FAMILY AND POLITICS: THREE GENERATIONS (1790–1890)

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Abstract: This essay views nineteenth-century Latin American politics through the lens of kinship deemphasizing individuals, political organizations, and institutions. Politics is observed through the activities of families and the family itself is seen as the fundamental enterprise rather than the family hacienda *(landed estate) or commercial exporting business. With this perspective, the family can be seen expanding from an urban enterprise to an urban-rural one; extending its authority through political posts obtained in the city (military commanders, justices of the peace in areas of their rural estates). The spatial components of political power—local to regional to national—are also revealed by observing families as they attempt through marriage, political office, and transportation investments to extend their reach to a national level.*

The political history of Latin America has traditionally been presented as a chronicle of political parties, wars, and the tenure of particular government officials. In sketching the changing relationship between family and politics in nineteenth-century Latin America the major contribution of this essay is to suggest a shift in the framework we ordinarily use to understand political actions. Political action will be presented here as kinship politics or *politica de familia*. Here the principal actors are families. Such an approach makes Latin American history more understandable. By focusing on the family this approach deemphasizes individual behavior and the activities of political parties in favor of political behavior action of families. In the essay it will be argued that such an approach, within a three generational context, proceeding from an understanding of family issues and priorities, makes understandable the political history of nineteenth-century Latin America.

The critical relationship of family networks to the political structure of nineteenth-century Latin America is not obvious from comparative research nor even from historical studies of political parties, legislative bodies, or government leaders. It is only through in-depth studies at the microlevel in a variety of locales that the significant function of the family as a political actor comes through. Studies of great estates (*haciendas/estancias*), of occupational groups (particularly merchants), and of regions and communities emphasize individuals and demonstrate the role of the family, even though that is not their focus. These studies show that families assumed a much greater political role after the different Latin American nations became independent nations. Between independence and the 1890s in Latin America "combinations of fami-

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lies" or "federations of families" appeared. These groups were known locally or regionally as: the *casta divina* in Merida, the *grupo Monterrey* in Monterrey, the *Paraiba Oligarquia* in Brazil, and the *Ochocientos* or *Quinientos* or *Casa Otomana* group in Chile. They had both rural and urban bases of economic strength and of political power.

The Family as Enterprise

In this essay the usual approach has been inverted. Instead of studying the family through an institution or one of its enterprises, the family is considered as the basic enterprise. Such an approach yields a more complex picture. In looking at the family as *the* enterprise it is no longer urban or rural but is seen stretched and connected to both realms; it ceases to be mercantile or landed but combines more than one type of business. Politics and/or military position is not an exclusive occupation of an urban professional but rather an important part of the family enterprise growing in importance with the advancing century.

My study of three generations of families in Argentina made clear the increasing importance of the political role of families as well as the urban rural continuum of the family enterprise (Balmori, 1973; Balmori and Oppenheimer, 1979; Balmori, Voss, and Wortman, 1984). *Family* as used here is defined as a social unit based on blood and marriage. It was bilateral and extended vertically between generations (children and parents) and laterally through blood ties or marriage (spouse, brothers, sisters, cousins, brothers-in-law, and sisters-in-law). The legal definition (as to degree of kinship in terms of inheritance or marriage prohibitions) varied slightly between nineteenth-century Latin American family systems, and this definition essentially covers the most extensive case.

Generational Patterns

A number of political observers of the nineteenth century, including Auguste Comte, John Stuart Mill, Wilhelm Dilthy, and Ortega y Gasset, constructed generational theories of political and economic behavior (Marias, 1970). Their work reveals the important role of families in this period elsewhere besides Latin America, a role which fostered this generational view of time.

The evidence on Latin American families could easily support a thesis that cohorts of individuals marched in unison for a generation. However, I believe that the idea of the generation pertains to date of birth in only an approximate, circumstantial, or situational way. At least as important is the question of direct descent—whether the prior generation was already economically or politically established in the region.

The families investigated using this approach for Argentina and Chile yielded a three generational pattern for the nineteenth century but it is well to point out that the number of generations of family networks may vary according to locale and differing circumstances. It seems probable that the network pattern was already established in the eighteenth century in central regions of the Spanish colonial empire and some areas of Brazil.

