

# NEW METHODOLOGIES FOR A LATIN AMERICAN ECONOMIC HISTORY ON THE 19TH CENTURY: THE SOUTH-CENTRAL ANDES

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## Abstract

The economic literature of nineteenth-century Latin America has been dominated by its focus on the import-export complex and by comparisons with the United States and Western Europe, discussing why Latin America did not develop like the former regions. The use of import-export data is deficient in understanding economic development of the region; comparisons about what Latin America is not does not help understanding how development occurred. Instead, the essay develops new concepts such as the internal economy, as well as methodologies and categories to analyze the changes in the Latin American economy from 1830 to 1920, using as a case study the south-central Andes.

**Keywords:** economic development, nineteenth century, internal economy, south-central Andes

**Clasificación JEL:** N16, N26, N56, N96.

## Resumen

La bibliografía sobre la historia económica de América Latina ha enfocado en el complejo de importación/exportación y en comparaciones con los Estados Unidos y Europa Occidental, preguntando por qué América Latina no tuvo el mismo desarrollo que las regiones arriba citadas. Los datos del complejo importación/exportación son deficientes para entender el desarrollo económico de la región; comparaciones sobre lo que América Latina no es no ayuda en entender la clase de desarrollo que sí hubo. En vez de esos métodos, el ensayo desarrolla nuevos conceptos como la economía interior, como también metodologías y categorías para analizar los cambios en la economía latinoamericana de 1830 a 1920, usando como un estudio de caso los Andes centromeridionales.

**Palabras clave:** Desarrollo económico, siglo XIX, economía interior, Andes centromeridionales

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## 1. Introduction

The economic history of Latin America for the nineteenth century has been written about many times. Over decades a consensus emerged that, in the aftermath of independence, the region suffered from economic loss because of the civil wars and that, despite attempts in the 1880s at recouping prosperity through trade with Great Britain and other commercial powers, the new republics were unable to overcome a period of stagnation that lasted until the mid or late nineteenth century. It was only at that point that Latin America was able to bring about significant economic growth and development by developing their exports in primary goods to service the rapidly industrializing North Atlantic region.<sup>1</sup> The way in which most of the economic histories of the nineteenth century have determined this was by analyzing what has been most easy to measure, the import–export data collected by the respective national units.

Measuring imports and exports as a means of determining economic activity continues to this day. After all, the import–export complex, even in the aftermath of economic dislocation that the civil war and the loss of the Iberian commercial system that independence represented, remained vital to the economies of the nascent republics.<sup>2</sup> As a result, using the import–export sector as a proxy for economic growth for the early nineteenth century is problematic. This sector was relatively small in this period. Instead, the import–export nexus must be examined in conjunction with the internal economy. This provides a more complete view of the region that was much more dynamic than previously thought. Indeed, as will become clear below, the factors that caused this dynamism was different from either the colonial period or that of the twentieth century.

To understand the economic development of the region, it is necessary to focus on what I call the “internal economies” of Spanish America, which tended to be much larger and, for certain regions, more dynamic than that of outward-facing portion. By “internal economy” I mean economic spaces in which the major economic dynamic was that of internally produced goods and services. I use the term “internal economy” to distinguish from “domestic economies,” which were bounded by national political boundaries. Thus, internal economies are geographically bounded regions in which the economic activity is most intense within that region. While often related to the export sector, the internal economy included factors that were mostly tied to internal trade and consumption. This included the economic activities of peasant communities, whether of indigenous or not, the circulation and consumption of goods produced within the region, and the economic infrastructure, such as transportation systems, fairs, and other such factors, that were in the service of internal trade and consumption. It is taking into account the internal economies where, I think, scholars can make a large difference.

What must be done is to combine the data on the import–export complex with that of

1 The literature is too large to cite here. For a consensus take, see Victor Bulmer-Thomas (2014). Curiously, the section on the nineteenth century is one short chapter.

2 There were stark differences between Brazil and Portugal and Spanish America and Spain. In this essay, I will concentrate on the Spanish example. See for example Prados de la Escosura and Amaral (1993).

the internal economies, show the linkages between the two, and then assign relative values as well as surmise the effect that the economy had on different sectors of the economy and thus, on the population. The changing dynamics of internal economies and the export sector brought about different winners and losers and created an economy in which income inequality was much less than earlier, in the colonial period, or later, when the creole oligarchical state took over. The strengthening state also tilted the playing field to favor certain sectors over others that had a profound effect on the Latin American economies as they increasingly tied themselves into the North Atlantic trade networks.

This essay does not address directly the “Why did Latin America Fall Behind” literature, such as Stephen Haber (1997), John Coatsworth (1978, 2008), among many others, have discussed. The problem with that literature is that the authors are largely focused on the endpoint, namely industrial development. Comparisons to the rest of the world, especially the United States and England are rife in these discussions. Rather, the perspective I am proposing takes the status of the economy and its structures in Latin America (and one particular region) seriously as it was, rather than what it should have been. A refocusing in this way renders great benefits, as it helps understand how people lived during this period, thus finding many important insights into the economic lives of the inhabitants of the region. It also reorients the discussion on living standards, inequality and the long-term ways people tried to deal with circumstances that were often difficult.

How does one go about writing an economic history that gets beyond the conceptual and methodological issues that I have alluded to? To make manageable the research I have done over the past decades on the topic of the economic development of Spanish America from independence to the 1920s, I posit certain ideas that help in the conceptualization of the project. They encompass three different sets of issues. First, the issue of economic spaces in the nineteenth century, most of which did not conform to political boundaries. Secondly, the consideration of what I call the “internal economy” and what factors, beyond that of the import/export complex should be taken into account. Lastly, it is necessary to consider economic actors outside of merchants and miners who played a role that often has not been sufficiently studied.

