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**Prevailing Facets of Spanish Colonialism: The Roots of Exploitation and Inequality in
Latin America**

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Political Science and Public Service

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Introduction

Three motives inspired the Spanish Crown's exploration and colonization of Latin America: to spread Catholicism, to find wealth, mainly in the form of precious metals, and to expand the recently established Spanish empire. Exploitation and inequality were key characteristics of Spanish colonialism; the military personnel, noblemen, bureaucrats, and priests who constituted the four main groups of colonizers in Latin America carried with them a sense of entitlement and divine right fueled by Spain's victory in the Reconquista against the Moors and an aversion to hard labor instilled by Spanish traditions of accumulating wealth and power through relationship-building and receiving privileges from the Crown rather than by performing work. Four main facets characterized Spanish colonialism and contributed to the persistence of inequality and exploitation in colonial institutions – conversion, easy money, centralism, and political violence. The facets of conversion, easy money, centralism, and political violence are not institutions in themselves, but rather practices and logics of Spanish colonialism whose presence can be seen in social, political, and economic institutions and traced throughout history despite changes and developments in institutions. These facets' entrenched presence in the foundations of Latin American social, political, and economic institutions has manifested throughout the shared and unique histories of Latin American countries. The facets' lingering impacts and logics can be traced in key shared events in Latin American countries' histories, namely the Independence Wars in the 1800s, the *latifundia* land ownership system, and the debt crisis in the 1980s. Additionally, the facets are visible in the notorious Dirty Wars in Chile and Argentina, periods of terror and abuse perpetrated by the militarized state.

It is important to clarify what area I mean when I refer to Latin America throughout this paper. Spain's territories in the Americas stretched from present-day Western United States,

through Mexico and Central America, and across the Western half of South America. Latin America can be understood in different ways, but I use it to describe the territory encompassed by what is present-day Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Paraguay, Uruguay, Chile, and Argentina. This characterization of Latin America makes for a more detailed depiction of Spanish colonialism in those specific areas; it would be incorrect to generalize Spanish colonialism in the southern part of Latin America to Spanish colonialism in Central America (except for in Mexico, which experienced colonialism very similarly to Latin America due to its possession of the Aztec Empire), mostly because Spanish colonialism was more concentrated in, and thus played a more significant role in the development of, South American countries of Latin America. Southern Latin America was home to the Inca Empire, and previous research shows that the Spaniards “tended to colonize most extensively precolonial regions that were populous and highly developed,” for example territories of the Inca Empire in Southern Latin America and of the Aztec Empire in Mexico.¹ While maintaining this distinction of and focus on South American Latin America, keep in mind that the same logics and practices of Spanish colonialism were present throughout other Spanish colonial territories as well; my distinction simply helps to narrow the scope of this project and provide a more detailed analysis and discussion of a smaller area.

Spain’s colonization of Latin America was unique in its methods and the underlying practices, motivations, and logics behind those methods, especially when compared to England’s colonization of North America. English colonialism in North America occurred mostly at the hands of commoners; the famous Puritan Pilgrims sought independence from the Church of England and a new start away from a country which persecuted them for their religious beliefs.

¹ Matthew Lange, James Mahoney, and Matthias vom Hau, “Colonialism and Development: A Comparative Analysis of Spanish and British Colonies,” *American Journal of Sociology* 111, no. 5 (2006): 1412.

Spanish colonialism was joint effort between the Crown and the Catholic Church that aimed to further the power of both, while individuals religiously separated from their monarch and country built the early English colonies in America. English colonists sailed to America to start a new life with no intentions of returning to England, a motivation fundamentally opposed to Spanish colonists' motives, which were to spread Catholicism, extract wealth from the Americas, and return to Spain with an elevated economic, and therefore social, status. These differences in intentions are evidenced by the types of people sent to colonize the Americas. Early English colonists were families, men and women, prepared to work to settle in a foreign land, yet Spanish colonists consisted of priests, military men, bureaucrats, and noblemen expecting to conquer and convert under the authorities of the Crown and the Church.

Differences between England's and Spain's approaches to colonizing the Americas explain why liberal and capitalist institutions valuing private property and independence from centralized rule became the building blocks of the United States but struggle to survive in Latin America. English colonists' desire to build something new and better for themselves and their families opposed Spanish colonists' preservation of Spanish political and economic power structures from which they benefited. It is important to understand the uniqueness of Spanish colonialism and not to generalize colonialism. Exploitation and inequality characterized all colonialism, but colonialism occurred for numerous reasons and in differing ways in colonized areas. Not recognizing the distinctions between colonized countries' colonial experiences forms incomplete pictures of the origins and developments of different manifestations of the shared colonial logics of exploitation and inequality.

By looking at generalized and specific events in which Spanish colonial logics and practices recur, we can gain a deeper understanding of why economic and political instability

and inequality continue to plague many Latin American countries. My research's identification of how main facets of Spanish colonialism became rooted in Latin America additionally facilitates a better comprehension of the reasons behind failed attempts to address residual colonial logics of exploitation and inequality. Existing scholarship discusses the various aspects of Spanish colonialism, commonly the *encomienda* system of labor and the role of the Catholic Church. Some research also focuses on how poverty and exploitation in Latin America originated in Latin America's colonial period. However, none of these works trace specific facets of Spanish colonialism from the Reconquista into foundational Latin American institutions and then throughout shared events in Latin American history. Additionally, the Dirty Wars, while thoroughly studied (Argentina's more than Chile's), have not previously been explored within the proposed framework of the persistence of facets of Spanish colonialism.

This paper contains two main sections of analysis. The first part will provide a brief historical narrative of the experiences in Spain's history, most importantly the Reconquista, that contributed to the formation of the conversion, easy money, centralism, and political violence facets of Spanish colonialism. The facets are then explored in detail, establishing the theoretical framework that will be applied in the paper's second part, which describes generalized manifestations of the facets in the independence wars, the development of the *latifundio* system, and the 1980s debt crisis. The analysis concludes with a more specific investigation into the manifestations of the facets in Chile's and Argentina's Dirty Wars.

Roots of Spanish Colonialism

Contrary to colonialism by England and France, Spain and Portugal approached the colonization of Central and South America with strongly religious motives. The Iberian Peninsula, in which Spain is located, has a rich and complicated religious history in which

“Christianity had thrived, suffered, and recovered again and again.”² Prior to Christopher Columbus’ famous 1492 voyage of discovery to the Americas, Spain had only recently, in the same year, conquered the last remaining Moorish stronghold in the Iberian Peninsula, the Kingdom of Granada. The Reconquista, or Reconquest, was the almost 800-year war for dominion of the Iberian Peninsula between Christian and Muslim forces. Religion, specifically Catholicism, was a unifying point for the Christian forces, which consisted of the four Christian monarchies of Castile, Aragon, Portugal, and Navarre. The marriage of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile in 1426 joined the kingdoms of Aragon and Castile into Spain.

The mindset of ‘manifest destiny’ perceived by the Spanish monarchy in driving out the Muslims and spreading Christianity permeated Spanish society even after Spain had gained majority control of its territory in the 1200s. Ferdinand’s and Isabella’s final defeat of the Muslims in Granada in 1492 signaled to Spaniards that “God extended his favor...a sentiment that conquistadors soon carried to the Americas.”³ The Reconquista became a key part of Spain’s self-image and personal historical narrative, and the role played by Catholicism and the Church in the Reconquista embedded religious values into Spain’s social and political workings while also increasing the Church’s political and economic power. Just as the “[l]ines between State and Church, between public and private, were blurred” in 15th and 16th century Spain,⁴ so were those lines blurred in colonial Latin America; many of the relationships and overlap between the religious, political, and economic institutions established in Latin America during the colonial period are rooted in the Reconquista. Also, the Reconquista spawned systems by which military

² John Frederick Schwaller, *The History of the Catholic Church in Latin America: From Conquest to Revolution and Beyond* (New York: NYU Press, 2011), 13.

³ Mark A. Burkholder, Monica Rankin, and Lyman L. Johnson, *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance: A History of Latin America since Columbus*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 2.

⁴ Guillermo M. Yeatts, *The Roots of Poverty in Latin America*, trans. Gabriela Mrad (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2005), 20.

success became a mechanism for upward social mobility, linking military efforts with economic and social rewards so that the “predominant values and social rankings in Spanish society were related to military power.”⁵ As it emerged from almost eight centuries of the religiously charged Reconquista, Spain approached the colonization of Latin America with political, economic, and social power structures that religiously legitimized and economically and socially incentivized military violence and exploitation.

The strongly religious aspect of the Reconquista enabled the Catholic Church to accumulate large amounts of social, political, and economic capital in Spain. After the 1200s, the militarized religious zeal instilled by the Reconquista persisted and manifested in military-religious orders. Military-religious orders fulfilled two key functions in continuing to fight conversion and territory battles in Spain. First, the orders added a military branch to Spanish forces to help defeat the Muslims, and second, they provided “moral, physical, and spiritual assistance,”⁶ thus strengthening the belief that the Reconquista and subsequent wars were inherently tied to a religious, divinely-ordained purpose.

Often, the Spanish monarchy rewarded military-religious orders’ service with land grants over which the Church exercised a high degree of autonomy, specifically through a set of unique laws and privileges called *fuero eclesiástico*, a concept similar to that of clerical immunity.⁷ Since the 1100s, monarchs of the various kingdoms in the Iberian Peninsula awarded *fueros* to specific towns or groups, often as a reward for military success or as an incentive for those towns and groups to support the monarchs’ initiatives. Forging alliances with nobles was paramount to the early Christian kingdoms’ success – “allegiance to family, birthplace, and residence

⁵ Yeatts, *The Roots of Poverty in Latin America*, 19.

⁶ Schwaller, *The History of the Catholic Church in Latin America: From Conquest to Revolution and Beyond*, 17.

⁷ Schwaller, *The History of the Catholic Church in Latin America*, 15.

outweighed attachments to larger administrative units, including kingdoms.”⁸ *Fueros* served as a different set of laws, often allowing increased privileges and autonomy, by which a town or group would be separately governed. Under *fueros*, nobility accustomed to prioritizing their wants and needs above the Crown’s were incentivized to align their interests with the Crown’s while maintaining high degrees of autonomy and privilege. *Fueros* often accompanied land grants, called *encomiendas*, which reinforced the special privileges endowed under the *fueros*. The owner of an *encomienda* was called an *encomendero*. *Encomiendas* “consisted of temporary grants by the Crown of Castile conferring jurisdiction over territories recaptured from the Moors. Specifically, the Crown ceded the right to collect a number of taxes payable by the inhabitants of the territory subject to the *encomienda*.”⁹

Fuero eclesiástico gave Churches and Church officials and clergy, in gratitude for the service of military-religious orders, an increased level of autonomy. It granted immunity from royal courts, meaning that priests accused of a crime could opt to have their case heard in ecclesiastical court, by their peers, instead of in royal or local court. This provided opportunity for Church officials to act outside of and above the Spanish Crown. Additionally, Church officials were often exempted from taxes; in cases where the Church owned land upon which others lived, as a result of land grant rewards to military-religious orders, the Church officials had the power to levy taxes from those residents. Excusal from paying taxes and the acquisition of income from taxing the people, coupled with Church officials’ ability to operate outside of common legal restraints, allowed the Church to accumulate wealth and land much more quickly than most other groups in Spain.

⁸ Burkholder et al., *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance: A History of Latin America since Columbus*, 3.

