



Latin American Studies Center

The University of Maryland, College Park

**Petitions, Petitioners and
the Construction of
Citizenship in Early
Republican Argentina**

Seth Meisel

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Working Paper No. 11

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Petitions, Petitioners and the Construction of Citizenship in Early Republican Argentina¹

Yo lo sé bien porque soy
Nativo de aquellos pagos
Que tanto tiempo sufrieron
Con la guerra y sus estragos

Leopoldo Lugones, “La cabeza de Ramirez”²

In the Spring of 1819, Córdoba widow María Dolores Molina submitted a petition to the province’s appointed governor. She had no choice. She had already appealed to a local judge, but “*allando serrado los oídos del Jues a mis Tiernos y Justos clamores, me acojo a la caridad de V[uestra] S[eñoría] como verdadero Padre que atienda a los clamores de seis Hermanas que con sus lagrimas rosean los umbrales de su Justicia. . .*”³ The governor, she trusted, would fully appreciate the “*estado deplorable*” of seven sisters who had only God to protect them after their brother, José Simón, had been impressed into the army during the latest recruitment drive. Molina was proud to relate that the sisters’ other brother had volunteered to fight “*en defensa de nuestras Banderas.*” All the more reason, she argued, that once the governor had been properly informed, he would never allow the Molina women to remain bereft of the care and sustenance that José Simón’s constant work alone had provided. What recourse remained except petitions and prayers?

After a decade of warfare with no end in sight, many in Córdoba were undoubtedly turning to heaven for deliverance. Yet, during Argentina’s tumultuous transition from colony to nationhood in which a protracted civil war (1820–1862) followed on the heels of the struggle for Independence (1810–1819), many like Molina addressed their pleas to high government officials. Provincial archives preserve thousands of these entreaties. Confronted with the harsh demands of wartime mobilization and chronic political instability, Córdoba’s inhabitants sought relief by writing to state authorities. They narrated the toll that war had taken on their families, detailing the impact of events and government policies on their lives.

Petitioners did not simply lament their fate. Rather, like the widow Juana Carrizo, whose industrious son had also been forcibly recruited that Spring, they

put their faith in the “*inagotable mar de piedades que reyna en el generoso corazon de V[uestra] S[e]ñoría para con los Pobres,*” with the understanding that their case would receive full consideration.⁴ Petitioners thus implored officials to intercede on their behalf, offering concrete recommendations on how authorities might employ the state’s power and resources to ameliorate their hardships. As Carrizo expressed it, this was the kind of wisdom and justice they expected from a “*Gefe*” of “*nuestra amada Patria*.” The just resolution of their appeals, petitioners intimated, was a fitting demonstration of their leader’s determination to ensure widowed and elderly parents, hardworking families, and patriotic soldiers their rightful place in post-colonial Argentina.

For all of these reasons, petitions offer the historian of the early national era an invaluable resource in understanding the popular experience of Argentina’s first half-century of independent rule. Though couched in deferential and humble phrases, these appeals succeeded in capturing the attention of the state, ensuring a place for themselves in the historical record. Supplicants confronted officials with self-conscious, albeit self-interested, chronicles of their lives that speak directly to the birth pains of nationhood in Argentina. For the modern reader, these popular histories challenge the historiography of the early 19th century which, until recently, has largely depicted the period as one shaped primarily by elite ideological conflicts and opportunistic *caudillos*. While corroborating the overwhelming impression of elite violence, petitioners’ narratives convey their own sense of participation in contemporary affairs as well as their perception of the kind of bonds that might hold Argentina’s fragile communities together.

Petitions also help us comprehend the political culture that emerged in the new nation in at least two important ways. First, the genre itself and the practice of submitting petitions has a distinguished heritage in Spanish America. Indeed, the foundational literature of the region is composed of colonial *relaciones* and *probanzas de mérito* written to the king by the conquerors and early imperial administrators in order to call attention to their deeds in the monarch’s service and lay claim to the honors they consequently felt they deserved.⁵ Ordinary subjects also had access to the sovereign’s grace through petitions. This traditional form of redress was central to early modern statecraft in that it recognized the king as the font of honor and the guarantor of justice in a hierarchical world.⁶

Why did Argentina’s popular classes continue to present themselves as humble supplicants before a paternalistic authority even after the overthrow of the Spanish monarchy and the creation of new political institutions? This paper argues that there was no contradiction in the use of this old-regime avenue for making popular claims and emerging republican ideals.⁷ The widespread act of

writing petitions served as a crucial bridge between colonial and post-colonial legitimacy. At the same time, its endurance illustrates that while post-revolutionary regimes incorporated many traditional political elements, the changing content of a familiar discursive form contributed to the ideological transformation from colony to republic.

Second, the process of petition-writing itself transformed early national politics. As petitioners related their afflictions and their merits, they also fashioned new identities for themselves. In their depictions they were conscious political actors, fully aware of their civic obligations and thus deserving of the protections that only the state could offer. The image of republican virtue they embraced may have been reinforced by the local intellectuals who helped draft these petitions. However, to see the language and ideas expressed as simply the artifact of these literate intermediaries seriously misconstrues the place of petitions in Argentina's political culture.

On the one hand, to be effective, petitions had to be compelling. The logic of intervention they sought depended on presenting the reader with the individual details that made their cases not only plausible, but also remediable.⁸ On the other hand, we can conceive of the process of composing a petition as a significant moment where political learning took place. As prospective supplicants laid out the particulars of their cases before a local notary or other educated advocate, their personal stories were shaped into a prescribed form in keeping with certain formalities of organization and phrasing. In this exchange they came to appreciate how best to present themselves to governing authorities. They also had the opportunity to transmit their own expectations about what constituted a good ruler to state officials. In this sense, then, petition writers created an expected audience who, because of their shared values, would empathize with the supplicant's predicament and help bring justice to a world out of kilter.⁹ These appeals to the government thus served as a way for those who presented themselves as powerless to invoke the power of the state and, by doing so, forge a new governing pact between Argentina's elite and its popular classes.

This approach to the study of petitions shares a concern with much recent scholarship of the Independence period for the ways in which new opportunities opened up for popular participation. Elite competition forced Spanish American leaders to mobilize support by making explicit how potential followers might benefit from their programs. Ideologies had to be "translated" for popular consumption, a process that not only led to innovative forums and vectors for transmitting this knowledge, but also demanded some mechanism by which popular issues could be recognized, incorporated or in some way assimilated in the continu-

ing negotiations over the indigenous form that liberalism might take in the new nations. Studies by Peter Guardino, Florencia Mallon and Sarah Chambers, for instance, take seriously the partisan newspapers and pamphleteering, elections, patriotic holidays, and judicial proceedings that an early historiography dismissed as political theater.¹⁰ In their analyses, these venues, many of them post-revolutionary novelties, served as important sites of contact where new kinds of alliances were constructed. Slaves, indigenous communities and other lower-class groups had developed a variety of strategies during the colonial period to engage the protective responses of the state. During the revolutionary and civil wars, the opportunities for redress and the potential dangers of standing aside during this tumultuous period were far too great. Yet, while lower class groups endeavored to shape the nascent state, they largely did so through the agency of elite allies and by adapting their ideologies. This collaboration, however, did create new political identities that would in turn redefine national politics.

The individual appeals that this study examines may appear to have the character of private communications, unlikely as such to shape the public sphere. The argument that follows, however, hopes to demonstrate that by making their claims upon the state, petition writers drew upon the most optimistic promises of Argentina's post-colonial authorities as well as their own vision of a well-constituted society in order to demand that the official who personally received their entreaties endeavor to assure supplicants their rightful place in the new political order. By ratifying the government's prerogative to distribute justice, petitioners certainly helped bolster the shaky legitimacy of early national regime's authorities. Yet their requests also forced authorities to accede to popular conceptions of the rights and obligations of Argentina's citizens in order to retain their support.

“They Were Only Able to Petition and to Pray”

“They were only able to petition and to pray,” was the conclusion Lenin reached when considering the reasons for peasants’ apparent political passivity.¹¹ In his view, these traditional mechanisms of redress sapped rural people of their revolutionary potential as a culture of supplication deepened their “naive monarchialism”: a myth in which rural Russians attributed all of the evils of their condition to cruel local officials while still blindly believing in the Tsar as a “Deliverer” from such abuses.

