

Circumstantial Empire: Britain and Argentina, 1800-1832

Draft Proposal

By Patricia C Prada Jimenez

Introduction

In their article entitled 'The Imperialism of Free trade'¹ John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson developed a theory of Imperialism that was different to conventional ones studied until the 1950s. They introduced a concept², that of an 'Informal Empire', which challenged those existing theories by stating that imperialism could not be explained only by the study of the formal empire-'those areas painted red on the map'-. This would be like '...judging the size and character of icebergs solely from the parts above water-line'.³ For the authors Argentina, like other South American countries, was part of an Informal Empire which experienced significant British influence by economic, social cultural and political means. The purpose of the present research study is to focus on this concept of Informal Empire and to analyse the validity of the theory with regards to the relationship between Argentina and Britain from 1800 to 1832.

Traditional views of imperialism explained that the British Empire went through rather different stages during the nineteenth century. Between 1815 and 1840 British imperialism had experienced its most significant expansion, between 1840 and 1870 this had changed and together with the developing ideas of free trade and *laissez faire* there was a period of anti-imperialism. In 1870s the so-called 'new-imperialism' meant a revived enthusiasm for expansion-or some may say protection of the already existing possessions-⁴ which would last until the beginning of the 1900s. Gallagher and Robinson questioned these traditional theories and tried to show that there was a continuity of policy in Britain towards the outside world. They also argued that the necessity of 'integrating new regions into the expanding economy' was a continuous understanding based on aspects of political and economic relationships that varied according to regions and time.

Understanding and definition of terms

It will be important for the present research to understand that when dealing with terms such as Imperialism, Empire, and of course, Informal and Formal Empires one is bound to come across various definitions and attempts to explain them. Terms such as these have

¹ Gallagher, J. and R. Robinson, 'The Imperialism of free trade', *The Economic History Review*, 6 no. 1 (1953) 1-15

² The concept of Informal Empire can, so far, only be attributed to C. R. Fay who uses the term to refer to British Imperialism in his work *Cambridge History of the British Empire* (1940)...

³ Gallagher, J. and R. Robinson, 'The Imperialism of free trade'...

⁴ One example is Charles Jones...

had different meanings and connotations in history and any study of time in which they are applied must always consider what is still a moot. For the purpose of this work I will primarily reflect on what Gallagher and Robinson understood as imperialism; '...the 'various' ways in which an economically expanding society exerted its influence and protected its interests abroad'.⁵ This is why, for the authors, both Formal and Informal empire should be part of any analysis of British expansion overseas. What was of obvious importance to them at the time was the development of British trade and the political and economic factors involved in their affairs with foreign territory.⁶ Both exist to Gallagher and Robinson as 'variable political functions of the extending pattern of overseas trade, investment, migration and culture'. Finally, it is important to note that they also reached the conclusion that if this is so they are 'essentially interconnected and to some extent interchangeable'.⁷

Keith Hancock astutely said 'imperialism is no word for scholars' as it needs constant redefinition.⁸ Efforts to define and redefine related terms have been endless. Lenin considered "imperialism [as] capitalism in that stage of development in which the dominations of monopolies and finance capital has taken shape...in which the partition of all the territory of the earth by the greatest capitalists' countries has been completed".⁹ But it is not 'economic' or 'capitalist' imperialism that this thesis will subscribe to. Neither is Hobson's theory in which imperialism is the "perversion of true capitalism by a minority of business elites and vested interests for their own selfish purposes, through the exercise of illegitimate and undemocratic influence over governments and mass opinion".¹⁰

Definitions and theories of imperialism vary significantly still these days-and will certainly involve a considerable amount of this study-in the attempts of scholars to go back to the idea of Informal Empire. The most recent work on the subject: *Informal Empire in Latina America: Culture, Commerce and Capital*¹¹ includes two excellent chapters which thoughtfully attempt to explain what this thesis will acknowledge as essential notions to consider in the study of the relationship between Argentina and Britain at a time when Imperialism or Empire were probably indistinguishable in spite of the different ways in which they worked according to time, space and 'circumstances'. Alan Knight, for whom 'Argentina was the prize possession within [Britain's] informal empire' something that '...grew stronger as the threat of force receded', stressed the importance of testing a 'good' and 'working' concept. One that 'must be reasonably clear...display some congruence with reality ...and conform to standard usage'. This way, concepts 'enlighten' rather than 'obscure' any analysis of events.¹² On the other hand a useful distinction is made by Charles Jones who differentiates between Imperialism as a 'policy or doctrine' and Empire 'as a structure', a state of being, 'a constitutional order' that was realized by means of legal

⁵ In Kennedy, P., 'Continuity and Discontinuity; British Imperialism 1815-1914' in *British Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. C.C. Eldridge (New York, 1984)

⁶ Note that in Africa and the Victorians the authors' focus seem to have shifted towards the importance of other aspects of the relationships with the existing empire. Trade was not in these areas as important at the later period as strategic objectives and the events taking place in the peripheries was a crucial factor in the developments in the 'Scramble for Africa'.

