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“Consumption and Excess in Spanish America (1700-1830)”

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‘Consumption and Excess in Spanish America (1700-1830)’

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It may be said without exaggeration, that the finest stuffs made in countries, where industry is always inventing something new, are more generally seen in Lima than in any other place; vanity and ostentation not being restrained by custom or law.¹

With this grand overstatement the Spanish travellers Jorge Juan and Antonio de Ulloa summed up their account of fashion in 1740s Lima. Dress in the capital of colonial Peru, according to these men, differed from that of Europe only in its extravagance. European goods and clothing, they insisted, were widely available, which allowed the ladies of Lima to indulge their immoderate taste for Flemish lace and pearls, to the ruination of their husbands. Such was these women’s passion for finery that they often succumbed to uterine cancer, brought on, the travellers were certain, by ‘their excessive use of perfumes’.² Moreover, mid-eighteenth-century Lima was, in the eyes of Juan and Ulloa, a city of sartorial democracy:

Nor is the distinction between the several classes very great, for the use of all sorts of cloth being allowed, everyone wears what he can purchase. So that it is not uncommon to see a mulatto, or any other mechanic, dressed in a tissue equal to anything that can be worn by a more opulent person, they all greatly affect fine clothes.³

¹ Jorge Juan and Antonio de Ulloa, *A Voyage to South America* [1806], (New York: Knopf, 1964), 196.

² Juan and Ulloa, *A Voyage to South America*, 196, 214.

³ Juan and Ulloa, *A Voyage to South America*, 196.

Juan and Ulloa paint a striking picture of colonial Spanish America as a land awash with European luxury products ('stuffs made in countries where industry is always inventing something new'), and where the use of fine clothing was not controlled by any sort of legal restriction ('vanity and ostentation not being restrained by custom or law'). Neither feature accords very well with current understanding of either eighteenth-century Spanish American trade or Bourbon colonial legislation (let alone our knowledge of the widespread poverty that affected many in the colonial world), and it would be easy to dismiss Juan and Ulloa's account as mere hyperbole.⁴ I do not wish to argue that their descriptions of colonial life are in any way accurate. Rather, I am interested in exploring the meanings they and others ascribed to the idea of *luxury* and luxurious consumption. Certainly the extravagance of colonial costume seems for Juan and Ulloa to have served as a metaphor for the unrestrained corruption that they considered typical of creole government in Spain's American colonies. In this and other writings Juan and Ulloa provided a 'devastating description of corruption and maladministration in colonial government, designed to demonstrate that corruption and inefficiency were deeply ingrained in the colonial administration of Peru'.⁵ The richness of colonial dress merely reflected the 'delicacy and . . . luxury' in which colonial officials wallowed, which in turn led inexorably to venality and abuse.⁶

The Spanish travellers Juan and Ulloa were not alone in using luxurious consumption as a metaphor for political and moral corruption. Eighteenth century European philosophers were very concerned about the impact of consumption,

⁴ For eighteenth-century trade, see John Fisher, *Relaciones económicas entre España y América hasta la independencia* (Madrid: MAPFRE, 1992); and for Bourbon social legislation, see, *inter alia*, Juan Pedro Viqueira Albán, *Propriety and Permissiveness in Bourbon Mexico*, Sonya Lipsett-Rivera and Sergio Rivera Ayala (trans.) (Wilmington: SR Books, 1999).

⁵ For Juan and Ulloa's analysis of colonial corruption, see Anthony McFarlane, 'Political Corruption and Reform in Bourbon Spanish America', in Walter Little and Eduardo Posada-Carbó (eds), *Political Corruption in Europe and Latin America* (London: Macmillan, 1996). The quotation is from 43-4.

⁶ Jorge Juan and Antonio de Ulloa, *Noticias secretas de América* (Madrid: Historia 16, 1990), 119.

particularly of luxury goods, on the wealth of states and the morality of their citizens. Writers in Europe agonised over whether the production and purchase of luxury goods functioned as the motor of national economies, as Bernard Mandeville had argued in his 1723 *Fable of the Bees*, or whether, on the contrary, such activities weakened both states and the bodies of those individuals unable to resist the blandishments of fashion.⁷ Luxurious consumption, such anti-luxury critics maintained, led to effeminacy. 'It is in the rustic clothing of the fieldworker and not underneath the gilding of the courtier that one will find bodily strength and vigour of the soul', insisted Rousseau.⁸ He, along with Mandeville, Adam Smith, David Hulme, and many others contributed to this eighteenth-century 'luxury debate'. But to return to our Spanish travellers—Juan and Ulloa did not need to resort to the writings of English and French philosophers to access this imagery. In Spain too writers analysed the concept of *lujo*, or 'luxury', and debated whether luxury provided an essential stimulus to the economy, or whether it led to corruption, effeminisation, and, ultimately, damnation. Works such as Juan Sempere y Guarinos, *Historia del lujo y de las leyes suntuarias en España* (1788) stressed the beneficial aspects of the luxury trades, while others, such as José Cadalso's 1789 imitation of the *Lettres persanes*, worried that excessive consumption, particularly of foreign goods, would weaken the nation. Cadalso's Moroccan traveller Gazel observed, in language not unlike that of Rousseau:

Examine the history of all nations, and you will see that the authority of each has rested on custom. On this strong base they have grown, from this growth has come abundance, this abundance has produced luxury, from luxury has

⁷ See, for examples of the former view, Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees: or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits* [1723], 2 vols, (Oxford, 1966), I:3-251; and Jean-François Melon, *Of Luxury*, in *A Political Essay upon Commerce, written in French by Monsieur M****, Translated, with some Annotations, and remarks By David Bindon, Esq.* (Dublin, 1739). For the latter view, see Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 'Discourse which won the prize of the Academy of Dijon in the year 1750' ['Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts'], in Donald Cress (ed.), *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: The Basic Political Writings* (Indianapolis, 1987), 1-21.

