers of the port. The Unitarians sought to organize a centralized national state that would be financed mainly from the port's revenues. Their program of liberal reforms called for rationalizing government institutions, curtailing Church prerogatives, upholding free trade, creating a national bank, and encouraging European immigration. (Rock 1987: 98-99; Bushnell 1983: 20-30) Opposition to the Unitarian program

grew first of all among large landed producers in the Buenos Aires countryside. As exporters of hides and salted beef, they wanted import duties retained by the provincial government and kept only so high as to obviate the need for land or income taxation. They also objected to Unitarian pursuit of a war with Brazil over hegemony in Uruguay:

> . . . conscription of peons depleted the rural labour force; the Indian frontier was neglected and now open to Brazilian invasion; and the prolonged blockade of Buenos Aires cut off estancia exports from their overseas markets. (Lynch 1981: 33; see also Monsma 1992)

The caudillos of the interior provinces also opposed the Unitarian project, but on a rather different basis. Unlike the merchants and cattle-raisers of Buenos Aires, who had benefited greatly from post-Independence free trade, interior producers and artisans suffered when the Spanish colonial monopoly was removed and when and their trade outlets to Peru and Chile were disrupted by war and revolution. "Their only defense was the cost and the difficulty of transporting goods. . . . This isolation helped to preserve the old social structure of the provinces, and it prevented their integration with the littoral into a national economy." (Lynch 1986: 66-67) The

Federalism of the interior, then, "marked a recrudescence of the *comunero* and local mercantilist traditions rooted in the seventeenth century" and crystallized around "local resistance to forced appropriations and military impressment" directed from Buenos Aires. (Rock 1987: 94)

Efforts at state centralization were further constrained by the war-sped collapse of the mining economy in Upper Peru. Interurban trade went into long-term decline. Local holders of mercantile wealth shifted investments into rural enterprises that required relatively little infrastructure or labor -- on the grasslands around the Río de la Plata, into cattleraising. The mounted labor force required by the large ranches (*estancias*) was largely temporary. The precarious nature of existence in the war-torn post-Independence countryside caused ranch laborers (*gauchos*) to seek protection and patronage from large ranchers (*estancieros*), who could both offer laborers temporary wage work and shield them, at least temporarily, from forced recruitment into the militias or army. (Salvatore 1992) Even so, the sporadic nature of ranch work and the patron-client ties between estancieros and gauchos

made it relatively easy to arm and mobilize the latter for internal rebellion or inter-provincial warfare.

While inter-provincial commerce revived somewhat after the crises of the 1810s, domestic mercantile activity failed to become a principal source of wealth for elites in any of the Argentine provinces.[5] Thus no significant dominant-class segment formed an early compelling interest in the construction of a national state. Indeed, rural producers in Buenos Aires were almost wholly oriented to external markets in hides and salted beef; hence they viewed the Unitarian efforts to construct a national state as unwarranted constraints on their resources, personnel, and prerogatives. On the other hand, Buenos Aires ranchers were beholden in significant ways to their own provincial state, especially inasmuch as the valorization and extension of their landholdings depended on that state's military capacities. Frontier expansion in Buenos Aires "was not primarily a movement of individual pioneers" but rather involved "large scale military operations against the Indians . . . on a scale which no one save the government could undertake with any hope of success." (Burgin 1946: 21,

23-24)

Upon Rivadavia's installation as president of the United Provinces of the Río de la Plata in 1826, porteño ranchers rallied to the Federalist banner of the interior caudillos and waged a three-year revolt against the Unitarians. It was out of this civil war that Juan Manuel de Rosas emerged as caudillo of Buenos Aires province in 1828-29. Rosas proceeded to suppress all challengers to the port province's hegemony in the other provinces, be they federalist or unitarian. A frontier rancher and militia chief, Rosas was vested in 1835 with "the entire sum of public power" by the Buenos Aires provincial legislature.[6] (Lynch 1981: 163-66)

While Rosas steadfastly opposed all efforts to institutionalize a central state, Buenos Aires under his stern rule exercised hegemony over the nominal Argentine Confederation established under the Federal Pact of 1831. That accord initially involved only the littoral provinces of Buenos Aires, Entre Ríos, and Santa Fe but was later joined by Corrientes and the interior provinces as well. The Pact provided for the convening of a General Federative

