


REVIEW ARTICLE

Political Experimentation in the Age of Global Revolutions

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Cristina Soriano. *Tides of Revolution: Information, Insurgencies, and the Crisis of Colonial Rule in Venezuela* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2018), 336 pp. ISBN: 9780826359865, \$95.00.

Vanessa Mongey. *Rogue Revolutionaries: The Fight for Legitimacy in the Greater Caribbean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), 288 pp. ISBN: 9780812252552, 45.00.

Marcela Ternavasio. *Los juegos de la política: Las independencias hispanoamericanas frente a la contrarrevolución* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editores, 2021), 219 pp. ISBN: 8413402956, \$ 20.00.

Brian R. Hamnett. *The End of Iberian Rule on the American Continent, 1770–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 372 pp. ISBN: 9781316626634, £ 27.99.

Hilda Sabato. *Republics of the New World: The Revolutionary Political Experiment in 19th Century Latin America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2018), 240 pp. ISBN: 9780691161440, \$ 34.00.

Josep M. Fradera. *The Imperial Nation: Citizens and Subjects in the British, French, Spanish, and American Empires* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2018), 416 pp. ISBN: 9780691167459, \$ 53.00.

Abstract

This essay reviews six recent books that explore how revolutionary upheavals pushed imperial and republican projects alike to experiment with novel political ideas and mechanisms. These initiatives came in response to calls for representation and equality throughout the Age of Revolution. In doing so, these books reveal the failures and successes of these projects in responding to these demands. The authors of these works show that republican and imperial processes of state-building and legitimacy-building did not have a predetermined outcome—quite the opposite. To constitute themselves as valid political alternatives, revolutionary, imperial, and republican projects had to adapt to different actors' expectations, contingencies, and growing geopolitical tensions. By exposing those adaptation processes, the six books under review demonstrate that the Age of Revolution was a period of intense political experimentation across the ideological spectrum.

Keywords: Age of Revolution; political experimentation; empire; republicanism; revolutionary movements

Some years ago, David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam proposed that historians study the Age of Revolution from a global perspective. It was a call to imagine this period “in terms of connections, both long-term and long-range.”¹ In doing so, they invited us to break a paradigm that focuses mainly on the American and French revolutions and, to some extent, the Haitian and Spanish American revolutions. As Armitage and Subrahmanyam show, upheavals occurred globally, and even more important, they had broader consequences that affected nascent republican and old monarchical regimes on a global scale. The crises of European monarchies forced empires, revolutionary movements, and nascent republics to experiment with new ideas, practices, and mechanisms in order to achieve political stability and deal with debates regarding equality and representation. Building on the arguments of the six books under review, this essay examines the Age of Revolution as an intense period of global political experimentation—a term coined by Hilda Sabato in one of the books analysed here—across the ideological spectrum.

There was nothing set in stone. Expectations, contingencies, and geopolitical interests shaped the fate of revolutionary and imperial projects of political transformation. On the one hand, revolutionary upheavals created local, national, and transnational political projects that succeeded or dramatically failed. Revolutionary movements’ efforts to overthrow monarchical rule or build new states based on novel legal principles and, in some cases, racial equality, were not predestined to triumph and often reached a stalemate. On the other hand, revolutionary challenges to monarchical rule pushed empires to create new imperial models and forms of legitimacy that impacted territories across the globe. Thus, as Jeremy Adelman has explained, it was also a time of imperial revolutions, when empires were devoted to testing novel mechanisms to reconstitute their political authority.²

Therefore, the Age of Revolution witnessed how the old empires and the nascent revolutionary states experimented with diverse forms of governance and legitimacy. The six books under review explore the consequences of these processes of political experimentation in local, regional, and global scenarios. Focusing on the numerous connections between territories such as the Caribbean, the continental Americas, Europe, Africa, and Asia, these works reveal the emergence of a myriad of republican and imperial political projects that sought to legitimise themselves as possible alternatives for a world that was undergoing relentless change. To illustrate, I have divided this essay into two parts. The first focuses on how the circulation of information, misinformation, and people shaped revolutionary and counterrevolutionary efforts to create novel political ventures that could help consolidate republican or monarchical endeavours in the circum-Caribbean and Rio de la Plata areas. This section highlights how contingencies and quick political changes shaped these efforts through the Spanish American revolutions. The second part analyses how republican and imperial projects crafted new political practices and mechanisms to adapt to revolutionary calls for equality and representation. This section shows that political experimentation was the base of both republican and imperial enterprises throughout the Age of Revolution, revealing that their responses to demands for equality created a significant divergence in how they decided to make political inclusion or exclusion the cornerstone of their governmental systems.

¹ David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Introduction: The Age of Revolutions, c. 1760–1840: Global Causation, Connection, and Comparison,” in *The Age of Revolutions in Global Context, c. 1760–1840*, ed. David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), xiii.

² Jeremy Adelman, “An Age of Imperial Revolutions,” *American Historical Review* 113:2 (1 April 2008), 319–40, <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr.113.2.319>.

