

Capítulo 2:

The Social Impact of a Middleman Minority in a Divided Host Society. The Case of the Portuguese in the Early Seventeenth Century Buenos Aires

(published in 1985 in the *Hispanic American Historical Review* [Albuquerque], 65 [3], 467-491; under the title: "The Social Impact of a Middleman Minority in a Divided Host Society. The Case of the Portuguese in the Early Seventeenth Century Buenos Aires", registered in the HLAS, v.48, 1986, item 2833; and in the HAPI, 1985, p.652);

The assimilation of the Portuguese immigrants in the early seventeenth century is crucial to an understanding of the process of nation-building in Argentina, for it was responsible for setting the most notable precedent for the acculturation of foreigners. Already under mercantilism, there were efforts to accelerate the rate of population growth by means of measures intended to extend the areas under colonial control. Whether Spanish mercantilism in regard to the Spanish colonial state ever had a clear immigration policy with regard to foreigners is a matter of speculation. Juan de Solórzano y Pereira was the first to provide the crown prohibitions and exceptions with respect to foreigners in the Hapsburg period.¹

Later, the Philosophes (Saint-Pierre, Chastellux, Condorcet) again adopted the populationist goals of the mercantilists, arguing optimistically that the future of mankind, despite colonialism, would thereby improve. Local enlightened scholars, such as Azara, Alvear, and Lastarria, also tried to legitimize populationist policies. Unlike the populationists (Danguel, La Plombaine, and Jaubert), who were primarily concerned with combatting celibacy, the physiocrats (Quesnay, Mercier de la Rivière, Du Pont de Nemours, Morellet) indicated the limits to population growth and argued that such continuous increase was disadvantageous to a community.² Most of the Latin American scholars involved in the Independence movement --for example, Bernardino Rivadavia and Julián Segundo de Agüero-- expressed this population goal in a contradictory discourse, a mixture of physiocratic and utilitarian terms. Besides Rivadavia, Estéban Echeverría was the first to emphasize immigration, as a method to settle farms and develop agriculture. Following Echeverría, Juan Bautista Alberdi became the main propagandist of widespread European immigration.³

Positivist historians in Argentina were the first to confront the issue of how to characterize the respective roles played by a creole population and foreign immigration. To the preexisting crude critique of the life and morals of the creole and Indian populations, these historians added the strong belief that reform was feasible.⁴ The notion of the colonial world as static and stagnant was used as an argument to justify northwestern European neocolonialism and to suggest the inability of the local population to carry out any kind of change. In this same line of thought, following the prevailing ideology of the "free trade" and ethnocentrically-oriented Second International, José Ingenieros, the main positivist historian, maintained that Portuguese merchants were progressive racial elements who had changed the uncultivated moral and social values of the creole and greatly contributed to the economic development of the region.⁵

Later, left-wing liberals, in characterizing porteño society, considered the Portuguese merchants, following an idealist and simplistic diffusionist paradigm, as a sort of oppressed minority, and, as such, progressive tools for undermining the "mercantilist" Spanish monopoly, the creole encomendero elite, the *estamental* (rank-oriented) social stratification, and the absolutist Peruvian viceroyalty. In their eyes, this was the only path to the development of a local bourgeoisie.⁶ They

regarded struggles within the municipal councils and those struggles against direct internal constraints (royal visitors) as an expression of "colonial liberties" in the midst of an estate society, and as the anticipation of the emergence of a local independent merchant bourgeoisie. By the same token, other left-wing liberals, such as A. P. Canabrava (1944) and Ceferino Garzón Maceda (1968), gave high praise to the role played by Portuguese merchants in the introduction of a monetary economy, and regarded Buenos Aires's internal market-oriented creole producers as playing a secondary role as exporters of regional products.⁷

As a tool against Argentine positivism and left-wing liberalism, the revisionists (nationalist historians) regarded the Portuguese settlers as a dominant and antinationalist minority, while also emphasizing the "protectionist" and "patriotic" nature of the creole elite (*beneméritos*).⁸ By the 1930s, when pure elite creole families had almost ceased to exist, there arose the mythical *Hernandarias* and the *beneméritos* racial characters, epitomizing criollismo, and exploited as symbols by right-wing nationalist historians against threatening immigrants.

