Journal of Evolutionary Studies in Business JESB

Volume 8, Number 1, 81-118, January-June 2023 https://doi.org/10.1344/jesb2023.8.1.34043

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The Weapons of Revolution: Global Merchants and the Arms Trade in South America (1808-1824)

Abstract

This article investigates the role that the arms trade connected to Hispanic American Independence Wars played in the transformations at the origins of 19th century globalization. It looks specifically at how arms supplies to governments encouraged the early post-mercantilist development of South American commerce, and some of the domino effects of such development. This turning point in economic history is analyzed through the biographical trajectories of merchants who were well positioned between geopolitics and trade, and who had "imperial" functions without being formally involved in imperialist projects. Business and political correspondence, notarial documents, and customs registers from archives in Europe and the Americas reveal the workings of networks and business affairs of global merchants whose companies were major arms importers in Buenos Aires during the years leading to Chile's liberation. The threads of John McNeile's (an important but neglected figure) and David DeForest's networks hook onto the principal economic and political laboratories of the countries from whence most arms were imported: Great Britain and the United States. They reached Chile and Peru from Buenos Aires and remained crucial to the liberation campaigns, encouraging further commercial expansion along the American Pacific coast and toward Asia, and pioneering financial adventures. Relations between commercial houses active in Hispanic America and Asia reveal British and US transpacific networks and ties between Hispanic American and Asian commerce and economies. The article thus shows how, by bringing together fragmented and scattered sources from both sides of the Atlantic, the significance of the arms trade in South America as a driving force of globalization emerges.

Keywords: Arms Trade; War Finance; Hispanic American Independence; Buenos Aires; Pacific; John McNeile; David Curtis DeForest

Las armas de la revolución: comerciantes globales y la importación de armas en América del Sur (1808-1824)

Resumen

Este artículo investiga el rol ejercido por el comercio de armas vinculado a las guerras de Independencia hispanoamericanas en las transformaciones en el comienzo de la globalización decimonónica. Analiza, específicamente, cómo los suministros de armas a los gobiernos contribuyeron al desarrollo post-mercantilista del comercio sudamericano, y determinados efectos dominó de dicho negocio. Este momento de cambio en la historia económica se analiza a través de las trayectorias biográficas de comerciantes bien posicionados entre geopolítica y comercio, que poseían funciones "imperiales" sin estar formalmente involucrados en proyectos imperialistas. Mediante correspondencia comercial y política, documentos notariales y registros de aduanas, de archivos de Europa y las Américas, se revela la operativa de las alianzas y de las iniciativas empresariales de comerciantes globales cuyas compañías fueron principales importadoras de armas en Buenos Aires durante los años precedentes a la liberación de Chile. Las trayectorias de las redes de John McNeile (importante pero olvidado personaje) y David DeForest se insertan en los principales laboratorios económicos y políticos de países desde donde se importaban la mayor parte de armas: Gran Bretaña y los Estados Unidos. Alcanzaron Chile y Perú desde Buenos Aires, y permanecieron cruciales para las campañas de liberación, promoviendo una expansión comercial adicional a lo largo de la costa del Pacífico americano, y hacia Asia, y fueron pioneros en aventuras financieras. Las relaciones entre algunas casas de comercio activas en Hispanoamérica y Asia revelan redes y vínculos transpacíficos, británicos y norteamericanos, entre los sistemas comerciales y económicos de dichos lugares. De este modo, relacionando fuentes fragmentarias y dispersas de ambos lados del Atlántico, el artículo desvela la importancia del comercio de armas en Sudamérica como un motor de la emergente globalización.

Palabras clave: comercio de armas; finanzas de guerra; Independencia hispanoamericana; Buenos Aires; Pacífico; John McNeile; David Curtis DeForest

Les armes de la revolució: comerciants globals i la importació d'armes a l'Amèrica del Sud (1808-1824)

Resum

Aquest article investiga el rol exercit pel comerç d'armes vinculat a les guerres d'Independència hispanoamericanes en les transformacions a l'inici de la globalització del segle XIX. Analitza, específicament, com els subministraments d'armes als governs van contribuir al desenvolupament post-mercantilista del comerç sudamericà, i determinats efectes dòmino d'aquest negoci. Aquest moment de canvi a la història econòmica s'analitza a través de les trajectòries biogràfiques de comerciants ben posicionats entre geopolítica i comerç, que posseïen funcions "imperials" sense estar formalment involucrats en projectes imperialistes. Mitjançant correspondència comercial i política, documents notarials i registres de duanes, d'arxius d'Europa i les Amèriques, es revela l'operativa de les aliances i de les iniciatives empresarials de comerciants globals les companyies dels quals van ser principals importadores d'armes a Buenos Aires durant els anys precedents a l'alliberament de Xile. Les trajectòries de les xarxes de John McNeile (important però oblidat personatge) i David DeForest s'insereixen en els principals laboratoris econòmics i polítics de països des d'on s'importaven la major part d'armes: Gran Bretanya i els Estats Units. Van arribar a Xile i el Perú des de Buenos Aires, i van romandre crucials per a les campanyes d'alliberament, tot promovent una expansió comercial addicional al llarg de la costa del Pacífic americà, i cap a Àsia, i van ser pioners en aventures financeres. Les relacions entre algunes cases de comerç actives a Hispanoamèrica i Àsia revelen xarxes i vincles transpacífics, britànics i nordamericans, entre els sistemes comercials i econòmics d'aquests llocs. D'aquesta manera, tot relacionant fonts fragmentàries i disperses de tots dos costats de l'Atlàntic, l'article desvela la importància del comerç d'armes a Sudamèrica com a motor de l'emergent globalització.

Paraules clau: comerç d'armes; finances de guerra; Independència hispanoamericana; Buenos Aires; Pacífic; John McNeile; David Curtis DeForest

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Received 6 March 2021 - Accepted 28 March 2022

Online ISSN: 2385-7137
http://revistes.ub.edu/index.php/JESB

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Journal of Evolutionary Studies in Business JESB
Volume 8, Number 1, 81-118, January-June 2023 https://doi.org/10.1344/jesb2023.8.1.34043

1. Introduction: weapons and revolutions

There is no doubt that the arms trade was a factor in the Age of Revolutions and in what Christopher Bayly (1989) has called the "Imperial Meridian" (1780-1830), that moment in which new empires were built in Asia while the old Atlantic empires were disintegrating. The implications of the arms trade on the commercial reconfiguration of empires are, however, under-researched. Studying such trade at the micro-historical level is useful to deepen our understanding of strategic adjustments by businesses to geopolitical change, but also of state-level changes in financial mechanisms – i.e., macroeconomic transformations connected to war. The analysis of short-term timescales reveals interconnections between political and economic goals and public and private interests, which were usually intertwined. This study highlights how the weapons trade in South America contributed to the transformation of commercial circuits and practices. It reconstructs the trajectories of global merchants connected to decision-making centers in Great Britain and the United States, the two countries from which independentists most sought support and from which most arms were imported, specifically, the British firms of John McNeile[1] and those connected to the US merchant David Curtis DeForest.

Zacarias Moutoukias and Marjolein 'T Hart (2021) have shown how the 1810s war financing unwittingly weakened the old corporate order and further dismantled imperial structures that limited South American direct trade with foreigners.[2] As Arnaud Bartolomei (2021) has pointed out, bargaining for privileges and protection, and other mercantilist habits still characterized the opening of new markets, which relied on institutional and political supports, often at both ends, and new forms of monopoly in long-distance trade. And although this was also the case

[1] In South American sources, McNeile's name is spelled in many ways: McNelly, Mcneil, McNeilly, M.Niely, M.Nielly, etc.

[2] For cases of direct trade with foreigners in colonial times, see: Pearce 2007.

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for the arms trade in South America, it nonetheless eroded mercantilist remnants. It was not the terrain for the baby steps of an impersonal market-driven free-trade capitalism, but it provided political momentum to growing links between South American spaces and North Atlantic economies, and – what concerns us here – nurtured new opportunities and practices on a global scale. As we will see, a specific analysis of the weapons trade reveals further continuities and transformations in the Hispanic American economies linked to war.

Tulio Halperin Donghi (1982) and Clément Thibaud (2006) have described the sharp turn towards militarization in South America during the crisis of the Spanish monarchy, and Halperin Donghi and Christopher Platt (1972) shed light on South American attempts to produce weapons and gunpowder. However, these attempts partially failed,[3] and as Caitlin Fitz (2016) and Rafe Blaufarb (2016) have pointed out, a significant part of the equipment for war came from abroad, while the greater availability of arms after the end of the Napoleonic and Anglo-American wars fostered the escalation of conflicts in South America.

Fitz and Blaufarb have analyzed firearm imports to Hispanic America based on documentation from the chief exporters: the United States, where sales of arms to Hispanic American "rebels" were legal, and Britain, where – notwithstanding the 60,000 arms shipped in 1817 alone under Privy Council license –, they were outlawed since 1814 due to a treaty with Spain. South American documents allow us to adopt the point of view of the recipients, who had fewer reasons to conceal this trade. No further investigation was made of these after Rafael Demaria (1972, 239-243) noted the central position of some foreign arms traders in Buenos Aires, including McNeile and DeForest. No existing document shows all the traffic, but combining many – *Solicitudes civiles y militares*, documents from the arms factory, miscellaneous sources,

[3] March 30, 1816, and passim, Archivo General de la Nación, Buenos Aires (hereafter AGN), *Sala X* (hereafter X), 9-1-4.

