Of vague war and vague peace in Argentina's desert, 1775 – 1880

Michael Riekenberg

Abstract:

This article addresses the relationship between war and peace in the *frontier* of the La Plata region during the period between circa 1775 and 1880. Like other frontier spaces in Spanish-America during this period, the La Plata region constituted a type of open violent space, lacking distinct periods of war during an era of apparently continuous, war-like power relations. Under these circumstances, "post-war order" was an undefined idea. Instead, over decades "war" and "peace" co-existed under various forms of local political orders. These systems were contentious and contested, they were ambiguous, and they competed with other political endeavours, which were conceptualised in hegemonic terms, bringing state-centric ideas of political systems into the local arena. These orders shall be the focus of this analysis.

Michael Riekenberg, Professor am Historischen Seminar der Universität Leipzig im Bereich Vergleichende Geschichtswissenschaft/Ibero-Amerikanische Geschichte   **E-mail: riekenbe@rz.uni-leipzig.de**
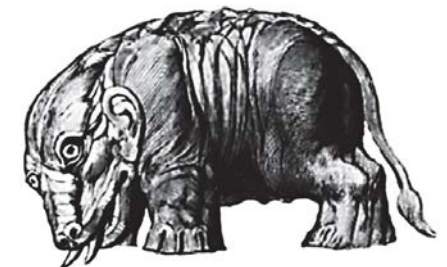
Introduction

The idea that the state held the authority/power in the enactment of organising war as well as in establishing peace prevailed much earlier on the Iberian Peninsula compared to the rest of Europe. Already during the early 16th century, war, peace and the state had merged in the political thinking in Castile and Aragon. "In short, the state has the authority both to declare and wage war" (Fernandez-Santamaria 1977, 69). Even the idea of a post-war order (the term itself was not in use at that time, rather one spoke of peace or peace time) rested on this terminological triad. A related supposition was that there was a distinct separation between war and peace – guaranteed by the state – as well as a clear temporal division between the two. This "Westphalian" view, as I would refer to it, of the order of war and post-war order, arrived in America with civil servants sent by Spain during the colonial period. Simultaneously, realities of war developed in this region, which blurred the line between war and post-war (peace). Already emerging during the colonial period at the territorial boundaries of Spanish-Creole settler territories, the frontiers were, as Herberg-Rothe (2003, 30) puts it, "an intermediate state, which was neither war nor peace". Subsequently, at the end of the colonial order, "new kinds of war came to Latin America" (MacFarlane 1998, 21) during which 'the' state lost the monopoly of interpreting war and the end of war in the interior of (former) Spanish America.

Post-war orders are shaped by the wars preceding them. In order to analyse these types of order, it is therefore necessary to first establish which kind of wars preceded them, in particular, what sort of war these 'new wars' were. [1] Of course they were no state wars, especially as in Latin America during the 19th century these kinds of wars were rare (with the exception of Chile), and state wars have even decreased in number and relevance since then. Presumably, this is one of the reasons why 'post-war orders', which we usually associate with the end of interstate wars, have hardly been researched by historians in the case of Latin America to date. Furthermore, these 'new' wars of the 19th century were no civil wars either. The term civil war *(guerra civil)* was widely distributed in Latin America and is still used in current literature when referring to internal violent conflicts. But civil wars also correlate with the existence of a state, and in Latin America during this period the state was organised too loosely, its territory barely developed and the population's attitudes and mentalities were too state-distant for the state to be taken into consideration as a determining factor for establishing the nature of wars taking place on

[1] One of the minimal requirements for a conflict to be characterized as a war is, according to Orywal (1996), the extrafamilial organisation of the armed forces, which control territories and act collaboratively during combat operations, and which have the goal of eliminating the enemy.

its territory. According the definition of Kalyvas the starting point of a civil war is "recognized sovereign entity [...] subject to a common authority" (Kalyvas 2006, 17) no longer existed by the end of the colonial state. In fact, after 1810 the region of former Spanish America came to a "corrosion of authority and the amplification of hotspots of violence" (Sabato 2009, 195). In the subsequent wars, rather, not a mere couple of violent actors fought over the power within the state as would be the case during a civil war, but there were a number of different warring fractions participated, each of which were equal in their status as "war makers".