⁸ Rousseau, 'Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts', 4.

followed effeminisation, effeminisation gives birth to weakness, and from weakness has come ruin.⁹

It would be easy, then, to interpret Juan and Ulloa's description of Limeño luxury as nothing more than an exotic setting for a familiar debate; a Spanish response to the *Fable of the Bees*. Colonial Peruvian government, Juan and Ulloa asserted, was corrupt, and this corruption was mirrored in the decadent clothing worn by the capital's inhabitants. To interpret their writing in this way, however, would be to overlook the ambivalent nature of Juan and Ulloa's account. At the same time that they criticise Lima's inhabitants for their predatory nature and ungovernability (local women, in particular, 'scarce stoop to the will of their husbands'), at the same time that they offer such criticisms, they also make plain their admiration for the city's grandness.¹⁰ Here, for example, is an extract from another lengthy description of the sumptuous clothing worn by Limeñas:

[underneath] the petticoat . . . hangs a border of very fine lace, sewed to the bottom of the under petticoat; through which the ends of their garters are discovered, embroidered with gold and silver, and sometimes set with pearls; but the latter is not common. The upper petticoat, which is of velvet, or some rich stuff, is fringed all round, and not less crowded with ornaments than those described elsewhere in this work. But be the ornaments what they will, whether of fringe, lace, or ribands, they are always exquisitely fine. The shift sleeves . . . are covered with rolls of laces, variegated in such a manner as to render the whole truly elegant.¹¹

Elegance, as much as excess, marks the dress of eighteenth-century Spanish Americans in the eyes of Juan and Ulloa.

Juan and Ulloa were not the only ones to view Spain's American colonies as a land of luxurious sartorial elegance. European travellers from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries lingered over descriptions of luxurious colonial dress,

⁹ See José Cadalso, *Cartas Marruecas* [1789] (Madrid: Espasa, 1950); and Juan Sempere y Guarinos, *Historia del luxo y de las leyes suntuarias de España*, 2 vols (Madrid, 1788). The quotation is from Cadalso, *Cartas Marruecas*, 168-9. Juan Rico, 'Criptoburguesía y cambio económico en la Ilustración española', *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos*, vol. 408 (1984), provides an excellent overview of the Spanish luxury debates.

¹⁰ Juan and Ulloa, *A Voyage to South America*, 200.

¹¹ Juan and Ulloa, *A Voyage to South America*, 196-7. (See also 71, 84, 138, 197-198.)

particularly in Mexico City and Lima, the two most important viceregal capitals in Spanish America. 'Of all the parts of the world, the people here are most expensive in their habit', reported the British marine captain William Betagh of 1720s Lima.¹² Some writers agreed with Juan and Ulloa that such expensive dressing was ultimately destructive; the French traveller Amédée Frézier claimed that Limeñas' 'insatiable appetite for pearls and jewels, for bracelets, earrings and other paraphernalia . . . saps the wealth of husbands and lovers'.¹³ Overall, however, seventeenth and eighteenth-century descriptions of Spanish American dress combine a concern for the destructive impact of luxury with a wide-eyed admiration for its splendour and elegance. 'Both men and women are excessive in their apparel, using more silks than stuffs and cloth. . . A hatband and rose made of diamonds in a gentleman's hat is common, and a hat-band of pearls is ordinary in a tradesman', observed the English priest Thomas Gage in the mid-seventeenth century.¹⁴ Women in Santiago de Chile, noted eighteenth-century English sailor John Byron, 'are remarkably handsome, and very extravagant in their dress':

They plait [their hair] behind in four plaits, and twist them round a bodkin, at each end of which is a diamond rose. Their shifts are all over lace, as is a little tight waistcoat they wear over them. Their petticoats are open before, and lap over, and have commonly three rows of very rich lace of gold or silver. In winter, they have an upper waistcoat of cloth of gold or silver, and in summer of the finest lawn, covered all over with the finest Flanders lace.¹⁵

For Byron, what attracts attention is those 'little tight waistcoats', rather than the possible impact on the Chilean economy of the importation of all that Flemish lace. From such accounts it seems as if even the slaves of wealthy women, acting as extensions of the bodies of their owners, display great finery. In Cartagena, slave

¹² William Betagh, *A Voyage Round the World, being an Account of a Remarkable Enterprise begun in the Year 1719*, (London: T. Combes, 1728), 266.

¹³ Amadeo Frézier, *Relación del viaje por el mar del sur* [1716], (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1982), 191 (see also 219-222).

