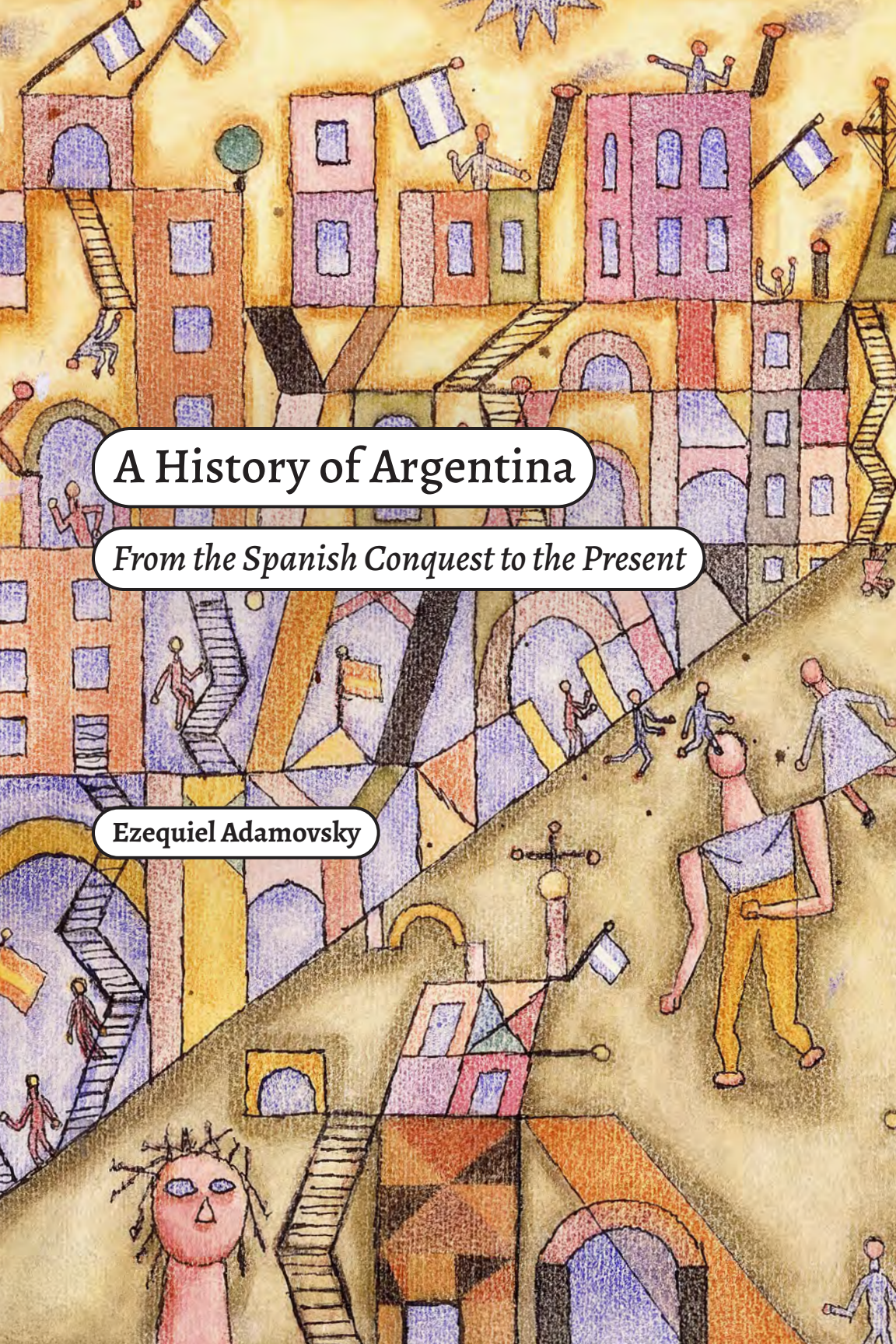
A History of Argentina
From the Spanish Conquest to the Present
Ezequiel Adamovsky

A History of Argentina

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From the Spanish Conquest to the Present

Ezequiel Adamovsky

TRANSLATED BY REBECCA WOLPIN

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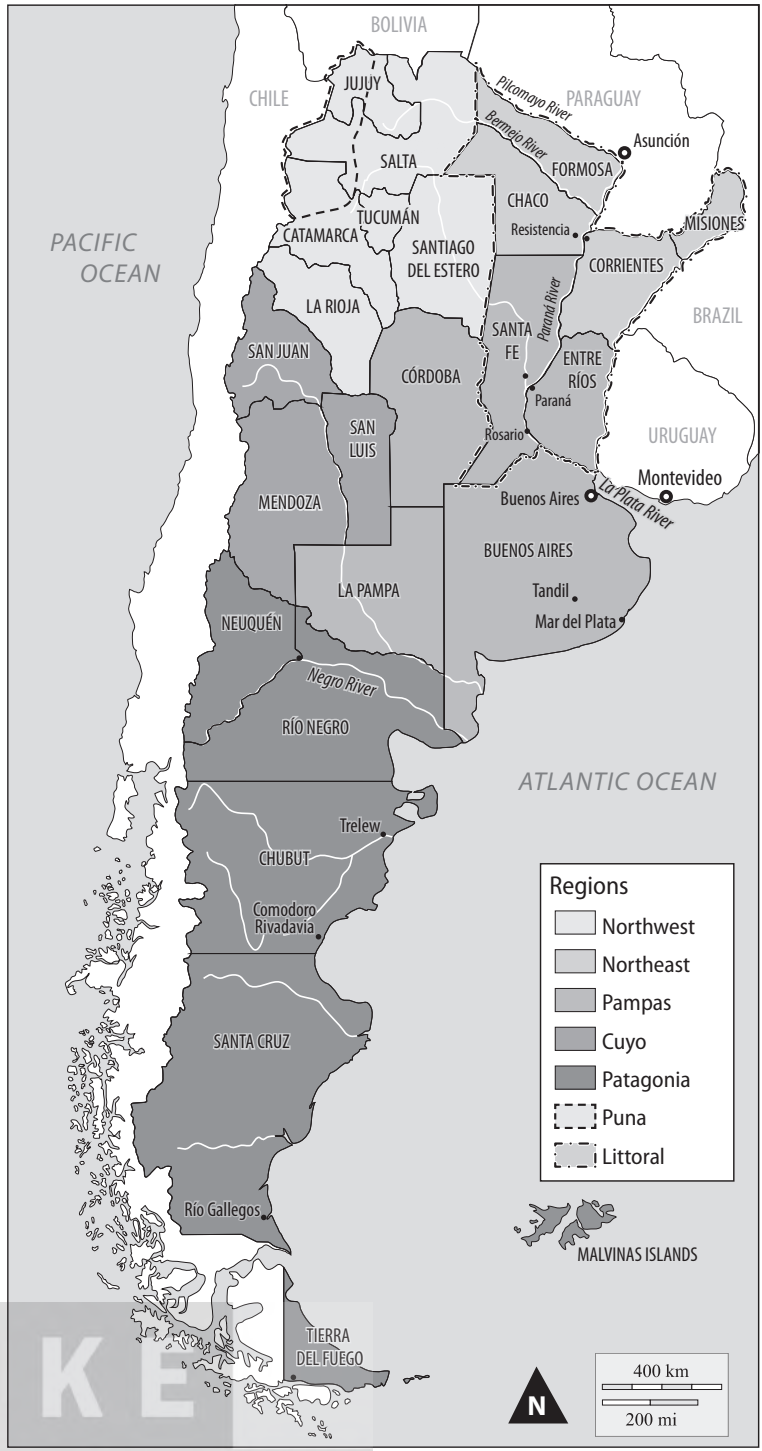
ABBREVIATIONS

AFJP	Administradoras de Fondos de Jubilaciones y Pensiones (Retirement and Pension Fund Administrators)
AMIA	Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (Argentine Jewish Mutual Aid Association)
ARI	Afirmación para una República Igualitaria (Affirmation for an Egalitarian Republic)
ATE	Asociación de Trabajadores del Estado (Association of Government Employees)
CCC	Corriente Clasista y Combativa (Classist and Combative Current)
CGE	Confederación General Económica (General Economic Confederation)
CGT	Confederación General del Trabajo (General Confederation of Labor)
CGTA	CGT de los Argentinos (CGT of Argentines)
CHA	Comunidad Homosexual Argentina (Argentine Homosexual Community)

CONADEP	Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas (National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons)
CONICET	Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas (National Council for Scientific and Technical Research)
CTA	Central de Trabajadores de la Argentina (Central Federation of Argentine Workers)
CTERA	Confederación de Trabajadores de la Educación de la República Argentina (Confederation of Education Workers of the Argentine Republic)
CUSC	Comité de Unidad Sindical Clasista (Committee of Class and Union Unity)
ERP	Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (People's Revolutionary Army)
FLH	Frente de Liberación Homosexual (Homosexual Liberation Front)
FORA	Federación Obrera Regional Argentina (Argentine Regional Workers' Federation)
FORJA	Fuerza de Orientación Radical de la Joven Argentina (Argentine Radical Youth Force)
FRENAPO	Frente Nacional contra la Pobreza (National Front against Poverty)
FREPASO	Frente País Solidario (Front for a Country in Solidarity)
FTAA	Free Trade Area of the Americas
GAN	Gran Acuerdo Nacional (Great National Agreement)
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GDP	gross domestic product
GOU	Grupo de Oficiales Unidos *or* Grupo Obra de Unificación (United Officers' Group or Unification Task Force)
IAPI	Instituto Argentino para la Promoción del Intercambio (Argentine Institute for the Promotion of Trade)
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INDEC	Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos (National Institute of Statistics and Census of Argentina)

MAS	Movimiento al Socialismo (Movement for Socialism)
MERCOSUR	Mercado Común del Sur (Southern Common Market)
MMAL	Movimiento de Mujeres Agropecuarias en Lucha (Movement of Agricultural Women in Struggle)
MOCASE	Movimiento Campesino de Santiago del Estero (Campesino Movement of Santiago del Estero)
MTA	Movimiento de Trabajadores Argentinos (Argentine Workers Movement)
MTD	Movimientos de Trabajadores Desocupados (Movements of Unemployed Workers)
NGO	nongovernmental organization
PAN	Partido Autonomista Nacional (National Autonomist Party)
PCR	Partido Comunista Revolucionario (Revolutionary Communist Party)
PDN	Partido Demócrata Nacional (National Democratic Party)
PDP	Partido Demócrata Progresista (Progressive Democratic Party)
PRO	Propuesta Republicana (Republican Proposal)
PRT	Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (Revolutionary Workers' Party)
PSI	Partido Socialista Independiente (Independent Socialist Party)
STP	Secretaría de Trabajo y Previsión (Secretariat of Labor and Social Security)
UCEDE	Unión del Centro Democrático (Union of the Democratic Center)
UCR	Unión Cívica Radical (Radical Civic Union)
UCRI	UCR Intransigente (Intransigent UCR)
UN	United Nations
UNASUR	Union of South American Nations
USA	Unión Sindical Argentina (Argentine Syndicates' Union)
VAT	value-added tax
YPF	Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales (Fiscal Oilfields)

MAP 0.1. Argentina: provinces and regions.