Congress to deliberate on foreign and local commerce, river navigation, fiscal issues, and the national debt (mainly, a large sterling loan secured from Britain by Rivadavia in 1824). No Congress was ever held, although a transitory Representative Commission did meet several times in 1831-32. The commission broke up amid a heated debate over free trade vs. protection between representatives of Rosas and Corrientes governor Pedro Ferré.[7] (Cragnolino and Schwarzstein 1984: 11-12) The Pacto Federal remained a dead letter until 1853, when it would be taken up as the legal basis for a new attempt at "national organization." Meanwhile, Rosas's resistance thereto signaled

> . . . the firm decision of the great majority of the men of Buenos Aires in no way to cede any of the privileges they possessed in having a national customs house without a national state, and control over foreign trade and river navigation without interference from the majority of the provinces that shared these problems." (Chiaramonte 1991: 16)

Rosas preferred, then, to exercise domination through patron-client relationships with individual provincial governors and steadfastly opposed all efforts to organize central-state institutions. Proponents of a national constitution that could have provided guarantees to the

less-powerful provinces were harshly repressed during Rosas's rule in the 1830s and 40s, and many were driven into exile, especially in Chile and Montevideo. Many of the constitutionalists who were driven out of Buenos Aires after 1839 took refuge in Montevideo, where some served in the successive anti-Rosas regimes in that rival port city. From Montevideo, the Unitarians made repeated overtures to the governors of Corrientes and Entre Ríos province and were open proponents of French and British intervention against Rosas during the 1840s.

The 1850s -- Interregnum and revolution

Despite holding an advantageous position with respect to its rivals, Buenos Aires's hegemony was never absolute. Rosas repeatedly had to forestall or suppress coalitions among the other provinces, through diplomacy and military action. The 1840s were marked by renewed interprovincial warfare, overlaid by an on-again, off-again conflict with Britain and France over commercial access to the interior rivers. The latter was settled in 1849 largely on Rosas's terms, signaling Buenos Aires's renewed determination to monopolize the customs revenue and put strict limits on

foreign vessels' access to the waterways of the Plata. (Rube 1978: 7-20; Oddone 1937: 250-51) This provoked strong opposition from upriver producers in the littoral provinces, who during the intermittent French and British blockades of the Paraná had become wealthy by shipping wool and hides directly to Europe from open ports on the Uruguay. (Urquiza Almandoz 1978: 250-52)

Gen. Justo José de Urquiza, governor of Entre Ríos province and an immensely wealthy rancher and exporter in his own right, was able to forge a potent but short-lived coalition with the Brazilian monarchy, its Uruguayan clients, Argentine exiles in Montevideo, and the government of Corrientes province. (Saldías 1988: II,48; Demicheli 1971: 260-64, 522-25) Urquiza's army first broke Oribe's siege of Montevideo and then routed Rosas's forces at the battle of Caseros. In February 1852 the defeated dictator fled to exile in England. (Rube 1978: Chs. 4, 10; Lynch 1981: 327-35)

The collapse of Rosas's rule and hence of Buenos Aires's hegemony posed anew the question of Argentina's "national organization." Following a conference of

provincial governors at San Nicolás that affirmed the validity of the 1831 Pacto Federal, a constituent congress was convened to reorganize the Argentine Confederation and prepare a constitution. But the new rulers of Buenos Aires balked at the proposed arrangement, which called for equal representation for all provinces and thus fulfilled longstanding efforts by the interior to gain parity with the wealthy port. Asserting claims to *libertad* and spearheaded by former opponents of Rosas who had returned from exile in Montevideo and Chile, Buenos Aires rebelled against Urquiza in September 1852 and withstood an eight-month siege. An attempt by the porteños to rally support among the other provinces failed. By mid-1853, Buenos Aires had in effect seceded from the Confederation. (Goróstegui 1987: 24-36)

Nearly a decade of intermittent civil war followed. Despite the new constitutional framework, the Confederation remained a congeries of caudillo-run provinces. General Urquiza held the office of president but in practice ruled in the Rosas style as "caudillo of caudillos." (Oszlak 1982: 58-69; Scobie 1964: 107-112)