## 2. Territorial Issues

The need for the concept of the “internal economy” is useful because the area that I am studying does not conform to national boundaries. The area encompasses a quadrangle roughly from north to south from the altiplano of Bolivia in the department of Oruro, Bolivia to Tucumán Province in Argentina. From east to west, the region’s boundaries are the Gran Chaco plain to the Pacific coast. This approximate rectangle includes portions of various countries, namely Bolivia, Argentina and Chile.

While not necessarily typical of Latin America – lack of rivers, high mountains, and the driest desert of the world along the Pacific Coast provided a natural barrier to the outside – the south-central Andes do encompass many of the factors that were so important in the rest of Latin America. The region boasted a wide variety of environmental conditions, it had a large

peasant population, and an important mining sector, frontiers with autonomous indigenous peoples, an elaborate trade network, and many small and medium-sized urban centers. This was all within an ethnic mix that incorporated peoples of European descent, a large number of people who considered themselves to be mestizo as well as a large number of people who still lived in indigenous villages and were classified as Indian.

The reason I selected this region is because it was tied together through trade routes and commercial connections that make it a coherent whole that were more important than fragile and inconsistent political boundaries that the national states attempted to impose to create economic realities that simply did not exist for most of the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

The reasons for this unorthodox approach of ignoring national boundaries are multiple. For one, national boundaries in the period under discussion (1820s–1920s) for much of this time were relatively meaningless in terms of economic activity and economic spaces. As Carlos Sempat Assadourian (1983) showed for the colonial period, the circulation of goods due to silver mining incorporated all of the South American continent that had been colonized by the Spanish and the Portuguese. As Antonio Mitre (1986) and myself (1987a) have shown, this “Peruvian economic space” persisted well into the nineteenth century, as shown, in the case of Mitre, by the continued circulation of Bolivian silver coins as the dominant currency. Trade patterns established during the colonial period (and perhaps even before then) persisted as major means of the transport and sale of goods, well documented especially by Conti (2008).

Another advantage of dealing with a region in which national boundaries are internal to the region is that it is possible to measure better trade flows. National borders, even with the deficient control by new states, provide the best data about some of the products that flowed across the area, thus making possible the measurement of at least some of the commerce. This was especially the case with goods such as livestock, minerals, and imports *de ultra-mar*.<sup>4</sup> Despite much smuggling, the customs data provides some yardstick about trade flows, mineral exports and consumption patterns.

Most importantly, this region, defined not by national boundaries but by commercial circuits, had a vibrant interior economy that was based on common commercial ties and a system of fairs that had emerged in the colonial period that transcended national boundaries. The fairs in Salta, Jujuy in Argentina, Ayoma, Huari, Monteagudo in Bolivia, Vilque in Peru and elsewhere followed a seasonal logic that combined indigenous economies with those of cattle ranchers and mule breeders in Argentina. But these fairs were also connected to the import/export circuits shared by local and European merchant firms.<sup>5</sup>

Interestingly, it is impossible to consider just the internal economy without considering the import/export complex, because one affected the other and the import–export complex was attuned to that of the internal economy. We have evidence of this through the seasonality of

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3 The south–central Andes as a region was first defined by Viviana Conti. The ideas about this region grew from a common project that she and I initially collaborated on.

4 There were some internal customs, but data from these posts is sporadic at best. For some of the internal customs, see Langer (2009).

5 The scholar who has done the most work on fairs is Viviana Conti. See for example Conti (1987).

muleteers and llameros willing to transport goods to and from the coast, of import merchants participating in the fairs and taking into account the seasonality of demand for goods, as well as the weather, in which the export of contraband silver could only be done when the high Andean were free of snow and the indigenous community members with their llama caravans or the salteño mule drivers were willing to take the ingots across because they were not otherwise occupied in agricultural labor.

Another territorial issue is that regions that were not under the control of the new nation-states contributed to the economic development of the region. Unlike North America, where the indigenous frontier economy has been analyzed as part and parcel of the economic development of the United States and Canada (Jones 1998; Braund 1993), the indigenous frontier in Latin America has been largely (with the exception of the rubber boom) seen as a barrier rather than an integral part of the economic development of the region. The pampas, for example, were seen as a “desert,” bereft of people and economic activity or, at best, where a trade in “vicios” – yerba mate, sugar, alcohol and the like – provided some limited economic activity (Ratto 2007). Only its conquest in the last decades of the nineteenth century, according to this view, brought the region into the world economy. This is also the story of the Chaco region just to the north, or the Amazon jungle and eastern Andean foothills, where indigenous resistance to invasion by highland settlers was quite effective.<sup>6</sup>

What this scholarship does not take sufficiently into account is that the indigenous frontiers were quite permeable and that trade relations in particular, but also labor migration, stimulated the frontier economy in ways that affected the rest of the region. For the south-central Andes, for example, the eastern frontier, first in the densely jungled (and agriculturally highly productive) Andean foothills and later, the Gran Chaco, had a significant indigenous population that in fact had access to a plethora of goods through *español-americano* merchants who visited the region. This was the case with the Chiriguano (today known as Ava-Guaraní), who numbered in the hundreds of thousands and who acquired textiles and metal goods from highlanders (Langer, 1997; Langer and Hames, 1994).

For examples, once the settlers and the Argentine and Bolivian states had begun to defeat the indigenous population by the second half of the century, many left for the sugar plantations in Salta and Jujuy and contributed their labor to the success of these enterprises (Conti, et al., 1988; Langer, 1987b). The settlers established cattle ranches in the region, exporting the livestock to the Pacific coast, where nitrate mine workers consumed the beef. This cattle circuit undoubtedly stimulated the region’s economy and, to a certain extent, made possible the survival of the mining settlements in the vast, dry Atacama desert that skirted the ocean. In other words, the frontier was crucial for the development of the rest of the region, during and after its invasion by highland societies (Bowman, 1924).