⁷ Knight, Alan 'Rethinking Informal Empire in Latina America (especially Argentina)' in *Informal Empire in Latina America: Culture, Commerce and Capital*, ed. Mathew Brown, *SLAS* (Oxford, 2008), pp. 23-48

⁸ in Porter, A., *The 19th Century*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p 6

⁹ Idem

¹⁰ Hobson, John A., *Imperialism: A Study*, 3rd edn (London: Allen & Unwin, 1938)

¹¹ Mathew Brown ed., *Informal Empire in Latina America: Culture, Commerce and Capital*, *SLAS* (Oxford, 2008)

¹² Knight, Alan 'Rethinking Informal Empire in Latina America (especially Argentina)'

and often military practice.¹³ In agreement with Charles Jones, applying the concept of Informal Empire to Argentina 'makes perfectly good historical sense'. However, whether Argentina was in fact part of 'it' or of some other sort of relationship especially in the early decades of the century or even subject to deliberate imperialistic action by the metropolis is exactly what this work aims to reveal.

Background

By exploring the different ways in which Britain was present in Argentina and developed closed links with local and neighbouring business, local landed elites, diplomats and political groups it will be possible to see whether any sort of influence was as significant as Gallagher and Robinson suggest. Had this turned Argentina into a country that was indeed part of the Empire-even if informal-?

Argentina had gained its autonomy from Spain in 1810.¹⁴ After years of struggle-which were not yet to end-it managed to become a separate country without the Spanish control that had prevailed for centuries. However, why was Britain now thinking, "The deed is done, the nail is driven, Spanish America is free; and if we do not mismanage our affairs sadly she is English"?¹⁵ In spite of the failed attempts of 1806-7, was Britain searching in South America for new established "satellite economies"¹⁶ to provide them with raw materials and widening markets for its constantly developing economy? Was Argentina going to become one?

If this influence really existed, how did it really work? It will add to this investigation to explore particular attitudes and events such as the local response to British presence and the "Collaborating Elites"¹⁷, the establishment of a British community in the area; the mercantile houses, British schools, and different associations, the purchase of land, and various other British investments in the country. By also examining what role the British played in the politics and culture of Argentina this study will try to understand and probably determine the real meaning of 'Informal Empire' when applied to this country and its relationship with Britain at this crucial time in the history of the Viceroyalty of the River Plate, later the Argentine Nation.

Countries such as Brazil and Chile seemed also to be part of this Informal Empire. Was this any relationship at all comparable to that which Britain had with Argentina? How important were the developments on the Eastern coast of the River Plate, later Uruguay, in the decisions taken by both Argentina and the Metropolis and radically affecting and often assertively shaping the regions' developments? Numerous researchers have also worked on the concept of Informal Empire and Informal Imperialism in the Middle East¹⁸ and

¹³ Jones, Charles 'Finance, Ambition and Romanticism in the River Plate: 1880-1892' in *Informal Empire in Latin America: Culture, Commerce and Capital*, ed. Mathew Brown, *SLAS* (Oxford, 2008), pp. 124-148

¹⁴ Independence was eventually achieved in 1816

¹⁵ George Canning in Galeano, Eduardo, *Open Veins of Latin America*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1997), p. 173

¹⁶ Gallagher, J. and R. Robinson, 'The Imperialism of free trade'

¹⁷ Robinson, Ronald, 'Non-European Foundations of Imperialism: Sketch for a Theory of Collaboration', in *Studies in the Theories of Imperialism*, ed. Rodger Owen and Robert Sutcliffe (London, 1972), 117-42

¹⁸ Silverfarb, Daniel 'Britain's Informal Empire in the Middle East: a Case Study of Iraq, 1929-1941' *International Affairs* (Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1987), Vol. 63, No. 2, pp. 336-337

Honduras¹⁹ and even on victims of other metropolis such as Germany in East-Central Europe²⁰ or Japan's Informal Empire in China²¹ in later periods. Many indeed worth reading.