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Violence

The Conquest and the Colonial Order

IN THE BEGINNING, there was violence. Nothing in the territory now known as Argentina indicated that there would be a country here. The dozens of peoples who inhabited these lands before the arrival of the Spaniards lacked ties of any appreciable scale. They were not united by political alliances, a shared language, religion, customs, or even by networks of economic trade that spanned throughout all or most of the territory. The very geography of the region revealed little predisposition toward unity. The dusty heights of the Puna and the ravines of the northwest were like the continuation of an Andean world that extended out from Ecuador. The torrid and impenetrable lowlands of the Gran Chaco were an extension of those that today form part of Paraguay and Bolivia, bordering the Amazon. The fertile grasslands of the Pampas expanded outward without acknowledging the borders of what are now Uruguay and southern Brazil.

The arrival of the Spaniards marked the beginning of a dramatic process of change aimed at adapting the inhabitants to new social hierarchies and connecting them to the transnational economic circuits dominated by Europe. It was the interminable maelstrom of the conquest; it was the way the Spaniards invaded, occupied, and reorganized the territory and its peoples that laid the initial foundations of what, centuries later, would become Argentina. It was the violence of the occupation that would force an arbitrary conformity between men and women of completely different origins on a land that without it might never have harbored a unified nation. Before the Spanish conquest, there was no "Argentina," just as there was no "colonial Argentina." Even after 1810, it was still not clear that there would be a country here separate from the other South American territories. There was no distinctive national identity among the inhabitants of this part of the Spanish territories, whose histories were also intimately tied to the histories of those who lived in what is now Paraguay, Bolivia, and Uruguay.

Of course, the contours and characteristics that the Argentine nation would end up adopting well into the nineteenth century were determined not only by that initial violence (which incidentally persisted over time in different forms and to different degrees) but also by what the inhabitants of these lands did with it, the bonds of cooperation, resistance, and emotional attachment they were able to build out of the relationships forced on them by the conquest. Every step in the country's history can be understood as the effect of that fundamental relationship between power and cooperation, class oppression and resistance, violence and attachment, hierarchy and equality, exclusion and community. It was the inevitable clash between these powerful and intertwined forces that fueled the whirlwind of historical change and chaotically led to what Argentina is today.

But in the beginning, in the brutal act of the conquest, what prevailed was violence.

Before the Invasion

The territory Argentina now occupies was among the last places touched by the expansion of the human race: it saw the arrival of the first *Homo sapiens* only thirteen or fourteen thousand years ago. Small bands of hunter-gatherers entered the region through various routes and began seeking places to settle. By six to eight thousand years ago, they were already well established in several areas, from the Puna in the extreme north to Tierra del Fuego. By this

time, they had developed particular ways of life in response to the resources on hand: they were canoeists and shellfish gatherers on the islands and in the channels of the extreme south, guanaco and rhea hunters and seed and root collectors at the base of the Andes in Cuyo and in the Pampas, and fishermen on the banks of the rivers that form the Río de la Plata basin.

In Patagonia, Chaco, the Pampas, and other areas, their organization into small bands or tribes of hunter-gatherers persisted until well after the arrival of the Spaniards. Other regions went through remarkable processes of technological and organizational innovation. Around four thousand years ago, the peoples of Cuyo and the northwest began to domesticate animals and sparked a true revolution when they learned to select and cultivate plants. The practice of agriculture made it possible to produce food surpluses, which in turn enabled population growth and the formation of more complex villages and societies with thousands of members rather than just a few hundred. These societies gave rise to forms of power and social differentiation previously unknown to the more egalitarian hunter-gatherers, though not yet particularly prominent. Around the same time, they also developed pottery, and roughly two thousand years later they were already manufacturing metallic objects and textiles. Their trade networks expanded outward and the circulation of goods connected the Pacific with the Chaco. Roughly one thousand years ago, several of these societies expanded and intensified their political centralization and class divisions.

Toward the end of the fifteenth century, that region was conquered by the Cuzco Incas and incorporated into their powerful empire, which extended south through the mountains to what is now northern Mendoza. Half a century of domination was enough to infuse this area with greater homogeneity, and many Inca customs and organizational practices were adopted. Quechua became a lingua franca throughout the region, connecting more extensive circuits thanks to the extraordinary Inca road system. The power of local chiefs who collaborated with the Incas increased and social inequalities became more pronounced. The conquerors familiarized the subjugated peoples with the custom of mita, which forced them to supply contingents to complete work shifts outside their communities. Rebellions were not uncommon, especially in the valleys of the indomitable Calchaquí people. The empire often responded by relocating the rebels far from their homes, which led to even more blending and homogenization of the population. However, neither the identities nor the particular languages of peoples, such as the Diaguitas, Omaguacas, and others, were completely lost.

MAP 1.1. Aboriginal peoples circa 1500. Adapted from Pablo Yankelevich, *Historia mínima de Argentina*.

Although less dramatic, technical changes and progress were also recorded beyond what is now northwestern Argentina. Peoples of the Amazon expanded across the rivers and brought their agricultural practices with them, most likely toward the end of the pre-Hispanic period. This is the case of the Guaraníes, who reached the Paraná delta, and the Avá warriors, who advanced along the Pilcomayo and Bermejo Rivers to the base of the Andes, from where they frequently attacked the Inca territories. The Comechingones of the Cordoban sierras also practiced small-scale land cultivation. Tehuelches and Pehuenches in Patagonia, Selk'nam and Yámanas in Tierra del Fuego, and Querandíes and other peoples in the Pampas, the northeast, and elsewhere remained essentially hunter-gatherers. However, several of these peoples expanded the scope of their trade, developed pottery making, began hunting with bows and arrows, and produced textiles.

Seen as a whole, the territory of present-day Argentina was a loosely connected mosaic with a wide variety of peoples (see map 1.1). Their origins, cultural patterns, linguistic families, and ways of life were very different. The relationships between them, when they existed, could be either cooperative or hostile. In the Gran Chaco area, several particularly bellicose peoples engaged in wars and rivalries. There, the Avás had subdued the Chanés, keeping them subjugated for centuries, exploiting their labor, and taking Chané women. In contrast, other peoples—such as the Tehuelches or the Huarpes in Cuyo—were noted for their gentleness and hospitality. In any event, it was a heterogeneous world in a constant state of change and upheaval. We have no detailed record of the pre-Hispanic era of these preliterate peoples, but archaeological findings indicate that it was undoubtedly a period rich in innovation, history, and culture.

The Conquest

The arrival of the Spaniards would affect this world in a way that none of its inhabitants could have imagined. For they were not just another people arriving to impose their power, as the Incas had done. The Iberian conquistadors were driven by different impulses.

When Christopher Columbus first arrived in the Americas, Europe was emerging from a long crisis that had begun in the fourteenth century. The feudal structures that had ensured the supremacy of nobles and monarchs during the Middle Ages had reached their limits. Exploiting the peasantry had become more difficult and less profitable; land was running out and they could

no longer sustain their ambitions. Large-scale trade conducted in cities and ports now offered the best opportunities for those who sought to rise above the rest. Large-scale merchants, nobles, and monarchs all shared a common interest: to expand trade networks by penetrating into new territories. For the merchants, the enterprise offered the promise of increased profits and perhaps even the potential of being elevated to nobility. For the nobles, it meant more space for feudal estates and consequently greater wealth. For the monarchs, it meant finances that would secure their place in an increasingly fierce competition with rival dignitaries. Even those who had no standing whatsoever but were willing to serve as soldiers could harbor hopes of social advancement in the new lands. Everything was propelled outward, toward conquest. These were the first steps of capitalism as a world system. From this point on, economic interests would play an increasingly important role as the organizing principle of social life, guiding human behavior, forging new links between the various regions of the planet, and defining each individual's place in society. The Americas, a land of plunder and conquest, a source of gold and silver, of raw materials and human labor, would give capitalism its first decisive boost.

The occupation was carried out in the name of the Hispanic monarchy and under the auspices of the Catholic Church. Yet in practice it was essentially a private undertaking. The members of the expeditions that explored the continent were generally not officials sent by the Spanish Crown but rather adventurers backed by capitalists, who provided the costly financing for these incursions in the hopes of future earnings. With the understanding that all conquered territory belonged to them, the monarchs authorized incursions through "capitulations," contracts in which they reserved a share of the profits for themselves and granted the conquistadors rights to land and sometimes to positions or titles of nobility. The conquistadors would gather a few hundred (or sometimes only a few dozen) soldiers with the promise of spoils and arm them, sending them off across a stretch of the new lands. From the leader to the last recruit, everyone was motivated by the desire to reap some sort of reward. In its early stages, the Spaniards mostly engaged in straightforward pillaging.