At a closer look we might not want to refer to those wars as 'new' at all, as MacFarlane suggests, they were not new, considering the quoted 'intermediate state' of war during the colonial period. Apart from borrowing the original term from sources such as *maloca* **[2]**, other terms are used in the literature, such as "limited wars" (Centeno 2002) or "segmentary wars" (Riekenberg 2003), each term describing similar phenomena albeit with a different emphasis. According to MacFarlane (1998, 24), the 'irregular' character of the 'new' wars is important. Yet Centeno assumes the everyday applicability of the term, and it is the routine representation of these conflicts in the case of Latin America (Bailey 2008). But if we follow this suggestion, not only was the transition from everyday life ('peace') to war marginal, but worse, war hardly changed people's lives once it broke out. "Life goes on much as before", writes Centeno (2002, 21) about life during war, which is why the term 'post-war order', which claims to assign a *difference* to a situation described as a war, becomes meaningless. The term 'segmentary wars' locates the explanation for the inner wars in Latin America in the network of relationships of the violent actors and their "fragile balance of power" (Riekenberg 2003, 23). The different violent actors were equally powerful and none was safe from the other, as there was no superior Leviathan that would have had control over the use of violence. German sociologist Norbert Elias has pointed out that reciprocal tendencies for violence are usually high if two equally powerful opponents face each other, but much less so if one side is clearly superior (Elias 1977, 130). In the case of segmentary relationships of violence, wars developed as a result of weakness and the mutual fear of the individual violent actors. Jürg Helbling (2006) discusses this from an ethnological perspective, looking at the origin of local wars and the mutual production of what he calls a "reputation of deterrence". It has to be emphasised that on the one hand these segmentary relationships of violence were particularly violent as the violent actors are forced to duly threaten and display violence so as to deter and intimidate others. Yet on the other hand the real level

[2] These were wars conducted by so-called *yndios* against Spanish-Creole towns (see Corominas 1956, 207).

of violence is lower for a party's relative weakness prohibits risking everything during combat. Viewed from this perspective segmentary wars are 'small' or 'limited' wars.

To recapitulate; there are different terms for and interpretations of the 'new' wars in the literature. Regardless of the term and definition used, under the condition of these Latin American wars, 'post- war orders' were fragile entities of short duration, during which the social chronologies in which violence was organised and wars conducted were much more multilayered and ambiguous than suggested by the academic, and holistically used term 'post-war order'. This article shall focus on the La Plata region, what is today essentially Argentina and Uruguay, and aims at describing the coexistence of various post-war orders in a kind of space that particularly generated possibilities for violence, the *frontier.* Contemporaries during this time called this space simply *desierto,* desert. This case study reveals certain characteristics typical of other *frontier*-regions in Latin America. However I shall not mean to suggest that these characteristics of the La Plata region can be generalized to other places or times.

But as in other border territories in which the organisation and symbolic order of violence played a key role in the reproduction of social ordering, in the case of the *frontiers* at La Plata during much of the 18th and 19th centuries, "it is hard to isolate specific phases of armed conflict from continuous openly violent relationships" (Osterhammel 1995, 48). Nevertheless one would be mistaken in concluding that the actors eschew the contemplation of war and peace with a preference for the latter, for provided that the situation held the promise of certain advantages for them, and as there was not much difference between war and peace, each had their own advantages. In fact, they created orders in which war and peace were close. They ascribe meaning to the situation in consideration of their specific localities. For these orders were contentious and contested; they were ambiguous and they competed with other political endeavours and beliefs, which were conceptualised in hegemonic terms, bringing state-centric ideas of order into the local arena. Which kind of orders were they, what kind of significance did they have and how much violence could they endure without ceasing to constitute 'peace'? This article deals with these questions. The terms 'post-war order' and 'peace', and respectively 'peacetime' are used synonymously according to the sources, though we have to keep in mind that peacetime ('post-war order') in Latin American history of the 19th century was hardly peaceful.