Information, Failure, and Political Games in the Caribbean and the Iberian World

Tides of Revolution, *Rogue Revolutionaries*, and *Los juegos de la política* demonstrate the decisive influence of transimperial tensions, foreign upheavals, and cosmopolitanism in shaping political imagination and experimentation during the Spanish American revolutions. Cristina Soriano, Vanessa Mongey, and Marcela Ternavassio show that the flow of information—or misinformation—and the mobility of revolutionary and counter actors in the Caribbean and the Rio de la Plata played a crucial role in these endeavours. In the case of the Caribbean, merchants, refugees, smugglers, and revolutionary privateers circulated widely across the islands and the mainland coast, mobilising information and exporting revolution. Their actions not only encouraged socially diverse populations to craft anti-colonial discourses on the mainland but also motivated nascent republics such as the United States to limit the right of revolution. Likewise, in the case of Rio de la Plata, the interests of the Spanish and Portuguese crowns in the Americas and Europe and the concerns of rebel agents created a puzzling setting in which revolutionary and counterrevolutionary actors struggled to obtain reliable information. Thus, political experimentation and decisions depended on the circulation of data and, often, on the difficulties of getting it in locales highly connected with Europe, the Caribbean, and the continental Americas. In such a manner, these three books reveal the problems and the vast entanglements of novel political projects during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

In *Tides of Revolution*, Cristina Soriano argues that the emergence of a semiliterate public sphere based on the circulation of oral and written information allowed socially diverse groups to craft anti-colonial and anti-monarchical political projects in pre-revolutionary Venezuela. Contrary to the historiography that shows the centrality of printing presses and relevant intellectual societies as crucial factors in the development of the public sphere in Latin America, Soriano states that the lack of these two elements facilitated the development of a more radical public arena in Venezuela. She explores testaments, naval registers, representations, royal decrees, colonial officers' documentation, and conspiracy trials, among other sources, to delve into this issue. According to her, the absence of printing presses hindered colonial officials' efforts to control the flow of information that reached Venezuela in the late eighteenth century, especially after the Haitian Revolution. Venezuela's geographical location enabled the circulation of this information. Its vast Caribbean coast received countless merchants and smugglers as well as refugees and maritime maroons, turning cities such as La Guaira and Coro into multinational and multiethnic hubs where news about the American, French, and Haitian revolutions circulated extensively. Local populations adapted foreign discussions about abolitionism and republicanism to their contexts, accelerating the development of political communities and opening new spaces of negotiation between colonial authorities, plebeian artisans, and people of colour. Soriano's book also reveals the importance of the Haitian, and to a lesser extent the French revolutions in developing this public sphere in Venezuela, as it became an antimodel for colonial elites while providing a common ground for plebeian artisans and people of colour.

Soriano portrays how the Haitian Revolution influenced the development of Venezuela's incipient public sphere and the creation of innovative political projects in her study of the rebellion of Coro in 1795, the La Guaira Conspiracy in 1797, and the failed Maracaibo uprising in 1799. In the case of Coro, Soriano demonstrates that the rebellion sought to eliminate taxes and indigenous tributes while embracing revolutionary calls for abolishing slavery and overturning colonial hierarchies. Even more critical, Soriano illustrates how several social groups used different images of the Haitian Revolution to depict

the conspiracy: colonial authorities understood the plot as a republican uprising; white colonial elites portrayed it as a racial war; people of colour saw it as an opportunity to negotiate with local officials and landowners, as had happened in the first years of the Haitian Revolution.

In the case of La Guaira, Soriano shows the creation of a multiclass and multiracial movement inspired by the circulation of writings and newspapers from the Atlantic world, the arrival of French refugees from Saint-Domingue, and the local adaptation of revolutionary texts. In perhaps one of the most remarkable moments of the book, Soriano reconstructs the vital role that labourers played in the conspiracy. Reunited in a local barbershop, *pardo* artisans and soldiers avidly discussed political texts examining republicanism, abolitionism, and anti-colonialism. Soriano illustrates how this movement sought to create a novel republican project that would eradicate social, racial, and status distinctions. Lastly, Soriano focuses on Maracaibo's failed rebellion of 1799. Led by black corsairs from Saint-Domingue, the failed uprising also reveals the close links between the Haitian Revolution and Venezuela. According to Soriano, the rebellion failed because of the lack of support of local populations, growing Francophobia, and the rumours of Toussaint Louverture's project to expand race war and emancipation after he invaded Spanish Santo Domingo. In that way, Soriano shows that contingency matters as well. The Haitian Revolution's different moments widely influenced the development and perception of conspiracies and rebellions in Venezuela.