In contrast, following a dependency approach, the New Left considered the Portuguese settlers neither an oppressed minority, nor a dominant minority, but allies of Tucuman encomendero-merchants, who, instead of helping the formation of a revolutionary bourgeoisie as propounded by the left-wing liberals, reinforced a regime of estates that consolidated a natural, or feudal economy.⁹ The thesis of the present chapter seeks to reinforce this New Left view, arguing that the Portuguese settlers neither resembled an oppressed minority, as postulated by the liberal left, nor were a dominant minority, as propounded by the "national" left. Instead, using Edna Bonacich's terminology, they were a minority in the process of shifting from a middleman to a dominant position.¹⁰

Moreover, in the early part of the present century, scholars for the first time took up the issue of social integration of foreign immigrants. Juan A. Alsina y Manuel C. Chueco, both demographers taking Francisco Latzina's argument, based on the existent sexual imbalance supported the point of view that this integration, thanks to the low percentage of females among the immigrant population, was almost complete. Half a century later Gino Germani, a sociologist, argued based on a geographic differentiation that social integration in the countryside was quite incomplete compared with that found in urban centers.¹¹

Recently, foreign scholars have involved themselves in this old debate, arguing that the melting-pot theory (*crisol de razas*) does not satisfactorily explain the broad effect of foreign immigration. While Samuel Baily has suggested that the category of cultural pluralism is more appropriate than the melting-pot theory, Mark D. Szuchman believes, in the case of late nineteenth-century Córdoba, that frequent intermarriage between foreigners and creoles did not free nineteenth-century Argentina from ethnic tensions or hostility toward amalgamation.¹² Following this methodological line, I shall attempt to analyze in this article the social impact of immigration, taking into consideration not only the different concepts of race, ethnic group, or nationality, and the concepts of integration, acculturation, assimilation, adjustment, differentiation, discrimination, and desegregation, but also the hypothesis that the attainment of high economic and social mobility provided a strong reason to expect a decline in ethnic identification or national differentiation.¹³

Discussion of the nature of the Portuguese immigration to Spanish America in the early seventeenth century will vary according to whether we consider them an ethnic, a national, or a religious minority; on whether we consider them willing or unwilling to integrate into the host society (in other words, willing or unwilling to perpetuate ethnic and cultural differentiation); on whether we consider them a dominant, a middleman, or an oppressed national minority; and on whether we admit their chance of shifting from a middleman position to dominant position.

According to the Laws of the Indies, despite the fact that the Hapsburg dynasty was between 1580 and 1640 the ruler of both Portugal and Spain, the settlers of the Spanish and Portuguese colonial empires retained their own national identity and boundary, and could not trade with each other. Most creole settlers viewed elite Portuguese as a foreign race to be kept apart from the creole majority, while plebeian Portuguese were viewed as part of the castas. The labels typically applied to Jews by anti-Semites --ambitious, striving, crafty, clannish, shrewd, extremely intelligent-- were often applied to Portuguese merchants.¹⁴ Similarly, the labels applied to African slaves were also often applied to Plebeian Portuguese. The Portuguese seamen who manned the ships trading from West Africa to Brazil and the Rio de la Plata were predominantly mulattoes, and thus related by blood to the slaves they transported.