The term 'frontier'

We can describe the *frontier* as a territorially open transitory space, without a clearly delineated area, situated between a state-like polity and the communities of pre- and extra-governmentally organised populations. Even though these were largely indigenous people, *frontiers* could also develop in remote areas where absconded slaves formed communities *(maroon societies).* These *frontiers* developed as a result of land seizure by Europeans, i.e. they were part of the colonial practice even though many variations existed, considering the grassland in the South, the forest areas in the Amazon or the arid region in Northern Mexico. Within the field of history and even to date the term *frontier* is being shaped by the famous lecture held by Frederick J. Turner in 1893 in Chicago (this also applies in the negative sense for Latin American history; see Rausch 1984, 246). Turner, whose family was part of the westward track in the USA, was born in 1861 in Portage, Wisconsin. During this time Portage was part of the *frontier,* and life in this small town was shaped by people who were viewed as typical for the *frontiers* (Nobles 1997). Turner grew up within such a space and presumably considered the *frontier* as naturally developing. Referring to his childhood, he countered his critics in a letter he wrote in 1925, asking "is it strange that I saw the frontier as a real thing?" (Waechter 1996, 83). Compared to this, perceptions of space within the academic field have changed. We no longer assume that spaces merely exist. Rather we are convinced that they come into existence by people's imagination and their every day social practices. Georg Simmel (1903) articulated this in the words that space acquires meaning "by the soul's arrangement and resumé of its different parts". Thus spatial 'structures' and their relevance for research only acquire meaning and are only accentuated when people ascribe meaning to them.

During that time how did people in La Plata comprehend the *frontier?* Caution must be applied in considering the sources. Most of what we assume to know about the *frontier* nowadays we know from public officers', merchants' or missionaries' accounts surviving in archives. From the perspective of other sections of the population, the *frontier* has been a "silent world" (Villalobos 1982), which left no written record (though in the 18th century some indigenous *caciques* in La Plata began employing Spanish typists for prestige reasons; see Schindler 1967). Therefore such views are limited to within archives in which historians usually work. Yet we do know that the contemporary actors did not have a similar notion of space to the academic idea of the *frontier.*

In the 16th century, the city councils in Southern America spoke of *términos,* thus the edge of the city, when referring to the border, or they spoke of *extramuros,* which can be translated as "outside of the walls" (of the settlement) (Riekenberg 1996, 64). **[3]** Both conveyed relatively accurately the Spanish and Creole vague notion of space and territoriality within the *frontier.* As *'extramuro'* describes an open space, this term was a more precise equivalent to Turner's term *frontier* compared to the term *frontera,* which had been widely used since the early 17th century. The colonial administration spoke pejoratively of such spaces. Within urban administration, the image emerged of frontier spaces as of a way of life of the *gente despedida.* Literally this means the lost or dismissed people, dismissed from urban civilisation, lost from the city, lost from the state and its ideas about order. Under the influence of the contemporary climate theories, the grassland for the *frontier* degenerated to a breeding ground for barbarism (Sarmiento 1845; 2007). 'Barbarism' became a permanent narrative when during the 19th century the liberally-inclined class or literary groups in Buenos Aires or in Parisian salons spoke about the *frontier* in the grassland of the La Plata-region.

Therefore the *frontier* became a symbolically constructed *space of possibilities,* obviously not in Turner's sense of a source of political utopia, but in the sense of the destruction of local realities, which reacted awkwardly toward the idea of the state and state-sponsored civilisation. Low demographic figures reinforced this. La Plata was considered sparsely populated. During the late 18th century barely some ten thousand peoples lived in the city and province of Buenos Aires. This is why the Argentinian historian Halperin Donghi (1996, 19) writes that due to the demographic void in La Plata even in the early 19th century there was no society, but only an 'outline' of it. Therefore political elites saw themselves liberated from the constraints of a 'society' which did not exist as such. Rather they phantasised about its destruction. The first time this came to light was during the Bourbon reforms when the colonial state grew internally and externally. In 1777 Pedro Cevallos had been entrusted with the newly formed government of the vice kingdom of La Plata. Cevallos, who had studied in Madrid, was a vigorous civil servant and military officer. In a memorandum of 1778 he suggested to the city council of Buenos Aires 'the extermination' of the "hostile barbaric indigenous people" in the *frontier* (Biedma 1924, 127). Until this point, during times of war the concept of pacification had prevailed. Even though the term was obviously a euphemism, deliberately used by the military and civil servants, it had nevertheless been a defensive war concept. In comparison, and in the words of Cevallos (and

[3] From the Middle Ages until 1492 there had been *frontiers* on the Iberian Peninsula in the region of Castilian-Moorish frontier spaces. Interestingly, their imagination hardly influenced the understanding of the 'new' frontier spaces in (Spanish) America.

simultaneously in the North of Mexico; see Riekenberg 1996, 67), a concept of destruction emerged, which aimed at state-led, systematically planned and militarily conducted exterminations of the so-called *yndios bárbaros* (Riekenberg 1996). **[4]** The project of a hegemonic conceptualisation of post-war order of the *frontier* was taking shape. It was no coincidence that a Spanish newcomer to the La Plata-region carried this project forward.