⁹ Ronald W. Batchelder and Nicolas Sanchez, “The *Encomienda* and the Optimizing Imperialist: An Interpretation of Spanish Imperialism in the Americas,” *Public Choice* 156, (2013): 46.

Military-religious orders built up the political and economic powers of the Catholic Church and formalized a relationship between the Spanish crown and the Catholic Church, a relationship which, when it reached its height, manifested in the conquest of Latin America. As stated by Guillermo Yeatts, “The conquest of Latin America was essentially a public initiative in which the unity of Church and State was at its highest point.”¹⁰ The societal importance Spaniards placed upon the Catholic Church combined with the Church’s powerful set of assets positioned it as a strong ally of the Spanish Crown. A papal grant of royal patronage granted after Spain’s conquest of Granada allowed Queen Isabella to further intertwine the Church and Crown by selecting individuals for high-level Church positions and pressuring mid- and low-level Church officials and clergy to undertake reforms.¹¹

Military participation in the Reconquista provided opportunities for economic and social advancement for individuals, too. The Christian kingdoms of Castile, Aragon, and Portugal “were hereditary monarchies marked by social, economic, and legal inequality,”¹² leaving little room for upward social mobility or achievements outside of one’s inherited social rank. Historian John Elliott emphasizes this lack of career options in Spanish society, writing, “The nature of the economic system was such that one became a student or a monk, a beggar or a bureaucrat. There was nothing else to be.”¹³ The monarchy headed Spanish society. Underneath the monarchy resided few titled nobles, then untitled nobles, or *hidalgos*, followed by a majority of commoners, including merchants, professionals, artisans, servants, farmers, and livestock herdsman, and lastly some African slaves.¹⁴ The Reconquista gave young men access to spoils of

¹⁰ Yeatts, *The Roots of Poverty in Latin America*, 38.

¹¹ Burkholder et al., *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance*, 3.

¹² Burkholder et al., *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance*, 2.

¹³ John H. Elliott, “The Decline of Spain,” *Past & Present*, no. 20 (1961): 65.

¹⁴ Burkholder et al., *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance*, 2.

war and the possibility of land rewards from the Spanish Crown for their military successes, all major components of achieving a higher social status. Wealth correlated with social status in Spain, and war spoils, such as goods and slaves, combined with land grants from the Crown, increased military men's wealth and thus their social statuses.

The Reconquista heavily informed the Spanish monarchy's conquest mindset and fueled its exploration of the Americas. Numerous aspects of the Reconquista mindset and Spanish monarchy were reflected in the social, religious, political, and military institutions of Latin America throughout the region's history. Examining the roots and evolution of these systems helps to explain why Latin America has historically experienced political turmoil, economic instability, and outbreaks of state-sponsored violence.

Key Facets of Spanish Colonialism

Spain's colonization of Latin America involved complex interactions between multiple actors with varying ideologies and motivations. While there are many features of Spanish colonialism, I identified four main facets – conversion, easy money, centralism, and political violence. These four facets interplayed throughout the colonization and development of Latin America, but each distinctly influenced the institutional and social history of Latin America. The conversion, easy money, centralism, and political violence aspects of Spain's colonization of Latin America trace back to Spanish society, and the evolution of the ideologies and institutions tied to those four facets demonstrate just how relevant the effects of colonialism remain. While each facet's expression changed significantly throughout Latin American history since colonialism, they are intrinsically present and identifiable in key logics, ideologies, and institutional functions at all stages of Latin America's development. This section describes the

facets of conversion, easy money, centralism, and political violence, providing context for the next section, which illustrates how the four facets have manifested in Argentina and Chile.

To understand the religious, social, political, and economic origins of Latin America, it is also important to look at who built Spanish America. The four groups that constituted the majority of Spanish settlers were military men, noblemen, priests, and bureaucrats who served the Spanish Crown.^{15, 16} All of these groups benefited from the conversion, easy money, centralism, and political violence facets of Spanish colonialism, and as the founders of Spanish America, they possessed the power to ensure that those facets and the inequality of the institutions and systems associated with them would prevail in Latin America just as they did in Spain. Remembering that these four groups founded the early economic, political, religious, and social institutions, both formal and informal, helps to show how strongly the four facets of conversion, easy money, centralism, and political violence influenced the foundation and growth of Latin America.

A Brief Discussion of Race and the Facets

While not a focus of this research, it is important to acknowledge the role of race in Spanish colonialism and Latin American countries' developments. Race and its part in determining economic and social statuses in Spanish colonies generally followed the trend of the whiter you are, the wealthier you are, but it was also more complex. Early manifestations of racism in Spain were obvious in the Spaniards' exploitative and abusive enslavement and approaches to conversion of indigenous peoples. Because of the perceived God-given sanction of

¹⁵ Yeatts, *The Roots of Poverty in Latin America*, 69.

¹⁶ Schwaller, *The History of the Catholic Church in Latin America*, 38.

A distinction is made here between military men and soldiers: "To refer to the participants in the conquest of the New World as soldiers would be a misnomer. The term "soldier" implies that they received a salary, but these men and women did not receive any pay."

their colonial mission and their acceptance of “the inevitability of human inequality,”¹⁷ Spanish colonizers claimed a superior moral status to the natives. Charles Mills explains the resulting impacts of this logic on the evolution of racism in colonial societies:

The establishment of society thus implies the denial that a society already existed; the creation of society *requires* the intervention of white men, who are thereby positioned as *already* sociopolitical beings. White men who are (definitionally) already part of society encounter nonwhites who are not, who are ‘savage’... These the white men bring partially into society as subordinate citizens or exclude on reservations or deny the existence of or exterminate. In the colonial case, admittedly preexisting but (for one reason or another) deficient societies (decadent, stagnant, corrupt) are taken over and run for the ‘benefit’ of the nonwhite natives, who are deemed childlike, incapable of self-rule and handling their own affairs, and thus appropriately wards of the state.¹⁸

As Spanish colonies developed and grew into more established societies, and the population of mixed-race children grew, original white-nonwhite distinctions and hierarchies had to evolve. “Not biology, but wealth, lineage, occupation, and power or, alternatively, poverty and tributary status largely defined race. Yet culture, the mastery of Spanish or Portuguese, Christianity, mode of dress, diet, place of residence, and honor also contributed to racial and ethnic identity.”¹⁹ Therefore, although “white elites continued to pride themselves on ‘pure’ lineage as the basis for being ‘Spaniards’, mixed-race children were not automatically excluded from wealthier social circles simply because of their race, but rather were afforded privilege if they had money and could demonstrate a successful adoption of Spanish civilized culture and European whiteness.”²⁰

¹⁷ Burkholder et al., *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance*, 114.

¹⁸ Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 13.

¹⁹ Burkholder et al., *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance*, 115.

²⁰ Burkholder et al., *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance*, 115.

The facets of conversion, easy money, centralism, and political violence acted to perpetuate systems of inequality that favored Spanish colonizers, who were white, and thus can also be connected to the evolving role of race and racism in Latin America. However, further investigation into that connection does not belong to this project and would be a course of future research.

Conversion

Christianity post-Reconquista in Spain provided the dominant lens through which Spain conquered and settled the Americas. Evangelizing to the heathen indigenous peoples served as one of the main motivators for the exploration and exploitation of the Americas; spreading Christianity was a key piece of Queen Isabella's and King Ferdinand's conditions for funding Columbus' famous 1492 voyage.²¹ As the key implementors of conversion, priests consistently sailed with the military personnel, nobles, and bureaucrats to Latin America. The religious charge of the Reconquista generated two main sentiments, both of which contributed to the conversion facet of Spain's colonization of Latin America. These components of Spain's conversion mentality included the beliefs that Spain's mission in Latin America was God-ordained and that maintaining religious homogeneity was in the best interest of Spain's security and would aid in Spain's mission to expand its empire. Spain's approach to conversion in Latin America exemplifies how Spain deemed itself superior to the indigenous peoples of Latin America, especially to non-Christians, as a result from its victory in the Reconquista.

First, Spain's victory against the Muslims infused Spaniards with a sense of divine mission to conquer and convert nonbelievers. To the Crown, its victory symbolized an extension of God's favor to Spain. Conquering a new land in the name of God while simultaneously

²¹ Schwaller, *The History of the Catholic Church in Latin America*, 36.

spreading Christianity seemed a natural continuation of the divinely sanctioned work of the Reconquista and provided Spain with another opportunity to gain more favor with God.²² Thus, conversion became a key piece of Spain's mission in Latin America. Spanish Christians' perception of God's favor also contributed to a sense of superiority over other countries and groups, especially non-Christians, and began the distinction between civilized, Christian countries and barbaric, heathen countries. The process of 'civilizing' indigenous peoples, a common thread in imperial colonial rhetoric, was inherently tied to converting them. Connecting the processes of civilizing and converting legitimized Spain's use of force and violence as means of saving indigenous peoples.

Second, the Reconquista gave rise to an absolute belief that Catholicism was the only religion and that religiously homogenizing Spain would promote security. Linked to Spain's belief in its divine mission to conquer and convert, the Reconquista also endowed Spanish Christians with the certainty that their religion was the one and only right religion. This belief fueled intolerance of and lack of respect for other religions, furthering Spain's zeal to convert the non-Christian native peoples in Latin America. The Spanish monarchs also pursued religious uniformity to stabilize and unite the Spanish empire in order to more smoothly expand the Spanish empire. The Crown believed that a religiously united Spanish empire would promote national security and stability by decreasing the likelihood of another religious war like the Reconquista. Conversion signaled a finality to physical conquest. However, postcolonial and geography theorist David Slater points out that "any discussion of threats to order and stability must be linked to discourses of identity and difference. What exactly is being threatened? What are the discourses or regimes of truth that are immanent in the power relations that seek to

²² Burkholder et al., *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance*, 4.

preserve order?”²³ In expanding an empire, “desire for territorial expansion in conjoined with an imperialist sameness for order where any notion of ‘mixture’ or ‘blot’ is not to be gladly contemplated.”²⁴ Through placing such immense importance on conversion, Spain founded beliefs in Latin America around the importance of ideological purity and unity.

The Crown’s push for a purely Catholic Spain is exemplified not only by Spanish colonialism but by the Spanish Inquisition, the Spanish Crown’s aggressive mission between 1476 and 1515 to eliminate false converts from Judaism, or *conversos*, in Spain. The Inquisition provided the Spanish monarchy with a religious-political institution through which “they could unite their disparate kingdoms, deflect political tensions onto the Jews, and make the Spanish monarchy the vanguard of militant Christianity in Europe.”²⁵ The Spanish Inquisition shows how far the Spanish Crown was willing to go to ensure genuine conversion to Catholicism among all in its empire, and it offers another example of the Reconquista’s effects on the Spanish ideologies and institutions.

The conversion facet of Spain’s colonization of Latin America demonstrates how Spain claimed a moral high ground and assumed a superior position in relation to Latin America. It epitomizes the traditional narrative of colonialism: a colonizing power imposes its own superior ideologies upon another group through framing its intervention as necessary in saving the colonized from itself. Slater explains this occurrence by identifying three formative elements of an imperial power:

²³ David Slater, *Geopolitics and the Post-colonial: Rethinking North-South Relations*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 39.

²⁴ Slater, *Geopolitics and the Post-colonial*, 33.