In South America, they entered by way of the Pacific Ocean, first setting foot in Peru. Paradoxically, the wealthiest and most centralized civilizations turned out to be the easiest to dominate. As Hernán Cortés had done in Mexico, in 1532 it was enough for Francisco Pizarro to overthrow the leadership of the Inca empire in order to gain access to the extensive society it had

organized and that, to some degree, was already accustomed to obedience and paying tribute. The Spaniards quickly occupied the most promising lands, and in 1545 they discovered Potosí Mountain, in present-day Bolivia, which would become the most important silver mine in the world and a fabulous source of wealth for the Hispanic monarchs. Potosí's silver proved to be a powerful driver of capitalism: the metal's purchasing power provided a vigorous stimulus to the international trade networks.

After 1545, Spanish expansion through the Americas would slow down because it had to penetrate areas populated by more-fragmented, less-hierarchical societies with less capacity to produce surpluses. This was the case in the territory that Argentina now occupies, which was relatively sparsely populated and devoid of mineral wealth. More than economic attractiveness, the expansion here was driven by political impulses.

Rivalries and scheming soon developed among the conquistadors of Peru. Those who ended up in a subordinate position or who arrived later vied for their share of the spoils. They all sought to win the favor of the Crown and gain land or special rights. But resources were becoming scarce and violent clashes soon followed. In order to avoid losing control, the authorities sought to "clear the land," as they referred to it at the time, encouraging the scheming and disgruntled to try their luck to the south, in territories still unknown to them.

At the same time, the Crown had long been interested in seeking a more convenient entry by way of the Atlantic and sought to protect its dominions from its Portuguese competitor. Thus, conquistadors also attempted to gain a foothold by entering through the Río de la Plata.

Of these two entry points, the most decisive impulse came from the north. The first incursions into what was to become Argentine territory took place starting in 1543: by land, from Upper Peru, and by sea, from Chile. And they were led by some of the soldiers and adventurers who were resentful about not having made their fortunes in Peru. Either self-financed or backed by capitalists, the conquistadors assembled small armies and set out to conquer the area. Inca officials and chiefs familiar with the area helped guide them and identify who was who among the caciques (or indigenous chiefs) of the northwest. Taking advantage of rivalries among the caciques to secure temporary allies, the Spaniards advanced slowly and with difficulty toward the south, looking for riches and indigenous masses to subjugate. Frequent mutinies among the troops, irritated by so much effort for so little gain, made the advances rather chaotic and improvised. Brutal clashes with the natives were common.

Nevertheless, during the second half of the sixteenth century, the conquistadors managed to establish thirty settlements, although, due to indigenous attacks and a lack of supplies, only twelve survived. Of these, the first was Santiago del Estero in 1553, followed by Tucumán (1565), Córdoba (1573), Salta (1582), La Rioja (1591), and Jujuy (1593). Entering from Chile, they founded settlements in the Cuyo area: Mendoza (1561), San Juan (1562), and San Luis (1594).

The list ends with the three cities they established in the littoral region, entering by way of the Atlantic. The first voyage up the Río de la Plata—named for the legendary riches it was believed to lead to that nevertheless did not materialize—had taken place in 1516. The first attempt at settlement was in 1527 with a fort in the present-day province of Santa Fe that barely survived for three years. Pedro de Mendoza arrived with a larger expedition in 1536 and succeeded in founding Nuestra Señora del Buen Ayre (the future Buenos Aires), but the settlers were forced to abandon it five years later due to starvation and attacks by the indigenous peoples. Of these initial attempts, the Spaniards only managed to hold on to the fort in Asunción (1537), now the capital of Paraguay, which existed in isolation for years. From there, explorers descended the rivers under the command of Juan de Garay and founded Santa Fe in 1573 and Buenos Aires, for the second time, in 1580. In 1588, Corrientes followed.

Although these settlements were referred to as "cities," they were initially rather precarious hamlets of adobe, sometimes with only two or three dozen inhabitants. Communication between them was difficult and life was very hard. The likelihood of lethal attacks by the natives remained a reality for a long time. Throughout the sixteenth century, the presence of the Spaniards was minimal: by 1570, there were roughly 350 in the entire territory of present-day Argentina. By the end of that century, there were only 250 Europeans in the entire northwestern region; of these, the king had granted around 150 of them the right to collect tribute from as many as 270,000 natives.

Over time, the cities would gradually become established as the seats of civil, military, and religious authorities and of merchants who coordinated the flow of economic activity. They were the center of lettered culture and, much later, of the printed word (there were no printing presses until well into the eighteenth century): islands in a rural ocean inhabited by groups of preliterate peoples with very different customs. Urban spaces thus emerged in the territory of present-day Argentina with quite a different profile from the one they had in Europe and elsewhere. The cities did not grow out of the

cultural, political, or economic development of a people but rather out of colonial outposts, footholds of foreign domination, and bastions from which to establish and manage the class, ethnic, and cultural superiority that the Spaniards claimed for themselves.

Colonial Ties and the Encomienda System

Colonial rule was first and foremost a formidable means of extracting tribute from the natives and resources from the land. A new kind of society was built in the Americas that organized work and social differences according to a fundamental distinction: the victors and the vanquished. The forcefulness of the conquest served as a base for a juridical inequality that was justified with ethnic arguments. Differences between people were simplified by classifying them into two large groups. From that moment on, all natives, regardless of whether they were Querandíes, Lules, or Guaraníes, and regardless of whether they had resisted colonization or not, were simply transformed into "Indians" (according to the misleading name Columbus assigned them when he thought he had reached India). Considered inferior and equated with children, they and their descendants became vassals of the king, who gave them as "encomiendas" to a conquistador, meaning the conquistador was granted control over them and their labor. Both the monarchy and the encomendero (the conquistador who had been granted the encomiendas), of course, claimed the right to receive tribute from them.

These bonds also led to an equalization among Spaniards, regardless of their differences at birth. On the Iberian Peninsula, vassals, known as *pecheros* (commoners), were obliged to pay tribute. In contrast, *hidalgos* (from *hijos-de-algo* or "sons-of-something," that is, the nobles) were exempt from payment. This was the fundamental distinction between classes: those at the top did not pay; those at the bottom did. But in the Americas, the Spaniards, even those who had not had the good fortune to be born nobles, were exempt from paying tribute simply because they were not Indians. Those who arrived in the new continent, even if they were poor soldiers, sailors, or artisans, felt they were entitled to preferential treatment. They refused to perform certain types of manual labor—which were now considered "Indian work"—and they aspired to be served by the natives. Since there were so few Spaniards in the area, it was important that there should be no odious legal differences between them. Because of this same demographic weakness, they needed the collaboration of the caciques, who were exempted from paying tribute,

granted the honorary title of "Don," and, if they did not yet have the privilege, made hereditary chiefs.

Few conquistadors managed to strike it rich in the relatively poor Argentine territory. Nor did they manage to ennoble themselves: in the entire area occupied by Argentina, the Crown granted only one noble estate, the Marquisate of Tojo (encompassing part of Jujuy and Salta and lands that today belong to Chile and Bolivia).

Every conquistador sought to receive Indians in encomienda from the king, along with the ownership of urban or rural lands. The encomienda consisted of the right to charge the Indians a tribute, which mainly took the form of labor (personal service) in the beginning. In exchange, the encomendero had to protect the king's domains, with military force, if necessary, and instruct the Indians in the Catholic faith. Encomiendas were not granted as property: they were concessions, although in some areas they were often extended to heirs. They could be revoked and reallotted to others.

The encomienda regime was brutal, especially in the early years. While passing through Tucumán and Cuyo on his way to Chile, for example, Francisco de Villagra captured close to six hundred natives and transported them in chains to be used as porters and servants. Many of them died on the way. Sometimes the Indians were divided up in the abstract before expeditions, without knowledge beforehand of what the conquistadors would find. In Paraguay, Córdoba, and Santiago del Estero, an encomienda meant immediate access to the labor of hundreds or even thousands of Indians. But in other regions, such as Santa Fe, it did not result in immediate control, and the encomendero had to subdue a dispersed and reluctant population.

In practice, the encomienda was akin to outright slavery, especially in the early days. The encomendero forced the Indians to work on his lands or properties, in his household service, or in textile mills. He could also rent them to others or send them to the Potosí mines and other Spanish enterprises in Chile or elsewhere.

There were two types of encomiendas. The ones that included established Andean communities repurposed the Inca institution of the mita (originally a form of labor-based tribute) by requiring community members, called *mitayos*, to perform tasks set by the encomendero. The other type of encomienda consisted of uprooted individuals or families, called *yanaconas*, who did not form recognized indigenous communities but instead lived and worked permanently as personal servants on landed property that had been granted to or taken by the encomenderos.

There were initially no regulations on how much tribute was to be collected or in what form; nor was it clear whether women and children had to participate. The number of *mitayos* a community had to contribute and the duration of their service were the subject of negotiations that depended on the relative power or ability of the caciques and of the encomenderos or their stewards. Overexploitation was the norm. In Argentine territory, the most common form of encomienda was through personal service, even after the Crown indicated that it should be collected only in monetary form.

The Spaniards who had not been granted encomiendas also managed to find a way to subject the Indians to menial labor and not just by renting them from encomenderos. During a considerable period of time, they organized what were called *correrías* or *malocas*, rapid incursions into indigenous territory to capture Indians who then became *yanaconas*—although initially they were simply enslaved—or were included in encomiendas. As late as the mid-eighteenth century, colonists in Tucumán were still carrying out manhunts of this type to reduce the indigenous peoples of the Chaco to servitude. The authorities also used to provide Indians "on order" to merchants who were not encomenderos to help with various tasks, particularly transportation. And they were used in the construction of public works.

In addition to its use in mining, the land itself was a valuable resource. Since from a legal standpoint the Crown considered all conquered lands as its own, property access could only be granted as a favor or a concession by the king. Initially, concessions were free (or more accurately, granted in exchange for services), but they soon began to be sold at auctions. In theory, lands belonging to indigenous communities had to be left in their hands so that they could be self-supporting and pay tribute, but the lands were often usurped.

Conquest and Gender

The conquest also established a system of privileges for men, exceeding what they had known in Europe. Indigenous societies were already patriarchal before the arrival of the Spaniards. But the meaning and organization of the patriarchy could vary greatly. Men were in charge, but women occasionally held positions of influence, especially in ritual functions. Exceptional cases have been documented in which they held the position of cacique or commanded men in a war.

