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The Makings of Marginality: Land Use Intensification and the Diffusion of Rural Poverty  
in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Uruguay

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts  
in Geography

by

Samuel Brandt

2019



## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The Makings of Marginality: Land Use Intensification and the Diffusion of Rural Poverty  
in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Uruguay

by

Samuel Brandt

Master of Arts in Geography

University of California, Los Angeles, 2019

Professor Stephen Andrew Bell, Chair

This thesis examines the historical-geographical processes that led to the marginalization of a rural underclass in Uruguay and to the formation of rural informal settlements, or *rancheríos*. In doing so, it brings forth three main ideas. The first is that of the *pastoral city-state* as a metaphor for the excessive centrality of Montevideo in a territory dominated by extensive livestock raising. The second and third look at the makings of rural marginality and the gradual transformation of Uruguay's rural proletariat from semi-nomadic gauchos to sedentary peons as the result of the closing of two frontiers; a spatial frontier in the colonial period, and a technological frontier in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In both cases, the intensification of land use resulted in the consolidation of Montevideo's primacy.

The thesis of Samuel Brandt is approved.

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2019

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INTRODUCTION  
*The Pastoral City-State and Rancheríos as Symbols of Uruguay's Urban-Rural Inequalities*



Figure 1: Map of Uruguay for the reader's reference, showing Montevideo, the nineteen departments, and other locations mentioned in this thesis. (Source: CIA, 1995)

At the entrance to almost every small town in Uruguay are little white houses neatly ordered in rows. These homes are part of the Movement for the Eradication of

Unhealthy Rural Housing (MEVIR). Since its inception in 1967, MEVIR has become a ubiquitous piece of Uruguay's rural landscape and a prominent social service for Uruguay's rural poor. Over five decades later, MEVIR houses over 30,000 families, a remarkable figure for a country, where the vast majority of its 3.4 million citizens live in urban areas.

Though today it is a parastatal organization governed by a board appointed by the Ministry of Housing and Spatial Planning, MEVIR's origins are not state-directed, but philanthropic. Alberto Gallinal Heber (1909-1994), one of Uruguay's largest landowners, founded MEVIR to provide, he said, "dignified living" to rural laborers who were residing in disease-prone informal settlements made of mud and straw scattered on the interstitial spaces between ranches in Uruguay's sparsely populated countryside. These settlements were called *rancheríos*, or in a more pejorative connotation, *pueblos de ratas* (rat towns).

Before studying MEVIR on its own terms, it is necessary to understand why Gallinal deemed it a necessary intervention into Uruguay's rural landscape. This MA thesis examines the historical-geographical processes that led to the marginalization of a rural underclass in Uruguay and to the formation of rural informal settlements, or *rancheríos*. In doing so, I bring forth three main ideas. The first is that of the *pastoral city-state* as a metaphor for the excessive centrality of Montevideo in a territory dominated by extensive livestock raising. The second and third look at the makings of rural marginality and the gradual transformation of Uruguay's rural proletariat from semi-nomadic gauchos to sedentary peons as the result of the closing of two frontiers; a spatial frontier in the colonial period, and a technological frontier in the latter half of the

19<sup>th</sup> century. In both cases, the intensification of land use resulted in the consolidation of Montevideo's primacy.

The fact that *pueblos de ratas* were a persistent scourge across the rural Uruguayan landscape in the first place may come as a surprise to those with passing familiarity with Uruguay. After all, by most metrics, Uruguay in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century outstripped its Latin American neighbors in terms of material and cultural development, socioeconomic equality, and political stability, earning the sobriquet “*la Suiza de America*” (The Switzerland of the Americas).<sup>1</sup> Outside observers noted the similarities to Europe in architecture, customs, and of course, the demographic composition of the Uruguayan people, with a vast majority descended from recent European immigrants or Spaniards who arrived in the colonial era. The already small indigenous element had been completely subsumed into the creole masses during the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and blacks descended from slaves never numbered above 10% of the national population.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, Uruguay has rightly been touted as a model of social justice. Most foreign monographs about Uruguay in the 20<sup>th</sup> century are a variation on this theme, focusing on the achievements of the “welfare state” presided over by José Batlle y Ordóñez, president from 1903-1907 and 1911-1915 and major influence until his death in 1929.<sup>3</sup> By today's standards, Batlle y Ordóñez's accomplishments in labor legislation, education, secularism, and other fields stand out as progressive. Even those writing after the

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<sup>1</sup> For a good discussion of the genesis of this term and the vehement criticism of it by certain strands of Uruguayan intellectuals, see: Caetano (2018).

<sup>2</sup> In this thesis, the term “creole” refers to a racially mixed (through predominantly of Spanish ancestry) population native to Uruguay as opposed to immigrants from Europe. For more on the history of Afro-Uruguayans, see Andrews (2010), and Borucki (2015).

<sup>3</sup> For example, see: Hanson (1938), Fitzgibbon (1954), Lindahl (1962), Alisky (1968).

stagnation and social unrest of the 1960s tend to conclude with a rosy picture of the Oriental Republic, focusing on its superiority—actual or perceived—over its neighbors, and mentioning, but not centering or elaborating on the growing problem of *rancheríos* and the increasing social and economic rift between Montevideo and the interior.<sup>4 5</sup>

For most of these authors, their work on Uruguay was an aberration in a career that took them mainly to other parts of Latin America. In light of the position of the North American and European academic during the Cold War, poverty, it seems, was of greater concern in other parts of the hemisphere. More pertinent to the matter at hand is that most of these studies were written from sojourns in Montevideo and through disproportionate exposure to the urban political and intellectual classes, with limited direct knowledge of affairs in the Uruguayan interior. This bias in foreign scholarship has bearing on consumption of knowledge about Uruguay abroad.

However, if we look at Uruguayan intellectual history in the first two thirds of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we notice a major caveat to the notion of Uruguay as a model of social justice; that model goes out the window if we erase Montevideo and the departmental capitals.<sup>6</sup> In other words, before, during, and after Batlle’s welfare state, government

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<sup>4</sup> Since independence in 1830, Uruguay’s official name has been “The Oriental Republic of Uruguay”, owing to its location on the eastern bank of the Uruguay River.

<sup>5</sup> Following this period, there is also the pressing matter of growing rifts within Montevideo itself, and the emergence of urban informality at the same time that Gallinal’s initiatives reduced rural informality.

<sup>6</sup> Uruguay is divided into 19 departments. It is significant that until 2010, there were only two levels of government in Uruguay, national, and departmental. This recent addition of municipalities was more of a token gesture. Thus smaller settlements within each department did not have their own representation. Government presence was limited to outreach from branches of the state such as ministries, or *juntas* of the departmental government. The title of Rankin (1998)’s book chapter, “Why Are There No Local Politics in Uruguay?” is telling.

policies privileged the urban, exacerbating the peripheral role of the *campo* (countryside), and in so doing, let *rancheríos* and a rural exodus continue apace.<sup>7</sup>

Noteworthy is the fact that these claims came from all points of the ideological spectrum.<sup>8</sup> The underdevelopment of the *campo* relative to the city was of concern to conservative landowners such as Luis Alberto de Herrera, who resented the unrelenting urban biases of social and economic policy. But it was also of concern to avowed communists, such as Vicente Rovetta, who insisted on the right of rural laborers to own the land upon which they worked, whether they were in agriculture or livestock.<sup>9</sup> Regardless of their endgame, what these thinkers saw in common was that despite the progress in Uruguayan society overall, eradicating *rancheríos* was a problem of utmost importance that demanded urgent action.

The dichotomy between capital and interior—or more accurately, capitals and interiors—in Uruguay is not to be taken lightly. In my forthcoming book, *Uruguay: The Little Country in the Middle*, I have termed this small South American nation as the *pastoral city-state*. In practice, this means two things. First, the extreme primacy of Montevideo in the national urban system (see Figure 2), and second, a sparsely populated interior dominated by pastoral activities rather than crop farming or unproductive land such as deserts or mountains.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> This exemplifies the argument put forth by Burns (1983), that the benefits of modernization in Latin America were unevenly distributed and in fact formed a barrier to development.

<sup>8</sup> For example, see: De Herrera (1920), Martínez Lamas (1930), Chiarino and Saralegui (1944), Solari (1958), Vidart (1960), Rovetta (1961), Terra (1969).

<sup>9</sup> During Uruguay's military dictatorship (1973-1985), Rovetta exiled himself not to the US, Western Europe, or other Latin American countries, as did many key figures of the left, but to China, where he was received personally by Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai.

<sup>10</sup> Alonso (1984) p. 10 notes that 88% of Uruguay's land is productive, a staggering amount.

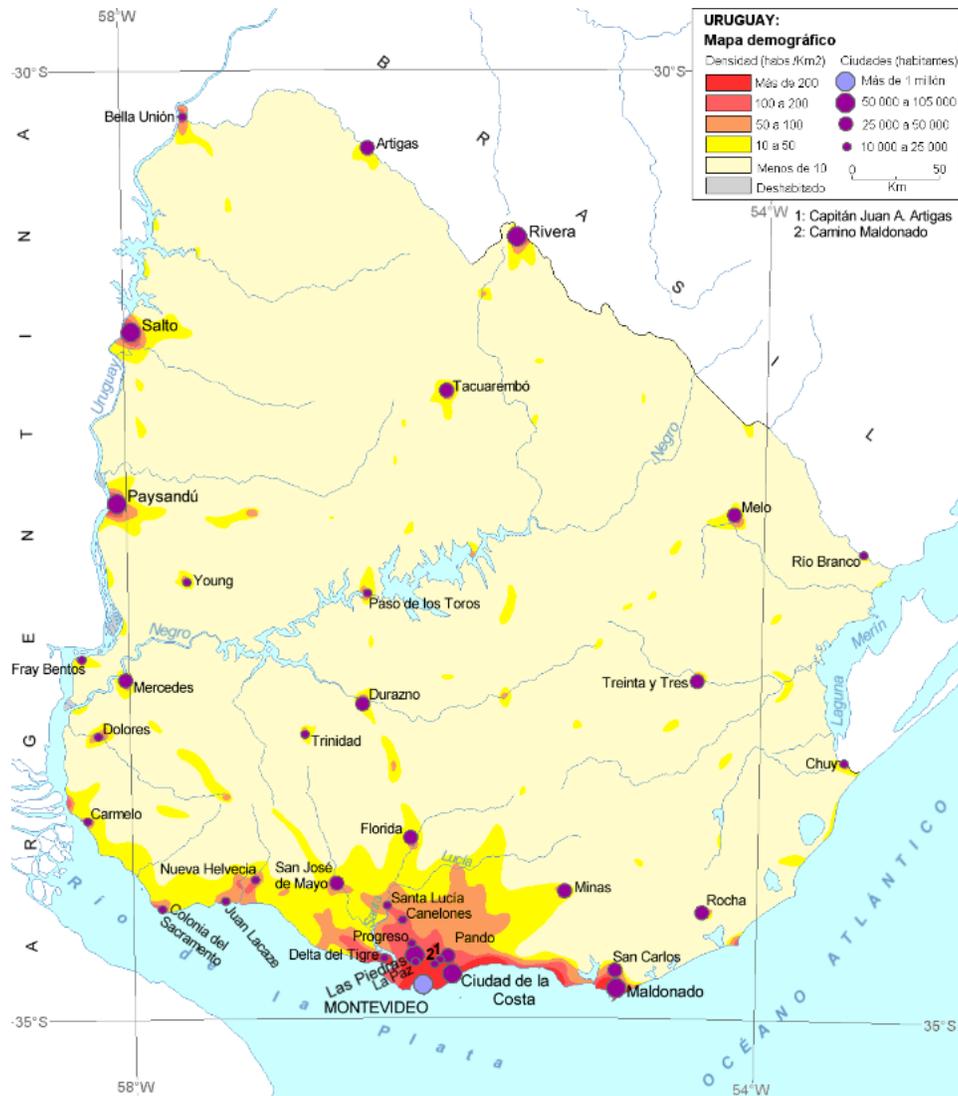


Figure 2: Map of Uruguay's population density, illustrating the sparse settlement of the countryside and the concentration of population in and around Montevideo. (Source: Administración Nacional de Educación Pública, [http://aulas.uruguayeduca.edu.uy/pluginfile.php/6834/mod\\_resource/content/1/modulo2-fichas-actividades-estudiantes/ficha\\_13.html](http://aulas.uruguayeduca.edu.uy/pluginfile.php/6834/mod_resource/content/1/modulo2-fichas-actividades-estudiantes/ficha_13.html), undated circa 2011)

Montevideo has always been a primate city par excellence. Uruguay has never had a second city, much less third, fourth, or fifth. Today, Montevideo's metro area is home to 1.7 million of Uruguay's 3.4 million people, which makes it 17 times bigger than the country's second largest metro area, Salto, at just over 120,000. Salto the city, in turn, is 50 times bigger than the second largest settlement in its eponymous department. This is

evidence of the fact that Uruguay's macrocephaly is true on both the national and departmental scales. Most departmental capitals could be considered *meta-Montevideos*, that is, primate cities in their own department.<sup>11</sup> This trend is most prevalent in the ranching territory of the north. Historically, due to their locations along waterways or railways, the departmental capitals have served as a link in the urban hierarchy between the isolated, sparsely populated *campo* and Montevideo. With respect to the distribution of population, institutions, and communications, the only countries more centralized than Uruguay are literal city-states like Singapore and Kuwait.



Figure 3: National Seal at School #1, Melo, Cerro Largo Department (photo by author 18 November 2018)

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<sup>11</sup> In the words of Simon Hanson (1938) p. 246, “Montevideo is a great head on a very small body”. Credit is due also to Rial (1984) for use of the term *macrocefálico*. Taking 2011 Census data, 12 of Uruguay's 18 interior departments have a capital city with over half the population, *and* no other city of more than 1/3 the population of the capital.

