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The Hispanic World at War and the Global Transformation of Commerce. Global Merchants in Spanish America: Business, Networks and Independence (1800-1830)

Abstract

This special issue investigates how in the times of war, political turmoil, and disruption of commercial practices during the Age of Revolutions two centuries ago, merchants appear as demiurges of a new order. This is part of a polycentric reading of epochal transformations that does not deny the primacy of politics and military power in establishing relations of force, but which underlines the complex negotiations at their base. The collection of essays looks at the profound global consequences of the fall of the Spanish American empire, particularly as they related to the decline of mercantilism and the reconfiguration of both Atlantic and inter-Pacific commerce. A crucial element in this transformation was the war economy, which had implications not only in Spanish America, but in the whole of the Hispanic world and beyond. Global merchants or businessmen —foreigners and Hispanic— strategically located in the Hispanic World, whose networks and affairs linked Europe, Asia and the Americas, worked within the vacuum created by the crisis of the Spanish monarchy in what was a fluid and foundational moment. The essays investigate how the Napoleonic Wars and the Wars of Independence against Spain accelerated the emergence of new actors, practices, rules and commercial circuits, by analyzing the personal and business networks that built, redefined and renegotiated the role of Hispanic America in the global economy. This prosopography of merchants thus shows trajectories through which, despite infinite difficulties, global and transregional merchants appear as one of the maieutic forces in the birth of the modern world.

Keywords: Mercantilism; Open Trade; Informal imperialism; Age of Revolutions; Imperial Reconfiguration; Globalization; Microhistory; Global History

El mundo hispánico en guerra y la transformación del comercio mundial. Comerciantes globales en la América española: redes, negocios e Independencia (1800-1830)

Resumen

Este número monográfico investiga cómo los comerciantes contribuyeron a la construcción de un nuevo orden en tiempos de guerra, conflicto político y disrupción de las prácticas comerciales durante la Era de las Revoluciones, dos siglos atrás. Este conjunto de artículos forma parte de una lectura policéntrica de transformaciones históricas que –sin negar la primacía de la política y del poder militar– subraya las negociaciones complejas que estuvieron en la base del establecimiento de nuevas relaciones de fuerza. Analiza así las profundas consecuencias globales de la caída del Imperio Español en América, particularmente en lo que se refiere al declive del mercantilismo y a la reconfiguración del comercio atlántico e inter-pacífico. Un elemento crucial de esta transformación fue la economía de guerra, que tuvo implicaciones no tan solo en la América española, sino en el conjunto del mundo hispánico y más allá. Hombres de negocios y comerciantes globales, tanto extranjeros como hispánicos, estratégicamente situados en un espacio imperial en fragmentación, y cuyas redes y negocios unían Europa, Asia y las Américas, actuaron en el vacío creado por la crisis de la monarquía española, en lo que fue un momento fluido y fundacional. Mediante el análisis de las redes de negocios y personales que construyeron, redefinieron y renegociaron el rol de la América hispánica en la economía global, los trabajos en este número investigan cómo las Guerras napoleónicas y las Guerras de Independencia contra España aceleraron la emergencia de nuevos actores, prácticas, reglas del juego y circuitos mercantiles. Esta prosopografía de comerciantes trans-regionales y globales, por consiguiente, muestra trayectorias a través de las cuales, a pesar de la dificultad, dichos comerciantes aparecen como una fuerza mayéutica en el nacimiento del mundo moderno.

Palabras clave: mercantilismo; comercio abierto; imperialismo informal; Era de las Revoluciones; reconfiguración imperial; globalización; microhistoria; historia global

El món hispànic en guerra i la transformació del comerç mundial. Comerciants globals a l'Amèrica espanyola: xarxes, negocis i Independència (1800-1830)

Resum

Aquest número monogràfic investiga com els comerciants van contribuir a la construcció d'un nou ordre en temps de guerra, conflicte polític i disrupció de les pràctiques comercials durant l'Era de les Revolucions, dos segles enrere. Aquest aplec d'articles forma part d'una lectura policèntrica de transformacions històriques que –sense negar la primacia de la política i del poder militar– subratlla les negociacions complexes que hi va haver a la base de l'establiment de noves relacions de força. Analitza així les profundes conseqüències globals de la caiguda de l'Imperi Espanyol a Amèrica, particularment pel que fa al declivi del mercantilisme i a la reconfiguració del comerç atlàntic i inter-pacífic. Un element crucial d'aquesta transformació en va ser l'economia de guerra, que va tenir implicacions no tan sols a l'Amèrica espanyola, sinó també en el conjunt del món hispànic i més enllà. Homes de negocis i comerciants globals, tant estrangers com hispànics, estratègicament situats en un espai imperial en fragmentació, les xarxes i negocis dels quals unien Europa, Àsia i les Amèriques, van actuar en el buit creat per la crisi de la monarquia espanyola, en el que va ser un moment fluid i fundacional. Mitjançant l'anàlisi de les xarxes de negocis i personals que van construir, redefinir i renegociar el rol de l'Amèrica hispànica en l'economia global, els treballs d'aquest número investiguen com les Guerres napoleòniques i les Guerres d'Independència contra Espanya van accelerar l'emergència de nous actors, pràctiques, regles del joc i circuits mercantils. Aquesta prosopografia de comerciants trans-regionals i globals, per tant, mostra trajectòries a través de les quals, malgrat la dificultat, aquests comerciants apareixen com una força maièutica en el naixement del món modern.

Paraules clau: mercantilisme; comerç obert; imperialisme informal; Era de les Revolucions; reconfiguració imperial; globalització; microhistòria; història global

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1. Agent of global change: the Hispanic world after the collapse of the Atlantic empires[1]

Two centuries ago, the Independence Wars in Latin America marked a turning point in the birth of the modern world, with the fall of the first great European empire in the Americas. An unintended consequence of this was the end, in general, of a particular nexus between empire and trade —mercantilism— which was based on the protection of power reserves in a context of relative equilibrium among empires. Notwithstanding the idea of a balance of power that characterized the new post-revolutionary European order in Vienna, in fact, the end of the Napoleonic Wars saw the affirmation of a global military hegemon, Britain, and this provided the framework for accelerating integration of different political and economic systems. Nineteenth century globalization, however, did not rise automatically from this *Pax Britannica*. This special issue proposes to consider one of the main actors of the previous phases of globalization, the Hispanic world, as a fertile terrain for experimenting with new global practices, which pushed the world towards free trade.

The Spanish empire was for centuries not only a porous fortress, but a privileged channel for commerce. In defiance of the mercantilist logic that was for a time prevalent in Spain and Europe, the merchandise of disparate nations flowed across Europe, the New World and Asia through that channel. That empire was a walled city on the Atlantic, from which passages and gateways opened, among them a "backdoor" from the Americas to Asia. And as the walls holding up the vital and enterprising citadel of the global Spanish monarchy crumbled, the powers of the North Atlantic became the indisputable industrial, commercial and financial centers of the globe. Did this fall, in fact, play a role in the emergence of these global powers? Although merchants, especially from Britain and the United States, acquired some strategic

[1] This text has been conceived and written by the two authors collectively, and to adhere to Italian academic conventions, Deborah Besseghini has dealt with the macro-imperial issues in sections 1 and 3, and Ander Permanyer with issues related to political economy in section 2.

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economic control in the Hispanic world, great Hispanic merchants[2] did not disappear overnight. Did the ties between Hispanic and non-Hispanic merchants play a role in the global reconfiguration of commerce that followed Latin American independence?