¹⁴ Thomas Gage, *Travels in the New World* [1648], (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), 68.

women strolled through the streets adorned with golden necklaces and earrings, strings of pearls and silken shawls, alleged one eighteenth-century Spanish friar.¹⁶ Altogether, the meaning of colonial Spanish America's supposed dedication to luxurious dress is complex. On the one hand, it may signal the region's general decadence and inability to govern itself. On the other hand, it also acts as a marker of the region's wealth and grandeur. The poet Bernardo de Balbuena, for example, argued that the 'adornments, utility, grace and beauty' of Mexico City's inhabitants (visible in their 'finery, brooches, cameos, trappings, clothes, silks and brocades, . . . gilt embroideries, embroidered borders, gold and silver laces, jewels, jewel cases, pearls, precious stones, pearls, gold, silver, embroideries . . .') contributed to the city's 'grandeza'.¹⁷ This view is presented with particular clarity in the comments of Agustín de Vetancurt, a Mexico City chronicler who wrote in 1698 that:

The beauty of this city is in its inhabitants, because of their elegance and cleanliness . . . The poorest woman has her pearls and jewels, and considers herself unhappy if she does not have her gold jewellery to wear on holidays. . . Great is the elegance and lustre, the cleanliness, and adornment of the rich, officers, and even those of the least importance, [who] sport ruffs and black capes, travel about in carriages, and on horseback; it is greatness, but whoever was to see everyone together, not making distinctions between the rich noble or gentleman, and the artisan, would think it impolitic, but it is the glory of this country, which inspires majesty, aggrandises humble hearts, and annihilates wretched conditions.¹⁸

¹⁵ John Byron, *Byron's Narrative, containing an Account of the Great Distresses Suffered by Himself, and his Companions on the Coasts of Patagonia from the Year 1740 till their Arrival in England, 1746*, (Belfast, 1844), 105-6.

¹⁶ Fray Juan de Santa Gertrudis Serra, *Maravillas de la naturaleza* 2 vols (Bogotá: Empresa Nacional de Publicaciones, 1956), I:43. See also Byron, *Byron's Narrative*, 107; and Gage, *Travels in the New World*, 68, 73.

¹⁷ 'Galas, libreas, broches, camafeos, /jaeces, telas, sedas y brocados, / . . . escarches, bordaduras, entorchados, /joyas, joyeros, perlas, pedrería, /aljófár, oro, plata, recamados . . . ' (Bernardo de Balbuena, *Grandeza mexicana* [1604], (Rome, 1988), 70, 78.)

¹⁸ Agustín de Vetancurt, 'Tratado de la Ciudad de Mexico y las Grandezas que la ilustran despues que la fundaron españoles' [1698], in Agustín de Vetancurt, Juan Manuel de San Vicente and Juan de Viera, *La ciudad de Mexico en el siglo XVIII (1690-1780): Tres crónicas*, Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes (Mexico, 1990), 46-7. I have modified the translation given in Ilona Katzew, 'Casta Painting: Identity and Social Stratification in Colonial Mexico', *New World Orders. Casta Painting and Colonial Latin America*, Ilona Katzew (ed.), Americas Society (New York, 1996), 18.

Similarly, the fact that in Havana 'there is no limit or order in the delicacy and splendour of clothing' was for José Martín Félix de Arrate evidence of his city's greatness. (José Martín Félix de Arrate, *Llave del Nuevo Mundo: Antemural de las Indias Occidentales: La Habana descripta: Noticias de su fundación, aumentos y estados* [1761], (Havana, 1964), 76, 94-7.) Even the anti-creole Raynal, drawing on Spanish sources, reported that in Lima, conspicuous consumption was 'looked upon as a sort of

Luxurious dress, Vetancurt insists, is 'the glory of this country'. It is an illustration of Mexico's grandeur, not a sign of corruption.

Similar views are expressed, in a different medium, in the eighteenth century *casta* paintings that are beginning to attract much-deserved scholarly attention. These classificatory painting series depict the outcome of every conceivable type of racial mixing, usually with useful captions along the lines of 'from salta-atras and mulata is born tente-en-el-aire'. These paintings are interesting to us in this context not so much because of their depictions of racial mixing per se, but rather because of the settings in which these different groupings are placed. These painting series, usually destined, as far as we can tell, for members of the colonial elite, are, as Ilona Katzew has noted in a penetrating analysis, images of both the exotic and the self. *Casta* paintings depict not only the exotic nature of colonial Spanish America's racial heterogeneity, but also the colonial universe itself. In this sense they are reflections of the creole self. Katzew notes that these paintings employed 'a number of visual strategies . . . to construct this self-image', including in particular 'the emphasis on the luxury and abundance of the colony'.¹⁹ *Casta* paintings, especially those of the first half of the eighteenth century, tend to depict all castes and classes as dressed in magnificent clothing, adorned with quantities of jewellery, and surrounded by other signs of wealth. 'The uniform assignment of luxurious garb to the different castas in these early series is [their] most outstanding feature. . . . Luxury, thus, becomes paradigmatic of the privileged social and economic reality of [Spanish America] that the elite wanted so desperately to convey to Europe'.²⁰ In *casta* paintings, as in the writings of travellers and chroniclers, we can see luxury being used, not to indicate

grandeur and dignity'. (Guillaume-Thomas Raynal, *A Philosophical and Political History of the Settlements and Trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies*, 10 vols (London, 1798), III:131.)