Soriano demonstrates how the circulation of information from the Caribbean and Europe shaped an emerging public sphere in which anti-colonial discourses and revolutionary ideas reached a significant part of the population. Soriano draws upon well-established literature on the development of the public sphere in Latin America. Her analysis of how *pardo* and black populations reached certain levels of literacy and gathered in places such as barbershops to debate the Atlantic revolutions contributes to understanding the deep connections between the uncontrollable circulation of information and the rise of revolutionary consciousness in the middle and lower classes. The development of this consciousness pushed local authorities to decrease the slave trade and negotiate with elites, people of colour, and enslaved populations to keep the peace in the area. In such a manner, Soriano reveals that it is impossible to understand Venezuela's early independence in 1811 and its vital role in the Spanish American revolutions without contemplating the vast number of revolutionary ideas Venezuelans debated in the late eighteenth century. Most of this information came from Caribbean connections and allowed Venezuelans to imagine new political alternatives and ways to organise their own society.

Political debates about liberty and republicanism continued reverberating in the Caribbean through the 1810s and the 1820s. In *Rogue Revolutionaries*, Vanessa Mongey sheds light on how political imagination boomed in the circum-Caribbean, in places such as Galveston (located on the coast of Texas), Amelia Island (located near Florida), or Providencia (located near the Nicaraguan coast). If Soriano explores how multinational and multiethnic alliances promoted anti-colonial conspiracies in pre-revolutionary Venezuela, Mongey demonstrates that multinational and multiethnic networks of revolutionaries and privateers turned the Caribbean into a political laboratory during the Spanish American revolutions. By exploring failed revolutions and ephemeral states such as Amelia Island, Providencia, and the Republic of Boricua, Mongey highlights that the Age of Revolution was a period in which nascent states' authorities and adventurers constantly debated the right of revolution and sovereignty. We cannot take state legitimacy for granted. As Mongey proves, the revolutionary era witnessed the creation of transient polities that did not endure because of the lack of international recognition or the inability of these new regimes to legitimise themselves internally and externally. To explore these problems, Mongey does a prosopography of revolutionaries and privateers

such as Louis Aury, Joseph Savary, and H. L. V. Ducoudray Holstein, among others. She draws in diplomatic correspondence, newspapers, pamphlets, letters, memoirs, and petitions, among other sources. According to her, privateers and revolutionaries created mobile international communities that sought to export revolutions by crafting a “cosmopolitan patriotism” (6) that pretended to expand emancipatory movements. However, Mongey reveals that, despite their calls for liberty, these revolutionary projects usually participated in the slave trade, showing how “historical actors embraced political principles selectively” (74).

Through five chapters, Mongey explores how privateers became state entrepreneurs who failed in their efforts to consolidate the states they created. She successfully shows that we should not consider these states as anomalies. State formation was under contest and depended very much on contingency, international support, and the recognition of the right of revolution. Aury and Ducoudray’s stories illustrate this in greater detail. For instance, Aury participated in the foundation of three different states in Galveston, Amelia Island, and Providencia in the 1810s and the early 1820s. In Galveston and Amelia Island, Aury and his associates set up governments that created small state apparatuses, issued letters of marquee, organised elections, drafted a constitution, and smuggled enslaved people to Louisiana. However, the United States government did not recognise these states because it feared revolutionary contagion, disliked the presence of black sailors within these ventures, and believed that these endeavours could threaten U.S. racial hierarchies. Something similar happened with the Republic of Providence between 1818 and 1822. Although Aury and his associates were devoted to institutional building and issued privateer commissions, the new Colombian government was looking to leave behind any connection with privateering at that time. While Soriano shows how the circulation of information forced colonial authorities to suppress anti-colonial conspiracies and negotiate with local populations, Mongey reveals that the rise of privateers’ republican projects also encouraged republican regimes such as Colombia and the United States to contain revolutionary endeavours. State formation and the development of republican experiments had a limit even for revolutionaries across the Atlantic world.

Ducoudray’s 1822 Republic of Boricua sheds even more light on this matter. Some of Ducoudray’s collaborators were Afro-Caribbean men from Guadeloupe and Saint Barthélemy. Mongey reveals that they sought to create a republic in Puerto Rico without racial and ethnic discrimination, a cosmopolitan haven inspired by the French revolution, the U.S. constitution, the calls for equality of Colombia and Mexico, and the free-trade policies of the Swedish Empire. Although slavery would remain legal in the new republic, this project was too radical for the United States, colonial powers in the Caribbean, and even republics such as Colombia. They opposed Ducoudray’s enterprise, arguing that privateers were pirates with no rights to export revolution. Both the nascent republics and European empires believed they needed to limit the right of revolution, especially when Afro-Caribbean men were looking to establish republican projects at a time when rumours of slave revolts widely circulated in the Caribbean and the United States.

Mongey effectively shows the importance of mobility and contingency in shaping political experimentation endeavours in the Caribbean. First, she demonstrates that these privateers and revolutionaries dedicated themselves to exporting revolution by mobilising men, printing presses, and information in different locales. In doing so, privateers connected the histories of multiple revolutions across the Americas. Like Soriano, Mongey highlights how the circulation of people (especially those with experience in previous rebellions) and information played a crucial role in crafting revolutionary projects across the hemisphere. Second, privateers’ failed projects illuminate the fragility of state formation during the Age of Revolution. Mongey reveals that state legitimacy was a combination of military and political power and the international recognition of well-

established and developing states looking to regulate the right of revolution. These states wanted to avoid the risk of radical projects led by Afro-descendant populations. As Soriano points out, contingency was also crucial in this matter. The United States and Colombia's particular interests in specifics—such as the containment of slave revolts, the fear of racial animosity, or the aim of abandoning privateering—hindered any efforts of Providencia, Galveston, and the Republic of Boricua, among others, to achieve international legitimacy. Thus, diplomacy and geopolitical pressures sealed the fate of failed republican experiments in the Caribbean.