Exhibiting an unusual degree of urbanization and macrocephaly since its conception, Uruguay has always been a quasi city-state. Yet because Montevideo's growth was only possible due to the prowess of extensive livestock ranching requiring few laborers on undulating plains, *the pastoral city-state* is a more accurate term. With horse and cow, half the national seal pays homage to Uruguay's zoologic and rural foundations (Figure 3). The other half pays homage to the country's human and urban foundations, with the images of the fortress that defended the city and port of Montevideo, and the scale of justice. As this prominent national symbol illustrates, the underlying feature of Uruguay's geography is the relationship between a dominant maritime capital and a sparsely populated interior, where oases of humans dot a green desert of cows, an all the more remarkable incongruity given that Uruguay is situated in a temperate climate.

In his 1930 work, *Riqueza y Pobreza del Uruguay*, author, economist and head of statistics for the Customs House at the Port of Montevideo, Julio Martínez Lamas explains the fatalistic dominance of cattle over humans on Uruguayan soil,

*Extensive cattle ranching in itself is a paradox: wealth and poverty at the same time: preponderant factor and almost insurmountable obstacle of the national future. An estancia is a hortus conclusus: the ideal rancher resides in the meat of the cows and the fleece of nature, more than in intense human work; a factory is an ensemble of men, a colony is an ensemble of families, a ranch is a group of cows...As much as cows grow by sporadic action, a man will always be worth a hundred beasts.*<sup>12</sup>

This metaphor of the *estancia* (livestock ranch) as *hortus conclusus* (Figure 4) or enclosed garden extends to the nation and its limited internal market. In essence, the biggest thing missing from a cattle-driven society is human capital.

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<sup>12</sup> Translation by author



Figure 4: The Words *Hortus Conclusus* (“enclosed garden”) are engraved on the façade of the chapel of the Colegio Nuestra Señora del Huerto in Mercedes, Soriano Department. The building was designed by French architect Pierre Paul Alfred Massüe. (photo by author, 16 November 2014)

In simplified terms, as the interior produced the country's wealth, the city reaped most, but not all, of the benefits. Moreover, in the time period Martínez Lamas was observing, Montevideo received the vast majority of European immigrants who preferred urban occupations to farming or ranching.<sup>13</sup> Late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Montevideo was the elegant capital where upwardly mobile immigrants could buy plots of land in growing neighborhoods such as La Unión and Jacinto Vera, while in the *campo*, semi-feudal relationships persisted, not least those having to do with possession of land.<sup>14</sup>

The persistence of *pueblos de ratas* does not mean that there were not major campaigns to improve the well-being of the interior. In fact, there is a long list of services that governments provided beyond Montevideo in the latter third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and first two thirds of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Most notable was education. Following the ideal of free, mandatory, and secular primary education advocated by reformer José Pedro Varela in the 1870s, there was a proliferation of *escuelas rurales* (akin to one-room schoolhouses) across Uruguay's countryside, though it must be noted that long distances and poor communications in the more remote areas remained (and still remain) a hindrance to attendance.<sup>15</sup> It must also be said that secondary education, while instituted

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<sup>13</sup> As a case in point, for one of the most prominent and stereotypical groups, the Galicians, the idea of "*Hacer la America*" (Making America) was more easily achieved in the growing capital by taking to professions such as tram (and later, bus) driver, or publican. The large public sector and accompanying posts created by the *batllista* welfare state also served as an incentive for immigrants to find work in the city rather than move to the interior.

<sup>14</sup> It is important to note the relatively minimal impact of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century agricultural colonies populated by European emigrants in Uruguay's interior compared to that of neighboring regions, such as the *pampa gringa* in Argentina, and the colonial zones of Rio Grande do Sul. The issue of agricultural colonization will return in Chapter 3.

<sup>15</sup> Varela was heavily influenced by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento and Horace Mann. See Carreño Rivero (2010) for more on the lineage of Varela's pedagogical thought. There was a distinct geography to this rural educational project, as the extension of a sense of nationhood spread from the relatively more enlightened city towards the interior with an eye to the impending southern extension of Brazilian culture. Artifacts of "progress", be they education, material culture, or technology in Uruguay have almost always moved from south to north.

in the departmental capitals, rarely penetrated the *campo*, and tertiary education remained exclusively in Montevideo. Rural electrification, potable water, and policlinics were among the other public works undertaken in the interior, especially under *batllista* regimes.<sup>16</sup>

In sum, the material landscape of Uruguay's interior shifted considerably in the hundred years leading up to MEVIR, on account of both technological changes in the capitalist ranching system and state initiatives in public works. However, in light of these transformations, the lack of any comprehensive effort to erase the blemish of the *pueblos de ratas* and house those dispossessed by the decreasing labor demands of an increasingly mechanized ranching system becomes all the more significant. The following narrative is not simply about the economic and dwelling fate of Uruguay's rural poor, but about the relationship between this fate and the material and spatial transformations that occurred in Uruguayan territory.

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<sup>16</sup> The term *batllista* refers both to the governments of José Batlle y Ordóñez and to the followers of his ideas.

CHAPTER 1  
Closing the Spatial Frontier: Emerging Ranching Latifundia and an Urban-Rural Binary  
in Colonial Uruguay

This chapter demonstrates how from the introduction of cattle in 1611 to Uruguay's independence in 1830, the ecological conditions of the grasslands to the east of the Uruguay River, the portion of the broader pampas known as the Banda Oriental (Eastern Bank), yielded a system of land use dominated by large-scale holdings (latifundia) and a political system dominated by urban interests that paved the historical contingency for *pueblos de ratas* to become a national phenomenon later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. During this time, land went from being wildly abundant and lacking ascribed value to scarce, legally bound and linked with social hierarchies. On top of the growing breach between port capital and sparsely populated hinterland, the hunger for land and inward expansion resulted in increasing inequalities within the interior.

A series of events during the Colonial period (1512-1830) help us understand this rather gradual social-environmental transformation of the Uruguayan landscape from a barren and forgotten corner of the Spanish Empire to a place with an unexpected source of wealth in nature, and increasing geopolitical importance. In addition to their heuristic purpose, each event served as a catalyst in this process. The events are as follows: the first landfall of Europeans on the Eastern Bank of the Uruguay River (1512), the release of cattle on the Banda Oriental by Governor of the Río de la Plata and Paraguay, Hernando Arias de Saavedra (1611), the founding of Montevideo (1724), the *Real Instrucción*, or royal decree that made possible the purchase of land (1754), the expulsion of the Jesuits from American lands of the Spanish Crown (1767), the opening of free trade between ports within the colonies (1778), the opening of the first salt-beef plants

(1788), and the land reform proposals of José Gervasio Artigas (1815). This chapter in turn, analyzes how each of these events contributed to the intensification of land use and rise of rural marginality.

Before diving into these events, some notes about physical and human geographical context will help familiarize readers uninitiated with Uruguay.

First is a reminder about Uruguay's peculiar biophysical state, as alluded to in the introduction. For reference, the size of present-day Uruguay is around 176,000 square kilometers, slightly larger than England and Wales combined. Its topography is remarkably flat, especially in the Southwest, where there are deeper soils, though most of the rest of the country is covered in rolling hills, notably a ridge called the Cuchilla Grande that reaches as high as 500 meters, and extends from the Atlantic all the way to the Brazilian border. As part of the pampa biome, Uruguay's vegetation is dominated by fertile grasslands. The minimal tree cover and absence of large mammals or topographical barriers accelerated the spread of cattle during the colonial period. Until the completion of railways in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the one major barrier to communication was the Río Negro, which roughly divides the country into north and south. This had important implications for the distribution of settlement in the colonial period, and meant that during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the north often had stronger links to Brazil than to Montevideo.

Second is a note about population. During the colonial period, *mestizaje* between Europeans, indigenous Americans, and Africans happened in the Banda Oriental as it did elsewhere in the hemisphere, though this was more apparent in the interior of the country, than it was in Montevideo. Spanish men of various regional origins, removed from the

reach of the Crown, had children by women from tribes native to the Banda Oriental, such as the Charrúas, Guenoas, and Minuanes. Over time, more and more slaves from various parts of Africa and Brazil mixed into this population, especially after 1800.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, overall population numbers for the territory of present-day Uruguay remained very small throughout the colonial period, totaling under 31,000 in 1800, and 74,000 in 1829, a year before independence.<sup>18</sup> Starting with the founding of Montevideo in 1724, the threat of Portuguese expansion, rather than resource exploitation, was the primary reason the Spanish began to populate an area that had been so remarkably bereft of humans for a temperate zone. The Spanish-Portuguese rivalry for territory will be a recurring theme in this chapter.

*First landfall of Europeans: “Tierra sin ningún provecho” (1512)*

The first hundred years of Spanish possession on the Eastern Bank was marked more by absence than presence. The Crown declared the area a “*tierra sin ningún provecho*” (land without any benefit) and failed to found any settlements.<sup>19</sup> This was due in part to the absence of known mineral riches, but also the scant possibility of coercing the native population into a system of retributive plantation agriculture.<sup>20</sup> Some estimates

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<sup>17</sup> See: Sluyter (2012) p. 149. Borucki (2015) p. 36 notes the importance of trans-imperial networks of slaves in the Spanish and Portuguese Empires, where 60% of Africans who disembarked in the Río de la Plata had passed through Brazilian ports.

<sup>18</sup> Pellegrino (2003) p. 8

<sup>19</sup> Likewise, the Portuguese Crown showed little interest in founding permanent settlements in the area that is now the extreme South of Brazil.

<sup>20</sup> For the seminal quote on this matter, see Real de Azúa (1984) [1973] p. 17-18: “La zona oriental del Plata...[era la] última porción entonces, del Reino de Indias que pareció merecer metódico cuidado—y ello bajo el acicate de pretensiones rivales—sin masas indígenas aptas para su reducción a servidumbre y aun sin esas riquezas minerales de importancia ni esas posibilidades climáticas para una retributiva ‘agricultura de plantación’”. Curtin (1990) considers the peripheral regions of the Americas, such as the Banda Oriental, as beyond direct lines of imperial control.

suggest that there were as few as 5,000 indigenous living in the territory that is now Uruguay during the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>21</sup> Those nomadic hunter-gatherer communities did not have writing systems, or polities.<sup>22</sup> For all intents and purposes, the 16<sup>th</sup> century in Uruguay was a dormant one as far as the land's agronomic potential.

*Hernandarias unleashes cows (1611)*

In *With Broadax and Firebrand*, Warren Dean (1997) recounts how the Portuguese who used these tools set about destroying the precolonial forested landscape to pave the way for agriculture, ranching, and settlement. These ecological changes had repercussions on a massive geographical scale. Broadaxes and firebrands were not necessary in Uruguay given the almost complete lack of forests. However, large-scale environmental change due to directives of a colonial government is also central to early Uruguayan history. The protagonist in this story is one Hernando Arias de Saavedra, better known as Hernandarias. Born in Asunción, he served as Governor of the Rio de la Plata and Paraguay on four occasions between 1592 and 1618. With support from his superiors in Madrid, he made a decision that would change the Eastern Bank forever. In 1611 on Isla Vizcaíno, an island in the Uruguay River in present day Soriano Department, around 80 kilometers upstream from where the Uruguay River joins the Paraná River to form the Río de la Plata estuary, Hernandarias unleashed cows and horses.<sup>23</sup> Following a century of neglect, he was the first to see these lands as offering

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<sup>21</sup> For example, see Alonso (1984) p. 15

<sup>22</sup> Zum Felde (1963) [1919] p. 13 notes that the aboriginal tribes not only didn't have permanent settlements, but didn't even build temporary dwellings.

<sup>23</sup> Estimates differ as to the exact number. Between 50 and 100 is most likely. Hernandarias was not alone, but he was the first. From the 1620s, the Jesuits released a great deal of livestock in

more to the Crown than a simple path from the Atlantic into gold and silver country thousands of miles inland. The livestock quickly made their way onto the mainland and reproduced exponentially given the abundance of natural grassland and the absence of other large animals that would serve as predators.

Hernandarias ushered in what Alberto Zum Felde (1963) [1919] calls the Leather Age, a play of words on the Bronze Age and Iron Age, in which exploitation of wild cattle for their hides would facilitate Uruguay's *genre de vie*.<sup>24</sup> The primary characteristic of the Leather Age was easy exploitation with minimal investment. To say that these beasts were important is an understatement. Insofar as there was an economy, they were it.<sup>25</sup> First of all, just about everything one needed in their daily life could be provided by the body of a cow, be it meat for sustenance, skin for blankets, hides for shelter, tallow for candles, or fat for cooking.<sup>26</sup> These material conditions of abundance allowed a great deal of personal liberty, where association and cooperation were far less necessary than in arable farming or plantation societies. As such, the early ranching economy also allowed

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their reductions in the upper Uruguay (present day Rio Grande do Sul) that migrated south. See Kleinpenning (1995) p. 15

<sup>24</sup> Zum Felde (1963) [1919] p.15 introduces the counterfactual that without the introduction of cattle on a large scale, the Eastern Bank would be small [European] settlements on the coast with an "inhospitable" indigenous interior. This is because colonization requires some type of natural resource to sustain itself and offer prospects for exploitation. In Uruguay, this couldn't have been agriculture, Zum Felde argues, because there were not enough people, and the Spanish crown didn't have free commerce like the British dominions in North America. *Genre de vie* is an important idea in geographic thought, introduced by the French geographer Paul Vidal de la Blache (1911) arguing that humans use a diverse set of physical environmental attributes to fashion a distinctive place or region. Zum Felde (1963) [1919]'s use of the term "*genero de vida*" multiple times suggests he may have had some awareness of this strand of thought. Indeed, before around 1960, French human geography carried great influence in most of South America.

<sup>25</sup> Kleinpenning (1995) p. 25 states the following: "Until the second half of the eighteenth century, the legal and illegal vaquerías formed the predominant and sometimes even the only form of production in the Banda Oriental." Zum Felde (1963) [1919] p. 27 claims that "from 1700 to 1800, leather is, in effect, the only material of all industry [on the Eastern Bank]".