This special issue brings together six essays that demonstrate how the crisis of the Spanish monarchy was a principal motor of change in one of the most profound periods of transformation in human history, the Age of Revolutions. Applying the method of microhistory to analyze epochal structural changes (Levi 1985 and 1992; Trivellato 2009, 2011 and 2015),[3] the included essays illuminate transformations in commercial habits in a context of war, linking the local to the global, and revealing significant elements from which we can begin to define macrohistorical trends. Research highlights the concrete initiatives that merchants with trans-local interests carried out to adapt to the fall of the Empire, which, above all, had structured the globalization of the Early Modern era. These adaptations profoundly influenced the trajectory of the new nineteenth-century empires. The authors look at how the collapse of the Spanish empire forced Hispanic Americans to experiment with the praxis and rules of the open market, and how through this experimentation, they transformed what in colonial times had been exceptional and discretional "free trade" practices into "modern" trading relations. And we will see the implications of all this in Asia and in the Asian detachment of the Spanish Imperial

[2] The authors use "Hispanic" to refer to all the merchants who were born or naturalized in the territories of the Spanish Monarchy, regardless of their ethnic origin, place of birth, or political positions and loyalties. This is a convention, based on the authors' reflections on the ambiguity of more traditional, and specific, definitions in a context of imperial disintegrations, in which identities were shifting. The authors use more specific categories (Spanish, Creole, *indiano*, Chilean, Peruvian, etc.) only when appropriate.

[3] The authors use the concept of microhistory with full awareness of its metamorphosis over the years, from the first Italian school to its more recent, multifaceted, re-significations (Bertrand and Calafat 2018). The works in this special issue adopt an acception of the word "microhistory" that emerged in relation to global history studies. They, indeed, look at trans-local and global connections through case studies (often biographical trajectories, which the authors follow like Ariadne's thread through different geographical and historical settings), which illuminate significant mechanisms of social and network relations in specific contexts. The essays focus mostly on "mediators" – between cultures, interests, empires, and conflicting spaces. These go-between figures help clarify aspects of the social history of globalization, including the complex relations between individual behaviors and the redefinition of collective norms in time of radical changes.

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"citadel"—the Philippines. Without concealing or ignoring the negative effects of armed conflicts, we maintain that instead of hindering such transformations, the war context fostered them in territories that were traditionally strategic as hinges between worlds. After all, war was and is structurally crucial for economic growth (Baran and Sweezy 1966; Rodger 2010).

The micro-historical approach provides paths to sneak post-independent Latin America in the field of Global History (Brown 2015). Even if global historiography pays great attention to turning points, it focuses above all on the role the Iberian world had in the more ancient economic globalization, at the time of the construction and consolidation of the oceanic European empires. It centers on the "discovery" or the colonial epoch, and particular attention is paid to the eighteenth century (Pearce 2007; Marichal 2007; Stein and Stein 2009; Aram and Yun-Casalilla 2014; Del Valle, More and O'Toole 2019). In general, excellent narratives on the Iberian world's trajectory in global history stop at the Age of Revolutions, as if the period were an endpoint and not a turning point (e.g., Bouza, Cardim and Feros 2020). Studies on the global economic implications of the great fracture procured by Hispanic American independence are relatively rare. Of this early-nineteenth century economic transition, scholars of the Hispanic world have investigated above all roots and "heritage" —this includes the studies on the unequal integration of Latin America in the industrial world (e.g., Frank 1967; Stein and Stein 1970). Hispanic merchants with their international and trans-imperial networks are protagonists in several works on global history in the Early Modern era (Crespo Solana 2009; Herrero Sánchez and Kaps 2017), but not so much in the Age of Independence. Seminal books on international merchants in independent Latin America open with 1810 or 1820, but they generally deal relatively little with the period till 1830 (Reber 1979; Llorca-Jaña 2012; Llorca-Jaña and Miller 2021). Almost a *Terra Incognita* of economic history, the 1800-1830 transition straddles production systems and trade association practices, and the functioning as

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vectors of change of trade networks. This transition is hard to analyze, but crucial, for, as Matthew Brown has pointed out (2015), in global history the Independence Era is a strategic junction: between the "ancient" and the "modern" world, between monarchy and republics, between old loyalties and "the invention" of national traditions, between mercantilism and free trade, and between policies suited to agricultural societies and those suited to an emerging industrial capitalism.

Also due to the region's political separation from the Philippine Islands —which are a crucial hook for the global approach in historiography on the Early Modern era— the post-independence Hispanic American trajectory is hardly connected to the history of Asia (Bayly 1989 and 2010; Bonialian 2019, 13-31). Yet Hispanic American independence had repercussions in Asia, as shown in studies that look at the circulation in the region of Spanish coins (Irigoin 2009), or Chilean copper, which opened new opportunities between Europe, Asia, Australia, and the Americas in the 1820s (Evans and Saunders 2017; Navarrete-Montalvo and Llorca-Jaña 2020). But only a few authors address the immediate economic consequences of the imperial crisis in the Asiatic side of the Empire (Valdés Lakowsky 1987, 241-313; Legarda 1999 and 2002; Pérez Lecha 2014, 259-93; García Gimeno 2017; Elizalde 2020).

In the field of Atlantic History, Hispanic American independence has been widely analyzed, and the literature shows how conflicts in Hispanic America activated complex (and contradictory) transitions to modern republicanism, finance, and fiscality in the Atlantic space.[4] However, although the historiography no longer interprets the Hispanic world as a totally passive player in the global nineteenth century, it still treats it as a peripheral actor (Wallerstein

[4] Literature on the mentioned research fields is too broad to be quoted properly. Here we mention, as non-exhaustive examples: Marichal 1989; Guerra 1992; Lempérière et al. 1998; Grafe and Irigoin 2006; Irigoin and Grafe 2008; Verdo 2006; Adelman 1999 and 2010; Garavaglia 2010; Brown and Paquette 2013; Entin 2010 and 2018; Morelli 2019; Sabato 2021; Moutoukias 2021; Ternavasio 2021.

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1974-1989; Osterhammel 2014; Bonialian 2019). The participation of Hispanics in the "great game" of hegemonic reconfigurations, and the commercial, neo-colonial and cultural aggressiveness of nineteenth-century imperialism and sub-imperialism of Spain and the new Hispanic American states, are no longer underestimated (Garcia Balañà 2008; Fradera 2005 and 2018; Paquette et al. 2018; Bartolomei, Huetz de Lemps and Rodrigo y Alharilla 2021), but modernity in the Hispanic world is still interpreted almost as a reflection of the structures created by the new hegemons, and particularly by the main character in the literature on global history, Britain. We share the interpretation of formal and informal empires as superimposable networks for strategic protection, and there is no doubt that the British Navy —the largest in the world, which protected the dominant commercial fleet around 1815— in good measure structured the nineteenth-century international order from "the sea" (Benton and Ford 2016). Yet the implicit idea that the winners in the geopolitical arena invented all the structures of modernity, almost out of an ineffable moral superiority, does not hold, as change has demonstrable multilateral origins (Berg 2004; Hobson 2020; Yazdani and Menon 2020; Riello 2022). That questionable assumption has not been challenged enough, while the idea that the opening of Hispanic American ports fostered commercial liberalization on a global scale, and that Hispanic America played a role in the impact that the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars had on global trade and economy, have been disregarded (O'Rourke 2006, 148). Perhaps because the region's commercial opening has been traditionally seen as externally imposed, the moment of rupture has seemed less interesting than the search for its long-term origins. Yet independence was a backbone of change, not just the inevitable superstructural outcome of some structural long-term economic causes. The eighteenth century was an age of reform, of attempts to reinforce the state for war. It is possible that this weakened traditional social structures to the point that they pulled out at the first wind, but the principal cause of the Atlantic

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revolutions was the wind itself, i.e., the final geopolitical clash between the Atlantic empires (Guerra 1992). With the clash came reconstruction, however, and this, not the eighteenth-century reforms, was the foundational political moment of a new economic framework.