However, these processes of political experimentation were not exclusively related to the revolutionary side or the Caribbean area. In *Los juegos de la política*, Marcela Ternavassio explores why the Spanish and Portuguese crowns did not join efforts to defend monarchical rule in the Rio de la Plata area during the Restoration (1814–20). Although the possible alliance was not intended to create a new state and new institutions, the coalition could become an unforeseen and powerful diplomatic pact to stop revolutionary enterprises in the area. Ternavassio delves into dynastic and diplomatic correspondence in archives in Spain, Portugal, Brazil, Argentina, Great Britain, and Uruguay. She shows that diplomatic conflicts, contingency, and transimperial tensions thwarted any possibilities of establishing this alliance. While Soriano and Mongey highlight how the flow of information facilitated the formation of revolutionary movements in the Caribbean, Ternavassio states that the lack of reliable information undermined counterrevolutionary efforts in the Rio de la Plata region. Using the game metaphor, Ternavassio reveals that the players—in this case, diplomatic agents and imperial authorities in Rio de Janeiro and Madrid—never had a complete picture of the possible actions of their counterparts. Ternavassio claims that this lack of trustworthy information created a set of “failed hypotheses” (12) regarding the conflicting interests of the Spanish and Portuguese crowns, leading imperial officers and revolutionaries to take decisions based on events that never happened. Rumours, secrecy, and conjectures shaped the Spanish and Portuguese strategies in the Americas. Hence, she invites us to question teleological understandings of the Spanish American revolutions by focusing on how counterrevolutionaries comprehended the political moments they faced and the possibilities they imagined even though they never occurred.

Ternavassio studies three key moments to illustrate this issue: Pablo Morillo's planned expedition to Rio de la Plata in 1815; the negotiation of a double dynastic wedding between the Spanish and the Portuguese crowns; and the possibility of a monarchical restoration after Rio de la Plata declared independence in 1816. In the first case, Ternavassio argues that Morillo's expedition did not arrive in Rio de la Plata (Morillo ended up landing in Venezuela) because the Spanish crown never knew if the Portuguese would allow the landing of Spanish troops in Brazil. Aware of the importance of having a base to support their forces, the Spanish needed to secure the House of Braganza's aid. However, they never received accurate information about that. Why? Ternavassio states that Portugal and Spain's territorial interests regarding the Banda Oriental and Olivenza, British pressure to stop the alliance and ensure the return of Dom Joao VI to Portugal, and the Braganza's interests in protecting the Brazilian frontiers hampered the negotiations that sought to secure Portuguese support. If, as Mongey shows, the interests of republics such as Colombia and the United States obstructed the establishment of privateers' republics, the conflicts between empires also impeded the creation of monarchical alliances. The tensions between the Spanish, Portuguese, and British crowns created an atmosphere of uncertainty about any possibility of the Braganza's assistance.

Similarly, the double dynastic wedding between Dom Joao VI's daughters—María Isabel and María Francisca—and Ferdinand VII and his brother, Carlos María Isidro, increased the speculations among Spanish representatives, diplomatic envoys, and émigrés in Rio about a possible alliance of the Bourbons and the Braganzas. Uncertainty was such that

even when Portugal invaded the Banda Oriental in 1816, many revolutionaries and European crowns believed it was part of a secret deal between the Braganzas and the Bourbons to begin the recovery of the Americas. However, Ternavassio shows that the invasion was part of a process of Americanizing the Portuguese monarchy in which the Braganzas wanted to consolidate their power in the area. Yet that information was not evident to the Spanish crown and the revolutionaries. Partly because of that uncertainty, the Provincias Unidas of Buenos Aires declared their independence in July of 1816. Rumours of instituting a constitutional monarchy led by a French Bourbon prince in Buenos Aires to end the dispute between revolutionary factions along with establishing an alliance with the Braganzas to secure their support against Spain began to circulate in the Rio de la Plata. Those rumours shaped the responses of revolutionaries, the Braganzas, the Spanish crown, and other European powers. Revolutionaries, and especially popular classes, decided to oppose any monarchical regime despite the fragility of the Provincias Unidas' government. European courts also disagreed with the creation of monarchies in the Americas, believing they would break the balance between them. At the same time, the Braganzas decided to defend their interests in the Banda Oriental, and the Spanish crown saw how its opportunities to recover Buenos Aires diminished after San Martín's army defeated royalist troops in the battle of Maipú. Thus, Ternavassio demonstrates that transimperial tensions, international pressures, and massive uncertainty led counterrevolutionary projects to reach a dead end in the Rio de la Plata.