Historians of colonial Spanish America have discerned a similar escape valve at work. Several of the largest rebellions of the late colonial period rose up under the slogan of “Long live the King! Death to bad government!”¹² These challenges to imperial rule were ostensibly revolts against local magistrates with the aim of forcefully bringing their grievances to the attention of a distant, but responsive, monarch. What is in many respects a prototypical form of Spanish American collective protest was founded on the popular conception of each royal subject’s right to speak directly to the king. The credence that their calls would fall upon generous ears therefore helped shape popular patterns of resistance.

Wise princes, not surprisingly, encouraged beliefs that focused popular expectations on their persons. A. J. R. Russell-Wood has argued that for the Portuguese monarchy, “royal acts of private justice reinforced the moral authority of monarchs . . . and those personal qualities of magnanimity and compassion associated with ideal kingship.”¹³ Even a “new prince” such as the Florentine Grand Duke, Cosimo I De Medici, viewed supplication as essential to building a relationship of trust between a ruler and his subjects. As he explained in a letter to his son, he had “established a good custom, which was highly appreciated by our citizens and all of our subjects. The [custom] was that any kind of person . . . could write to us and have the letter arrive in our hands. . . From this it followed that, once we understood what was necessary, we provided as we thought best for the common and individual good of those who wrote to us.”¹⁴ These private communications, moreover, helped the monarch keep his finger on the pulse of public opinion. Early modern governments thus endeavored to ensure the unimpeded transmission of petitions at the same time that, given the volume of subjects’ letters, they regulated the form they should take.¹⁵

Argentina’s “new princes” continued to receive and act on petitions for many of these same reasons. In the province of Córdoba, the focus of this study, both the governors appointed by the central government in Buenos Aires (1810–1820) and the governors who ruled a semi-autonomous province (1820–1852)

saw fit to deliberate upon popular missives much as the king and his colonial representatives had done. The four different autocrats who governed over the final three decades represented rival ideological factions, belonging to either the Federales or Unitarios party. They also shared power, to a degree, with an elected legislature composed largely of provincial notables. But the governors themselves, Juan Bautista Bustos (1821–1829), José María Paz (1829–1831), José Vicente Reynafé (1831–1835), and Juan Manuel López (1835–1852) were all local military men who seized power. While their power was later ratified by restricted elections, it was their favorable treatment of petitions that aided in establishing the legitimacy of their respective governments.

Idelfonso Villarroel, a neighbor of Juana Carrizo's son in the Indian village of Pichana, understood this when he wrote to the governor with his tale of woe. How he wished to "*acercarme verbalmente a los benignos oydos de V[uestra] S[eñoría] para expresarle con viva voz mis necesidades.*"¹⁶ But, while traveling with his wife to the capital to sell a load of salt, the sheriff (Juez Celador) Caetano Acuña confiscated his mules for the army, leaving him stranded. To add insult to injury, authorities had also impressed his only son, a hat maker whom he had left in charge of his two small daughters and the family hut (*casucha*). Villarroel was an old man. Having "*fincada toda mi esperanza y subsistencia mia y de mi familia en la profesion y subsistencia del citado mi hijo,*" he requested that the governor overrule Acuña and free his son. This, he concluded, would show mercy and justice.

Achieving justice, in this case as in so many others related by Córdoba's inhabitants, first required denouncing local officials' abuse of power. They would then spur the governor towards acting on their memorials. Casimiro Luna and Lazaro Barrionuevo, therefore, were even more pointed when they wrote to the governor to condemn how his good laws had been disregarded. Citing the government order to exempt "*hombres de bien*" and other hardworking family men from army recruitment, they accused local judges of having flouted the governor's wise intentions. Luna himself was willing to vouch for the personal qualities of his ranch manager (*capataz*), arguing that his valued employee clearly deserved the protection of the governor's regulations.¹⁷ Barrionuevo wrote on behalf of his son-in-law, who had been recruited in a flagrant miscarriage of justice: after the local justice's recruitment effort of vagrants and derelicts had driven the district's shiftless men to hide in the hills, the official had instead seized responsible, married men from their homes in order to fulfill his quota. This violation of home, law, and propriety forced Barrionuevo to travel to Córdoba despite his advanced age in order to inform the governor "*por el peligro efectivo en que queda toda la*

familia de perecer si V[uestra] S[eñoría] no se conmuebe de n[ues]tra desgracia da suerte.”¹⁸

Denunciations invested considerable faith in the governor and his management of state and society. By contrast, they characterized the local officials who implemented his policies as men of “*capricho*” and “*exceso*” who acted only “*segun sus corazones y espíritus de impiedad*.”¹⁹ Maria del Rosario Sexas was blistering in the letter she wrote imploring the Commander of the Civic Militias to release her son from military service. She was at pains to disabuse the Colonel of the notion that provincial officials carried out conscription according to the law or that the poverty of widows like herself was taken into proper consideration by such authorities: “*no dejara la especulacion de V.S. de advertir que en los Jueces del Campo solo se halla la injusticia y mala distribucion de ella . . . y de este modo faltan a la fe y lealdad de sus Ministerios.*”²⁰

With a mixture of legalism and moral outrage, these petitions ambiguously established at once the writers’ own sense of what constituted good government with a recognition that, in society, justice flowed downward. In this conception, the judicious precepts of the governor in the capital were subverted with impunity by the government’s representatives in the communities. Only effective enforcement of the superior authority of the governor, therefore, could end such abuses and bring provincial reality in line with the benevolent plans of its highest official.

Petitions thus posited a special tie between writers and the governor. By ratifying the governor’s claim to rule on behalf of the general welfare, they accepted his legitimacy. In particular, petition writers promoted the expansion of the governor’s authority as a bulwark against the private powers exercised by local notables who monopolized the positions of justices, sheriffs and militia officials. As weak, post-colonial governments sought to centralize their power in a time of civil wars and political instability, this popular alliance proved to be a useful tool in curtailing the excesses of local power brokers. Moreover, by stressing the coincidence between petition writers’ hopes for security in their lives and the governor’s existing laws, petition writers flattered the governor that his authority did indeed represent the “will of the people.” In a period when few other formal mechanisms of political representation existed, especially for Córdoba’s poor, petitions served as a gratifying proxy of popular opinion and the principal articulation between governing authorities and the lower classes.

For provincials oppressed by the demands of war, petition writing provided an individual strategy for expressing discontent and seeking redress. At worst, their appeals would be ignored.²¹ Certainly, the deeply ingrained acceptance of petitioning at all levels of society had an important role in channeling popular dis-

content along vertical lines in search of remedies from a social and political superior. It was, after all, the individual claim placed by the writer on the governor that invited him to act as the supplicant's protector.

Nevertheless, while the practice of petitioning may have drawn upon, and reinforced, a culture of patronage, and thereby diminished possibilities for collective protest among Córdoba's subaltern groups, this correspondence had clear political intentions and impact. Lower-class petitioners implemented this traditional tool to exchange deference to authority for concessions from the post-colonial state. While the language and form of petitions were largely prescribed, Córdoba's poor put them to their own uses. As James Scott has argued, such appearances of hegemony are simply the "public transcript" where political inferiors have to ratify elite presentations of themselves when dealing openly with the powerful. Thus, "it is impossible to know from the public transcript alone how much of the appeal to hegemonic values is prudence and formula and how much is ethical submission."²²

Denunciations, for instance, demonstrated the letter writers' belief that state power could be invoked on their behalf. They also clearly recognized divisions among the province's governing elites and how multiple levels of authority might be leveraged against each other.²³ The relative efficacy of this strategy is neatly captured in the kind of "fossilized" evidence of state power in action found in the the archival documentation. Petitions served as the first page of a case file and were directly followed, often written on the same page, with the governor's order on how to respond to the request and then the written record of the government inquiry or actions executed as a result.

Manuela Contrera won the release of her son, José Gregorio, by detailing the many irregularities in his recruitment. She complained that the judge who had him captured, motivated by her son's refusal to help build him a fence, had no jurisdiction in her district, was and had not bothered to look for vagrants to recruit, as the law required, but rather had searched in mothers' houses for "*honrados y mansos*" sons to conscript. The governor's laws protected poor widows like her, Contrera observed.²⁴ Indeed, her petition did set the wheels of government in motion and one after another, judges from her locality complied with the governor's demand for a response, all verifying that José Gregorio was an obedient son who worked to support his mother and grandmother as Contrera had claimed.²⁵ They did not address the other points of her accusation, but the case file concluded with the governor's order to free José Gregorio from military service.