²⁵ Patricia Lopes Don, “Franciscans, Indian Sorcerers, and the Inquisition in New Spain, 1536-1543,” *Journal of World History* 17, no. 1 (2006): 29.

First there is an enduring *invasiveness* or desire and capacity to penetrate other societies and cultures, where the penetration is multi-dimensional and affects the psychological, political, economic, financial and cultural realms in an intersecting manner. This element is part and parcel of the will to *impose* on the other a set of values, imaginations and practices, which are deemed to be superior – to ostensibly save the other from itself, to impose an external identity onto a recipient society or culture which is represented as in need of progress, or order, or civilization, or improvement, or reform or democracy, thus denying the other society its right to make its own destiny...these imposing representations are crucially imbricated with the legitimization of interventions... This second element is then inseparably entwined with the third, which is constituted by the *lack of respect* for the other, being manifested in subordinating modes of representation, of negative essentializations which erase or belittle the complexities, differences, and heterogeneities and *intrinsic value* of the other culture or society.²⁶

The conversion facet of Spanish colonialism aligns with the three elements outlined by Slater. Utilizing conversion, Spain legitimized the three main parts of imperialism: first, its desire to invade and change existing native societies; second, its imposition of its religious and political ideologies upon indigenous peoples; and, third, as shown by its physical and ideological invasion into indigenous societies and by its exploitation of indigenous peoples and resources, its inherent lack of respect for and denial of the value of non-Spanish, non-Christian peoples.

Easy Money

Another main facet of Spanish colonialism was Spain's inclination towards easy money. While the term 'easy money' can often refer to an economic stimulus policy in which interest

²⁶ Slater, *Geopolitics and the Post-colonial*, 52-53.

rates are low, I use it to describe the process of obtaining money through little work. Two important concepts contributed to Spain's easy money attitude – rent-seeking behavior and a booty mentality. Spain's rent-seeking politics and the residual booty mentality from the Reconquista accustomed Spain to making easy fixes in its economy, exploiting resources and people in Latin America for short-term gains while discouraging entrepreneurial economic activity that would have resulted in long-term economic success and stability both in Spain and in Latin America. Spain's easy money mentality doomed economies in Latin America to instability and low productivity, set a precedent for state interference in private property, and incentivized exploitative behavior. All of the groups who colonized Latin America benefited from the exploitative and privilege-based nature of rent-seeking behavior, and military personnel especially profited off the booty mentality instilled by the Reconquista.

Although Spain benefited financially and politically from the Reconquista, the Spanish Crown needed more funding to advance its empire and hoped that expansion into the New World would provide financial benefits. Even if Columbus' initial voyage failed, financial losses to the Crown would be small, and the additional opportunity to spread Catholicism and Spain's glory swayed King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella to fund Columbus when no other European monarch would.²⁷ The Spanish government traditionally relied on taxing its people as one of its main sources of revenue, exemplifying its roots in rent-seeking behavior. "Rent-seeking is a socially unproductive behavior in which in the short term one player wins, and the other one loses, but in the long term, everybody loses."²⁸ Because of the Crown's tendency to award *fueros*, which often included tax exemptions or even the ability to tax others, to wealthier nobles, the commoners "who comprised more than 90 percent of Iberia's population" suffered the most from

²⁷ Burkholder et al., *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance*, 18.

²⁸ Yeatts, *The Roots of Poverty in Latin America*, 12.

taxes.²⁹ In the short-term, taxation of commoners and tax exemption of nobles provided the Crown with income to fund its affairs while allowing it to retain the support of the nobility; however, in the long-term, it created an unsustainable economic structure that resulted in financial problems and inequality among Spaniards. When it conquered Latin America, Spain brought this type of rent-seeking behavior with it.

Rent-seeking fundamentally opposes profit-seeking behavior. Profit-seeking encompasses “that entrepreneurial behavior that obtains profits as a result of competition in an open market and by virtue of offering a better product at a lower price”; in rent-seeking, “benefits do not derive from meeting a need in a competitive context, but from a legal obstacle to competition, an artificial monopoly, a special permit, etc.”³⁰ In Latin America, as in Spain, “rent-seeking activities were rewarded. It became more profitable to invest time and effort in influencing government officials to obtain privileges or protections than to go the difficult road of satisfying the consumer in an open market.”³¹ The economic institutions and arrangements in Spain, such as *fueros*, incentivized individuals to obtain privileges to make money-making easier rather than participate in risk-taking, entrepreneurial, competitive economic behavior. A major example of rent-seeking behavior in post-Reconquista Spain is the *encomienda* system, the Spanish Crown’s practice of rewarding military service in the Reconquista with land grants often covered by *fueros*. Through participation in military-religious orders, men sought government-awarded privileges to further their social and economic positions, embodying Yeatt’s description of rent-seeking as a behavior rooted in obtaining benefits through special privileges.

²⁹ Burkholder et al., *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance*, 117.

³⁰ Yeatts, *The Roots of Poverty in Latin America*, 12.

³¹ Yeatts, *The Roots of Poverty in Latin America*, 72.

The *encomienda* system in Spanish America made Spain's rent-seeking tendencies even more obvious. In order to maintain as much control overseas as possible while still collecting rents from Spanish colonists and native peoples, the Crown imposed inheritance, trade, and relocation restrictions on the *encomiendas*.³² These restrictions offered additional incentive for *encomenderos* to obtain the maximum immediately available profit from the lands and indigenous peoples they governed rather than try to create more wealth. Since the Crown made *encomiendas* uninheritable, *encomenderos* did not have a reason to develop the *encomienda* for longevity because they could not pass it on. Trade restrictions forbade the sale or rent of natives, thus preventing *encomenderos* from optimally adjusting the size of their labor force, and relocation restrictions prohibited *encomenderos* from moving their indigenous labor force to more productive locations.³³ The *encomienda* system in colonial Latin America was deliberately designed by the Crown as a rent-seeking institution; in order to preserve its absolute power, the Crown sacrificed the longevity and institutional integrity of the *encomiendas* through the restrictions it enforced on them. Another relevant observation of the rent-seeking characteristics of the *encomienda* system is how it tied revenue to the indigenous population, the labor force of the *encomiendas*. Under the unsustainable conditions of the *encomiendas*, *encomendero*'s profits declined with their indigenous labor force, eventually necessitating the import of African slaves to some parts of Latin America in order to maintain the profit demanded by the Crown.³⁴

Yet another example of Spain's rent-seeking behavior is the *mesta*. The *mesta* "was an institution by which exclusive grazing rights were granted by the king of Spain to the guild of sheepmen; these rights interfered with the private properties of third parties who use the land for

³² Timothy J. Yeager, "Encomienda or Slavery? The Spanish Crown's Choice of Labor Institution in Sixteenth-Century Spanish America," *The Journal of Economic History* 55, no. 4 (1995): 843.

³³ Yeager, "Encomienda or Slavery?", 843.

³⁴ Burkholder et al., *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance*, 25.

growing crops.”³⁵ By designating land that could have otherwise been used for agriculture to grazing purposes, the Crown disturbed agricultural activity in a primarily agrarian society while also destabilizing the principle of private property. This “encouraged the bourgeoisie to flock into the lower nobility and abandon productive enterprise; the loss of their commercial and manufacturing skills and the indivisibility of their land entails would ensure that Spain remained locked into a high rent-seeking equilibrium.”³⁶ The *mesta* demonstrates the Spanish Crown’s habit of weakening the middle class’ property rights and is one example of the unsustainable institutions and behavior that Spain carried over and built into Latin America. Private property is essential to the long-term success of the state; Aristotle claimed that private property is a precondition for happy and well-ordered states.³⁷ Furthermore, economic studies consistently link strong protection of property rights to better economic outputs.³⁸ The Spanish Crown’s consistent interference in and disruption of private property destabilized its economy in the long run and trapped it in a cycle of destructive rent-seeking behavior very comparable to the economic instabilities and turmoil experienced in most Latin American countries.

The Reconquista created a booty mentality in Spain which the conquistadors carried with them to Latin America. Almost 800 years of taking conquered Muslims’ belongings, land, and slaves provided Spaniards with a way of accumulating wealth without having to invest in it or work for it to grow. Rent-seeking and the post-Reconquista booty mentality accustomed Spain “to seek additional resources following a path of least resistance,”³⁹ instilling an easy money

³⁵ Yeatts, *The Roots of Poverty in Latin America*, 21.

³⁶ Mauricio Drelichman, “All that Glitters: Precious Metals, Rent Seeking and the Decline of Spain,” *European Review of Economic History* 9 (2005): 333-334.

³⁷ Karen Margrethe Nielson, “Economy a Private Property,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle's Politics*, ed. Marguerite Deslauriers and Pierre Destrée (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013): 75.

³⁸ Constantine Alexandrakis and Grigorios Livanis, “Economic Freedom and Economic Performance in Latin America: A Panel Data Analysis,” *Review of Development Economics* 17, no. 1 (2013): 35, 46.

³⁹ Mauricio Drelichman, “All that Glitters: Precious Metals, Rent Seeking and the Decline of Spain,” *European Review of Economic History* 9 (2005): 314.

attitude in the conquistadors, which they brought to Latin America. The *encomiendas* and *fueros* also enabled the beneficiaries of such institutions to prey off the labor of the lower classes by collecting their taxes and controlling the products of their labor. Spanish settlers could have grown crops and raised livestock themselves, but they lacked interest in doing so because they could have done those things in Spain. “Rather, they craved provisions and gold and insisted that the natives provide both.”⁴⁰ Spain’s draw to easy money was accompanied with a growing aversion to performing hard labor among the conquistadors, a sentiment that was supported by the tendency of the nobles and military personnel in Spain to take advantage of the lower classes under *fueros* and *encomiendas*. This aversion to hard labor and attraction to easy money becomes particularly obvious in the exploitative behavior Spanish conquistadors participated in in colonial Latin America.

Centralism

The third main facet of Spanish colonialism is centralism. The Spanish monarchy exhibited many characteristics of a centralism, “a system of government in which political authority is concentrated under a strong government.”⁴¹ The Spanish monarchs exercised large amounts of concentrated authority over their territory, despite ceding some taxation and legal rights to nobles and clergy through *fueros* and *encomiendas*, a position that Yeatts labels “monarchic absolutism.”⁴² The Spanish monarchy’s power is evident in the immense reforms Queen Isabella instituted in the Catholic Church following the Reconquista. Centralism also played a fundamental role in the economic and political organizations of Spanish settlements in Latin America, and its influence is closely tied with that of the conversion and easy money

⁴⁰ Burkholder et al., *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance*, 22.

⁴¹ Burkholder et al., *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance*, 200.

⁴² Yeatts, *The Roots of Poverty in Latin America*, 23.

facets. As stated by Yeatts, the “centralized monarchy and bureaucracy of Castile defined the institutional evolution of both Spain and Spanish America.”⁴³ Since nobles, bureaucrats, and priests composed three of the four main groups of Spanish colonists, they ensured that the centralist Spanish systems they benefited from would also exist in Spanish America. The centralism rooted in Latin America by Spanish colonialism established unequal power distribution systems that favored the executive branch and the wealthy, setting up future pro-democracy efforts in Latin America to fail.