<sup>26</sup> Zum Felde (1963) [1919] p. 28 cites a Jesuit traveler to Montevideo in 1727 just after the foundation of the city. He noticed 40 houses made of hides, compared to only two made of mud.

for a much more horizontal social structure than was emerging elsewhere in the Americas.

Groups of men on horseback would settle for three to four months at a time around a *mina de ganado*, or “cattle mine”, where they had rounded up a particularly appealing group of beasts in a convenient location and would methodically slaughter the animals.<sup>27</sup> The imagery of the word mine is powerful in two ways. First, by painting cattle as a resource present in “naturally-occurring” deposits in a way that plants, and even smaller livestock aren’t, it distances ranching from the docile activity of arable farming. Second, it brings to mind the gruesome image of digging into the guts of the animal the way one might dig deep in search of silver, or gold. In these expeditions known as *vaquerias*, a *capataz* (foreman) directed a large group of *peones* (peons).<sup>28</sup> While the structural origins of a labor hierarchy persisting today emerged, it is important to point out that during the Leather Age, social and spatial distance was minimal, and there were almost no institutions that worked to consolidate this hierarchy. “Sin Rey, sin ley, sin fé” (Without king, law and faith) is a widely cited saying about the way of life of these first gauchos. This liberty was possible in part because both banks of the Uruguay River were still such a peripheral part of the Spanish and Portuguese Empires.<sup>29</sup>

With these mines of cattle, what sorts of human-induced patterns in the landscape emerged? As for the people themselves, this form of extraction did not require the need

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<sup>27</sup> The absence of women and children in the historical record with respect to plantation societies is notable. See the work of Richard Slatta for more on the social and geographic origins of the nascent gaucho “race” in Argentina. Kleinpenning (1995) p. 22-23 elaborates on the *ganado de mina*.

<sup>28</sup> In a 20<sup>th</sup> century context, *peón* is the general term for a rural wage laborer.

<sup>29</sup> In his work another corner of the empire, the Oriente of Cuba, Martínez-Fernández (2010) makes the point that the frontier is not an entirely spatial concept, but also a social one, having to do with the inability to reproduce hierarchies away from the imperial centers of control.

for organized permanent settlements. Even with a growing cattle economy, there was still only one permanent non-military settlement on the Eastern Bank through the first quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the hamlet of Santo Domingo Soriano, not coincidentally adjacent to where Hernandarias had first released cattle in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>30</sup> The population of the Banda Oriental as a whole remained small, since the form of production was based on temporary occupation, and since one man could look after hundreds if not thousands of cows. Though the object of hunting had changed, the basis of a hunter-gathering society had altered little in the transition from the indigenous Charrúas, Guenoas, and Minuanes to gauchos. The *campo* was simply a site of indiscriminate slaughter, where land and cattle were not private property. Moreover, because this economy was purely based on extraction, minimal investment was required.<sup>31</sup>

We would be remiss not to place this situation in its hemispheric context. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Spanish Crown founded towns from Mexico's colonial heartland to the Central Valley of Chile and forced indigenous people into a caste system and coerced labor. It also opened institutions of higher learning, and built glorious churches bedecked with the mineral wealth extracted by this labor. Yet in the Eastern Bank, the murmurings of a nascent cattle economy remained an afterthought and backwater. To summarize, we return to the adage about the early gaucho way of life. The lack of geopolitical interest besides the threat of Portuguese expansionism signified "sin Rey", and the lack of delineated property exemplified "sin ley". Important also was the absence of religion, "sin fé". The Church's disinterest in the Eastern Bank came largely due to three factors:

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<sup>30</sup> The *raison d'être* of Colonia del Sacramento, founded in 1680, and which changed hands between the Spanish and Portuguese multiple times in the Colonial period, was military control, rather than prompting any agrarian settlement.

<sup>31</sup> Kleinpenning (1995) p. 25, Astori (1971) p.12

the lack of ready sources of wealth for constructing churches (or at least the type of churches the Crown prioritized), the subservience of the church in Uruguay to Buenos Aires, and the extremely low number of sedentary people to justify building.<sup>32</sup>

#### *Founding of Montevideo (1724)*

Few towns in the world have had such lasting geographic consequences upon their inception as Montevideo. Founded in 1724 in large part to thwart Portuguese territorial ambitions, La Ciudad de San Felipe y Santiago de Montevideo introduced an urban-rural binary to the Eastern Bank, and a division within this rural canvas between a south that was closely linked with the capital and thus developed more quickly and a more distant north that maintained closer ties with the Lusophone element and was slower to adapt to technological and legal changes.<sup>33</sup> As significantly, Montevideo's founding ushered in a new era of rural land use characterized by private ownership, a centrifugal movement that eventually reached the extremities of the Banda Oriental.

The fortunes and opportunities of new *montevideanos* both derived from and had an impact upon the *campo* and its bovine wealth, now totaling 25 million cows.<sup>34</sup> Land became scarcer as urban-dwellers were granted rights to areas around the city. In the process, the urban elite composed mostly of Spaniards and their children became absentee owners of new *estancias* on which more rigid labor hierarchies emerged, and

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<sup>32</sup> Alisky (1969) p. 60 has promoted the first two factors, and I have not seen anyone refute them.

<sup>33</sup> In light of the ecological conditions of the colonial Eastern Bank, Zum Felde (1963) [1919] p. 22 characterizes the countryside as liberty, abundance and adventure, while the city was monotony, subjection, and necessity.

<sup>34</sup> Figure from Alisky (1969) p. 6

were codified in the types and location of housing.<sup>35</sup> This increasing value of keeping cattle in one place (an *estancia*) rather than the more mobile *vaquería* was crucial in the establishment of private land ownership. However, since not much changed with respect to why the cows were being slaughtered (the value of their hides), the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century saw minimal shifts in the capital investment required.<sup>36</sup>

For its first three decades, Montevideo was the only permanent Spanish town on the Eastern Bank. When settlements were founded in the following three decades, they were all within a day's march. Only at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century did the Spanish found towns farther afield such as Minas, Rocha, and Melo, largely due to the geopolitical motives of consolidating their territory up to the border with Portuguese-occupied lands.<sup>37</sup> Before the arrival of the railway in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Río Negro was a major impediment to communications. Because of this, it is significant that reaching neither Minas nor Rocha nor Melo require crossing any major waterways.

#### *Real Instrucción (1754)*<sup>38</sup>

Alberto Zum Felde calls the period from the founding of Montevideo (1724) until Artigas' independence struggle (1811) *la Gobernación*. During this time, the political and civil organization of the country was formed according to the norms of Hispanic Civilization, decided far away from the South Atlantic.<sup>39</sup> Land played no small part in this organization. The lack of mineral riches on the Eastern Bank meant that the Crown

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<sup>35</sup> For more on absentee ownership, see Kleinpenning (1995) p. 35. See Kleinpenning (1995) p. 42-43 for a detailed description of labor and housing on the colonial *estancia*.

<sup>36</sup> See Astori (1971) p.15

<sup>37</sup> See Benvenuto (1967) p. 22-24

<sup>38</sup> For a lengthier discussion from which I draw heavily, see Kleinpenning (1995)'s section titled, "The development of private landed property and rural occupation rights" p. 45-58

<sup>39</sup> Zum Felde (1963) [1919] p. 12

didn't ascribe much value to land until it faced economic difficulty and serious geopolitical challenges.<sup>40</sup> Once land became more of a commodity, where its value lay in people occupying it, the only way to populate this land was to grant it.

Under the Spanish Crown, there were a few different ways one could acquire land in the Banda Oriental. First were *repartos*, aimed at encouraging and regulating colonization. This is how land was given to the first inhabitants of Montevideo, and in turn, other settlements officially established by the crown.<sup>41</sup> Citizens were given a parcel (*solar*) in the city, a plot of arable land (*chacra*) of around 200-300 hectares beyond the urban limits, and an *estancia* of 1,875 hectares (known as a *suerte*), and usufruct of the *ejido*, or communal lands, east of the walled city.<sup>42</sup> Compared to *repartos*, the next type, *mercedes* were almost always larger. Authorities granted *mercedes* in return for important services rendered to the Crown, something that naturally encouraged favoritism.<sup>43</sup>

The first two mechanisms for land acquisitions were a form of gift that did not require purchase or occupation for legal possession. Given that much land remained unused, or occupied with incomplete rights, the 1754 *Real Instrucción* revoked the *Réal*

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<sup>40</sup> Rovetta (1961) p. 9 notes the relationship between land value and economic difficulty.

<sup>41</sup> The first group came directly from the pre-existing Buenos Aires, while two waves of settlers arrived from the Canary Islands in 1726 and 1729. See Capillas de Castellanos (1971) p. 3 and p. 10.

<sup>42</sup> See also: Alonso (1984) p. 15. Barracchini and Altezor Fuentes (2010) p. 30-34 have reproduced a list of the recipients and the size of their land.

<sup>43</sup> Kleinpenning (1995) p. 46 continues, "While the *repartos* led to the emergence of a class of small owners, the *mercedes* encouraged the creation of large estates with few, if any, people. The aim of the Spanish authorities was to safeguard parts of the Banda Oriental against Portuguese occupation. Because the land was initially worth little or nothing, large areas could be granted as gifts. Where the land remained unpopulated, however, it could not be said to have been safeguarded against foreign occupation". The most important and one of the first *mercedes* in the Banda Oriental was that granted in 1738 to Francisco de Alzaibar, a shipowner from Biscay, who arranged contracts with the Crown to transport colonists to an infant Montevideo. Alzaibar's land, or *rincón*, occupied around a third the area of present day San José Department, with over 40,000 head of cattle by 1753. Source: Kleinpenning (1995) p. 46. Interestingly, Barrios Pintos (1967) p. 82 notes how the colonial instructions for Alzaibar's *estancia* include an article about providing housing for all blacks. The extent to which these instructions were heeded is another matter.

*Cédula* of 1735, which had required all property titles granted by the authorities (i.e. viceroy, or *cabildo*) to be confirmed by the king.<sup>44</sup> What this meant was that land could now be purchased, but there was a lengthy request procedure and bureaucratic process called a *denuncia* to make that possible.<sup>45</sup> According to Kleinpenning, “after the establishment of Montevideo, the Real Instrucción became the principal legal framework within which the acquisition of land in the Banda Oriental countryside took place”.<sup>46</sup>

Because of the length, complexity and cost of the procedure, Kleinpenning notes the important distinction between *denuncias* in theory, and how they were actually carried out on the ground. The lack of choice in where to live for *agregados* (helpers), and *puesteros* (people in charge of certain parts of the *estancia*) foreshadows the later proliferation of *rancheríos*. These two jobs were important because someone needed to keep an eye on neighbors where property was in many senses incompletely defined.

Danilo Astori (1971) writes about three antagonisms that defined the late colonial Banda Oriental: 1) large latfundia vs. smaller parcels, 2) the latifundist exporting oligarchy vs. the *gauchaje trabajador*, or labouring gaucho masses, and 3) Montevideo vs. the countryside. Astori’s groupings help us understand the three main impacts of the royal land tenure system: a bias towards the *montevideano* elite, a bias towards large

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<sup>44</sup>A *cabildo* was an administrative council that governed municipalities in the Spanish colonies. For example, while the viceroy was located in Buenos Aires, Montevideo did have its own *cabildo*.

<sup>45</sup> Kleinpenning (1995) p. 49: “It became very usual in practice for a prospective landowner to take the initial step and then fail to follow the subsequent procedure and simply to occupy the land, as if he were the owner. The procedure was often not completed in full even where very large areas of land were involved... Simple occupation also occurred on a large scale in practice, i.e. without any official first step being taken towards legal acquisition. Poor and uneducated country people, in particular, such as *agregados* and *puesteros* who wished to become landowners, usually had no other choice, even though they ran the risk of subsequently being driven from the land. Many smaller *estancias* were created as a result”.

<sup>46</sup> Kleinpenning (1995) p. 49

holdings, and the social and spatial marginalization of the majority of the rural population.

Historian and key Partido Nacional figure of the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, Juan Pivel Devoto claimed that the *estancieros* of Montevideo, once they stabilized their properties and fortunes, suffused by a group spirit and guided by a common interest, acquired great economic power and influence in political circles in the Banda Oriental. The authorities listened to them and often acted in accordance with their views and wishes.<sup>47</sup> What's striking about Pivel Devoto's observation is that he could well have been speaking about the Asociación Rural in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, or the Federación Rural in the 20<sup>th</sup>. This group spirit, common interest, and political clout of the *Montevideo*-based ranching oligarchy is a pattern that began soon after the city was founded and remains a crucial thread in Uruguayan history.<sup>48</sup> Absenteeism prevailed, with owners mainly military men, high-level functionaries, or well-to-do merchants from the city.<sup>49</sup>

The *Real Instrucción* was used to acquire properties even larger than those granted in *mercedes*. As Kleinpenning asserts, it not only legalised and consolidated the already existing large landownership, but also stimulated its further development.<sup>50</sup> While the small urban-commercial elite grabbed hold of the best geographically positioned *rinconadas*, the poor were by and large left out of the land grant system, systematically,

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<sup>47</sup> Paraphrased from Kleinpenning (1995) p. 53. It is not clear from Kleinpenning's footnotes and bibliography which of Pivel Devoto's sources this is from. The Partido Nacional (National Party), commonly known as the *blancos*, is one of two main political parties that emerged out of the Guerra Grande civil war in the 1840s. For most of their history, they have been in opposition to the ruling Colorado Party, of which Battle y Ordóñez was a member. Generally speaking, *blancos* have drawn their support from the interior, while *colorados* have drawn support from the capital.

<sup>48</sup> The distinguished development economist Albert Hirschman (1967) identified absentee land ownership as a problem in Uruguay, *Development Projects Observed* p. 138-139, 159.