Marcos Palacios' petition secured his own discharge. He too explained that he had to care for his widowed mother, her five daughters, and their meager be-

longings, all of which was more than amply documented by judges familiar with his situation. In this case, the governor not only granted his freedom, but issued a warning to the offending judge who had conscripted him that should he commit another infraction of this variety, the governor would order that he be impressed into the army.²⁶

In other cases, petitions initiated formal judicial proceedings. After the Afro-Argentine blacksmith, Francisco Moreno, wrote to the governor protesting that his employer was trying to sell him as if he were still a slave, the governor instructed the Defensor de Pobres, the state's public defender of the poor, to represent Moreno in a personal audience convened to establish the artisan's status.²⁷ Da Petrona Gonzalez also wrote to Federal Governor Manuel López in 1841, beseeching him as "*Padre del Publico*" to forgive her son's unwitting participation in a Unitario uprising against his government the year before and to end his exile. While the documents do not record the final resolution of her request, they do show that a commission began collecting testimonies about her son's culpability in the "October Revolution" as well as "public knowledge" concerning his political sympathies.²⁸

A significant number of petitions found their way into the account books of the provincial treasury. These personal appeals to the governor asked him to lighten the authors' misfortunes by exercising his power to disburse state funds. Many were from soldiers who requested assistance to feed their families, buy a decent set of clothes, start a business, or purchase a house. Casimiro Ibazeta, a retired cavalry official, received a month in back wages after writing to Governor López in 1847 and describing his maladies. When healthy and capable, he had been a good patriot: "*Que cuando la provincia necisitó de mis brazos pa[ra] sostener sus derechos fui uno de los que corrí con gusto a tomar las armas a fin de hacer respetar la causa Santa de Federacion y la autoridad legitima constituida de nuestro pais.*" Now however, he needed the "*caridad*" of the government.²⁹ The militia drummer Pedro Rios was more emphatic in explaining why he turned to the governor to help him end his "*desnudez,*" "*sumergido en mis miserias y sin tener amparo ni proteccion de nadio solo de Dios y de V[uestra] E[xcelencia] habiendome sin padre, sin madre y sin tener quien me de vuelta, vuelvo mis ojos a el padre supremo de Córdoba.*"³⁰ That same year, López ordered the treasury to give seventy pesos to militia sergeant Pedro Bedriñan for his new home; four pesos to Independence War veteran Gregorio Jara, so that he might continue to provide the local militia with five lessons; three pesos to the militiaman Toribio Garay, because his craft of shoemaking was in an economically depressed state; and three pesos to soldier Antonio Almada to care for his sick wife.³¹ These men were among the

189 members of the armed forces who received discretionary funds by order of the governor in 1847—funds which represented approximately 14.5% of all military outlays for that year.³²

It is Córdoba's women, however, who seem to have made the most insistent call for state paternalism. Soldiers' wives and mothers sent an avalanche of petitions to the governor, crowded the secretaries' chambers, and sat in vigil in the treasury's offices waiting for payments.³³ Their appeals to the province's governors for pensions and pay supplements reveals how, for many families of military men, wresting concessions from these provincial autocrats was a crucial survival strategy at a time of war. Consequently, the petition and the audience were women's principal forms of public political behavior. By pressing women's claims to state resources, these petitions placed their demands at the center of the fiscal debate on how to apportion the burden of war. Their success in this endeavor, during a period of economic hardship when all sectors of society were being asked to make sacrifices for the war effort, illustrates the way in which Córdoba's inhabitants employed petitions not only to gain material benefits but also to shape the boundaries of citizenship in the new republic.

The Boundaries of Citizenship

Petitions made claims upon the state and its authorities. While framed as appeals to a benevolent statesman, at their core was a demand for redress or aid. Petitions therefore played a significant role in the negotiations that consumed the Argentine polity after 1810 over what powers the post-colonial state would hold and how it might exercise them. This struggle to define the rights and obligations of Córdoba's citizens and their individual relationship with the state was one in which petition writers were fully engaged.³⁴

More importantly, despite the conservative language and form of petitions, supplicants used them to assert novel privileges. They did so largely by fashioning new identities for themselves as vital participants in the nation-building process. Petition writers thus presented themselves as patriots, consciously engaged in the events of their day and therefore deserving of the state's protections. Córdoba's women were able to establish their own contribution to the war effort as well as the centrality of the well-constituted family to early republican society. Soldiers presented themselves as men of honor, consciously sacrificing themselves for new political ideals. Even slave recruits were able to equate their efforts on behalf of newfound freedoms with their own personal emancipation. The demands that resulted from these new identities never directly challenged elite rule, but as soldiers and their families vied to expand the parameters of citizenship, they likewise eroded many aspects of the inherited colonial order, changing the rules of political participation in the process.

Córdoba's women pressed their own vision of citizenship in their petitions by making a public issue of war recruitment's debilitating effect on the family economy. To characterize such actions as part of a political debate may appear to exaggerate their conscious intentions. Certainly, the individual appeals of female supplicants seem much more particularistic and shielded from public affairs than the collective actions of revolutionary French and American women with their boycotts, *cahiers*, marches and riots.³⁵ Nevertheless, within the narrow options of Argentine provincial political life, women came to master the one most accessible to them. Their petitions forcefully asserted women's claim to full participation in the war effort. Couched in the language of humility and gratitude was a persuasive demand for the state to recognize the rights due to Córdoba women in return for their patriotic abnegation. Petitions to the governor not only defended the rights of war widows, wives, and mothers; they pushed the boundaries of such concepts in order to encompass a more general protection of the family as principal guarantor of women's welfare.

An atypical petition from María del Rosario Espinosa illustrates this determination to have women's own sense of involvement recognized by the state. Her statement is uncommon because it was addressed not to the governor, but to the commission in charge of certifying war losses from the Civil War (1829–31). Espinosa recognized that her case was unusual. Unlike most of the ranchers, merchants, and artisans who came before the board seeking restitution, she noted that, “*Yo no he perdido capitales, ni fortunas por que no las he conocido.*” Her claim, she argued, still deserved their attention.

*El unico que gozaba en mi alivio era mi hijo que el cielo me habia ortogado. Este me fue arrebetado por la pasada administracion. El me importaba mi subsistencia y la de otro menor hijito que quedo a mi lado. El me importaba no un capital o fortuna material sino una fortuna virtual que en substancia me valia el mismo. Si el estado en la presente administracion se ha propuesto generosamente reparar estas ruinas y embalsamar estas llagas que la pasada abrió tan cruelmente a la Patria me creo yo con no menor derecho a ser considerada y atendida con una pension alimenticia para ambas miserables mi nietecito y yo. . . . Yo espero que VS penetrado de mi situacion y de mi menor se sirva acordanos la pension que venga a bien en que recibiremos gracia y mas con justicia.*³⁶

What her petition shared in common with the majority of those submitted by the female family members of soldiers who had died or were in active service was an emphasis on the fragile state of the household economy in the absence of their sons and fathers. Recurring with notable frequency, in fact, is the self-characterization of these women as “orphans.” Usually the term is not employed in its technical sense. Rather, petitions by both mothers and wives referred to themselves as orphaned by the departure by their family's men, whether the soldiers were sons, husbands, or fathers. The use of orphan in this context, thus, was of a family left unprotected and exposed without the support of a male wage earner.³⁷ The result, the petitions detailed, were women “*rodeada por tiernos hijos*” and on the brink of the most pitiful misery.

This exposition of the family's utter dependency on the father's labor need not be uncritically accepted as a faithful depiction of provincial domestic relations. Gerónima Castro, for instance, demanded her dead husband's back wages arguing that, “*mi derecho a ellos es indisputable respecto a que yo con mi trabajo contribuyó a su mantenimiento por la deficiencia misma de estos mientras vivió.*”³⁸ It was her labor, in other words, which subsidized the sergeant's unremu-

nerated services in the military. Nevertheless, though Castro prefaced this request by stressing her current reliance on alms to survive, it is clear that such stories of economically independent women were not likely to be those most favored with the state's scarce resources.

One petition writer reasoned that the war had orphaned her:

¿A quién vuelvo los ojos? ¿A quién? Al Padre de los pobres y desgraciados al que nos tiene dadas bastas pruebas de que no mira con indiferencia sino con la mayor emoci3n de su coraz3n la desgracia del ultimo de sus compatriotas al Padre de los Cordobeses, en una Palabra a V[uestra] E[xcelencia].³⁹

The force of these entreaties was derived from the obvious symmetry between the problem described and the women's requests. If the governor's laws had orphaned soldiers' families, it was also in his power to substitute the missing father by "adopting" the abandoned women, helping thus to reconstitute Córdoba's homes. By ensuring the subsistence of soldier's families with military pensions, pay advances and access to the army mess halls, the governor easily replaced the absent breadwinner.