Centralism in Spain developed in part from Catholicism. Spanish monarchs derived their power directly from God, without intermediaries, and the “divine right of kings” began to set a precedent of monarchs protecting state sovereignty, often at the expense of individual rights.⁴⁴ The king and the state became synonymous, and both “took on a sacred character.”⁴⁵ Echoing the major Catholic principle of an ultimately blind faith and trust in God, “giving support to rulers was an article of faith.”⁴⁶ Catholicism helped legitimize the Crown’s monopolization of economic and political institutions while also fostering hope among the people that their leaders, whose power was God-given, would be good and fair. This hope and willingness to put faith in new leaders are common in Latin America’s history.

Very few checks existed on the executive powers of the Spanish monarchy during the years of Spanish colonialism in Latin America. The monarchs controlled most elements of Spanish society, including the economy. In Spain and Spanish America, “[a]ll the details of the economy and the polity were carefully structured to promote the interest of the Crown.”⁴⁷ All of

⁴³ Yeatts, *The Roots of Poverty in Latin America*, 20.

⁴⁴ Yeatts, *The Roots of Poverty in Latin America*, 29.

⁴⁵ Markus M. L. Crepaz, *European Democracies*, (New York: Routledge, 2017): 211.

⁴⁶ Yeatts, *The Roots of Poverty in Latin America*, 29.

⁴⁷ Yeatts, *The Roots of Poverty in Latin America*, 21.

the previously mentioned institutions demonstrate this. Through the *fueros* and *encomiendas*, the Crown incentivized cooperation with its agenda and grew its military strength. The *mesta* shows the Crown's willingness to infringe on private property rights in order to maximize its profits. In the Inquisition, the Spanish monarchs wielded the association between Church and state as a weapon to promote religious homogeneity to unite and strengthen the Spanish Empire. The Catholic Church's position in Spanish society also benefited the Crown's exploration into Latin America. Spanish and Latin American laws and institutions were geared towards furthering the Crown's strength, and later the *caudillos'* and inherited oligarchies' strength; this situation made it easier for the lower and middle classes, who represented the majority of the population, to make and keep money if they worked outside of the law. Centralism dictated that Latin America's legal, political, and economic institutions were founded with the purpose of finding easy money and then funneling those profits to people who already possessed military or political power.

The Crown's control of the *encomienda* system in colonial Latin America also shows how deeply the Crown valued its centralized power. Financial professor Timothy Yeager points out that the *encomienda* served as a "constrained wealth-maximizing outcome" because it provided a lower income to the Crown than would other forms of labor, such as slavery.⁴⁸ The inheritance, trade, and relocation restrictions imposed on the *encomiendas* were deliberately designed by the Crown to further its own interests, supporting Yeatts' claim that "the details of the economy and the polity were carefully structured to promote the interest of the Crown."⁴⁹ Despite the short-term nature and lower revenue of the *encomienda* system, the Crown preferred the *encomienda* system of labor because it afforded the Crown a more secure position of rule in

⁴⁸ Yeager, "Encomienda or Slavery?", 846.

⁴⁹ Yeatts, *The Roots of Poverty in Latin America*, 21.

Latin America. Finally, the Crown reserved the right to confiscate *encomiendas*, a right it more often invoked against the largest *encomiendas* in order to weaken the wealthiest *encomenderos*, further exhibiting the Crown's prioritization of securing its centralized power over wealth creation in Latin America.⁵⁰ Yeager writes, "[t]he Crown guarded its security at the expense of creating a poor institutional framework for productivity and investment."⁵¹

The Crown carefully orchestrated its role in Spain's advancement into Latin America. In order to keep financial risk to the Crown minimal, most expeditions to Latin America were privately funded. However, the Crown retained the sole right to authorize expeditions through a contract called the *capitulacion*. The *capitulacion* granted the expedition's leader "the exclusive right to conquer a particular territory, specified the concessions in the newly conquered territories that could be assigned as rewards to the participants, and enunciated the rights reserved for the Crown."⁵² These expedition leaders are referred to by different names, including *caudillos* and *adelantados*. Whatever success the leader found, the Crown usually received twenty percent of the profits; this arrangement became known as the "Royal Fifth."⁵³ The Crown's heavy involvement in dictating the terms of exploration and colonization contributed to conquistadors' aversion to hard labor since, rather than seeing the Crown take twenty percent of the profit of one's personal labor, taking advantage of indigenous peoples' labor turned the best immediate profit. Combined with the Reconquista-rooted easy money mentality, the Crown's domination of the colonization of Latin America offered little incentive for conquistadors to not exploit indigenous peoples for labor.

⁵⁰ Yeager, "Encomienda or Slavery?", 856.

⁵¹ Yeager, "Encomienda or Slavery?", 857.

⁵² Batchelder and Sanchez, "The *Encomienda* and the Optimizing Imperialist: An Interpretation of Spanish Imperialism in the Americas," 48.

⁵³ Batchelder and Sanchez, "The *Encomienda* and the Optimizing Imperialist," 48.

Centralist governments constituted the first governments in Latin America, demonstrating the influence of Spanish centralism in Latin America. While not monarchies, these early governments operated under similar principles. Yeatts describes the early governments in Latin America:

Early on, those who exercised power in America were in fact the *adelantados*, who had been granted concessions by the Crown to explore new lands and claim them in the name of the king...An *adelantado* had the triple role of governor enforcing the laws of Spain and its public administration; captain general leading the expedition troops; and chief justice, because he heard judicial matters.⁵⁴

After establishing a city, the *adelantado* and sometimes other authorities would pick officers for the *cabildo* or *ayuntamiento*, “the basic unit of political, judicial, economic, and social administration.”⁵⁵ Officers were originally elected or appointed, but by the mid-1500s, under Philip II, the positions went up for sale in order to fund the financially struggling Crown. Offices were considered property, and as such they became inheritable or transferrable through marriage.⁵⁶ This facilitated the emergence of municipal oligarchies; the wealthiest in town bought out political offices, and, as in Spain, wealth became tied to political power and special economic, social, and legal privileges.

While not a characteristic unique to centralist governments, social status played an important role in Spanish and Spanish American centralism. Similar to noblemen in Spain, noblemen in Latin America used their titles for social, political, and economic power. The Spanish “accepted the inevitability of human inequality, supported hierarchy, and lacked any

⁵⁴ Yeatts, *The Roots of Poverty in Latin America*, 41.

⁵⁵ Yeatts, *The Roots of Poverty in Latin America*, 42.

⁵⁶ Burkholder et al., *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance*, 62.

enthusiasm for promoting social mobility. They sought privileges rather than equality, believing that a properly ordered society concentrated power, wealth, and status in legally privileged groups at the top.”⁵⁷ This lack of motivation to change the inequitable status quo was built into Spanish society, and since four main groups that came to Latin America (military men, noblemen, priests, and bureaucrats) mostly benefited from the Spanish social system, they, too, lacked incentive to change the role of social status in Spanish America, choosing instead to model colonial Latin America after the centralist Spain they had just left. Like in Spain, most of Latin America’s population consisted of the rural and urban poor, who “lived lives constrained by material deprivation and violence” as they worked to turn a profit for wealthy *encomenderos* and, ultimately, the Spanish Crown.⁵⁸

Political Violence

The final main facet of Spanish colonialism was political violence. Spain exited the Reconquista as a highly militarized society, and the Spanish Crown used the military to further its own political interests. Having won the Reconquista, the military was seen as a doer of God’s will and a physical embodiment of the strength of Catholic Spain. Military service provided one of the few routes of escaping one’s inherited social rank, making it a lucrative career. Young men especially seized the opportunities for economic and social advancement that serving in Spain’s military presented: military success was “rewarded with land and feudal power, and therefore, those with military might became nobility.”⁵⁹ Since conquering the New World was identified as a continuation of the work of the Reconquista, military men took the opportunity to continue accumulating wealth and status. Recall that military men constituted one of the four

⁵⁷ Burkholder et al., *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance*, 116-117.

⁵⁸ Burkholder et al., *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance*, 121.

⁵⁹ Yeatts, *The Roots of Poverty in Latin America*, 19.

main groups of early settlers in Latin America. Latin America was forcefully conquered by military personnel from a country that prioritized military strength and rewarded military violence, and this deeply embedded violence into Latin America's economic and political culture.

Spain's militarization stemmed from the Reconquista. Almost 800 years of war with the Muslims had awarded military might immense value to Iberian kingdoms and also intertwined it with the promotion of Christianity. In Spain, it became common practice to reward military success with land grants, known as *encomiendas*, often accompanied by legal and taxation privileges under sets of laws called *fueros*. Military-religious orders formalized the association between the military and the Church. Spain's victory in the Reconquista solidified the Crown's religious justification for military violence, and the *encomienda* and *fuero* systems incentivized perpetration of military violence as a means to advance one's previously unchangeable social standing.

Spain, contrary to some of its religion's teachings, legitimized military violence by emphasizing other Catholic principles of obedience, humility, and service: "they accepted...and tolerated...wars and military service as acts of obedience and conservatism...And the Christian lower classes, with very few exceptions, followed their religious leaders' viewpoint, humbly acknowledged the power of the earthly authorities as legitimate and often found a military career desirable."⁶⁰ By tying the military and religion together, the Spanish Crown strengthened the powers of both institutions, the military and the Catholic Church, and legitimized its use of violence towards its political ends; the military could perpetrate violence as part of its holy right, and the Church could use military might to spread its teachings, but both ultimately served the

⁶⁰ Despina Iosif, *Early Christian Attitudes to War, Violence and Military Service*, (New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2013): 146.

agenda of the Crown. The Reconquista strengthened Spanish society's perception of the military as the means by which Spain would become one of the greatest empires in the world. If victory against the Moors symbolized an extension of God's favor, then the military symbolized an agent of God's will. Demonstrating the high importance of the military, the Spanish Crown consistently directed a large portion of its income towards funding the military because the military would lead Spain's effort to build its empire.⁶¹

Although much of the violence experienced during Latin America's colonization was perpetrated by military personnel, or at least military-like personnel, political violence during Latin America's colonial period was also tied to religion. This is seen in the implementation of the Spanish Inquisition in Spanish America during the first half of the sixteenth century. With two headquarters, one in Mexico and one in Peru, the Seville Holy Office's jurisdiction was extended to Spanish America.⁶² Inquisition trials commonly employed violent strategies for inducing confessions and prescribed violent punishments to those convicted: "Bigamy, blasphemy, and other transgressions against public morality became the tribunal's primary concerns. The principal sentences for such offenses included fines, flogging, confiscation of property, gagging, exile, and service in the galleys."⁶³

In search of East Asia, Columbus' first voyage landed on the island of Hispaniola, also known as Española, which today consists of Haiti and the Dominican Republic. In accordance with the traditional Spanish reward system, Columbus granted *encomiendas* to leading officers. While most accounts agree that Columbus' initial contact with the natives was diplomatic and peaceful, native resistance to the Spaniards' demands for precious metals and food caused

⁶¹ Yeatts, *The Roots of Poverty in Latin America*, 22.

⁶² Don, "Franciscans, Indian Sorcerers, and the Inquisition in New Spain," 33.

⁶³ Burkholder et al., *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance*, 82.