<sup>49</sup> Barrios Pintos (1967) p. 85

<sup>50</sup> Kleinpenning (1995) p. 48

though not necessarily intentionally.<sup>51</sup> The kind of explicit social engineering advocated by the ranching elite a century later (see next chapter) was not embedded in these laws. Not able to access the large holdings, *agregados*, *puesteros* and smaller-scale ranchers were impeded from legal control. Moreover, the *Real Instrucción*'s priority on larger holdings, and the political pressure from the owners of these holdings inhibited the establishment of sedentary settlements linked to smaller-size properties.<sup>52</sup>

As the majority of the rural population was unable to gain legal access to land, they found other ways to sell their labor.<sup>53</sup> Some were able to live on *estancias*, provided they rendered certain services for the owner, but most lived a semi-nomadic existence, earning the epithet *hombres sueltos*.<sup>54</sup> Kleinpenning describes some of their activities: collecting freely wandering cattle, poaching a few hides, joining others to slaughter cattle for an *estanciero*, *pulpero* (owner of a general store) or hide dealer from the city, driving cattle to Brazil, and even theft and smuggling. Having access neither to their own land nor their own cattle, they failed in becoming owners of the means of production. Illegal

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<sup>51</sup> Rovetta (1961) p. 13

<sup>52</sup> Kleinpenning (1995) p. 54. It is important to note that this transition happened first and more quickly south of the Río Negro. Because land was scarcely populated in the north until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (that is to say a) relative to the south, b) that there were almost no organized settlements, and c) almost no arable farming), it was cheaper. Absenteeism was less common, as *estancieros* enjoyed closer and more protective relationships with their employees. See Kleinpenning (1995) p. 57. Only a small part of the Banda Oriental was under the jurisdiction of Montevideo (an area including the entirety of present-day Montevideo, Canelones and San José Departments, the southern half of Florida Departments, and small portions of Flores, Lavalleja and Maldonado Departments). The rest was under the jurisdiction of Buenos Aires. (Map in Kleinpenning (1995) p. 31)

<sup>53</sup> Kleinpenning (1995) p. 56

<sup>54</sup> Services, as we will find, that become obsolete a century later. The word *suelto* is important. The best translation of *suelto* is "loose". These men were loose not so much in the sense of having free will, but in the sense that they had little to which they could tie or attach themselves that would confer social status and economic prospects.

land occupations would see *ranchos* (humble dwellings) built, only to be burned by the authorities.<sup>55</sup>

Even if there were not an epidemic of *pueblos de ratas* as decried in the latter 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was what we could call a rural housing crisis; that is a lack of stable housing for a large portion of the rural population and thus an absence of a fixed sense of place. Geopolitics not only impacted where settlement happened, but also the materiality of the settlements.<sup>56</sup> Since stone was prioritized for fortifications, most rural dwellings in the 18<sup>th</sup> century continued to be built with mud, straw, and hide.<sup>57</sup> Social and economic marginalization due to lack of work and access to land was coded into the built environment.

#### *Expulsion of the Jesuits (1767)*

A major event in Latin American history, the expulsion of the Jesuits from American lands of the Spanish Crown in 1767, also had an impact in the Banda Oriental.<sup>58</sup> Jesuit efforts in what is now Uruguay had worked to minimal effect compared to the wealth of missions in Upper Argentina, Paraguay, and present-day Rio Grande do Sul. When the missions in the latter were disbanded, many of the indigenous who had lived under a strongly paternalistic Jesuit regime proved unable to continue independently, and migrated southward helping populate Montevideo and other new

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<sup>55</sup> Kleinpenning (1995) p. 57

<sup>56</sup> The question of material possessions is also worth mentioning. Besides horses and work equipment, there was little else that these rural laborers could call their own.

<sup>57</sup> Benvenuto (1967) p. 18

<sup>58</sup> The years are different for the Portuguese, Spanish and French, though within this general time frame.

settlements like Paysandú and Maldonado.<sup>59</sup> Authors differ on how these migrants contributed economically. Barrios Pintos cites the Governor of Buenos Aires, Francisco de Paula Bucarelli, claiming in 1768 after the expulsion of the Jesuits, that “the subsistence of *estancias* requires able peons”, an observation in line with Kleinpenning, who claims that “the fields of Montevideo and Maldonado derived many new cultivators from this source”. Zum Felde (1963) [1919], however, argues that they went from pacified farmers to gauchos on horseback, blending into the new creole race.

Following the French geographical tradition of *paysages agraires* proposed by Albert Meynier in 1962, María Ines Moraes (2012) sees the colonial Banda Oriental as the historical-geographical interaction between three overlapping—though not mutually exclusive—types of landscapes.<sup>60</sup> First was the “pastoral missionary landscape”, developed between the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup>, and oriented towards producing meat for the residents of Jesuit Missions in South America. The institutional base of this landscape was communal property for land and livestock, with a mix of exploiting wild cattle, and raising tamed ones. Second was the “Montevidean agrarian landscape”, established later during the second quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, whose objective was to supply the newly established and barely settled

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<sup>59</sup> See Zum Felde (1963) [1919] Ch. 1 (p. 22), Barrios Pintos (1967) Ch. 3 (p. 68), and Kleinpenning (1995) Ch. 1 (p. 19). Paysandú is a port-town on the Uruguay River, around 200 kilometers upstream from where the river flows into the Río de la Plata. As such, it owes its logic as a settlement to being a stopping point on the fluvial route between the Jesuit missions and Buenos Aires. For more on the founding of Paysandú, see M. de Elgart and T. de Cataldi (1970). Maldonado is located around 100 kilometers east of Montevideo, roughly where the Río de la Plata meets the Atlantic. In 1755, the governor of Montevideo, José Joaquín de Viana founded Maldonado as a permanent settlement, in part to thwart Portuguese expansionism following the 1750 Treaty of Madrid, which had ceded the Oriental Missions in Upper Uruguay to Portugal, and Colonia del Sacramento to Spain. In 1757, de Viana brought indigenous families who had been exiled from the missions following the Guaraní War, to join the settlement. See Pérez Montero (1955) for more on the founding of Maldonado.

<sup>60</sup> Discussed by Stefanello (2016) Ch. 2.

Montevideo. This economy inherited its morphology of *chacras* and *estancias* from Buenos Aires and was cemented in individual rights of land and livestock. Third, and coming to the fore in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century was a landscape rooted in the exploitation of hides based on individual property, wage labor, and a boss seeking profit. Thus, given this framework, the expulsion of the Jesuits marked a watershed moment in environmental change, wherein the communal missionary landscape became subsumed by a more individualist approach to land and resources.

#### *Opening of Free Trade (1778)*

Another event with repercussions on rural development in the Banda Oriental, yet decided by faraway decree was the October 1778 *Reglamento y Aranceles Reales para el Comercio Libre de España a Indias* (Regulation and Royal Duties for Free Trade of Spain to the Indies). The Bourbon Reform in light of the Crown's increasing financial difficulties allowed Spanish American ports to trade directly with each other and with ports in the metropole. In the part of the hemisphere of concern to us, the reform came in large part in reaction to growing contraband for hides to be sold in a wider Atlantic marketplace.

With the increased market for hides from the United States and Europe, there was a newfound antagonism for control over land.<sup>61</sup> Prices rose quickly, and landowners found it attractive to lease small parcels in part for maximizing profit, and in part because a greater density of people in the holdings surrounding Montevideo would help defend attacks. Immigrants from places such as the Canary Islands with minimal capital could no

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<sup>61</sup> Sluyter (2010) discusses how the demand for hides from the Río de la Plata Basin came largely from the European countries that exported manufactured goods to Argentina and Uruguay. See also: Astori (1971) p. 14.

longer afford a *chacra* of their own and were forced into being tenants.<sup>62</sup> This created a further division between the more productive, larger latifundia and the less productive, smaller minifundia.<sup>63</sup> On a more microgeographic level, this growth in ranching due to more commercial opportunities led to changes on the *estancia*. Streams (in no short supply) became a de facto natural boundary on properties. Given the prohibitive cost of walls, demarcation by river was useful. Animals were branded for the first time, and gauchos worked in increasingly fixed groups under a *capataz*.

### *The first saladeros (1788)*

The penultimate event signals the first shift away from the Leather Age, though hides would still remain the most valuable bovine product for decades to come.<sup>64</sup> In 1788, Francisco de Medina opened the first *saladero*, or salt-beef plant in a new town called Rosario del Colla in present-day Colonia Department.<sup>65</sup> *Saladeros* producing *tasajo* (salt-beef) to ship to slaves in Brazil and Cuba quickly became a common feature in the landscape of the Banda Oriental, especially in coastal and riverine locations.<sup>66</sup> Seen on a social scale, Barrios Pintos (1967) notes how Medina's *saladeros* were as ambitious as the real estate interventions of Emilio Reus a century later.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> The prevalence of emigrants from the Canary Islands who worked in agriculture on the periphery of Montevideo has led to *canario* becoming the demonym of people from Canelones Department, where most of this agriculture is concentrated.

<sup>63</sup> See Astori (1971) p. 12, Kleinpenning (1995) p. 75

<sup>64</sup> See Bell (1993)

<sup>65</sup> See Kleinpenning (1995) p. 58 for more on the origin of *saladeros*.

<sup>66</sup> Sluyter (2010) p. 101 notes that Buenos Aires *saladeros* produced more for the Cuban market, while Uruguayan *saladeros* produced more for Brazil.

<sup>67</sup> The Madrid-born Reus (1858-1891) is best known for social housing initiatives in the Villa Muñoz and Palermo neighborhoods of Montevideo.

This proto-industrial site meant that the value of cows no longer resided exclusively in their hides for export or their meat for subsistence. Having a manufacturing facility further increased the need to keep cattle together, as well as to breed them.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, this meant a need for a much higher concentration of labor than on ranches, a labor force that included a sizeable number of slaves newly-brought from Africa. The proto-industrial setting also meant pacification of this labor force through the provision of housing and the consolidation of hamlets such as Las Piedras and Pando (both are within 25 kilometers of Montevideo) into towns.<sup>69</sup> However, the built environment came to be increasingly reflective of social hierarchies. Zum Felde (1963) [1919] notes how the first *rancheríos* tended to cluster around *saladeros*. In other words, the wild Eastern Bank was slowly but surely being domesticated. A minority of *gauchos* and *matreros* who preferred to not be a part of *estancia* life found refuge in wooded and hilly areas (*montes* and *serranías*), notably in present-day Lavalleja Department.<sup>70</sup>

#### *Artigas' Reglamento de Tierras (1815)*

The three antagonisms of large owners vs. small owners, oligarchs vs. *gauchaje*, city vs. country, coupled with the ambiguity of land ownership and the threats of contraband and indigenous raids gave way to Uruguay's first land reform debates, known at the time as an *arreglo de campos*.<sup>71</sup> This section outlines this debate as it occurred both

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<sup>68</sup> Kleinpenning (1995) p. 39, 41

<sup>69</sup> Housing materials included laurelwood, ñandubay, and pine. See Barrios Pintos (1967) p. 130-136. Zum Felde (1963) [1919] p. 24 writes about how hamlets became towns.

<sup>70</sup> See: Zum Felde (1963) [1919] p. 35. *Matrero* means "fugitive". The term implies that criminal activity is involved, rather than the more legally neutral *gaucho*. However as we will see in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the activities of the *gaucho* became increasingly criminalized.

<sup>71</sup> Examples of ambiguity of landownership included owners without title, and imprecise boundaries. Stefanello (2016) Ch. 2 provides a convenient categorization and analysis of two

on paper and on the ground between the turn of the century and Uruguay's independence in 1830.

The most comprehensive proposal for an *arreglo de campos* came from Spanish naturalist Félix de Azara in his 1800 *Memoria sobre el estado rural del Río de la Plata*, a study that evolved from his work as a boundary commissioner concerned with the practical ways of impeding Portuguese expansionism.<sup>72</sup> It is important to note that the preoccupation with and movement towards the border area for reasons of security was a crucial step in closing the spatial frontier of Uruguay. This process really consolidates in the several decades following independence, as the Uruguayan government founded additional towns in the extreme north, namely Rivera, Tacuarembó, and Artigas. Among Azara's wishes were the granting of property titles to people who had occupied and stocked their lands, but not yet received official rights and appropriation of those who had failed to do this, compulsory arming of rural citizens, annulment of fraudulent acquisition, and permanent boundary divisions on the properties in order to prevent land disputes.<sup>73</sup> Despite exhibiting a desire for expropriation and redistribution to varying

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main types of *arreglos*, economic reforms, and military reforms. He notes how the former were often rooted in the Physiocratic ideas of the French tradition.

<sup>72</sup> See Glick and Quinlan (1975) for Azara's role in Spanish knowledge networks. Azara's population estimates are a valuable data source, though their accuracy for military and slaves is disputed. It is worth stressing how sparsely populated the Eastern Bank remained at this time. Azara estimated a rural population of 25,000, which would amount to a density of 1 person per 8 square kilometers. To stress the extreme degree of urbanization at the time, Azara estimated Montevideo's population at 15,000. By comparison, the United States was only 6% urban at this time. Note that Azara's estimates differ from those of historical demographer Adela Pellegrino (2003) cited elsewhere in this thesis. For more on the influence of Azara on Artiguist land reform, see Fajardo Teran and Gadea (1967). Stefanello (2016) argues that this work overemphasizes the teleological at the expense of a more complex web of intellectual history.