The effective limits of kinship for inclusion in family business varied somewhat by generation. In the first generation of families studied in Buenos Aires, for example, the family connection made through marriage was primordial, since the group contained a large percentage of immigrants who married into local families. Marriage provided these immigrants with a local social and economic base. In the second generation multiple marriages between families were common; sibling exchanges occurred frequently and brothers-in-law appeared in important

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roles in family transactions. Godparents also were prominent and left parts of their estates to their godchildren. Many were siblings of the godchildren's parents. In the third generation endogamous marriages between uncles and nieces, aunts and nephews, appeared, indicating an interest in consolidation of political power and economic resources. These marital strategies were responses to testamentary and inheritance laws, but they also represented specific decisions about the expansion or contraction of family alliances and networks to suit changing circumstances.

Family political activity evinces a shift in focus by generation: the first generation fought in the independence movement and expanded investments in export agriculture; the second created regional structures of economic and institutional power; in the third generation the family established connections with the capital city, now the hub of a centralized state and the place through which the export and import trade was funneled.

The example of families in Buenos Aires Province typifies the three-generational patterns. The first generation's activity for independence was accompanied by a move for free trade and a desire to end monopolies of large merchant houses. After 1820, as trade (hides, salted meat, and ranching) increased, these issues became more important. By the second generation commerce expanded considerably and economic and political adjustments became necessary. New laws were needed to help expand and develop *estancias* (ranches) and to recruit men as soldiers and *estancia* laborers. In the third generation the Buenos Aires family network attempted to expand its control to include other regions. The province eventually rose against the city to protest its federalization and the establishment of the capital in the city of Buenos Aires. The city prevailed and became the funnel through which the provinces traded.

The family of Vicente Casares illustrates these patterns of political and economic behavior. Vicente, a Basque immigrant in the early 1800s, acquired a *barracas de cuero* (hide warehouse) soon after his arrival but was an important urban merchant also. Through marriage and important mercantile connections overseas, Vicente bought a shipping company and land. To combat the powerful merchants in the city of Buenos Aires, Vicente and his eldest son shifted their shipping company to the Paraná River trade. From trade in the usual urban goods for silver he shifted to products from the Buenos Aires hinterland (Casares, 1875).

In the second generation the family again traded directly with city merchants and two sons became important political figures (Vicente E. was on the public works committee of the city and Carlos eventually became governor of the province). By the third generation the family was a city-based exporting firm, dealing in products from the Buenos Aires hinterland: cattle and agricultural products. Politically at the pinnacle of their power they were involved in the union of two major political parties: the Autonomista and the Nacional and helped secure the presidential candidacy of Julio Roca (President: 1880–1886: 1898–1904).

Network Families and Public Posts over Three Generations

The First Generation. Prominent colonial families frequently controlled patronage at the municipal levels, primarily through the city council or *cabildo*, but family ties with royal officialdom disintegrated along with the imperial political structure during independence. Independence also attenuated or dissolved corporate groups,

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such as guilds, militias, brotherhoods, and other church organizations, so they could not protect or promote family interests. In many areas of Latin America the combination of chaotic political conditions, war, and the flight of capital created circumstances similar to those found by Andre Bourgiere in Europe earlier:

> Whenever the state no longer wields enough power to act and to protect its people, the family expands, assumes control of every aspect of the individual's life, and becomes a bastion. (1976:vii)

This picture of the independence period is borne out by Tulio Halperin-Donghi, who wrote: "with regard to the degree to which the Revolution affected the vigour of the family as an institution it accorded to the influence of families a more explicit recognition than the Royal Administration had done" (1974:393–94).

The period of independence is often viewed as a time of discontinuity in which an elite composed of royal officialdom and merchants is replaced by a new rural elite with connections in the post-Napoleonic world of free trade. In occupational terms this change appears accurate. However, many of the old families continued to be influential after independence and many new families gained power through marriages to daughters of old families. In other words, families provided the principal continuity as political and economic realignments occurred throughout the nineteenth century.