These three books reveal the obstacles and the advantages that revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries faced in crafting political projects in the Americas. Soriano, Mongey, and Ternavassio expose how rebellions, privateers' revolutionary movements, and counterrevolutionary groups sought to develop new schemes to support their endeavours. In the case of pre-revolutionary Venezuela, people of colour and artisans drew from their readings and the information they received regarding the French, American, and especially the Haitian Revolution to craft anti-colonial discourses and spread them in a nascent public sphere. Moreover, the arrival of refugees and merchants from former Saint-Domingue helped them to imagine a more egalitarian society, one in which colonial hierarchies could be part of the past. Meanwhile, Mongey demonstrates how privateers, inspired by the upheavals in the Atlantic world, devoted to exporting revolution in the circum-Caribbean area. However, Mongey also shows the limitations of their projects. First, many of these transient polities embraced the slave trade to finance their activities, showing that their idea of "cosmopolitan patriotism" did not include enslaved populations. Second, Mongey reveals that the interests of other republics and empires set a limit to privateers' projects, demonstrating how ventures such as the Republic of Boricua, a radical haven for revolutionaries (but not for enslaved populations) were not well received in the international arena. The difficulties in establishing new endeavours were not exclusive to the revolutionaries. Counterrevolutionaries also experienced several hardships in their efforts to join their forces against the revolutionary cause. Ternavassio shows this clearly. Despite the interest of the Spanish crown in having an alliance with the Portuguese crown in the Rio de la Plata area, the lack of reliable information and the tension between European empires turned any possibility of cooperation into an illusion. Thus, envisioning rebellions, anti-colonial projects, and even monarchical alliances was an intricate challenge for both revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries.

Republican Experiments and Imperial Revolutions in the Nineteenth Century

The End of Iberian Rule, *Republics of the New World*, and *The Imperial Nation* explore the consolidation of political experimentation on broader scales, imperial, continental, and global, and in a more extended period, from the 1760s to the end of the nineteenth century.

Soriano, Mongey, and Ternavassio's works uncovers how the circulation of information, and the lack of it, shaped processes of revolutionary and counterrevolutionary political experimentation before and during the Spanish American revolutions. As we have seen, most of these processes failed because of the colonial administration's repression, pressures from republics such as the United States and Colombia, and diplomatic tensions between European crowns. Meanwhile, Brian Hamnett, Hilda Sabato, and Josep Fradera delve into the larger consequences of political experimentation throughout the Age of Revolution. European monarchical crises led to the rise of republican regimes in the Americas and the global transformation of imperial rule. Hence, using connected and comparative approaches, they look at the decay of Iberian monarchies, the consolidation of the republican experiment in the Americas, and the reconfiguration of imperial rule on a global scale. Hamnett, Sabato, and Fradera demonstrate that both republican and imperial governments put many efforts into crafting new political entities to respond to the challenges created by the ideas of people's sovereignty and racial and political equality. Consequently, they reveal that both republican and imperial regimes entered a continuous and noteworthy process of political experimentation throughout the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In *The End of Iberian Rule*, Brian Hamnett delves into the dissolution of the Spanish and Portuguese empires in the Americas. Hamnett analyses the two processes together, something that historiography has not explored in detail. He argues that imperial collapse at the metropolitan centres was the leading cause of continental Spanish America and Brazil's independence. According to him, the Spanish and Portuguese empires failed to resolve two critical issues. First, they could not solve their growing debt problem and the rising military tensions with other European powers. Second, they could not negotiate with colonial elites regarding their calls for home rule and more autonomy. What is remarkable about Hamnett's work is that he demonstrates that the Spanish and the Portuguese monarchies faced a similar process, showing that, before the late eighteenth century, negotiation with colonial elites was the key reason the Spanish and Portuguese monarchies' power persisted for so long. Although they initially handled their crises differently according to their circumstances, especially with the arrival of the Braganzas to Brazil, both empires failed for the same reason: their obstinacy in keeping a centralised monarchy that relied upon the idea of a unitarian nation. Thus, the Spanish and Portuguese crowns' lack of flexibility to negotiate these political principles with colonial elites led to the dissolution of their power in the continental Americas.

Hamnett shows that this process began at the end of the eighteenth century and that the Napoleonic invasion of the Iberian Peninsula in 1808 only aggravated an ongoing metropolitan crisis. Both empires' failure to mobilise resources persuaded imperial authorities to craft reforms that diminished the power of local elites in the Americas. In the case of the Spanish Empire, Spanish American elites and some members of the imperial administration promoted the idea of a decentralised monarchy in which local leaders had more representation in decision-making processes, especially after the American Revolution. However, the idea that the monarchy constituted "One Nation" with a centralised government prevailed. Something similar happened in the Portuguese Empire but with a considerable difference: it put little effort into promoting unity within Brazilian territories. The two empires' paths temporarily diverged during the 1810s. Hamnett demonstrates that the arrival of the Braganzas to Rio compelled the Portuguese crown to negotiate with local elites, especially with Brazilian merchants and enslavers. This strengthened the power of Rio elites, creating tensions with other Brazilian provinces that had a direct relationship with Lisbon before the imperial crisis. Meanwhile, the Napoleonic invasion of Spain emboldened the proclamation of local juntas within the monarchy and the call to craft an imperial constitution. The Spanish