<sup>73</sup> See Kleinpenning (1995) p. 89-90 for an overview.

degrees and to different groups, neither Azara nor his contemporaries specified anything about their ideal housing stock.<sup>74</sup>

The Spanish Crown actually agreed in good part with these proposals, mainly because they were geopolitically helpful, but lacked the money to implement them.<sup>75</sup> The group that would have been able to supply the funds, the large landowners, did not see it in their interests.<sup>76</sup> The measures taken instead, such as the *Cuerpo de Blandengues*, prioritized law and order, representing a compromise by combating the symptoms rather than addressing the root cause of unrest and marginalization—the institution of the *latifundia*.<sup>77</sup> The *Blandengues* were a Corps of Lancers created to avoid rural disorder and right contraband. Their establishment is a clear example of how state power enabled the reproduction of inequalities. Other Bourbon Reforms in the *campo* planned colonization of the border area to affirm Spanish sovereignty on the Eastern Bank and protect against the threat of Portuguese encroachment, not exactly aims that challenged existing social

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<sup>74</sup> Kleinpenning (1995) outlines proposals from the following people: Antonio Pereira, ex-militia lieutenant and commander of the countryside of Montevideo (1786); Viceroy Arredondo (1791); unknown author to Viceroy Pedro de Melo of Portugal (1794); Coronel Joaquín de Soria, commandant of the town of Melo (1800); Miguel de Lastarria, secretary and assessor of the viceroy Marquis of Aviles (1800); Jorge Pacheco, captain of the *Cuerpo de Blandengues* to the viceroy Santiago Liniers (1808). While serving as first *Intendente* (governor) of Buenos Aires in 1785, Francisco de Paula Sanz wrote to Viceroy Loreto, mentioning that it was necessary to reduce the number of families that lived dispersed in miserable *ranchos*, having as a main goal obliging the vagabonds to take up work. De Paula also lamented the lack of agriculture despite the fertility of the soils, as the preoccupation with hides hindered newly arrived colonists from using the plow. As possible correctives, he proposed bringing different kinds of seeds from Spain, and specialist farmers who had succeeded in Chile (cited in Stefanello (2016) p. 113-14).

<sup>75</sup> Looking at the writings of Viceroy Loreto, Stefanello (2016) p. 99-101 notes another reason for the Crown to pursue some type of land reform: The presumption that stability of land meant stable possession of cattle, and thus greater control over the “*tesoro del país*” (national treasure).

<sup>76</sup> See Kleinpenning (1995) p. 95-96, Astori (1971) p. 21

<sup>77</sup> See Alonso (1984) p. 18. Sala de Touron et al (1978) note that the formation of the *Blandengues* accelerated the conversion of *gauchos* into *peones* (cited in Stefanello (2016) p. 111).

hierarchies or showed care for the well-being of the marginalized.<sup>78</sup> In the next chapter, rural policing as a bandage to cover the social wounds of latifundia will return as an important theme.

General José Gervasio Artigas is widely viewed as Uruguay's founding father or national hero. Statues and paintings of *el prócer* adorn public buildings and spaces across the Oriental Republic today. While Artigas led military efforts to remove the Banda Oriental from the control of Buenos Aires, he did not actually want an independent nation, but rather sought a federation with Argentine Provinces, namely Entre Ríos, Santa Fe, and Corrientes. Defeated by the Portuguese in the Battle of Tacuarembó in 1820, Artigas left for an exile in Paraguay, where he lived out the remaining three decades of his life, never to see his native land in an independent state.

Danilo Astori (1971) sums up the three fundamental aspects of Artiguist thought: 1) a federal vision, 2) a republican ideal, and 3) redistribution of land property.<sup>79</sup> This third aspect, which concerns us the most, arose in a context in which the leaders of the Revolution against *porteño* control were mainly those marginalized by the latifundist land structure.<sup>80</sup> Unlike his transplatine counterpart, Manuel Belgrano, who was trained at the University of Salamanca, Artigas was less of a learned intellectual, and more of a practical man limited by his experience and context, who made use of agrarian ideas that were plausible in resolving the issues at hand.<sup>81</sup> Namely, despite his influence in agrarian affairs, he never scribed any treatise linking economy and agronomy.<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, his

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<sup>78</sup> See Astori (1971) p. 19 and Barrios Pintos (1967) p. 183

<sup>79</sup> Astori (1971) p. 22

<sup>80</sup> *Porteño* means of or referring to Buenos Aires.

<sup>81</sup> Transplatine means across the Río de la Plata, i.e. Uruguay and Argentina. Cisplatine refers to the same side of the Río de la Plata, i.e. Uruguay and Rio Grande do Sul

<sup>82</sup> Stefanello (2016) p. 224

1815 manifesto *Reglamento Provisorio de la Provincia Oriental para el Fomento de su Campaña y Seguridad de sus Hacendados* (hereafter *Reglamento*), is a seminal document, and one that has been invoked in Uruguayan land reform efforts ever since. In the wider context of Uruguayan history, what is most remarkable about Artigas' land reforms is that unlike any seriously heeded ideas after him, he proposed appropriating the land, rather than buying it. Not once in the *Reglamento* did he mention payment.<sup>83</sup>

The aim of the *Reglamento* was to favor farms of a more limited, but adequate, area and thus provide a counterweight to the extensive latifundia. Artigas was not so revolutionary as to wish for the eradication of the large-scale holdings, rather only expressing that they become a non-dominant social force. His idea was to allocate land to those deserving of it (importantly, the landless and immigrants) under the condition that they inhabit it and make it more productive. Thus, unlike the Spanish Crown, Artigas was more concerned with social justice than geopolitics. Arguably his most famous quotation directly reflects his ideas of land reform, “*que los mas infelices sean los mas privilegiados.*”<sup>84</sup> He spoke affectionately of *mis paisanos*, to whom the *Reglamento* distributed *suertes de estancia* on which they were required to build a house and two corrals.<sup>85</sup>

From 1814 to 1817, as governor of the newly established Provincia Oriental of the Rio de la Plata, following the defeat of the Spanish, Artigas was able to begin putting these ideas into action on the ground. But after he went into exile and the Portuguese took control of the Banda Oriental, Artigas' dreams were crushed and much of his action

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<sup>83</sup> Noted by Rovetta (1961) p. 17

<sup>84</sup> “May the unhappiest be the most privileged.”

<sup>85</sup> The word *paisano* conveniently means both “peasant”, and “compatriot”. Kleinpenning (1995) p. 114 notes this requirement.

undone. Many, though not all, of the lands he had expropriated and redistributed were returned to their original owners. General Lécór, President of the new Cisplatine Province, issued a decree in 1821 to sell remaining lands to the highest bidder. It was during this time that Auguste de Saint-Hilaire commented on the rural housing in the Eastern Bank as “miserable huts”, whose inhabitants used “shells for spoons”.<sup>86</sup>

Following an exodus of Artiguist revolutionaries to Argentina, the Eastern Bank’s cattle industry was paralyzed. In the words of Zum Felde, “the oriental people almost didn’t exist. The country was an inert scourge, Montevideo simply a barracks occupied by Portuguese soldiers”.<sup>87</sup> Overall, the Portuguese, and from 1822, Brazilian, occupation represented a pro-latifundist counter-revolution.<sup>88</sup> There was little in the way of development in either the city or the country. The ruling presence was purely military, with minimal commercial, political, or cultural concerns.

Thanks to Britain’s desire to form a buffer state between Argentina and Brazil, and its diplomatic intervention, Uruguay became an independent nation in 1830. The first constitution of the newly independent republic in 1830 made some stipulations about land reform, but little happened in practice. In *Estudios Constitucionales* (1887), the politician and writer Francisco Bauzá notes that the theoretical and abstract document was not made for the rural masses, but for an urban minority.<sup>89</sup> In effect, this handed the fate of rural lives away to the distant administrative arbitration of the capital. During the 1830s, the land policy of Fructuoso Rivera and Manuel Oribe favored owners over occupiers.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Quoted in Barrios Pintos (1967) p. 93

<sup>87</sup> Zum Felde (1919) [1983] p. 81

<sup>88</sup> Zum Felde (1919) [1983] p. 83

<sup>89</sup> Cited by Zum Felde (1963) [1919] p. 130

<sup>90</sup> Kleinpenning (1995) p. 120-121, and Rovetta (1961) p. 18. Fructuoso Rivera of the Colorado Party and Manuel Oribe of the National Party were the two major political figures in Uruguay’s

When the Guerra Grande, the longest in a series of civil wars in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, broke out from 1839 to 1851, chaos hit the *campo*, setting the country back in important ways, such as paying indemnities to foreign-born property owners. Confiscation of property went from being a social project to a political weapon. The financial difficulties of creole landowners, in part due to the war, led to an increase in foreign land ownership. In a pattern that would intensify later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the war revived domestic conflicts and sharpened dependency on foreign imports.<sup>91</sup>

### *Concluding Remarks*

To conclude this chapter, we pause to reflect on what landscape the newly independent Oriental Republic inherited. In some senses, a lot had changed from the arrival of the first Europeans three centuries earlier, and even from the establishment of Montevideo a century earlier. Large-scale landholdings known as *estancias* owned by an absentee urban-commercial elite had become the norm, as the rural *gauchaje* was increasingly forced to sell their labor within a more and more cemented social hierarchy defined in large part by the urban-rural binary.<sup>92</sup> But there were also constants. First of all, the Eastern Bank remained a backwater of the Spanish Empire. Compared to centers of arts and letters in places like Lima, Mexico, Bogotá, Sucre and Cordoba, an “intellectual pauperism” pervaded the streets of Montevideo, and even more so in the

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first decade of independence. Their differences were a key factor in the onset of the Guerra Grande. With the help of Argentina’s ruling *caudillo*, Juan Manuel de Rosas, Oribe led the fight against the *colorados*.

<sup>91</sup> Astori (1971) p. 32

<sup>92</sup> Stefanello (2016) p. 13 apud Sala de Tournon et al (1978) argue that the general result of the consolidation of the latifundia was a socioeconomic colonial structure that prevented peasants from accessing land.

*campo*.<sup>93</sup> As Félix de Azara noted, herding cattle required little learning, instruction, or talent.<sup>94</sup>

More importantly, the sheer dominance of cattle remained unchallenged. The fact that cattle could move themselves (unlike the plants or rocks in plantation and mining societies), and could auto-reproduce put no pressure on the development of economic and social infrastructure in the *campo*.<sup>95</sup> The rural poor had become more and more unstable, moving from precarious job to precarious job. The majority were forced to build their own dwellings—as opposed to relying on the occasional benevolence of the *estanciero*—and lived in material conditions of misery, a key marker of this infrastructure deficit. Yet, as long as property remained bounded only on paper, freely roaming cattle at least provided sustenance. A sustenance, as we will soon find, that would not last.

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<sup>93</sup> Eloquently documented by Zum Felde (1919) [1983] p. 277

<sup>94</sup> Cited by Benvenuto (1967) p. 68

<sup>95</sup> Alonso (1984) p. 17

CHAPTER 2  
Closing the Technological Frontier: Consolidating Rural Marginality in Late Nineteenth  
Century Uruguay

The previous chapter traced the consolidation of rural land ownership in the colonial Eastern Bank into a select group of latifundist hands. Amidst the increasing land hunger of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a not insignificant portion of the rural proletariat was forced into banditry, or otherwise marginalized. Following independence and the Guerra Grande, the marginalization continued apace into the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, though now chiefly the result of technological changes in ranching. Fencing and other measures deemed “improvements” consolidated *latifundia* and the prestige and dominance of ranching over arable farming. Adversely, *pueblos de ratas*, informal settlements populated by the displaced rural proletariat, became a phenomenon of national proportions. This chapter examines the relationship between technological change and rural poverty, looking at how wire fencing and other technological innovations radically transformed the spatiality of rural Uruguay by displacing the rural poor. These innovations were not *ex nihil* economic development, but required a specific political system, and transatlantic commercial networks. Measures taken to rectify this situation, specifically the promotion of agricultural colonies, failed. The closing of this technological frontier is a way of summarizing the transition of the typical rural site of production from pre-capitalist the *estancia cimarrona* (wild ranch) to the capitalist, technocratic *estancia moderna*.

*Origins of Wire Fencing*

Of all technology introduced to Uruguay in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, wire fencing had the greatest impact on rural land use, labor, and social relations. Benjamin Nahum (1968) encapsulates the intensification of land use when he says that, “as the tractor was to agricultural countries, fencing was to our cattle nation”.<sup>96</sup> Wire was not the first material used to create enclosures in the Uruguayan *campo*. Antecedents included ditches, stone fences, and plants such as quince, agave, and *tala* (hackberry, or *Celtis tala*). The object of these was mainly to deter feral cattle. Stone in particular was costly to erect, and subject to animal damage. Barrios Pintos (1967) even noted the use of palm corrals, pineapple, banana and cactus in coastal Rocha department.<sup>97</sup>

In 1852, a year after the end of the Guerra Grande, the first wire arrived in Uruguay in a ten bundle shipment.<sup>98</sup> Sources differ on who was the first *estanciero* to fence, but what matters is that a disproportionate number of the wire vanguard were Europeans based in the Litoral Departments rather than creoles further inland to the north and east.<sup>99</sup> The actual labor of building the fences was done mostly by Basques as well as some Italians. Starting in the 1850s and 1860s, landowners desired fencing for a variety of reasons. Most notable was the rise of sheep farming.<sup>100</sup> During the 1860s especially, wool prices were considerably more favourable than those for cattle hides and *tasajo*, due in part because the market for the latter in the slave economies of Cuba and Brazil was

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<sup>96</sup> Nahum (1968) p. 68

<sup>97</sup> see Jacob (1969) p. 31, Nahum (1968) p. 63, and Barrios Pintos (1967) p. 244-246. In 1813, José Manuel Pérez Castellano mentioned primitive fencing with trees to prevent cattle from becoming feral.

<sup>98</sup> Jacob (1969) p. 38

<sup>99</sup> Names like the Liverpoolian, Richard Bannister Hughes, and the Alsatian, Joseph Buschental appear. For example, see Nahum (1968) p. 64. See also Slatta (1983) for a lengthy discussion about the pioneers of wire fencing in Argentina. In Uruguay, the Litoral refers to the area along the Uruguay River, especially the departments of Colonia, Soriano, Río Negro, and Paysandú.