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6 There are some exceptions to this view. See Kristen Jones (1998) for the cattle economy, also Perez (1998) for the cinchona bark. A similar view is Brian DeLay (2007), who reproduces the Mexican view of Comanche raids.

### 3. The Time Frame

Periodization is important as well. In my study, the reason for delimiting the period from roughly independence in the 1820s to the 1920s is because it encompasses a period that is coherent politically, socially and economically. The study begins with the aftermath of the establishment of the new republics. The reason for doing so is, for one, because there is a true break in administration and administrative capabilities of the state. Unlike the late colonial period, where there is abundant data and a strengthening Bourbon state attempts to control greater segments of the colonial economy (Andrien and Johnson, 1994), the newly established republics had a very thin administrative core that made economic control of the new country impossible. Taxes went down and the ability to collect them as well. Contraband, a problem since the colonial period, proliferated for many types of goods (Langer, 2021; Chiappe, 2020).<sup>7</sup>

Control over territory by states decreased significantly. Frontier areas that colonial troops had conquered in a late-eighteenth century push often fell back into indigenous hands as forts and missions disappeared. The number of soldiers under state banners decreased under fiscal constraints while those of armed men who were not part of national armies increased (Wolf and Hansen, 1967; De la Fuente, 2000; Langer, 2002a). The quantity and quality of local officials decreased, as evidenced by lists of official payments and a reduction in the number of pages of documentation generated by local officials compared to the colonial period.

Once the society in the region fell into a new normal, a number of characteristics appeared that made this period fundamentally different from the periods before or afterward. These characteristics include a dynamic internal economy that included the economic predominance of peasant production and commercialization (including the highland indigenous communities), the importance of smuggling, the commercial dynamism of the autonomous indigenous frontier, consumption that relied heavily on credit, a relatively equitable distribution of land, low labor coercion, with a relatively even distribution of income. Other, more negative characteristics, included a lack in the monopoly of violence, virtually no foreign investment, little infrastructure with a deficient road network that permitted the transportation only of relatively high-value goods.

In the areas that I have worked, it was only in the 1870s that documentation increased to colonial levels, and the penmanship and spelling improved in official papers, an anecdotal but powerful way of understanding increasing state capacity. State budgets are a different way of examining this, though there is relatively little literature on this topic; there is more on the ability of the state to engage in war in Latin America (Huber 1991; Halperín Donghi, 1982). That tracks these changes as well.

The late nineteenth century was a transitional period from that in the aftermath of independence and is key to understanding the economic development of the modern era Latin American economic history, from approximately the Great Depression to today. It was the period in which the region increasingly plugged into the North Atlantic economy, but in which

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7 Of course, what became contraband after independence in many cases also reflected older trading patterns that persisted from beforehand but which the new national states were unable to control.

distribution of income showed increasingly towards *español-americano* elites and the relative strength to extract surplus of different population groups changed. It was also a period of increasing state strength, due to increased revenues from exports. This also meant that the state was able to acquire a greater repressive capacity through the financing of standing armies, the initial penetration of railroads that helped project that strength, as well as better communication through the telegraph. The revolution in arms, with repeating rifles, the six-shooting Colt *revolver*, and other such technologies made it possible for Latin American elites to kill large numbers of people with a few men. This led to the invasion into autonomous indigenous lands throughout the Americas and the closing of borders to maps that we recognize Latin American countries to have now.<sup>8</sup>

The late nineteenth century is also the beginning of oligarchic rule in Latin America and the imposition of a tiny elite at the top of the region's government. This was done through the new technology useful for repression that had emerged, but also because of a change in the way that the elites thought. The advent of Positivism, contaminated by Social Darwinism, provided the intellectual underpinning and excuse for these tiny elites to impose themselves, since they defined themselves as coming from European stock, thus justifying their new position at the top of the political hierarchy. The new monied elites derided the old caudillismo, which had at times permitted non-elites to rise temporarily to the top, in which the emerging elites characterized the admittedly more chaotic political systems as barbaric and unmodern (Arguedas 1929; Sarmiento, 1845; Gootenberg, 1997; Peralta and Irurozqui, 2000).

Despite the imposition of liberalism and the emerging oligarchy, older systems of economic organization persisted in many regions and were effectively minimized only by the 1930s, as much by the Great Depression (which decimated export economies), as by urbanization, an effective integration of industry and the proletarianization of large segments of the labor force. Before that, for example, banking systems remained weak, serving the urban oligarchy than the majority of the population. Financial systems that predated banking remained in the countryside. This is the timeframe of the study, during which the internal economy flourished and then declining, transformed by the new trans-Atlantic industrial economies.

#### 4. Factors to Understand Nineteenth-Century Economic History

Lack of state capacity is not a proxy for economic development. In the case of Latin America, it might have been just the opposite, at least in terms of equality of income distribution. Although economists such as Hernando de Soto (1989) argue that the registration of property rights (and thus implicitly a state presence to accomplish this) is key to economic growth and development, the fact is that in the history of Latin America a significant portion of the economy remained what is called *maladroitly*, the "informal sector." To oversimplify for our purposes, the informal sector is a part of the economy that the state has no control over and is unable to accurately quantify and thus, tax. For the nineteenth century, this sector was

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8 And a second imperial phase of Western Europe. It also included the invention of vaccines and other remedies for tropical diseases, which was important for the conquest of Africa and southeast Asia, but less so for the Americas. See for example Erick D. Langer and John Tutino (2016) and Davis (2017).

by far the largest segment of the economy, not just because few products or services were taxed and because of the great proportion of peasants (who try to keep as much of their household economy invisible), but also because contraband and smuggling, even of export goods, stimulated sectors of the economy and brought about distributions of income that, at times, favored indigenous communities, mine workers, transportation workers, and other relatively marginalized groups. This was part of the economy that economists have had a hard time to measure, especially for the nineteenth century. But without taking into account the largest proportion of the economy, it is impossible to understand economic development as a whole, since it remained invisible to those who used only the data that the state generated. This data was not only miniscule in terms of the total economy (or that of the internal economy), but because of contraband and informality, highly suspect in terms of its veracity.