On 'war' and 'peace'

The initially-cited term 'intermediate state', which was 'neither war nor peace' (Herberg-Rothe 2003, 30) is a slightly awkward term to describe the relationship between war and peace in the *frontier*. Its strongest shortcoming is generally adhering to the 'Westphalian' concept of war and peace and not taking into account the development of different local realities of war and peace in the *frontier*. The problem of describing the contiguousness and conjunction between the two leads to considerable terminological difficulties. Primarily, this is due to the spread and the routinisation of the act of violence in the *frontier*. The absence of a superior force of power, a *Leviathan,* forced the people in the *frontier* to provide for their own safety, which fostered their familiarity with violence. The economic conditions of the grassland also created a routine use of violence, as armed horsemen, herding cattle, had to defend the freely roaming livestock from thieves and smugglers. Hence it would be a mistake to locate the reasons for the violent atmosphere solely in the stigmatisation of the space as a place of barbarism, as done by the city council and the literate elites *(literatos).* Rather, the *frontier* generated a distinct order, in which acts of violence regulated social relations, urging people to use violence to ensure security. Space with its specific conditions generated possibilities for violence with which people had to engage in order to survive (cp. Baberowski 2008).

In the light of our topic it is noteworthy that ordinary violence and violence of war appear to share a common ground, exacerbating the differentiation between war and peace. As Chasteen argued (1995, 29), it has been easy to transform a group of armed horsemen in the grassland into a regular cavalry. However this was only possible as the weapons used during open warfare and in daily quarrels or disputes of honour were the same. During a *guerra gaucha,* a war in the grassland, rifles were hardly used, but instead knives, lances or *boleadores* **[5]**, weapons carried around on an everyday basis. Yet during what we call wartime other forms of violence

[4] For further details see Riekenberg (1996). Thereto Weber (2005, 326) writes that my reasoning was too 'schematic'. The use of the term extermination is, according to him, a mere "rhetorical flourish", not a "change of politics". I consider it problematic to merely brush over linguistic changes in primary sources as Weber does, thereby ignoring structural changes within the historical context.

[5] These were two or three stones, wrapped in leather, strapped together and then thrown at a fleeing animal, which if successful was to tumble and fall.

emerged, leading to what we term brutalisation. For example, the heart of a slain enemy was removed or skin peeled off so as to make tobacco pouches (Salvatore 2003, 257). This kind of behaviour apparently did not occur during peace-time violence, and thus would be congruent with Clausewitz's (1937, 62) view that during war violence is escalated to 'the utmost'. Such episodes of violence are very significant as they reveal how 'war' and 'peace' were differentiated in the contemporary imagination. On the one hand we can note how routine acts of violence from everyday life penetrated into violence of war as horsemen used the body of the inferior enemy in a way similar to the way they used livestock in their everyday economic life. In this instance, ordinary violence and violence of war merge closely. On the other hand there is an elaborate violent ritual during which the winner appropriates the body of the enemy beyond death. Beth Conklin (2001, 95) described similar patterns of behaviour from an ethnological point of view among the Wari of the Amazon, who treated the body of an enemy in the same vein as those of animals, with the purpose of creating dominance and distinguishing between friend and foe. Despite all the overlap, 'war' and 'peace' diverge at this point. I would not go as far as to claim that according to the forms of violence used it is possible to conclude whether contemporary actors imagined to be in states of war or peace. Yet the correlation between types of acts of violence and state of peace or war elucidates the contemporary understanding of violent relationships, indicating that during this time actors differentiated between war and peace.