<sup>100</sup> See Kleinpenning (1995) p. 135-136. Per Alonso (1984) p. 19, in the 1860s, Uruguay went from 3 million to 16 million sheep.

diminishing, and demand elsewhere was not suited to acquire the taste of a food associated with slaves. Fencing made possible subdivision into pasture, which allowed for crossbreeding and more efficient feeding, meaning more meat and more wool in less time.<sup>101</sup> Moreover, fencing made it possible to plant forage, and rationalize production by replicating it at a larger scale. This is important, because by the 1860s, the totality of Uruguay's area fit for production had been claimed by some type of ownership.<sup>102</sup> The frontier lay no longer in territorial expansion, but in technological innovation.

The greatest boom of wire fencing in Uruguay occurred in the 1870s. In 1875, Agriculture Minister Andres Lamas exonerated import duties on wire and posts, a measure that lasted until 1879. By 1882, 64% of livestock farms had already been fenced.<sup>103</sup> During this time, the cost of wire as a ratio to cost of land decreased rapidly.<sup>104</sup> Wire may have been a significant investment to ranchers, but was nevertheless widely considered a worthwhile one. It increased security by preventing the possibility of looting and other crimes, and moreover, in the long-term, it was cheaper to wire than to lose hundreds of wandering animals.

### *Fencing, Land, and Labor*

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<sup>101</sup> See Nahum (1968) p. 65

<sup>102</sup> Astori (1971) p. 33

<sup>103</sup> Kleinpenning (1995) p. 141, Jacob (1969) p. 35, Nahum (1968) p. 65. Kleinpenning (1995) notes that "the riverside woodland generally provided insufficient timber for the fabrication of suitable fencing posts and so they were imported in large quantities from Paraguay." It is important to remember how little tree cover there was in Uruguay's rural landscape.

<sup>104</sup> Jacob (1969) p. 36. He notes how there was fierce competition among European countries and the US to furnish this wire. The Basque diaspora in Argentina urged the improvement of wire factories in Bilbao. Daily estimates on wire prices in Buenos Aires were treated like currency or stocks. In Uruguay, industrialists tried to produce wire, but struggled due to dependence on iron and manganese imports.

Wire fencing was a technological innovation whose consequences in the *campo* extended far beyond the price of meat and wool. The juridical, social, and spatial shifts were arguably more lasting than the financial returns.

The ability to fence at a large scale increased the price of land, making it harder and harder for small and medium holdings to survive, further entrenching the dominance of latifundia. An 1879 amendment to the Rural Code stated that the costs of fencing needed to be shared.<sup>105</sup> Thus, if an *estanciero* decided to fence his property, the neighbor would need to share the cost, like a party wall. For many smaller owners, this cost proved prohibitive, and they were forced to sell their land, becoming part of the landless *peonada*, or masses of peasant labor. Fencing did not just create a rougher division between larger and smaller owners, but also between owners and non-owners. The 1830 constitution had proclaimed property a “sacred and inviolable right”, but only with fencing could property rights be specified. Thus, both materially and legally, wire fencing created a clear insider/outsider distinction. As Danilo Astori (1971) argues, fences were more than a physical division of property. They transformed ranching into an activity inaccessible for the majority.<sup>106</sup>

This was possible due to the unique situation of public lands in Uruguay. An 1834 law had allowed the sale of public lands with the aim of improving government revenue. Little by little, the amount of land taken up by public lands shrank due to title transfers and annexations.<sup>107</sup> By the 1870s, there were no large, continuous, clearly identifiable,

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<sup>105</sup> The Rural Code is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

<sup>106</sup> Astori (1971) p. 46

<sup>107</sup> Kleinpenning (1995) p. 127 notes another important event with respect to public lands. An 1858 law ordered that government bodies cease dealing with new requests for acquisition of public lands. In theory this would have stemmed the rapid loss of public lands, but in practice, it

unused areas of land remaining in Uruguayan territory.<sup>108</sup> Another legal issue caused by wire fencing was the blockage of rights of way.<sup>109</sup> Building fences to demarcate property over pre-existing paths caused difficulties in communications, and disruptions for those droving livestock.

Wire fencing changed how land was defined and in the process, who got to use it. Through various mechanisms, fencing made a large portion of the rural work force redundant. Many specialized gaucho tasks, such as rounding up loose livestock with a *boleadora*, were no longer necessary.<sup>110</sup> Jacob describes how the *capataz* became like the manager of a company with economic and zootechnical knowledge.<sup>111</sup> In *Historia Rural del Uruguay Moderno*, Barran and Nahum (1967) called fencing “the first technological unemployment in Uruguay”.<sup>112</sup> With many laborers no longer necessary to service an *estancia*, many were obliged to live off their own resources, a reality that Nahum (1968) claims eliminated the possibility for a “communism of the *campo*”.<sup>113</sup> Unlike during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century Leather Age and its wildly abundant cattle, the limited resources available by the latter 19<sup>th</sup> century no longer provided sustenance for the *peonada*.

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further consolidated the ownership structure, because land remained in the hands of those who occupied it at the moment.

<sup>108</sup> See also Jacob (1969) p. 44. Kleinpenning (1995) adds that the government simply didn't know where much of state owned land was, because often, public land formed part of the *sobras* (excess, illegally usurped land) of private properties. Only in 1912 did the organization of a land register begin.

<sup>109</sup> Jacob (1969) p. 101

<sup>110</sup> This tool is a material culture example of how the ranching economy evolved from the indigenous approach to capturing animals. Sluyter (2012), p. 149 in his chapter on the Pampas, concludes that “the herding ecology of the late colonial period... emerged out of the hybridization of Spanish and native practices rather than African ones”, but he does argue that Senegambian blacks did play a role by developing the *balde sin fondo* (bottomless bucket), which was important for supplying water for herds. See Nahum (1968) p. 74

<sup>111</sup> Jacob (1969) p. 48

<sup>112</sup> cited in Barrios Pintos (1967) p. 250

<sup>113</sup> Nahum (1968) p. 70

In a spatial sense, the materiality of more and more fencing meant fewer and fewer places to absorb the unemployed. Think of the *campo* as becoming a big game of hide and seek with a technological clock ticking down much faster than in the Leather Age. Thus fencing had the double and somewhat contradictory effect of taming a landscape in terms of mobility, property and scientific control of livestock, while at the same time unleashing tens of thousands of surplus laborers. Barran and Nahum estimate that fencing left around 40,000 people unemployed out of a rural population of around 400,000. The dispossessed had three options, migrate abroad, migrate to the city, or stay put in the campo by building informal dwellings on the few remaining unfenced spaces.

### *Rancheríos*

We now focus on this third option—to remain in misery—the informal settlements, which came to be known as *rancheríos* or *pueblos de ratas*.

First, what did these *rancheríos* look like? As the vernacular architecture par excellence of the Uruguayan campo, these dwellings reflected the scarcity of the environment. The 1877 Agricultural Commission Census recorded that 27,580 out of 38,265 rural constructions were made of mud, as opposed to the sturdier brick.<sup>114</sup> Straw and reeds were the most common roof material. In his 1967 essay “El Rancho Uruguayo”, Daniel Vidart described these houses in less quantitative terms, “the materials were at arm’s length: tree trunks for the frame; strips of rawhide to unite the posts, *paja brava* (*Panicum prionitis*) for the roof; mud and grass for the walls”. The 1967 University Extension report on *rancheríos* discusses the palo-a-pique building method, where vertical *palos* of *ñandubay* (*Prosopis affinis*) and *coronilla* (*Scutia*

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<sup>114</sup> Cited in Jacob (1969) p. 107

*buxifolia*) were laid perpendicular to horizontal *piques* of willow and eucalyptus.<sup>115</sup>

*Pueblos de ratas* were at best rudimentary and austere; at worst, breeding grounds for disease, such as *chagas*, and crime, such as cattle rustling. Observers routinely decried them as primitive. In 1891, Frenchman Théodore Child wrote that Uruguayan ranchos were even worse than those he had seen in Argentina, describing them as simple block mud huts with a roof of maize straw, a floor battered earth, a door and sometimes a window.

Second, where did these dwellings appear, and why? These ranchos were not necessarily a new form of vernacular architecture for Uruguay or otherwise. But what was new was the proliferation and concentration of them at a scale that could be considered towns with up to dozens of families, rather than an isolated shack. *Pueblos de ratas* owed their location to both geographic and juridical factors. They emerged on the few patches of unoccupied land, as well as along roads near the *estancia* from which the residents had been expelled. Stream banks and sides of hills also formed natural interstitial spaces towards which to flee. Raúl Jacob (1969) calls the *rancherío* the counterface of the entire rural modernization process. Though lacking in specific examples, the following passage gives a good overall picture of how this counterface was in itself a process:

At first, housing arose isolated in the *campo*, taking advantage of elevation and a tree that would serve as refuge. When the 'new *estancia*' got rid of the beings that it once housed, these people would take advantage of someplace free where on the edge of the *estancia*, or of a path, they could raise their new house...various families built their habitations contiguously and thus was born the *rancheríos*.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Departamento de Extensión Universitaria (1967) p. 16

<sup>116</sup> Jacob (1969) fails to address what made some *rancheríos* more contiguous than others. Translation by author.

In a 1910 report, historian Daniel Garcia Acevedo argued that inhabitants of *rancheríos* chose their sites for among several reasons: a) to take advantage of the fact that the owner of the land lived far away, b) it was a public land, c) they didn't know the owner, d) the owner had given them tentative permission to build their huts through simple commiseration, or e) in exchange for a service such as gatekeeping at night.<sup>117</sup> Thus, the location of *rancheríos* was not uniform in all cases, but rather a rational decision making process embedded in the increasing social, and even physical, distance between landowners and the landless.

Third, who lived in these *rancheríos* and what did they do? In *Tiempo y Tierra*, novelist Juan José Morosoli described Uruguay's interior in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as a landscape that had become inhospitable to subsistence. The *rancheríos* thus were born out of the struggle to subsist following the collapse of the abundance of feral protein and secure institutional employment. To make a point clear, the expelled labor from *estancias* was a mix of people whose jobs became redundant altogether, and of people who retained some semblance of their job, but were no longer given a place to live on the property of the *estancia*. When selecting who would remain housed and fed, owners preferred the cost effective single men to men with families. When Jacob describes the building of *rancheríos* by families, this is intentional, though, as we will see later, the family unit was by no means dominant in these communities.

For *estancieros* in an age of increasingly competitive capitalism, calculating costs was more important than ever. The result is what Nahum describes as the loss of a rural middle class. This middle class wasn't just peons, but also *agregados*, *puesteros*, and smaller landholders. The extensive *estancia* in the colonial period had made vital use of

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<sup>117</sup> Cited in Rovetta (1961) p. 59

people to populate its area and attempt to monitor its margins, while the intensified *estancia* amidst the technological craze removed the need for most *agregados* and *puesteros*. Male inhabitants of *rancheríos* lived mainly from three types of labor, *changas* (temporary work) in the livestock sector such as shearing, illegal activities like cattle rustling and contraband, and lastly, building of railways, fencing and telegraph lines. Females tried to find work as domestic servants on *estancias* or in towns and economic circumstances forced some into prostitution. Children born out of wedlock were normal, as were high rates of infant mortality and tuberculosis.<sup>118</sup>

Since the *estancias* in Uruguay had such great distances between them, the dispossessed labor force failed to generate a unified political consciousness. Rather than being a point of organization and identity, *rancheríos* were more a point of departure, a temporary space between one's previous life as a ranch hand, and a possible future life as an urban worker, a place to depart as soon as new opportunities arose. The great cruelty of fencing is that those without families were forced, or at least encouraged to stay on *estancias*, losing one hallmark of gaucho identity, nomadism, while those with families forced onto the interstices of the *campo* lost another hallmark, sustenance.

It has been widely cited that each fence amounted to misery, uncertainty, degradation and servilism for 10 to 20 individuals or households to whom revolution was a faint hope.<sup>119</sup> In sum, as the counterface of the rural modernization process, *rancheríos* were the foremost material manifestation of the fact that the state was complicit in

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<sup>118</sup> Kleinpenning (1995) p. 153

<sup>119</sup> Jacob (1969) p. 47, Nahum (1968) p. 74 and others have cited this figure. The original source is taken to be from Federico Eugenio Balparda in *Revista Rural* in 1879. Kleinpenning (1995) p. 151 makes the following observation: "According to the report of the jefe politico and police chief Eliseo Chaves, there were some 500 displaced families in the department of Tacuarembó in 1878. It is the only concrete statistic of agricultural employment at that time".

maintaining the inequalities of the campo inherited at the end of the colonial period. Before looking at this state more closely, we turn briefly to the question of other technologies.

### *Friends of Fencing*

Wire fencing may have been king of this rural technological revolution, but it was not alone. Several related innovations also accelerated the plight of the rural poor.

First, as the bounding of land made the control of livestock easier, crossbreeding of livestock with more productive species accelerated. Mixed breeds were designed according to foreign tastes in meat and wool, and began replacing the creole cattle that had covered the Eastern Bank since Hernandarias.<sup>120</sup> Given the emphasis on breeding it is not a stretch to say that *estancieros* cared much more about their animal capital than their human labor. For smaller producers without the technical means to adapt, their creole cattle wouldn't fetch as much on the market, further relegating their socioeconomic status. Additionally, crossbreeding was more prevalent in the South, indicative of the divide between foreign landowners and the Brazilian and Uruguayan owners more common in the North, a divide which recurs later in the chapter.

Second, as creole cattle had to contend with crossbred cattle, creole horses now had to contend with the iron horse. Both intentionally and unintentionally, railroads wrought adverse consequences on the traditional rural way of life. Across the estuary, the Argentine president and ardent advocate of modernization, Bartolome Mitre declared in

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<sup>120</sup> Creole cattle are usually understood as the descendants of the animals introduced by the Spanish and Portuguese.