This is a data problem, but also a methodological one. By seeing only a small part of the economy and with a distorted lens, it is like looking at a small part of a battlefield, covered in smoke and with bad binoculars. From that, the observer cannot determine who is winning the encounter, much less the war. How is it possible to overcome this problem? It is not easy, but possible. Rather than relying exclusively on government statistics, it is necessary to look at the important economic actors outside of the usual suspects, such as large-scale merchants or large landlords. To mix metaphors, examining merchant records, mine company data, probate records, notarial and judicial records are the only way it is possible to put together, piece by piece, the incredibly intricate crossword puzzle that is the nineteenth-century economy in the Latin American heartland.

Several issues arise even with the most dedicated collection of data. First, it is difficult to compose time series for prices or other data with these types of records. They remain fragmentary and of arbitrary lengths. As mentioned above, another issue is that economic data is missing from regions where the creole state had no jurisdiction, such as the economically active and significant frontier regions where indigenous peoples remained autonomous. These regions often contributed substantially to the internal economies (and at times, imported foreign goods and exported products outside of the area). As for example Jones (1998), DeLay (2007) and Hämäläinen (2009) have shown with the Comanche in North America, it is possible to do so, by taking seriously data from transactions along the flexible membrane surrounding indigenous territory, combined with insights gained by travelers and traders.

Likewise, for the Andes, the internal economies of highland indigenous economies are opaque to the outside observer, but the famously litigious community members have left many highly suggestive case studies in the judicial archives of the region. Combined with the judicious use of upstreaming – using the insights gained by anthropologists in the more recent past – it is possible to discern the economic dynamism of these communities. Probate records in highland indigenous territories show the great wealth that many members were able to accumulate, often greater than many of the creole elites located in the nearby towns.<sup>9</sup> The probate records also show trade patterns, as the list of debtors and of debts trace where the

9 A master of figuring out communal economic dynamics are the anthropologist Tristan Platt (1992). For the theoretical foundations of how to understand communal economies, see Harris (2000). The use of probate records, see Langer (2002b).



person who passed away had contacts. Thus, it is possible to discern the economic structures and changes in indigenous communities, though it must be based on the kind of microhistorical analysis, using ethnohistorical sensitivity with creative use of data that has rarely been done.

Much of the peasant economy was, because of its opacity for the government and its inability to tax this sector, what we would call informal. Informality was closely tied to the fact that formal national boundaries during most of the nineteenth century had little to do with economic regions. Typical of most postcolonial situations, the borders that the independence wars forged were roughly based on the administrative units under the Spanish empire, but did not have much economic (or cultural/ethnic) relevance. This was especially the case in the central Andes, where for example Peru and Bolivia divided up the Aymara region of Lake Titicaca. In the south, the dispute over Tarija in 1826 and later border adjustments because of the War of the Pacific or between Argentina and Bolivia (the last of which – the conflict over Yacuiba in the Chaco – was not resolved until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century), is emblematic of these issues. The Spanish empire in South America largely functioned as an economic unit; the 1776 division between the new Viceroyalty of La Plata and the old one of Lima did extensive economic damage, but the connections remained, as seen by the ease with which at the end of the independence wars the remnant Viceroyalty of Peru could relatively easily reabsorb Alto Peru from the Rio Platenses between 1812 and 1825 (Céspedes del Castillo, 1947; Roca, 2007; Langer, 1987a; Assadourian 1983; Fifer, 1972).

How does one analyze an economy that has been too opaque to work on before? It is important to think of old ways to do so, inspired by what has already been done, but also look at new ways, often new methods, to figure out issues that previously had not been considered<sup>10</sup>. A fruitful way to think about these issues is to examine the issues around which one might analyze the economic development of the region.

One method is to focus on contraband, which was not measured in traditional economic histories. Since then, we have been able to find data produced by the smugglers themselves. This is especially the case with silver, which was by far the most important export from the region. The import/export merchants who employed agents in the silver mining centers to purchase the mineral left correspondence that has not been utilized sufficiently. William Lofstrom, in the 1980s, analyzed the letters of Dámaso de Uriburu, who in the 1820s illegally exported silver across the border from the mines in southern Bolivia to Argentina (Lofstrom, 1973). A much more important smuggler was Gregorio Pacheco, a merchant in Tupiza, Bolivia who later became a silver miner and then President of Bolivia. His papers document his extensive smuggling operation that spirited silver and gold bullion to Chile. From his papers, it can be estimated that about one third of all silver production in Bolivia was taken out as contra-

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10 This is not to say that none of this has been done before. The discussion above shows various scholars who have worked on and illuminated many aspects. Most important is Tristan Platt, a pioneer in understanding the Andean peasant economy and who has inspired me in this project. For mercantile networks, Viviana Conti is essential, as was Antonio Mitre (working from the concepts that Carlos Sempat Assadourian developed). José Alejandro Peres Cajías is also doing great new work, asking classic question in economics of the nineteenth century and coming up with inspired answers. See for example Herranz-Loncán & Peres-Cajías (2016).

band and so was not taken into account in official figures (Langer, 2021).

What did this mean for the internal economy of the region? First, it meant that a lot more production created profits that entered into the economy. Who did these revenues benefit other than the merchants themselves? Much of the minerals that ended up as contraband came from small-scale miners. The profits from contraband also benefited the transportation sector, controlled by peasants and highland indigenous communities. The purchasing power of these groups was thus higher than we previously thought, stimulating imports and also higher consumption of goods produced locally.