Eighteenth-century reforms comprised new and more aggressive mercantilist policies, in keeping with the struggle among empires. In the Spanish empire, reforms were aimed to reinforce colonial loyalty and alliances of interest, including some with discontented colonists of rival powers, in the context of a synergy with France that remained structural despite the trauma of the French Revolution. And despite the name of the most famous among the Bourbon reforms, "*comercio libre*," Bourbon "free trade" had none of the possible modern meanings of the word. Although physiocratic ideas and colonial requests played a role, Spain's late eighteenth-century economic reforms were often tools for productive development aimed at attracting and retaining precious metals (for example, by exchanging colonial goods with means for their production, like slaves). This was the case of the *comercio de colonias* and the *comercio de negros* in the Americas. Even the opening of Manila to international trade in 1789 was aimed at protecting the Royal Philippine Company's interests, the principal reformist project in the islands, and to consolidate the Spanish crown's weak authority in Asia *vis-à-vis* the British interests in the archipelago through economic development. Furthermore, in many regions these reforms were applied in the wake of new conflicts with Britain, which imposed more barriers. Trade with neutral powers, the *comercio de neutrales*, was a war measure, precarious by nature, which had been introduced during Spanish support for the US independence and renewed intermittently during the French Wars. It served to strengthen imperial control and the Spanish Monarchy's alliances in a bluntly anti-British function. Thus, generally, British ships could not enter the Spanish American ports legally, while US ships could. Since indirect trade flourished, this was a strategic injury for London more than a

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commercial injury (which the existence of indirect and illegal trade lessened). Other merchant communities could interfere for their countries' interests in Spanish America, where they had tolerated informal consuls, and commercial intermediation strengthened their maritime presence in the Atlantic, which exacerbated Anglo-US relations. After the reversal of alliances in 1808, the Spanish anti-French government allied to Britain did not allow a generalized direct trade between Hispanic America and Britain —not even France had obtained it before— and the commercial relations occasionally established remained precarious (Besseghini 2021). Although the warring empires were not watertight compartments, as Adrian Pearce (2007) has brilliantly demonstrated, it was not the reforms, but the collapse of the Spanish empire, which put an end to the mercantilist struggle. The independence of the British colonies had not been enough to cease the clash between France and England in the Atlantic, which finally overwhelmed the Spanish empire. During Hispanic America's independence process, a trade structure began to be welded that (despite all existent continuities) no longer found support in the reciprocal closure between porous systems of imperial protection.

The special issue's aim is to understand how the Wars of Independence concretely accelerated the rise of new actors, practices, rules and circuits for commerce. The micro-historical analysis highlights the interaction between global and local dimensions that allow us to deepen the furrow that Jeremy Adelman (2008 and 2015), J.H. Elliott (2006) and others have traced. Imitation among empires was a foundation for global modernity (Subrahmanyam 2006, 261-262). The hypothesis is that Latin America contributed to "make the modern world" —to provocatively paraphrase Niall Ferguson (2003)— because in the period of independence it was a crucial terrain for some of those transformations that signaled the passage to new forms of power and imperial control, and an *agent* of a new phase of economic globalization, particularly important as just preceding the spread of the industrial revolution (Cipolla 1974). One element

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of this change was the substantial fall of mercantilist empires, even though this did not stop the search for state protection in long-distance trade (Bartolomei 2021).

We are interested in this fracture, whose origins stem from simultaneous factors, such as the maturation of political and technical-scientific revolutions from the most varied origins; the British victory in the Napoleonic Wars (which consolidated a military and financial hegemony); and, above all, the generalized need to open ex-colonial ports in the Hispanic world, a world that was crucial for trade in the previous globalization phase. This helped to transfer elements of strategic control from an imperial structure to structures oscillating between post-imperial and neo-imperial —a first case of modern decolonization (Delgado 2006; Thurner 2019). The transformations in Hispanic America were triggered by geopolitical factors, including attempts by the warring powers to exert indirect control over Hispanic American resources. Geopolitical pressures unleashed local reactions that dismantled the Euro-Atlantic imperial concept. Yet although the golden era of free trade —the mid-nineteenth century— was also the golden era of British imperialism, the opening up of new commercial opportunities in Latin America was not a consequence of interferences linked to a project of "imperialism of free trade," which have been overvalued in some debates –as Deborah Besseghini has recently highlighted (2021). The post-independent "opening" of Latin American ports was not imposed by the impersonal needs of *industrial* capital to access cheap raw materials and new buyers, but by a series of political and military circumstances. In the 1810s, industry was embryonic even in Britain, primary production was valued and protected with tools such as the Corn Laws, and the economic reasoning was still mercantilist and aimed at procuring silver. On the other hand, the Hispanic Atlantic's demand for Indian cotton textiles was already important in Britain's trading and manufacturing developments in the eighteenth century. Therefore, although the opening up of direct trade with Latin America may have helped the British economy in the context of the

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Napoleonic Wars, this change in Hispanic American ports was not caused by the *external imposition* of a modern free trade culture for a newly emerging industry. The transformation originated instead from the needs imposed by the local repercussions of global war on territories that for centuries had been part of an imperial system extended over continents, and which were particularly unfit to survive in isolation. In other words, the ports were opened to almost all nations and goods because it was the only economically wise option for regions formerly included in a global economy protected by a "colonial pact," i.e., a framework of negotiations, which was crumbling. By opening trade in a rather generalized form, Hispano-Americans remained part of global commercial circuits through new channels and with new forms of protection, without having to change empire. They thus avoided isolation, even among themselves, after 1810. And they exploited the geopolitical rivalries of foreigners and their neutrality in the Wars of Independence to continue trading in the old imperial spaces, and to permanently access new opportunities and spaces.

Hispanic Americans' need for networks and protection, not foreign powers' hunger for markets, favored the informal-imperial intrusion as a new pact that linked Hispanic America to new imperial spaces. This helped to break down and make obsolete residual mercantilist barriers. Latin America gave a clear push to commercial liberation, not for the sake of others, but for its own needs, and in a sense pushed Britain towards free trade (Howe 2017). We can, therefore, overcome the contradiction between imperialism and autonomy (Platt 1980; Stein and Stein 1980). The *political* phenomenon we call "informal imperialism" (Robinson and Gallagher 1953), an external cause of independence (Besseghini 2021), forced Hispanic actors to look for a new balance between political and commercial, collective and individual interests. Yet with their *initiative,* Hispanics became a pivot of change. Global merchants emerged in this process who were almost free from imperial barriers and less dependent on the mediation and protection

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of trans-imperial groups. A change of circumstances —and not "beneficial influences" of "more advanced" cultures— paved the way for a contradictory but fairly stable commercial opening in historically key territories for global trade. The process created a domino effect on the remaining imperial structures and a space for the implementation of ideas on "free trade" from the most varied origins. Looking at things in these terms, we understand why in some areas the immobility of the new republics contradicts an allegedly imported liberal mentality, and why foreigners easily obtained certain "reforms" but not others. Initially they did not have to fight for commercial opening, because it was in the interest of Hispanic Americans to grant it. Foreigners had to fight for other advantages, but the most important change occurred when Hispanic Americans took the opportunity of the crisis to tear down the walls of the Spanish imperial citadel.