Despite ongoing conflicts among themselves over policy

toward the Confederation (see p.19 below), the liberals in Buenos Aires strengthened their grip throughout the decade. After Buenos Aires's victory at the battle of Pavón in 1861, the Confederation collapsed and was supplanted in 1862 by the República Argentina, now under the domination of Buenos Aires. The new authorities carried out military campaigns against the less corrigible interior caudillos, but increasingly found mutual interests with and provided concessions to the export-oriented provinces of the *litoral*.[8]

This moment in the history of the Río de la Plata can fruitfully be analyzed using the political-conflict model of "revolution" elaborated in the current literature by Tilly (1991, 1992a,b) and Goldstone (1991a,b).[9] The process that eventuated in the organization of the Argentine Republic can be broken down into the following sequence: (1) a *breakdown* of the loose system of quasi-sovereign provinces constructed under the hegemony of Rosas (the Argentine Confederation), giving rise to (2) *contention* for state power among rival groupings of elite actors, resulting in (3) a situation of *dual sovereignty*, which was resolved through (4) the

consolidation of an Argentine national state on a constitutionally centralized basis.

Table 2.1. Thirty years of warfare in the Río de la Plata

Phase/dates	Theater	Opponents	Comments
1 1839-1841	Argentine provinces	Federalistas vs. Unitarios	Scorched-earth campaign in interior provinces by Federalists under Gen. Manuel Oribe
2 1842-1851 ("La Guerra Grande")	Uruguay	Oribe, Rosas vs. Rivera, Argentine exiles, France, Britain	Siege of Montevideo, efforts by Unitarios to gain support from Brazil, Entre Ríos province for broader war.
3 1852-1862	Arroyo del Medio	Buenos Aires vs. Confederación Argentina	Siege of Buenos Aires followed by a low-intensity civil war; each side seeks allies in interior of other, as well as among indigenous peoples of the pampas; Confederación is unable to develop sufficient state capacity to subdue Buenos Aires.
4a 1862-1871	Interior/ Littoral	Argentine Republic vs. Federalist caudillos of interior	Occupation of interior provinces by porteño armies commanded by Uruguayan proconsuls; subjugation of weaker provinces to authority of central state dominated by Buenos Aires.
4b 1865-1870	Paraguay	Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay vs. Paraguay	Full-scale war instigated by Argentine president Mitre and spearheaded by Brazilian Empire, aimed at blocking Paraguay's emergence as an alternative pole/model of political and economic development within Plata space. Scorched-earth offensives devastate Paraguay.

This Argentine revolution unfolded concurrently with and in the aftermath of thirty years of warfare throughout the Río de la Plata, which engulfed not only the Argentine provinces but also Uruguay, Paraguay and Brazil at different times and in various theaters. The protracted conflict involved -- either militarily or diplomatically or both -- Buenos Aires, the littoral and interior Argentine provinces, Uruguay, Paraguay, Brazil, France, and Britain. The overlapping phases and theaters of this "30 years' war" are summarized in Table 2.1.

Political and economic transitions

As at other turning points in the region's history, much of the substance of politics among the Argentine provinces during the 1850s turned around the status of Buenos Aires: would the province persist as an autonomous polity, within or outside the Argentine Confederation? Or would its rulers take the initiative in setting up a more centralized state -- in the parlance of the time, "organize the Argentine nation"? Among the political elites of Buenos Aires, support for each of these approaches ebbed and flowed according to the perceived chances of success, the

way interests would be affected, and the geopolitical context. Elections to the provincial legislature and executive were often contested on this ground; pamphleteers, journalists and public orators launched polemics; and sporadic violent clashes occurred both among porteño factions and between the armies of Buenos Aires and the Confederation.