The focus on participation in the cash economy conceals a whole other dynamic of the Latin American economy of the nineteenth century. Although the south-central Andes were “unbanked” in the sense that there were no banks in the region until 1872, the use of credit was extremely common and increased exponentially the amount of resources available to individual consumers, including hacienda peons, independent peasants, urban consumers, and community members. An analysis of Tarija merchant records shows that, for example, that *hacienda* owners guaranteed the loans that their peons received for goods purchased from stores. In other words, hacienda peons were able to access goods that they could not pay for at that particular time, thus increasing their ability to consume beyond their earning capacity (Langer and Hames, 1994). Work on other merchant records show that purchase on credit was well-nigh ubiquitous and that payment, often for 30 or 90 days, went far beyond that time frame.<sup>11</sup> What this meant was that consumers, whether urban dwellers or peasants, enjoyed the use of products that they paid for much later. Thus, silver coins and the circulation of these coins, was only the tip of the iceberg of actual consumption. We need to examine consumption patterns, and thus standards of living, taking into account not only the circulation of cash – mostly in silver coins – but the much larger realm of credit, or virtual coins.

This extended into the countryside as well, in ways that did not always involve direct conversion to monetary values. The *para pelo* system, common in the Chuquisaca countryside, is characteristic of this. This system created virtual cow herds among the peasantry of Tomina. Beginning in the early twentieth century, the owners of cattle took their animals, as well as those of their neighbors to the regional cattle fairs, such as that of Ayoma in Potosí. There, they sold the heads and, when they returned home, promised to provide any of their neighbors whose cattle they had sold in the fairs, with a heifer two years old [*novillo de dos años*] at any time that they required. Since grazing land was scarce and grazing fees expensive, it was in the best interest of the cattle owners to keep these animals virtual as long as possible. What this meant was that, when the original vendor died, his heirs had to provide his debtors with the cows that he owed (Langer, 1989, pp. 167–168). This was another payment in kind that worked outside of the monetary system, but which was absolutely crucial to the functioning of a wide swath of territory where small-scale ranching was an important part of the mix of activities that the peasants engaged in.<sup>12</sup> Where else did a system like this exist in the rest of this region?

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11 “Contabilidad Libro # 34” Fondo Vacaflores, Archivo Sociedad Agrícola, Ganadera é Industrial de Cinti, La Paz..

12 The other main activity was the cultivation and sale of chile peppers.

Credit systems are crucial for understanding the dynamism of the rural economies of the Andes. It is clear that, if we go beyond the hypothesis of economic stagnation or that of the circulationist model à la Assadourian (1983) that only takes into account the exchange of silver coins throughout the territory (though this is important in delineating the supra-national space that commerce encompassed), the issuance of credit not only expands our understanding of consumption patterns – much greater than presumed under either the circulationist or economic stagnation models – but it helps relocate our understanding of the distribution of both income and consumption in the region. This is even more important, as credit systems can provide data points for understanding the “informal” sector, which otherwise might remain invisible to those relying on government-generated statistics.

The transportation sector merits a separate examination. For the half century after independence, this sector was based on animal power, with the use of llamas, donkeys, oxen, and mules. Reliance on these animals created what I call the *pack animal transportation complex*, as had been the case during the colonial period.<sup>13</sup> The characteristics of this complex are rarely appreciated because most economic historians jump right to the railroad, comparing unfavorably the iron horse to the earlier transportation technology. It thus leaves the older system, with its own characteristics, under-analyzed.

It behooves us to examine the pack animal transportation complex in its own right. One example of the important characteristics of the animal-driven system was the network of waystations – called *tambos* in the Andes – that were essential for understanding the transport of goods prior to the railroad. These way stations, their maintenance and support, implied a good deal of state sponsorship and state capacity, which states such as Peru and Bolivia maintained, based on colonial patterns. In the case of Bolivia, the state had a special interest in the support (and, at times, the establishment of new) *tambos* as a means of assuring, for example, the import of the highly poisonous but essential trade good of mercury (República de Bolivia, 1833, p. 19; Platt, 2016).

The state also continued to use the colonial system of *tambos*, mostly run by indigenous communities and, at times by independent indigenous and mestizo entrepreneurs, to maintain a transportation system that aided in commerce in general, as well as the transport of mercury and metals, throughout the countryside. *Tambos* provided a place to overnight the pack animals and lodging for travelers, and even some animals to replace those worn out by the voyage. Given that that Bolivian and the Peruvian states depended on indigenous tribute and their labor prestations to maintain the road system (in many places indigenous highland communities were responsible for maintaining and staffing the *tambos*), it meant that the complex social system that had developed over centuries in the colonial period to support these maintenance and support of *tambos* that continued into the republican period.

We have evidence that, after independence, the transport network in many cases depended on native entrepreneurs, who were willing to enter into a contract with the state to provide the essential services at the *tambos*. This was in addition to the tribute obligation, that mandated that one male member of the recognized indigenous communities be provided to serve

13 For some literature on llama driving in the Andes for the colonial period, see Glave (1989). For the republican period on mule drivers, see Conti and Sica (2011); Conti, (2006) and Molina Otárola, (2011).

as postillon, a position that was integrated into the indigenous cargo system so as to justify its existence and its great expense in terms of labor, for the upcoming indigenous service holder in the Andean community.