Women, moreover, reminded him that his prerogative to dispense with the treasury's funds also allowed him to preserve other crucial functions of the well-constituted family. Andrea Quevedo, whose husband was then stationed in La Rioja, begged for some pesos in order to have a "*modo de subsistir sin poner en peligro mi honor.*" Another petitioner complained that her son's absence forced his sisters "*hacer trabajo ajeno a su sexo.*" Several widows' entreaties singled out their need to purchase mourning garments in order to be properly attired at mass, and still others pleaded for government scholarships for the education of soldiers' children.⁴⁰ Underlying all these supplicants' arguments was an emphasis on the impropriety of having the families of Córdoba's defenders fall into the stratum of the disreputable classes.

Despite government gestures to the contrary, however, Córdoba women overwhelmingly understood that the surest strategy to avoid exposing their families to the disintegrating effects of war was to keep their men away from the army's grasp. A large portion of women's petitions in the Córdoba archives, therefore, are directed towards gaining exemptions from military service for family members. While requests for pensions and pay described the unreasonable daily sufferings of life on the home front, the exemption petitions projected these miseries into a future in which the sickness, poverty and unsustainable obligations

of the present would only be compounded. María Mercedes García, in fact, was rather blunt in her conclusion that it was incompatible for her son to serve both her and the militia. Another widow similarly asked that her son be released from service in order that, “*contraído solo al objeto de mi subsistencia natural*” he help alleviate her misery with his work.⁴¹

Colonial law had long provided exceptions from military recruitment for the only sons of widows. Córdoba women demonstrated their familiarity with this precept and their determination to ensure its preservation in national law.⁴² What is perhaps most interesting, however, is the way in which they manipulated family categories in order to interpret the provision as an overarching protection for widows’ welfare. Much in the same way that “orphan” was employed to denote women deprived of a subsistence provider, the category of “only son” came to refer to any male who took responsibility for a woman’s support.

Most often, in fact, the exemption was requested for other male relatives. Dorotea Colazos sought to keep her son-in-law from active service by explaining that he served her as “*hijo y padre*.” A seventy-year old, blind widow thanked providence for providing her with a nephew and asked that he also be relieved of duty in order to help protect her property. Others petitioned on behalf of brothers-in-laws, uncles, and adopted sons.⁴³ Stretching the concept in another direction, married women petitioned for exemptions for their sons because their husbands were absent, or widows with many children noted that while they had several sons, the eldest were married and absorbed in caring for their own families and therefore, only their youngest were able to attend to their needs.⁴⁴

These explorations of the expanding boundaries of “only son” in exemption petitions illustrate the way in which women sought to introduce recognition of customary practices into official regulations.⁴⁵ The definition of an “only son” was obviously different for state authorities and for economically vulnerable women. Female petitioners thus sought to protect the men upon whom their livelihood depended.

In many cases, these petitions expressed a kind of bargaining with the state. One widow wrote, “Since it is not fair, Your Excellency, that the only two sons with whose work my subsistence and those of the other minors is proportioned both be giving their service,” she asked that the protection of the laws be granted her and one of her sons be released.⁴⁶ This text is representative of many others where women listed the services of their sons and petitioned for an exemption for at least one to “*sostenerme en mi viudez*.” From the 1830s onward, moreover, many of these requests for the release of one son ended with the mother’s promise to present the son for service herself should the country need him.⁴⁷ In many senses, such petitions rendered women in their best light: patriotically contribut-

ing to provincial defense by sending their sons off to war, but also asking that such a sacrifice have limits.⁴⁸

Moreover, it was an argument to which the state was particularly responsive. First, by invoking the image of stable and responsible rural families, these petitions coincided with the official aims of government recruitment policy to uphold an ideal conception of family relations. The obedient son (or uncle, brother-in-law, etc.) who cared for his elderly parents was exempted from active service while disorderly family relations were punished with conscription or remission to the frontier.⁴⁹ In fact, justices of the peace in charge of certifying exemption petitions, in fact, often advised that they be rejected if the sons were considered deficient in looking after their mothers. No wonder, then, that in many petitions widows described their sons as models of filial piety.⁵⁰

Second, by explicitly protesting that their sons and husbands were not among the vagrants and delinquents stipulated as the target of recruitment drives, these petitions implicitly affirmed the justice of this policy. Finally, the state had an important object in promoting the sheltering role of good fathers, because this same ideal was the basis for the state's own appeal for mobilization. Exhortations to soldiers against the approaching enemy never failed to link defense of the fatherland with protection of the female members of the soldier's own family. In this sense, a father's duty to the state and his family were one. More generally, a well-constituted civil society was seen to rest on such reciprocal responsibilities. The Article that concluded the list of the "*Deberes de todo hombre en el Estado*" in Argentina's first legal code read "*Merecer el grato y honroso titulo de hombre de bien, siendo buen Padre de familia, buen hijo, buen hermano y buen amigo.*"⁵¹

In his study of Buenos Aires society under governor Juan Manuel de Rosas, Mark Szuchman has argued that "the *rosista* formula for authority signaled a respite from the massive loss of life with the consequent recuperation of the porteño household's cohesion. The destructive challenges to the integrity of the family in the first two decades after 1810, and the subsequent relief from the virtual continuous loss of young men's lives after Rosas' advent," was one pillar of the *Federal* dictator's popular support.⁵² In Córdoba as well, government practices in the areas of pensions and recruitment gave the state the ability to project an image as defender of the province's families and the institutions that regulated their well-being. Popular petitioning, however, enabled these policies to truly penetrate and influence public opinion. By coaxing governors to adjust procedures to meet their individual needs, women petitioners fundamentally shaped the way in which wartime mobilization was experienced. Ironically then, in this realm where the aims of military authorities and those of Córdoba's families seemed so at odds, women's calls for paternal-

istic practices, and the government's modest response to spare those deemed most vulnerable, helped reconcile this contradiction.

Córdoba's foot soldiers also employed petitions to argue that their war services had earned them the right to the recognition and privileges due the provinces' defenders. This stance was rather curious, as most of Córdoba's recruits since the formation of the first revolutionary armies had joined the military under duress. Yet, whatever their social origins or the manner in which they were incorporated into the ranks, soldiers presented themselves in their memorials to the governor as loyal supporters of his government. Their requests to authorities typically begin with a long list of services and sacrifices on behalf of the "cause," making clear that they saw their actions as motivated by patriotic convictions and not simply military discipline.

Soldiers' "silences" on Argentina's recruitment procedures and their depiction of public spirit was designed to appeal to post-colonial authorities' own hope that the army might serve as a school for citizenship. After 1810, revolutionary and partisan propaganda endeavored to cultivate martial ideals in Argentina. An early government decree enjoined provincial authorities: "*tendrá especial cuidado de fomentar el espíritu militar, distinguiendo a los sugetos que desde el 25 de Mayo de 1810 se dedicaron a tan honrosa profesión.*"⁵³ New national holidays celebrated military victories and commemorated the war dead.⁵⁴ The oratory of the day spoke only of honor and service. In the Cathedral of Córdoba, the May 25th sermon of 1814 exhorted provincials, "*Jovenes, tomad las armas aunque os detenga vuestra madre*" and in 1825, "*ya tenemos una patria conocida...y en cuyo obsequio y defensa debemos sacrificar no sólo nuestros intereses sino también nuestra propia vida.*"⁵⁵ Thus, though the majority of recruits entered service involuntarily, once inducted, the enlisted were subject to a program of indoctrination in patriotic speeches, sermons, and ceremonies that praised their courage and dedication to the cause as authorities tried to win popular adhesion. Forced to be "patriots," Argentina's soldiers were imagined as a committed bulwark whose glorious sacrifices protected the fatherland. Gauchos, customarily reviled for their disorderly ways, now shed their ponchos and were reborn in serge uniforms as honorable men of conviction.