An analysis of 154 families of Buenos Aires over three generations shows the rise of a powerful family network, which dominated the city and its hinterland by the second half of the nineteenth century and the nation by the last quarter of the nineteenth century (Balmori, 1973). By and large they were newcomers in the first generation, mostly in trade. But they were not synonymous with the large group of 178 *comerciantes* (major merchants) studied by Susan Socolow in her work on late eighteenth-century Buenos Aires (Socolow, 1978). They were *mercaderes* (middle-sized merchants), traders, and even *pulperos* (shopkeepers) who occupied a much less important level of trade. The two groups overlap slightly, in that twelve first generation family founders belonged to both groups. With less than a 10 percent overlap, there would seem to be a good argument for a discontinuity of elites brought about by independence. But here is where family is most useful in giving us a better and more complete picture of social evolution.

Among the wealthiest families listed as subscribers to the Banco de la Provincia of Buenos Aires in 1828, 14 names from the powerful colonial merchant group appear as well as 30 from the new emerging network. But 19 marriages took place between the two groups in the first generation, 16 in the second, and 8 in the third. If marriages of offspring of these marriages were also studied, the number would increase greatly. Kinship alliances thus reveal continuity over a period where study of other institutions has shown discontinuity.

During the late eighteenth century, principal power bases of merchant elite families were urban; they were also international. But in this period the rural base generally became necessary to urban power as production and export of primary materials from cattle and agricultural estates grew in importance. In many cases also we find that merchants sought marriages with land-owning families as a mechanism for political power and economic diversification (Kuznesof, 1980; Kennedy, 1973).

The general ruralization of Latin American society in the nineteenth century, both in terms of population and economic production, has been noted by such scholars as Halperin-Donghi and Morse

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(1974:27; 1975:4–26). Nevertheless, any close observation of a family's urban rural enterprise points to a continuum in which continual family presence in both city and hinterland was important throughout the nineteenth century, though one location may have been more critical for a certain generation. During the first generation the literature suggests that families demonstrated strong territorial characteristics. These first generation spatial ties can be illustrated through examples from Brazil and Argentina. In early nineteenth-century São Paulo, Brazil, the commissioned militia officers acted as "territorial and kinship-based elite power group of critical importance to the management of the community" (Kuznesof, 1979:205). This group used its rural, economic, and social power base to influence the community. Kin networks were often strongly territorial in the first generation when large areas of Latin America operated in a political vacuum.

Martin Guemes's hegemonic control over the province of Salta (Northwest Argentina) from 1810 to 1821 was based on the control of military, political, and economic resources by a group of Salta families who came to power with the elimination of Spanish officials in 1810. In summing up the relationship of Guemes to the kinship group, Roger Haigh shows that:

> ". . . the continued domination of the family structure is apparent. He was selected by it and was successful only when he enjoyed its support. On points of discord between Guemes and his supporting group he was either defeated or forced to compromise his position. Guemes was dead within a week after the final break ensued, and the family structure immediately reassumed complete control of the province. It appears that Guemes was more an instrument of the kinship elite than the tyrant of Salta." (1964: 481–90)

Despite this economic and political shift of power to the rural hinterland, network families never abandoned their urban base. Political continuity in the urban area was necessary for families to influence the distribution of national resources. And when the colonial corporate institutions disappeared, families became direct, active agents in public affairs. Historical literature of the nineteenth century shows that the family saw political office as an additional and necessary complement to its business interests. Over three generations, the public, political role of families increased in importance.

Chilean politics in the postindependence period have been described by Mary Felstiner as being based on the idea of kinship:

> . . . political relations had the intimacy and security of family relations. If their new society looked like the old society in many ways, it is because they turned to what they had for organization; they turned to kinship alliances. For political and social positions, they drew on kinship qualifications. For ideology they called up the image of the family, which justified both rebellion and family interest in the state. Images of the polity as family or a federation of families pervaded revolutionary ideology (1976:80).