¹⁹ Katzew, 'Casta Painting', 17.

²⁰ Katzew, 'Casta Painting', 19.

corruption and decadence, but rather to glorify the colonial world. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century writings on consumption in Spanish America thus interpret luxurious consumption in two ways. On the one hand, excessive consumption signalled both moral degeneracy and weakness. On the other hand, it could be read as a sign of the grandeur and success of the colonial world.

This world was, by the late eighteenth century, under attack. As Antonello Gerbi and David Brading have shown, during the eighteenth century a number of European intellectuals produced forceful arguments that the Americas and its inhabitants were inherently inferior to Europeans. Writers such as the Abbé Raynal and Corneille de Pauw insisted that Spanish America's unhealthy climate and general inadequacy rendered the region permanently backward and unfit to govern itself. Moreover, such philosophers concurred that Spanish America's creole population was hopelessly degenerate. This degeneracy was reflected particularly in the decadent and luxurious lifestyle supposedly pursued by colonial creoles. Spurning the manly asceticism of their European forbearers, creoles had sunk into a life of gaming, drinking, and unsustainable expense which contributed to their ultimate effeminisation and impotence.²¹ Creoles, Raynal claimed, spent their days sunk in 'barbarous luxury, pleasures of a shameful kind, a stupid superstition, and romantic intrigues'.²² The Scottish historian William Robertson likewise reported that, as a result of climate and repressive government, 'the vigour of [the creole's] mind is so entirely broken, that a great part of them waste life in luxurious indulgences'.²³ Such views, which drew very obviously on the 'luxury debate'

²¹ See Antonello Gerbi, *The Dispute of the New World. The History of a Polemic, 1750-1900* (Pittsburgh, 1973).

²² Raynal, *A Philosophical and Political History*, VII:189. See also David Brading, *The First America, the Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots, and the Liberal State, 1492-1867* (Cambridge, 1991), 444.

²³ William Robertson, *The History of America* [1788?], book 8, in *The Works of William Robertson*, 8 vols (Oxford, 1825), VII:340, 342. See also Brading, *The First America*, 440. For the connections between this 'dispute of the New World' and the independence movements, see Rebecca Earle, 'Creole Patriotism and the Myth of the Loyal Indian', *Past and Present*, vol. 172 (2001), 125-45.

discussed above, constituted a cultural and political challenge to the Spanish American elite. Luxurious consumption thus lay at the heart of a debate about the fitness of Spanish America to govern itself. It was simultaneously a sign of grandeur and a mark of infamy, an illustration of America's glorious destiny and proof of its permanent inferiority.

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We need to understand these processes if we are to understand the ways in which creole insurgents reacted to the idea of consumption, particularly the consumption of imported goods, during the independence era. European insistence that creoles were a decadent, effeminate bunch unfit to govern themselves made problematic the sort of celebration of luxurious consumption cited above. During the colonial period it was possible to combine admiration for America's wealth with a certain moral disapproval for the effects of excess, but during the independence period this ambivalent position was much harder for advocates of independence to sustain. Creole patriotism, combined with the polemical need to justify independence, began to impose a re-interpretation on the idea of luxury. Generally conceding the point that colonial rule infantilised American subjects—Simón Bolívar for example, complained that Spain had maintained Americans 'in a sort of permanent infancy'—supporters of independence nonetheless argued that with independence, Americans had come of age.²⁴

With manhood came an appropriately masculine rejection of luxury. No longer were creoles to be seen as decadent, well-dressed, effeminate layabouts. On the contrary, insurgent creole writers insisted, they were the leaders of strong, masculine, and independent nations. Celebration of independence thus involved an explicit condemnation of effete, colonial luxury. Thus in his 1824 poem 'La Victoria

de Junín: Canto a Bolívar', the insurgent poet José Joaquín de Olmedo notes how fighting for the republican cause transformed Peru's youth from perfumed overdressed effeminates to heroic, male warriors. Describing republican soldiers he asks:

¿Son esos los garzones delicados,
Entre seda y aromas arullados?
¿Los hijos del placer son esos fieros?
Sí: que los que antes desatar no osaban
Los dulces lazos de jazmín y rosa
Con que el amor y placer los enredaban,
Hoy ya con mano fuerte
La cadena quebrantan poderosa
Que ató sus pies, y vuelan denodados
A los campos de muerte y gloria cierta. . . .²⁵

[Are those the delicate youths
Lulled to sleep amid silks and perfumes?
The sons of pleasure those fierce warriors?
Yes: those who before dared not undo
The sweet ties of jasmine and rose
With which love and pleasure bound them,
Today with strong hands
Break the powerful chain
That bound their feet, and boldly fly
To the fields of death and certain glory. . . .]

To understand this rejection of perfumes, silks, and roses in favour of death and certain glory we need merely recall the anti-American polemics of Raynal and others discussed above. This poem is, in part, a response to such critiques of Americans. Olmedo does not dispute that Peru's youth used to be degenerate effeminates, but he insists that the movement for independence has transformed them into beings fit not only for war but, he implies, for government.