Other comparisons will be drawn with, not only those areas under the Informal Empire suggested by the authors, but also of countries which, opposite to the case of Argentina, were part of the formal empire at some point in time.... Another example may well be Canada, especially its Western area, since both countries shared at the time some similarities in terms of resources, political immaturity, and geographical features.²²

There seems to have always been more interest of Latin American historians in Britain's role in Latin America than of British academics. Only during the 1960s did interest in the topic become significant and British universities began researching it.²³ Having taken into consideration the relevant background literature one finds that some research has been carried out on the topic by authors who developed new ideas or adhered to different theories. However, it is noticeable that this existing literature is not enough to understand or explain certain phenomena. In particular areas of study there has been little investigation and further work is needed on those controversial issues that remain unresolved. Were the British so influential in the political developments of the time? Was Argentina exclusively dependent on exports and imports to and from Britain? Was the interest of Britain such that they would have used 'more' force if Argentina had not pursued the political and economic domestic and foreign policies that Britain continued to suggest? Was British diplomacy aggressive enough or even effective when dealing with events going on at a regional level? How close were those representing Britain in South America to the real debates taking place in the British Parliament? Consequently, was the periphery familiar with the metropolis' deliberations? Was there any serious debate going on at all on a specific policy towards the River Plate?

Gallagher and Robinson's theory can and should still be challenged if one is to discover new sources of information that are available for study and analysis these days. A concept such as Informal Empire should certainly be tested in order to understand how the British and Latin Americans perceived each other. There is still likely to be vast amounts of information unknown which may help shed light on significant issues. Understanding the developments in Anglo-Argentine relations in the nineteenth century that could still today have an impact in each country's policies towards the other is fundamental.

'Converted' critics like H. Ferns²⁴, others such as; A. G. Hopkins²⁵, David Rock²⁶ and A.

¹⁹Naylor A. Robert, *Penny Ante Imperialism: The Mosquito Shore and the Bay of Honduras, 1600-1914; A Case Study in British Informal Empire* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, Cranbury, N. J., U.S.A., 1989)

²⁰Grenzebach, William *Germany's Informal Empire in East-Central Europe: German Economic Policy towards Yugoslavia and Rumania, 1933-1939 ?* (Franz Steiner, Stuttgart, 1988)

²¹Peter Duus, Raymond Myers, and Marke R. Peattie, eds. *The Japanese Informal Empire in China, 1895-1937* (Pinceton; Princeton University Press, 1989)

²² Other examples on countries such as Persia, Turkey West Africa, and Malaya are:

McLean, David 'Finance and Informal Empire before the First World War',....*ECHR* (Blackwell Publishing, Cambridge ?)

²³ Miller, Rory, *Britain and Latina America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries*, (UK: Longman, 1993)

²⁴ Ferns, H.S., *Argentina. The City and the Nation (1971)*

Ferns, H.S., *Argentina* (London: Ernest B Limited, 1969)

Ferns, H.S., *The Argentine Republic 1516-1971*, ed. W. E. Minchinton, National Economic Series, (Devon: David & Charles (Holdings) Ltd, 1973)

Thompson²⁷ suggested that the relationship between Argentina and Britain was one of 'mutual advantage rather than informal imperialism' or not even exploitative at all. D. C. M. Platt strongly denied any premeditated control over Argentina's economy or politics and questioned any theories of informal imperialism in the region.²⁸

Other scholars contribute to this debate by deconstructing the concept of Informal Empire and that of Imperialism. Hence, they provide a new perspective in which one could attempt to understand what Gallagher and Robinson lacked to explore any further. Alan Knight, Charles Jones, Cain, and Hopkins are some examples.²⁹ In Argentina, great thinkers, politicians, and historians of past times such as Felix Luna, Raul Prebisch, R. S. Ortiz and even our most brilliant laureate, Jorge Luis Borges³⁰, tried to understand what it was that drew Britain to such remote and initially inhospitable place but still managed to seduce some of its people to such extent. Klaus Gallo, Andrew Graham Yooll, and Carlos Escude³¹ among others yet often review this intriguing past that linked this silver estuary and the greatest Empire of the time. Many more authors and contributions exist to be considered. But what they have not yet ascertained is a clear appreciation of the circumstances-mainly in South America- and finally a distinct new concept which alternatively to that proposed by the studied authors better explains the workings of the British relationship with what is today the Republic of Argentina.