In their petitions, therefore, soldiers not only requested government assistance as discussed earlier; their claims often had a clear intent to place them firmly among the respectable classes of the province. A frequent request was for an allowance for clothing so that they might be dressed decently as befit their position. Another common appeal was to ask the governor to intervene on soldiers' behalf and exempt them from church fees so that they might marry and live a settled, moral life.⁵⁶

In short, the military uniform brought a special status that the government was honor bound to protect. This privileged relationship is illustrated more clearly in episode from the José Reynafé governorship. In 1836 a raft of petitions, evidently part of an organized campaign, arrived in the governor's office protesting new regulations that prohibited hat-makers from selling their wares on the street. What stands out in the artisans' political strategy was that they neither submitted a collective grievance nor appealed as craftsmen, but rather had local notaries draft individual complaints in which each of the hat-makers, as members of the urban militia, prefaced their requests with a narrative of their war services and unwavering loyalty to the governor's cause. What they also described in no uncertain terms was how their work sustained their unpaid militia services and how this livelihood was now being threatened by these ill-conceived decrees. If deprived of access to their customers, they argued, they would soon be out of work, idle and of no use to society or their families. If the governor was to protect his militiamen and keep them from having to beg on the streets, they demanded that he revoke the previous ruling, as he soon enough did.⁵⁷ The state committed itself to protecting its defenders, and the soldiers in turn employed their petitions to draw the state's attentions to their needs.

One of the strongest of these bonds linked the state and slave recruits. Indeed, in Córdoba, some of the most notable claims for government recognition of enlisted men's sacrifices came from the province's Black soldiers who were sporadically recruited into Argentina's armies after 1813. As Afro-Argentine recruits were keenly aware, political emancipation from the tyranny of imperialism and slaves' own freedom from personal bondage were ideas that rapidly became intimately linked in the nation's political arena. The 1813 decree calling for the first widespread enlistment of Black slaves also coincided with measures that provided for the gradual elimination of human chattel. Slave trading with Africa was prohibited throughout the Río de la Plata and those henceforth born into slavery were to be emancipated at adulthood under the provisions of the "Free Womb" law. As slaves were being assembled under the nation's banner, the newly approved anthem proclaimed:

*Oíd mortales el grito esperado,
Libertad, Libertad, Libertad,
Oíd el grito de rotas cadenas
Ved en trono la noble igualdad.*⁵⁸

It is in this context, therefore, that Córdoba's slave soldiers demanded that their actions be understood as signs of their loyal adhesion. Proudly recording en-

gagements, generals, and years of service they had known, they sought official recognition of their rights to full civil liberties as well as, often enough, the state's help in freeing their family members.⁵⁹ Perhaps one of the most remarkable petitions of this kind was submitted in 1831 by Manuel Liendo, who, because he had fought with the insurrectionary Federal forces during the Civil War (1829–31), had never been offered a formal promise of emancipation. He therefore petitioned to the Governor for his freedom in a text rich with irony:

Que poseido del mas vehemente deseo de la prosperidad de la Patria casi perdida por los enemigos del orden me resolví morir antes que pasar por la degradante servidumbre a que la habian reducido los revoltosos del primero de Diciembre y animado de estos nobles sentimientos he prestado mis servicios...

In the campaign he was wounded and made prisoner but resolved “*de sufrir mas por esa vos de libertad que tanta alienta el corazon humano (aunque yo no le conozco)*.” Though but a “*triste esclavo aunque revistido de la grandesa del triunfo que bajo su auspicio he sido participante*” he asked “*si soy digno de gozar el fruto de la libertad*.” In honor of “*sus estimables servicios y duros compromisos*” the governor gladly acceded to his petition and provided for his emancipation.⁶⁰

Such petitions are, of course, individual strategies pursued by Black soldiers who employed this forum to present the Governor with their particular political *vitae*. In doing so they countered the traditional view that slaves were not political beings because, as property, their minds, like their bodies, belonged to their owners. Soldiering, however, had endowed them with a political personality. Indeed, to dispel one fiction they cloaked themselves in another, the fond hope announced time and again by the province's leaders that soldiers' actions under their leaders' command was a testament to their loyalty. In these petitions, soldiers' tales became protestations of fealty, told by men of decision whose lives demonstrated that they were fully worthy of the benefits that the government had long held out as belonging to those who helped create the new order.

These highly emotional moments in which the promise of a better society crystallized briefly in the call and response of the soldier's act of petitioning and the governor's dispensation were indicative of larger socio-political transformations which also worked to ratify the new understandings. Indeed, the extent to which early republican governments began to erode caste privileges in an attempt to win the favor of their Afro-Argentine recruits is noteworthy. During the early 1810s, many militia and veteran regiments were, for the first time, integrated.

Black officers won the right to be addressed by the honorific “*don*” and in several cases could even be found commanding white troops.⁶¹

In Córdoba, the most concerted attempt to win the allegiance of the province’s considerable Black and freedman population was under the Unitarian governor José María Paz. Surrounded by a hostile countryside and desperate for additional support, Paz made a special effort to bring urban Black artisans to his side. His cultivation of urban Blacks began with a promise that at the war’s conclusion, he would emancipate slaves who had been conscripted into his forces by an October 1829 decree.⁶² Paz also founded a new militia battalion of urban artisans, principally composed of *castas*, that linked militia support with substantial psycho-social benefits for mixed race craftsmen. The innovation was clear when he replaced a prestigious white silversmith as commander of the urban militia with the mulatto army officer, Lorenzo Barcala.⁶³ In the view of Domingo Sarmiento, this was a deliberate move to provide Paz’s administration with “an interpreter who should explain his ideas and objects to the common people...”⁶⁴ While Sarmiento’s characterization perhaps overstates the explicit mediating function Barcala played, certainly his appointment broke with the convention by which *casta* troops were, in traditional colonial fashion, led by white officers. Moreover, Paz openly defended his *casta* officers, who suffered the stigma of their color and their slave births, against public incidents of social prejudice.⁶⁵ Paz demanded proper respect for **his** officers. Further, for his Black and mulatto soldiers, he made military service the basis for providing them with access to previously denied social privileges, such as marriage to “white” women and entrance for their sons into the university.⁶⁶

Epistolary Performances

Petitioners transformed early national politics by forging a new relationship with governing authorities and enlarging the body of legitimate political actors. Their claims on the state challenged the hierarchical privileges inherited from the colonial order with competing practices of citizenship based on merit and political commitment. The cumulative effect of individual appeals to the state in establishing petitioners rights to benefits, protection and dignity is a notable achievement. However, a full appreciation of petitioning's place in post-colonial Argentina requires also considering the ways in which the practice itself transformed political culture.

Petition writers told stories about their lives. The narratives they presented to authorities sought to make sense, both for their authors and the reader, of Argentina's political troubles. One way they did so was to structure their expositions around social stereotypes, casting themselves in cultural set pieces such as the abandoned orphan, destitute widow, overburdened father, self-sacrificing soldier, etc. These "epistolary performances," in Sheila Fitzpatrick's felicitous phrase, called upon the recipient to also play their "role" of benevolent ruler.⁶⁷ The conventional social dramas that supplicants staged in their petitions, certainly drew upon shared elements of traditional culture. However, they also served to frame the debate between Argentina's popular classes and ruling elite over the rights and obligations of early national citizenship. As is often the case, a new political culture was constructed from traditional understandings.⁶⁸ Petitions thus helped shape Argentines' expectations of how authorities might exercise their power and what would be the legitimate relationship of individuals and their families to the newly independent polity. In a period when all of these issues were hotly disputed, petitions writers posited real life scenarios that resolved such burning questions. In this sense, supplicants' narratives seem to be an important variant of the kind of "social dramas" the anthropologist Victor Turner has theorized as the "matrices through which individual societies define or redefine their beliefs." Significantly, for Turner, it is in periods of crisis that such social dramas become critical in creating new understandings: "Where historical life itself fails to make cultural sense in terms of that formerly held good, narrative and cultural dramas may have the task of poesis, that is of remaking cultural sense."⁶⁹

The performative dimension of petitions was central to their meaning in another crucial way. Petitioners made claims upon the state by asserting new identities as citizens. Their pleas were, therefore, an act of civic engagement protesting their loyalty, their sacrifices, and their commitment to the nation-building process. This novel combination of victimhood with the emerging republican praise

of civic virtues is nicely captured in a request the war widow María Antonia López submitted to Colonel Francisco Reynafé, brother of the governor, imploring a food pension for her and her sons in compensation of their loss in war.