This latter point is made even more clearly by Andrés Bello, in his equally celebrated 1826 'Silva a la Agricultura en la Zona Tórrida'. Utterly rejecting colonial celebrations of successful, aggrandising luxury, Bello insists that individuals given

²⁴ Simón Bolívar to Henry Cullen Kingston, 6 Sept. 1815 (the 'Jamaica Letter'), in Vicente Lecuna (ed.), *Selected Writings of Bolívar*, 2 vols (New York, 1951), I:103-22.

²⁵ José Joaquín de Olmedo, 'La Victoria de Junín: Canto a Bolívar' [1824], *Poesía hispanoamericana*, Francisco Montes de Oca (ed.), (Mexico, 1982), 14.

over the luxury not only lose their masculinity, but also render themselves unfit to govern:

¿Sabrá con firme pulso
de la severa ley regir el freno;
. . . . aquel que ya en la cuna
durmió al arrullo del cantar lascivo,
que riza el pelo, y se unge, y se atavía
con femenil esmero,
y en indolente ociosidad el día
o en criminal lujuria pasa entero?²⁶

[Will he know how to hold the reins,
Of severe law with the firm hand
. . . he who even as an infant
Was lulled to sleep by lascivious songs,
Who curls his hair and applies creams,
And dresses with feminine care,
And spends the entire day in indolent idleness
Or in criminal lust?]

To drive home his contrast, Bello emphasises the hardy masculinity characteristic, in his view, of the Latin race from which he believed creoles to descend:

No así trató la triunfadora Roma
Las artes de la paz y de la guerra;
Antes fió las riendas del estado
A la mano robusta
Que tostó el sol y encalleció el arado;
Y bajo el techo humoso campesino
Los hijos educó, que el conjurado
Mundo allanaron al valor latino.²⁷

[Triumphant Rome did not thus pursue
The arts of peace and war;
Rather she entrusted the reins of state
To robust hands
Toasted by the sun and hardened by the plough,
[Which] beneath the smoky peasant roof
Educated its sons, who subdued the
Conspiratorial world to Latin valor.]

Luxurious consumption, in the view of these poets, signalled dependence, emasculation and weakness. Creole republicans thus came to embrace the same

²⁶ Andrés Bello, 'Silva a la Agricultura en la Zona Tórrida' [1826], *Poesía hispanoamericana*, 20.

²⁷ Bello, 'Silva a la Agricultura en la Zona Tórrida', 20.

anti-luxury position typical of French revolutionaries, who likewise linked consumption to effeminacy, dependency, and therefore monarchy.²⁸

We should note the gendered nature of this discourse. During the colonial period, as we saw, consumption of luxury goods was not linked exclusively to women, but it was gendered as a feminine activity; the luxurious lifestyle of colonial male creoles was thought to emasculate them. This gendered perspective is retained in the moralising republican poetry of men such as Bello. Consumption is thus not only the sign of a colonial; it is also the sign of the feminine. What does this tell us about women's perceived ability to participate in public life? I think it reminds us that in independence-era Spanish America, as in revolutionary France or North America, revolutionary discourse positioned femininity in partial opposition to republicanism.²⁹ In any event restraint, rather than consumption was the mark of the republican. When delegates to the Mexican Congress of Apatzingan in 1822 wished to demonstrate their status as hardy republicans, they recorded that while at the congress they consumed, not delicate viands and fine wines, but simple *esquite*, a dish composed of beans and toasted maize. Their consumption of this 'rustic food' indicated, the delegates were certain, their republican greatness; supine colonials would have disdained such humble food.³⁰

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And yet . . . From where did all those degenerate delicacies come? They were imported from abroad.

²⁸ See Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, 1988), 36, 156; and Colin Jones and Rebecca Spang, 'Sans-culottes, sans café, sans tabac: Shifting Realms of Necessity and Luxury in Eighteenth-Century France', *Consumers and Luxury: Consumer Culture in Europe, 1650-1850* (Manchester, 1999), 40.

²⁹ For comparative comments, see Rebecca Earle, 'Rape and the Anxious Republic. Revolutionary Colombia, 1810-1830', in *Hidden Histories of Gender and the State in Latin America*, Maxine Molyneux and Elizabeth Dore (eds), Duke University Press (2000), pp. 127-46.

³⁰ *La avispa de Chilpantzingo, escrita para perpetuar la memoria del Primer Congreso instalado allí en día 12 de sept. de 1813 por el señor D. José María Morelos* (Mexico, 1821), 7.

In eighteenth-century Europe defenders of luxury had stressed principally its stimulating effect on the economy. The creation of luxury objects, it was argued, provided employment for numberless artisans who would otherwise have remained without income.