Although the creoles might have considered religious affinity a unifying bond, they in fact saw the Portuguese as strangers; and the Portuguese reciprocated. Portuguese tended to be disdainful of the creoles, considering them feeble and lethargic, men who "...have no wish to take risks or accept danger by land or sea to gain a living".¹⁵ This was by no means an exceptional attitude on the part of the Portuguese. Wherever the Portuguese exercised colonialism, they practiced some racial discrimination.¹⁶

Like any oppressed nationality (the French Canadians in Canada, the Flemish in Belgium),¹⁷ the Portuguese in Buenos Aires resembled middleman, or buffer minorities. Unlike oppressed minorities, however, middleman minorities were not directed to satisfy labor demands. According to Edna Bonacich, middleman minorities "...are characteristically found in societies in which there is a wide gap between elites and masses, with the minority group serving to fill the gap "...both externally and internally".¹⁸ A similar role was played by the Dutch, British, and French mercantile groups in seventeenth-century Seville.¹⁹ The Portuguese minority ran a business between Europe and West Africa on one side, and Veracruz, Cartagena, Lima, and Buenos Aires on the other. Within the Rio de la Plata, the Portuguese minority raised the price of commodities passing through their hands, and received from these simple transactions a large profit.

In contrast, however, to the Hindus in colonial East Africa, or the Armenians in Ottoman Turkey, portrayed by Edna Bonacich, the Portuguese middleman minority in seventeenth-century Buenos Aires faced a host society whose elite was deeply divided by opposed interest and national groups (creoles and Spaniards). The presence of this middleman minority strongly influenced the relationship between the elite and the masses (Indians and Blacks) as well as between those two elite groups. At the same time, this contradictory relationship divided the Portuguese middlemen into settlers and sojourners. Most became settlers, investing in land, intermarrying, learning Spanish, and involving themselves in local politics; still, a minority continued behaving as sojourners, moving from one town to another, and avoiding any kind of definitive settlement.

Acculturation is usually a prerequisite for assimilation.²⁰ I plan to use this last term not as a concept concerned only with the "adaptive capacity" of the immigrant group, or with the "macroenvironmental variables of the host society", is argued by Bernard Wong,²¹ but as a much broader concept including what Milton Gordon has called structural assimilation, or the large-scale entrance into partnerships, fraternities, and institutions of the host society, on a primary-group level.²²

I also plan to use the concept of adjustment to refer to the first phase of the assimilation process. Samuel Baily used this term to refer to the phase in which "...the immigrants develop the knowledge, skill, and organization that enable them to function effectively". Unlike Baily, who measured adjustment by how quickly and how easily immigrants are able to find housing and employment, I plan to measure "adjustment" by how rapidly Portuguese settlers were able to obtain political, economic,

and marital assimilation.²³ For the study of the relative assimilation or differentiate (ethnic identity) of the individual immigrant, I shall take into consideration the following: the quantity and quality (professional identities) of settlers and sojourners; and the economic, political, and social advantages and disadvantages of the host society.

The Buenos Aires (Rio de la Plata) region differed from other Spanish American regions densely populated by Indians, such as Lima, Veracruz, Cartagena, Tucuman, or Cordoba, in that in those areas the creoles were white and considered themselves Spaniards; and Spaniards, Tucuman and Cordoba excepted, monopolized foreign trade. In the Buenos Aires region, however, the creoles were, by the seventeenth century, a mestizo population that considered itself apart not only from Indians, but also from Spaniards and Portuguese. As a matter of fact, creoles in Lima, Veracruz, and Cordoba strongly opposed their daughters' marrying Portuguese immigrants, an important influence on Portuguese merchants' remaining sojourners rather than becoming settlers. By contrast, in Buenos Aires, the division between Spaniards and creoles lowered hostility and prejudice against the Portuguese.

In Buenos Aires, miscegenation among whites and Indians was almost a century old (including the history of Asunción del Paraguay, whence the founders of the city of Buenos Aires came). Since religious heterodoxy was strictly forbidden in colonial Spanish America, geographic region, rank, and economic status were in seventeenth-century Buenos Aires the main determinants in the holding of a particular office, in the choice of a marriage partner, and in the acquisition of private property. Multiple conflicts following geographic lines evolved among creoles, Portuguese, and Spaniards. These geographic (national or regional) conflicts, however, did not preclude certain economic alliances from forming. Portuguese merchants, some Spaniards, and creoles often banded together in seventeenth-century Buenos Aires to defend the trade routes against other Spaniards and creoles who sought an internal, market-oriented production.