In this shared terrain of initiative, in a new political framework characterized by a hegemonic military power, in the evolution of relationships and networks partially established during the "colonial period", and in negotiations and adaptations originated from the Independence war context, we found motors of a new phase of globalization, which would lead to both "free trade" and imperialism. The essays deal with this terrain of shared initiative in a wide-ranging geographic space: from California to China; from the Río de la Plata to the United States; from Chile to India; from Europe to Peru; from the Philippines to Mexico. They show the role of trans-local and global merchants in the definition of new trading practices and in the adaptation of old practices to new circumstances.

2. The Pacific side of the mercantilist citadel

The identification of the Iberian empires as "mercantilist" has conditioned approaches made so far, especially as far as the period under study is concerned. Concepts such as "mercantilism" and "monopoly" conceal more complex realities. The Spanish monopoly in the overseas trade

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did not comprise the strict control of all the elements of a specific area of production and trade, but the establishment of certain economic, geographical, and institutional limits to the system so as to serve the purposes of the fiscal-military state; anyone having the means to do so could participate in the system, being thus coopted by the state (Grafe and Pedreira 2020). As abovementioned, apart from the strict stipulations that made up the formidable citadel of Spanish mercantilism, this encompassed new geographic areas and economic actors as the imperial economy developed. This section analyses the particularities of the Pacific Ocean, which constituted a space of relative liberty since the mid-eighteenth century: while the Atlantic side of the citadel was fortified for the war, its Pacific side was more precarious, making imperial control over the commercial life of the ocean more difficult.[5] As this section will describe, such particularities represented the limits of monopoly and the difficulties of its implementation, which forced *ad hoc* adjustments. For instance, actors from outside the Hispanic sphere were allowed to participate in the Philippine trade since the establishment of the Spaniards in the late sixteenth century; during the eighteenth century, new actors in and beyond the trans-Pacific trade appeared. In so doing, this section shows the centrality of the Philippines and the Pacific in the process of reconfiguration of the Spanish trade during the Independence Wars.

This Pacific —and Philippine — role was indeed relevant, yet more often than not it has been cast aside in the great narratives about the Spanish Empire and the transformation of the imperial economy. On its Asian side, the centuries-old Manila Galleon system, based on the transshipment of silks and other Chinese productions in exchange for American silver, gave way to a more diversified productive and commercial economy. On both sides, metropolitan

[5] Pierre Chaunu (1960), insisted on the contrary on the lack of autonomy of the Pacific *vis-à-vis* the Atlantic Ocean, claiming the former was strictly controlled by the "Iberians."

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intervention increased. In all cases, the connection between the two Pacific shores was, since the sixteenth century, a promising perspective for the economic actors, whether Hispanic —*indianos* and *peninsulares*— or foreigners, who participated in the transformations here analyzed. And yet, the Pacific was always perceived as a problem from the metropolitan policymakers' viewpoint. The Galleon system had been, since its inception, a mercantilist means to avoid the excess of Asian merchandise in the American markets —where they competed with manufactures sent from Spain— as well as to contain the leakage of silver outside the imperial borders (Legarda 1955). Still, this control was not easy to implement.

The Spanish system in the Pacific included a great deal of *indiano* initiative, which fitted badly in the mercantilist preoccupations of the metropolitan policymakers. As emphasized by Mariano Bonialian (2012 and 2019), the Pacific was, until the mid-eighteenth century and before the reformist intervention, an *indiano* space, with great autonomy with respect to the political economy established by the Crown. The non-abidance of its mercantilist stipulations was widespread; for instance, the limits on the volume and value of merchandise on board of the trans-Pacific Galleons were ignored more often than not; on the American shore, trade between viceroyalties was important until the mid-eighteenth century, while in the Philippines, direct trade with the Asian ports took place despite being strictly forbidden according to the Galleon stipulations (Herrera Reviriego 2014; Tremml-Werner 2017). As the reforms advanced, the trans-Pacific trade fitted less in the big metropolitan schemes by which the colonial economies were supposed to furnish commodities to the metropolis. The Galleon's transshipment trade especially, for it was blamed for the underdevelopment of the Philippine plantation system, and for keeping the archipelago from becoming a relevant market for metropolitan manufactures (Permanyer-Ugartemendia 2020, 117-118). This metropolitan caution explains the belated establishment of the Royal Philippine Company (Real Compañía

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de Filipinas), in 1785, when compared to other earlier companies in the territories of the House of Bourbon (Rodríguez García 2005), notwithstanding previous failed attempts focused on the Asian trade (Díaz-Trechuelo 1965, 3-30). And yet, the reform process in the Philippines should not be seen only as an imposition from the imperial center but also as an attempt to coopt *indiano* initiative, which was continually adapting to the problems that the Galleon trade faced since the late seventeenth century, and mostly, the dwindling profit margins of the trade (Yuste 2007, 269-271). Thus, experiments on the plantation economy —already taking place in Southeast Asia throughout the early modern period (Reid 2015)— and in the regional trade can be seen even before the reform.

The Philippines' distinctiveness with respect to other peripheries of the Spanish colonial world is explained by the distance of the archipelago from other imperial centers as well as by its location in Southeast Asia. In addition, its territorial model was more autonomous when compared with other Spanish possessions, resulting from its geographical distance and dispersion. War disruptions also changed the rules of the game, but as explained hereafter, trade was relatively stable, for necessary readjustments and adaptations were constantly made. As we will see, it was imperial competition rather than the wars —from the British in particular—[6] that worried Spanish policymakers when dealing with the Philippines. Another difference of the archipelago *vis-à-vis* other Spanish territories was that, together with Cuba and Puerto Rico, it remained in the Spanish imperial sphere throughout the nineteenth century —even though, as Ruth de Llobet (2012 and 2020) has shown, serious challenges to the authority of the Crown also took place there. Thus, although the nineteenth-century Philippines were opened by the

[6] Together with the widely quoted British invasion of Manila between 1762 and 1764, British advancements in the Asian trade should be mentioned, especially as they increased after the 1784 Commutation Act (Mui and Mui 1984), which drastically reduced the import taxes on the Chinese tea, thus boosting its demand and trade; also the 1786 establishment of the British colony of Penang as an East India Company outpost. In addition, and during the Nootka conventions, the transfer of Luzon to the *Honourable* Company was contemplated (Furber 1935).

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colonial authorities to foreign interests, the absence of independence meant there were no such opportunities for foreign investors as those resulting from the setting up of new republican institutions, nor the financing of new governments, nor furnishing them with arms, which took place in Latin America.

Resulting from its location in Southeast Asia, the Philippines were targeted for the development of a plantation economy —rather belatedly, as it did not bear fruit until the late eighteenth century— and were characterized by a greater porosity *vis-à-vis* foreign actors. There was a prominent Chinese diaspora in the islands since the institution of the Spanish colonial order, a presence that perhaps represents one of the most outstanding features of the Philippine system when compared to others within the Spanish empire. Other diasporas with presence in Southeast Asia were also in the Philippines —more as a result of *ad hoc* decisions rather than metropolitan directions— and especially, since the early nineteenth century, Western traders and particularly British, French, and US traders would become more prominent. Since 1789, metropolitan policymakers opened up Manila to Western navigation, with the condition that the ships entering its port could not carry European merchandise, a limitation that was bypassed by the *comercio de neutrales* during the French Wars (Martínez Shaw 2007, 48). In this sense, the measure tried to make the most of the diversity of the Asian region, so as to meet metropolitan priorities in a context of increasing commercial and imperial competition. The 1789 opening of Manila resulted from a similar rationale to that of the *comercio de colonias* in America after the American Revolutionary War in 1784 (Delgado 2007). In the Philippines, the measure was above all destined to promote the trade of the Royal Philippine Company, the flagship of the reform project in the archipelago, by which the advancements of rival powers in the region were to be counteracted.