As Pride and Luxury decrease, . . .
All Arts and Crafts neglected lie

insisted Mandeville.³¹ In colonial Spanish America, on the other hand, as we have seen, luxurious consumption was praised, not for its beneficial impact on the economy, but rather as a reflection of the colony's grandeur. For Spanish American advocates of luxury the fact that most of the items employed to display this greatness had been imported from Europe, rather than constructed locally, was not relevant. Indeed, the superiority of imported European goods was taken for granted. 'Marido y bretaña, solo el de España', ran the saying.³² The quantities of imported goods available in the Indies played an important role in colonial America's claims of *grandeza*, as Bernardo de Balbuena made clear in his seventeenth century poem *Grandeza Mexicana*. Listing with delight the imported luxury products available in Mexico City, Balbuena provides a glorious shopping list of *ultramarcinos*:

De Cambray telas, de Quinsay rescate,
de Sicilia coral, de Siria nardo,
de Arabia incienso, y de Ormuz granate;
diamantes de la India y del gallardo
Scita balajes y esmeraldas finas,
de Goa marfil, de Siam ébano pardo;
de España lo mejor, de Filipinas
la nata, de Macón lo más precioso,
de ambas Javas riquezas peregrinas,
la fina loza del Sangley medroso
las ricas martas de los scitios Caspes,
del Troglodita el cínama oloroso;
ámbar del Malabar, perlas de Idaspes,
drogas del Egipto, de Pancaya olores,

³¹ Mandeville, 'The Fable of the Bees', 34.

³² 'Husbands and fabrics are best when from Spain.' Anita la Respondona, *Allá van esas frioleras al Pensador Mexicano* (Mexico, 1821). See also Pilar Gonzalbo Aizpuru, 'De la penuria y el lujo en la Nueva España, siglos XVI-XVIII', *Revista de Indias*, vol. 56:206 (1996), 65-8.

de Persia alfombras, y de Etolia jaspes;
de la gran China sedas de colores,
piedra bezar de los incultos Andes,
de Roma estampas, de Milán primores;
cuantos relojes ha inventado Flandes,
cuantas telas Italia, y cuantos dijes
labra Venecia en sutilezas grandes;

.....

al fin, del mundo lo mejor, la nata
de cuanto se conoce y se practica,
aquí se bulle, vende y se barata.³³

[Cloths from Cambrai and from Quinsay ransom,
Coral from Sicily and from Syria nard,
Incense from Arabia, and from Ormuz garnets;
Diamonds from India and from proud
Scita purple rubies and fine emeralds,
From Goa ivory, from Siam black ebony;
From Spain the best, from the Philippines
The finest, from Macón the most precious,
From both Javas pilgrim riches,
Fine porcelain from timid Sangley
Rich furs from the scitios Caspes (?),
From Troglodyte the fragrant cinnamon
Amber from Malabar, pearls from Idaspes,
Drugs from Egypt, from Pancaya perfumes,
From Persia carpets, from Etolia jasper;
From great China coloured silks,
Bezoar stones from the uncultured Andes,
Prints from Rome, from Milan beauties;
As many clocks as Flanders has invented,
As many cloths as has Italy, and as many pendants
As Venice has worked with great subtlety;

.....

In short, the world's finest, the best
Of all that is known and produced,
Here abounds, is sold and is affordable.]

Balbuena mentions only one item native to the Americas: the bezoar stones extracted from the stomachs of llamas and other Andean camelids, which were believed to counteract the effects of poison. These stones are specifically described as originating in the 'uncultured Andes'; Spanish America's only contribution to this list of goods is thus isolated from the civilisation characterising the offerings of the

³³ Balbuena, *Grandeza mexicana*, 60-2.

rest of the world. If it counts as a luxury at all, it is a second-rate, uncultured luxury, quite different from the splendid offerings of Rome and China.

Imported luxury items did not appear only in poetry. Lance Grahn's analysis of smuggling in eighteenth-century New Granada illustrates the availability of imported 'damask, taffeta, silk, flannel, linen, calicoe, serge, lace, thread, shirts, . . . pepper, cinnamon, . . . mirrors, . . . and toys'.³⁴ Wills and inventories bear witness to the quantities of imported finery possessed by wealthy colonials. When Magdalena Gil de la Hita died in Tocayo, Venezuela, in 1730, she left not only 'pearl earrings, earrings with brilliants, [and] necklaces of pearls', but also 'damask dresses, blouses of Holland cloth'.³⁵ 'Luxury', in other words, was imported from abroad.

The anti-luxury position of independence-era writers such as Bello should logically therefore have been accompanied by calls to restrict the importation of European luxury goods. This, however, is not what happened. On the contrary, most republican governments worked hard to secure access to European-manufactured domestic goods in the years after the defeat of Spain. As Victor Bulmer Thomas noted, 'political independence gave the new republics the right to change many aspects of the colonial economy. The prime candidate was the external trade monopoly, which had deprived Latin America of the chance to sell in the best-paying market and buy in the least expensive.'³⁶ Although, as many scholars have

³⁴ Lance Grahn, *The Political Economy of Smuggling: Regional Informal Economies in Early Bourbon New Granada* (Boulder, 1997), 27. In colonial New Granada 'all the comforts or luxuries of life' had been imported from England (via Jamaica), claimed Cochrane in 1825. (Charles Stuart Cochrane, *Journal of a Residence and Travels in Colombia during the Years 1823 and 1824* [1825], 2 vols (New York, 1971), II:108.) See also Arnold Bauer, *Goods, Power and History: Latin America's Material Culture* (Cambridge, 2001), 125.

³⁵ Ildefonso Leal, *Libros y bibliotecas en Venezuela colonial (1633-1767)*, 2 vols, Biblioteca de la Academia Nacional de la Historia (Caracas, 1978), II:9.