In addition to the effects it might have had on the Andean cargo system or the poorly paid or perhaps “free” labor by the lowest man on the list of cargos that an indigenous community male member had to start with,<sup>14</sup> many indigenous communities, especially those that were located in the altiplano region of Peru and Bolivia, were heavily involved in the transport of materials across the region. This was especially the case of the indigenous peoples around the town of Challapata, located at the crossroads of the highlands and possessors of large herds of llamas that were able to traverse the rough terrain of the region with relative ease. This was one of the centers from which the teamsters and their herds came from. Another center was the Calchaquí Valleys (in what is now Argentina), where the peasant mule (and donkey) drivers provided the pack animals for the movement of goods across the Andes. The goods transported included silver ore, as much as agricultural goods such as maize, as well as foreign imports.

The reliance on animal power led to the different uses of land. Unlike later, with railroads and then trucks, the cultivation of forage and thus the importance (and higher value) of properties that could provide forage to the animals was of great concern. This was especially the case along the major trade routes, where haciendas catered to the forage market. The cultivation of *cebada en grano* or of alfalfa was lucrative for landowners along major routes and vital to the maintenance of the system of transport. It is clear that forage crops were important money-makers in many haciendas and even some smaller properties. I have evidence that some mule drivers purchased and maintained their own alfalfa fields in strategic locations so that they could provide fodder for their mule trains or have a permanent source of fodder crops for their animals when they were resting as a means of vertical integration of transport (Langer, 1989, 101).

## 5. Economic Actors

Much of nineteenth century economic history has assumed that the most important section of the population to consider as economic actors were the urban, Europeanized (male) elites. As economists have pointed out, the activities of this sector were generally not as dynamic after the declaration of the new nation-states. While some import/export merchants prospered, in general this tiny slice of the population was on its back heels after independence, when much of the urban economies and also large rural estates, the sources for cattle, horses, and combatants, had been severely affected.

We can see this by examining the demographics of the cities. At the beginning of the republican period, most urban centers throughout the south-central Andes lost population and there was a trend of “ruralization” of the region. It was not so much that rural areas were

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<sup>14</sup> It is possible that the work details with the local priest were of a lower, or perhaps equivalent, status quality as that of *postillon*.

gaining population, but that rural areas did not lose against that of towns and cities. The weight of the population was in the countryside, with peasants who controlled most of the land predominating. For example, José M. Dalence estimated in 1846 that in Bolivia 148,147 people lived in urban areas (defined as places that had at least 316 inhabitants [!]) in a total population of 1,378,896 people (Dalence, 1975, p. 179, 182). In other words, slightly more than 10% of the Bolivian population lived in urban centers. Similarly for Salta Province, in 1869 22,025 people lived in urban areas (defined as low as 169 people) out of 88,993 total inhabitants; only about a quarter of the total population. This was comparable to Tucumán Province.<sup>15</sup>

The vast majority of the population resided in the countryside in the south-central Andes. We have little analysis, especially compared to Mesoamerica, of the productivity of the rural properties in the Andean region. This is a huge gap in the literature, as it is hard to estimate living standards if we know virtually anything about the efficiency, production, and labor costs in the countryside. Unfortunately, the discourse after the agrarian reforms in the Andes in the mid-twentieth century about the estates' presumed "feudalism" cut off serious analysis of nineteenth-century profitability precisely when, in the 1970s and 1980s, scholars gained access to a lode of hacienda records. The archaic regimens of the haciendas in the twentieth century in places such as Peru and Bolivia made most historians presume that the highland estates were just as retrograde a century earlier. Whether that was the case and what the conditions of the estate laborers was in the nineteenth century did not come up for comparative analysis.

It is likely, for example, that the hacienda regime before the twentieth century was much looser than later. There is substantial anecdotal evidence that labor conditions were much better than later on, when the hacienda regime took over much of the Andean countryside in the late nineteenth century. A case in point, the extensive diaries of one of the largest landlords of Bolivia, Francis Burdett O'Connor, show that he was unable to get his peons to come to work on Mondays and that his peons (and personal servants) came and left without him being able to stop them.<sup>16</sup> The severe patriarchal and authoritarian model that is the stereotype of the later period is not much in evidence before the late nineteenth century. In other words, the role of the hacienda peon must be reconsidered for the nineteenth century and their relationship to the hacienda owner.

Haciendas in the nineteenth century were much less extensive than later and they were not the only rural producers. For much agricultural productivity, we need to look at indigenous communities, as well as that of the substantial number of freeholding peasants not attached to haciendas or indigenous communities. However, data is lacking on these populations. Rural catastros begin to appear by the late nineteenth century, which help us measure productivity of these rural properties. Unfortunately, the late nineteenth century was a period in which hacienda expansion was in full swing. It leaves us with little understanding of earlier in the nineteenth century, when the hacienda regime was less prevalent and perhaps different (Harris et

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15 Primer censo de la República Argentina verificado en los días 15, 16 y 17 de Setiembre de 1869 (Buenos Aires: Imprenta del Porvenir, 1872), 535,558 (Salta) and 492, 516 (Tucumán).

16 Francis Burdett O'Connor Archives, Archivo y Biblioteca Nacional de Bolivia. The diaries in question go from 1849 to 1864.

al, 1987). However, local studies based on judicial and notarial records can help us gain insight as to the productivity and market participation of the rural peasants that lived in this wide region that incorporated so many different agrarian regimes.

Another useful perspective to think about economic development in the nineteenth century is to think about the role of peasant economy. With this, I am referring in large part to the indigenous communities that, until the land reforms of the late nineteenth century, controlled most of the land (and contained most of the population) in the Andean highlands. In many ways, they were the drivers of economic development and growth in the nineteenth century.