Essentially three alternatives (not necessarily mutually exclusive) for reorganizing the provincial regime and its relations with the other provinces were debated in Buenos Aires after Rosas's fall:

> 2. Accept the constitutional framework of the Confederation, thereby relinquishing Buenos Aires's viceregal pretensions, its monopoly on customs revenue and other prerogatives (the *federalista* or *constitucionalista* position);
>
> 4. Through a combination of military force and concession of certain prerogatives, re-establish and fortify Buenos Aires's hegemony over the remaining provinces and organize a porteño-dominated central state; or

6. Acknowledge and affirm Buenos Aires's de facto status as an independent state; at the extreme, proclaim full sovereignty and accept the military and diplomatic consequences thereof (the *autonomista* position).[10]

The political conflicts of the 1850s unfolded against the backdrop of a concurrent shift in the way Buenos Aires and the littoral provinces were inserted into the world economy. The mix of export staples shifted markedly from cattle products -- especially salted beef shipped to Brazil and Cuba for slave consumption -- to wool, destined for the recently mechanized mills of Britain, France and Belgium. Sheep supplanted cattle on broad expanses of the land surface, particularly in the north and west of Buenos Aires province, as well as in adjacent zones of Entre Ríos, Santa Fe and Córdoba. The first railroad was opened in 1857, and steam vessels began plying the Río de la Plata and the interior rivers.

Explaining post-Rosas poliics (I): Class analyses

The opening of Argentina's "wool boom" and the deepening of its ties to the North Atlantic world thus

coincided with renewed elite contention over the organization of a central state. This conjuncture has long suggested to scholars that there were important linkages between the economic and political changes, but the possibility has never been satisfactorily explored. Much of the extant scholarship evinces a problematic concern with pinning down the class or economic bases of conflicting political currents. Francis McLynn, for example, has asserted that the ascendancy of *nacionalista* supporters in Buenos Aires at the close of the 1850s reflected their affinity with the ranchers and merchants oriented to the world market, whereas *autonomistas* "tended to be composed of the old-style *caudillo* landowner, whose links with European capital were more tenuous than those of landowners in the nationalist sector." (McLynn 1979: 306) In Oscar Oszlak's view, however, it was the *autonomistas* who represented "the merchant and landholding interests identified with the internal strengthening of the economic circuit formed by the province and the international market"; whereas the Confederation's military pressure on Buenos Aires facilitated the rise of the *nacionalistas* -- whom Oszlak

considers a political faction relatively autonomous from direct economic interests. (Oszlak 1982: 77) Andrés Fontana largely shares this assessment, but concurs with McLynn to the extent of asserting that urban merchants came to identify more with the *nacionalista* position in hope of expanding markets in the interior, while exporting landowners shifted only from *federalismo* to *autonomismo* inasmuch as they could not share in the mercantile surpluses extracted from the other provinces. (Fontana 1977)

Acknowledging that "the social basis of porteño resistance is unclear, and merits further investigation," Herman Schwartz has surmised that the *autonomistas* represented "a combination of merchants and the urban and state capitalists tied to the Ferrocarril del Oeste." (Schwartz 1986: 449 n.48) This echoes H.S. Ferns's speculation that the 1854 decision of the Buenos Aires regime to underwrite the construction of this first Argentine railroad signaled a "policy of isolation and of independence of foreign capitalists" and an attempt to embark on "a course of independent development based upon local supplies of capital." (Ferns 1960: 313)

María del Carmen Angueira asserts that rural producers of both cattle and sheep favored national unification but were opposed by salted-meat producers (*saladeristas*) who were "ardent defenders of autonomy." (Angueira 1989,1: 6) But Waldo Ansaldi has claimed that while both ranchers and export merchants remained "satisfied with a state territorially limited to the sphere of Buenos Aires province," it was import merchants who sought a national state inasmuch as they needed "a growing internal market." (Ansaldi 1989: 73)

Ansaldi inadvertently undermines his own and all such class-segment-centered arguments, however, when he acknowledges that there was often "a mixing of roles, since there were Buenos Aires porteño bourgeois who were simultaneously landlords and merchants." Indeed, this was a principal characteristic of the Buenos Aires elite at mid-century, as Diana Hernando's (1973) detailed exercise in collective biography has demonstrated. Hernando sums up her findings for this period as follows:

> What this study shows is that there are strong distinctive patterns corresponding to the sequence of generations as well as strong patterns corresponding to the times. A common pattern can

> be observed: . . . in the first generation a male immigrant arrives (somewhere between 1780 and 1820) and soon . . . turn[s] to some commercial venture. Many of them become important merchants. . . .
>
> For those who become merchants, their commercial dealings soon turn to cattle and cattle products -- hides, tallow, etc. These dealings in cattle eventually lead to the purchase of land towards the end of the first generation's life.
>
> The second generation -- their sons -- will be the ones to build the estancias (cattle ranches). . . . The sons will turn their inheritance into land, or will marry into a family which has land. . . . The commercial aspect of the venture is continued; usually one son is the estancia builder, another runs the commercial end in the city. (Hernando 1973: 21-22)