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Nevertheless, the study of Philippine singularity is hindered by the scarcity of studies on this period. While some things are known about the Bourbon reforms as well as about the consolidation of the Philippine productive and commercial system throughout the nineteenth century (Fradera 1999, 71-131; Legarda 1999, 51-90; Alonso Álvarez 2009, 305-338), this is not the case with the transition period between the two. In all likelihood, the economic diversification and, in particular, the development of the plantation system, bore their fruits. We know that commodity exports were developed to a certain degree during the 1820s, and that the regional connections of the Spanish trade developed in the decades prior to 1830. Not in vain, this coincided with the end of the Manila Galleon and the crisis of the Royal Philippine Company (Permanyer-Ugartemendia 2014). Carlos Martínez Shaw's (2007, 52-70) figures allow us to see, in broad terms, how the Manila foreign trade slightly increased after 1789, but decreased as a result of the war with Britain in 1797, followed by a noticeable increase in the first decade of the nineteenth century in spite of the crisis of the Galleon trade and the wars. In this period of stability, ships with Western flags increased —British and US flags in particular— foretelling the dominance of British and US traders in the Philippine economy by the central decades of the nineteenth century (Legarda 1999). As for the British, they managed to maintain their trade during their war with Spain by resorting to other flags and to the private services of the Calcutta factory of the Royal Philippine Company (Permanyer-Ugartemendia 2013, 95).

The development of the export economy and the opening up of Manila were possible thanks to the archipelago's permeable and cosmopolitan character, and the factories of the Royal Philippine Company in the two most strategic Western outposts in Asia —Canton in 1787 and Calcutta in 1796— were particularly crucial. There the Spanish Company tried to coopt the developments in the initiatives undertaken by Philippine traders through its integration in the

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productive economy and the regional and intercontinental trades stemming from the archipelago. In their private undertakings, the employees of the Company —most of whom were *peninsulares*— set up important networks of collaboration with Philippine traders, and were active in the regional "country trade," that is, the Western private trade in Asia, mostly British (Permanyer-Ugartemendia 2020, 128-130). Hispanics in Asia provided means of access to sources of silver and to Philippine credit, which helped in developing the Western trade in Canton and the opium traffic in particular. As will be shown in Permanyer's article, Spaniards were heavily involved in the boom in the opium trade between India and China in the 1820s.

Despite the commercial developments experienced during the transition from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, the *fait accompli* forced the Philippines to reorient its economic model after the Latin American republics were established (Legarda 2002). In the process, the Philippines consolidated its integration in the Asian —and particularly Southeast Asian— economy (Elizalde 2020) while the trans-Pacific link became secondary. As shown in Permanyer's article here introduced, right after the end of the Galleon in 1815 the trans-Pacific trade continued on behalf of the Philippine traders until 1821 (Legarda 2002; Pérez Lecha 2014; García Gimeno 2017), in an iteration of the secular route, where textiles were exchanged for silver —yet by the late 1830s textiles will be mostly British fabrics, and old imperial coins would eventually be replaced by new republican coins (Permanyer-Ugartemendia 2013, 365-366).[7] The problems in resuming the trans-Pacific trade from Manila prompted the Spanish traders to use Canton instead, yet this trade would become secondary in the redefinition of the

[7] Between 1826 and 1828, the wide circulation among Filipino merchants of independent Hispanic-America's coin led the Manila Government to the decision of countermarking them "habilitado por el Rey N. S. Fernando VII": *Taccuino* (notebook) VIII, doc. 4, 1828, Archivio Storico di Casale Monferrato (ASCM), Fondo famiglia Vidua di Conzano: viaggi di Carlo Vidua (herafter ASCM, FV). Deborah Besseghini is currently doing research in the mentioned Vidua Collection. See also: Yrisarri & Co. to John Gillies, Canton-Manila, 29/4/1826; Yrisarri & Co. to Yrastorza, Brodett & Co., Canton-Manila, 1/5/1826, Cambridge University Library, Department of Manuscripts and University Archives, Jardine Matheson Archive, C2/4.

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economic model of the islands. After initially having collaborated with Spanish subjects for the development of the plantations and commodity exports as well as the silver-for-textiles trans-Pacific trade, these would eventually be dominated by non-Hispanics actors, mostly British and US traders. As Besseghini's article shows, the reconfiguration of trade between Asia and South America was sometimes crucially linked to businesses related to the Wars of Independence, involving arms, silver, copper, and opium.

The definition of the mercantilist institutions in the Philippines as well as their collapse and the eventual redefinition of a new economic order, were dominated by the archipelago's remoteness and consequent higher degree of autonomy. One of the mercantilist institutions par excellence, the Manila Galleon had been quickly appropriated by its actors, colonial subjects, who would watch over its control so as to avoid metropolitan interference (Yuste 2007; Bonialian 2012). Even the Royal Philippine Company, the main institution representing the Bourbon reforms in the colony, used to strengthen the developments already taking place, particularly the plantation economy and a greater integration in the Asian trade, provided opportunities used by the Philippine economic actors, of access to knowledge, markets, products and contacts with foreign traders through the factories in the most important Western trading posts in Asia. Furthermore, the re-definition of the economic model in the Philippines after the crumbling of the mercantilist order took place in different circumstances when compared to the rest of the Spanish empire. Not only remoteness, but the interruption of the trans-Pacific link —which did not disappear but lost its *raison d'être*— confirmed the path of the colony to a greater integration in the Asian and global trades. Thus, experimentation in the Philippines took place not only as a result of the final collapse of the imperial order —as the islands remained in the Spanish empire until 1898— but as the consequences the loss of the American colonies inflicted on the old mercantilist model, which rendered it unfeasible: not only the Galleon ended, but the

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trans-Pacific trade could no longer be led by Philippine traders, for, as Spanish subjects, they were not allowed to trade in the new republics as long as these remained unrecognized by Spain. This paved the way for others, mostly foreigners, in the trans-Pacific trade. Moreover, the Royal Philippine Company, which depended on the trans-Pacific and trans-continental trade, could no longer resort to these. The new Philippine economy in the Three Colony system left mercantilism behind, and both local economic actors and metropolitan authorities would work towards the development of the plantation system, where the exclusivity of the means of production and trade was not conceived, and therefore foreigners could participate fully, even to the degree of controlling the remaining colonies' economic activities throughout the nineteenth century.

In all, the transformations on both sides of the Pacific Ocean show how, rather than the British and the US traders bringing in the Gospel of free trade to unwilling local merchants, the latter in fact took the initiative in a context of crisis and change. Showing the porosity of the mercantilist citadel, collaboration between Hispanics and foreigners was common in different places of the Spanish empire even before the imperial collapse: instead of using a clean slate, foreign traders benefitted from the knowledge, access to capital and credit, commercial networks, and connections to the old and new political powers, possessed by the Hispanic traders on both sides of the Pacific Ocean, and there was thus a period of collaboration between the two groups until at least 1830. As shown in the articles here presented, collaboration among traders of very different origins —from Britain, the US, other Western countries, Hispanics in America and the Philippines, and Asians in the latter— set the pattern during the period under study here, where everything seemed open.