“armed force and physical abuse” to displace the “initial cordiality.”⁶⁴ The Spanish arrivals were quick to use violence to subdue any further native resistance, and survivors were enslaved under the new *encomenderos*.⁶⁵ Within five years of Columbus’ arrival at Hispaniola, at least one third of the native population died. Estimates of the native Taíno population prior to Columbus’ arrival vary greatly from 60,000 to 14 million, but in 1512, twenty years after the initial landing, 20,000 Taíno people remained in Hispaniola.^{66, 67} While much of the population decline is attributed to disease, it is widely alleged and documented that Spanish abuse of and violence toward native peoples contributed to the death toll.⁶⁸

This pattern of conquest and enslavement of indigenous populations was repeated throughout Spanish America by most conquistadors and *encomenderos*. Indigenous populations labored to produce crops, raise livestock, and mine gold and silver, and *encomenderos* often “employed violent practices to hasten the yield.”⁶⁹ Although the Spanish Crown made attempts in the 1500s to control the *encomienda* system, both to curb the native mortality rates associated with it and to prevent the creation of a too-powerful nobility, the *encomiendas* had already become institutionalized in Latin America.⁷⁰ In fact, the three main restrictions on inheritability, trade, and relocation worsened conditions. The “inheritance restrictions provided *encomenderos*

⁶⁴ Burkholder et al., *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance*, 22.

⁶⁵ Yeager, “*Encomienda* or Slavery? The Spanish Crown’s Choice of Labor Institution in Sixteenth-Century Spanish America,” 856.

Despite the Spanish Crown’s restrictions preventing the sale or rent of indigenous laborers, I still consider them “enslaved” because they were afforded no real legal protections and had no choice in the type nor duration of labor they performed. Their labor was supposedly substituted for their mandatory tribute payments to *encomenderos*. However, the Spanish Crown deliberately avoided calling the native laborers “slaves” in order to support their previous standard that people were only naturally slaves if they had the opportunity to embrace Christianity and chose not to, a precedent that did not apply to indigenous people in Latin America since they had not yet had that chance and were simply living in a state of ignorance.

⁶⁶ William F. Keegan, and Corinne L. Hofman, *The Caribbean before Columbus*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017): 255.

⁶⁷ Burkholder et al., *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance*, 24.

⁶⁸ Schwaller, *The History of the Catholic Church in Latin America*, 43.

⁶⁹ Burkholder et al., *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance*, 102.

⁷⁰ Burkholder et al., *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance*, 26-27.

with incentives to destroy more quickly the human capital because any bequeath motive was absent.”⁷¹ The privileges awarded to the military in Spain encouraged men to participate in the colonization and conquest of Latin America, where their violence was rewarded with land and indigenous labor through the *encomiendas*; since the *encomiendas* did not provide the *encomenderos* with the versatile and long-term wealth they had hoped for, working the land and natives for all that they were worth provided the easiest and most profitable option. Additionally, there was always the looming threat that the Crown could confiscate one’s *encomienda*. Violence provided a familiar means by which *encomenderos* could maximize yields during the volatile timespan of their rule. The *encomienda* system provides a telling example of how violence and exploitation for social, economic, and political gains became entrenched in Latin American society.

It is important to note that although the *encomienda* system in Spanish America was mirrored after the *encomienda* system in Spain, the levels of violence and exploitation associated with Spanish America’s *encomiendas* far exceeded the levels seen in Spain. Perhaps the great distance between Latin America and any legal retribution in Spain caused conquistadors and *encomenderos* to tend towards more unacceptable treatment of the natives. Conversion in Spanish America, although one of Spain’s original main motivations for and goals of colonialism, dropped to second place, behind the exploitation of natives in order to turn a personal profit. The Crown’s dissatisfaction with the inhuman treatment of indigenous peoples is evidenced by its attempts to legislate against abuses of natives. Some *encomenderos* and conquistadors were arrested and jailed following investigations into their violence towards indigenous peoples, but those consequences could not undo the harm caused to indigenous

⁷¹ Yeager, “*Encomienda* or Slavery? The Spanish Crown’s Choice of Labor Institution in Sixteenth-Century Spanish America,” 843.

populations and cultures nor the institutionalized resort to violence that had already been established in Latin America. Spain's approach to colonizing Latin America established violence as an element of political institutions, and violence not only represented a failure of those institutions but also "a necessary component of their maintenance."⁷²

Intersections between the Four Facets

The four facets of conversion, easy money, centralism, and military violence characterized Spain's unique approach to colonizing Latin America. Through colonization, the Crown aimed to spread Christianity, find wealth, and expand its empire. Spain's recent victory over the Muslims in the Reconquista heavily influenced the facets of Spanish colonialism, and, while each facet uniquely contributed to the institutions and culture of colonial Latin America, they played off of each other in ways that amplified their negative effects to create an unprecedented social, political, and economic situation. Latin America was built on inequality and exploitation, and all of the facets played a key role. The types of people who colonized Latin America were not workers or laborers, and they embodied the facets and ensured that they were firmly rooted into Spanish American society, enabling the facets to maintain their presence in the social, political, and economic institutions of Latin America throughout its history.

Conversion and the Crown's rent-seeking and booty mentalities helped the Crown justify the exploitation of natives under the *encomienda* system, and the Crown's deliberate crippling of the *encomiendas'* maximum productivity via restrictions incentivized violence and abuses towards indigenous laborers. The Crown prioritized maintaining its centralized power over encouraging wealth-creation in Spanish America, as evidenced by its choice to restrict *encomiendas*, introducing the theme of abusive and coercive states, who often incentivized and

⁷² Daniel M. Goldstein, and Enrique Desmond Arias, *Violent Democracies in Latin America*, (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2010): 4.

used violence, into Latin America's history.⁷³ Latin America's economic base was built on gaining privileges through one's social status rather than on competitive market principles, disincentivizing entrepreneurial and wealth-creating activities. Latin America's centralist roots cultivated top-down as opposed to bottom-up political and economic systems. The wealthy dominated the political and economic scenes, and military service offered one of the few ways to escape one's inherited status. With political, economic, and social institutions and traditions skewed to favor those who already possessed the most wealth and power, Latin America was inherently unable to effectively develop stable economic and political environments that protected the majority of the population from abuses by the military and the government. Combined with the influence of the conversion facet, political violence tied to religious purposes planted seeds in Latin America of the importance of ideological purity and homogeneity, ideas that would become very relevant during much of the political violence experienced throughout Latin America. Ideologies and economic, social, and political power structures descended from the facets manifest throughout Latin America's history, exemplifying how deeply Spanish colonialism permeates Latin America's very foundations.

Spanish Colonialism's Impacts on Latin America

This paper now moves from the previous theory section into an analysis of the manifestations of the four main facets of Spanish colonialism throughout Latin America's history. While the social, political, and economic institutions of Latin American countries differed and changed over time and between countries, I argue that the colonial logics and practices of conversion, easy money, centralism, and political violence were present throughout

⁷³ Diane E. Davis, "The Political and Economic Origins of Violence and Insecurity in Contemporary Latin America: Past Trajectories and Future Prospects," in *Violent Democracies in Latin America*, ed. Goldstein and Arias, (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2010): 39.

those changes and differences. All prior Spanish territories experienced the facets of conversion, easy money, centralism, and political violence. Despite not sharing the same exact colonial histories, most Latin American countries' histories reflect the same social, political, and economic trends. To demonstrate that the four main facets were present in all countries' unique colonial experiences it is important to point out major shared experiences in Latin American countries' histories. After providing this generalized overview of key manifestations of the impacts of Spanish colonialism on Latin America, I will then look at how the four facets are discernable in the Dirty Wars in Argentina and Chile. This more country- and event-specific focus shows how the logics of Spanish colonialism are traceable to similar ends in two Latin American countries, despite marked differences in those countries' colonial and postcolonial histories.

Shared Impacts

The power of the Spanish empire began to decline following the Thirty Years' War, a war from 1618 to 1648 between Protestant and Catholic Europe which determined who the leading European powers would be.^{74, 75} Spain and its fellow Hapsburg states and allies lost to France, England, Bohemia and other anti-Hapsburg states. In 1763, Spain lost another war to England, the Seven Years War. After reaching its lowest point after Napoleon's invasion of Spain in 1808, Spain lost most of its territories in the Americas within twenty years. Current countries that were once Spanish colonies include Central America from Mexico to Panama, the islands of Cuba and the Dominican Republic, and Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Paraguay, Uruguay, Chile, and Argentina.

⁷⁴ Elliott, "The Decline of Spain," 52.

⁷⁵ Drelichman, "All that Glitters," 334.

Areas of Latin America experienced different specific colonial institutions, but conversion, easy money, centralism, and political violence facets were present in the development of all Latin American countries originally colonized by Spain. For instance, the *encomienda* was not the only form of forced labor in colonial Latin America; colonizers' and *encomenderos*' instituted types of labor based on the resources available on the land they were granted. Chile and Peru possessed profitable mining lands, so natives were forced to work long shifts in the mines under an institution known as the *mita*.⁷⁶ Agricultural labor under the traditional *encomienda* prevailed in Argentina, however. Both the *mita* and the *encomienda* witnessed systemic violence toward native laborers and exhibited Spanish colonialism's rent-seeking tendencies. Conversion, too, underlaid colonization of all Spanish territories in Latin America, but the severity and fervency varied across territories. Mexico, for example, experienced the most rigorous Inquisition in Spanish America. Between 1536 and 1543, Mexico City hosted nineteen Inquisition trials against natives, a number unparalleled elsewhere in Latin America.⁷⁷ Despite regional differences in specific colonization processes, individualized and shared country experiences throughout Latin America's history reveal Latin American countries' shared Spanish colonial influences. Three of the most exemplary shared experiences were the Independence Wars in the 1800s, the evolution of the *encomienda* system into *latifundios*, and the debt crisis, or Latin America's "lost decade," of the 1980s.

The Independence Wars

Spain's monopolization of Latin American trade fueled unrest in the colonies. For over 200 years, Latin America only had two authorized ports, in Veracruz, Mexico and Portobello, Panama, both of which were governed by numerous customs inspections, and the colonies were

⁷⁶ Yeatts, *The Roots of Poverty in Latin America*, 39.

⁷⁷ Don, "Franciscans, Indian Sorcerers, and the Inquisition in New Spain, 1536-1543," 27.

strictly forbidden from trading with each other and with other nations; the Crown only allowed the import of Spanish goods and the export of goods to Spain.⁷⁸ Smuggling increased in response to the restrictive policies. Through its trade monopoly, the Spanish Crown prioritized the centralized wealth and power of the monarchy over the economic success of the colonies and their inhabitants. Inspired by the success of revolutions in the United States and France during the late eighteenth century, Latin American countries fought for their independence from Spain. The independence wars of the 1800s encompassed the fights for initial independence from Spain as well as conflicts between the countries as they tried to define their territories, formulate states, and establish balance between each other. In 1816, Argentina declared its independence, followed by Chile in 1818, and, within the next ten years, Paraguay, Uruguay, Bolivia, Peru, Colombia, Venezuela, and Ecuador also asserted their independence.⁷⁹

The independence wars channeled two of the facets of Spanish colonialism – centralism and military violence. “After the chaos of the independence wars, the republics underwent periods of disorder and anarchy under authoritarian regimes that represented *sui generis* versions of Iberian centralism.”⁸⁰ The wars also reinforced the military success as one of the most profitable ventures in Latin American society, echoing the status awarded to Spanish conquistadors through the *encomienda* system, and assigned military forces a lasting role in politics. The “military became a ready route for social advancement. Typically, after the war, generals became landowners, wielding both social and political power.”⁸¹ Throughout the 1600s and 1700s, the *encomiendas* in Latin America came to be called *haciendas*, so independence war generals who received land became *hacendados*. The main difference between the social and

⁷⁸ Yeatts, *The Roots of Poverty in Latin America*, 43.