An overwhelmingly male enterprise, colonization was based not only on ethnic and class differences but also on gender differences. Privilege

manifested in the sexual, reproductive, and labor-related control of indigenous women. Although only the drama of the white captives has remained in collective memory, the Spaniards' *malocas* often focused on the abduction of native women. The nearly total absence of European women during these initial decades meant that indigenous women were used to satisfy the conquistadors. The appropriation and sexual possession of them took many forms: from kidnapping and rape, to forced occasional sex, extended concubinage, and in some cases legal marriage. They formed part of the colonial spoils.

The trade and control of women was also decisive in the relations between the conquistadors and the indigenous peoples. The alliance with the Guaraní men that allowed the Spaniards to survive in Asunción was sealed with an exchange of gifts: European adornments and tools for local young women. Some amassed as many as sixty women, and it was not uncommon for a Spaniard to have ten (something unthinkable in Europe). Used for sexual pleasure, they were also a source of wealth—due to the labor they provided in agriculture and textiles—and of power, because through them alliances were forged with their relatives.

Reproductive control was crucial: once it became clear that a rigid separation between Spaniards and Indians was unfeasible, the numerous mestizos born to these native women provided the conquest with a critical mass of supporters. These "lads of the land," as they were called, were indispensable in the foundation of the first cities. Those of the littoral region were almost exclusively settled by them. Of the seventy-six initial settlers of Santa Fe, only seven were Spaniards, and of the seventy who refounded Buenos Aires, at least fifty were mestizos from Paraguay.

The control of women was also key to the encomienda system. Indigenous women often supplied the labor in their communities that the *mitayos* were no longer able to provide. When the indigenous men were sent to the mines or forced to serve far from the community, locally powerful men—encomenderos, caciques, mestizos, officials—took advantage of the "surplus" of women in various ways, including sexually. This reinforced their power and the alliances between them. In contrast, access to white women was subject to very strict control. Among men of a certain social status, the virginity of marriageable girls was an absolute condition; marriage was indissoluble and the husband had complete power over their shared property and children. Adultery committed by women was severely punished by the law (whereas adultery by men was usually not).

The organization of the colony therefore led to a reordering of the relationships between people at different levels. Class inequality rooted in ethnic divisions merged with gender inequality in a way that placed native women in a particularly notable state of oppression. Thereafter, *mestizaje*, or miscegenation, became evidence of the victory of the Spaniards—and not only because it contributed to dissolving the cohesion of indigenous communities; the mestizos' bodies themselves reproduced the visual mark of the conquest, evidence of the original possession of women by the conquistadors.

Initial Resistance and Demographic Catastrophe

Though few in number, the Spaniards managed to dominate the local population thanks to their ability to forge alliances with certain peoples who supported them in their military ventures. This was also key to the survival of the first cities: they managed to survive in Asunción because their presence was useful to the Guaraní-Carios who lived there, helping them fight their traditional enemies, the Guaycurúes from Chaco. In Santiago del Estero, the Juríes were also allies.

The difference in weaponry was significant: the Spaniards had crossbows, firearms, good swords, shields, armor, fierce mastiffs, and horses. The natives had only spears, bolas, bows and arrows, slingshots, and stones. Even so, the resistance was fierce. Some of the first explorers on Argentine soil died at the hands of the natives: Diego de Rojas, Juan Díaz de Solís, and Juan de Garay, among others. In some cases, an alliance with the Spaniards only materialized after initial resistance failed. This was the case with the Carios in Asunción, who, in any case, resumed their struggle as soon as it became clear, starting in 1555, that their "allies" were dividing them up into encomiendas. There were other revolts and rebellions after that date, including a major one in 1575–79, which ended in brutal repression.

In other areas, local resistance was unyielding, as in the valleys of the Calchaquí people, which saw large-scale uprisings. It was also there that the capacity of the peoples to establish military coalitions against the invader became apparent. The cacique Juan Calchaquí led the first coalition starting in 1560: the allied forces of the Omaguacas, Lules, Ocloyas, and Chichas destroyed Cañete, Córdoba del Calchaquí, and Londres (other cities suffered a similar fate shortly thereafter).

An even broader coalition was organized in 1578 by Viltipoco, an Omaguaca cacique who managed to unite almost all the mountain peoples of

the northwest, including the battle-hardened Avás of Chaco. Together they amassed nearly ten thousand warriors ready to carry out surprise attacks on the main cities and destroy them, something they surely would have achieved had they not been betrayed by Indian allies of the conquistadors. The Spaniards caught Viltipoco and halted the rebellion.

Peoples in other areas also resisted. Their success was hindered by the fragmentation and rivalries between caciques as well as their limited capacity to generate sufficient economic surplus to sustain prolonged military efforts. The Spaniards exploited this weakness with lightning attacks on horseback that destroyed crops and left defiant populations on the verge of starvation.

This resistance meant that the Spanish conquest of the territory was uneven. The valleys of the Calchaquí people remained indomitable throughout the sixteenth century. Some groups along the Río Uruguay maintained their independence until the middle of the eighteenth century. Patagonia, the Pampas, and the Chaco were autonomous during the entire colonial period.

The conquest of the Americas unleashed one of the greatest demographic catastrophes in history; nothing spared the population of the territory that is now Argentina from its worst effects. A combination of factors produced a dramatic decline in the number of inhabitants. To begin with, there was the extermination of those who resisted the conquistadors when they arrived. Those who attempted to avoid their domination in later years were also assassinated. Additionally, the introduction of diseases unknown in the New World, such as smallpox and measles, decimated entire communities.

Overexploitation led to a general increase in mortality and likely to a lower birth rate as well. The breakdown of communal production due to the dispossession of land or the use of the workforce for other purposes also played a part in this. Some fled to avoid this fate. The appropriation of women by the Spaniards and the phenomenon of *mestizaje* contributed as well.

The catastrophe cannot be quantified with categorical figures, but the figures we do have point to a sharp decline in population. Estimates suggest there were about half a million Guaraníes at the time of the invasion. After fifty years of contact with the Europeans, only a third or perhaps a quarter of that number remained. In the Tucumán region, the decline appears to have been more severe. From half a million inhabitants when the Spaniards arrived, only 15 percent remained a century later.

The data on Indians working under encomienda are equally revealing. In Santiago del Estero, more than 80,000 were held under encomienda in

1553; thirty years later only 18,000 remained. The decline continued during the seventeenth century. In the region of Tucumán, in 1596 there were 56,500 tributary natives; by 1607 they were reduced to 16,200, and at the beginning of the following century there were barely 2,000.

The Colonial Order

The first explorers often performed the role of civil authorities themselves in the cities they established. After the initial pillaging, a colonial order gradually developed, with laws and institutions controlled by the Spanish monarchy, albeit with decisive local participation. It was not a state as such but rather a network of concurrent civil and religious powers, with overlapping and sometimes competing jurisdictions.

The territory Argentina now occupies was initially included in the Viceroyalty of Peru, a colonial administrative district covering much of Spanish-dominated South America. As the king's representative, the viceroy had broad executive, legislative, and judicial powers. The king also appointed the governors of the most important administrative subdivisions. During certain periods, these positions were available for purchase. This led to flagrant abuses in order to recover investments as well as several scandalous dismissals. Other officials in various positions—chief magistrates, lieutenants, captains, and chief justices—acted as judges in smaller districts. Additionally, several Reales Audiencias (Royal Councils) were established as courts of appeal. The Argentine territory initially answered to the Audiencia of Charcas (present-day Sucre), with the exception of the cities in Cuyo, which answered to the Real Audiencia of Chile. Each city had its cabildo (municipal council), which was in charge of local affairs, including those of the surrounding rural areas. Its authorities were elected by *vecinos* or those males considered "respectable" members of society in terms of class and racial background.

The main function of the colonial administrative apparatus was to manage the vast mechanism for extracting profits from the land and from indigenous labor. Ensuring the flow of trade, collecting taxes, countering contraband, keeping rebellions and indigenous attacks on cities at bay, protecting the circulation of goods along the roads, and defending possessions from rival European nations: these responsibilities all required an administrative apparatus.

Above all, it was important to ensure the flow of metals from Potosí and other mines to the Iberian Peninsula. To this end, the Crown organized

a commercial monopoly supervised by its officials called the "fleet and galleon system." In theory, it was quite simple: only a few ports on the Iberian Peninsula were authorized to trade with the Viceroyalty of Peru (and to connect with another few ports in the Americas). The viceroyalty was strictly forbidden from trading with other Spanish territories. Merchants in Lima were granted a local monopoly over the trade of all goods arriving from Europe. Everything was shipped there, and then agents would distribute and sell products in the various communities. The system required, as a counterpart, that as much gold and silver as possible be amassed in Lima and then shipped to the Iberian Peninsula.

If in theory it was simple, in practice it was extremely complicated. The goods arriving in Lima and the metals departing from there were transported along the Pacific Coast in ships that connected Peru with Panama. Once they arrived at the Isthmus of Panama, the goods had to be transported over land from one ocean to the other. After arriving at the Atlantic Coast, they were loaded onto other ships that traveled to the Old World in large formations to guard against pirate attacks. The long and costly journey and the numerous agents and middlemen involved made it a tremendously expensive system. In terms of purchasing power, metals from the Americas lost much of their value.

Therefore, circumventing this monopoly through contraband was an irresistible temptation for merchants in the Americas (except those from Lima, of course) and strongly encouraged by merchants of rival nations who did not want to be excluded from the business.

With direct access to the Atlantic, the port city of Buenos Aires was an ideal place for illegal trade, which for a long time was its main activity. Ships of many different origins unloaded merchandise and enslaved people, which were then sold by merchants in Buenos Aires to the continent's interior. In payment, the foreign merchants received precious metals and certain commodities that they transported back to Europe.

The Crown oscillated between suppressing smuggling and tolerating it, since it was a way of financing the city of Buenos Aires, which it needed to have well equipped as a bastion against the expansionism of the Portuguese and other rivals. To capitalize on this and set some limits on illegal trade, in 1622 an inland Customs Office was established in Córdoba (which certain smugglers nevertheless evaded). Additionally, partial authorizations were granted so that Buenos Aires could trade some goods on a temporary basis. None of these measures succeeded in suppressing the growing amount of contraband in Buenos Aires, which gradually became a hub of international trade.