Methodology

The present research will be carried out through a general contextualization and interpretative methods and when suitable comparison with other areas which may have been and could be framed under Gallagher and Robinson's concept of Informal Empire. Bibliographical, historical and when available archival material will be analysed to situate the historical context in which developments occur. The scrutiny of these will exemplify

Ferns, H.S., 'Beginnings of British Investment in Argentina', *Economic History Review*, iv (1951-2)

²⁵ Hopkins, A. G., 'Informal Empire in Argentina: An Alternative View', *JLAS*, 26 (1994), 469-84

²⁶ Rock, David 'The British in Argentina: Old and New Approaches to Imperialist Contact' Bristol Conference BIRTHA University of Bristol....

²⁷ Thompson, A., 'Informal Empire? An Exploration in the history of Anglo-Argentine relations, 1810-1914', *JLAS*, 24 (1992), 419-436

²⁸ Platt, D. C. M., 'The imperialism of free trade; Some reservations', *Economic History Review*, 6 (1) (1953), 1-15

²⁹ Some examples are: Knight, Alan 'Rethinking Informal Empire in Latina America (especially Argentina)' in *Informal Empire in Latina America: Culture, Commerce and Capital*, ed. Mathew Brown, *SLAS* (Oxford, 2008), pp. 23-48 Jones, Charles 'Finance, Ambition and Romanticism in the River Plate: 1880-1892' in *Informal Empire in Latina America: Culture, Commerce and Capital*, ed. Mathew Brown, *SLAS* (Oxford, 2008), pp. 124-148 Jones, Charles, "Business Imperialism" and Argentina, 1975-1900: A Theoretical Note', *JLAS*, 12 (1980), 437-44 Cain, P. J. & A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism*, vol. 1 (1993) Cain, P. J. and A.G. Hopkins, 'Gentlemanly capitalism and British expansion overseas; the old colonial system 1688-1850', *The Economic History Review* 2nd series, 39, 4 (1986) Cain, P. J. and A.G. Hopkins, 'The political economy of British expansion overseas 1759-1914', *The Economic History Review* 2nd series, 33, no.4 (1980)

³⁰ Some examples are: Luna, Felix, *Los conflictos armados: De las invasiones inglesas a la guerra de Malvinas*. Buenos Aires: Planeta, 2003. Scalabrini Ortiz, Raul, *Política Británica en el Río de La Plata*. Buenos Aires: Fernández Blanco Editor, 1957

³¹ Some examples are: Graham Yooll Andrew, *Small Wars you may have Missed (in South America)* (London: Junction Books, 1983) Graham Yooll Andrew, *Ocupacion y reconquista (1806-1807): A doscientos años de las invasiones inglesas*. Argentina: Lumiere, 2006 Gallo, Klaus, *Las invasiones inglesas*, Buenos Aires, Eudeba, 2004 Gallo, Klaus, *De la invasion al reconocimiento. Gran Bretana y el Rio de la Plata*, Buenos Aires, AZ editora, 1994

circumstances which will validate the outcome of the work.

The research work has been theoretically informed and often challenged by various existing theories of imperialism: Conservative, Liberal, Capitalist, Marxist, Political, Cultural, and Economic. Yet this does not mean it specifically adheres to any one of these in particular.

The investigation will be organised by data collection, critical analysis and examination of primary and secondary sources; primary sources including La Epoca, La Vanguardia, and La Nacion-local newspapers-in Argentina and The Times and others in England, and academic and other Journals in both countries. I will be looking for further material to be revealed and analysed in institutions and organisations in both countries; Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos, Instituto del Servicio Exterior de la Nación, Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Academia Nacional de la Historia, Consejo Argentino para las Relaciones Internacionales, and the Anglo-Argentine Society; UK Department of Overseas Trade, the British Parliament, reputed Universities in Argentina, England and possibly countries with a 'connection' to the study of the concept of Informal Empire and Imperialism.

Advice from experts and consultation-in the forms of interviews and/or open discussions-with those already involved in previous and current related research will be essential; in Latin America: Klaus Gallo, Gustavo Ferrari Wolfenson, Andrew Graham Yooll, Florencia Hubenak, Vicente Massot, and Carlos Escude among others, in England; Colin Lewis, Rory Miller, Alan Knight, Raouf Tajvidi, Nicola Miller, Charles Jones, Jane Ridley, and others as well.

And finally inevitably working with Rudyard Kipling and one of his most brilliant poems-still to be known by many...³²

Language competency

I will seek to access documentation and various sources of information, especially that to be found in Argentina. Having access to material in Spanish will be useful when analysing further available information than that examined so far.