It is possible to know more about indigenous communities, which housed the second-largest number of rural people in the region, especially in the western highlands of Bolivia and in Jujuy, Argentina. In Bolivia, community members constituted around 40% of the total population in the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>17</sup> To a large extent, the measurement of the economic activity of this population has been done through the examination of indigenous tribute.<sup>18</sup> The economies of the Andean indigenous communities to a large extent remain opaque to scholarship, though some understanding has emerged. Tristan Platt and Olivia Harris have been most influential in the understanding of communal economic practices (Platt, 1982; Platt, 1986; Harris, 2000; Cottyn, 2021). The view that emerges is that the indigenous economy not only worked with a different understanding of money and of trade, but that communities were quite dynamic in their economic endeavors; for example, Tristan Platt makes the case that the ayllus of northern Potosí were important purveyors of wheat to urban centers in the region (Platt, 1984). In addition, the traders of coca leaf, almost exclusively indigenous, were linchpins to the republican economy and tended to accumulate a lot of capital. These indigenous merchants established stores in most towns (and especially in mining regions, where the demand for coca was strong), but the center of this trade was through the indigenous town of Challapata, located in the altiplano south of Oruro. The reason for this location was the indigenous mercantile tradition of the challapateños and their control over the vast herds of llamas that took the merchandise from town to town. Thus, the central role of the means of transport made possible the commercialization of the coca leaf, an essential ingredient to any mining enterprise and many an agricultural enterprise as well workers in the Andes refused to labor without their accustomed share of coca leaf to power them through the laborious tasks of rural or mining labor (Langer, 2002b; Soux, 1993; Carter, et al. 1980).

Community members were essential in other parts of the transport trade; most trains, mule or llama that both miners and merchants depended on came from them. Community

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17 Estimates are rough. Highland indigenous communities paid tribute to the state. In 1858 there were 133,905 tributaries. These were able-bodied men between the ages of 18 and 50. If we multiply this number by four (a very conservative estimate) to take into account the family of tribute payers, this means that there were approximately 535,620 community members. Dalence in 1846 gives a national population estimate of 1,363,896 inhabitants (and we know that vegetative growth was low), it means that about 40% of the population lived in indigenous communities. There were of course other people who were not organized in such a fashion who we also indigenous. See Dalence (1975, p. 196) and Grieshaber (1977, p. 134).

18 Tribute was a head tax that did not provide much information on economic activity; the rest of the rural population was not taxed. In Argentina, indigenous tribute was abolished in 1813.

members also supplied the bulk of agricultural goods for the towns and cities. Thus, the city of Potosí, the largest urban center in the south-central Andes, relied almost exclusively on the foodstuffs to feed the city that community members brought in from the countryside to the central market. Likewise, in addition to providing much of the labor force in the mines throughout the region, indigenous community members also owned mines or mined minerals in areas that had been abandoned or where there were no current mining claims; this continues to happen to the present day. They also worked in the mines in a kind of sharecropping arrangement that gave mine owners a portion of the minerals mined whereas the workers kept the rest (usually one half) (Godoy, 1990; Platt, 2014; Langer, 2021; Rodríguez Ostría, 1991). In other words, community members in the nineteenth century used many ways of accessing money to participate in the cash economy.

Probate records also show that wealthy community members spread their resources to other community members, often relatives, by loaning them llamas or fronting them merchandise, so that they could also participate as teamster or in commercial activities for their own benefit. The incentive to spread the wealth and let others also participate was part and parcel of the Andean mentality of redistribution of wealth that underlay the economic morality of indigenous communities (Langer, 2002b; Harris, 2000).

In sum, a reevaluation of the Andean agricultural economy is in order. There is more data to use and there are new questions to ask (though perhaps these are old questions that previously we were unable to answer). One is of productivity and the importance of different institutions that can now be estimated. Another is about the distribution of income. Here, an (re-) examination of hacienda records, estimation of indigenous community production, and of independent peasant villagers is in order.

Another important group that has not received sufficient attention for the nineteenth century is the role of women in the economy. I know of no economic study of women in Latin America in the nineteenth century, other than for urban areas.<sup>19</sup> Women have remained invisible because they were overwhelmingly preliterate and so did not leave as many records. Also, patriarchal systems in place diminished the role of women, though there is more information than generally considered. Women as actors in the economic systems must be taken more into account, especially in terms of production, but also consumption. How might one do this?

The lack of data includes the participation of women in the economy for the nineteenth century. While there are some good studies on female participation for the colonial period and for the contemporary period, this is not the case the nineteenth century.<sup>20</sup> Women were essential for this economy and for economic development and must be discussed as a separate analytical category. In the Andes, indigenous highlanders saw women as complementary to men and, for example, only married men could aspire to most offices within the community because in fact these jobs could only be done with female labor as well.

In addition to the reproduction of the domestic sphere, women were essential in agricultu-

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19 There has been some work done on women and credit in Mexico. See Francois (2006).

20 For the colonial period, see for example Mangan (2005) or Barragán (2020, 289–314). The literature for the contemporary Andes is too large to list. See for example Babb (1998).

ral jobs, in urban areas, and in the mining camps. The job of *palliri* was overwhelmingly filled by women. The *palliri* broke up pieces of rock brought up from the mines, to select pieces that were full of metal and discard the rest. This physically demanding work required not only strong arms and backs, but also a good eye for the minerals that lurked in the pieces of rock. Rossana Barragán recently worked on this facet of mining for the colonial period, but this work remained just as important in the republican period (Barragán, 2020). We have the mining company records for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to show this importance; it is that for the republican period, no one has ventured to analyze these data.

Beyond labor, women worked as merchants as well. In the city of Potosí, for example, they held most positions of small retail traders. In other Bolivian mining centers, women were the shop owners who purchased the minerals that the mine workers took out of the mine as their sharecropping arrangement and smelted it down in small workshops to sell to the export merchants, who then smuggled it out of the region (Langer, 2021). Women were crucial for understanding the contraband trade, an essential piece of the informal economy.