The Catholic Church and the Missions

The Church contributed to the colonial enterprise in various ways. In fact, civil and religious authority overlapped on the Iberian Peninsula itself, where those in power defined themselves as "Catholic Monarchs."

The imperative to "evangelize the infidels" and save their souls provided ideological legitimacy for the subjugation of the natives. The cross and the sword penetrated side by side. But the clergy also directly intervened in the control and discipline of the Indians. Under the Crown's policy of grouping the natives into settlements known as "reductions," the religious orders had control of the most significant ones. During the first decades of the conquest, very few priests were present. It was only toward the end of the sixteenth century that a greater number of secular clergy and the Franciscan, Jesuit, Mercedarian, and Dominican orders settled in the territory now occupied by Argentina. From then on, the Church played a central role in the new order, although the monarchy had reserved the right to designate bishops in the Americas. This added coherence to the invaders' efforts but did not prevent disagreements and conflicts.

Priests were instrumental in the acculturation of the natives. The indigenous peoples spoke dozens of different languages and had distinct worldviews, although they were generally not familiar with the European sense of responsibility or individual autonomy (their cultures were collectively based), nor did they share their moral criteria. Certainly none of the indigenous peoples of the region shared the European obsession with controlling the virginity of young women. Women could have sexual relations with multiple partners of their own volition or at the request of their fathers or husbands (the offering of women was a common form of hospitality toward strangers). Unions could be stable or exclusive, in accordance with the customs of each people. The Mocovíes, for example, were normally monogamous. In contrast, polygamy was common among the Mapuches and the Guaraníes. Although there are no extensive accounts of these topics, there are mentions of the existence of homosexuality among the Guaraníes and of two-spirit Mapuches. Native religious rituals sometimes involved the consumption of alcoholic beverages or hallucinogens.

The Church played a major role in disrupting these traditions. Wherever it could, the Church prohibited polygamy and reinforced male domination of women's sexuality. Along with the civil authorities, it embarked on an intense persecution of "sorcerers" and the "extirpation of idolatries" through

horrendous punishments, including burning people alive. But it was not all a matter of repression: part of the Church's success can be explained by its ability to allow syncretism with a certain number of local beliefs, which survived reformulated as part of Catholic worship. Despite this, the penetration of Christianity among the indigenous peoples was quite superficial for many years, and traditional beliefs and forms of double worship persisted.

The Church was a major economic force and accumulated so much wealth that it was even able to act as a moneylender. The religious orders were among the most powerful agriculture and livestock producers. In a vast territory that spanned parts of present-day Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, and Paraguay, the Jesuits established their well-known missions, which became veritable political and economic powerhouses.

With a focus on evangelizing the indigenous peoples, the missions were formidable mechanisms of production. The Guaraníes who lived there had certain advantages over those who lived under the despotic command of the encomenderos. They did not have to pay as much in tribute (for a time, they did not need to pay tribute at all) and were not subject to the mita. Each family received a plot of land of its own to cultivate and had to do a share of work on communal mission lands. The Jesuits managed and sold the surplus. The system combined family and collective elements and even relied on some of the customs of the Guaraníes themselves. It made production more efficient and enabled the indigenous peoples to have a better standard of living than in other places. This was reflected in the changing demographics; while the number of Indians under encomienda fell dramatically, the population in the missions increased.

For more than a century and a half, the Jesuits controlled a veritable empire within the Spanish empire. Moreover, the missions had the ability to mobilize the Indians militarily for whatever the authorities required. In 1644, they were granted permission to use firearms, something forbidden to other indigenous peoples. The missions also protected the Guaraníes from the depredations of the *bandeirantes*, bands of itinerant raiders from São Paulo who hunted enslaved people for the sugar plantations in northeastern Brazil. By 1730, 140,000 people lived in roughly thirty Jesuit missions, some of which had as many as 1,500 to 7,000 inhabitants, more than most cities at the time.

The Church also played a central cultural and "moralizing" role in the life of the cities, which were conceived as Catholic communities. Most education—provided in convents, parishes, and a few schools—remained in its hands. It also controlled the University of Córdoba, the only university during the

colonial period in what is now Argentine territory. Religion featured prominently in community life. In typically Baroque religious style, great emphasis was placed on the externalization of faith through rituals and theatrical stagings, with music and devotional images. Colorful processions, funerals, and celebrations of saints' days were central to social life at the time and served as occasions for contact between people of different social and economic status (although at the same time, there was a tendency toward ethnic segregation in churches).

The Economy and Labor

The new colonial order also brought about other changes in the local economy. The encomenderos soon began to focus the labor force on the production of saleable goods, especially for the market in Potosí, which by the early seventeenth century had more than a hundred thousand inhabitants and produced nothing of what it consumed. Occasionally they forced indigenous people to regroup in organized villages in order to produce a specific good, such as textiles.

Gradually, regional specializations began to emerge. Throughout the northwest of what is now Argentina, campesino women and children made linen and blankets from cotton and wool. In the sixteenth century, the region of Tucumán was one of the main centers of cotton production on the continent, and the city of Tucumán was known for manufacturing various artisanal goods. Paraguay was a source of yerba maté (the Jesuit missions excelled in this crop), as was Corrientes, which also cultivated tobacco. In the littoral region and in Córdoba, Tucumán, Jujuy, and Salta, mules were bred for Potosí. In the mid-eighteenth century, Salta introduced the sugar industry, while the Cuyo area was a major producer of wine and aguardiente.

Buenos Aires, Santa Fe, and other parts of the littoral region were unique in that in their green grasslands, cows and horses abandoned after the first failed attempts at colonization had multiplied spectacularly. *Vaquerías*, which were mounted expeditions focused on hunting this wild livestock in order to sell it, flourished. Horses were broken in and sold alive. Cattle either had their tendons severed or were stunned with bolas or lassoed at full gallop to be slaughtered on the spot once they had collapsed. After the hide and tallow had been removed, the meat and the rest of the animal were left to rot in the sun. Leather was mainly destined for overseas export. By the early eighteenth century, the *cimarrón* or wild livestock was disappearing and the local economy

shifted to breeding mules and cattle. Specialization and a focus on the mining market fueled the flow of goods to Potosí but also between the various zones, which supplied each other with whatever they themselves did not produce.

There were different scales and types of productive operations. The northwest was dominated by haciendas (sizeable estates) with large tracts of land, although there were also small- and medium-sized ranches. Production on the haciendas was diversified—agriculture, livestock, and textiles—and they housed a significant number and wide range of dependents, including day laborers, enslaved people, and tenant farmers. In the littoral region, there were few haciendas of this type. Instead, there were estancias (cattle ranches) specializing in livestock production, where a much smaller number of people worked, both enslaved people and laborers.

In the major urban centers, small- and medium-scale artisanal production flourished, and agricultural production throughout the region helped supply the cities. Of the numerous farmers, some worked the land with their own hands and others used enslaved people or seasonal laborers.

In the Pampas, agriculture was very rudimentary; wooden plows and even hoes made from cow scapulae were used. Additionally, there were still shepherds and a subsistence peasantry, who sometimes incorporated European crops and livestock. It was all very heterogeneous: one could be dependent—like those living on the haciendas—or independent, communal or individual, a tenant farmer or one who owned land.

Santiago del Estero, for example, had an extensive indigenous peasantry with a very precarious agricultural system. Although they were independent, the farm workers and campesinos also generated surpluses for other sectors. Peddlers roamed the countryside offering goods on credit; those who acquired them incurred a debt that they repaid through future production, particularly artisanal. Since the peddlers also took on debt to finance their dealings with large merchants in the cities, the campesino surplus ended up flowing to the latter.

The indigenous peoples located outside the areas controlled by the Spaniards became progressively more involved in economic exchange. The ponchos made by Mapuche women were the most important textile product in regional trade in the eighteenth century. At the end of that century, an extended period of peace on the frontier facilitated the expansion of the trade flow: the indigenous peoples sold textiles and ornaments to the white settlers and bought weapons, yerba maté, alcohol, and other goods. Starting in 1784, at least thirty delegations of indigenous groups from the Pampas arrived in

Buenos Aires, where they were received by the highest authorities and engaged in negotiations with merchants.

Women of all ethnic groups played an important role in production. They worked under encomienda in domestic service, sewing, and textile production. They worked as prostitutes and in numerous other occupations and services. Some managed to become the owners of *pulperías* (trading posts) or small stores, the heads of small farms and estancias, and even leather merchants.

The labor supply was an issue from very early on. As always in the peripheries of capitalism, the forms of labor varied widely, with a high proportion of unfree labor. There was no "backwardness" in this: it was only in the late nineteenth century that free wage labor would become the exclusive practice in Europe, where a variety of servile or semifree labor relations persisted.

The encomienda was initially the dominant system, but it gradually lost economic relevance, displaced by other arrangements and affected by the sharp decline in the indigenous population. By the end of the eighteenth century, it remained significant only in Jujuy and Paraguay. More-or-less-free wage labor was gaining ground. The campesinos and even the indigenous peoples of the Chaco who were not living in "reductions" were often employed on a seasonal basis for the harvests in Salta and Jujuy, returning afterward to their communities.

In areas such as the province of Buenos Aires and other parts of the littoral region, where land and livestock were plentiful and the population density was very low, it was hard to find workers. As a result, wages were relatively high. Despite this, demand for labor occasionally exceeded the supply. In this area, there was a rural population with no fixed occupation that enjoyed freedom of movement, was difficult to control, and found ways to earn a living without being employed by others, or at least not on a permanent basis. In the eighteenth century, they were called gauchos or *gauderios*, and the authorities accused them of rustling livestock and of being "lazy and idle." Laws and coercive measures were introduced in an attempt to force them to work for the estancias. At least initially, the laws were not very effective.

The demographic catastrophe coupled with the scarcity of available labor prompted producers to introduce enslaved people throughout the Americas. Capitalist expansion thus relied on slavery, which provided a labor force often seen as more in keeping with ancient times but which reappears everywhere hand in hand with capitalism.