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the log of *Entradas Marítimas* etc. – allows us to cross-check and see details of the arms deliveries. McNeile, DeForest, their partners, and US consul Thomas Halsey were the major arms importers, the principal deliverers of arms to the public arsenals, and among the most recurrent sellers to the state. As we will see, this favored their businesses expansion in new sectors and regions.

Conventional wisdom has it that in the 1810s selling weapons was a method of gaining entry into Hispanic American markets. Perhaps it also served to keep profits high in markets that, although not poor (Llorca-Jaña 2012), appeared saturated as soon as trade was "opened". Difficulties increased once the end of the Napoleonic Wars brought fresh competition – for example, in textiles – from continental Europe (House of Commons 1822, 227-234). Merchants perceived the arms trade as beneficial to their general business. In 1816, McNeile, by then an important merchant in Buenos Aires, partner of the British appointed consul and spokesman for the community in his absence, wrote home: "*without powder and arms* [the year's account] would cut but a sorry figure."[4] How did the arms trade, representing around 2-3% of imports' value that year,[5] work – at least in part – as a business' lifeline for some?

Revolutionary governments allowed arms traders and other entrepreneurs in strategic sectors linked to the war, such as producers of salted meat (like McNeile) or consignees of privateering spoils (like DeForest), to import and export specific goods duty-free, for example copper to Asia, and gunpowder and arms from Europe and the United States. Sometimes this was a form of reward for their services, which had included selling weapons to states still under construction and with financial difficulties that needed allies positioned – as McNeile and

[4] McNeile to Richard Staples, March 20, 1816, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast (hereafter PRONI), *Staples Papers* (D 1567), F/1/5.

[5] To make this estimate, we have considered average prices for firearms in Buenos Aires (see footnote 45) and the duty the merchants generally paid on non-arms imports.

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DeForest – in political-economic networks that included decision-makers abroad. Thus, a virtuous circle was created for these traders.

Merchants in Buenos Aires who traded the most arms were also importers of a wide range of goods and paid large shares of import duties – i.e., their trade prospered and contributed both to commercial expansion and financing war. Financing war depended almost entirely on duties on foreign trade, and state's suppliers and lenders sometimes speculated or presumed tolerance (Halperin Donghi 1982, 107; Mazzeo 2006, 71). Cash shortage increased in South American ports after independence and was behind difficulties such as those of the arms factories, but the war economy encouraged "substitute forms for metallic coin" crucial for trade and for financing war, as highlighted by Emilio Hansen (1916), Halperin Donghi, Samuel Amaral (1981), Moutoukias, and others. Especially after 1813, with the first forced loan in Buenos Aires, sovereign power recognized its debts by issuing *pagarés* (promissory notes), which the holder or beneficiary could use to cancel their debts to the Government. The British rejected in principle forced loans, but some of them – like McNeile – lent voluntarily,[6] and they in general profited from local bargaining mechanisms, which favored great traders and hurt smaller ones.[7] Beyond promissory notes, bills of exchange payable at the Buenos Aires Custom House were also used to buy goods and services for many theatres of war, such as consignments of provisions and weapons to the army. Treasury sometimes ordered the Custom House to draw bills upon its debtors, the beneficiaries being creditors of the state, who used them to cancel

[6] Hispanic merchants traditionally negotiated their "mandatory" contributions, but the British case was slightly different as Royal Navy officials defended their refusal of forced loans on the basis of international law. See: Captain Bowles to Croker, Aug. 3, 1813, The National Archives, Kew UK (hereafter TNA), *Records of the Admiralty* (hereafter ADM), 1/1555; Staples to Tribunal del Consulado, Dec. 20, 1817, AGN X 1-3-11; Commodore Bowles to Pueyrredón, Sept. 28, 1818, TNA, ADM 1/23; Staples to Hamilton, June 3, 1819, TNA, *Foreign Office* (hereafter FO), 72/227.

[7] Depreciated *pagarés* could be bought from smallholders who needed to quickly recoup their capital or were unable to use them to pay custom debts (Moutoukias 2018; Moutoukias and 'T Hart 2021).

Online ISSN: 2385-7137
http://revistes.ub.edu/index.php/JESB

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their debts to the state (Moutoukias and 'T Hart 2021). For example, an 1816 payment to McNeile for military supplies worth 33,564 was ordered in bills "*contra los deudores de la aduana*" (drawn upon customs' debtors), 14,400 to be considered both "*en favor y contra*" (in his favor and upon) him.[8] The Custom House drew bills upon its debtors worth 33,564 pesos and McNeile cancelled custom debts for 14,400 pesos – a considerable payment.[9]

Therefore, although they seldom received cash, merchants were interested in selling arms to these fledgling states. They negotiated prices from an advantageous position, i.e., in a war context, but success or failure in selling well depended on many factors, including the value of the arms traders' political connections. Complaints about cost/quality ratio were recurrent, but governments accepted inflated prices for arms and vessels (e.g., Platt 1972, 48) *precisely because* merchants accepted the forms of payment the governments imposed. The governments paid (duty-free imported) arms mostly in bills – and in privileges like permits to extract silver, as in McNeile's case.[10] Arms traders used these bills to pay their custom duties on their other, diverse imports. To close the circle, merchants preferred paying duties with paper (promissory notes and bills), instead of metallic coin.

In the next sections, we will reconstruct McNeile's and DeForest's wartime affairs and networks, from their bases in Buenos Aires, to their dealings in Chile, Peru, Mexico, and beyond. These micro-histories illustrate the impact their arms trade had on the modification of wider, even global, commercial circuits, and how their personal and political connections worked as linchpins of transformations. Merchants with roots in such trade were positioned to become both vectors of change and guarantors of continuity in the storm. The analysis of the

[8] April 18, 1816, AGN X 9-2-4. And other cases that year.
[9] Nos. 835 and 839, AGN, *Sala III* (hereafter III), 38-3-12; McNeile's payment in AGN III 38-3-13.
[10] April 18, 1816, AGN X 9-2-4. *Pagarés* were also used, e.g., AGN X 8-9-5.

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arms trade also allows us to explore early involvement of transnational merchant and financial networks in the War of Independence, and how these networks permitted independentists to access international credit – a point generally addressed for the 1820s.

2. Arms suppliers, fiscal strategies, and the dawn of a new trade

The breakup of the Spanish American empire was like an earthquake, and its effects were felt far and wide. In the tempest of the Napoleonic Wars, the end of Spanish rule meant the collapse of an enormous structure, and the crash struck the Old World, accelerating the end of old monopolies and leading to reconfigurations of commerce. New actors, new rules, and new geographies of commercial routes emerged.

The winds of political change blew through Buenos Aires, which after the 1810 revolution became the safest Hispanic American port open to direct foreign trade and channeled this energy into exporting liberation campaigns. From 1817 on, global merchants expanded their activity in Chile, almost on *libertador* San Martín's coattails, using the arms trade as an entry point. Alliances with British and US traders contributed to Valparaíso's secure affirmation as the principal South American port in the Pacific. Loyalist ports like Callao were sporadically opened to neutrals' trade as well, chiefly in order to receive weapons, but this increased political instability undermining benefits (Marks 2007). Revolutionary upheaval sealed the decline of Acapulco, the historical Spanish port for Asia.

Chile's liberation was thus key in linking international trade circuits between hemispheres. It razed the shaky barrier between the Atlantic and the Pacific – the Spanish "monopoly" – laying down an open route for foreign trade. The arms trade contributed to foster, as we will see, direct exchanges between South America and Asia, and with America's Pacific coast as far as California, thus dynamizing Britain's and the United States' trade along trajectories for their

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imperial expansion. Chile's mineral market withstood international speculation on Hispanic American mines and Chile became a major exporter of copper, first to Asia and later to Britain and the United States. According to the British consul, between 1817 and 1824, two-thirds of Chilean copper production was exported to Asia on Calcutta Country Ships (Mayo 2001, 368) – i.e., British ships active in inter-Asian trade –, not including what US ships transported to Canton.[11] All this had global implications.

Buenos Aires customs registers are filled with eminent names of Hispanic traders (Lezica, Sarratea, Ugarte, etc.): their ongoing vitality is not called into question here. Yet, British merchants paid the most duties. From 1813 (when the "national" consignee requirement was eliminated) till 1817, they paid an average of 60% of *all* duties on imports by sea. One-third of that total came from just three traders: McNeile, George Dickson, and James Brittain (Galmarini 2000, 137-138). The first two were partners in a firm.

Vital networks of local businesses lay behind the duties foreign merchants paid. Local merchants needed foreign flags' protection, as well as foreign ships and networks, to continue long-distance trade after the break with Spain and its global empire. They especially exploited British and US neutrality in the independence wars and their determined defense of trade. The inequality of relations with great powers and their economic spaces and actors were largely due to political-military circumstances. Foreign merchants often presented themselves as politically influential and provided practical aid to the independentists, especially if they perceived their political patrons at home unofficially approved their initiative. In their attempts to obtain

[11] Between 1815 and 1819 US copper exports from the Americas to Canton increased almost fourfold, fueling British fears for their own copper business (House of Commons 1821, 181-182).

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support from their governments, they painted gloomy pictures of rival or enemy influence – exploiting fears of losing geopolitical advantages (Blaufarb 2007).