In order to gain a better understanding of how sections of the population of the *frontier* comprehended war and peace it is essential to look at the 'structures' of the order of violence. Obviously, the actors do not operate without any form of constraint or presupposition. On the contrary, spatial factors shaped „structures", thereby determining as the options for acts of violence. Besides the absence of a Leviathan, or the overlap between ordinary and warlike acts of violence, the number of actors capable of war in the *frontier* is noteworthy. Local military groups, state-run military groups – such as the *blandengues,* for the first time constituted in 1752 in the province of Buenos Aires –, armed herdsmen, caudillistic followers, gang armies and smuggler gangs, all partly overlapping as for example the militia was the basis for its followers, competed over the control of resources, trading routes and the means of violence. Possibly the most important war actors were the *cacicazgos,* which were originally indigenous groups of the Pampas. Yet already during the early colonial times deserting militiamen, run-away African slaves and urban refugees began integrating into such groups. Observers estimated around 1850 that more

than half of the combatants of the cacicazgos stemmed from the non-indigenous population and there is little reason in assuming the ratio was any different from that around 1800.

The *cacicazgos* lead *maloca* wars, i.e. bellicose incursions into Spanish-Creole settler areas. The *cacicazgos* controlled the salt deposits in the Pampa, crucial for utilising livestock. They were especially efficient at kidnapping, which became an integral part of the *frontier* economy. Polygamous structures allowed for the integration of kidnapped women into family and clan structures. Yet prisoners were also used in exchange for alcohol, weapons, money or horses. This practice of kidnapping for commercial reasons grew to the extent that the government in Buenos Aires warned in 1790 that the kidnapping and demanding of ransom threatened "to become a branch of commerce" (Socolow 1992, 82) in the *frontier.* From today's perspective it appears that a "market of violence" (Elwert 1997) had emerged. Yet in light of Tyrell's (1999, 277) criticism of the concept of "market of violence" I consider it appropriate to use this term figuratively rather than literally. We can imagine circumstances in which the economy rested on acts of violence, or in which acts of violence become the broker in economic transactions. Around 1880 theft of livestock, smuggling and kidnapping constituted the most important activities in the market of violence in La Plata. Yet noteworthy differences remained, as the *frontier* in La Plata constituted no homogeneous space of violence. Rather there were different "degrees of personal security" (Salvatore 2003, 104) within those different parts of La Plata. The new South in the Pampa, south of Buenos Aires, was regarded as particularly dangerous. Older and more agrarian parts of the *frontier* in the vicinity of cities or settlements were comparatively much safer to live in.

The effects of the "market of violence" on the organisation of war and peace were considerable. Permanent peace (post-war order) was not possible in the *frontier* as long as there was the market of violence, for its logic precluded a time 'after' war. On the contrary, the dynamics and wealth in the market of violence in La Plata were so enormous that the *cacicazgos* managed in early 19th century "to build a more hierarchical and military political formation" (Jones 1995, 110). The *cacicazgos* became political actors in the new 'nation'. Through the concept of extermination and ethnicisation of social reality the Spanish officers or the government in Buenos Aires attempted to break up the power of emerging networks that existed in the market of violence, so as to establish 'peace'. The 'Westphalian' principle was that it was the state's obligation to create post-war order. This principle failed to work as long as the market of violence in La Plata was

lucrative and strong enough to support those actors. Besides this, the structures of the market of violence had no ethnic dimensions in their acts of violence, as favoured by the government. The logic of the market of violence was more pragmatic. After all, the ratio of the military power has to be kept in mind. Experienced militia commanders in the *frontier* warned the government in Buenos Aires repetitively of an all too daring policy against the *cacicazgos.* As to legitimise such policies the government used the same disputes of the early colonial period, during which Spanish lawyers and congregational clerics had argued about the legal status of the indigenous population in America and their protection by the Spanish crown (Riekenberg 1996). This is why Cevallo's aforementioned plan was not completed.

According to the Spanish civil servants' and military officials' understanding at the time, war was defined as "a dispute between those ruling countries and states" (Nuñez de Taboada 1820, 703) and therefore peace orders could only be negotiated between those actors or 'systems'. Nevertheless the *frontier* created a reality with its own institutions, which we could call *particular* post-war orders. In contrast to the 'Westphalian' model of post-war orders these were not, or were only to a certain extent, warranted by the state. They were lower in their judicial obligation and they included only certain areas, which were neither clearly defined nor demarcated, and did not encompass the whole territory over which the state intended to gain control. The post-war orders were also not finalised by the state itself, at least in all cases. The state was only marginally institutionalised, if at all, and its resources were concentrated within the vice kingdom La Plata on the urban centre Buenos Aires and the Andean highland. Hence in the grassland of the Pampa, the state delegated its own power to private sureties, including the right to negotiate and finalise peace agreements. Thus the government in Buenos Aires gave licenses to landowners in the *frontier,* so that they could negotiate and sign peace accords with those *caciques* (Jones 1995, 111), a practice lasting approximately until 1835.