Captured in Africa or, less frequently, brought over from Brazil, enslaved people played a very important role in the territory of the future Argentina.

Between 1580 and 1640, some twenty-five thousand entered through the port of Buenos Aires, most of them bound for Chile, Upper Peru, and the Tucumán region (where they were used in cotton production).

In Buenos Aires itself, where there was no other source of manual labor, they were essential in a range of urban tasks and on small-scale farms and estancias. In many areas, they were used in domestic service. According to one estimate, by 1650 there were already ten thousand Black and ten thousand biracial Black-white enslaved people in the territory of present-day Argentina, and the number continued to grow. Between 1680 and 1777, approximately forty thousand arrived and at least another seventy thousand were added between that year and 1812. Many of those arriving at the port of Buenos Aires were imported as contraband.

The slavery trade was accompanied by unprecedented levels of violence. Africans arrived in Buenos Aires in overcrowded ships, beaten and malnourished, to the point that it was common for a fifth of them to die along the way. In Africa, hunting of enslaved people bled the demography dry and, for three centuries, decimated the population by taking the youngest and the fittest, subjecting them to extreme levels of interethnic brutality. There is no doubt that this resulted in slowing that continent's development, leaving a wake of suffering, the effects of which can still be felt today.

The splendor of European "civilization" had its counterpart in the barbarism it was financed with: the enslavement of the African continent and the reduction to servitude of the Americas. The territory of present-day Argentina (and of the Americas in general) can be said to have played an ambiguous role in the international division of the advantages and disadvantages established by the capitalist system. If on the one hand it suffered the subjugation of its indigenous population and the plundering of its resources for the benefit of Europe, on the other, it—particularly Buenos Aires merchants—reaped the benefits from the enslavement of an entire continent.

The *Sistema de Castas*

The introduction of enslaved people to the Americas added a third category of people, whose legal status differed from both the conquistadors and the Indians.

The initial expectation of the Spaniards was to maintain three perfectly delimited groups. To achieve this, "Indian villages" (*pueblos de indios*) were established, with their own authorities and cabildos, which were expected to coexist with those of the white settlers. This was in contrast to enslaved people,

who were not granted any political rights. Most of these villages would eventually disappear, but some survived (in Jujuy and Santiago del Estero, they even lasted up to the period of independence) and were a bastion for the preservation of indigenous traditions.

The civil and religious authorities sought to prevent white settlers from forming relationships with people from the other two groups. But an unstoppable process of *mestizaje* made this idea unfeasible. As a result of contact with local customs, the distance from the Iberian peninsula, and the absence of Spanish women, the moral standards and courtship practices of European men were laxer than in the Old World. In addition to occasionally taking young Black or native women by force, it was very common for Spaniards to have, alongside their "legitimate" families, mestiza, indigenous, or enslaved concubines with whom they fathered children.

White women, especially those of some status in society, had far less latitude for moral transgressions. They could seldom escape male control, unless they chose to live in a convent, which some did. Scrutiny was less intense for those of more modest means, and they sometimes had children by nonwhite men.

Regardless, human bodies copulated and reproduced with complete disregard for the prejudices and regulations of the authorities. Whether as a product of rape, necessity, or love, they gave birth to other humans whose very existence transgressed ethnic boundaries. Initially, the mestizos born to indigenous mothers inherited rights and legal status from their white fathers (slavery, on the other hand, was passed down through the mother's side of the family). In the cities of the littoral region, where a significant majority of the founders were mestizo, they were considered *vecinos*, with the same rights as their white neighbors. This was not the case in other regions, however, and, as the years went by, this initial permissiveness gradually disappeared throughout. Social differences were based on ethnic distinctions; therefore, lineages could not be allowed to mix and lose all importance.

Consequently, in the seventeenth century, the social hierarchy was reorganized through a new, more complex system that combined ethnic criteria with distinctions based on skin color. Known as the *sistema de castas* (caste system), it was consolidated in the eighteenth century with the requirement of a certificate of "purity of blood" in order to gain access to the benefits that came with being white/Spaniard.

Those who did not have "pure" blood were classified into one of the castes. Initially there were five main groups: Black, Indian, *zambo* (a biracial

combination of the former), "mulatto," and mestizo (biracial combinations of each of the first with white, respectively). The three biracial combinations were later divided into subtypes, with more specific denominations that indicated the proportion of each race in the mix: *tercerón* ("octoroon"), *cuarterón* ("quadroon"), *mulato prieto*, and many others.

The castes were intended as a system of ethnic hierarchy backed by both legal provisions and informal practices. Those who belonged to a caste could not hold public, military, or ecclesiastical positions. During some periods, they were not allowed to bear arms, walk alone at night, be educated alongside white people, or dress sumptuously. Everyone did have the right to litigate in court. Even enslaved people could bring lawsuits against their enslavers and did so—at times successfully—in cases of extreme abuse, to avoid being separated from their families, or to be allowed to marry. Obviously, the treatment they received from the judges was discriminatory. The caste system was accompanied by a belief in the superiority of "pure blood" and the inferiority of others as well as by a distribution of labor and economic opportunities according to caste divisions, so that those who were in the worst position on the scale of ethnic-racial prestige were also the most economically disadvantaged.

In theory, castes were defined by birth and permanent. However, there was some mobility. Those who were able to ascend socially due to their financial ability, family ties, or political contacts and managed to disguise their origins could pass as Spaniards. They could even obtain an official certificate of "purity of blood" (something only attainable by those who were not very dark-skinned). This was largely defined by the context: it depended on the consensus that the person in question could achieve among their respectable *vecinos*, who had to accept them as a peer. Segregation was more rigid in the cities than in the countryside and on the frontiers, where society was generally more permissive. The mestizo condition could also be reversed through repeated intermixing with Europeans: anyone with less than an eighth of indigenous blood was considered white. Conversely, it was not uncommon for a person of exclusively European origin who was very poor to be called mestizo by extension. Ethnic and class categories overlapped.

The demographic dynamics produced a constantly changing and highly varied population. In 1778, the percentage of people recorded in the census as "Black" was very high in some cities: more than 40 percent in Salta and Córdoba, more than 50 percent in Santiago del Estero and Catamarca, and 64 percent in Tucumán. "Indians" represented a major percentage of the population in these cities as well, reaching 53 percent in La Rioja and 82 percent in Jujuy.

Those considered white/"Spaniards" were a minority, except in Buenos Aires (68 percent), Mendoza (51 percent), and San Luis (53 percent).

There is a possibility that these regional differences were somewhat smaller than these figures suggest. Few of the 1778 censuses included "mestizo" as a category, even though they represented a significant portion of the population, so in some places they were classified as Spanish and in others as indigenous or Black. The high number of "Spaniards" in Buenos Aires likely reflects the fact that it was a more open society with greater social mobility than the societies of the northwest, enabling mestizos who had achieved a certain degree of economic success to be more easily perceived as white.

Given the relative mobility it enabled and the association between skin color and social status, the *sistema de castas* spawned a "pigmentocracy" that would persist even after its abolition during the period of independence. Skin color and other physical traits—such as hair texture—would continue to play a crucial role in defining who was better than whom. Consequently, the local class structure evolved differently from that of modern Europe, where the ruling classes believed themselves to be superior to the workers on the basis of a number of attributes that nevertheless did not include racial superiority. This prejudice resulted in a variety of consequences in the relations between the upper and lower classes in Latin America, including the territory now occupied by the Argentine state. It is one thing to have class differences between people who consider themselves part of the same "we" and share a territory, but the inequality established when one group considers itself racially superior to the rest and occupies that territory, imagining it as a colony, is something quite different.

Interethnic Relations and City Life

Relations between ethnic groups were complex. The *sistema de castas* obviously meant ethnic hierarchy and differentiated rights. Additionally, there were enslaved people and enslavers, encomenderos and those who labored for them. Of those perceived as white, individuals born in the Americas did not enjoy all the prerogatives of those born in Europe. For many indigenous communities, *mestizaje* was a form of ethnocide that accelerated their disappearance—in part because mestizos were often not integrated into the community but also because some Indians sought to pass for mestizos in order to improve their status and thus abandoned their communities. Often mestizos were outsiders: they did not belong entirely to either the indigenous world or the white

world. This ambivalence, embodied in their physical appearance, undoubtedly had a particular psychological impact.

The Black population was faced with a range of living conditions. Those who had been brought over as enslaved people had an extremely hard life. They lost their names and were given the surnames of their new enslavers, for whom they were forced to work. It was not uncommon for them to be subjected to corporal punishment or for the women to be raped by their enslavers or the enslavers' relatives. For these reasons, enslaved people made huge efforts to win their freedom. Attempts to escape were not uncommon. Those who were able to save some money tried to buy their freedom, something that more than a few succeeded in doing. There were also cases in which the enslavers ended up freeing certain enslaved people out of genuine affection for them or for the children they had with them, so that they would not pass slavery on to their offspring.

By 1810, more than 20 percent of the Black inhabitants of Buenos Aires were free. However, of the forty-three thousand inhabitants of the city at the time, ten thousand were still enslaved. Free or captive, Africans and their descendants played a key role in society. In the countryside, they carried out all manner of tasks, including that of ranch foreman: sometimes, even while enslaved, they supervised white laborers. A considerable number of the farm workers of Buenos Aires province were Black. In the city, enslaved people occupied a central role in domestic service, while free Black laborers excelled in artisanal production (a few even became enslavers themselves).

Although they came from very diverse peoples and geographic spaces, the Black inhabitants of this territory built a strong sense of identity. In Buenos Aires in the eighteenth century, they formed organizations by "nations" (according to their place of capture in Africa), met in *tambos*, and held dances on Sundays. They also had their own Catholic brotherhoods. Unlike in other regions, they did not live their daily lives segregated from the rest of the popular classes, with whom they worked and socialized. Relationships between poor white men and Black, indigenous, or mestiza women were not uncommon; those between poor white women and men of other origins were less frequent.