The analyzed merchants prospered in Buenos Aires, especially between 1814, when the revolutionary government equipped its first fleet, and 1816-1817, when it was preparing and realizing Chile's liberation. Buenos Aires' *Libros mayores y manuales de la aduana* provide a picture (albeit still concealing important elements) of which merchants paid more custom duties and how. These traders were McNeile, Brittain, and Dickson in 1814; and McNeile, DeForest, and Brittain in 1816.[12]

In 1814 the Custom House drew bills covering the government's "military expenses" in favor of various individuals. Halperin Donghi (1982, 103) underlined that British merchants were predominant among them, and that McNeile received the most, but that it was almost impossible to establish why. In 1814 British traders began the large sales of vessels and weapons to the state, receiving bills in their favor usable to pay custom debts.[13] Perhaps herein lies the origin of some payments.

It has been argued that the first forced loan answered Juan Larrea's project for a fleet to attack loyalist Montevideo. As contemporaries noted, British merchants profited greatly from the sale of the necessary vessels and military supplies at inflated prices.[14] Larrea was the economic mastermind of several Buenos Aires governments, and a business ally of both McNeile and DeForest, to whom he owed important favors.[15] Documentation reveals that McNeile played a

[12] AGN III 38-3-1, AGN III 38-3-2, AGN III 38-3-3, AGN III 38-3-12, AGN III 38-3-13.

[13] e.g., "David Price" and "McNeile," AGN X 8-9-5; see also, AGN III 38-3-1, AGN III 38-3-2, AGN III 38-3-3 (Dickson 16,727 and McNeile 12,000 pesos "*por gastos militares de marina*").

[14] "Confesión de Guillermo White" and passim, AGN X 22-1-1. A recent exception to a certain historiographical silence on the British role in this project is Ternavasio (2021, 56).

[15] On Larrea as "friend" of the British, see Tagart 1832, 265-266 (consider errors in names' transcription).

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key role in these commercial and financial operations, in alliance with other merchants like David Price, and even sold a vessel belonging to the British consul's family firm, which became the expedition's flagship.[16] Since US merchants faced difficulties deriving from Britain's reinforced maritime control of the River Plate during the second phase of the 1812 Anglo-American War (Besseghini 2020a), DeForest almost suspended his activities. But thanks to Larrea, in late 1814 he was able to take advantage of the liquidation of the fleet and booty, thus consolidating his position in Buenos Aires (Keen 1970, 97). Although after a political reverse Larrea was condemned for damage to the public purse, his involvement of foreign merchants in an operation crucial to Buenos Aires' security proved beneficial. For one thing, it secured tacit consent from the British Captain in the River Plate.[17]

McNeile and DeForest then founded new alliances with José de San Martín and Juan Martín de Pueyrredón, respectively, becoming principal arms' suppliers. Political connections and cooperation were crucial for their success. Figures 1 and 2 show McNeile's and DeForest's position in the Buenos Aires' import trade, as related to the number of ships they received and to the position of the different national mercantile communities before and after the 1815 political upheaval that largely replaced the Revolution's ruling group.

After the end of the European and Anglo-American wars in 1815, neutral foreign merchants, particularly navy-protected British and Americans active on the Cape Horn route, rose to the top of the South American import trade. They adapted to the market, including that of firearms, and were allowed great flexibility vis-a-vis Custom Houses.

[16] "Deposición de David Price" and passim, AGN X 22-1-1; Feb. 15, 1814, AGN X 36-5-1; *Belfast Newsletter*, Oct. 1, 1813.

[17] Graham and Humphreys 1962, 132 and passim. Captain Bowles brought to the British Treasury exceptional quantities of coins and bullion that year: TNA, *National Audit Office* (AO), 1/7/13.

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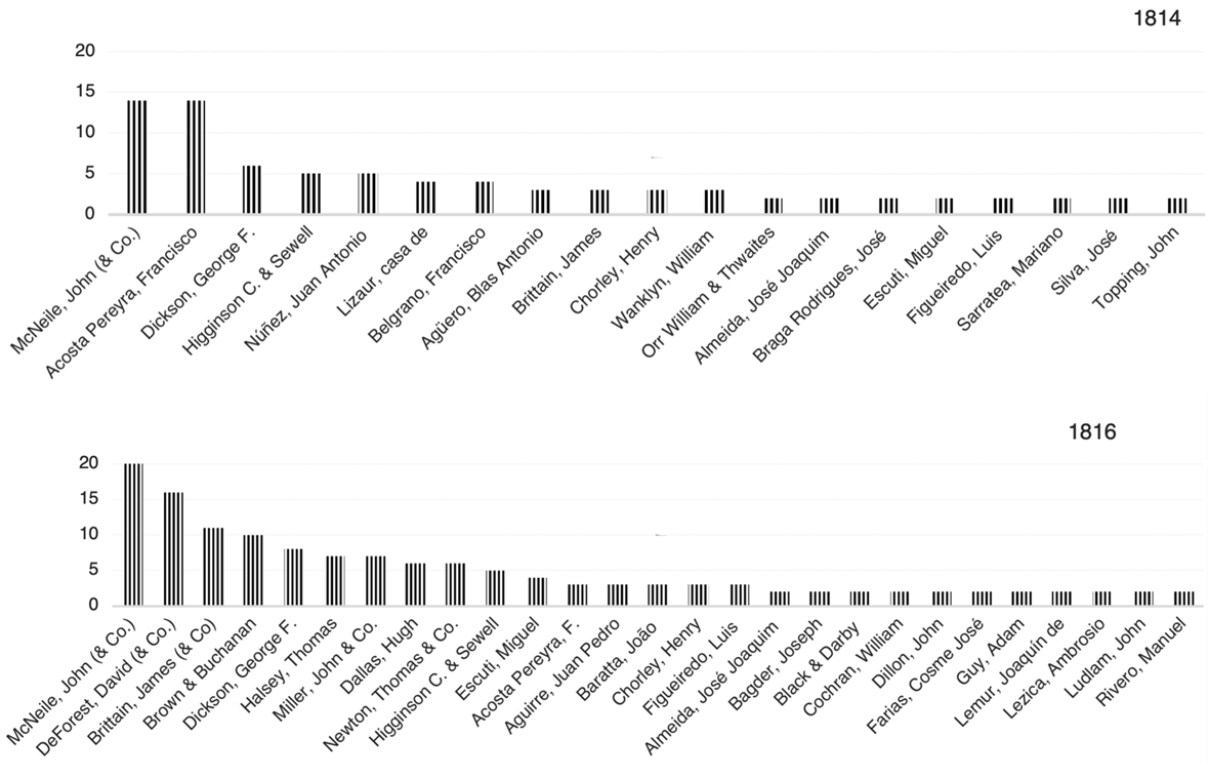
FIGURE 1. Consignees who received at least two ships in Buenos Aires, 1814 and 1816



Source: The author's elaborations based on AGN X 36-5-1.

In 1816, the sovereign power in Buenos Aires paid "arms, powder, flints and war supplies" in bills worth 467,209 pesos in favor of ten individuals, among whom seven were foreign merchants and three were McNeile, Dickson and DeForest; and 77,028 pesos for "arms and war supplies" to McNeile, DeForest, Halsey and Hugh Matison.[18] Crossing this kind of information with other like that provided earlier may reinforce our interpretation that a significant part of McNeile's and DeForest's customs debt payments was connected to weapons sales, i.e., to bills derived in their favor payable at the Custom House.[19] Availability of notes and bills to pay

[18] The ten were: McNeile, DeForest, Dickson, Brittain, Juan José Real, Thomas Newton, Baltazar Jiménez, Manuel Pinto, Halsey and William Miller, see: "Estado […] ministros generales de hacienda", 1816, Archivo Histórico de la Provincia de Buenos Aires, *Tribunal de cuentas*, Legajo de gastos 1017.

[19] These custom payments were worth about 70,000 pesos in 1816, in both cases, see: AGN III 38-3-13. Many bills in McNeile's favor are mentioned also in the 1816 *manual* custom log, AGN III 38-3-12.

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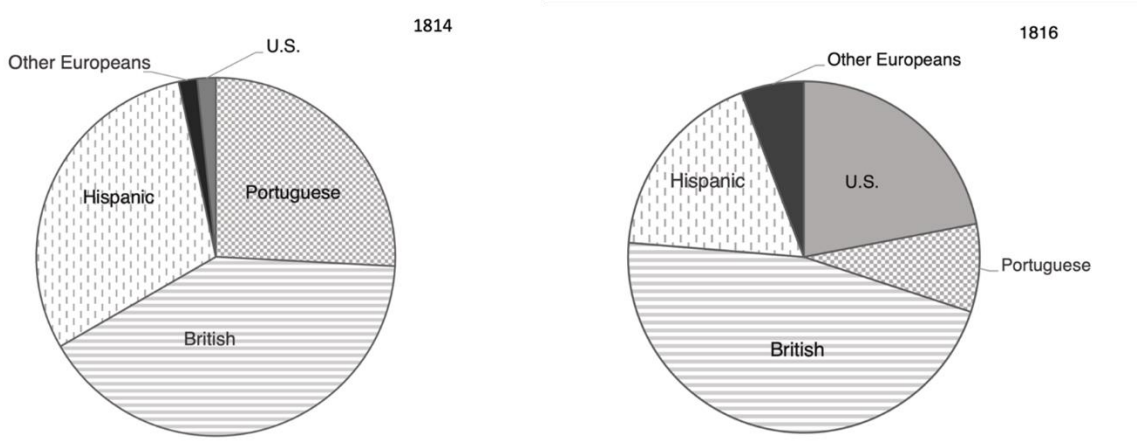
custom duties allowed these merchants to preserve their metallic coin for further commercial and financial operations, in other regions as well, and probably with greater ease than other traders.