⁷⁹ Yeatts, *The Roots of Poverty in Latin America*, 53.

⁸⁰ Yeatts, *The Roots of Poverty in Latin America*, 52.

⁸¹ Yeatts, *The Roots of Poverty in Latin America*, 52.

political power of *hacendados* who had fought in the independence wars and the *encomenderos* of the early colonial period was that *hacendados*' power accumulation faced no restrictions since now Spanish Crown existed to restrict their gains. *Hacendados*' centralization of wealth and power went unchecked, contributing to the oligarchical authoritarian regimes and the prevalence of *latifundios*, large land concentration, experienced by many new Latin American countries.

Encomiendas into Latifundios

The differences that distinguish *encomiendas*, *haciendas*, and *latifundios* are somewhat blurred. *Encomienda* usually refers to the more traditional colonial reiteration of the Spanish *encomienda* system. As a reward for aiding in the conquest of Spanish America, an *encomendero* received a land grant in Spanish America, which he governed and extracted wealth from via indigenous forced labor. The *encomienda* system was marked by restrictions placed upon it by the Spanish Crown to prevent a threatening accumulation of economic, political, and social power among *encomenderos*. *Haciendas* operated similarly to *encomiendas* in that there was one central ruler, an *hacendado*, who exerted almost unchecked power over their territory and commonly free-wage laborers, binding them to the land by keeping them indebted.⁸² Following the independence wars, military generals could receive *haciendas*, echoing the colonial military reward system of the *encomiendas*. *Haciendas* could also develop “over years through numerous small grants, purchases, bequests, and usurpations of native land.”⁸³ However, unlike *encomenderos*, *hacendados* were not limited by inheritance restrictions preventing them from passing on their estate to their heirs nor were they hindered by the fear of government confiscation of their estate. This allowed *hacendados* to accumulate wealth and power unimpeded, something *encomenderos* could rarely do.

⁸² Burkholder et al., *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance*, 221.

⁸³ Burkholder et al., *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance*, 140.

Latifundios refer to “the large rural estates that long dominated the countryside throughout much of Latin America.”⁸⁴ This form of land concentration evolved throughout the 1800s and into the 1900s from the *haciendas* as *hacendados* accumulated more land and wealth. *Latifundios* could also be purchased, almost exclusively by the wealthy, however. While the price of land was low, “the administrative costs of submitting a petition [to buy the land] made requesting title too expensive for much of the population.”⁸⁵ With the wealthy dominating possession of the land, the rural poor faced deteriorating conditions, “and poverty persisted in the countryside...A few peasants farmed their own lands, but most worked on large estates as latifundia expanded.”⁸⁶ *Latifundistas* often used the land for raising cattle and avoided investing in the land for agricultural purposes in order to minimize any financial risk and expenses. Chris Carlson explains the effects that the *latifundio* had Latin American logics of production:

Right away, this form of land appropriation translated to a certain logic of production. Cattle ranchers began converting arable land into pasture, causing small producers to denounce the invasion of lands they had under cultivation. As early as the 1890s, *campesinos*⁸⁷ were complaining to state officials that cattle ranchers were using land that was ‘undoubtedly fit for agriculture, not for grazing’...One official noted that many of those who had acquired land were ‘only concern[ed] with exploiting the precious woods that abound, ignoring their duty to use [the land] for agriculture or livestock’. This was a direct result of the way in which the land had been appropriated, which put little pressure on producers to maximize its productivity...Not only did [*latifundistas*] not acquire the

⁸⁴ Chris Carlson, “Latifundio and the Logic of Underdevelopment: The Case of Venezuela’s *Sur del Lago*,” *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 44, no. 1 (2017): 286.

⁸⁵ Carlson, “Latifundio and the Logic of Underdevelopment,” 294.

⁸⁶ Burkholder et al., *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance*, 221.

⁸⁷ *Campesinos* were peasant farmers.

land in a competitive market, but their ability to maintain possession of the land did not depend on competition in the market – that is, they did not depend on competitive production of the land in order to pay for it – and thus there was little pressuring them to maximize the productivity of their holdings. Instead, landowners sought to minimize risk by investing little in the land, and simply collecting rents from the cattle herds that roamed their land, or from other extractable resources.⁸⁸

The logic of underdevelopment and the lack of incentive to maximize the land's productivity in order to avoid investing large expenses and undertaking any risk characterized the *latifundio* and demonstrated the colonial facet of easy money. The *latifundio* also channeled colonial logics of centralism. *Latifundios* accounted for large portions of Latin American countries' revenue, and, to the benefit of the few elite and the detriment of the majority middle- and lower-class, governments continued to support the expansion of the *latifundio* system. Exploitation under the *latifundios* was evident. “[G]rowing debt peonage trapped future generations in a vicious cycle of grueling work and inheritable indebtedness. Few indigent peasants could escape unending exploitation.”⁸⁹ The *latifundio* structure “stifled” “social and economic opportunities for the majority of the rural-agricultural population.”⁹⁰

The easy money and centralism facets associated with the *latifundios* transferred into many Latin American governments since government leaders were often *latifundistas*. Oligarchic elites “often owned the essential resources – such as mining and agriculture – that formed the foundation of their nations’ wealth.”⁹¹ Through the economic importance of the

⁸⁸ Carlson, “Latifundio and the Logic of Underdevelopment,” 294.

⁸⁹ Burkholder et al., *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance*, 221.

⁹⁰ Paul R. Shaw, “Land Tenure and the Rural Exodus in Latin America,” *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 23, no. 1 (1974): 123.

⁹¹ Burkholder et al., *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance*, 244.

latifundios in the export market, elite families accumulated wealth and solidified their political authority. Although they revised constitutions to promote more liberal practices, particularly open trade, oligarchic elites “embraced increased centralized authority under a strong executive,” namely, themselves.⁹² Liberal-oriented policy changes served the land-owning elites’ personal political and economic interests while worsening the conditions of the poor.⁹³

The 1980s Debt Crisis

At the end of the independence wars, the “newly independent countries struggled to find stability amid internal turmoil,” and “national leaders also found themselves challenged further by a near-constant threat of military invasion.”⁹⁴ By the twentieth century, however, “[l]iberal oligarchies and positivist leaders succeeded in establishing relative political and economic stability.”⁹⁵ Industrialization movements in the United States and Europe required raw materials, “which meant that Latin American economies could jump on the train to progress, attaining unusually high growth in their exports, production, and wages.”⁹⁶ For example, “in 1880 Argentine exports increased tenfold compared to the beginning of the century and multiplied by 50 the value of rural exports; Chile multiplied its exports by 50 during the same period.”⁹⁷ The increased international demand for Latin American resources heavily benefited the *latifundistas*, who owned most of the rural land from which raw materials came. The demand also encouraged infrastructure developments, particularly railroads, to move people and goods throughout Latin American countries. However, having only recently begun to achieve such economic success in the international market, governments had to front the expenses of construction with foreign

⁹² Burkholder et al., *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance*, 244.

⁹³ Burkholder et al., *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance*, 245.

⁹⁴ Burkholder et al., *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance*, 227.

⁹⁵ Burkholder et al., *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance*, 275.

⁹⁶ Yeatts, *The Roots of Poverty in Latin America*, 63.

⁹⁷ Yeatts, *The Roots of Poverty in Latin America*, 65.

debt. The resulting effect was that by 1913, “almost one-third of all foreign investment in Latin America was invested in government debt.”⁹⁸ Governments and investors assumed that the railroads and other projects would increase wealth and generate enough profits to pay off the debts. These assumptions proved to be incorrect, as “[h]indsight makes clear that continued borrowing was not sustainable and that both the banks and the Latin American nations were engaging in reckless behavior.”⁹⁹

Although Latin American countries appeared to be transforming into more liberalized, free-trade societies, the changes were only surface-level. The “foundation of the apparent institutional transformation that occurred in the nineteenth century was weak. It was not based on the evolution of usage, customs, and rules that protected individual liberty and restricted the power of government...the transformation depended on constraints placed by international trade.”¹⁰⁰ Because “foreign investment required predictability in the legal framework,” it “acted as a constraint on the government,” introducing more checks on the overly powerful executive branch.¹⁰¹ These constraints existed in tandem with international demand for Latin American exports, so once the United States’ and Europe’s investment in and trade with Latin America began to decrease in the early 1900s, the levels of economic and political stability in Latin America decreased, too. Due to the recent infrastructural improvements, Latin America’s production of raw materials grew to meet the projected international demand, but the combined impacts of the Great Depression (1929-1933), World War I (1914-1918), and World War II (1939-1945), significantly diminished that demand, causing Latin American production to grow faster than the international demand and resulting in continually dropping prices of Latin

⁹⁸ Yeatts, *The Roots of Poverty in Latin America*, 65.

⁹⁹ Burkholder et al., *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance*, 368.

¹⁰⁰ Yeatts, *The Roots of Poverty in Latin America*, 71.

¹⁰¹ Yeatts, *The Roots of Poverty in Latin America*, 67.

American exports.¹⁰² Additionally, political turmoil and violence in many Latin American countries during the second half of the twentieth century further decimated Latin American economies and expanded already existing black markets.¹⁰³

Latin America's colonial institutions emerged as governments once again started to centralize power and as the World Wars spurred rises in nationalism. The nation, "a new unit colonized by rent- and privilege-seeking interest groups who preached ideological nationalism," replaced the individual in politics, and "[i]n the decades that followed, the state and not the market led the economy."¹⁰⁴ Latin American countries attempted to redefine themselves as social democracies, implementing social constitutions that "placed limits on individual rights and legalized taking of property for a public purpose."¹⁰⁵ Despite being well-intentioned, social constitutionalist governments in Latin America in the 1900s channeled the facets of conversion, easy money, centralism, and political violence of Spanish colonialism. Latin American governments' emphasis on nationalist ideological purity echoed the Crown's pursuit of religious purity, states controlled the economy, trampled on private property and individual rights, and relied on rent-seeking strategies, especially taxes, to increase public spending, and legitimizations of military violence were linked to narratives of state intervention.

Latin America in the 1980s was characterized by "stagnation and hyperinflation; reductions in per capita GDP; declines in health, education, and justice; destruction of pension systems; complete absence of public investment (and its consequences on the quality of services); corruption; and ruin of state-owned corporations."¹⁰⁶ In its 1986 Annual Report, the

¹⁰² Yeatts, *The Roots of Poverty in Latin America*, 77.

¹⁰³ Yeatts, *The Roots of Poverty in Latin America*, 76.

¹⁰⁴ Yeatts, *The Roots of Poverty in Latin America*, 74.

¹⁰⁵ Yeatts, *The Roots of Poverty in Latin America*, 75.

¹⁰⁶ Yeatts, *The Roots of Poverty in Latin America*, 86.