1857 that the arrival of the railroad would inaugurate the extinction of brute caudillism.<sup>121</sup> These premonitions were by no means false. Just like fencing, railroads provided a source of temporary labor for the rural worker, while eliminating a more permanent type of job, in this case, droving.<sup>122</sup> Rovetta and Nahum note that building railroads was a long and slow process. This underscores the important fact that the social consequences of modernization were not an instantaneous transformation by arms and decree.<sup>123</sup>

In another similarity with wire fencing, railroads were a material instrument in the human attempt to dominate nature, and a symbol of foreign dependency.<sup>124</sup> Railroads further pushed the primacy of Montevideo, and generally favored larger, older settlements. Kleinpenning observes a crucial fact of Uruguayan geography: the railroads did not create a single new settlement of any scale.<sup>125</sup> One reason why new agricultural based towns failed to blossom was because of the high charges on the British-owned system.

A third innovation was the refrigeration of meat.<sup>126</sup> Like the *saladeros* a century before them, refrigerated meat-packing plants transformed how the animal was used, and the labor involved to raise, slaughter and bring the product to market. The meatpacking

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<sup>121</sup> Cited in Jacob (1969) p. 114. A *caudillo* is the prototypical strongman in Spanish America, typified in Domingo Faustino Sarmiento's *Facundo* (1845).

<sup>122</sup> Droving was at best reduced to much shorter distances. The transportation of dead animals (i.e. meat) also increasingly occurred by rail. Luis Pedro Bonavita in 1958 (cited in Rovetta (1961) p. 65) made the curious claim that *rancheríos* were actually a problem with urban origins, when workers sent from the city to do railway installation no longer had work. In no other sources have I seen this corroborated. See Cronon (1991) for a comparative case around the same time in the North American Great Plains.

<sup>123</sup> The talking head of modernization himself, Asociación Rural leader Domingo Ordoñana (see later in the chapter) insisted that the shift to agriculture should be slow and morose (p. Astori (1971) p. 44)

<sup>124</sup> See Jacob (1969) p. 13

<sup>125</sup> Kleinpenning (1995) p. 287. i.e. larger than a few thousand people.

<sup>126</sup> The first transatlantic shipment of refrigerated meat took place in 1876 aboard the French ship *Le Frigorifique*.

companies, mostly foreign, tended to become active stakeholders in land. For example, Liebig's, who had their plant in Fray Bentos, once owned as much as 10% of the land in Río Negro Department.<sup>127</sup> Refrigeration also led to material changes on *estancias*. Chutes and baths replaced the *boleador*, the lasso and the stone corral. By the time Batlle y Ordóñez became president in 1903, this transformation was nearly complete and creole cattle extremely rare.<sup>128</sup>

Lastly, smaller scale technologies served as additional labor reducing mechanisms. New tools meant that castration, shearing, and branding could be done more quickly with fewer men.<sup>129</sup> Agricultural technologies also hit arable farming around the same time with a slew of innovations introduced to Uruguay in the 1870s that reduced farm labor.<sup>130</sup>

#### *Latorre and the ARU: The Political and Institutional Handmaids of Modernization*

These material and social changes were not simply the result of foreign gadgets running amok on the Pampas. It is important to ask whose interests were at stake during this technological transformation. There was an explicit politics behind the implementation of these innovations, led most significantly in the 1870s by the close

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<sup>127</sup> To put this in perspective, by 1925, Liebig's owned 102,000 hectares on ten different properties. (Pintos (1938) p. 127). In 1870, the total area in the entire country dedicated to farming was 200,000 hectares (Astori (1971) p. 45). Pintos (1938) notes that leading Argentine political thinker Lisandro de la Torre discovered that meat-packing companies in Argentina were giving larger landowners better prices. The fact that meatpacking plants were almost entirely located in Montevideo or Litoral towns such as Fray Bentos is indicative of the trends of uneven development central to this chapter. See Rial and Klaczko (1981) for more on the uneven geography of industry in 19<sup>th</sup> century Uruguay.

<sup>128</sup> See Pintos (1938) p. 73-74

<sup>129</sup> Kleinpenning (1995) p. 151

<sup>130</sup> Kleinpenning (1995) p. 178-179. Recall that while the vast majority of Uruguay's territory was devoted to livestock, there remained an important agricultural area on the periphery of Montevideo, which produced cereals and fruits. See: Astori (1971) p. 15, and Capillas de Castellanos (1971) p. 30.

collaboration of President Lorenzo Latorre and the *Asociación Rural del Uruguay* (hereafter ARU). Given their magnitude, these investments in the rural sphere could only be accomplished by large landowners or the state.

The ARU can be seen as the ideological successor of the Gremio de Hacendados that fought off Artigas' land reform in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. But what exactly did they stand for? In a broad sense, the ARU was organized to promote modernization of the ranching sector in Uruguay, and to lobby the government to smooth the obstacles—including people—to the intensification of land use. The ARU demanded progress in a Positivist sense, seeking and testing technologies that would improve yield and profit for the benefit of the nation's ranchers. Its leadership was composed of landowners, disproportionately based in the South, many of whom were born in Europe. Their insistence on innovation contrasts with the many landowners in the country's North of Brazilian origin who looked to Brazil before cooperation with the Uruguayan government. Many of these Brazilian ranchers opposed ARU initiatives such as crossbreeding, the introduction of sheep, and artificial pasture because they implied capital that they didn't have, and therefore, risk.<sup>131</sup> Fencing, however, was less controversial because it was about securing and consolidating property.<sup>132</sup>

For the ARU and its mouthpiece Basque-born leader Domingo Ordoñana, livestock represented the true wealth of the country, believing that as the most lucrative source of income, the property of ranching latifundists should be defended by the state.

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<sup>131</sup> Chasteen (1995) writes about the reluctance of *estancieros* in the North to adapt to new technologies and the economically risk-averse climate in which *blanco caudillo* Aparicio Saravia rose to prominence in Cerro Largo Department in the 1890s .

<sup>132</sup> Nahum (1968) p. 66

Astori summarizes their attitude as “what’s good for ranching is good for the country”.<sup>133</sup> Progressive the ARU may have been in a technological sense, but in a social sense that adjective ceases to be helpful. The ARU wasn’t conservative in the sense of privileging old ways of doing things, but they certainly were in their inability to reconcile innovations with social change. Crucially, the ARU used moral arguments in an aim to perpetuate the superiority of ranching over arable farming, and in connection, the latifundia over the minifundia.

The ARU found a champion in Lorenzo Latorre. Of military background, Latorre served as President from 1876 to 1880. In many ways, he was the first leader to promote and institute a national project. As Göran Lindahl argues, “he put an end to anarchy and created the foundations of a juridical community”, and presided over a central administration that was finally able to uphold sovereignty.<sup>134</sup> Fortunately for the ARU, this juridical community was premised on the protection of private property. Latorre achieved many things in office.<sup>135</sup> He regularized the service of public debt, created a Civil State Registry, and broadened access to education, especially of the vocational variety. Yet, none of these excuse the fact that his brutal hand oversaw the expulsion of thousands from the countryside. Jacob has made the crucial point that centralized political power was necessary to implement fencing on a national scale and to guarantee private property.<sup>136</sup> In a cruel irony, part of Latorre’s nation-consolidating project was to

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<sup>133</sup> Astori (1971) p. 44

<sup>134</sup> Lindahl (1962) p. 15. Zum Felde (1963) [1919] p. 213 calls Latorre the first to centralize the country. Zum Felde (1963) [1919] p. 214 claims that Latorre governed despotically, but for the general interest of the people. His successor Máximo Santos governed despotically, but against all interests. Only the military class supported him.

<sup>135</sup> See Pintos p. 33-34 for a more exhaustive list.

<sup>136</sup> Jacob p. 27-28

make Artigas a symbol of the Republic, thereby stripping the *prócer* of his ideals about land.<sup>137</sup>

Latorre's rural priorities went firmly in step with the ARU idea that the nation's wealth came from ranching. What followed was a series of policies aimed at imposing law and order in the *campo*, headlined by the implementation of a Rural Code.<sup>138</sup> Given the amount of vagrancy across the interior, policing was front and center. The Rural Code planned private security forces for *estancieros*, the commissary was granted more power as a defining social and territorial institution in rural departments, and the army and police were equipped with Remingtons—an instrument of technological superiority over gauchos.<sup>139</sup> The ARU even went so far as to oppose conscription, for fear that the military could become a pressure group in which the rural masses organized, and because conscripts would be doing labor for the state, rather than for *estancieros*.<sup>140</sup>

But a drive towards law and order only massaged problems. In fact, as a solution to rural instability, it was nothing new, dating back to the time of the Blandengues.<sup>141</sup> As

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<sup>137</sup> See Jacob p. 29-30. A chapter titled "*The Grandeur of Average: Artigas, Batlle, and the Mesocracy*" of my forthcoming book discusses the late 19<sup>th</sup> century movement to make Artigas a national hero in order to differentiate Uruguay from Argentina and Brazil.

<sup>138</sup> See Zum Felde (1963) [1919] p. 210 for an overview of Latorre's rural policy. Kleinpenning (1995) p. 140 summarizes the rural code well: "The code was a systematised series of provisions which were designed not only to provide greater certainty in the field of land ownership (through *deslinde* [demarcation], *amojonamiento* [delimitation], registration of titles and fencing), and in relation to livestock (obligation to mark livestock, penalties for cattle thefts), but also to bring greater order and security to the countryside. The legal code did not contain any provisions, however, to promote a redistribution of land. On the contrary, no limit was placed on the ownership of land."

<sup>139</sup> Jacob (1969) p. 21 notes that in 1874, two-thirds of rural departmental budgets went towards police.

<sup>140</sup> Jacob (1969) p. 94 and Nahum (1968) p. 79. This wariness against social organization of the rural masses is all the more prescient given Borucki (2015)'s finding that during the same time period, military service afforded another disadvantage group, blacks, an opportunity to participate in the shaping of the nation that they may not have otherwise had.

<sup>141</sup> Per Kleinpenning (1995) p. 157, in the 1830s, Rivera had tried his best to get rid of the marginalized, only to see them return.

Nahum duly notes, *rancheríos* and the military were not economic solutions to rural social problems, neither for the individual, nor for the nation.

*Social Engineering Through Land Use: The Moral Superiority of Livestock Ranching Over Arable Farming*

So what other solutions did the ARU and Latorre offer? In a word, agriculture. Despite absentee ownership remaining common, *estancieros* were not oblivious to the *rancheríos* and the technologically-driven exodus.<sup>142</sup> The ranching class did have well-intentioned and genuine attempts to help the marginalized population, but they were all premised on a hierarchical system with livestock ranching atop crop farming. Latorre and the other military governments of the time saw arable farming as a labor outlet for the displaced, or in the words of Kleinpenning, a “safety valve”.<sup>143</sup> Ordoñana and his associates at the ARU relied on moral claims to back up this worldview. Retrospectively, their rhetoric is also racially coded, with a desire for European customs to be adopted at the expense of gaucho and creole ones.<sup>144</sup>

Farming would provide a way of reconstituting the rural family unit, something that ran counter to modern ranching, in turn providing what Ordoñana called “new rural morals” that would help make the *campo* “habitable”.<sup>145</sup> Because of the labor demands, agriculture would force people to have families, he thought. Agricultural communities for the rural masses also meant a way to increase obedience to two other institutions: church and state. Both teaching and religious observance were ways of instilling respect into the

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<sup>142</sup> For example, Rovetta (1961) p. 56 cited *estanciero* Juan Ramón Gómez poetically decrying the *pueblos de ratas*.

<sup>143</sup> Kleinpenning (1995) p. 154

<sup>144</sup> Jacob (1969) p. 109 notes Ordoñana’s use of racialized caricatures with phrases such as “polenta and accordions instead of mazamorra and guitars”.

<sup>145</sup> See Jacob (1969) p. 10, 23

family.<sup>146</sup> Putting the cart before the horse, Ordoñana in his naiveté assumed that if you built churches and schools, colonists would come.

His colleague Juan Ramón Gómez claimed the Rural Code would usher in a “pacifist revolution” by turning the gaucho into a “*fermier*” (and by definition, ranchland into farmland), a vision that conveniently ignored the fact that it required arming civilians.<sup>147</sup> This attempt to put the displaced in their place through socially coded land use was both a means of demographic control and trying to avoid a bloodier and more economically disastrous revolution. On a more micro scale, Ordoñana made no secret of how fencing conveniently separated the landed from the landless, who would exchange the lasso for the less profitable yoke.<sup>148</sup>

From the mid 1870s to the mid 1880s, visions of agricultural colonization flourished on pen and paper, though tellingly less so on the actual soil. Just like law and order to rein in the rural masses, agricultural colonies were not novel to the era, but were pursued with greater vigor due to the stronger central government. To give a sense of what these visions looked like, here is a chronological list of examples:

Undated: Federico Gonzalez proposed requiring that rural houses be made of stone and brick rather than clod or palo-a-pique.<sup>149</sup>

Undated: Lucío Rodriguez Diez, a key figure of the ARU, proposed making colonists exempt from military service.<sup>150</sup>

1874: Juan G. Corta, treasurer of the ARU, claimed that ranching peons lived “without any of the pleasures that civilized man obtains through work” and that their

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<sup>146</sup> See Jacob (1969) p. 50

<sup>147</sup> Cited in Jacob (1969) p. 23, 50

<sup>148</sup> See Nahum (1968) p. 70, 78

<sup>149</sup> Cited in Jacob (1969) p. 61. Any biographical details of Federico Gonzalez are unclear

<sup>150</sup> See Nahum (1968) p. 66 on Rodriguez Diez. Cited in Jacob (1969) p. 63.

errant existence put them in a struggle against society that would perpetuate the gypsy tradition.<sup>151</sup> This encapsulates the idea that giving the dispossessed a plow would be better than giving them arms, and shows the palpable elite fear of rural social subversion.

1876: Lucío Rodríguez Díez suggested an asylum for the unemployed in each town that would stimulate work by activities such as woodcutting and road building. Proceeds would be used to provide adequate shelter. Ordoñana saw this as too noble, because he did not have faith in the *peonada*'s industriousness.<sup>152</sup>

1877: The *Granja Escuela* (Farm School) was created, but enrollment was dominated by the sons of *estancieros* interested in new lines of crops like wine grapes and tobacco, rather than former ranch hands looking to convert to farming.