The particular post-war orders received their support as well as their weak stability from their own institutions. Following the Chilean model, in irregular intervals so-called parliaments were held in the *frontier.* Lasting several days, these were meetings attended by the members of the *cacicazgos,* civil servants, militia officers or merchants. Political negotiations and palaver, business agreements, games on horseback and alcohol consumption gave the meetings their distinct character. They were places of communication, at which agreements were made and business done. Gifts were exchanged and sons of *caciques* were endowed with officer patents of the Spa-

nish-Creole militia. This was done for the purpose of creating clientele bonds with friendly or 'christianised' *yndios,* as they were called, who were benevolently exempted from the category of barbarians. These post-war orders were fragile, rarely long lasting and mostly only locally successful (Jones 1997). As there was no overarching judicial system including both sides, mutual obligations were supposedly weak, although we cannot be certain of this. Simultaneously, there were attempts to regulate war and peace more strictly, such as in the case of the agreement of 1820 between the urban government of Buenos Aires and the *caciques* of the Puelches of the South, demarcating the different "areas of jurisdiction" for the two parties (Riekenberg 1996, 65). The context was the intention of preventing the *cacicazgos* from further interference in the domestic political conflicts of the new republican order in La Plata. In February 1820, militia from the inner province Santa Fe had captured Buenos Aires, and indigenous groups of horsemen had fought alongside the militia of the interior.

The language of the agreements reveals that the Spanish-Creole office holders defined the *caciquismo* as statist or state-like entities. In this way the local reality of war became integrated into their own conventions and already existing patterns of thought. A war was nationalised symbolically, while in reality it was not a national one. At the same time this definition helped in strengthening the status of the *cacicazgos* as political actors. Relationships of violence in the *frontier* and the existing network of war and peace were not solely imparted first and foremost economically as suggested by the image of the market of violence. Rather the conditions were multilayered and ambiguous. Similarly, the particular post-war orders were not merely an expression of (state) non-governance of the market of violence. Rather they were an expression of the *political* situation and undertakings, as well as the element of political contention between different polities and powerful groups in the *frontier,* of which the state was merely one. In some respect they mirrored circumstances of the early 19th century in La Plata, apart from some urban centres including, for example, the harbour city Buenos Aires, where "intentions and often failed experiments for the constitution of polities" (Sabato 2009, 195) had to serve in lieu of a consolidated state.

About 'small' and 'big' violence

The *cacicazgos* conducted their last big cattle- and slave rustlings in 1876, during which groups of horsemen are alleged to have removed 300.000 cattle and took 500 prisoners, releasing them in exchange for ransom. Shortly afterwards Cevallos' plans can be said to have come to fruition. In 1879/80, during the so-called 'desert campaigns' *(campañas al desierto),* the *cacicazgos* in the Pampas and in Patagonia suffered military defeat, a few years after those in northern Chaco. This was made possible by the development and professionalisation of a national army (in 1869 the military academy in Argentina was founded) that was to replace the militia. The improved infrastructure through the construction of the railway and telegraphs also played a role. Above all the balance of power had shifted. The 'national' state of Argentina had managed to strengthen its central power during the triple alliance war against Paraguay (1865–1870) whereas the political undertaking of the *cacicazgos* to form a political, state-like confederation after 1850 was doomed to failure.

Even though the literature refers to extermination campaigns it is unclear what the real magnitude the war of 1879/80 was. General Rosas, commander of the troops, mentioned the figure of more than 1.300 *yndios* killed, though the term *yndio* included all people that had joined the *cacicazgos.* In other literature the number of direct war related losses on the side of the *dominio caciquil* is set lower; Sáenz Quesada (2001, 384) uses the number of 300 war victims. Yet without a doubt, there was a disposition to extermination on the side of the military and the liberal political elites in Argentina. At a time of positivist ideas about progress with the reception of the modern concept of race, the willingness for genocide grew within the liberal elites in the military, academia and politics. Argentinian physicians stated that the Malthusian law required one "to finish off" the *yndios* (Bartolomé 1985, 43). The aim was the "purification" (Karstedt 2006, 119) of the territory from "barbarians".