FIGURE 2. Ships consigned to each national group, 1814 and 1816[20]



Source: The author's elaborations based on AGN X 36-5-1.

At the end of 1816, after writing to his partners that business would have been bad had it not been for arms, McNeile returned to London, continuing to trade in South America through McNeile, Dickson & Co. of Buenos Aires, and McNeile, Price & Co. in Chile. He maintained relations with San Martín and his envoys in England, providing them with many services. One of his partners later estimated that his South American business earned McNeile a capital of £60,000 (about 270,000 pesos).[21]

DeForest had by then established a partnership with Patricio Lynch, friend and relative of Supreme Director Pueyrredón, and Johann Zimmermann, US vice-consul from 1819 and later Hamburg consul in Buenos Aires.[22] DeForest returned to the United States as consul-general for the United Provinces of the River Plate in 1818. He received a settlement worth 101,952

[20] The word "Hispanic" identifies the merchants from the Hispanic world who were active in Buenos Aires.

[21] Staples to Planta, Dec. 6, 1825, TNA FO 6/10.

[22] Patricio Lynch managed DeForest's interests for a 30% of profits. Various houses connecting DeForest with the Lynchs were established (Körner 1966, 15).

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pesos (about £22,600) from his partners but continued doing business in South America through them (Körner 1966; Keen 1970). Zimmermann would dissolve his firm with Lynch in 1821, after Pueyrredón's fall.

Immediately after the arrival of San Martín in Chile, DeForest's agent Estanislao Lynch and McNeile's partner Richard Price – brothers, respectively, of the abovementioned Patricio Lynch and David Price –, emerged as central to the arms trade in Chile.[23] Ventures of McNeile's British group and the US-Argentine one promoted by DeForest went beyond weapons, and engaged in other politically strategic initiatives, such as financing and/or facilitating quasi-diplomatic missions, privateering, mining investments, bullion and coins exports, and loans, which permitted governments to buy further military supplies.

3. Two global merchants in Buenos Aires: the beginnings

Let us step back to analyze DeForest and McNeile's early connections, political networks, and activities, which help explain their position as arms traders and as transatlantic mediators between interests, as well as their rise as great merchants.

David DeForest was born in 1774, in what is today Shelton, Connecticut, son of estate owners Benjamin and Mehitable Curtis. His first ill-fated affairs in the West Indies led him to embark on a ship to China in the late 1790s, although his voyage came to an end in Buenos Aires.[24] He was able to take advantage of the opportunities offered by neutral commerce, an exceptional measure motivated by British attacks on Spanish ships during Spain's alliance with France, which gave US merchants a carrying trade involving both Spanish America and European colonies in Asia. By 1805, DeForest had stabilized his business between Buenos Aires, Cuba,

[23] In 1821 they also were the main debtors to the Chilean customs: Feb. 10, 1821, Archivo Nacional de Chile, Santiago (hereafter ANC) *Contaduría Mayor*, vol. 2530.

[24] On information on trans-Pacific trade in DeForest's journal (1801), see: Silva and Tejerina 1991.

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the United States, and England, thanks to his family connections and alliances with José Acebal in Cuba, Francisco de Ugarte in Buenos Aires, Dunham & Lord in Boston, and Thomas Wilson in England. This is the same Wilson famous for passing information on River Plate to British Captain Home Popham on the eve of his brief conquest of Buenos Aires in 1806. DeForest attempted to have himself named US consul to Buenos Aires, but the continuation of neutral commerce was by then uncertain.[25] At the time of the independentist expedition to Venezuela of Francisco de Miranda (who with Popham in 1804 had submitted a plan to liberate South America to the British Government), DeForest met with President Jefferson, who questioned him about South America. It seems that DeForest was not enthusiastic about Miranda's plans: should the expedition succeed, he wrote to Wilson, Venezuela would open its ports to Britain, wrecking US carrying trade.

DeForest returned to Buenos Aires with a cargo of slaves. He witnessed the failure of the British invasions as guest of Benito Rivadavia, father of future President Bernardino. DeForest then settled as a commissions merchant, acting through Juan Pedro Varangot, a friend of the anti-British resistance hero and now viceroy, Jacques de Liniers (Keen 1970).

John McNeile was born in 1785 to Alexander, a landowner of County Antrim and friend of the greatest West Indies merchant in Belfast, Hugh Montgomery.[26] Alexander McNeile was also a land agent for MP John Staples, who had family ties to both Arthur Wellesley (later Duke of Wellington) and Viscount Castlereagh, the most prominent political figure of the day. One of Staples's sons, Richard, was Montgomery's son-in-law. Together they founded Montgomery, Staples & Co., which specialized in trade with Buenos Aires. The firm was preparing the departure of its first commercial ship to South America as the British Navy was conveying the

[25] DeForest made further attempts in 1807 and 1809.

[26] A founder of the Northern Banking Partnership, of which John McNeile became a director.

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Portuguese Royal Family to Brazil. Agents for this venture were the youngest son of John Staples, Robert, and John McNeile.

The firm benefitted from Liniers' tolerance of contraband in Buenos Aires, one consequence of a shift in the alliances uniting Britain and the Hispanic world against Napoleon. McNeile started exporting tallow, cochineal, quinine, and cotton from Brazil, while he sold British manufactures, including weapons, in Buenos Aires.[27]

Meanwhile, DeForest was an informer of the US consul in Rio de Janeiro and worried about what seemed British attempts to take control of independentist impulses. The new Viceroy Cisneros temporarily legalized neutral and allied trade on November 6, 1809.[28] DeForest's consignee was then Larrea. DeForest was expelled in December though, together with other foreigners. The British avoided expulsion thanks to mediation by their representatives and the Navy (British warships were by now a permanent fixture), until the May Revolution removed the expulsion threat (Besseghini 2021). As a member of the *Junta*, Larrea supported Staples and McNeile's *saladero* (salted meat plant). The firm supplied the local military and had agreements to stock the British Navy.[29] Old-Spanish fiscal exemptions for *saladeros* were later extended to McNeile, thanks to Justo Pastor Lynch, customs functionary of Irish descent and father of DeForest's future partners.[30]

In sum, before enlarging their arms business, both McNeile and DeForest were already part of transatlantic trading and political networks, and both had valuable allies in Buenos Aires.

[27] *Belfast Newsletter*, Aug. 25 and 29, Sept 19, 1809; March 15, 1810, AGN, *Catalogo Archivo de Gobierno*, Aduanas.

[28] The first ship to enter the port under the new regulation was consigned to DeForest's partner by British merchant Henry Glover of Rio de Janeiro, whose Leeds firm had ties to the United States.

[29] Staples to DeCourcy, Jan. 25, 1810, PRONI D1567/F/1/5; "Staples", AGN X 8-9-5.

[30] AGN X 41-10-7. Shortly before, McNeile had been on the verge of selling the *saladero*.

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4. Missions to buy arms in political grey areas and the War of 1812

In early 1808, when Spain was still allied with France, a British expedition in support of Hispanic American independence had been prepared by Arthur Wellesley, later Duke of Wellington. But after the July 1808 overturning of alliances, Wellesley led his forces to assist in the liberation of Spain and Portugal from French occupation. If the French won in Spain, London would support the separation of the American territories, but the outcome of the Peninsular War was still uncertain. Certain, however, was British interest in obtaining Spanish *reales de a ocho*, the global means of payment. To pressure Spain into formally opening Hispanic America to British trade, London asked Cadiz to recognize McNeile's partner, Robert Staples, as consul in Buenos Aires (Llorca-Jaña 2009; Besseghini 2020a). Meanwhile, South American *juntas* asked London for arms, but for defense against France, not Spain. Envoys had recourse to private trade which, at that time, was not yet illegal. DeForest, then in London, negotiated an arms purchase for the Buenos Aires envoy, who received unofficial help from the British Government (Whitaker 1964, 75).[31]

The United States remained neutral in the liberation struggles of both Hispanic America and Spain, and sought to take advantage of the situation. Secretary of State Monroe informed DeForest, on his return to the United States, of the intention to name a French merchant as consul to Río de la Plata.[32] William Gilchrist Miller, agent of DeForest, had already been chosen as vice-consul in Buenos Aires, and although DeForest's correspondence with a merchant later

[31] DeForest bought weapons from Graham, Riggs & Co. Their agent, Samuel Gardiner, was already active in selling arms to Buenos Aires. Another mission to buy arms was entrusted to John Curtis.

[32] Louis Goddefroy, DeForest's agent in Montevideo.

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active in exporting European arms to South America reveals that DeForest contributed to alter the plan to name a Frenchman,[33] it was Thomas Halsey who received the appointment as consul.