Kinship in Chilean politics was by no means limited to ideology. "In October 1811, Joaquin Larraín told José Miguel Carrera: 'We have all the presidencies in the family. I am President of Congress, my brother-in-law of the Executive and my nephew of the Audiencia.' " In 1813 the Chilean junta removed several members of the Carreras family from military command so that all the armies "would not be located in one family" (Felstiner, 1976:74–75). Family power was dynamic in the nineteenth century. In fact we can find two shifts that correspond with the second and third generations. During independence, large families first became visible in independence politics and soon after established close connections with the hinterland of the cities where they resided. They gained legitimacy in public affairs by becoming officers at the provincial level of the

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republics they helped create. For the first generation this activity was usually limited by location; the second generation would attempt alliances that transcended space and occupation.

The Second Generation (1820–1860): Family as Enterprise. The second generation (1820–1860) was the most important. By mid-nineteenth century, a group of interrelated families not only had created a sound economic network among themselves but had gained legitimacy for their group in public affairs. They had become officials in the national institutions including the executive branch, legislature, customs, the port authority, and public works.

Second generation families struggled to obtain certain types of provincial level posts. When they could not capture them directly, they obtained them through marriage. For the second generation, these included provincial legislator, customs official, militia officer (preferably rural militia), justice of the peace (often combined with a militia post), port commissioner, municipal officer, or officer of a political party. The most prominent and important post was that of provincial governor. As a result, families formed a solid political network of control, from their rural base to the national urban structures.

The head of the second generation family was a "mixed-occupation" type. But whatever the combination (mercantile-*hacendado,* merchant-miner, or merchant-entrepreneur), the mercantile enterprise continued. Political posts added to the business venture: they helped expand and improve opportunities for the family business.

Whenever the enterprise dealt with credit and transportation, political offices were integrated into the family's enterprise. Thus the lines between public and private enterprise were blurred. This particularly holds true for credit and banking. There are many examples of the combination of public posts with private enterprise and of the use of public office to foster diversified interests in the literature on families (Flory and Smith, 1978; Kicza, 1982:447; Cardoso, 1978:108, 188). After the elimination of the church as a credit institution and before the establishment of public banking, giving and getting credit became a main reason for the family network. In Guadalajara, Mexico, for example, mobilizing credit was the central motive for the agricultural-commercial family enterprise. To the second generation, this credit network was crucial as specific cases in the Cauca Valley in Colombia and in Mexico have shown (Hyland, 1982; Huerta, 1981; Greenow, 1984). The family used a combination of urban and rural resources to create credit for investment and to secure and stabilize it as a source of income. Marriage alliances also were used to organize a system for distributing credit and allocating scarce resources (Lindley, 1978:288).

The second generation family's credit network reveals itself through different sharing arrangements: joint purchases of lands, joint running of haciendas, exchanges of properties as credit within the kin network. The Pereyra and Iraola families of Buenos Aires, for example, ran an *estancia* together: a Pereyra supplied the land and the Iraola the cattle. The two families were joined by two double marriages in the second generation (Iraola, 1862).

For many families in the second generation, the immediate region was the origin and base of their political power. For nineteenth-century Paraiba, Brazil, Linda Lewin has used the term *politica de familia* (family politics) to define the way a family network shared regional political

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posts. In this case, different family members complemented their activities to ensure local control. They monopolized elective offices and appointive bureaucratic posts in Paraiba; they mobilized private armed forces; they appropriated local tax revenues. Lewin also has shown a specific feature of the second generation: "the fundamental bonding at the level of male siblings" (1979:265). This bonding among brothers-in-law was particularly important in politics because families relied on them to coordinate local power. Men bonded as political allies by marrying sisters. If these were also their cousins, the family core became more tightly woven.

The example of Paraiba is illustrative of the important shift in marriage patterns and their relationship to political power. Exogamous marriages expanded political power by connecting regional networks to national ones or allying regions to help combat or form the national state. So while families practiced endogamous marriages locally, they also expanded their political base and power through exogamous ones. The second generation, above all, combined the two practices.