The question of how 'big' a war was is important for an understanding of the post-war order, because wars claiming vehement losses and extreme levels of destruction would supposedly lead to greater disruption between the 'before' and 'after'. Conversely, less significant transitions between war and post-war periods lead us to assume that the destructiveness of the war would be comparatively low. Otherwise the claim that "life goes on as much as before", as Centeno puts it, would be inconceivable. It is therefore useful to investigate the war's magnitude and directly ask

the question as to how many combatants were killed during the conflict so as to gain a clearer picture of war in Latin America in the 19th century. Now, of course the number of those killed during the time of the war is obviously unknown. This is partially a result of the sources. We have to be cautious with the records of chroniclers. Usually they were officers, war participants themselves, and in the books they exaggerated the dimensions of battles in which they had taken part. Nevertheless their data is still used in some of the literature today.

Were the battles akin to butcheries I am sceptical, especially of theoretical considerations concerning the character of segmentary relationships of violence. Yet even more recent works such as Fowler's on Mexico or Euraque's on Honduras (Riekenberg 2007) suggest that many wars in Latin America in the 19th century were by no means particularly intense in violence, on the contrary they were comparatively *low* in violence, in other words 'limited wars'. Hence, records relating to the continuation of reciprocal patterns of behaviour during the war, for example those violent acts perpetrated in the name of honour or for reasons of revenge, confirm this. Violence during collective combat operations could be "individualised" as Fuente (2000, 52) shows. Hence, reciprocal patterns of social behaviour united 'war' and 'peace'. This ensured the continuation of behaviour as well as the social organisation beyond the type of political or warlike fracture, in this way giving the wars a 'small' character. The idea of extermination on the other hand was differently embedded. It ruptured reciprocal forms of the organisation of violence and caused significant levels of violence, simultaneously producing other forms of post-war order. These were conceived hegemonically and had strong ideological content, which would have not existed in the particular post-war orders in 'the market of violence'.

The 'big' violence aimed at the appropriation and structuring of space by the state (see Nouzeilles 1999). In La Plata this was based on three strategies, which became the key components of a hegemonial post-war order. It entailed the already mentioned violence of extermination, the cartographisation of the landscape, as well as the musealisation of history. Prior to the late 18th century the Spanish and Creole knew little about the geography around the La Plata area. Basically, their knowledge of the territory was limited to the trading corridor linking Buenos Aires with the Andes area. During the Bourbon era, the desire for the cartographisation of space grew and scientific explorations, usually linked with military purposes, increased. The exploration, the map, and, later on, the measuring brought the state's claim to power into areas which were unfamiliar. In 1774 Manchester born Jesuit Tomás Falkner, who had been living in La Plata

since 1730 and temporarily teaching mathematics at the university of Córdoba, produced an ethnographic description of Patagonia. In 1778 the Spanish captain Fancisco de Viedma undertook an expedition from Montevideo southwards. In 1781 the Spanish marine officer and agronomist Félix de Azara explored on account of the crown the area north of the Rio de La Plata (Uruguay). In 1789 the Spanish crown sent a scientific commission with biologists and geologists to Montevideo and Patagonia. All these explorations advanced the formation of modern territoriality and the belief in a measurable, homogeneous, ultimately controllable space.

The triad of scientific exploration, military destruction and symbolic appropriation of the *frontier* was documented by Inés Yujnovsky (2008). She refers to Estanislao Zeballos, founder of the "Argentinian Geographic Institute", later minister for foreign affairs, who accompanied the soldiers on their 'desert campaign' in 1879/80, together with other topographers, engineers and photographers. Subsequently Zeballos published a widely read study of the geography, natural history and ethnography of the south. **[7]** Particularly insightful are the copper engravings illustrating this publication, which are based on photographs taken by Arturo Mathilde, a young photographer of Swiss origin, during the military expedition. A comparison between the original photographs and the copper engravings or illustrations designated for the publication reveal the kind of revision of the photographs that had been done. We see the manner in which Zeballos designed the picture of a virgin, monumental nature, in which he placed the assumed traditional elements of rural life, all becoming formative parts of the typical idiosyncrasies of Argentinian nationality (*gaucho,* horse). Zeballos portrays the *yndios* as "buildings blocks of a non recurring past" (Yujnovsky 2008, 113). Thus they became a museological element of the nation, cleared for studies by academia (Yujnovsky 2008, 115). The symbolic post-war order of the *frontier* was a museological sketch of order, its history was "dead and disappeared" (Navarro Floria 2007, 270).