Study area

Situating Argentina's development at times of independence from Spain means that the areas to be explored are different to what is called Argentina today. Chronologically and sometimes according to comparative analysis with reference to them by other states the areas of study will be; South America, the Viceroyalty of the River Plate, Provincias Unidas del Rio de la Plata, Buenos Aires, and Argentina. A representative example of these differences is the Viceroyalty, which in 1776 comprised what are now Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay and Uruguay. What is clear is that the present study focuses on those areas spreading from the estuary of the River Plate towards the inlands and the following and consistent acquisition of those territories under the governments in power in Buenos Aires until 1832.

³² TBC...

The River Plate was named by Spanish conquistadores after having received considerable amounts of silver-*argentum*-gifts from the locals. Juan Dias de Solis arrived firstly in the coasts of this river in 1516. Santa Maria de los Buenos Aires was to become the name of the port founded in 1536 by Pedro de Mendoza at Santisima Trinidad, now Buenos Aires. The first native historian considered to have used the term Argentina in was Ruiz Dias de Guzman in his writings on the history of his native lands. He wrote *Anales del Descubrimiento, Población y Conquista del Rio de la Plata*, presently known as *La Argentina Manuscrita*, finished in 1612. It was first published in 1835. It was, however, a Spanish explorer and poet, Martin del Barco Centenera, who in 1602 had published "*Argentina y la Conquista del Rio de la Plata*".

As for what is considered the metropolis in this work it will be referred to as Britain-originally understood as such by the invading Romans, from the Celtic word '*pretayne*', which from 1801-when Britain recovered Ireland-to 1922 was officially named United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. This included Scotland, Ireland, England, and Wales.

Limitations

As explained above an all inclusive research of definition of concepts is not by any means an objective at present. There exist an almost immeasurable amount of works on the Historiography of Imperialism. Focus will be placed on original explanations and relevant and many more recent distinctive descriptions of what Argentina and Britain's connection was between 1800-1832.

The implications that the outcome of this project may have on current affairs between both countries will probably be the work for a future study.

Finally and with sincere regret, implications of 'cultural influence and 'how far the strength of cultural ties drew strength from economic interests' or whether this may have worked in the reverse will be limited.³³ No matter how enriching Literature, Psychology and other disciplines are or how the role of 'a male agent of informal empire' and 'a female object or substance of [it]' may be, it is almost a duty in this type of work to merely refer to them in order to be able to focus on the original and principal initiative. It is however acknowledged that an interdisciplinary approach is most valuable and I adhere to Felipe Fernandez Armesto in his definition of it as 'pursuing one's specialism in the conviction that it is permeable, and that it overlaps with others, ... [and] it is very much the richer for it'.³⁴

Conclusion

This project is a humble attempt to challenge even the latest work of those brilliant

³³ On this subject see Louise Guenther, 'In Bed': British Merchants, Female Brazilians, and the Artful Seductions of Informal Empire, Bristol Conference on *Informal Empire in the Long Nineteenth Century*, University of Bristol, Bristol 2006. Jennifer L. French, Mary Louise Pratt, and also..... on British travels in Patagonia....

³⁴ Felipe Fernandez Armesto, a personally admired and often controversial historian, is cited in Mathew Brown's introduction to *Informal Empire in Latina America: Culture, Commerce and Capital*

scholars who have recently-and at no better time and with intelligent effort- ventured on a new definition of Informal Empire.³⁵ There is no doubt that as Andrew Thompson explains this most recent scholarly research and its outcome-a much needed re-fashioning of the concepts- 'is still worth debating'.³⁶ But it also still poses more questions when it comes to the exploration of Latin America and its relationship with Britain; In this particular case the very strong link that Argentina even in the twenty first century holds with it, the origin of which may well be the first few decades of the nineteenth century and the result of the workings of an existing and long protected 'Circumstantial Empire'.

The present work was last updated in December 2012.
For further material on this project please contact the author.
NOTE: bibliography & references are yet to be completed (TBC)

³⁵ Mathew Brown ed., *Informal Empire in Latina America: Culture, Commerce and Capital*, SLAS (Oxford, 2008). For the redefined concept see Mathew Brown, pp. 21-22

³⁶ Thompson, Andrew, 'Informal Empire: Past, Present and Future' in *Informal Empire in Latina America: Culture, Commerce and Capital*, SLAS (Oxford, 2008)