³⁶ Victor Bulmer-Thomas, *The Economic History of Latin America since Independence* (Cambridge, 1994), 28. See also Tulio Halperín Donghi, 'Economy and Society', *Spanish America After Independence, c.1820-c.1870*, Leslie Bethell (ed.) (Cambridge, 1987); and R. A. Humphreys, *British Consular Reports on the Trade and Politics of Latin America, 1824-1826* (London, 1940), x, 28-39, 53, 63, 91-2, 226-7, 302. For classic contemporary complaints about the Spanish trading monopoly, see Bolívar, 'The Jamaica Letter'; and Mariano Moreno, 'Representación de los hacendados' [1810], in Mariano Moreno, *Representación de los hacendados y otros escritos* (Buenos Aires, 1998).

shown, independent Spanish America did not immediately eliminate all trade barriers or tariffs, the restrictive trading monopoly imposed by Spain was removed. The result was an increase in imports from countries other than Spain. The total value of British exports to Latin America, for example, increased in 1824/26 to £5,009,000, up from £1,125,000 in 1804/6.³⁷ In the years after independence 'goods . . . arrived as never before'.³⁸

Not all of these imported items were 'luxury' goods, but some of them certainly were. In 1822 France's trade with Buenos Aires, worth £820,109, consisted, in the words of the British consul, not of items 'of primary necessity to this country', but rather of silks and fine linen.³⁹ In the same year Buenos Aires also imported 370 clocks and watches, 57 pianos, over 12,000 yards of silk lace, and 26,445 cashmere shawls.⁴⁰ Uruguay meanwhile imported 122 packages of perfumery.⁴¹ Imports to Guayaquil consisted in 1826 of 'almost every article that necessity requires, or luxury indulges in'.⁴² Consumers in Veracruz were buying swan-skin waistcoats in 1824.⁴³ The first American diplomatic envoy to Mexico, Joel Poinsett, noted not only the great demand for imported 'fine calicoes' and black silk lace veils (ideally, he noted, '7/8 deep, 9/8 wide with a border 1/4 wide at bottom, with small sprigs throughout—some plain with the border'), but also that the Mexican market was

³⁷ Rory Miller, *Britain and Latin America in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London, 1993), 73.

³⁸ Samuel Amaral and Richard Doringo, 'Latin America was Behind: The Economic Background of Independence', in *State and Society in Spanish America during the Age of Revolution*, Victor Uribe-Urán (ed.) (Wilmington, 2001), 19.

³⁹ Robert Montgomery to Woodbine Parish, Buenos Aires, 29 July 1825, in Humphreys, *British Consular Reports*, 35, 38.

⁴⁰ Humphreys, *British Consular Reports*, 56, table D. Britain exported over £2,000 of musical instruments to Buenos Aires in 1818. (Humphreys, *British Consular Reports*, 56. For the import of pianos into Chile, see 98.) Platt notes that in the 'free, expensive and receptive atmosphere created by the break with Spain, . . . Broadwood pianos found their way up the river and over the mountains to Bogotá'. (D. M. C. Platt, *Latin America and British Trade, 1806-1914* (London, 1972), 47.)

⁴¹ Humphreys, *British Consular Reports*, 64.

⁴² Henry Wood to George Canning, Guayaquil, 28 Feb. 1826, Humphreys, *British Consular Reports*, 236.

⁴³ Humphreys, *British Consular Reports*, 328. See also Balanza general del comercio marítima por los puertos de la República Mexicana en el año de 1825, Miguel Lerdo de Tejada, *Comercio exterior de México desde la Conquista hasta hoy* [1853] (Mexico, 1967). Thanks to Guy Thomson for this source.

now glutted with 'Canton silks, Spanish silks, and Florentines'.⁴⁴ In Lima the glut concerned imported French ribbons.⁴⁵ These items were not shunned by the republican leadership. On the contrary, General San Martín's study in Mendoza was 'very neatly furnished in the European manner; the furniture was all English: he had handsome commodes, tables, &c. of rose-wood, inlaid with brass, neat chairs to match, and a Brussels carpet'.⁴⁶

The success of republican governments in accessing European imports was praised as a tangible benefit of independence. 'Our ports', reported the Colombian minister for external affairs proudly in 1823, 'have been and remain entirely open to neutral trade so that they might learn by experience the importance of a country which the miserable policies of the Spanish had kept in obscurity'.⁴⁷ European travellers, who of course often wrote with the clear interest in encouraging trade between their countries and the newly-independent Spanish American nations, likewise praised the economic liberalisation that followed Spain's defeat.⁴⁸ The importation of luxury goods was, seen from this angle, more evidence for the positive impact of independence. Thus Captain Basil Hall noted in 1824 that Chile was benefiting from 'the present free trade', 'for there is not a single arrival at the port which fails to bring some new article of use or of luxury, or which does not serve, by lowering the former prices, to place within reach of the inferior ranks many things known before only to the wealthy; to extend the range of comforts and

⁴⁴ Poinsett, *Notes on Mexico*, 350.

⁴⁵ Charles Milner Ricketts to George Canning, Lima, 27 Dec. 1826, Humphreys, *British Consular Reports*, 133. In contrast with the situation in Buenos Aires and Bogotá, in Lima there was allegedly no call for musical instruments (133).

⁴⁶ John Miers, *Travels in Chile and La Plata*, 2 vols (London, 1826), I:159.