Moreover, ascriptions of distinct class bases to the varying elite approaches to Buenos Aires's status and to central-state construction misconstrue the concrete ways politics was conducted in the province after the fall of Rosas. The image presented is one of contention among discrete, coherent political groupings that persisted over time, had some institutional structure, and could be identified with specific newspapers and public figures. In fact, as more traditional accounts of Argentine political history have long stressed (Armesto 1914; Botana 1986; D'Amico 1952; Martínez 1990, Sáenz Quesada 1982), mid-century contention was a much more chaotic affair, largely

precluding precise sociological characterizations of the sort essayed by the historical sociologists cited above. While considerable contention indeed took place over Buenos Aires's political identity and its relationship to the other Argentine provinces, positions among the elites shifted repeatedly and only crystallized in the mid-1860s into persisting currents characterizing themselves as *nacionalistas* and *autonomistas*. Even then, moreover, politics remained largely a matter of conjunctural alliances and personalist followings, and it was not an easy matter "to interpret each party as the expression of a more or less defined group within the ruling class." (Chiaramonte 1971: 149, 157; see also Halperín Donghi 1985)

Explaining post-Rosas politics (II): Actors and discourses

Indeed, this is seldom an easy matter, as forcefully demonstrated in the critical demolition of the "social interpretation" of the great European revolutions. (See, e.g., Furet 1981; Morrill 1990) Seeking to theorize an alternative approach to the analysis of political change, Carlos Forment has asserted that the formation of political groupings "cannot be traced to . . . structures" but "must

also be examined in relation to political practice, to the interplay of culture and power":

> When the regime is in crisis, when its socio-institutional structures (for example: state apparatus, social stratification system, economic markets) and cultural rules are unravelling then, by definition, they cannot organize everyday life. . . . [W]e need to pay much closer attention to the way political practices shape group formation. Once formed, these groups will engage in practices aimed at either buttressing old, declining structures or hastening the formation of newly emerging ones. (Forment 1991: 39-40)

Applying a similar approach, Pilar González Bernaldo's magisterial dissertation (1992) seeks to explain the emergence of the Argentine nation-state by means of a detailed study of shifting forms of civic association and public discourse in Buenos Aires from Independence to 1860. Using evidence gleaned from police archives, private correspondence, travelers' accounts, records of associations, commercial almanacs, etc., González Bernaldo constructs a panoramic account and a typology of *sociabilité publique*, which she understands as

> . . . toutes les relations humaines qui se deroulent hors de l'espace privé . . . et que impliquent des sentiments d'appartenance collective que renvoient a la collectivité sociale. En principe cela favoriserait la

> construction des réseaux ouverts tissés autour des liens secondaires."[11] (González Bernaldo 1992: 31)

While offering a welcome antidote to the overly determinist and instrumentalist accounts cited earlier, González Bernaldo nonetheless fails to provide a convincing explanation of how such changes in associational form and discourse were translated into the structures of a state. Moreover, her account is far too Buenos Aires-centered and assumes rather than demonstrates that shifts in the conduct of porteño politics alone catalyzed and shaped the organization of a national state.

Explaining post-Rosas politics (III):

Political action, political economy

Both the approaches summarized above are incomplete insofar as they fail to acknowledge (1) that *different* ways of doing politics, and in particular of gaining and wielding state power, were in conflict among would-be Argentine statemakers during the 1850s; and/or (2) that while economic interests are important to the analysis, conflicts involving political practices cross-cut economic interests in ways that were not easily predictable. Attention *both* to

clashing repertoires of elite political action *and* to how this conflict was interwoven with the contention over customs revenue, river navigation, and other class and regional interests stressed in the standard historiography will enable a more textured explanation of Argentine state formation, one that takes more fully into account the life experiences, stated aims, and concrete choices of the actors involved.