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3. Hispanic America and a few submerged pillars of nineteenth-century globalization

Long distance trade is tied with intricate laces to imperial or transnational protective structures. This happened in "colonial" times but also when new imperial systems arose in the nineteenth century that tended to englobe independent territories informally. In a sense, the extensive administrative independence of provinces had been a feature of the global composite monarchies of the old regime and a new tacit form of imperial integration was a feature of the new powers. Being protection systems, empires are by nature partially exclusive, but being potentially global, they need external inputs. This oscillation between control and openness is crucial in the rise of trade and power systems till today.

Foreigners found legal ways to enter the Hispanic world in the Bourbon era, because this sometimes corresponded to the fiscal-military state's needs, but also because the center received pressures from below to obtain limited and protected commercial openings. Yet contraband was a huge phenomenon during the eighteenth-century mercantilist wars, notwithstanding imperial reforms.[8] Contraband was indeed structurally functional to the survival of the porous mercantilist citadels, and guaranteed an ample power, as well as profits, to the men of the Spanish empire who allowed it, acting as filters and pocketing informal duties and *gabelles*. In some spaces, illegal trade strengthened the colonial pact until the eve of the Spanish system's crisis and beyond, as can be inferred from the cases explored in Duggan's article. Contraband and "exceptional" legal exchanges between empires were not a premise of nineteenth century "free trade" globalization, but in it lay the origins of some of the trans-imperial networks that contributed to the great transformation by working as connectors of commercial worlds even after the collapse of the Atlantic empires.

[8] Zacarias Moutoukias has much researched the topic in his work. See also: Romano 2007.

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Empires are consolidated from below and from the outside, and, especially in moments of transformation, foreigners are precious collaborators to imperial centers, for they are free from local traditions and structures. Hispanics probably provided essential collaboration to the creation of the formal and informal empires of the nineteenth century. This special issue partially leaves out, by design, the fundamental political sphere —even if trade and politics are never separate— and looks at the practical needs "from below," of traders who collaborated in imperial transformations without necessarily being involved in imperial plans. These "autonomous actors" found creative solutions to adapt some strong imperial structures to their needs, and to tear down the useless ones. Therefore, transformations were born from the interaction between surviving elements of the mercantilist systems and empirical innovation, and the Hispanic world was a privileged field for such interaction.

The substantial economic success of Great Britain at the time of the global war against France was at least partially linked to an organized public-private synergy that supported the Navy thanks to high government spending. This Navy-based system favored infrastructural, agricultural, and manufacturing development. Britain's "aggressive mercantilism of the fiscal-naval state," as Nicholas Rodger (2010) defined it, although assimilable in intent, was different in many practical aspects both from the somewhat proto-Keynesian policies of the French crown —which with the pomp of the court financed French manufacturing development—, and from the system of vertical integration based on state concessions in the Hispanic world. British "naval mercantilism," in fact, was probably better than any other at producing strategic military benefits linked to the protection of trade. Moreover, the war fed, rather than breaking, the mechanism, which, however, functioned even in peace, unlike those that fed the terrestrial military power. Far from having been arrested by the Napoleonic Wars, the war overall fueled productive development (Neal 1990, 218), while the "authentic" modern free trade, a laissez-

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faire policy, had nothing to do with the affirmation of British hegemony in 1815. To function at its best, also as a multiplier of economic development, this Navy-based mercantilist system needed a global reach: to control the main strategic keys of the world —a process that Lord Castlereagh declared completed in 1816.

The crisis of the Spanish monarchy made Britain's victory in the Napoleonic Wars, with all its consequences, more probable. Among other things, the Spanish crisis facilitated the survival, expansion and consolidation of this naval mercantilism. Rather important naval stations with their detachments were gradually extended in Latin America, especially in the South. The possible consolidation of the French power over Latin America during the Napoleonic Wars had represented a potential threat to Britain before 1808: an enemy able to control the Southern Cone, for example, could have obstructed the passage from Cape Horn, but also the route from the Cape of Good Hope to India, which passed close to Brazil. The issue was strategic, and only secondarily commercial: to prevent the consolidation of Napoleonic domination in Europe from weakening British control of the seas, which among other things prevented Napoleon from monopolizing Spanish-American silver, London planned to bring Spain to her side: the porous Spanish system was fine, provided it was allied with Britain. But after the Austerlitz battle and the Tilsit treaty this seemed impossible. To hinder Napoleon's immediate prospects for controlling the region —and perhaps to scare Spain— plans were drawn up for Spanish-American independence, to be carried out through a British-backed independence army. The goal was realized, however, thanks to the transfer of the Portuguese royal family to Brazil and the French invasion of Spain, when London acutely chose to protect the rights of the Spanish Bourbons. Britain protected the passage of the Hispanic American territories into the anti-French camp, and the British Navy extended its presence in Latin America (Besseghini 2021). After this change in alliances, British support for Hispanic American independence fluctuated,

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but eventually, the commercial openings prompted London to tacitly support the breaking of imperial ties with Spain.

By opening ports while trade was the only "diplomatic" channel, indeed, Hispano-Americans took advantage of geopolitical rivalries to secure allies and independence. After the 1810 revolutions in Hispanic America, open trade nourished alternative alliances that had temporarily weakened after the *comercio de neutrales* crisis around 1807. In 1813-1814, for example, open trade justified the presence in Valparaíso of a US warship active against the Spanish in Peru, while the United States were at war with Britain. Meanwhile, US envoys were pushing for the "rebel" colonies' absolute independence, and in that moment, this would favor France (Besseghini 2020b). Therefore, to preserve the anti-French alliance with *all* the Hispanic world, London found itself forced, paradoxically, into a closer tacit synergy with the independentists, especially during the 1812 Anglo-American War. After 1815, Hispanic America became an element in the European balance, and the British defensive imperial strategy implied that influence in "rebel" Hispanic America could not be lost. By choosing this path, Britain discouraged and sometimes impeded Hispanic American alliances with its explicit or implicit enemies and extended the control necessary for imperial security: a process definable as informal imperialism.

In 1953 British historians Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher noted that in the nineteenth century there was a large, submerged part of modern imperial constructions which, like the submerged part of icebergs, was the most important. Henceforth, the expansion of imperial control that did not lead to annexations was referred to as "informal imperialism," although following Robinson and Gallagher, informal imperialism is more precisely a tacit project of imperial control by indirect means. In their scheme, starting from 1815, an initial intrusion by informal means would normally generate local crises, followed by a greater commitment of the

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imperial power or powers during the nineteenth century. This could take various forms, including conquests or the creation of a control firm enough to be defined as an "empire," albeit informal, but it could also take the form of a more limited attempt to strengthen support points for imperial security that were not so cumbersome as to suffocate local autonomy, and yet sufficient to ensure basic imperial interest. For many reasons, this minimal necessary, implicit, control of a few strategic elements was all that was worth getting in Latin America. London, for example, continued to prevent others, whether foreign or local powers, from monopolizing resources and strategic positions, preying on Hispanic divisions in the crisis. These submerged, defensive imperial pillars are interpretable as a pivot of the "swing to the East" of British imperial strategies, as they secured an acceptable settlement of the West.