constitutional experiment deteriorated the relationship between the colonies and the metropolis. First, Spanish liberals preserved the idea of the monarchy as “One Sole Nation” with the Spanish metropolis at the centre, dismissing Spanish American calls for home rule and greater autonomy. Second, Spanish representatives, in order to get political majorities in the Cortes, denied citizenship rights to *pardo* populations in the Americas. Growing tensions between royal authorities and *Americano* elites about local representative bodies and the restoration of absolutist rule in Spain in 1814 only intensified the political dispute, unleashing violence and calls for independence all over Spanish America.

Hamnett reveals that the dilemma of understanding the monarchy as one nation with a strong centre persisted in the 1820s, harming the last efforts of the Spanish and Portuguese crowns to keep their power in the Americas. Ternavassio’s book shows that the inability of the Spanish and Portuguese to negotiate an alliance in the Americas had already decreased the possibilities of preserving monarchical rule. However, Hamnett highlights how the final blow to the royal cause came, once again, from the Iberian metropolis. According to him, the Portuguese Cortes sought to relocate Lisbon as the main centre of power as a strategy to decrease the strength of southeastern Brazilian elites. This measure enraged Brazilian elites. They witnessed how Lisbon wanted to erase the status that Brazil had acquired during the imperial crisis with one stroke. At the same time, in Spain, the constant tensions between moderate and radical liberals and the conflict with the absolutists completely undermined the possibility of negotiating with colonial elites who were already seeking independence. Thus, in the case of Brazil, the new monarchy crafted a new constitutional charter in 1824 that consolidated the power of southeastern elites while increasing the tensions with the other provinces that, historically, did not have a link with Rio. Simultaneously, in the case of Spanish America, the former colonies adopted republican regimes. Thus, Hamnett argues that the driving force of the dissolution was the empires’ determination to keep metropolitan unitarianism while rejecting the colonies’ call for plurality and autonomy. However, for Hamnett, the new regimes were “successor states” instead of “nation-states” (309). The challenge for the new Brazilian empire and the new republics was to engineer new political structures to secure their power and legitimacy.

In *Republics of the New World*, Hilda Sabato traces how the new Latin American republics faced this task. Like Mongey and Hamnett, Sabato emphasises that there was no recipe to follow. Sabato claims that Latin American republics entered a unique process of political experimentation, especially in a time of monarchical restoration in Europe. They all adopted the principle of popular sovereignty as the founding tenet of their regimes, leading the new republics to put much effort into crafting novel ways of creating political legitimacy. To explore this issue, she brilliantly synthesises the political history of Latin American republics such as Colombia, Mexico, Peru, Chile, and Argentina in the nineteenth century. As Mongey and Soriano reveal in their studies, Sabato demonstrates that republican authorities and civil populations committed themselves to creating exercises of political innovation based on the expansion of elections, armed citizenship, and public opinion. In these arenas, people constantly contended to define individual rights, regulate government powers, and demarcate citizenship, following a struggle that began at the end of the eighteenth and first decades of the nineteenth centuries. However, competition and conflict shaped these efforts, instituting political instability as one of the major cornerstones of the Latin American republican project. By exposing this process, Sabato explains the political reasons for Latin American volatility in the nineteenth century.

Sabato shows that the shift to a republican model based on the equality of its individuals, elected representative bodies, and the idea of exerting control over the government

posed significant challenges for Latin American republics. However, they appealed to popular mobilisation to succeed in this transition. Sabato explains that elections became one of the most important ways to achieve and legitimise power. She demonstrates that Latin American republics sought to extend the right to vote. Property, income, or employment requirements were loose, especially if we compare them with the United States or Europe. Moreover, elections were held regularly at all levels, becoming a “radical novelty of the post-independence era” (64). Sabato highlights two significant aspects of the electoral dynamic in Latin America. First, elections helped to organise the population and to create asymmetrical political associations devoted to mobilising the votes. Men of popular classes played a vital role in this issue. Second, elections fostered tensions between notions of national representation and the idea of parties, nurturing political antagonism and violence. Thus, although the republican regime sought to encourage broader participation, it also promoted political instability.

Such was also the case with armed citizenship and public opinion. Like elections, militias helped mobilise the population, consolidating the asymmetrical power relationship between leaders and their members. Some of these militias became pillars of regional and local power. Because of that, they vigorously intervened in elections and partisan politics and sometimes acted against what they considered despotic authorities. The right to bear arms and the idea of civic duty inspired militias to exert their power as a legitimate action within republican traditions. Finally, Sabato delves into how public opinion became another arena to rally men and women around political issues. Multiple public associations, *cafés*, *tertulias* (round-table discussions), and newspapers emerged in the new Latin American republics, promoting the formation of an autonomous civil society that actively participated in partisan conflicts. Soriano’s book shows that the public sphere’s growth helped mobilise revolutionary ideas in Venezuela. Meanwhile, Sabato exposes how public opinion became a powerful tool to promote republican principles and consolidate the new governments’ institutions. Thus, Latin American republics experienced the growth of associational life and political publications. This development facilitated the circulation and discussion of political ideas both in the countryside and urban areas, enabling the population’s participation in the civic life of the republics.