Vice-Consul Miller had given assistance to Pedro de Aguirre and Diego Saavedra's[34] mission to the United States in 1811, placing a sum at the envoys' disposal. They had travelled from the River Plate on a ship consigned to John Jacob Astor, the most active merchant in trade with China, whose agent in Buenos Aires was DeForest. DeForest opened his US networks to the pair,[35] thus starting his business relation with Aguirre. Aguirre and Saavedra met informally with Monroe and subsequently wrote to him alluding to a "favorable disposition toward our cause" by the US Government and people (Bemis 1939, 24). According to Aguirre, Stephen Girard (a leading East India merchant) had obtained authorization to export 18,000 muskets[36] to Buenos Aires (Demaria 1972, 232-233), but no proof exists that Monroe answered Girard's letter on point. It seems that Aguirre bought 1,000 muskets and 370,000 flints, thanks to the good offices of Miller & Van Beuren (Whitaker 1964, 68-69).[37] Miller later wrote to President Madison that the mission had contributed to an increase in US influence (Manning 1925, 326).

During the Anglo-American War of 1812, McNeile's partner, Staples, passed information to Foreign Secretary Castlereagh about far greater arms deliveries for the Aguirre-Saavedra mission: 4500 muskets, 2000 pistols, 1000 swords and 100,000 flints, with a second shipment

[33] DeForest to William Crammond, Nov. 24, 1811, Yale University Library, New Haven, United States (hereafter YUL), *DeForest Family Papers*, Letterbooks vol. 5. See also: DeForest to Senator Varnum, Nov. 19, 1811, and DeForest to William Todd, Nov. 23, 1811, Ibid. French arms were mostly sold in South America through the United States.

[34] Son of former *junta* President, Cornelio Saavedra.

[35] DeForest to Daniel Sheldon, Nov 8, 1811; DeForest to Larrea, Nov. 10, 1811; DeForest to Pedro López and José Cabrera (i.e., Saavedra and Aguirre), Nov. 8 and 24, 1811, Ibid.

[36] Smoothbore muskets (the British "Brown Bess", the French "Charleville") were the most used in the Independence Wars. The word rifle, occasionally present in archives, indicates rifled-barrel guns.

[37] During the Aguirre-Saavedra mission, DeForest was in correspondence with John Miller, partner of Abraham Van Beuren (e.g., Nov. 20, 1811, Ibid). One John Miller in South America was brother of US vice-consul Miller: Dixon to Croker, July 12, 1813, TNA ADM 1/21.

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en route.[38] There was talk of sending Staples back to South America, after the failed recognition of his role as consul by both Spain and Buenos Aires had induced him to return to London (Llorca-Jaña 2009; Besseghini 2020a).

Some merchants suggested counteracting US influence, acquired through the arms trade, with a British Government agent in Buenos Aires. Staples was thus sent back, not formally as the consul, but as agent of the Treasury to buy coins and bullion, an undertaking justifiable with Spain by the necessity of financing the war against Napoleon. Staples' mission also allowed merchants to conduct remittances to Britain, avoiding the risks of the naval war underway with the United States. In exchange for the coins and bullion sold to Staples, they received bills payable in England with a premium. In this way, the British had an informal consul who collaborated with the Foreign Office and acted as informal advisor to Buenos Aires (Hanon 2005, 171). To maintain equal distance with all the merchants, Staples withdrew from business with McNeile, who remained agent for Staples's brother. The connection between the two was still common knowledge in Buenos Aires, as were Staples's family ties to prominent British political figures.[39]

In 1813-1816, McNeile was commission agent for several firms. He was *apoderado general* for Greg, Lindsay & Co. of Samuel Greg, a cotton manufacturer originally from Belfast who dealt in military supplies during the Napoleonic Wars and had great quantities to sell afterwards.[40] McNeile's Belfast partner, Montgomery, had made his fortune in collaboration with the Greg family. This connection may be a lead worth looking into to identify McNeile's

[38] Staples to Castlereagh, Aug. 7, 1812, TNA FO 72/157.

[39] ff. 53-62v, Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, La Courneuve, *Argentine* 1.

[40] 1815, "Obligación: Thomas Stevenson, á los Señores Sam.l Greg y Compañia, y por estos a su apoderado Don Juan Mc Neile," AGN, *Protocolos de escribanos*, Registro 2.

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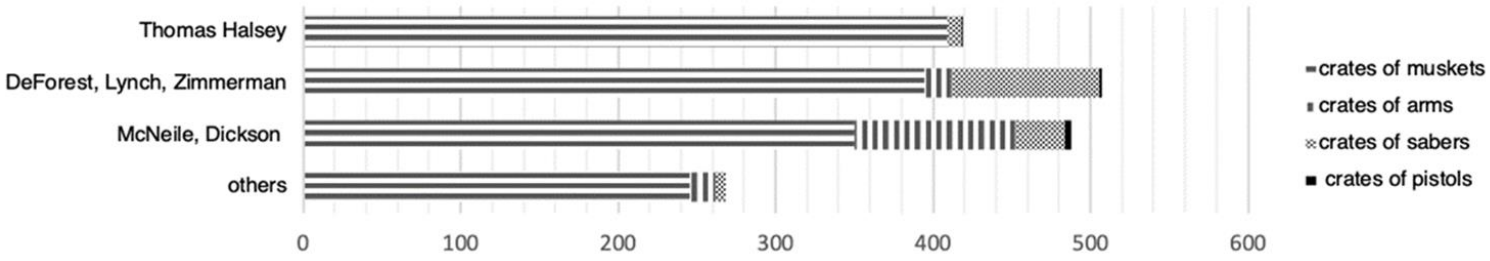
partners in Britain in affairs linked to the Independence Wars, which the 1814 prohibition against supplying the "rebels" partly conceals.

5. McNeile and DeForest's war business in Buenos Aires

Commerce in arms from Britain was well underway at that point, despite the bans. Between 1815 and 1825, 700,000 muskets were exported to the Americas, a number that includes re-exportations from the United States, Brazil, and the West Indies (Blaufarb 2016, 106-110). Moreover, for example, Buenos Aires' envoy to London, Manuel de Sarratea, bought large quantities of flintlocks – the part of the weapon requiring the most technical skill and the easiest to conceal –, which are overlooked in such estimates.[41] McNeile and Dickson contributed to finance his mission and were repaid at Customs.[42]

FIGURE 3. Arms consignments in Buenos Aires in 1816-1817



Source: The author's elaboration based on AGN X 36-5-1.[43]

[41] *Sarratea al Gobierno sobre gastos ordinarios extraordinarios y secretos*, AGN X 2-1-1. Muskets were manufactured in Buenos Aires using imported flintlocks (Demaria 1972, 231). By Government order, the arms factory chiefly assembled weapons, instead of fabricating them from scratch: May 8, 1816, and passim, AGN X 9-1-4.

[42] Sarratea to García, April 28, 1814, AGN X 2-1-1; Hullett to Dickson, McNeile, Feb. 26, 1816, AGN X 1-2-12.

[43] In January 1817 Halsey received 6 crates with 122 carbines that we have counted as muskets. In addition to the weapons in the graph, an unspecified cargo of muskets was consigned to Halsey (Feb. 19) and "a few muskets" to François Leloir, later the French informal consul (May 8). A more detailed log for 1816-1817 gives roughly the same information.

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Based on *explicit* references to arms crates in the *Entradas Marítimas* log, Figure 3 shows which traders received the most in Buenos Aires during the effort to liberate Chile. These were McNeile, DeForest, their associates, and US Consul Halsey.[44]

A crate generally contained 20 muskets, and if we consider their average price was 12 pesos each, the estimated value of the most consistent cargo for Dickson and McNeile in 1816 corresponds to half of the value of their custom duty payments in general that year, and the estimated value of McNeile and DeForest's documented consignments to the arsenal to between 1/4 and 1/3 of their custom payments.[45]

We can also estimate that Dickson and McNeile received around 9,500 firearms (muskets and pistols) between 1815 and 1818, a substantial amount if we consider that most of the battles during the wars of independence were fought by a few thousand men. This data reflects the portion of arms traffic that passed through ports such as Baltimore, Philadelphia, Antwerp, and Rio de Janeiro: only one cargo of firearms arriving directly from Britain is explicitly mentioned.[46] But this does not mean that imports from Britain were few.

The number of firearms imported by McNeile and his partners was probably greater than that recorded. Expressions such as "*250 cajas, se ignora el contenido*" (crates, content unknown) were quite common. In 1815, when more than 15% of the ships arriving in port were received by Dickson and McNeile, entries of this type often referred to ships from Britain consigned to

[44] On payment of Halsey's arms deliveries, AGN X 8-7-4.

[45] AGN X 9-1-4, *Fábrica de armas*. Dickson and McNeile delivered around 20% of muskets entering the arsenal, plus 2000 delivered by one of their supercargoes. Some muskets McNeile consigned were considered poor quality and valued at 10 pesos each: Nov. 15, 1816, Ibid. A musket's price could vary from 6 to 19 pesos (Demaria 1972, 235). The average price for sabers was 9 pesos, 8 for pistols.

[46] A second cargo of "arms" from London probably included muskets. The same day (June 6, 1816), Dickson indeed consigned 903 muskets to the arsenal, AGN X 9-1-4

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them.[47] One 1818 document mentions containers transported for McNeile from Britain, not their content, but a note on the back specifies some crates contained weapons.[48] De Forest also received unmarked arms crates (Demaria 1972, 238-239), a measure against Spanish seizures.