Hará memoria que uno de los que sufireron la desgracia de morir en la accion . . . contra los salvajes . . . fue mi marido Leandro Cabral. . . Tambien se acordará que solo el interes patrio y no la obligacion de ningun beneficio a que estuviere ligado le sufrió la resolución de tomar las armas. Que su perdida en bien comun causó mi ruina y el desamparo de los dos varoncitos desafortunados. . . ¿Y no será concedido Sr. Coronel que la expondente por si y a nombre de esos dos ciudadanos que lo serán con el tiempo, implore de V[uestra] S[eñoría] el pequeño compensativo en obsequio del merito contraido por la perdida expresada de una racion de carne diaria mientras el Estado pueda proporcionarla y que tambien la gratitud de V[uestra] S[eñoría] como Gefe en quien entonces la Provincia depositó la confianza de aquella operacion citada . . . ? Si Sr. Coronel. Asi se espero de su patriotismo.⁷⁰

López's embrace of the soldier-citizen ideal coincided with the aspirations of Argentine leaders. Like many would be nation-builders in this age of "democratic revolution," they promoted the republican model of citizenship because of its focus on the transformative nature of civic participation. Civic rituals and military service were necessary to make citizens out of Spain's former subjects. They also served to make clear that citizenship was a learned activity which engendered the kinds of new identities, values and capacities that made a government based on "the will of the people" possible.⁷¹ In this spirit, the Paz government ordered one militia commander in 1830 to muster his men in order that

los hombres haga cada uno de su parte un esfuerzo de patriotismo y las mujeres empiesen a dar tambien testimonio acostumbRANDOSE a ver a sus hijos y esposos empleados en la defensa comun. Que para todo esto hace marchar sin distincion a quantos puede asi al canton del exercito a que vean a sus concudadanos y amigos reunidos y estrechen mas entre si el vinculo de paisanage como lo hace tambien los de la ciudad donde no hay un hombre que en el dia no este en un destino util a la Patria.⁷²

Petition writers appealed directly to these republican ideals with self-portraits of patriotic volition that must have been gratifying to early national authorities who otherwise had good evidence to doubt popular acceptance of their rule.

Petition writing was a political act. Yet to highlight its performative aspects suggests that more than other political actions it was merely about manipulating rhetorical conventions and adopting poses appropriate to the actor's strategic aims. How accurately do the ideas and identities expressed in petitions reflect those of supplicants? We can begin to take measure of this question by examining how deeply embedded the practice of petitioning was in Argentine culture and how after Independence it became a vehicle for diffusing the new republican ideals. The mediation of a variety of new political figures and practices, in particular, helped shape the concepts expounded in citizens' writings to the state. Indeed, as individual claims became part of a more general standards for popular legitimacy, petitioning served to enlarge the public sphere by approximating something like organized "public opinion."

Scholars of petitions frequently remark on the seriousness with which petition writers approached the task of preparing their appeal. Choosing a language that seemed proper for speaking before authority, complete with flowery phrases that would both please and demonstrate the supplicant's civility, petitioners had learned the rules of how best to present themselves.⁷³ As Foucault noted of petitions' conventions, it causes

beggars, poor folks, or simply the mediocre to appear in a strange theatre where they assume poses, declamations, or grandiloquences, where they dress up in bits of drapery which are necessary if they want to be paid attention to on the stage of power.⁷⁴

In Córdoba, it would seem that these roles were played convincingly because they were so well rehearsed. Petitioning, of course, was an alternative to seeking an audience with government authorities, a practice which still continued in full force in the early Independence period. Not surprisingly, the language of supplicants reproduced the very personal appeals made when speaking directly before men of power.

The best evidence of this practice, however, is second hand, reported to higher authorities by the lower ranking officials who supplicants urged to intervene on their behalf. In 1816, the local administrator Gaspar del Corro reported to the governor occasioned in his district when neighbors gathered to celebrate the rising of the sun on May 25th, the patriotic ritual that commemorated "el aniversario de nuestra regeneracion y libertad de America." On that same day several desertors approached del Corro asking him to pardon their crime. He acceded to their request

Penetrado yo de la importancia que daría al sistema en estas gentes rústicas el perdón de este género de delito . . . [though aware] que en mi no había facultades pa[ra] condonarlo, les aseguro que en memoria de tan grande día, y a nombre del gobierno, yo por mi parte les perdonaba y quedaba responsable a que V[uestra] S[eñoría] en uso de la plenitud de sus facultades aprobaría un procedimiento en que no ha influido otro principio que el hacer propogar cada vez mas la idea [de] las ventajas que nos trae nuestra libertad.⁷⁵

The desertors' choice of this occasion to beseech the judge and their alleged promise to faithfully serve in the future suggests that their appeal was also couched in the patriotic terms of civic lessonhood that del Corro used to justify his actions. Similarly, when Juan Martín Moya, the former judge and *curaca* (sic!) of the Indian village of Pichana wrote to the governor in 1819 on behalf of Mauricia Mercado, his request to release her son from military service invoked the same call for paternalistic protection and charity and the assertion of the son's dutiful attentions to his mother and family, that women themselves employed in their petitions.⁷⁶

These examples illustrate the importance of a substantial sub-genre of petitions: those appeals submitted to the governor by provincial notables on behalf of the less powerful in at least two ways. First, the fact that they represented their "clients" with arguments and phrases virtually identical to those contained in personal petitions is evidence that they found such a presentation to be both plausible and worthy of redress by a just authority figure. They themselves, after all, had been moved to respond to such requests. Indeed, their advocacy of these cases suggests the degree to which the form and content of petitions was nurtured in patron-client sociability.

Second, these entreaties demonstrate the crucial role of political intermediaries in shaping petitions' claims. When the illiterate chose to "write" to state officials, their co-authors were the local intelligentsia. It was not especially hard for provincials to find someone to lend their pen to this task.⁷⁷ The rural and urban poor had long had contact with the cultural elite of priests, government officials, notaries and others of the literate classes. Popular culture was, therefore, constantly engaged with a cultural elite whose influence most certainly helped channel popular discontent along the legalistic and paternalistic paths of petitioning.

Beginning in 1810, however, new political brokers emerged. As Argentina's post-colonial leaders sought to mobilize the masses in the Independence struggle and later organize them along partisan lines, they brought their message to the

people through patriotic sermons, speeches and newspapers. This effort to disseminate new ideas was furthered by the administrative officials, army brass and others government agents who represented the early republican order. These intermediary figures, in particular, began the process of “translating” the new ideals and implementing them in social and political practice. Del Corro’s interpretation of the meaning of “nuestra libertad” and how it called for a “lección práctica” in generously reintegrating desertors into civil society aptly illustrates how lower level officials played an essential role in shaping the new political culture.

The state-appointed lawyer for the poor, the Defensor General de Pobres, had an equally profound impact. This post, with colonial precedents but re-founded after the Revolution, served to propagate liberal ideals in the judicial system. The suits they filed on behalf of slaves, in particular, helped Afro-Argentines leverage the concepts of the Enlightenment and of republican citizenship in their bids for freedom.⁷⁸ In his defense of the Córdoba slave woman Encarnación in 1822, José Miguel de Tagle protested her master’s refusal to sell her as she had requested and the law recommended, arguing “*que siendo este hecho contra la libertad natural y contra nuestro sistema liberal, que quasi puede decirse que si no es justo el reclamo actual del derecho natural, tampoco debería serlo el derecho de los Pueblos a que tanto aspiramos . . .*”⁷⁹ In their studies of Buenos Aires and Guayaquil, Peter Blanchard and Camilia Townsend have also found the aggressive turn of slaves to the courts as a new battleground for improving their condition during the Revolutionary wars. Here they found a forum to stress that the nation’s struggle for liberation was the same as their own and sympathetic allies to help press their cases.⁸⁰

Petitioners did not simply repeat the learned phrases of these literate intermediaries. Rather, they seemed to relish the opportunity to speak about their lives. Indeed, they resisted efforts to present their cases in generic form. Maria del Rosario Salazar’s 1819 plea to the governor to release her “son” from military service was delivered with two other petitions the same day with largely the same requests clearly written in the same hand. Salazar, however, was evidently unwilling to have her predicament reduced to notary conventions as she directed the notary to amend her petition. It concludes with a postscript which clarifies that the young man she claimed was in fact a nephew she had raised since childhood. Therefore she treated him as a son and he, in turn, cared for her.⁸¹ Like the slaves who used natural law and the language of liberation to press their claims for freedom, it is hard to imagine that Salazar, a widow, did not believe that her family also was deserving of the protections of the state. The practice of petitioning thus engendered political learning as the popular classes were brought in contact with

the provincial literate and employed the skills and knowledge of these intermediaries to press their own claims. Petitioners' successful incorporation of new ideas demonstrates their ability to understand how they applied to them and how they furthered their aims.