A thread of historiography has discussed the role of businessmen as vectors of informal imperialism (Platt 1972b; Cohen 2019; Baeza 2019), and for Platt, Hispanic American external trade was too small to be a goal of imperialism (1972a) —an idea questioned in the recent historiography. However, businessmen and merchants are not automatically vectors of imperialism, and trying to demonstrate or, more often, to deny the existence of informal imperialism on the basis of the study of random merchants' trajectories is absurd. Although it may seem obvious, it is worth stating that merchants are not imperial agents or agents of imperialism unless they have duties in an imperial sense in connection with the center of political decisions. Trade may be a goal of imperialism, but the interest of individual traders is not an objective of imperial expansion, to which, however, traders can provide support. Merchants sometimes invoked and obtained imperial intervention, but explicit intervention was not always in their interest, nor in the imperial interest. However, all this does not mean that traders had no imperial function. The massive presence of traders justified that of warships. Warships were both a threat and a deterrent *vis-à-vis* the extension of rivals' geopolitical power,

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while a large presence of armed merchant ships in certain political circumstances served almost as a military presidio.[9] Due to their neutrality in the conflicts with Spain, foreigners almost acquired a monopoly and maintained hegemony in Latin American long-distance trade during the Wars of Independence. This gave great bargaining power to the warships' captains, who, until the new republican governments obtained recognition, exercised a semi-diplomatic role, settling political, strategic and commercial conflicts of interests, all converging in the export of coins and bullions. Yet foreigners were indispensable for the continuity in change, crucial for the supply of essential goods and for capital circulation during the wars. The fact that some foreigners controlled strategic sectors in the independence period, in brief, brought benefits to a wide variety of subjects.

In the interested *entente*, not only between hegemonic centers and nascent republics, but also between foreign and Hispanic traders, we find some submerged pillars of the global commercial reconfiguration. British and US merchants, in alliance among each other and with the Hispanics, became major mediators in direct trade from the Americas to India and China. This contributed, as we have seen, to "Asianize" the Philippines. The centers of Anglo-Saxon commerce in Asia were also those where trade with Hispanic America took place. Under the protection of the British Navy, the ships from Chile, then from Peru, Mexico, and Buenos Aires, arrived, above all, in Calcutta. There as well as in Canton, the important Hispanic-Asian community could find the Hispano-American silver and copper that merchants carried there through new channels after independence. Links between arms suppliers for the Independence Wars in Latin America, who were also major exporters of copper and silver, and the Anglo-Indian trading community, especially in Calcutta, or important US firms in Canton,[10] evidence the Wars of Independence's

[9] In 1808-1809 colonial authorities wrote about the impossibility of driving out British armed merchant ships because they did not have the sufficient military strength to do so.

[10] ASCM, FV, *Taccuini* I and II.

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influence in trade reconfiguration. The firm Begg, Barnard & Co., referred to in Besseghini's article, active in the arms trade in Chile and Peru, had business referents in Bengal, including Charles Myles, brother-in-law to *libertador* San Martín's British *aide-de-camp*. Joshua Waddington, from a group of arms dealers mentioned in Mazzeo's article, had a business contact (and probably relative) in Calcutta as well, Henry Waddington.[11] The partner and friend of the main British arms supplier in Buenos Aires, John McNeile, was a relative of the Alexanders of Calcutta, the powerful traders —of opium among other things— and well-known bankers who were active as referents in India of British and US arms merchants in Chile. Independence struggles in Latin America encouraged the exchange of commodities available in Europe during the post-war crisis —like firearms— for cheap copper and silver in demand in Asia, and there with opium, and then rice, indigo, cotton, tea, silks, and other commodities sought in the West. This was a partial consequence of the support that foreigners provided for the construction of the new American states, which in turn favored merchants suitable for use as political mediators for the recognition of independence. As a few articles here show, especially after 1815, when war material became overabundant in Europe and the United States, some foreigners were strategic in the conquest of independence as suppliers of arms and credit; as semi-diplomatic mediators in the establishment of public-private synergies to manage war expenditure; and in the opening of new, or in the restructuration of existing, global trade circuits.

Putting aside a priori judgments, we therefore see an imperial reconfiguration that created opportunities in new pacts. Just as the Bourbon empire was strengthened in the negotiation between the practices of trade and the needs of the fiscal-military state, so was informal

[11] Ibid.

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imperialism established in the negotiations between practices born of the crisis and the objectives of the new hegemonic centers. These centers also established subtle networks of strategic control by adapting to the initiative of the global merchants, Hispanic and foreign, who built a commercial revolution from below.

4. Global merchants in the imperial crisis: transformations from below

The articles in this special issue explore specific elements of the initiative from below, both in the transformations of imperial trade, and —mostly— in the initial role of the Hispanic world in the nineteenth-century globalization. Collaboration among Hispanics and foreigners was crucial to reconnect Hispanic America to global trade during the crisis as well as to consolidate the goal of independence. In the Philippines, such collaboration was fundamental to consolidate the new plantation economy and the integration of the archipelago in the regional and global trade after the old Galleon trade was discontinued. In this process, Hispanics were among the protagonists, as becomes obvious if one abandons pre-conceived ideas of dependent underdevelopment. The special issue shows them as active players in the transformations which led to a new global economic order.

Marie Christine Duggan weaves a tapestry about changes in global trade between the end of the "colonial" period and the beginning of the independent era from the vantage point of the Mexican Pacific coast, California and San Blas, from where the overview leads to China. Through the analysis of the networks and initiatives, legal and illegal, of one man, José de la Guerra y Noriega, and his collaborators, Duggan shows how in a few years this frontier area became central in trade to Asia. The author emphasizes how the fall of the Spanish empire profoundly transformed trade practices even in long-desired directions, but also destroyed the primary and secondary channels of the Hispanic protection system. The personal trajectories of men like De la Guerra y Noriega depended on the use, at the margins of the system, of the

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power tied to Mexico City's *Consulado*. The oscillation between the center's will to control and local pushes towards their own interests, along with the multiple possible alternative alliances in this game, led frontier Hispanics to manage relationships with foreigners with great contractual power, while their main alliances remained inside the imperial system during the crisis of the monarchy. De la Guerra adapted to independence by building a matrimonial alliance with a British merchant. Contrary to what is assumed in part of the US historiography, New England merchants were not the country's first important trading community. In fact, long before their emergence, Hispanic networks and, gradually, alliances between these and the British networks had set up the flourishing California trade. After the fall of the system that allowed him to minimize risks, De la Guerra reinvented his role and became one of the crucial Hispanic middlemen in the boom in the inter-Pacific trade.

The article by Deborah Besseghini analyses how the firearms trade from Europe and the United States incentivized this temporary explosion in exchanges between America and Asia. The independence conflicts created an important arms trade to Hispanic America that boomed after the end of the Napoleonic Wars, when the now superabundant arms in Europe found a market in Hispanic America through foreign middlemen, who, however, collaborated with active Hispanic partners and networks. Among the arms dealers, the British John McNeile and the US merchant David Curtis DeForest stood out, and both were politically well-connected at home and were indirectly involved in plans of foreign "imperial agents" in South America. The arms sales to the independent governments produced, for various reasons, benefits that encouraged the expansion of these merchants' trade and of their networks to Asia, but also in new sectors, such as loans to the independent governments and mining investments. The arms were paid with promissory notes, copper, and mining concessions that fostered the exportation of bullion and coins. In addition, the normalization of direct trade with Asia from South America

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undermined residual mercantilist barriers, such as those linked to the East India Company. Besseghini underlines the role of the leading arms traders, McNeile and DeForest, who were close to various pro-independence factions, as mediators of geopolitical interests between their respective countries and the independent governments. Furthermore, some of their associates were among the few foreign merchants able to settle in loyalist Peru, establishing the bases to foreign merchants' massive insertion after San Martín's arrival.