As for DeForest's group, based on similar estimates we know that it received approximately 13,000 firearms in three years. For example, in September 1815, DeForest imported 3,000 muskets from New York; in June 1816, 1,777 muskets he had sold to the state were delivered to the arsenal.[49] Between August and September 1817, Patricio Lynch received hundreds of muskets from Baltimore and Philadelphia. In November 1817, the brigantine *Ellen*, consigned to Lynch, brought 84 crates of muskets and others of pistols and sabers. In December, 190 crates of muskets were consigned to him. In February 1818, Lynch, Zimmermann & Co. received on the *Columbus* (later sold to the Chilean Navy) 47 crates of muskets.[50]

Taking into account the numbers gleaned above from the *Entradas Marítimas* register, imperfect as they are, we arrive at a total of approximately 22,500 firearms delivered by ship to Buenos Aires to DeForest's and McNeile's groups alone in three years' time. According to Fitz (2016), the United States exported 150,000 firearms to revolutionary Hispanic America over fifteen years.

In 1815, DeForest proposed outfitting corsairs to sail under the Buenos Aires' flag to merchants such as Astor, George Crowninshield, Thomas Tenant, and the firm of D'Arcy & Didier, represented in Buenos Aires by DeForest himself.[51] Hundreds of US sailors attacked the

[47] AGN X 36-5-1.

[48] Nov. 27, 1818, ANC *Contaduría Mayor*, vol. 2530.

[49] June 6, 1816, AGN X 9-1-4.

[50] AGN X 36-5-1.

[51] Henry Didier was DeForest's *apoderado* in the United States from 1817 on, when he substituted John Gooding: 1817, AGN, *Protocolos de escribanos*, Registro 2.

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Spanish in ships owned by US merchants for 50% of the prizes. The patents belonged to Buenos Aires citizens, of whom DeForest and his associates were the most active.[52] These *armadores* earned a 10% commission on all prizes. The Buenos Aires commercial house of DeForest often bought prizes auctioned off by DeForest, speculating with them. The capture of the ship *Tritón* of the Royal Philippine Company earned DeForest and his associates a 640,000 pesos profit (Keen 1970, 118). Only one captured ship was consigned to McNeile.[53] British direct participation in privateering, at odds with London and Navy interests, was effectively discouraged.[54]

Perhaps on DeForest's suggestion (Keen 1970, 124), Pueyrredón's government accused Consul Halsey – DeForest's rival in both the arms trade and corsair activity – of involvement in privateering for the Oriental Provinces, considered rebels by the United Provinces. It requested that the United States recall Halsey, who had appointed McNeile's partners among his agents.[55]

In 1818, DeForest was named Buenos Aires' Consul-General to the United States, and was instructed to request US recognition of the United Provinces' independence, and issue privateering patents (Keen 1970, 135). US laws forbade privateering by US citizens but DeForest returned to his home country as an "Argentine" citizen, and a foreign consul.

DeForest was unofficially received and created a favorable climate toward Buenos Aires (Whitaker 1964, 258). But although Henry Clay's party supported him, Secretary Adams

[52] The *Entradas Marítimas* register noted several captured Spanish ships consigned to DeForest, Lynch, and Zimmermann.

[53] Nov. 8, 1816, AGN X 36-5-1. Also involved was US captain James Chaytor who, after delivering a cargo of arms to McNeile immediately bought by the "state" (Dec. 11, 1816, AGN X 9-1-4), accepted a commission as privateer.

[54] Commodore Bowles obtained limitations on privateering activities from Buenos Aires in 1817 and from Chile in 1818.

[55] March 18, and Nov. 3, 1818, AGN, *Protocolos de escribanos*, Registro 3.

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wanted to delay recognition, and used DeForest's corsair activities to do so. DeForest was also embroiled in Bonapartist exiles' plans for Texas (Ocampo 2009, 276-278 and 290-291). Once recognition arrived, DeForest was replaced. Writing to the US Secretary of the Treasury, he claimed as a patriotic merit having promoted several US-Argentine trading houses in South America (Keen 1970, 121).

6. The arms trade on the Pacific Coast: a bridge to Asia

When General San Martín crossed the Andes, fresh business opportunities for flexible arms importers emerged in Chile, and from 1817 on, Buenos Aires' intermediation became gradually less important to reach the army preparing to liberate Peru.

At the end of 1816 José Miguel de Carrera – who in 1814 had departed for the United States in search of allies, with letters of introduction by DeForest to Astor and other merchants – left the United States with three frigates loaded with military supplies and a group of adventurers with the idea of liberating Chile, but San Martín beat them to it. One of Carrera's companions on the trip, US citizen Henry Hill, established the Chilean branch of DeForest's empire in 1817 along with Estanislao Lynch.

Lynch, Hill & Co. was the most important firm tied to the United States in Chile. Hill was introduced to San Martín in Buenos Aires by DeForest himself and became one of the main weapons suppliers to Chile. The cargo of weapons, shipped on the *Savage* by the D'Arcy & Didier firm and delivered to Hill, was sold to the Government for 96,000 pesos (Neumann 1947, 216; Körner 1966), launching a prosperous future for the firm's arms trade in Chile (e.g., Betancourt-Castillo 2020, 235; Méndez-Beltrán 2021, 164-165). The firm was also involved in privateering. Hill encouraged US sailors to participate, something which almost cost him his post as consul in Valparaíso (Pereira-Salas 1940).

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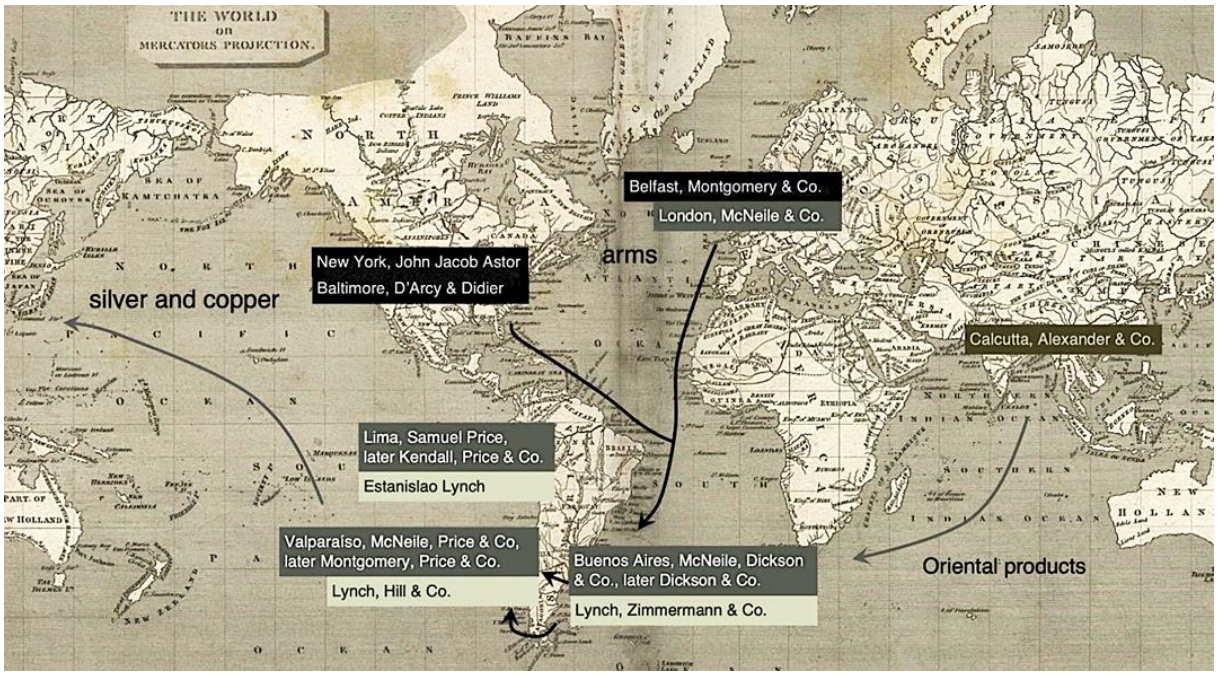
Hill and Lynch imported US goods and arms and exported copper – which was sometimes used to pay arms – to India and China through the intermediation of the British firm Alexander & Co. of Calcutta (Pereira-Salas 1940, 21), founder of the Hindustan Bank and active in the opium trade, as well as an intermediary in the trade with Asia to firms connected to McNeile.[56] The Irish network was crucial: two of Staples' siblings had married into the Alexander family. With the expansion to Asia, their business became truly global.

FIGURE 4. Map of the analyzed networks



Source: the author's elaboration, on the planisphere published in Rees, Abraham. 1820. *The Ciclopaedia, or Universal Dictionary of Arts, Sciences and Literature. Plates. vol. 6: Ancient and Modern Atlas*. London: Longman.

Back from Buenos Aires, Staples was called to give information before a parliamentary committee on trade between South America and India.[57] He claimed that US presence on this trade route was negligible. Robert Pizey, from the McNeile firm, clarified that, beyond the

[56] Connections of the US-Argentine group with the US firm Perkins in Canton – active in the opium trade – can be inferred from documentation from the 1820s: e.g., "Taccuino" (notebook) I, doc. 6b, Archivio Storico di Casale Monferrato, Italy (hereafter ASCM), *Fondo famiglia Vidua di Conzano*, Viaggi di Carlo Vidua (hereafter FV).

[57] McNeile, Dickson & Co. received their first cargo from Bengal in Buenos Aires on Dec. 21, 1817 (AGN X 36-5-1).