By casting their individual stories in terms of the political struggles and issues of the day, petition writers further shaped the nation's emerging political culture. While the goal of petitioners in Córdoba was to create a personal tie with the governor, the precedents established in the process became public knowledge. In Pofirian Mexico, Patrick McNamara has uncovered the "communal literacy" that permitted Oaxaca villages to make demands upon the state as communities and families while sharing a collective memory of their role in building the nation.⁸² No such formal collective tradition seems to have existed in Argentina. Nevertheless, there are tantalizing clues to suggest how petitions became part of the public sphere. Authorities since the last years of the colonial regime had published meritorious petitions, examples of true patriotism.⁸³ Even in 1837, grammar school students in the Córdoba canton of Anisacate worked on their penmanship by copying such model petitions which their headmaster proudly sent to the governor as evidence of their progress.⁸⁴ Moreover, families kept successful petitions, particularly those granting their men exemptions from military service. As awareness of the concessions won by petitioners became known, such privileges quickly acquired the status of rights.

Conclusion

Some of the most significant recent research on post-colonial Argentina has examined the efforts of early national leaders to forge a nation. By analyzing the civic rituals and associational life that leaders designed to help create a sense of patriotism, the works of Henry Vogel, Pilar Gonzalez and Ricardo Salvatore present a notable advance over the previous historiography that focused on constitutions and political personalities.⁸⁵ This examination of petitions, moreover, has argued for the agency of Argentina's poor in shaping citizenship in the young republic. It was petitioners' writings to the state which prevented a top-down project of cultural and political transformation from being still-born. Petitioners did not simply receive these ideas, they re-interpreted the new national ideals and made them their own, in the process claiming a place for themselves in the nation's history.

NOTAS

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² *Romances del Río Seco* (Córdoba, Argentina, 1984), p. 9.

³ Archivo Histórico de la Provincia de Córdoba, Gobierno [AHPC-G], 1819, caja 118, folio 305. In this, and in the following examples, I have retained the original spelling of the documents. I have used brackets to clarify the meaning of the frequent abbreviations used in such texts, but otherwise the syntax and spelling is typical of the “medium brow” culture (neither highly literate nor colloquial) that one finds in these petitions and in most early 19th century government documents.

⁴ AHPC-G, 1819, caja 118, folio 314.

⁵ Roberto González Echeverría, *Myth and Archive. A Theory of Latin American Narrative* (Durham, N.C., 1998), pp. 10, 56.

⁶ A. J. R. Russell-Wood, ““Acts of Grace””: Portuguese Monarchs and their Subjects of African Descent in Eighteenth-Century Brazil,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 32 (2000), p. 308; Cecilia Nubola, “Supplications Between Politics and Justice: The Northern Central States in the Early Modern Age,” *International Review of Social History* 46 (2001), p. 35; Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Editor’s Introduction: Petition and Denunciations in Russian and Soviet History,” *Russian History/Histoire Russe* 24 (1–2) (Spring-Summer 1997), p. 4.

⁷ It is worth noting that the right to petition is protected in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and petitioning continued in full force in Revolutionary France and in Soviet Russia.

⁸ Sarah Maza, “Stories in History: Cultural Narratives in Recent Works in European History,” *American Historical Review* 101 (5) (December 1996), p. 1512;

Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives, Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford, 1987), p. 20.

⁹ Golfo Alexopoulos, "The Ritual Lament: A Narrative of Appeal in the 1920s and 1930s." *Russian History/Histoire Russe* 24 (1–2) (Spring-Summer 1997): p. 127.

¹⁰ Peter Guardino, *Peasants, Politics and the Formation of Mexico's National State: Guerrero, 1800–1857* (Stanford, 1996); Florencia Mallon, *Peasant and Nation: The Making of Postcolonial Mexico and Peru* (Berkeley, 1995); Sarah Chambers, *From Subjects to Citizens: Honor, Gender and Politics in Arequipa, Peru, 1780–1854* (University Park, PA, 1999).

¹¹ Quoted in James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance. Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, 1990), p. 97.

¹² Eric Van Young, "Quetzalcóatl, King Ferdinand, and Ignacio Allende go to the Seashore; or Messianism and Mystical Kingship in Mexico, 1800–1821," in Jaime E. Rodríguez O., ed., *The Independence of Mexico and the Origins of the New Nation* (Los Angeles, 1989): pp. 109–127; John Phelan, *The People and the King. The Comunero Revolution in Colombia, 1718* (Madison, WI, 1978).

¹³ Russell-Wood, p. 307.

¹⁴ Quoted in Nubola, p. 39.

¹⁵ González Echeverría, p. 58; Suzanne Desan, "Reconstituting the Social After the Terror: Family, Property and the Law in Popular Politics" *Past and Present* (164) (1999), p. 107; Andreas Würigler, "Voices from Among the 'Silent Masses': Humble Petitions and Social Conflict in Early Modern Central Europe," *International Review of Social History* 46 (2001), p. 32.

¹⁶ AHPC-G, 1819, caja 118, folio 317.

¹⁷ AHPC-G, 1819, caja 118, folio 309.

¹⁸ AHPC-G, 1819, caja 118, folio 302.

- ¹⁹ AHPC-G, 1819, caja 118, folios 323, 330, 344.
- ²⁰ AHPC-G, 1819, caja 118, folio 323.
- ²¹ I have yet to find a case where the government retaliated against a petition writer because of the criticisms or accusations expressed.
- ²² Scott, p. 92.
- ²³ Lex Heerma van Voss, "Introduction," *International Review of Social History* 46 (2001), p. 6.
- ²⁴ AHPC-G, 1817, caja 52, 1817, folio 98.
- ²⁵ AHPC-G, 1817, caja 52, 1817, folios 95–97.
- ²⁶ AHPC-G, 1819, caja 60, folios 351, 354.
- ²⁷ AHPC, Escribania [AHPC-E] 2, legajo 130, expediente 13, "*Francisco Rodriguez esclavo de D[on]a Manuela Rodriguez esposa de D[on] Segundo Martinez solicitando su libertad.*"
- ²⁸ AHPC-E 3, legajo 102, expediente 3, "*Petrona Gonzalez por Mariano Vicente Gonzalez sobre caso de irresponsabilidad en una revolucion.*"
- ²⁹ AHPC, Hacienda [AHPC-H] 1847, Comprobantes, Tomo 550, folio 140.
- ³⁰ AHPC-H, 1847, Comprobantes, Tomo 548, folio 307.
- ³¹ AHPC-H, 1847, Comprobantes, Tomo 548, folios 188, 192, 200, 285.
- ³² These figures are calculated from AHPC-H, 1847, Libro Manual, Tomo 556.
- ³³ AHPC-H, 1845, Tomo 530, folio 528.
- ³⁴ For this definition of citizenship as relationship constantly being negotiated between political actors and the state see Charles Tilly, "Citizenship, Identity and Social History," in Charles Tilly, ed. *Citizenship, Identity and Social History* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 8–9.

³⁵ Linda Kerber, “‘I Have Don...much to Carrey on the Warr’: Women and the Shaping of Republican Ideology after the American Revolution,” in Harriet B. Applewhite and Darline G. Levy, eds., *Women and Politics in the Age of the Democratic Revolution* (Ann Arbor, 1990) pp. 228–230.

³⁶ AHPC-G, 1831, Tomo 123, folio 35. When the commission ruled her request outside its attributions Espinosa made new appeals to the mayor and the governor. AHPC-G, 1831, Tomo123, folios 36–37.

³⁷ See AHPC-H, 1844, Tomo 519, folio 585 (a woman “orphaned” by the departure of her son) and AHPC-G, 1825, Tomo 289, folio 462 (a wife “orphaned” by her husbands’ death). Fitzpatrick, “Supplicants and Citizens,” p. 96, has observed that petitions in Soviet archives register far more orphans than likely existed in reality and that the phrase often served as a synecdoche for powerlessness.

³⁸ AHPC-H, 1822, Tomo 271, folio 202.

³⁹ AHPC-H, 1847, Tomo 549, folio 528.

⁴⁰ AHPC-G, 1825, Tomo 89, folio 134; 1830, Tomo 113, folio 330, Tomo 120, folio 404; 1831, Tomo 126, folio 101; 1833, Tomo 132, folios 392, 450; 1836, Caja 146, folio 64; AHPC-H, 1846, Tomo 542, folio 8. The way in which Córdoba women entered the public sphere in order to protect their roles as mothers has obvious parallels with a much later generation, the Madres de Plaza de Mayo. Francesca Miller, *Latin American Women and the Search for Social Justice* (Hanover, N.H.: 1991), pp. 3–8, argues this is an underlying theme in women’s politics in Latin America. See also Temma Kaplan, “Female Consciousness and Collective Action: The Case of Barcelona, 1910–1918,” *Signs* 7 (3) (1982), p. 551.