Multiple sovereignty and the recurrent interprovincial warfare of the early post-Independence period shaped the emergence among powerholders and challengers of a set of characteristic ways of gaining and wielding state power. Among the practices that comprised this political repertoire, three stand out:

(1) the recruitment (or impressment) and arming of mounted rural laborers and the use of this army, militia, or *montonera*[12] either to conquer power in the provincial capital outright or to negotiate from a position of strength; (2) the enlisting of military and diplomatic aid from neighboring sovereigns and extraregional powers, so as to bolster one's own regime or bring pressure to bear for

internal change; and (3) confiscations of property and extralegal coercion to drive out or silence opponents (sometimes including the mobilization of a terror apparatus based on patron-client ties to urban plebeians; paradigmatic of this was Rosas's *Sociedad Popular Restauradora*, known to its victims as *la mazorca*). (A more complete elaboration of the post-Independence political repertoire in the Río de la Plata is sketched in Table 2.2.) The prevalence of such practices meant that the internal opponents of a given provincial

Table 2.2. Political repertoires in the Río de la Plata, 1830s-1840s

	Intra-Provincial	Inter-Provincial
Intra-Elite	Rural-based uprisings against city-centered provincial state Confiscations or embargo of opponents' property, as routine form of resource extraction by state State terror: exemplary murders, decapitations, disembowelings (*degollamiento*), etc., aimed at forcing opponents into hiding, flight, exile	Warfare between provincial states Networks among caudillos linked by patron-client ties Diplomacy and formation of inter-provincial pacts External intervention in internal provincial affairs
Elite-Plebeian	Banditry Rural guerrillas (*montoneras*) Patron-client relationships (e.g., landed producers protect ranch laborers from conscription; Rosas's support to Sociedades Africanas) Participation in state's terror apparatus (Sociedad Popular Restauradora, "La Mazorca")	Low degree of inter-provincial communication and circulation largely precluded cross-provincial plebeian movements.*

* Some interpreters present the Artiguista movement of 1813-1820 as plebeian resistance to the Buenos Aires el it as essentially an inter-elite conflict. Certainly Artigas did go further than any other elite actor in mobilizing in presenting programmatic appeals to their interests, especially land reform.

regime were constrained to seek support from the rulers of adjacent or rival provinces, lending a self-fulfilling quality to charges of treason and providing further pretext for repression.[13]

Rosas's fall provided an opening for the return to Buenos Aires of a loose network of political entrepreneurs schooled in a quite different repertoire during a decade of exile and travel in Chile, Montevideo, Europe and the United States. While by no means inexperienced in the prevailing practices of the Plata or disinclined to make use of them when it served their purposes, their preferred way of acting politically involved practices located in or directed to the "public sphere" -- newspaper and pamphlet propaganda, political clubs, election campaigns (including vote fraud and manipulation), parliamentary maneuvering, and factional diplomacy.[14] It was this that first set them apart from and brought them into conflict with actors committed to the older repertoire.

Those who in exile had become adept in the new repertoire were eager after the fall of Rosas to make it hegemonic, not only in Buenos Aires but throughout a reconstituted

Argentine Republic. By the 1870s they had largely succeeded. It will be argued in subsequent chapters that this outcome was facilitated to an important degree by changes in the economic context in which the shifting repertoires were embedded -- i.e., the momentous mid-century transition from cattle products to wool, oxcarts to railroads, sloops to steamboats, messengers on horseback to telegraph lines, etc. These material changes made the older repertoire more costly in some ways (e.g., flocks of purebred sheep were more costly to maintain than free-ranging cattle but were far more vulnerable in times of rural warfare; sheepraising required a sedentary work force that was less available for frequent military mobilization than were the mobile *gauchos* who tended the cattle herds), and facilitated the newer one in others (e.g., far more rapid and efficient overland transport and communications, which enhanced the circulation of printed media and of provincial elites themselves). This in turn helped to create a consensual context wherein elites from diverse regions could bargain over their conflicting interests by means of the new repertoire rather than by resort to armed

rebellion or encouragement of foreign intervention.

NOTES

1. *Porteño*, meaning "of or having to do with the port," refers in most contexts to the *city* of Buenos Aires, which was and remains the region's principal international port and the strategic linchpin between riverine and seaborne shipping.

2. For a more detailed account of the Spanish Crown's international-strategic considerations in establishing the viceroyalty, see Gil Munilla 1949.