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dominant Calcutta Country Ships, South American vessels were present (House of Commons 1821, 140-141). US merchants often traded through intermediaries from British India but British capital made use of US ships in direct commerce between South America and Canton. As time and trade went on, residual mercantilist barriers continued to break down. British merchants used their politicians' fear of US competition as an argument for eliminating East India Company restrictions. Licenses issued in Gibraltar were used for commerce between India and South America with ships under the size permitted by E.I.C. norms (House of Commons 1821, 94). British merchants in Buenos Aires, including McNeile's partners, organized shipments to Canton on US ships, passing through Chile and Peru and returning through the Cape of Good Hope.[58] In 1821, Staples went to India, where the family of his British wife-to-be, Eliza Russell, had made a fortune with opium.[59]

Anglo-American alliances were structural in the Asian markets (Fichter 2010). The intermediation of the Alexanders and other merchants connected to McNeile, like Stewart & Co.,[60] in Hill's affairs from Chile hints at a synergy between the two groups, despite their geopolitical rivalry in business related to the ongoing liberation campaigns.

McNeile enabled the purchase from London of several ships for the Chilean fleet, while similar attempts did not meet with the same success in the United States (Whitaker 1964, 232-236). McNeile's partner obtained a permit to export 10,500 quintals of copper to Calcutta as partial payment for the East Indiaman *Cumberland* (Méndez-Beltrán 2004, 187), sold to the Chilean

[58] E.g., *The Asiatic Journal*, March 1, 1830, with reference to 1822-1823.

[59] This Scottish family is not the same as that of the firm Russell & Co. of Canton. One of Eliza's in-laws was Wilhelm Drusina, Rothschild's agent in Mexico. On links between Drusina, Rothschild, and Huth & Co., see: Llorca-Jaña 2014, 478 and 486.

[60] "Poder general: Don Guillermo Stewart á Juan McNeile," Jan. 7, 1814; "Poder especial: Los SS. Stuart, MacCall y Comp.ª á favor de Mr. Juan Mc Neile y Comp.ª,"1820, AGN, *Protocolos de escribanos*, Registro 4. The document is signed William Stewart. Stewart & Co. sold Chilean wheat for Hill.

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Navy, which also carried military supplies.[61] The same happened with other cargos of weapons to San Martín. One arrived aboard the East Indiaman *Lord Lyndock* and contained 10 cannons, 3 mortars, 10 cannon carriages, 1,584 cannon balls, 76 barrels of flints, muskets, and swords. This made Hill worry that the Chilean Government would no longer need his arms deliveries.[62] McNeile's associates, Dickson and Price, also facilitated the business of Samuel Haigh, who sold a cargo of weapons on the eve of the battle of Maipú (Haigh 1829). In 1820, McNeile, Price & Co. consigned arms and naval equipment to José Riglos,[63] who followed San Martín to Peru.

McNeile, Price & Co. therefore exported duty-free[64] copper from Valparaíso to Calcutta: the price of copper in London was around 17 dollars per quintal, while in Calcutta it was 23-24 dollars. During the first half of 1819 alone, the firm exported more than 6,000 quintals of copper to Calcutta on the ships *Rebecca* and *Oak*, which they had previously used to import military supplies. In 1821, after San Martín's liberation, both the *Rebecca* and the *Lord Lyndock* arrived in Peru from India.[65] McNeile's partner, Price, participated in the establishment of the Chilean *Compañía de Calcuta*, which exported copper to Asia.[66]

These merchants, therefore, used the arms trade to enlarge their opportunities in direct trade between South America and Asia, which strengthened their links with chiefly western houses

[61] June 22, 1818, ANC *Contaduría Mayor*, vol. 2537.

[62] November 22, 1818, ANC *Contaduría Mayor*, vol. 2530; Lynch to Hill, Nov. 23, 1818, YUL Hill Papers.

[63] April 25, 1820, ANC *Contaduría Mayor*, vol. 2533.

[64] June 2, 1820, ANC *Hacienda*, vol. 57.

[65] José de Arismendi of the Philippine Company escaped to Manila aboard the *Rebecca* (loaded with a cargo procured by McNeile's agent), accompanied by Spanish-Irish trader Eustace Barron, who Staples would later appoint his vice-consul in Mexico (Besseghini 2020b).

[66] Its agent in India was José Antonio Herrera, future Chilean consul in Mexico.

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active in India and China. And silver and copper exports to Asia financed a multilateral trade, not just imports of cotton, indigo and rice to South America.

7. Arms trade, fiscal problems, and loans: first steps to new opportunities

The practices described with relation to purchases of arms and war financing relied on international trade, which increased overall. However, governments' difficulties in financing the war also increased. In Buenos Aires revenue from customs fell, as Pueyrredón lamented: between 1809 and 1816, it had increased seven-fold (Moutoukias 2018, 175, 179). And notwithstanding continuity in Hispanic-foreign alliances,[67] fiscal reforms and some privileges for local traders contributed to foreign merchants' search of new opportunities. Hill believed that the arms trade in Buenos Aires was suffering from the Government's growing "monetary necessities", and predicted that the same would happen in Chile. He hoped to soon transfer his affairs to Lima: merchants who financed San Martín were promised future fiscal exemptions and incentives in liberated Peru (Pereira-Salas 1940).

The need for international loans – often promoted by networks of the arms dealers themselves – turned disastrous for several countries in the context of the 1825 London financial crisis (Marichal 1989) and encouraged mining speculation. There were many false starts before the new governments found access to major financial markets, and although initially arms dealers remained small-scale lenders, the British network contributed to pave the way towards this end.

In Buenos Aires, Staples helped to create the *Caja de fondos de Sud América* – an unsuccessful attempt to resolve problems derived from the "monetization" of debts – transmitting a power, as requested by Director Pueyrredón, to "Messrs. Macaulay & Babington" to receive funds in

[67] After 1817 Ambrosio Lezica stands out in Buenos Aires custom logs, and his *apoderado* in Liverpool was McNeile: Jan. 7, 1817, AGN, *Protocolos de escribanos*, Registro 2.

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Britain.[68] It was a growth medium for the interests that would later support the Baring loan, through the *Banco de descuentos*, in which the Riglos and Lezicas favored the rise of Stewart & Co., all McNeile's allies.

Price and McNeile continued lending money to Chile and its envoys in London, and to use this credit to pay off custom debts.[69] Envoys received sums through Hullett Brothers, a firm with which McNeile and Staples had a long-lasting synergy, and with which one of them later negotiated Chile's first international loan.

However, both DeForest's and Halsey's projects to raise money for Buenos Aires in the United States failed. 1818 and 1820 saw the failure of other initiatives (one by the US Consul-General) aimed at raising capital for Chile, even though some US politicians sensed that influence gained through loans would prove strategic.

8. The expansion northward

Both British and US arms traders' networks paved the way to the rise of future protagonists of Hispanic American commerce and finance in Peru and Mexico. At the beginning of this process, British and US neutral presence on the Pacific coast benefitted commerce between independent Chile and loyalist Peru, in spite of naval blockades. This was tolerated by Chile not only because this trade was indispensable, but also because foreign arms traders had a great contractual power and room for maneuver in their trade, as sporadic attempts to prosecute them for trading with the loyalists showed. Neutral traders who financed and equipped the independentists wielded patronage similar to that which great traders and lenders had practiced in the Spanish system. The latter were now seeking protection by allying themselves with foreigners. McNeile, Price

[68] Staples to Hamilton, Feb. 16, 1819, TNA FO 72/227.
[69] March 24, 1819, ANC *Relaciones exteriores*, vol. 387; ANC *Hacienda*, vol. 16.

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& Co. was the agent for the British firm Gibbs & Sons, future kings of *guano*, and McNeile's group was positioned to ease and protect, from Chile, Gibbs' and their Spanish partners' business with loyalist Peru, for example (Besseghini 2020b).

In 1822 McNeile withdrew from his South American companies. The Chilean firm, under the names Montgomery, Price & Co.[70] and Dickson, Price & Co., continued doing business connected to war in Peru, in alliance with Henry Kendall, later British consul in Peru (Cavieres 1999, 171-172);[71] and through Samuel Price (Richard's brother), who had arrived in loyalist Lima as McNeile's agent in 1820. Price exported great quantities of silver, both before and after the arrival of the independentists, including for local partners, who either wanted to export capital to Europe in anticipation of their exile, or to continue trading overseas in alliance with foreigners (Besseghini 2020b).[72]

The arms trade fostered habitual trust and collaboration with independent governments in America that merchants exploited to enhance their position in other sectors, like loans connected to mining leases. Dickson, Price & Co. would later back the Chilean and Peruvian Mining Association promoted by Staples's British partner, Thomas Kinder (both companies were heirs of McNeile's activities). The initiative involved San Martín's envoy to London, James Paroissien, and John Barnard, at the center of the British community in Chile. Barnard represented another smaller circuit for the arms traffic and Asian trade, which collaborated with McNeile's and was linked to the Brotherstons of Liverpool, who in turn helped Paroissien make

[70] Robert Montgomery, nephew of Hugh of Belfast.

[71] The Kendall family was related by marriage to Brittain.

[72] Moens to Gibbs, Jan. 16, July 19, 1821, London Metropolitan Archives (LMA), *Antony Gibbs & Sons Ltd. Collection*, Private Letter Book from South American Partners (CLC/B/012/MS19867); Archivo General de la Nación, Lima (hereafter AGN Lima), *Libros de cuentas*, legajo 250, expediente 1212.