In contrast to bourgeois societies, precapitalist societies do not hold classes alone as the main category for social stratification, but also estates (estamentos). The presence of estamentos and of the forms of property corresponding to them, did not allow the class element to emerge as the sole category. Undoubtedly, the process of historical development did not forbid variability within each estamento. It might be possible, then, to discern class divisions; but the identification with a particular estamento (e.g.: *vecindad*) was more important than the specific forms of dependence at the interior of an estamento. The existence of estamentos does not coincide with the existence of classes. A particular group of individuals can possess a similar legal status, but have social statuses of totally different characters.²⁴

The concept of creole, Spanish or Portuguese became remarkably contradictory in seventeenth-century Buenos Aires society, variously identifying a member of the *vecindario* (a type of elite) or a nonresidential (almost a plebeian). Unlike Indians, slaves, and itinerant foreigners, some settlers and their families were assigned the titles of *estantes* and *vecinos* (residents). Although the latter enjoyed the right to acquire real estate and Indian *encomiendas*, as well as the right to become a member of the *Cabildo* and the *Milicias* (militia), the former had only the right to work as retailers, artisans, soldiers, or journeymen in farms and ranches.²⁵

The estamental quality of *vecino* also conferred the privilege to participate in the *vaquerías* (hunting of wild cattle) and in the export of wheat and flour to Brazil. *Vecinos* were classified on a scale encompassing five degrees of seniority. Moreover, the promotion from the estamental category of *vecino* to that of *regidor* (member of the *Cabildo*) brought with it increased opportunities to secure *mercedes de tierras*, *encomiendas*, licenses for *vaquerías*, and export permits.²⁶ The earliest settlers, who had arrived with General Juan de Garay, the founder of Buenos Aires, in 1580, were assigned the

title of first settlers and enjoyed higher quotas of flour and jerky for export. Later arrivals, dubbed by this system of gradation as fifth settlers, were given lower quotas.²⁷

The division between the ruling class and rank, and the ruled class and rank, in the Rio de la Plata did not coincide with differences of nationality or social class. The Spaniard creoles, or Portuguese did not constitute separate and homogeneous groups; the colonial government was strongly divided by a class and estamental line rather than by a national line. Just as the creole, Spanish or Portuguese wholesalers and public officials formed part of the ruling estamento, the Spanish, creole, or Portuguese artisans, pulperos, and peddlers formed part of the ruled rank. By causing new fragmentation of the ruling rank, the penetration by commercial capital upset and confused the old class and estate (encomendero) system, partially built on pedigree and privileges, on hierarchy and hereditary estate distinctions.

Although elite creoles distinguished themselves from elite Portuguese settlers who then ran Buenos Aires's foreign trade, not all of them descended from conquerors and first settlers. As is well known, most of the sixty-four founding settlers of Buenos Aires were creoles born in Asunción. Between 1580 and 1582, however, twenty-one of the founders (or 33 percent) went back to Asunción; and twenty years later, in 1602, only seven of the original creole founders remained in Buenos Aires.²⁸ Spanish and Portuguese immigration started filling the gap left by this out-migration. A member of the creole elite might then easily be any son or daughter of a creole woman and a Portuguese man. Because of the scarcity of Portuguese women, far more sexual exchange clearly took place between Portuguese men and creole women than between Spanish men and creole women. Those Portuguese men who became involved with Black, mulatto, or Indian women were obviously of a plebeian proclivity.