World Bank reported: “The current situation in most Latin American countries is one of negligible per capita income growth, depressed per capita consumption levels, low investment, a high savings drain for external-interest payments, net resource transfers from the private to the public sector to help finance debt-service payments (for most of which the public sector is responsible), and, in many countries, high inflation.”¹⁰⁷ Latin America’s foreign debt was so high that in 1985, “[i]nterest payments abroad were equal to about 38 percent of the region’s exports of goods; such percentages were especially high for Argentina (66 percent), Chile (45 percent), and Bolivia (34 percent).”¹⁰⁸ By 1990, Latin America’s overall inflation was 18 percent.¹⁰⁹ As Yeatts writes, “It is no wonder that the 1980s are known throughout Latin America as ‘the lost decade.’”¹¹⁰ Burkholder et al. explain how Latin America’s economy reached such a low point:

Governments accustomed to enormous budget deficits throughout the 1970s had relied on loans to cover the shortfall between expenditures and income. As access to additional capital disappeared, they tried to offset their deficits by increasing the money supply, a fiscal expedient that produced rampant hyperinflation throughout the 1980s...As consumer prices rose virtually overnight, the purchasing power of the population dropped substantially.¹¹¹

Recovery efforts during the debt crisis included the involvement of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which encouraged cuts in public spending. Furthermore, the IMF’s emphasis on decreased state spending caused a “wave of privatizations...As a result, a new opening to the global market replaced the economic nationalism that had characterized Latin American trade

¹⁰⁷ World Bank, “The World Bank Annual Report 1986,” 1986: 112.

¹⁰⁸ World Bank, “The World Bank Annual Report 1986), 111.

¹⁰⁹ Burkholder et al., *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance*, 370.

¹¹⁰ Yeatts, *The Roots of Poverty in Latin America*, 86.

¹¹¹ Burkholder et al., *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance*, 370.

and commerce...Many critics have argued that the consequence was to expose these nations to new systems of exploitation.”¹¹²

Latin America's Inability to Escape Colonial Logics

A common theme throughout the shared impacts of Spanish colonialism is the inability of Latin American countries to prevent regressions into social, political, and economic situations that resemble the exploitative nature of their colonial experience. This observation is important because it demonstrates how intrinsic colonial logics and practices are in most aspects of Latin American society. During the colonial period in Latin America, power systems were deliberately structured to further the interests of those already in power, and cycles of the state centralizing power through exploitation and coercion became built into Latin American institutions. Change would have to occur on a systemic level, rewriting both formal and informal rules and institutions. Latin American countries' failed attempts at implementing constitutions mirroring the decentralized government and liberal principles of the neighboring United States' Constitution following the independence wars of the nineteenth century show how simply declaring new formal rules could not override “a centuries-old heritage of bureaucratic controls and its corresponding ideology.”¹¹³ “Throughout the periods of anarchy and violence what remained constant was the centralist structure of government in its different authoritarian incarnations.”¹¹⁴ Reinventing the economic and political structures on such a deep level in order to promote equality and disincentivize exploitation would only occur if those in power initiated it or if the citizens carried out a successful revolution.¹¹⁵ The colonial facets and logics were allowed to continue and fester until they resulted in widespread catastrophes such as Latin

¹¹² Burkholder et al., *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance*, 371.

¹¹³ Yeatts, *The Roots of Poverty in Latin America*, 68.

¹¹⁴ Yeatts, *The Roots of Poverty in Latin America*, 61.

¹¹⁵ Yeatts, *The Roots of Poverty in Latin America*, 75.

America's "lost decade" because the only people who could make peaceful change had no incentive to.

The Dirty Wars

The Dirty Wars in Argentina and Chile present examples of some of the most extreme manifestations of the four colonial facets across social, political, and economic institutions. While Argentina and Chile shared a similar general history, following the trends of most of Latin American countries, and were neighbors, as independent countries they have their own unique identities and histories. For example, the Andes Mountains primed Chile for mineral and precious metals extraction under the *mita* variation of *encomienda* labor, while Argentina's flatter, lower-level land further inland from the sea was more dedicated to growing crops, particularly wheat, and raising cattle.^{116, 117} These trends continued as Argentina and Chile developed: the former continued its tradition in agriculture and livestock, and the latter concentrated on manufacturing with some agricultural work on the side. Chile emerged from the independence wars "one of Latin America's most stable and democratic countries," maintaining a strong tradition of civilian rule since its independence from Spain in 1818.¹¹⁸ Argentina struggled more on its way to establishing civilian rule in 1860, becoming the wealthiest country in Latin America, but the Great Depression ended its "stable, constitutional, elite-controlled political system" and strong economy in 1930.¹¹⁹ Following the trend across Latin America, Chile's and Argentina's elite controlled the countries' political systems. The beginnings of economic decline following the Great Depression and the inspiring Cuban revolution from 1953

¹¹⁶ Yeatts, *The Roots of Poverty in Latin America*, 36.

¹¹⁷ Burkholder et al., *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance*, 280.

¹¹⁸ Thomas C. Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America: Chile, Argentina, and International Human Rights*, (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007): 47.

¹¹⁹ Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America*, 95.

to 1959 triggered revolutions in Chile and Argentina, but Chile initially chose “revolution by the ballot box,” continuing to hold elections until 1970.¹²⁰ Argentina, however, opted for military revolutions, “experience[ing] nine successful military coups and twenty-one different presidential administrations” between 1930 and 1976, out of which “only two completed their constitutional terms, none after 1952.”¹²¹ Despite the differing preconditions for the Dirty Wars in Argentina and Chile, the colonial facets of conversion, easy money, centralism, and political violence manifested in shockingly similar ways throughout the Dirty Wars in both countries, revealing the continued presence of colonial logics and practices.

Chile

Increases in socioeconomic inequalities in Chile during the 1950s and 1960s, combined with the Cuban Revolution, began the political radicalization that would eventually lead to the country’s first military intervention since 1932. Chileans sought government reform that would address “high rates of infant mortality, inadequate housing for the urban and rural poor, and a power imbalance based on workers’ exploitation by the landowning elite under the system of latifundia.”¹²² Salvador Allende, with the support of Chile’s Socialist, Communist, and four smaller non-Marxist parties, won the presidential election in 1970, becoming “the world’s first, and only, freely elected socialist who was committed to eliminating large-scale capitalism in his country.”¹²³ Allende’s vigorous campaign against the business elite, who were heavily represented in Chile’s judicial and legislative branches, led to continued blockings of Allende’s agenda, but Allende, using the institutionalized power imbalance in favor of the executive

¹²⁰ Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America*, 49.

¹²¹ Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America*, 96.

¹²² Burkholder et al., *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance*, 355.

¹²³ Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America*, 48.

branch, continued to push forward with his reforms.¹²⁴ Allende's reforms included "housing reforms, workers' rights, access to health care, improvements to the nation's legal system, and a system of milk distribution to combat infant mortality."¹²⁵ Chile became increasingly polarized along historic lines between workers and landowners, and "[h]ypermobilization in both the countryside and the large cities brought peasants and workers face to face with landowners and bosses in ways that were inconceivable to either side just a few years earlier."¹²⁶

The 1973 military coup came as no surprise to most of Chile:

Chile was virtually bankrupt, beset by shortages and runaway inflation, and increasingly ungovernable... Weary of daily confrontation and permanent crisis, many ordinary Chileans welcomed military intervention, with the expectation that the armed forces would follow a conventional Latin American script: seize control, detain and deport top government officials, hold power for a year or two, and then call elections to restore civilian rule.¹²⁷

A military victory was traditionally one of the main methods of reestablishing political stability and appeared to be the only option at this point; the other two options, a gradual return to stability or peaceful negotiations between the two sides, no longer seemed viable.¹²⁸ Allende committed suicide after refusing to surrender to the military, which faced no resistance as it took control of the country. Despite having won virtually complete control of Chile, "for several weeks a brutal crackdown filled makeshift jails, hospitals, and morgues."¹²⁹ The military established military war tribunals, under which about 300 leftist supporters were executed

¹²⁴ Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America*, 49-50.

¹²⁵ Burkholder et al., *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance*, 355-356.

¹²⁶ Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America*, 50.

¹²⁷ Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America*, 51.

¹²⁸ Chris van der Borgh, "Political Violence, Intrastate Conflict and Peace Processes in Latin America," *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, no. 70 (2001): 120.

¹²⁹ Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America*, 51.

immediately.¹³⁰ In the first year of the junta's rule, an estimated 150,000 people were arrested, almost two percent of Chile's population.¹³¹ General Augusto C. Pinochet served as the leader of Chile's military dictatorship, which lasted until 1990 following a massive election in 1988 in which Chileans overwhelmingly signaled their lack of support for Pinochet.¹³²

In the weeks following the coup, the military junta dismantled any Chilean institutions that could challenge it. "It replaced UP [Unidad Popular] provincial governors with military officers, removed all mayors and city councilors, banned left parties and suspended the others, and closed Congress."¹³³ The junta placed Chile under strict censorship, dissolved the national labor federation, stationed military personnel as directors at universities, and burned the election registries.¹³⁴ These tactics enabled the junta to quickly centralize power, and its publicly violent tactics additionally suppressed any challenges to its absolute rule. In an October speech, Pinochet legitimized the junta's violence as "God's work, and he committed himself to the 'heroic struggle' to carry out a 'moral cleansing' in order to 'extirpate the root of evil from Chile.'"¹³⁵ This narrative likens the Chilean military's mission of destroying leftist ideologies and replacing them with one ideology – its own – to the Spanish Crown's conversion agenda during colonialism, an agenda that the Crown similarly justified by claiming it, too, was pursuing a divine agenda. Tensions between the poor and the rich had existed since Chile's very beginning and throughout its history, as workers were exploited from the *encomienda* system into the *latifundios* and were denied a political voice as a result of Chile's elite-centered political structure. Allende had provided the first real attempt at changing the systemic, colonialism-

¹³⁰ Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America*, 52.

¹³¹ Burkholder et al., *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance*, 356.

¹³² Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America*, 83-84.

¹³³ Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America*, 53.

¹³⁴ Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America*, 53.

¹³⁵ Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America*, 53.

rooted inequalities in Chile, but the tradition of a centralist government favoring the few prevailed. The military junta, following colonial traditions of alliances between those holding political power and the wealthy elite, strayed from conflict with the elite, and many middle- and upper-class Chileans continued on unaware of junta's violent measures for the first few months.¹³⁶ Chile's Dirty War erupted along colonial divisions and demonstrated the pervasiveness of colonial logics and practices within Chile's seemingly democratically progressing society.

Argentina

Army colonel Juan D. Perón was elected president of Argentina in 1946 and again in 1951. Under his governance, wealth was redistributed more favorably towards the work force, gaining him the support of the working class but alienating the economic and social elites. Perón's government's prolabor policies went against Argentina's colonial roots of privilege-seeking economics and state-elite collaboration, and when his term ended in 1955, Perón left Argentina as "a country so deeply and bitterly divided that it was essentially ungovernable except by force."¹³⁷ Radicalized groups increased, and workers suffered under anti-labor policies that served as backlash to Perón's socialist reforms. "Between 1955 and Perón's return to the presidency in 1973, Argentina alternated between civilian and military governments that averaged less than twenty-two months in duration."¹³⁸ While Perón remained exiled in Madrid, "government control alternated between civilian Peronist activists and military leaders."¹³⁹ Economic instability accompanied the frequent leadership changes in the Argentine government, and political violence plagued the country. Civilian guerrilla groups robbed banks, kidnapped

¹³⁶ Burkholder et al., *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance*, 357.

¹³⁷ Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America*, 96.

¹³⁸ Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America*, 96.

¹³⁹ Burkholder et al., *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance*, 358.

officials for ransom, attacked police, military posts, and elites, and assassinated military and government figures.¹⁴⁰ The presence of guerrilla groups only strengthened the government's incentives to kill civilians. Since guerrilla groups can be hard to target and defeat through traditional military measures, "counterinsurgent forces often choose to target the guerrillas' base of support in the population. This kind of counterinsurgency strategy can lead to the intentional killing of massive numbers of civilians."¹⁴¹ The government responded with violence, "us[ing] torture, executions, and disappearance to counter the surging leftist mobilization."¹⁴² Perón returned to Argentina to be reelected president in 1973, but his return to power only divided the country further. Perón died a year later, leaving his wife and vice president, Isabel, in charge of Argentina.