Sabato reveals how Latin American republican experimentation faced a dramatic shift in the 1870s. Elections, armed citizenship, and public opinion enlarged leadership, decentralised political power, and increased the participation of popular classes. Although Latin American societies were far from being egalitarian, they incorporated large population sectors into civic and political life. Nonetheless, this system also produced political instability. Alarmed by this volatility, armed uprisings, and international conflicts, Latin American elites devoted themselves to consolidating the power of the central state. First, they decided to end local militias, deactivating the constant tension between these bodies and centralised armies. Second, influenced by positivism, local elites pretended to achieve economic development by enforcing concepts of order based on stability and discipline. Finally, they began to promote ideas of national identity rather than notions of republican patriotism. In doing so, local elites centralised political authority and monopolised the use of force while decreasing popular participation. Thus, Sabato demonstrates that Latin American elites’ anxieties about political instability undermined the republican political project.

Republics were not the only ones developing processes of political experimentation in the nineteenth century. In order to persist, empires also created new political structures and mechanisms. Brian Hamnett highlights how Iberian monarchies turned to imperial constitutionalism to solve the crisis of political legitimacy that they experienced in the 1810s and the early 1820s. Meanwhile, in *The Imperial Nation*, Josep Fradera studies how empires decided to craft an enduring solution to enhance their power throughout the nineteenth century. He explores how the Age of Revolution pushed monarchical empires

to turn into national empires. Fradera argues that nineteenth-century empires established dual constitutions and unique formulas to reconfigure and consolidate their authority in their remaining and new colonial territories. By studying the cases of Spain, France, Great Britain, and the United States, Fradera shows how nineteenth-century empires introduced a new model of governance—the imperial nation—in which constitutions ruled over the metropolis and “special laws” reigned in the colonial territories. After the crisis of monarchical empires and the failure to encompass imperial constitutions, nineteenth-century empires devoted themselves to crafting a new pact to reduce the conflict between colonial subjects and metropolitan powers. Consequently, imperial authorities increased their dominance in the colonies, neglecting any constitutional right or equality for colonial subjects. The idea of who belongs to the nation played a vital role in this new endeavour. For nineteenth-century empires, colonial subjects were not part of the national community and, therefore, they should be governed by a different set of rules. Thus, instead of securing the rights of colonial subjects, empires decided to exclude them from any constitutional framework.

Fradera studies this process within a continuous cycle of destruction and reconstruction of empires. The global crisis experienced by monarchies during the Age of Revolution forced them to reimagine their relationship with their colonies. Such was the case with the British, French, and Spanish empires. They all suffered from fiscal pressures caused by imperial wars and calls for self-government in the colonies. Fradera highlights how the issue of subjects’ representation was at the centre of political debates. Nevertheless, this idea clashed with European empires’ interest in increasing revenues and enhancing control over their colonial possessions. This conflict—and in the case of the French, the increase of racial tensions in Saint-Domingue—preceded the crisis of old monarchical empires in the Americas, forcing them to create a revolutionary mechanism of political experimentation: the imperial constitutions. That was clear in the case of the French and Spanish empires. They were devoted to designing encompassing imperial constitutions that sought to create a single legislative framework, a single system of rights, and an extended notion of nation that covered both European and colonial territories.

Nevertheless, tensions arose in the midst of the process. For instance, since the revolution’s early years, the French constitution sought to exclude overseas territories. Meanwhile, in the case of the Spanish Empire, the 1812 Cadiz Constitution excluded African descendants from the right of citizenship, increasing hostilities with the Spanish American territories. For Fradera, although the Cadiz Constitution provided an imperial framework of rights and representation, its ethnocentric framework undermined its goal of deactivating political conflicts within the empire. Fradera states, like Hamnett, that imperial constitutionalism’s failure ended up intensifying the Spanish monarchy’s crisis. Thus, Fradera and Hamnett agree that European empires sought to neutralise their political dilemmas by developing a new imperial pact that unified systems of rights and representation between colonies and metropolis. However, they show that the interest of these empires in keeping the power of their metropolis stalled any possibility of negotiating with colonial populations, increasing the legitimacy crisis they were experiencing during the Age of Revolution.