In Yucatan, the Molinas family gained the position of provincial governor, the most important political office for the second generation. Olegario Molina attached himself to a liberal cause as secretary to General Cepeda Peraza, and several brothers received positions in the new administration after the liberal victory. One of the brothers, partner in Olegario Molina and Company, was state customs administrator in Progreso. Olegario became state deputy, then judge, then governor of Yucatan. He finally emerged in national politics as Secretario de Fomento of Porfirio Diaz, "the hope of every regional leader." The whole family group gained political posts, which brought continuous prosperity to the family business and created far-reaching political connections for all (Wells, 1982: 239).

The family network also wielded indirect political power. Domingo Elias, the *hacendado* and merchant head of a coastal Peruvian family, often backed a person he liked for an official position such as port customs official or regional tax collector. Elias would secure the nomination and finances to back the appointment (Englesen, 1978:433). Elias acted as a regional leader. Officially he held only one post, that of tax collector for education and charity for the South Central region. His business partner, Andres de la Cruz, president of Peru, appointed him to the post in 1837. By the 1840s Elias had entered national politics and he remained there until he died in 1867. During this time he used the extensive state apparatus to further his own and his family's interests.

Another important political arena for the second generation was the military. Military activity was not professional in the first or second generation, even in the case of military families. Instead it was a part-time occupation that reinforced other activities. But the military appointments clearly were important to a family's fortunes, particularly the post of military commander in the area of their landholdings. In Buenos Aires the person in this post could recruit scarce labor for *estancias* under the pretext that they were needed for a frontier force against Indian excursions. Other aspects of military office were also important: the importance of land as collateral for loans throws a new light on the use of land as payment for military officers in the nineteenth century. For example, Eustaquio Diaz Velez, son of an Andalusian immigrant who had done well as a *mercader* (trader), pursued a military career. With each military cam-

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paign he added *estancia* land to the family business. In 1827 he received 46 square leagues in the Monsalvo County of the Province of Buenos Aires. He ended up with equally large holdings in the county of Chascomus (Coni, 1927).

The political activities of the second generation centered on the attempt to consolidate urban and rural economic and political power through kinship alliances. This consolidation was aided through the control of the provincial legislatures, tax collectors, justices of the peace, and military commanders in the hinterland; or of national legislators, port officials, ministers, or presidents in the capital city.

The Third Generation. The hegemony achieved by the third generation network of families in different parts of Latin America was one tied to a period of intense activity in developing a national infrastructure (roads, railroads, port facilities, educational systems). Regional family networks competed over the distribution of national resources for these purposes and, when successful, shifted their influence from the provincial to the national level. They tried to maintain connections with the capital, to acquire national posts, and to position representatives on the directorates of investment banks.

Of course the national success of a regional oligarchy generally meant that the national monies available for development would be distributed unevenly. This situation exacerbated regionalist tendencies: family networks from two or more regions often would develop an alliance around their interests, to the disadvantage of the rest of the country. So, for example, the presidency of Brazil from 1889-1930 was passed back and forth between natives of São Paulo and Minas Gerais, in a compact known as the agreement of *cafe com leche* (coffee from São Paulo, dairy products from Minas Gerais).

The family networks also began institutionalizing what had previously been informal activities. They created political parties, corporations, and banks; they professionalized nonsalaried, territorial military positions. This institutionalization allowed the families to operate more easily through third parties and to use the legal system for their purposes. Family network activities could no longer be strictly identified as family controlled: though the family network was behind them the actions of a political party, a bank, a corporation, or any army could be viewed by the uninformed as the impersonal activities of unrelated institutions.

One of the most visible activities of the third generation was the creation of political parties. The Civilista party which emerged in Peru in the 1870s, for instance, institutionalized the political interests of the coastal landowners and *hacendados* who were connected by kinship ties (Englesen 1978:438). Similarly, allied families in the Cauca Valley of Colombia raised money on a group basis for the Conservative party (Hyland, 1982: 335–54).