Isabel left all main decision to her advisor, José López Rega, who had founded and controlled the Argentine Anticommunist Alliance (AAA), "an extraofficial death squad made up largely of military and police."¹⁴³ Under Rega, the AAA countered leftist terrorism between 1974 and 1976 by murdering intellectuals, journalists, union leaders, and students aligned with the left, sometimes at rates of more than a hundred per month.¹⁴⁴ The intense radicalization and division fed off of unresolved colonial tensions between the politically and economically powerful, and the laborers and intellectuals, who were historically repressed by elite-centered governments who furthered their own agendas and sidelined the working the majority. The situation was unsustainable, and "a majority of Argentines welcomed the coup of March 24, 1976, believing that a military government was necessary to restore order and reverse the

¹⁴⁰ Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America*, 97.

¹⁴¹ Benjamin Valentino, Paul Huth, and Dylan Balch-Lindsay, "'Draining the Sea': Mass Killing and Guerrilla Warfare," *International Organization* 58, no. 2 (2004): 376.

¹⁴² Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America*, 98.

¹⁴³ Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America*, 98-99.

¹⁴⁴ Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America*, 99.

economic decline.”¹⁴⁵ Military intervention was institutionalized into Argentina’s history, and political violence, while a key piece in maintaining colonial logics of inequality and exploitation, had also proved during the independence wars to be one of the only ways to overthrow repressive regimes. As in Chile, civilians expected that the military intervention would follow a similar cycle as it had before – the military would take control of the government for a couple of years while it restored the political system and reinstated elections. However, “it soon became clear that this regime was different from previous ones.”¹⁴⁶ Beginning with the 1976 coup, Argentina’s Dirty War lasted until 1983, when Argentina returned to civilian rule following the military’s defeat by Britain in Falkland Islands and growing international animosity towards the regime.¹⁴⁷

Jorge Videla, representing the joint venture of the army, navy, and air force commanders behind the coup, headed the military dictatorship. Unlike in Chile, the military did not impose a curfew and did not advertise its agenda of rooting out leftists. Instead, it pursued a less documented campaign characterized by untracked disappearances, perhaps in response to “the international outcry against human rights violations in Chile” during Chile’s Dirty War.¹⁴⁸ Videla’s dictatorship was reminiscent of Argentina’s colonial history. Argentina’s military dictatorship pursued a complete purge of Argentine society, enforcing strict censorship and instilling terror throughout the country as it abducted, tortured, and killed suspected leftist supporters. Until the regime’s collapse in 1983, the military and police murdered an estimated 3,800 leftists.¹⁴⁹ The regime disappeared an additional 8,960 people, of whom the regime kept no

¹⁴⁵ Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America*, 100.

¹⁴⁶ Francisca Lessa, *Memory and Transitional Justice in Argentina and Uruguay: Against Impunity*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013): 36.

¹⁴⁷ Burkholder et al., *Exploitation, Inequality, and Resistance*, 359.

¹⁴⁸ Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America*, 108.

¹⁴⁹ Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America*, 108.

arrest records nor whose bodies were found.¹⁵⁰ Torture was common, too, and the Argentine military and police forces ran approximately 380 secret detention centers.¹⁵¹ The centers practices psychological and physical torture, and medical doctors often supervised sessions.¹⁵²

Utilizing medical references such as “diagnosis,” “cancer,” “social pathology,” “surgery,” and “extirpation of diseased tissues,” the militarized Argentine state channeled logics of ideological purity and homogeneity, concepts that were fundamental in the Spanish Crown’s conversion campaign in Spanish America.¹⁵³ The state justified its violent and militarized campaign against leftist supporters through the idea that leftist ideologies were a danger to the state’s security and by spreading the narrative that only by eradicating such ideologies, through whatever means necessary, could the Argentine state be preserved. Videla placed no restraints on the military’s power, assigning to the military a purpose that surpassed moral boundaries, echoing the divine right granted to the military by the Spanish Crown during the Reconquista and conquest of Latin America.¹⁵⁴ Additionally, many of the lines between the leftist ‘terrorists’ and the rightist dictatorship, including its elite and military supporters, were built on centuries-old tensions stemming from how the Argentine institutions systemically marginalized and exploited the working class while perpetuating the centralized political and social power of the elites, whose wealth accumulated centered on colonial easy money, rent-seeking strategies. The state terrorism of the Dirty War in Argentina was deliberately designed by the dictatorship to cement and centralize allied elite and military while discouraging the formation of a cohesive opposition, just as the Spanish Crown’s deliberate choice of labor institutions and colonial

¹⁵⁰ Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America*, 114.

¹⁵¹ Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America*, 110.

¹⁵² Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America*, 111.

¹⁵³ Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America*, 101.

¹⁵⁴ Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America*, 107.

government structures served its desire to maintain its absolute authority over Spanish America. Disappearances by the Argentine military and police especially served the dictatorship's purpose of ironclad control, since uncertainty of victims' fates perpetuated feelings of fear and powerlessness among victims' friends and families.¹⁵⁵ Political violence characterized both Argentina's military dictatorship's and colonial Spain's preservation of power, and narratives of protecting state security and the endowment of a higher purpose legitimized the states' use of violence against resistive civilians.

Facets of Spanish Colonialism in the Dirty Wars

In the Dirty Wars, the facets of Spanish colonialism manifested in the states' legitimizations of political violence, deliberate, violent, and illiberal methods of centralizing state rule, initial civilian faith in the military, and disproportionate adverse effects to the peasants and workers. Logics of purity and uniformity associated with conversion translated into narratives of ideological purity as a means of maintaining state security, and the military and political violence served a higher purpose, perhaps even one ordained by God. The exploitation and inequality perpetuated by easy money strategies, particularly in the evolution of the *encomienda* into the *latifundia* and by the consistent domination of politics by the elite, created a key point of division in Argentina and Chile. Both countries attempted to break from the cycle of elite-controlled political systems, yet reformist attempts "ran against the cold reality of the administrative, legal, and cultural heritage of the colony," and the military quickly quelled these threats to tradition.¹⁵⁶ Following the Crown's example of centralized absolute authority, Chile's and Argentina's military dictatorships removed obstacles to their power and implemented tactics, especially violent ones, designed to spread fear and discourage resistance. As with colonialism, the few and

¹⁵⁵ Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America*, 108.

¹⁵⁶ Yeatts, *The Roots of Poverty in Latin America*, 70.

the elite suffered the least, while conditions worsened for the peasants and laborers. The military coups showed how the colonial relationship between military success and political and economic rewards persisted over centuries into the twentieth century. Despite differences in their political and economic scenes, Argentina and Chile share their Spanish colonial roots, and tracing the facets of Spanish colonialism to their expression in the notorious Dirty Wars helps demonstrate how fundamental Spanish colonialism remains in the informal and formal institutions of Latin America.

Conclusion

Spanish colonialism in Latin America left a lasting impact on Latin American countries visible in their political, social, and economic logics and institutions. Recently victorious in an 800-year war against the Muslims, Catholic Spain colonized Latin America in search of riches and to spread Christianity, two initiatives that it believed would strengthen and expand the Spanish Empire. Four facets characterized Spanish colonialism – conversion, centralism, easy money, and political violence. The facets intersected with each other to found Latin America on concepts of inequality and exploitation, and, from their beginnings, Latin American institutions were deliberately designed to further the power and wealth of the already powerful and wealthy. The depth to which the facets of Spanish colonialism are embedded in Latin America countries is evident in the countries' shared inability to escape colonial power structures and cycles of exploitation and inequality. Latin American countries' independence wars, the development of the *latifundia* from the colonial *encomienda* system, and Latin America's debt crisis in the 1980s provide a generalized overview of some of the key manifestations of colonial facets. By looking at the Dirty Wars in Argentina and Chile, one can see more specific paths from colonial logics and institutions to more current outbreaks of political violence, campaigns for ideological purity,

state inability and unwillingness to decentralize power, and economic conditions that hold down laborers.

To better understand why colonial practices and logics persist despite reforms and development in Latin American countries, I propose two routes for future research. First, looking at the role of individual and national identity in state politics could help explain ongoing identity issues in Latin American countries stemming from their contested state formation. As Slater points out, “the politics of identity and difference are located in the controversies of origin and discovery.”¹⁵⁷ A connection between the absence of a shared national identity, stemming from controversial roots of state formation in colonialism, may impact the occurrences of military coups as opposed to elections as a means of changing governments in Latin American countries.¹⁵⁸ Second, researching the impact of outside countries’ perceptions of and relationships with Latin America could shed additional light on why Latin American countries continue to experience logics and practices that bear resemblance to those of the colonial period. I suspect that some further-developed countries’ perceptions of Latin America as a third-world country contribute to international relations that continually place Latin America in the situation of the colonized. In other words, external intervention, particularly by the United States, in Latin American politics and international exploitation of Latin America’s resources serve as mechanisms of maintaining Latin America’s subordinate position to more powerful countries which benefit from narratives supporting the need for more developed countries to help modernize and develop Latin America. This logic is fundamentally colonial, and connections can be drawn between colonial forms of control and exploitation and contemporary relations between developed and ‘third-world’ countries.

¹⁵⁷ Slater, *Geopolitics and the Post-colonial*, 126.

¹⁵⁸ Fossum, “Factors Influencing the Occurrence of Military Coups d’Etat in Latin America,” 241.

Exploring the origins of a Latin America is important in understanding the values and traditions on which its institutions were built. This helps explain why some institutions fail to protect their citizens from abuse perpetrated by the state or why a democratic constitution governs the United States while attempts at decentralization in Latin American countries failed. The persistence of economic and political instability inherited from Latin America's colonial experience identifies how systemic reform, rather than surface-level amendments, that addresses patterns of exploitation and inequality across Latin American institutions needs to occur in order to affect lasting change. For example, the occurrence of military coups in Latin America have been linked to poverty.¹⁵⁹ This observation in light of speculations that the 2010s may represent another 'lost decade' for Latin America should serve as an indicator that persistent colonial logics and practices that perpetuate the existence of poverty, slow economic growth, and political turmoil in Latin America need to be taken seriously and addressed on a deep enough level in order to break the cycles and prevent reiterations of the Dirty Wars. Protests, political unrest, and authoritarian-styled regimes are already on the rise in Latin America. In Nicaragua, for instance, President Ortega continues to consolidate power among his family while exercising strict censorship and persecuting leftist supporters and intellectuals.¹⁶⁰ Venezuela, too, is in the midst of a political and economic crisis.¹⁶¹ It is vital to understand how historical roots continue to affect the ways in which countries structure their political systems, design social hierarchies, and formulate economic policies. My research helps to show that the less obvious, informal logics in a country can sometimes be more influential than the formal rules governing that country in determining a country's future trajectory and in predicting how it will respond to social, political,

¹⁵⁹ Egil Fossum, "Factors Influencing the Occurrence of Military Coups d'Etat in Latin America," *Journal of Peace Research* 4, no. 3 (1967): 241.

¹⁶⁰ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/04/world/americas/nicaragua-protests-ortega.html>.

¹⁶¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-36319877>.

and economic challenges, indicating that special attention to a country's origin and development can provide a more comprehensive understanding of that country's current situation.

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