The ethnic heterogeneity and complex relationships between people of different social standing were evident in the cities more than anywhere else. After the initial period, the main class consisted of large-scale merchants, landowners, and, depending on the region, other groups that had become wealthy through various activities, such as owners of bodegas, sawmills, slaughterhouses, shipyards, and wagon trains. They were white and generally

born in the Americas. This class also included high-ranking officials—mostly Spaniards—and the clergy.

A gradual change had taken place during the seventeenth century. The traditional elites, formed by the "distinguished" families associated with the founders and the first encomenderos, were replaced by families who had arrived later and became wealthy through trade. That was the case in Buenos Aires. In Salta, Jujuy, Córdoba, and Tucumán, the conquistador families maintained their preeminence until the mid-eighteenth century, when they were displaced by merchants, many of them from the Iberian Peninsula or other parts of the Americas. In some cases, it was the "distinguished" families that dominated commerce in their cities, so that conflict and displacement were not always necessary.

Below the main class, other white inhabitants occupied intermediate spaces. The Spaniards who had arrived first easily ascended to the top, but that became increasingly difficult as the colonial order grew more established. Social differences emerged among the Spaniards and, of course, among the white settlers born in the Americas: there were *pulperos*, innkeepers, small-scale merchants, artisans, foremen of haciendas and sawmills, transport owners, and small-scale producers.

In all these categories there were also people from the castes, especially in lower-ranking occupations: they were day laborers; peddlers; water, milk, and bread deliverers; fishermen; slaughterers; butchers; stevedores; and so on. Caste women were often employed as ironers, laundresses, or wet nurses or worked in the slaughterhouses. Enslaved people formed the lowest echelon of the popular classes. At the top were the artisans—shoemakers, tailors, harness makers, silversmiths, tanners, blacksmiths, et cetera—whose trades were the best positioned among those available to ordinary working people.

As in Europe, artisanal work was organized hierarchically, with the master heading the establishment and directing production. He was assisted by one or more salaried journeymen and one or more apprentices, young people whose families placed them in the care of the master to learn the trade and assist him in exchange for lodging, food, and sometimes clothing. The workforce of a craftsman's workshop could also include the artisan's own enslaved people or rented ones.

Among the artisans, there were various ethnic groups, including free Black laborers, whose contributions in cities such as Buenos Aires were significant. In some trades, they sought to organize themselves into guilds, similar to those in Europe, in order to regulate their activities and collectively defend

their interests. In Argentine territory, these attempts were generally unsuccessful or weak, in part due to ethnic divisions among the masters.

Toward the end of the colony, within this diversity in conditions, a simpler division became apparent, one that opposed "respectable people" versus "the plebs." This was a dichotomy that did not entirely overlap with skin color. Only white people could be respectable, but the plebs included all the poor, including those of exclusively European origin. The "shameful poor" from the lower class were nevertheless distinguished from the "solemn poor," people from good families who were penniless yet recognized as part of the "respectable" half. Lineage, class, and ethnicity therefore came together in a hierarchy that assigned a place to each.

Each city was governed by its cabildo, which was in charge of the administration of urban life, provisions, justice in the first instance, public celebrations, the allocation of available land, and the maintenance of roads. It also organized militias responsible for defending the city.

Urban life was controlled by those considered "respectable" *vecinos*, who had the right to elect and be elected as representatives in the cabildo and to join the militias. The colonial authorities were not supposed to intervene in the cabildo but sometimes managed to get their candidates elected to the council.

The category of *vecino* did not include everyone who lived in the city but a more restricted group of people. Initially, *vecinos* were the encomenderos and conquistadors. Later, other groups were gradually granted this privilege, such as hacienda owners, merchants, and eventually the heads of propertied families and those of certain economic status. "Purity of blood" was required to be a *vecino*, which excluded the castes. However, mestizos were considered *vecinos* in the foundational stage of some cities and even later if they were able to conceal their origins. The rural population, all women (whether from the countryside or the city), and most urban males were excluded from the category of *vecino* as they belonged to the "inferior classes."

Within this general context, cities began developing regional characteristics. Since there was no indigenous population in Buenos Aires to be subjected to encomienda, manual labor initially fell to the colonists themselves, who were overwhelmingly mestizos. For a long time, there was no great potential for economic accumulation. This combination of regional traits led to a relatively egalitarian tone in social interactions and to a more participatory local politics. Something similar happened in other cities of the littoral region, where the potential to survive by hunting wild livestock resulted in a population

of low means but haughty and jealous of its independence. The cities of the northwest were different in this sense. The elites there were able to set themselves apart based on clearer and more pronounced class and ethnic differences, and the prevailing tone was more hierarchical and feudal.

Rebellions and Social Tensions

The colonial order persisted for two and a half centuries, although not without tensions. The indigenous peoples continued to resist in various ways.

In the valleys of the Calchaquí people, there was a second wave of rebellions between 1630 and 1643, with a major uprising led by the cacique Chalemín and supported by several indigenous groups in the region (others, such as the Pulares and the Famatinas, joined the Spanish side).

A third wave broke out between the mid-1650s and the 1660s, led by a Spaniard, Pedro Bohorques, who was proclaimed an "Inca" monarch by the rebellious Indians. The repression was severe. The defeated peoples were deported to geographically distant places. The last to surrender, the Quilmes, were relocated to a territory in the south of the province of Buenos Aires that today bears their name.

In 1781, there were uprisings in Salta and Jujuy, coinciding with the great rebellions of Túpac Amaru II in Peru and Túpac Katari in what is now Bolivia. The revolt in Jujuy was led by José Quiroga, a mestizo raised in a Jesuit reduction. His message had a strong indigenist and anti-colonial tone. Now that there was an "Inca king" in the north, he announced that from that point on "only the Indians will govern," since "the poor want to defend themselves from the tyranny of the Spaniards." His followers were a heterogeneous group and included mestizos, Indians, and "criollos" (a term referring to people of European descent born in the Americas, although it also tended to suggest some degree of *mestizaje*). They attempted to march on the city of Jujuy but were driven back. They gained support in other parts of the viceroyalty and generated considerable concern among the upper classes everywhere. The repression was very harsh. In Jujuy, the authorities killed around ninety Wichis after the rebellion, including women and children (in Upper Peru, it was worse: around six thousand rebels were killed in La Paz out of a total population of twenty thousand).

Beyond (or between) the major uprisings, resistance also took place on a smaller scale. The indigenous peoples learned to use Spanish colonial law to their advantage and to litigate with the authorities in attempts to legally

defend their lands against further dispossession. They were occasionally successful.

The indigenous peoples who remained independent were also active. The Pampas and Patagonia underwent an intense transformation as a result of the influence of the Araucanians, who lived in what is now Chile. The peoples on this side of the Andes acquired some of their customs, and Mapudungun became the lingua franca. By adopting the Spanish horse, which they became experts in handling, they gained more mobility. New groups, such as the Ranqueles, were formed through the fusion of other preexisting groups. No political unity was established among the various factions, but their ties did intensify.

By the eighteenth century, the main leaders of the Patagonian indigenous peoples were generally mestizos. They spoke Spanish, traded intensely with the Europeans, established diplomatic agreements with them, and maintained settlements or camps where fugitives and white captives were kept.

Malones, lightning raids on colonial settlements or haciendas to steal animals, became a regular occurrence. Although *malones* were primarily an economic enterprise, they were also used as a political tool to resolve disputes and define dominance between chiefs, to force negotiations with the white settlers, and as a punishment when an agreement was not honored. The captives abducted in *malones* were often used for this purpose.

From the mid-eighteenth century, the renewed threat of the indigenous peoples led the Buenos Aires authorities to establish a system of forts and military outposts along the frontier. In later years, a policy was developed that aimed to transform these forts into agricultural settlements. In the Buenos Aires countryside, Chascomús, Rojas, Areco, and Salto were established this way, although they were initially more focused on livestock than agriculture. Not long after, a similar policy was introduced in Córdoba, San Luis, Mendoza, Salta, and Entre Ríos, also affected by indigenous incursions. These new settlements, together with a policy of forging alliances and treaties with the indigenous peoples, gave the Christians peace of mind for a prolonged period.

The frontier with the "savage" Indian was not a precise or definitive boundary. On the contrary, it was a porous zone of contact and of commercial, cultural, and political exchanges. This broad swath of land was also inhabited by a population that lived beyond the reach of the law: Christians who had run into trouble, fugitive enslaved people, Indians who had escaped from the

encomiendas, and enterprising cattle ranchers who settled there through private agreements with the caciques.

Although to a much lesser extent, the frontier with the indomitable Chaco people also permitted contact and exchanges. During the seventeenth century, they harassed the inhabitants of the settlements in the northwest as well as in Paraguay. In the eighteenth century, they caused great difficulties in Santa Fe. Like their Patagonian counterparts, they managed to maintain their independence until long after the end of the colony.

Enslaved people, on the other hand, had no opportunity for such open or massive resistance, although there were some scattered and limited mutinies. In any case, as we will see in the next chapter, there were some hints of unrest toward the end of the eighteenth century, and in 1803 there were several major episodes of enslaved people escaping in Montevideo, apparently with the intention of founding a free community, or *quilombo*, in the country's north.

The mestizo and white people born in the Americas also expressed their discontent in various ways. From very early on, the privileges enjoyed by the Spaniards generated some minor tensions, and as early as 1573 they were the cause of an uprising in Santa Fe. In the eighteenth century, there were some larger-scale movements. In Paraguay, there was a series of rebellions by *comuneros* (commoners) in which mestizos, campesinos, and soldiers staged riots against the authorities. These became quite intense between 1720 and 1735 and led to the death of the new governor in 1733 at the hands of the rebels, who then appointed their own leader.

In Corrientes, there were several rebellions, including a mutiny in 1732 against the highest local authorities, a repercussion of the Paraguayan rebellion. In 1764, inhabitants staged their own *comunero* uprising against the lieutenant governor, with broad plebeian participation.

In Traslasierra, Córdoba, there was an uprising in 1774 on behalf of the "commons" against the authorities of the cabildo in which both the affluent and the mestizo peasants participated. They demanded they not be governed by a European. Conscription for military service on the frontier also caused uprisings, such as those of 1752 in Catamarca and La Rioja.