If untied to the local context, however, foreigners ran into serious obstacles. Laurine Manac'h investigates the initiatives of a few significant French merchants and their opportunities and difficulties in the Río de la Plata during the revolutionary and civil wars. Dealing with the case of the French informal consul in Buenos Aires, Antoine François Leloir, she also analyzes some elements of the political role of global merchants. Leloir's integration in the local elite and support of a specific political faction —Pueyrredón's centralist one— end up being quite important in his trajectory. These elements stand out, at least in comparison to any other informal foreign consul and British and US great merchants mentioned here. Basing her research mostly on documents from the Buenos Aires' commercial court, the author analyzes the different fate, respectively, of the French traders who were well integrated into the local power groups, and of those who were not. Manac'h underlines that French merchants received little support from their homeland at the beginning of the independence period and during the civil wars —probably even less than in the British and US cases, as this special issue shows. Therefore, French merchants who lacked sound alliances in the local societies had no support networks to fall back on, and felt even abandoned by their fellow countrymen, as was the case of François Touchard. Even the circulation of credit between France and the Río de la Plata was complex, sometimes also due to political circumstances. Yet it remained possible during the revolutionary turmoil, through specific institutional supports and personal channels.

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Francisco Betancourt-Castillo explores the role of warfare in the commercial reconfiguration of Hispanic America by focusing on the corsair activities that provided a group of Hispanic traders in Chile the opportunity to diversify their investments. In the brief period after the arrival of the *libertador* San Martín and before the creation of the national navy, traders such as Antonio Arcos and Felipe Santiago del Solar showed an extraordinary initiative by engaging in profitable privateering. This contradicts the traditional historiography's focus on the prominent role US merchants had in Hispanic American privateering, which corresponds to coeval British and French fears. The corsair activities of Hispanic ship owners based in Chile was very important: it extended from Acapulco to Manila, compromising the interests of a few Peruvian merchants. All this encouraged the successful presence of these same Chilean merchants and privateers in the export trade and the consolidation of Chilean centrality in the Pacific.

Cristina Mazzeo's essay underlines how transformations in the regional, mostly Peruvian, economic balances occurred alongside some degree of continuity with the colonial period in the practices and the geography of 1820s commercial networks. The most important change was the centrality of foreign merchants as connectors between the centers of Lima, Buenos Aires, and Valparaíso. There, where Hispanic family networks operated, new relationships (including, but not limited to, family relations) started to function among foreign merchants, which reinforced the links between these three ports. Mazzeo illuminates such relations by reconstructing personal trajectories such as that of Frederick Bergmann, and the networks of the groups active in Hispanic American trade and tied mainly to the Winter and Brotherston houses in England, all involved in the business of war. Independence could not be reached without the contribution of capital and goods that the foreigners could supply. The cases explored by Mazzeo suggest that the idea that Latin America came under foreign economic control perhaps originated from the exceptional circumstances of the Independence Wars,

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probably the moment of greater opportunity for foreign merchants (Platt 1972a, 48), particularly in the case of Peru, which was harshly hit by the war and afflicted by capital flight. The characteristic of this exceptional moment had implications in the medium term, but Hispanics were not entirely removed by foreigners and still operated in their flanks.

Ander Permanyer's article explores the Hispanic commercial networks between the Philippines, China, and the Mexican Pacific in the process of dismantlement of the Manila Galleon and the independence of Mexico, during the 1820s. As the Galleon —a mercantilist institution that survived even the "*comercio libre*"— disappeared, and the Royal Philippine Company entered into crisis, the "private" trade —thus called because it worked outside these mercantilist structures— between the Philippines, China, and India prospered, while further integrating the islands in the Asian economies. In the process, Mexico was not forgotten, and the reestablishment of the old silver-for-silks trans-Pacific trade was envisaged. A Hispanic-British trade was developed in the Western trading networks in Asia in the 1820s, a crucial collaboration for the advancement of the India-China opium trade before 1830, with financial support from the Philippines —whose investors were looking for new investment outlets after the end of the Galleon— and with the hopes of restoring the trans-Pacific trade. Permanyer looks at the steps taken in this direction by Francisco Xavier de Ezpeleta and Juan Nepomuceno Machado, who benefitted from their close connections with the Royal Philippine Company together with the British commercial *milieu*, as well as with the forebears of the famous British firm of Jardine, Matheson & Co. in China. These connections were fundamental for the development of new trans-Pacific relations between China and Mexico in particular, thanks to their alliance with the firm of Barron, Forbes & Co., established on Mexico's Western coast, which dominated trade in the central Pacific in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Even in the midst of the uncertainty generated by the collapse of the mercantilist structures,

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collaboration between Hispanics and British took place after the consolidation of the latter's hegemony in the world of trade in the Pacific.

The trajectories of the merchants here analyzed are astoundingly intertwined in distant settings that are usually studied separately, in the new structure that linked Hispanic America to global traffics. Not surprisingly, family ties were strategic to business expansion (Fernández-Pérez and Lluch 2015). Relatively few individuals, in fact, met each other in fundamental crossroads of this system, and many of them were foreigners in the Hispanic world. Without their author's previous concurrence, some of these characters reappear several times in the various essays of this issue. The Brotherstons and John Begg are referred to by Duggan and Mazzeo; François Antoine Leloir and Juan Pedro Varangot are present in Besseghini and Manac'h's articles; Estanislao Lynch is dealt with by Betancourt, Mazzeo, and Besseghini; John Parish Robertson and Thomas Kinder by Besseghini and Mazzeo; Eustace Barron appears in Besseghini and Permanyer's essays. All this shows the extraordinary power of these merchants in setting up and shoring up wide commercial, even global, circuits in moments of crisis. There are foreigners and Hispanics among them, some of Irish ascendancy like Lynch, and even characters able to adopt diverse identities depending on the circumstances. Eustace Barron, the British vice consul in San Blas, sometimes taken as an example of an agent of informal imperialist practices for his enduring role in silver smuggling, was born a Hispanic-Irish in Cádiz. As a Spanish and loyalist merchant linked to the Royal Philippine Company, he lived and traded in Peru and Manila, only to be co-opted by the British consul in Guadalajara, McNeile's former partner, as a key man to defend British interests in the Pacific coast of Mexico (Mayo 2006; Besseghini 2020a). Barron's is a paradigmatic case of the reinvention of the tradition of the trans-imperial mediator, typically of the Irish Catholics at the time of the clash between mercantilist empires. The British and US commercial hegemony was not built from

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scratch after the collapse of the Spanish empire, but precisely because of the transition period where collaboration between Hispanics and non-Hispanics took place, through which there was an exchange of knowledge, access to commercial networks, as well as of capital and credit, to markets, to power and social and political influence, etc. As has already been mentioned, these Hispanic merchants were more often than not individuals who held extensive trans-continental and trans-oceanic networks who benefitted from the profound changes taking place since the late eighteenth century, in coexistence with the mercantilist citadel that, before its collapse, attracted experiences and initiatives of Hispanic and foreign actors for its reconfiguration. And these experiences served in the foundational moment of the fall of the last great European empires in the Americas to create a new commercial order, with new roles suited to a new imperial framework.

Foreigners were indispensable "global connectors" in the context of the disintegration of the Spanish empire and the Wars of Independence. The Hispanics thought globally, in alliance with the emerging centers for finance and trade of London, New York, and Paris —and for the new or renewed empires— but also of Calcutta and Canton. This micro-history of global merchants in the Hispanic world at the time of independence partially rewrites the story of global macroeconomic and macro-imperial changes, addressing the centrality acquired by new actors, but also showing all the baselessness of what remains of the black legend on the Hispanic trade. In addition to the intertwining of foreign and Hispanic networks, the centrality of the Hispanic world at war as a testing ground for global merchants' initiatives in a revolutionary age has been underestimated so far. The following essays fill that lacuna.

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