Apart from distinguishing themselves from the Portuguese, elite creoles also distinguished themselves from elite Spaniards (whites), who then controlled the Buenos Aires bureaucracy and who came from different Spanish provinces. But, in distinction to Potosí, where elite creoles identified Spaniards as Castellians, Basques, Andalusians, Galicians, Catalonians, or Asturians, in Buenos Aires the ethnic-regional status among Spaniards did not have any life or force outside the Spanish group.

Although inferior in power to the Spaniards, elite creoles were closely connected to them, and often played the role of their auxiliaries, serving in the rank and file of the church and the army, managing their estates in the countryside, and acting as mediators or "power brokers" (e.g.: pulperos, priests, and foremen) between Spaniards and Indians.²⁹ A gap in the power system existed between white and Indian levels as well as between Spaniards and creoles on one level, and middlemen minorities like the Portuguese on the other. The wider this gap, the greater the need of "power brokers".³⁰

As a result of the Tridentine reforms and the growing numbers of creoles in the Rio de la Plata church, the ecclesiastical bureaucracy was far more open with respect to the existence of "power brokers" within its rank and file than was the rest of the colonial bureaucracy. There was ample chance for elite creoles to wield political force within the Cabildo Eclesiástico (cathedral chapter). All the highest members of this body, throughout this period, including the deacon, the archdeacon, and the canons, were creoles of Paraguayan origin. So great was this opportunity and the availability of creole priests that in 1617 Governor Hernandarias wrote to the king asking him to spare the expense of sending priests because there were many creole priests (most of them mestizos) available.³¹ It is understandable, therefore, why the Cabildo Eclesiástico was closely associated with the internal market-oriented producers who were predominantly creole. These social and economic interests continually challenged the bishop in Buenos Aires, who was openly connected with the external market-oriented merchants.

Elite creoles were also grouped with Spaniards with regard to punishments, as is shown by the custom of discriminating between creoles and Indians in the form of punishments assigned to them. For instance, when, in 1631, Pedro Cajal, a Chilean creole, the natural son of Juan Cajal, oidor of the Real Audiencia of Chile, and the Indian tailor Juan Puma were found guilty of stealing from the Buenos Aires royal treasury, Cajal was sentenced to be beheaded and Puma to be hanged.³²

On the other hand, plebeian creoles, although higher in status than Blacks or Indians, were closely connected to them. Plebeian creoles often held jobs similar to those of free Blacks or Indians, and lived together with them in concubinage. Lack of detailed censuses prevent us from arriving at any firm quantitative estimate of their numbers. Nonetheless, sporadic information on the social history of the Buenos Aires countryside provides some clues to understanding its ethnic composition. As early as October 1585, the Buenos Aires treasurer, Hernando de Montalvo, revealed the existence in the countryside of a vast number of *mozos malentretenidos* (vagrants), who were neither whites nor Indians nor Blacks, and who marauded farms and ranches.³³ Cabildo records also reveal the use of the contradictory term *mestizo* to characterize a plebeian creole. In a case that arose in 1669, a prostitute who was banished to Santa Fé was characterized as a *mestizo* woman *de mal vivir*.³⁴

The concept of *mestizo* became extremely contradictory in seventeenth-century Buenos Aires society. It might identify either a member of the creole elite or a plebeian creole. In a case that arose in the 1660s, when the *mestizo* Domingo González Cabezas (the natural son of Simón González de Acosta and the *mestiza* Catalina Cabezas) became administrator of an *encomienda* of Tubichaminí Indians and twenty-one Serrano Indians in Magdalena county (which had previously belonged to Catalina Guerrero, daughter of Alonso Guerrero de Ayala), the term was used in the first meaning.³⁵