Staatsferne – a useful category?

Basing the term post-war order on the terminological triad of war, peace and state, the article points to the question of how post-war orders were produced in *staatsfernen* spaces, i.e. spaces characterised by "state-distant political orders". These were spaces in which the state had no monopoly of violence and in which the state's ideas about local and ethnic population groups held them as something alien with regard to its own world, to the point of violent rejection of

[7] Estanislao Zeballos (1881) *Viaje al país de los araucanos. Descripción amena de la República Argentina.* Buenos Aires: Jacobo Preuser.

the state's penetration on the part of such groups. In order to prevent any misunderstandings, no scenarios relating to ethnology shall be evoked, though there was an "intergroup aboriginal warfare" in the *frontier* area of La Plata, in Northern Gran Chaco, lasting until the 20th century (Mendoza 2007, 205). In contrast to incidents reported by ethnology, *Staatsferne* can only be defined in relation to the state, which for obvious reasons is a major deficit for this term. As it is generally known, research defined what in this instance is referred to as *Staatsferne,* as a collapse in the rationality of bureaucratic administration, as part or result of corruption or the creation of clientele structures „in" and „next to" the state. Nevertheless attempting to define *Staatsferne* as a lack of rational-bureaucratic organisation does not suffice. *Staatsferne* was not merely due to a deficit in state organisation. Rather *Staatsferne* was a local arrangement of power and a constitutive element of statehood itself.

In the case of present Latin America we have "smaller" spaces foremost in mind when referring to *Staatsferne* or similar terms. Hence the journalist Eva Karnovsky (2000) described the prison *El Rodeo,* situated near Caracas, as a space of *Staatsferne.* In a similar vein, the documentary *Tropa de Elite,* produced in 2007 by the director J. Padilha, shows the kind of 'war' that a special unit of the military police wages in the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro. From a historical point of view, the macro regions in which whole territories were *staatsfern* are equally significant. Though there were different kinds of variations in the genesis of *Staatsferne.* This is due to the fact that for the Spanish-American colonial region, apart from the Portuguese-Brazilian case, one can hardly speak of 'a' state. Rather the colonial state in America formed a distinct entity with all kinds of regional realities. Particularly, in Spanish-American history one has to differentiate whether the formation of *staatsfernen* territories occurred through the impact of local, nonetheless closed and strong polities, which kept the state at a distance; or whether such formation took place foremost as the idea and institutions of state found no support in a loosely arranged, scattered and demographically void society, thus statehood was lost in the emptiness of space. Examples of the former are found in the key areas of Spanish rule in America in the highlands of Mexico or Peru, whereas examples of the latter are found particularly at the fringes such as in the case dealt with in this article.

The term *Staatsferne* refers to the questions as to how statehood formed in people's daily routines and their ideas about the world, and as to how power and dependencies formed together with the term 'state' an image of politically conceived authority. From such a point of view the

state appears not as a set of rules or an institutional arrangement, but as cultural matter of fact; as a network of symbols, narratives and infrastructures through which bodies, places, and entities were newly arranged in order to constitute and portray power (Steinmetz 1999, 27). From such a perspective, people's illusions as well as their misunderstandings about what the state 'is', which in the literature are usually judged as deficits of state formation in Latin America, turn out to be constitutive elements of state formation. Yet then one is faced with new challenges regarding methodologies. More so than in other cases, for Latin American history it implies the necessity of an incorporation of a cultural-anthropological perspective when examining the state (as well as war an post-war orders), even more strongly than done in works of historians working on Latin America. This would allow explorations as to how the – foremost – illiterate, and inside 'their' state ethnically foreign, population groups assigned meaning to the idea of the state (or war and peace for that matter). "An ideal ethnography" writes Anton Blok (1985, 85), "would be a description in the language of the area studied." Why should that be any different for history?

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