⁴⁷ Pedro Gual, 'Memoria de la Secretaría de Estado y Relaciones Exteriores de la República de Colombia', 21 April 1823, *Administraciones de Santander*, 5 vols (Bogotá, 1990), I:146. Thanks to Tony McFarlane for suggesting this source.

⁴⁸ For comment on the economic motives underlying early nineteenth-century travelogues, see Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, Routledge (London, 1992), 146-55.

enjoyments; and to open new sources of industry'.⁴⁹ 'By thus creating higher tastes and new wants', he affirmed, 'they produce fresh motives to exertion, and give more animating hopes to whole nations, which without such powerful and immediate excitement, might, for aught we know, long have remained in their ancient state of listlessness and ignorance'.⁵⁰ Hall appears to be suggesting here that a desire for European luxury items in fact caused the wars of independence. Similarly, in a description of republican Valparaíso 1820s, he noted that, as a result of independence 'a total change had very recently taken place' in dress:

The former uncouth, and almost savage costume of the ladies, and the slovenly cloaks worn by the men, had given way to the fashions of Europe: and although these may be deemed circumstances almost to minute to mention, they are not unimportant when connected with feelings of national pride, hitherto unknown. It is by these, and a multitude of other small changes, that these people are constantly reminded of their past compared with their present situation; and it is of essential use to their cause, that they should take delight in assimilating themselves, even in trifles, with other independent nations of the world.⁵¹

Access to European luxury goods here signals the success of Spanish American independence. Conversely, the lack of luxury items measured out the distance that remained to be travelled along the road towards true modernity. In Colombia, complained on disaffected traveller in 1823, 'luxury goods are scarce and expensive'.⁵²

Thus for men such as Bello the use of imported luxury goods was a sign of colonial weakness. For other Spanish American insurgents (and their European

⁴⁹ Capt. Basil Hall, *Extracts from a Journal written on the Coasts of Chili, Peru and Mexico in the Years 1820, 1821, 1822* [1824], 2 vols, Gregg Press (Upper Saddle River, 1968), I:185. The British traveller Lyon similarly noted in 1826 that 'in the cities great improvements are observable within the last two or three years' (i.e. since independence). Concretely, these improvements were for Lyon symbolised the increased popularity of (presumably imported) toothbrushes. (Capt. G. F. Lyon, *Journal of a Residence and Tour in the Republic of Mexico in the year 1826* [1828], 2 vols, (Kennicat Press, 1971), II:248.)

⁵⁰ Hall, *Extracts from a Journal*, I:186.

⁵¹ Hall, *Extracts from a Journal*, I:90. Or see Lyon, *Journal of a Residence*, I:30: 'In the southern provinces [of Mexico], the effects of free intercourse with Europe have altered not only the forms of society and dress, but have given to the manners of the better classes a degree of polish which will speedily be imitated by their more rustic neighbours'.

⁵² Anon., *Cartas escritas desde Colombia durante un viaje de Caracas a Bogotá y desde allí a Santa Marta en 1823* [1824], Angela de López (trans.) (Bogotá, 1975), 95.

supporters) access to imported items of luxury was a proof of independence. Just as in the colonial period consumption of imported luxury items was both a mark of grandeur and of infamy, so in the early national era interest in imported goods was a sign of both weakness and independence. Nineteenth-century Spanish America sought to combine a view of consumption as an essentially moral issue, with the idea that access to foreign trade was a sign of independence and modernity. Spanish America thus entered the era of independence with a complex heritage as regards the meaning of consumption.

The element of this heritage with the longest life-span was the view that imported goods were a mark of grandeur. Throughout the nineteenth century Latin American elites consistently preferred what Arnold Bauer has called 'modernising goods' imported from abroad over home-produced items.⁵³ Just as in late seventeenth-century Mexico, in nineteenth century Latin America the possession of imported luxury goods was a sign of greatness and civilisation, or, to use the nineteenth-century term, modernity. 'When we say *confortable, agreeable, bien, comme il faut*, do we refer to things belonging to the Araucanians?', asked the Argentine liberal Alberdi.⁵⁴ Alberdi's use of French makes clear that, for him, comfortable, pleasant things came from Europe, not Argentina. Thus in late nineteenth century Brazil, for example, the São Paulo elite spent the proceeds of their coffee plantations on imported French china and other European luxury products. This pattern was repeated across Latin America; with few exceptions the wealth generated by exports was spent on imports, rather than in the domestic economy. Mandeville's claim that luxury stimulated local industry did not apply to nineteenth-century Latin America. Indeed, as I have argued here, this was never an

⁵³ Bauer, *Goods, Power and History*, chapter 5: 'Modernizing Goods: Material Culture at the Crest of the First Liberalism', 129-64.

important aspect of the Spanish American view of luxury. For Latin America, this disjuncture between the iconographic and economic aspects of luxury is perhaps the 'Latin Luxury' debate's most pernicious legacy.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Juan Bautista Alberdi, *Bases y puntos de partida para la organización política de la República Argentina* [1852] (Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires, 1966), 61-2.

⁵⁵ Thanks to Catherine Davies for stimulating thoughts on the nineteenth-century repercussions of the issues raised in the earlier sections of this paper.