The existence of a social differentiation within the Portuguese population does not mean that there was absolutely no social mobility among them in seventeenth-century Buenos Aires. The old Spanish division of society into rank-like estates, static in principle, was elastic enough in colonial entrepot economies to provide opportunities for moving up from the lower social ranks to positions of high social status. Because high economic and social mobility were possible, even plebeian Portuguese in the early seventeenth-century in the city had a strong incentive to assimilate, or, in other words, to experience a strong decline in ethnic identification. Considering that ethnic political consciousness declines as members of ethnic groups attain higher social status, according to Steven Martin Cohen, higher social class and some forms of ethnic identification were incompatible.³⁶ It is known that, in the period of fast penetration of commercial capital, some plebeian Portuguese were able to accumulate capital starting with their respective artisanship or petty businesses. For instance, Antonio de Pino, who started as a blacksmith, ended up as an urban landowner; Alfonso Carballo, who started as a carpenter, also became a landowner and a marriage partner of an elite creole bride; and Cristóbal de Torres, who started as a shoemaker and a *pulpero*, ended up as a rural landowner and a candidate for a Cabildo office.³⁷ Whenever economic conditions were not met and the chance to accumulate capital was very small, however, the differentiation process among plebeian Portuguese and Spaniards, resorted to commercial brokers or did not stay long in Buenos Aires. As soon as they could, they moved to Upper Peru and Chile, where higher profits could be made. Thus, in periods of crisis, brokers and geographical mobility replaced social mobility.³⁸ Finally, plebeian Portuguese and Spaniards enjoyed a greater opportunity to move up the social scale than did plebeian creoles. The latter seldom changed their status, and equally seldom moved out of their native location.

While plebeian Portuguese moved up the social scale individually, there was scarcely any social competition and prejudice. But when Portuguese merchants as a group moved up the social scale, an increase in social competition, and, therefore, in social prejudice, necessarily occurred as a defensive reaction for maintenance of the older social order. Elite Portuguese were increasingly viewed as a race, and sometimes even as a heresy, rather than as a nationality.

As Buenos Aires became incorporated into world trade in the first forty years of the seventeenth century, discriminations in bureaucratic privileges, based on geographic (national or regional) origin, shifted. In the Majority, national groups', such as the one formed in early seventeenth-century Buenos Aires by elite Spaniards and creoles (*beneméritos*), members held opposing viewpoints with regard to the treatment of Portuguese migrants.

Although in 1580 Philip II became a ruler of two empires (Spain and Portugal), the Cortes of Tomar (1581) enacted that the two should remain separated. Nevertheless, the trading prohibition between their colonial entrepôts (Buenos Aires with Bahia in South America, and Macao with Manila in Southeast Asia) was relaxed when the Dutch threatened the security of both empires.³⁹ The *Beneméritos*, internal market-oriented producers, believed that creole identity should be strengthened through a discriminatory policy against immigrants, such as the Portuguese, preventing them from acculturating and assimilating, and by discouraging elite creoles from marrying their daughters to outsiders. This point of view was openly supported by Hernandarias, the first creole governor of the Rio de la Plata Province, as well as by the whole *Benemérito* faction, thus helping to polarize Buenos Aires social and political structure into two clear-cut factions or *estamentos*.

In order to follow a successful discriminatory policy against the Catholic Hapsburg-ruled Portuguese, the *benemérito* factions (formed by elite creoles and Spaniards) had to resort to subtle religious arguments. In 1619, Captain Manuel de Frías, consul general of the Rio de la Plata, a strong adherent of the Jesuits, and a representative of the market-oriented producers of the interior, submitted to the Spanish crown an extensive memorandum pleading for inauguration of an Inquisition office in Buenos Aires, to halt the numerous arrivals of "New Christian Portuguese, formerly Jews", that threatened the purity of religion and constituted an economic monopoly, because "many of them are rich and powerful and very knowledgeable about all kinds of merchandise and slaves".⁴⁰ In contrast to the Mexican and Peruvian Inquisition, however, the Inquisition at Buenos Aires seized no Jews.⁴¹ Despite Captain Frías's success in establishing an Inquisition office, opportunities for Portuguese conversos (New Christians) to participate in the Spanish market increased with the death of Philip III in 1621, and the rise to power of the Conde Duque de Olivares, who sought to draw upon all kinds of commercial means to lift the Spanish empire out of its crisis. According to Julio Caro Baroja, "asientos, rentas, and trade licenses were granted to a large number of Portuguese conversos, with the expectation that the general economy would be strengthened."⁴²