Some women were large-scale merchants. This occurred more among the indigenous than non-indigenous women. We have evidence of female coca traders, some of who became quite prosperous.<sup>21</sup> In the Andes, the largest category of female entrepreneurs were *chicheras*, the women proprietors of taverns that sold the corn beer called *chicha* and food to its customers. As a number of scholars have shown, this was a complex enterprise that entailed the purchase of corn and the production of the beer, as well as provision of foodstuffs. This has been most studied in Cochabamba, where the *chicha* tax was an important source of municipal revenue, but was important in other regions as well. In the Andes, the *chicheras* monopolized the restaurant industry in all but the very largest cities (Gotkowitz, 2003; Hames, 2003; Rodríguez Ostría and Solares Serrano, 1990).

Be that as it may, many women who had gained assets often invested not in money, but in jewelry and gold and jewel-encrusted religious iconography that represented their life savings. These goods could be pawned or sold and probably provided the assets merchants considered when they provided goods on credit. Indeed, women as consumers in cities and small towns became a category during the late nineteenth century, when petty traders from the Levant traveled from town to town, with their mules and donkeys carrying pots and pans for sale, as well as some textiles and other household goods. Here, the use of credit was vital, though we know very little about how these transactions worked.

## 6. The Question of Productivity

The factors discussed above sketch a different view of economic development in the nine-

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21 Langer (2002b). It appears in the Cochabamba area, the network of coca traders that developed beyond that department – networks of coca merchants related by family ties back to Totora, a coca-growing region within Cochabamba, dominated many of the commercial city blocks of the small towns along the eastern frontier of the Andes. These stores appear to have been run by men, not women, as among the Oruro-based coca merchants who supplied the mining centers towards the west of the Andes.



teenth century. It is clear that the internal economy was far larger than the import/export sector. But what about productivity? Productivity is important for a host of reasons. First, it shows whether there is the capacity in the economy to provide high enough living standards for most people to prosper. Second, productivity changes over time. Other than suppositions about the increase in productivity in the export sector for the late nineteenth century, we know little about how productivity changed since independence to the 1870s and in what sectors – the works of Coatsworth (2008) and other Latin American specialists offer mostly rough generalizations. Third, certain sectors of the economy might be especially significant despite its size because it proves to be the motor that keeps the rest of the system going. This was an assumption in Assadourian's model, in which the mining center of Potosí and, to a lesser extent, the urban and administrative economy of Lima were the productive centers of the Peruvian economic space (Assadourian 1983).

For the post-independence period, little has been done to measure productivity. We can provide some suppositions about productivity that, however, still needs to be proven empirically. James Torres showed that the gold mining centers of the northern Andes recouped their levels of production quickly and then exceeded colonial measures by the 1830s (Torres, 2022). For the south-central Andes, this is not so clear, as the *k'ajcha* model of mine labor and production made it difficult to invest much into the mines (Langer, 2021). Major investment in equipment and new processes did not occur until the 1870s, especially with the introduction of German technical know-how with the engineers such as Ernesto Rück and the Francke brothers (Condarco Morales, 1985, p. 265–268).

Agriculture was the other great economic activity. There is in the literature a bias against peasant agriculture, assuming that communal holdings were less stable than private property. I submit that it was the other way around – once liberal policies made it possible to destroy communal holdings, property arrangements became more arbitrary (Platt, 1986, 1992). Be that as it may, productivity measurements are scarce for this rubric. Data on production and on labor are hard to find, though few have looked systematically at cadasters and other large data bases that exist for this region.<sup>22</sup> There is some data on Bolivian haciendas and northern Argentine sugar plantations (Favre, 1855; Córdoba, et al, 2015).

The diverse ecological levels in the tropical and subtropical Andes provided a plethora of different crops, making consistency in data problematic. It appears, however, that agriculture was quite productive, precisely in the Andean indigenous communities that used different ecological levels to produce an astoundingly varied harvest (Lehmann, 1982). Many haciendas also engaged in taking advantage of this geography as well (Langer, 1989). In that sense, coca leaf cultivation and commerce were particularly lucrative activities that created much wealth (Langer, 2002b). By the 1870s, the sugar plantations in Tucumán had taken off because of new machinery, combined with access through railroads to littoral markets (Sánchez Román, 2005). Also, cattle ranching, especially on the eastern escarpment of the Andes and the Chaco for consumption in the mining centers and the Pacific coast were activities that powered the

<sup>22</sup> For Bolivia, these cadasters exist as of 1881. However, other sources such hacienda records have not been adequately exploited. For Argentina, the manuscript of the famous 1869 census, such as the one that exists in the Archivo Histórico de la Provincia de Salta, provides potential information on rural labor and land tenure.

invasion of indigenous lands. It is likely that cattle ranching, at the expense of the fragile Chaco ecology and its indigenous inhabitants was extremely productive (Bowman, 1924).

## 6. Conclusion

As this essay suggests, the way in which economic historians think of economic development in roughly the century after independence must change. It is inadequate to consider the import/export trade to understand the economies of Latin America for this period. Instead, scholars must examine the internal economies of the region, in conjunction with the import/export sector. Some of the items that should be considered as part of the internal economies consist the transportation infrastructure, the local agrarian economy (and its productivity), and the role of money and credit circulating within and without the internal economies.

In addition, different actors within the economy must be considered beyond just the state and the import/export merchants. They include the peasants – both indigenous communities and villages of individual proprietors, as well as the role of the indigenous peoples of the frontier regions, who constituted a surprisingly large market beyond the pale of the nation-states. The role of women, especially outside of urban areas, needs to be examined. This includes women as workers, such as in commerce but also in agriculture and mining. The new research on the nineteenth century should focus on what existed and how economic systems functioned and how they affected the people in the region, rather than comparing it to other places in the world that had their own economic systems. Understanding the south-central Andes during the nineteenth century is a first step in that direction.

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