⁴¹ AHPC-G, 1831, Tomo 126, folio 94; 1835, Tomo 139, folio 84.

⁴² AHPC-G, 1826, Tomo 94, folio 485; 1827, Tomo 94, folio 284; 1834, Tomo 137, folio 301.

⁴³ AHPC-G, 1824, Tomo 86, folio 307; 1825, Tomo 89, folio 134; 1826, Tomo 93, folio 533; 1829, Tomo 103 folio 570; 1830, Tomo 120, folio 400.

- ⁴⁴ AHPC-G, 1835, Tomo 139, folios 96, 129.
- ⁴⁵ See Pyle, pp. 42–43, Russel Wood, p. 323 and Desan, p. 103 for similar arguments.
- ⁴⁶ AHPC-G, 1834, Tomo 137, folio 301.
- ⁴⁷ AHPC-G, 1833, Tomo 132, folio 418.
- ⁴⁸ AHPC-G, 1833, Tomo 132, folio 450, Tomo 133, folio 96, 102; 1834, Tomo 137, folio 319; 1835. Tomo 141. folios 522, 609, 611; 1836. Tomo 145, folios 29–31, Tomo 146, folio 134; Linda Kerber, “‘History Can do it no Justice.’ Women and the Reinterpretation of the American Revolution,” in Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert, ed. *Women in the American Revolution* (Charlottesville, VA, 1989), p. 21.
- ⁴⁹ AHPC-G, 1823, Tomo 84, folio 221; 1826, Tomo 92, folios 190, 314, 324, 510, 562, Tomo 93, folios 501, 535, 585; 1827, folio 96, folios 39–40; 1833, Tomo 132, folio 418.
- ⁵⁰ AHPC-G, 1826. C. 93, folio 501, 535; 1833. Tomo 133, folio 93; 1834, Tomo 137, 319.
- ⁵¹ This is from the 1815 “Estatuto Provisional Para la Dirección y Administración del Estado,” Arturo Enrique Sampay, *Las Constituciones de la Argentina (1810–1872)* (Buenos Aires, 1975), p. 223. The article was basically repeated in all successive provincial and national legal codes into the 1850s. Interestingly, this provision paraphrases Article 4 of the French Revolutionary Constitution of Year III (Desan, p. 97).
- ⁵² Mark Szuchman, *Order, Family and Community in Buenos Aires, 1810–1860* (Stanford, 1988), p. 223.
- ⁵³ In Horacio José Pianetto, “La situación social de la campaña de Córdoba durante el período de la revolución -- 1810–1814,” *Revista de la Universidad Nacional de Córdoba* 2nd ser. 9 (1968), p. 159.
- ⁵⁴ Hans Vogel, *Todo es Historia*, 287 (May 1991), p. 46, *Compilación de leyes, decretos y acuerdos de la Exma. Cámara de Justicia y demás disposiciones*

de carácter pública dictadas en la provincia de Córdoba desde 1810 á 1870 (Córdoba, 1870), pp. 8–9.

⁵⁵ Naptali Carranza, *Oratoria argentina*. (Buenos Aires: 1905), p. 101, Pablo Cabrera, “Ex-alumnos célebres de la Universidad de Córdoba. Miguel Calixto del Corro,” *Revista de la Universidad Nacional de Córdoba* 3 (1) (March 1916), p. 105.

⁵⁶ AHPC-G, 1827, Tomo 94, folios 454, 512, 514, 520, 548; 1836, Tomo 146, folio 136; 1838, Tomo 158, folios 443, 455; 1860, Tomo 249, folios. 220, 226. AHPC-H, 1852, Tomo 598, Comprobante 377.

⁵⁷ AHPC-G, 1836, Tomo 146, folios 194–206.

⁵⁸ Núria Sales de Bohigas, “Esclavos y reclutas en Sudamérica,” *Revista de Historia de América*, 70 (July–Dec. 1970), p. 287.

⁵⁹ AHPC-G, 1826, Caja 93, folio 509, AHPC-E, 1836, Legajo 78, expediente 17.

⁶⁰ AHPC-H, 1831, T. 378, f. 254.

⁶¹ Robert J. Turkovic, “Race Relations in the Province of Córdoba, Argentina, 1800–1853” (Diss. University of Florida 1981), p. 218.

⁶² AHPC-G, 1830, Tomo 114, folio 89; Notas de Contaduría, 1829–1831, 9 Oct. 1830; Turkovic, pp. 255–256.

⁶³ Hugo Moyano, *La organización de los gremios en Córdoba. Sociedad artesanal y producción artesanal, 1810–1820* (Córdoba, 1986), p. 187; Instituto de Estudios Americanistas, Documentos #9568, #9673.

⁶⁴ Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, Mrs. Horace Mann, trans., *Life in the Argentine Republic in the Days of the Tyrants or Civilization and Barbarism* (New York: 1868), p. 166.

⁶⁵ Lucio Funes, “El Colonel Barcala,” *Revista de la Junta de Estudios Históricos de Mendoza*, 7 (1937), pp. 131, 140; Ignacio Garzón, *Crónica de Córdoba* (Córdoba: 1892), II, p. 231; Turkovic, p. 218.

- ⁶⁶ Garzón, II, p. 350; AHPC-G, 1830, Tomo 115, folio 530; 1831, Tomo 126, folio 590.
- ⁶⁷ Fitzpatrick, "Supplicants and Citizens," p. 95.
- ⁶⁸ Tilly, p. 9, Guardino, p. 10.
- ⁶⁹ Quoted in Maza, pp. 1497, 1500.
- ⁷⁰ AHPC-G, 1834, Tomo 135, folio 156.
- ⁷¹ R. Claire Snyder *Citizen-Soldiers and Manly Warriors: Military Service and Gender in the Civic Republican Tradition* (Lanham, MD, 1999), p. 3.
- ⁷² AHPC-G, 1830, Tomo 118, folio 32.
- ⁷³ Russell Wood, p. 311, Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida* (Urbana, IL, 1999), p. 138.
- ⁷⁴ Quoted in Scott, p. 93.
- ⁷⁵ AHPC-G, 1816, Caja 49, folio 155.
- ⁷⁶ AHPC-G, 1819, Tomo 118, folio 317.
- ⁷⁷ I have never seen evidence regarding what fees notaries might have charged for this service. Most petitions, however, were submitted on stamped paper that cost three *reales*. In 1820 this was the equivalent of one day's wage for an apprentice carpenter or three hours' work for a master leather craftsman and about the price of an inexpensive woolen poncho or sixteen pounds of beef.
- ⁷⁸ Carmen Bernard, "La población negra de Buenos Aires (1777–1862)," in Mónica Quijada, Carmen Bernard and Arnd Schneider, eds., *Homogeneidad y nación con un estudio de caso* "Argentina, Siglos XIX y XX" (Madrid, 2000), pp. 106–107, 116.
- ⁷⁹ AHPC-E, Escribanías 3, Legajo 72, expediente 9 "Jucio verbal entre el Sindicio Procurador de Cuidad y Don Jose Rueda sobre una esclava de este" (1822).

⁸⁰ Blanchard, p. 517; Camila Townsend, “‘Half My Body Free, the Other Half Enslaved’: The Politics of the Slaves of Guayaquil at the End of the Colonial Period,” *Colonial Latin American Review* 7 (1) (1998): pp. 105–128.

⁸¹ AHPC-G, 1819, Caja 118, folio 339.

⁸² “Sons of the Sierra: Memory, Patriarchy and Rural Political Culture in Mexico, 1855–1911,” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1999, p. 382.

⁸³ “Muy Ilustre Cabildo,” (Buenos Aires: Imprenta de los Niños Expositos, 1807).

⁸⁴ AHPC-G, 1837, Caja 149, folio 92.

⁸⁵ Pilar González Bernaldo, “Pedagogía societaria y aprendizaje de la Nación en el Río de la Plata,” in *De los imperios a las naciones* (Zaragoza, 1994), pp. 451–469; Ricardo Salvatore, “Fiestas federales: Representaciones de la República en el Buenos Aires rosista,” *Entrepasados* 4 (11)(1996): pp. 45–68.

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