Thus, Fradera reveals how nineteenth-century empires imagined a new political mechanism to overcome this puzzle: the imperial nation. Following the French example of establishing a series of “special laws” for their overseas territories, European empires created a framework to manage their colonies’ calls for rights and representation. Instead of dealing with colonial calls for equality, nineteenth-century empires decided to close the political spectrum of the overseas territories. If, as Sabato shows, Latin American republics sought to enhance the franchise, European empires and the United States were committed to limiting the rights of colonial subjects and reinforcing the power of

metropolitan centres and imperial authorities. Fradera states that the French constitution of 1799 was the cornerstone of this endeavour. It excluded the colonies, setting a dual system of governance that persisted in French territories in the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia until the twentieth century. Fradera shows how successful this dual system of government was. European empires and the United States created different rules to govern indigenous people, people of colour, and colonial populations. For instance, the U.S. government developed segregationist policies that helped to preserve slavery and expropriate indigenous populations' lands. Likewise, in the Spanish Empire, adopting the dual system based on unspecified "special laws" contributed to expanding military control of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines while denying any right of representation or freedom to establish political parties to colonial subjects. Thus, the "special laws" became the backbone of these renovated empires. These unspecified laws allowed empires to imagine the imperial centre as the nation and consider colonial territories as foreign regions in which it was impossible to reproduce the political system of the metropolis.

Reading these three books in tandem provides a window into the more extensive process of political experimentation faced by empires and republics in the late eighteenth and the entire nineteenth centuries. Hamnett, Sabato, and Fradera prove that the revolutionary era led to global developments that affected governance on multiple levels. For instance, by bringing the Portuguese Empire into the analysis, Hamnett's work helps to elucidate in a more precise way how the inability of the Iberian metropolis to negotiate with colonial populations contributed to the dissolution of Iberian rule in Spanish America and Brazil. Furthermore, his work shows that both empires appealed to similar mechanisms of political experimentation—imperial constitutions—and failed. Meanwhile, Sabato and Fradera's works show the divergence between the Latin American republican experiment and the imperial nations in the nineteenth century. On the one hand, Sabato states that revolutionary upheavals inspired Latin American republics to build new political systems in which the people's sovereignty was the foundation of political authority. Because of that, they committed to fostering mechanisms that allowed populations to participate in political life. Empires took the opposite path. Fradera uncovers how the revolutions encouraged empires to develop a dual system that restricted the rights and participation of the colonies on a global scale. However, this outcome was not preordained. It was a consequence of a historical process of imperial political experimentation.

Conclusions

These six books expose the long process of political experimentation faced by revolutions, republics, and empires during and after the Age of Revolution. They reveal how the rise and reform of new and old political entities provided the framework for developing these processes. Furthermore, these books illustrate that outcomes were not predetermined for the emerging states or the ancient empires seeking to rebuild their power and legitimacy. Both nascent states and empires succeeded and failed in establishing new political models to consolidate their rule or overcome their crises. As Vanessa Mongey shows, political legitimacy became a battlefield in which several actors—imperial officers, local elites, and people of colour—tried to make sense of and handle the consequences of the revolutionary events surrounding them. It was not an easy task. They relied on the availability of information, the will of their counterparts to negotiate, and the interests of other rising states and empires to preserve or enhance their power. They also depended on how the nascent republics and empires decided to deal with questions of racial and political equality. This issue became central to all the projects of political experimentation in the nineteenth century.

The implosion of monarchical empires encouraged European and nascent republics to build new political structures to deal with racial and political equality issues.

Experimentation was the key to these processes. For instance, imperial constitutionalism was a political experiment through which European empires sought to solve their crises while dealing with the calls for autonomy, equality, and political representation by their colonies. This experiment failed, motivating colonies across the Atlantic world to declare independence. Nevertheless, that was not the end of political experimentation. Both republics and empires delved into more extensive processes of state-building and legitimacy-building that relied on expanding or contracting political participation and people's sovereignty. Seeing these processes from a global perspective allows us to see the more significant result of the process of political experimentation: the divergence, although not definitive, between the republican (especially in the Latin American case) and the imperial projects.

Now, it is time for historians to explore the different entanglements and shared influences that republics and imperial projects developed throughout the nineteenth century. For instance, Cristina Soriano demonstrates the impact of the Haitian Revolution on the development of the Venezuelan public sphere before the Spanish American revolutions. She uncovers the critical role that French refugees played in this matter. Exiles and refugees moved across republics and empires, mobilising ideas and sharing their experiences regarding revolutionary processes or imperial reconfigurations. Studying the reception of refugees and exiles also allows us to understand how empires and republics reacted on the ground to the consequences of political upheavals in the Americas and Europe. Both republican and imperial regimes had to handle the arrival of refugees and exiles to their territories, expanding the entanglements between those projects across the nineteenth century. Revolutions impacted not only the places that experienced the actual disruptions but also the locations that surrounded them, creating expectations, anxieties, and fears in imperial and republican authorities. On the other hand, historiography could study how republics and empires viewed each other when emulating the mechanisms of political power. As Fradera shows, the United States and European empires adapted similar tools to address calls for equality and representation. This is one example of how monarchies and republics influenced each other. Political actors were aware of the changes that republics and monarchies were experiencing, looking for examples of what to do and what not to do to consolidate the legitimacy of their regimes. Politicians, travellers, merchants, and exiles, among others, widely discussed how republics and empires were dealing with questions regarding race, representation, slavery, and political stability. By studying these debates and collaboration strategies between republics and monarchies, we could unveil the repertoires developed by nineteenth-century states to secure their authority and institutions.

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