1878: Eliseo Chaves, the police chief of Tacuarembó noted how it was difficult for families to devote themselves to agriculture when they lacked security in land occupation. Thus he urged and trusted *estancieros* to chip in financially to help families leaving their lands.<sup>153</sup>

1879: President Latorre, in an 1879 letter to the *estanciero* Drabble, was in a sense admitting failure by acknowledging rural misery. He wanted to concentrate rural families along railroads and waterways, taking people from the *rancheríos* and putting them in colonies that would make their labor more useful. He proposed 3 million pesos for this project.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Nahum (1968) p. 76

<sup>152</sup> cited in Jacob (1969) p. 91, Nahum (1968) p. 78.

<sup>153</sup> Jacob (1969) p. 59-60

<sup>154</sup> Jacob (1969) p. 74-75

1882: A clause in the Law of Colonization tried to prioritize repatriating Uruguayans who had moved abroad by luring them back as colonists.<sup>155</sup>

1884: The *Law of Agricultural Centers* aimed to provide a new livelihood in agricultural colonies for Uruguayan families who had been driven from *estancias*. The colonies would be controlled by police commissioners in every department bar Montevideo.

### *Failure of Colonization*

The dreams of pacifying the rural masses quickly proved naïve, and arable family farming remained unviable at any significant magnitude. In fact, many of the lands given to would-be colonists were sold back to livestock ranchers. There are a number of reasons behind colonization's failure, which can be grouped in six broad categories.

First, the ecological conditions were unfavorable to an agrarian society. In comparison with Argentina, whose soil naturally nurtures the nitrogen-replenishing pasture crop, alfalfa, Uruguay's nurtured only grass, something better suited to ranching.<sup>156</sup>

Second, politically, the Uruguayan government lacked the funds to put their money where their mouth was, both to expropriate lands, and to provide the necessary

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<sup>155</sup> This law would have been speaking specifically to those who had left for Argentina and Brazil, where work was more abundant.

<sup>156</sup> Alisky (1969) p. 4. Alfalfa is a deep rooted plant. Thus, the very deep soils of the Argentine humid pampa became conducive (eventually, once they were broken up with cereal farming) to the planting of alfalfa. Some parts of southwestern Uruguay could replicate this pattern, but most of the country, especially the north, could not.

information and assistance to farmers. Some reasons for this deficit include the lack of income from public lands, and the widespread practice of tax avoidance.<sup>157</sup>

Third were geographic constraints. Potential farmers were limited not just to holdings of poor quality but of limited size. Again, in comparison to Argentina and its fertile *pampa gringa*, Uruguay had not just fewer fiscal lands, but less land, period. Moreover, immigrants to Uruguay—many of whom did not come from a farming background—were attracted disproportionately to Montevideo and its economic opportunities.<sup>158</sup> This was especially true of Galicians and Italians. Likewise, too many institutions, including the trade schools that would have been of use to farmers were located in the city.<sup>159</sup> The urban-rural imbalance inherited from the colonial period persisted.

Fourth, economics and finance were not in would-be farmers favor. High railway charges ate into profits, and until the founding of BROU (Bank of the Oriental Republic of Uruguay) in 1896, small farms had trouble obtaining credit, because banks only lent to large landowners.<sup>160</sup> Arable farming was simply far less lucrative than livestock ranching. It required much more labor and machinery. Potential investors saw little value, so laws trying to incentivize private initiative had little effect. As a result, the government overrelied on speculation.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Nahum (1968) p. 78 estimated that around 1874, 29% of the country's land was unaccounted for in taxation.

<sup>158</sup> Kleinpenning (1995) p. 229. See also, Goebel (2009).

<sup>159</sup> Jacob (1969) p. 91

<sup>160</sup> Hanson (1938) p. 70, Jacob (1983) p. 85

<sup>161</sup> Kleinpenning (1995) p. 184

Fifth, were legal complications. Lacking a proper land survey, there was widespread uncertainty over what titles were valid. Leasehold terms were unfavourable, and subject to creaming off by middlemen.

Sixth, were cultural reasons that trumped the moral arguments of the ARU. By and large, marginalized countryfolk lacked the affinity for farming, exhibiting a disdain for the plow, which they saw as a task fit for *gringos*, and an insult to the gaucho identity.<sup>162</sup> In other words, it was hard to make sedentarists out of a people that saw passivity as antithetical to their identity, and were used to being mobile with regards to how they could make a living. As Jacob (1969) notes, the ARU didn't understand that decrees couldn't change mentalities.<sup>163</sup>

To summarize, the *estancieros* had a double standard of wanting to do something for the poor without losing their revenue and land. Given the above conditions and the complicity of the state, achieving both was impossible.

### *The Geographic Consequences*

This failure to turn itinerant ranch hands into sedentary farmers, and in turn to convert ranchland into arable farmland exacerbated the patterns of inequality produced during the colonial period, and had a lasting effect on the nation's geography.

First was the stark division of Uruguay's interior into the area of small farms mostly in and near Canelones Department, and the rest of the country dominated by large ranches. In 1880, 80% of the country's agricultural production came from four

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<sup>162</sup> *Gringo* was a semi-derogatory term for European immigrants, especially Italians. See Goebel (2009), for the history of this term. See also Slatta (1983) for a discussion of the labor proclivities of natives vs. immigrants on the Argentine pampas.

<sup>163</sup> Jacob (1969) p. 88

departments: Canelones, San José, Flores and Colonia.<sup>164</sup> Farmers planted crops in this area, in part because of the fertile soil, and in part because of proximity to Montevideo, which meant higher land values and easier access to market. Conversely, the sparse population of the rest of the interior meant that distances to market were prohibitive for crop farming. Other impediments in the traditional ranching zones included poor seed quality and limited use of good farm implements.<sup>165</sup> The fact that the 1897 and 1904 revolts came from the northern departments is evidence of the greater dissatisfaction of the rural masses in that part of the country. To put farming in Uruguay into perspective, it played second fiddle by some distance in terms of both land and labor. In 1878, the farming population of 43,744 people (15,364 owners, 9,951 tenants and 18,429 laborers), was about the same number that according to Barran and Nahum (1967), were expelled from ranching by fencing alone.<sup>166</sup> In 1876, 68% of Uruguay's land was devoted to livestock raising compared to only 3% for arable farming.<sup>167</sup> Despite all the talk, efforts to expand farming colonies brought about no significant change in regional variations of land use.

Second, the failure of the expelled *peonada* to become farmers further cemented the macrocephaly and hegemony of Montevideo in the national urban system. It is with great irony that during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the works to beautify and modernize the capital city, such as setting cobblestones, were carried out by the same rural workers expelled from the *campo* by a different brand of modernization. This of course was not so much by design, but as Jacob notes, by the arbitrary nature and lack of coherent solutions

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<sup>164</sup> Kleinpenning (1995) p. 179

<sup>165</sup> Kleinpenning (1995) p. 181

<sup>166</sup> Kleinpenning (1995) p. 179. For context, historical demographer Adela Pellegrino (2003) p. 8 estimates Uruguay's population in 1879 to be 438,245 people.

<sup>167</sup> Jacob (1969) p. 11

to social problems. There is the further irony that many rural migrants to the city skilled in certain rural tasks lacked value in a labor market dominated by industry, and ended up repeating their experience from *rancheríos* in *tugurios*, or informal settlements on the outskirts of the city.<sup>168</sup> Left with only obsolete skills, they were doubly marginalized from the *estancia* and from the city. Unlike contemporaneous industrialization in much of Europe and North America, where factories led to class consciousness, there was not enough labor demand in Montevideo to absorb the surplus from the campo.<sup>169</sup>

### *Concluding Remarks*

Following the spatial closing of the Uruguayan frontier with almost all land occupied by the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was neither the equivalent of Roca's march on the desert in Argentina, the *sertanista* expeditions into the Brazilian interior, nor the need for the government to pit cowboys against Indians as in the USA.<sup>170</sup> Yet in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century, Uruguay still had a frontier in which to expand the possibilities of ranching, albeit a technological one rather than a territorial one. No longer able to settle unclaimed spaces as a means to wealth, forward-thinking ranchers took advantage of new technologies to reconfigure preexisting spaces in a more productive way. Through fencing, railroads, and other innovations, the *estancia cimarrona* gave way to the *estancia moderna*, as the *estanciero*, especially in the South, became a capitalist entrepreneur with business-like labor relations with his personnel.

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<sup>168</sup> Jacob (1969) p. 108

<sup>169</sup> See Jacob (1969) p. 115, and Nahum (1968) p. 79. Alonso (1984) p. 12 speaking more about the 20<sup>th</sup> century adds that there was never a relevant industry able to absorb the rural exodus and that instead, the marginalized worked in unproductive activities.

<sup>170</sup> Uruguay's relatively small area played an important factor.

Yet progress brought with it consequences. On a more basic and material level, modernization and mechanization meant less contact and greater social distance between *estanciero* and peon. Livestock raising was no longer the totality of life and culture, but a business with increasing economic pressure. Thus it is imperative to criticize the very notion of progress espoused by the ARU, given that social hierarchies were cemented, farming failed to take root, and the fortunes of the rural laborer became ever more uncertain and subject to misery.

On a final note, the dispossession of the rural proletariat discussed in this chapter is evidence of the constant in Uruguayan history that so much (in this case, rural land use and social policy) is driven by vicissitudes in international market demand and technology more so than by any self-determination. Likewise, it is also an illustration of the limits of nature's generosity; when technological progress attached monetary value to livestock, to the land on which it grazed, and to all the people and instruments with which it came into contact, meat ceased to be at the fingertips of the average rural laborer.

## CONCLUSION

The story contained in these pages takes us roughly to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, still long before MEVIR was founded. To bring this story up to Alberto Gallinal Heber's time would require a closer analysis of the failures of *batllismo* and the Colorado Party governments to reverse the adverse social consequences of the modernization of ranching and uproot the causes of rural misery in the first six decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a task beyond the scope of this thesis.

The persistence of *pueblos de ratas* and the permanence of a rural underclass were the unaccounted for margin of error in the “chief laboratory for social experimentation in the Americas”.<sup>171</sup> Both Batlle y Ordóñez, and his nephew Luis Batlle Berres, who served either as president and or leading Colorado Party figure for much of the 1940s and 1950s, refused to engage in class warfare. They preferred a conciliatory approach to social problems, where laws, rather than redistribution, would be the cure for economic ills, thereby envisioning a society where workers could gradually, diligently, and methodically become bourgeois.<sup>172</sup> Crucially, Batlle y Ordóñez did little to press the hegemony of large-scale landowners, for reasons such as seeing foreign capital as a more politically vulnerable target for appropriation, a calculation that income tax would

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<sup>171</sup> Hanson (1938) p. vii uses this phrase to describe *batllista* Uruguay.

<sup>172</sup> Hanson (1938) p. 22 invokes two very telling quotes by Batlle y Ordóñez, one from 1917, “inequality is not deliberate on the part of the more fortunate”, and another from 1921, “Nor is there reason for class hatred, for we all covet riches”. See also Pintos (1938) 132-134. D’ Elia (1982) invokes two telling quotes from Batlle Berres. The first is from a 1944 speech to the Congress of American Parliamentarians in Chile, “We aren’t classist nor do we form castes; we only want the well-being of all and aspire that ‘the poor are less poor and the rich must be less rich’” Quotes are added on the final phrase, because he borrowed it from his uncle. The second quote is from a 1951 speech in Paysandú, “When good *batllismo* happens, communism has nothing to do”, reflects both the *neobatllista* (that is, relating to the ideology of Batlle Berres) critique of neighboring authoritarians Juan Domingo Perón and Getúlio Vargas, and its quickness in disassociating with the Soviet bloc.

disadvantage enterprise, and a belief that landowners were not responsible for social problems because they owned their land by “general consensus”.<sup>173</sup>

*Batllismo* in sum, despite what many commentators might imply, is NOT socialism. Rather, by avoiding social conflict, and by creating as broad a base as possible, it seeks to bring the benefits of enterprise to the masses. It is not about labor fighting capital but about the two being able to reconcile. In essence, it is reformist, rather than revolutionary.

On one hand, it is ironic then, that MEVIR, founded by a staunch *blanco*, fits fairly neatly into this *batllista* rubric. Yet on the other hand, it reads in perfect continuity with the history of social experiments in Uruguay in the long 20<sup>th</sup> century. Acting outside of, though with the help of, the state, Gallinal stands out as an *estanciero* who not only proposed a viable solution to a key aspect of rural marginality—inadequate housing—but had the wherewithal during a time of great social and political unrest to set the program on a course towards its long-term fruition.

The conception, foundation, and continuity of MEVIR is remarkable both in the Uruguayan historical context outlined in this thesis, but also more broadly, when compared to countless less-than-satisfactory national-scale housing projects in the Americas.<sup>174</sup> As such, telling the story of Uruguay’s rural poor and their relationship to housing is not simply important to fill a gap in the historiography of a small nation but is crucial to showing avenues for social justice in the Americas and beyond. MEVIR certainly is not the be-all-end-all solution for problems of the *campo*, nor is it a solution that can be airlifted and copied verbatim in other countries. And while it may be limited

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<sup>173</sup> See Pintos (1938) p. 132, Lindahl (1962) p. 257, Hanson (1938) p. 235

<sup>174</sup> The token examples are INFONAVIT in Mexico, Minha Casa Minha Vida in Brazil, and Viviendas 100% Subsidiadas in Colombia.

in affecting change to the socio-economic structure and land ownership patterns of rural Uruguay, it has a powerful material, symbolic and affective value that is worth examining more closely through the historical record and ethnographic observation.



Figure 5: MEVIR homes in Cerro Chato, Treinta y Tres Department (photo by author, 20 July 2017)

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