The urban masses were a constant source of fear for the wealthy classes. Public celebrations and festivities—Carnival, bullfights, even religious festivities—were sometimes the occasion for popular unruliness and the transgression of norms and hierarchies and were therefore carefully supervised by the authorities.

The Rise of Buenos Aires and the Bourbon Reforms

The colonial order emerged along with the initial core of the world capitalist economy as it expanded outward from its European birthplace. Given this relationship, the territory of present-day Argentina was highly dependent on the fluctuations of international trade.

The seventeenth century was a period of general crisis due to the depletion of the Potosí mining industry, the scarcity of indigenous labor, and the decline of European trade. Complications in the trade flow had a particularly strong impact on Buenos Aires. The decline of Potosí, the problems in Spain, and the hostilities and thieving that the Dutch carried out on the Iberian ships in the Atlantic had immediate repercussions and a negative effect on the economy of Buenos Aires.

Dependence on international trade increased decisively from the mid-eighteenth century onward. In England, the Industrial Revolution triggered technical and organizational changes that boosted the expansion of capitalism. It developed the factory system, which significantly lowered the cost of manufacturing production, and alongside it a network of banks and trading companies that supported the production and circulation of goods. These developments prompted England (and later other European powers) to look for markets to sell its products and source the raw materials needed to supply its smoky factories.

Within this context, the Iberian trade monopoly became intolerable. The ascendant England, allied with Portugal, exerted considerable pressure and finally gained access to Spanish American markets (a pressure it would redouble after losing its own North American colonies in 1776). In an attempt to stem the inexorable rise of the British, Spain allied itself with France and participated in the Seven Years' War (1756–63), a contest between imperial powers. Unluckily, it ended up on the losing side, making its position in the Americas more vulnerable, particularly in the Río de la Plata region, where the Portuguese were exerting pressure from the north.

In order to avoid losing control of the area, the Spanish Crown made a decision that would have tremendous consequences. For several decades, a new dynasty of kings, the Bourbons, had been trying to revitalize the economy of their dominions and strengthen their power in the Americas. A series of benefits for the mining industry in Potosí succeeded in reactivating production, which improved the Crown's revenues and brought greater prosperity to the entire region. The greatest reformist impulse occurred during the reign of

Charles III (1759–88), who made a significant effort to set up a centralized and more efficient state apparatus. He sought to establish a cadre of officials in the colonies who could break the resistance of local elites, protective of their interests. To this end, he abolished the sale of positions and consolidated the ranks of career officials from Spain.

But it was the response he gave to the challenge of the Portuguese and the British on the Río de la Plata that was the most important. In 1776, he sent a large expedition led by Pedro de Cevallos in order to assert Spain's military presence. To give him greater authority on the ground, Cevallos was granted the powers of viceroy. This was supposed to be provisional but ended up being definitive. The Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata was thus created, independent from that of Peru, with jurisdiction over the present-day territories of Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Bolivia. The provinces of Cuyo, which until then had formed part of the Captaincy General of Chile, were integrated into the new jurisdiction. The riches of Potosí would be administered by the new viceroyalty in order to help support it.

This territorial reorganization confirmed Buenos Aires' ascendancy and gave it a significant boost. It became the capital city of the viceroyalty and the seat of a Real Audiencia as well as a consulate charged with regulating commerce. Two years later, its importance grew decisively, when the Free Trade Regulation of 1778 allowed it to trade freely with other territories of the Crown and to legally import enslaved people and Spanish goods. This commercial freedom meant the end of Lima's monopoly on trade. Merchants in Buenos Aires began to dominate the export of silver, which continued to represent the bulk of all exports, but they also controlled trade with the interior, including Upper Peru.

Customs revenue grew exponentially. Buenos Aires went from exporting 150,000 hides a year in 1778 to shipping 1.4 million in 1783. Its population expanded exponentially from twenty-two thousand inhabitants in 1770 to nearly forty thousand in 1800, making it the largest city in the viceroyalty and a central consumer market in its own right.

These changes generated a regional imbalance that would prove to be long-lasting. The hub of colonial economic life shifted from the Pacific to the Atlantic. Before the viceroyalty was created, the Government of Tucumán was the economic and demographic center of the territory that would become Argentina, and Potosí was its driving force. By 1778, 58 percent of the population lived in the northwest, and Córdoba still had more inhabitants than Buenos Aires. The littoral was a comparatively underdeveloped area at the time.

Buenos Aires' explosive demographic growth and the new economic focus on the Atlantic led to changes. Associated with the export of leather and, to a lesser extent, salted meat, the littoral region (Buenos Aires, Corrientes, Entre Ríos, Santa Fe, the southeast of Córdoba, and the Banda Oriental) became as much a driving force of the economy as Potosí. The northwest entered a stage of relative decline due, among other things, to the effects of free trade, which had an impact on some of its products. For example, manufacturers of wine and aguardiente from San Juan and those of aguardiente from Catamarca were unable to compete with alcoholic beverages imported from Europe and experienced a definitive decline.

Therefore, the international division of labor, which had previously focused colonial life on the production of metals, now functioned in a way that encouraged the dissolution of incipient internal economic ties, generated regional imbalances, and oriented production other than mining to foreign markets. By the end of the eighteenth century, of the Spanish colonies in the Americas, the territory of the Río de la Plata was the fourth-largest exporter to Europe, following the regions with their centers in Mexico, Peru, and Cuba, and it was expanding dramatically. However, at the same time, the region's peripheral and subordinate position and its internal imbalances were also being reinforced.

The Atlantic orientation of the new viceroyalty positioned the merchants of Buenos Aires as the main class, which would also lead to consequences in the future. The Buenos Aires bourgeoisie, white and born in the New World, had flourished in commerce and had strong ties to contraband smuggling. It had grown wealthy through the trafficking of enslaved people and trade with various regions of the world. Without access to mines or haciendas, it was an almost entirely mercantile group. Their entrepreneurial spirit was strong, they had already managed to secure their own ships (some of them overseas), and they had links to other merchants in distant parts of the world. However, their relationship with the production of goods was weak, if not nonexistent. Toward the end of the colonial period, they had tried manufacturing salted meat to sell to seamen and for the slavery plantations of the Antilles, but it was still a fundamentally merchant bourgeoisie (their interest in the countryside and livestock farming would not develop until the following century). Their capital was already significant but still modest in comparison with the elites of other regions. A successful merchant in Buenos Aires could amass as much as a third of the wealth of his Cuban counterpart and a fifth of that of a Mexican. Due to its focus on trade and its position as a port city, the Buenos Aires

bourgeoisie tended to value free trade and to reject any type of monopoly. The liberalization ushered in by the Bourbon reforms was certainly welcome. It was, however, a freedom that applied almost exclusively to trade with Spain and its territories. Restrictions on trade with other nations remained in place (and, along with them, smuggling).

The Bourbon reforms brought about other significant changes that affected social relations. In an effort to centralize power and exert more control, the Crown imposed limits on the activities of the religious orders. Those who suffered the most were the Jesuits, who were unexpectedly expelled from the Americas in 1767. The powerful empire they commanded through their missions in the northeast rapidly collapsed; the smaller-scale missions they operated in other areas also shut down. The king's untimely measure generated considerable discontent and several acts of resistance in the Guaraní area, Córdoba, and Buenos Aires. Despite this, the communities that the Jesuits had organized were soon dismantled. The towns saw their populations fall dramatically; their inhabitants were left to work as cattle ranchers or in cities. The lands and animals under their control passed into the hands of private individuals.

Under the same logic of centralizing power, the Crown stipulated that all the officials appointed from that point on must be Spaniards and that those born in the Americas, now displaced, were only to hold minor positions. The local elites saw their dominance undermined, which they naturally disliked. Under the new colonial structure, the cabildo of Buenos Aires had less power. The elites in Buenos Aires still managed to form alliances with the new officials, either through shared business ventures or by connecting them with their marriageable daughters. They were thus able to mitigate the loss of power these reforms entailed. But the elites of other cities did not have that possibility.

Below the elites, those born in the Americas of lesser rank also felt displaced by the Spaniards, who in Buenos Aires and other regions held privileged positions in the artisan trades, small-scale commerce, and other activities. The Bourbon reforms also reorganized the tax system, introducing several unwelcome changes, such as an increase in the tobacco tax. The Spaniards, or "Goths," as they were referred to pejoratively, thus earned themselves the antipathy of the American-born population in those years.

Around the same time, at the initiative of the local elites rather than the king, a series of legal measures was introduced to improve the supply of manual labor. A requirement was implemented obligating the independent

rural population to carry *papeletas de conchabo*, documents signed by their employers to prove that they were not "vagrants." The requirement was imposed between 1772 and 1791 in the northwest and in Córdoba and for the first time in Buenos Aires in 1804, although prior to this there had been other forms of similar pressure.

The free population was therefore forced to seek employment. Those who did not have a job would be pressed into military service or moved to the frontier to inhabit forts and new towns. At the same time, the reorientation toward cattle ranching in the wake of the definitive extinction of the *cimarrón* livestock gave the land a value it had not previously had, which in the long term was also detrimental to the independent population of the countryside.

In general, the late eighteenth century was a time of intensified pressure to secure social hierarchies, class differentiations, and control over the lower classes. New legislation strengthened the power that fathers had over their children's marital decisions, to avoid undesirable unions (especially those that crossed caste barriers).

The Church also pushed to reform popular practices and habits. As a result, limitations were placed on the celebration of Carnival, for instance. The elites began to encourage supposedly more "enlightened," intimate, and austere ways of expressing faith, far removed from the more intense and public forms that were prevalent among the popular classes.

The period of the Bourbon reforms thus added new tensions to existing ones in the colonial order. The white, American-born population had more motives for discontent with the Spaniards, and the lower classes with the upper classes. However, until the early nineteenth century, neither the figure of the king nor the colonial order, sustained without a need for the presence of European armies in the territory, were strongly questioned.

This apparent calm would soon be shaken by a violent storm that would disturb the very foundations of the edifice the Spaniards had constructed.