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contact with the best-politically-connected merchants.[73] In 1822, Paroissien contracted the first international loan to independent Peru with Kinder, which was decisive for the continuation of the war. The agent of the loan was to buy silver in Lima through Staples & Co. in exchange for bills used to export capital to Europe (Kinder and Everett 1824, 39; Proctor 1825, 289). The use of bills to finance the loan allowed firms to pay for British merchandise with local paper.

As for the US-Argentine group, Hill returned to the United States in 1820 and Lynch moved to Lima, where he was later the "Argentine" consul. There he benefited from his position as financier and arms supplier to the independentists. In 1822-1823 he received ships from Liverpool, Baltimore, Boston, New York, and Providence, and exported Spanish dollars on both British and US warships.[74] Hill, Lynch and Co. continued to exist until 1824. In 1825 Lynch and William Cochran named the Barings and their agent John Parish Robertson – Cochran's partner in Cochran, Robertson & Co – *apoderados* for rights to the mines of Cerro de Pasco.[75] After the transition of the administration of the Kinder loan to other merchants, Robertson became the loan's agent.

Staples & Co. offered services for exporting capital from Mexico, too.[76] In October 1823 Staples was appointed British consul at Acapulco, but he was mainly active in Mexico City. He founded the Real del Monte Mining Company with Kinder, and his vice-consul in San Blas, the Spanish-Irish merchant Eustace Barron (already active in Peru and Manila) was pivotal to trade

[73] Journal 1822, 20 Sept., Essex Record Office (ERO), Chelmsford, UK, *Paroissien Papers 1807-1828* (D/Dob), F1/12. On Barnard see Andrés Baeza's work. Barnard had arrived in Chile during the *Patria Vieja* with a cargo of weapons from Britain (Ossa 2014, 63). Barnard's partner, John Begg, was active up and down the Pacific coast, as far as California. In Lima he was *apoderado* of Paroissien, who participated in their commercial endeavors in America and Asia (e.g., "Poder de Diego Paroissien a Juan Begg," AGN Lima, *Protocolos notariales*, vol. 37, 1820). James Brotherston of Liverpool was financial backer of Begg's initiatives and his brother-in-law.

[74] AGN Lima, *Libros de cuentas*, leg. 249, exp. 1210; AGN Lima, *Libros de cuentas*, leg. 250, exp. 1212.

[75] "Poder: D.[n] Guillermo Cochran y otros [a] D. Juan Parish Robertson y otros," AGN Lima, *Protocolos notariales*, vol. 41, 1825.

[76] *Gazeta del gobierno de México*, May 17, 1823; Hervey to Fillmore, Jan 9, 1824, TNA FO 204/3.

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and silver contraband from the Pacific coast (Mayo 2006).[77] In 1824, Staples and Kinder promoted another politically strategic loan to Mexico, but the operation generated controversy in England and the British Government dismissed Staples.[78] As both Staples' and DeForest's case show, with the new states' recognition, the value of political agents and brokers deeply involved in the Wars of Independence decreased.

9. Concluding remarks

The arms trade was carried out by politically well-connected foreign merchants, who played a creative role as mediators between very different parties. They sometimes enjoyed semi-diplomatic status, even though some of them, like Staples and DeForest, lost it after independences were recognized. McNeile was linked to Staples, British unofficial consul in Buenos Aires and later consul at Acapulco. Hill was US consul in Valparaíso, Zimmermann US vice-consul in Buenos Aires. DeForest, Lynch and Dickson would be appointed, respectively, "Argentine" consuls in the United States, Peru, and England. McNeile, Dickson, DeForest, and Hill returned to their own countries, but others, like Price, did not. In this, as in all trade, families were decisive for business expansion. The Prices and the Lynches are examples – the latter also exemplifies how local merchants took advantage of their business ties to neutrals.

Commercial circuits in South America grew from some of their roots strategically placed in the arms trade. This trade produced microeconomic mechanisms that connected war and economic

[77] Already in the mid-1820s: "Datas de tesorería 1825," Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City (hereafter AGNM), *Aduanas*, San Blas, caja 3126, exp. 27. The long war in Peru favored Chile in the Pacific trade, and the rise of San Blas and Mazatlán in post-independent trade circuits (e.g. AGNM, *Movimiento Marítimo*, vol. 1, exp. 3). In 1823, for example, coins were exported from Mazatlán aboard the *Isabella Robertson*, which had set sail from India and later from Chile for Winter, Brittain & Waddington. The supercargo was an agent of Cochran & Robertson. A ship bearing that same name was later active in India-Canton trade (the author thanks Ander Permanyer for this information). On connections in India of the South American firms (involved in the arms trade) of Winter, Brittain and Waddington, see: Taccuini I and II, ASCM FV.

[78] *The Morning Chronicle*, July 2, 1824; Canning to Hervey, July 20, 1824, TNA FO 50/3.

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change. Selling weapons to revolutionary countries was a good business opportunity for foreign neutral merchants, who in turn were politically interested in doing so, as arms were indispensable to gain independence and, therefore, to keep their trade firmly open. They were paid in varied ways that prompted their activities' expansion, and they created opportunities for other merchants in synergy with the governments. They relied on some support from their home country, e.g., when exporting coin and bullion on warships, or when selling them to the British Treasury agent – who was McNeile's former partner – obtaining bills payable in England (Manning 1925, 455; Besseghini 2020a). And they privately created similar opportunities. Such operations eased trade. For fifteen years, business linked to war represented a fairly stable basis from which to expand commercially. The arms trade served, in a sense, as fuel for commercial re-organization, which in turn further eroded remnants of mercantilism, as we have seen in the case of direct commerce between Hispanic America and Asia. But although foreigners were a driving force, they were not the only beneficiaries.

The link between the arms trade in South America, the export of bullion and coins, and the Asian trade has yet to be explored in full detail, including its association with the opium trade. But we know that major barriers to British and US intermediation between producers and consumers of copper and silver were toppled. As a consequence of their arms trade, which governments rewarded with permits and tolerance, key foreign merchants from the analyzed networks became leading exporters of copper and silver from the Americas to India and China (where *reales de a ocho* were most sought-after).[79] It would take immense work to find out the exact proportion of each format of silver – minted coins, bullion – exported, as well as their destinations. But it would be important to assess the global economic consequences of Hispanic

[79] Until almost the end of the analyzed period, *reales de a ocho* were still produced, in Peru and Mexico.

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American independences, as Alejandra Irigoin has pointed out in her studies on the implications of the collapse of the peso standard after Hispanic American independences on the silver-copper crisis in China (Irigoin 2009; Lin 2006).[80] The arms trade gave a boost to the "globalization" of Chilean copper as well – later managed by firms like Huth & Co., whose Buenos Aires agent was Zimmermann (Llorca-Jaña 2014, 478).[81]

Global merchants were able to take root in South America in an unstable political climate through the arms trade and other crucial services to the fledgling states. They were so indispensable that governments at home and abroad sometimes turned a blind eye to their business. The conjunction between major arms importers and global merchants whose South American business grew during the independence conflicts helps us understand both foreign merchants' response to revolutions and their ability to seize opportunities, and to exploit their political-relational capital in a war context. War was key to them. Although they created lasting networks and companies, both DeForest and McNeile withdrew from a deeper involvement in South American affairs in early 1820s.

Foreign powers considered the embedded presence of their own merchants as capital to be used and defended, while Spain was deprived of maneuvering room. London, for example, sought strong guarantees for British property in case of Spanish attacks[82] and in regions where there was only one "port of entry" – like Buenos Aires – this rendered Spanish military intervention more difficult. The presence of foreign warships benefitted independentists because loyalists

[80] The roughly two-fold increase of silver prices in copper coins.

[81] Copper exports to Asia in early 1820s may have contributed to the initial Chinese impression that the devaluation of its copper money was due to the increase of copper in circulation. Only in 1829 was the Chinese monetary crisis connected to silver exports. Lin refutes the idea that copper circulation in China increased, since copper exports from Japan were declining and mining production was in crisis, but it might be worth considering changes in copper imports from South America. For example, McNeile's partner stated (House of Commons 1821, 94) that both "specie and copper [were] the great means by which the Chinese trade [was] carried on [and] procured in great abundance in South America for British manufactures."

[82] E.g., Castlereagh to Henry Wellesley, March 9, 1815, TNA FO 72/172.

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only partially opened commerce, and by capitalizing on the ambition of men like DeForest and McNeile, independent governments were able to engage the interest of some great powers in their survival.

Acknowledgments:

This study comes from research carried out in many libraries and archives that lasted several years, parts of which have been financed by institutions including the University of Turin, the Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'Homme (Paris) and the Fondazione Luigi Einaudi (Turin). The author would like to express her gratitude towards the numerous colleagues who read the various versions of this article during the years, including all the contributors to this special issue. A previous version of this paper has been presented in the Conference of the Latin American Studies Association (Barcelona, May 2018), but the author discussed her ideas and findings in several international conferences, and she feels indebted to all who provided suggestions. The author is also deeply grateful to the anonymous reviewers and to the JESB personnel. Her interest in the arms trade comes from her father, Ermes Besseghini (1955-2021), who was a famous gunsmith in Italy. She especially thanks him.

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Online ISSN: 2385-7137
http://revistes.ub.edu/index.php/JESB

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