3. Virtually all Argentine historians have approached this topic within a patriotic framework, deploring (e.g.) the "mutilation and fragmentation of the viceregal economic territory." (Halperín Donghi 1975: 65ff.) Such an attitude, ubiquitous in Argentine political culture generally, is most pronounced in the irredentist tone of the "geopolitical" literature produced since World War II by Argentine military figures. Adm. Fernando Milia, for example, has contended that Argentina's "strategic island" is composed "not only of Argentina, but also of Paraguay and Bolivia. A similar study of the Plata Basin would lead one to include in this strategic island, the Oriental Republic of Uruguay and the states of South Brazil." (quoted in Pittman 1981: 765)

Argentine political scientist and historian Carlos Escudé holds a minority view, considering specious the notion that the modern Argentine state is but a mutilated remnant of the Spanish Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata. He argues on the contrary that "an objective appraisal cannot fail to recognise a very significant, if not huge, territorial expansion [by Argentina] during the second half of the nineteenth century." (Escudé 1988: 155)

4. Self-perpetuating corporate town councils, the cabildos originated as colonial institutions of urban governance.

5. With the partial exception of Corrientes; see Chiaramonte 1991: 65-86 and Whigham 1986, 1991.

6. John Lynch has characterized Rosas as "the individual synthesis of the society and economy of the countryside," depicting him as having personified the "rise to power of a new economic interest, the estancieros [ranchers]," a segment of the post-Independence élite that had "turned inward to develop land, cattle, and saladeros [meat-salting plants], extending the frontier, improving their investment by commercializing the livestock industry for export." (Lynch 1981: 43-46) For recent reassessments of the Rosas regime that ascribe greater autonomy to the provincial state and express skepticism regarding claims that the Rosas regime merely reflected the interests of the landowning class, see Halperín Donghi 1988, 1992a and Salvatore 1992, 1993.

7. The ruling elite of Corrientes drew upon southern European doctrines to elaborate an alternative mercantilist ideology to the dogmatic liberalism that prevailed among their porteño counterparts. (Chiaramonte 1991: 165-206) For an account of parallel developments in Peru during this period, see Gootenberg 1989 and 1993.

8. Historians and geographers of the Río de la Plata use the term *litoral* (littoral) to refer to the coastal and riverine provinces adjacent to the estuary -- Buenos Aires, Entre Ríos, Santa Fe, Corrientes -- as contrasted to the landlocked provinces of the "interior."

9. As against the "social revolution" model that scholars of Latin American politics and history have more commonly applied. The latter, classically stated by Marx (18__), has been revised and elaborated most thoroughly by Skocpol (1979, 1994). See also Goodwin (forthcoming) and Wickham-Crowley (1991, 1992). For a critique of singular models of revolution, see Tilly 1992c.

10. It should be noted that the labels *autonomista* and *nacionalista* referred only to this internal Argentine question and did not imply analogous positions regarding foreign interference or domination.

11. " . . . all those human relations that develop outside private space . . . and that entail sentiments of collective belonging that correspond to the social collectivity. In principle, this would favor the construction of open networks woven out of secondary ties."

12. In the usage of the time, the term *montonera* was applied principally to ad hoc military formations that lacked state legitimation. They were more characteristic of the landlocked interior provinces than of Buenos Aires and the upriver (or "littoral") provinces. While *montonera*-type revolts did occur there -- the 1829 movement that proved key to Rosas's first seizure of power; the anti-Rosas rebellion by ranchers in southern Buenos Aires province in 1839 -- contemporaries did not apply the label to these events. In the littoral provinces, the principal *montonera* rebellion was the one headed by Ricardo López Jordán in Entre Ríos in 1871. (Ansaldi 1977; González Bernaldo 1987; Chávez 1986)

13. For a possible model of these conflicts (suggested to the author by Abram de Swaan), consult Norbert Elias's account of the state-formation dynamic of coalitions and conflicts among European feudal lords and monarchs. (Elias 1982)

14. For a discussion of the emergence of a "public sphere" in Buenos Aires after mid-century, see Sabato 1992 and Sabato and Palti 1990. For a different view asserting the persistence of a public sphere from the 1810s onward, see González Bernaldo 1992.