Family networks often used these parties to expand and consolidate so they could project their influence into the national arena. The relationships between regional family networks and those dominating the capital city were complicated, involving alliances and payoffs on both sides. The relationship of the kinship network of Salta, Argentina, to that of the capital city of Buenos Aires in the late nineteenth century is described by Frederick Hollander as interactive, resulting in "a true national oligarchy":

> Following the victory of Buenos Aires over the interior provinces in 1862, the Buenos Aires oligarchy consolidated national control by supporting cooperative family coteries within each provincial oligarchy. These family coteries in turn were integrated into the national governments that followed; hence the succession of

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provincial presidents in the latter half of the nineteenth century. After 1880, intermarriages between the dominant families of the northwestern oligarchies and the oligarchies of Buenos Aires and the littoral provinces forged a true national oligarchy for the tentative political alliance of the two regions. The role of the northwestern oligarchies in the national government, which won the selective protection of the sugar industry, continued until the national oligarchy was fragmented and politically expropriated by the electoral victory of the middle class Radicals in 1916. (1976:x).

Institutionalizing family credit networks in banks helped to resolve differences and consolidate power at a regional level. For example, the Banco del Cauca of Colombia, founded in 1873, was "manifestly an enterprise of the landowning and commercial elite of the Valley" and included substantial subscriptions from "each of the major family clans of Cali" (Hyland, 1982:399–400). Its creation formally allied local and regional families, frequently for the benefit of the local economy. Once local competition among families was minimized and network families within a region were acting in concert, the bank also gave them more leverage in national, economic, and political activities.

From the end of the eighteenth century until the mid- or late nineteenth century, military organizations in most Latin American countries operated on a local territorial basis. Officers did not receive salaries, but often used land grants and the right to command labor. By the late nineteenth century, these organizations had been nationalized and professionalized, losing their territorial base and connections to the local population (Potash, 1977). While this professionalization could have destroyed one of the bases for family's local control, it also provided the means for expanding the control of major families beyond their original areas.

The military became a particularly important arm for the family network of the capital city, allowing it to expand its effective power base. In 1890 in Buenos Aires, the military replaced President Juarez Celman with his Vice-President Pellegrini. Though clearly a palace revolution, the army's role as the arbitrator of such decisions became clear at this point. The same was true in Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and other countries at about the same time. In Brazil, three essentially separate professional armies, with bases in São Paulo, Rio Grande do Sul, and Rio de Janeiro (the capital), were created during the Paraguayan War. The family networks of Rio Grande do Sul executed the Revolution of 1930, bringing Getulio Vargas into power. It used a highly centralized, provincial government structure to create the most effective, well-equipped army in Brazil. Although other factors were at work, the army was crucial in bringing the Gaucho family network to power at the national level.

Third generation marriages reflected the political and economic interests of the family network in question. Regional family networks desiring influence and involvement at the national level encouraged marriages into families who were nationally prominent or part of the capital city network (Lewin, 1979:270). Families with a national political base, on the other hand, wanted to contain and consolidate family power, to close the circle by intra- and interfamily marriages (uncle to niece, cousin to cousin, and widow or widower to brother or sister of the deceased) (Balmori and Oppenheimer, 1979:241).

Third generation family politics helped define a region's power vis-à-vis the capital. By the early twentieth century, the policies of competing family networks also defined how the regions and capital city related to foreign powers.

The resolution of regional relationships through city-based family networks has profoundly affected Latin American political systems, and it accounts for

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many of the present difficulties in governing.

Conclusion

In this essay the relationship of political action and economic interests are defined as kinship politics. In nineteenth-century Latin America political institutions were less important than families and many political structures were in fact the institutionalization of a dimension of family activity. Similarly the distinction between rural and urban was blurred by the family enterprise, which often maintained both a rural and an urban base of power. Family strategies associated with marriage and with business association commonly had kinship, territorial, and occupational characteristics. A marriage could be endogamous (to consolidate wealth within the family) or exogamous (to make alliances with other kindreds). A marriage could also occur within the region of a kindred's control or outside it, within the occupational group dominated by the family or outside it. All these strategies were utilized depending on the priorities of the particular generational family group. This essay suggests that the study of nineteenth-century political institutions and history is more coherent when approached through an analysis of family networks and business interests. The obvious reason for this coherency is the resiliency and adaptability of the kindred in a period of economic and political flux.

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