According to the information given by Nicolás Besio Moreno, the number of Portuguese settlers in 1643 stood at 108 heads of families, or a total of 370 individuals of Portuguese origin, while the total number of Buenos Aires inhabitants was only 2,000.⁴³ But if we take into account the information given by Ricardo de Lafuente Machain, then the number of Portuguese men in 1643 was slightly higher, at 144. According to Lafuente, the total number of Portuguese who arrived in Buenos Aires was 209 men. From this last number we must deduct 45 who were transients and did not remain in the area, 11 who cannot be considered residents because they remained single, 7 who arrived after 1643, and 2 who left for Upper Peru before 1643. If we analyze the number of Portuguese who entered Buenos Aires, we find that in 1643, according to Besio Moreno, 95 out of 108 immigrating Portuguese heads of households, or 88 percent, had definitely settled there. On the other hand, if we take the figures given by Lafuente Machain, then the percentage diminishes to 69 percent, or 144 out of 209 men.⁴⁴

Evidence on the acculturation of foreign migrants appears conflicting.⁴⁵ Foreign migrants, such as the Portuguese, were forced to make the dominant majority (creoles and Spaniards) their reference group for language, currency, diet, weights and measures, dress, objects of religious worship, leisure patterns, morals, and law.⁴⁶

Evidence on the integration (enjoyment of equal rights and privileges) of Portuguese settlers also appears conflicting. On the one hand are the examples of elite Portuguese settlers who, desiring integration into the dominant society, learned Spanish, took out Buenos Aires citizenship, were active on the Buenos Aires political scene, married Buenos Aires creole women, and even had children who later entered Spanish religious orders.⁴⁷ Portuguese settlers may have been entirely loyal to their minority ingroup, but they were, at the same time, unlike Portuguese sojourners, under the necessity of relating themselves to the values and expectations of elite Spaniards and creoles.⁴⁸ In the case of Portuguese settlers, such as Gil González de Moura, Pedro Home Pessoa de Sáa, and Almador Vázquez de Alpoín, creole values and expectations were met. These Portuguese settlers married creole women, invested in urban and rural properties, and participated in military expeditions against hostile Indians, the main task required by the creole establishment to achieve settler status.⁴⁹ As a symbol of adjustment to a colonial society undergoing a process of incorporation into world trade, home ownership appears to be an appropriate indicator. Thus, homes were usually purchased by individuals who had a strong commitment to settle in Buenos Aires. Migrants from Europe tended to avoid this commitment until they had determined that Buenos Aires offered real advantages over their previous areas of residence.

On the other hand, there is evidence of a plebeian and itinerant Portuguese minority (peddlers, pulperos, petty merchants, and tailors) who never settled permanently in the host city, usually rented their dwellings, never married elite creole brides, were periodically segregated from Buenos Aires society, and even returned to Brazil or Portugal because of religious persecution.⁵⁰

Yet, one can reach a conclusion about the general notion of adjustment suggested by Samuel Baily by measuring how rapidly and how often Portuguese settlers were able to obtain citizenship, be admitted as a public official, artisan, or pulpero, be engaged in trade, and/or be married to a creole woman. The granting of permits to enter the city (immigration licenses) and practice liberal professions and artisanship became a clear instrument for political assimilation. Whenever Buenos Aires faced threats of military invasion, the Cabildo reacted by issuing more immigration licenses than usual in order to draw Portuguese immigration into the interior, out of reach of potential Dutch invaders on the coast. When the Dutch threatened military invasion in 1616, 1633, and 1637, thirteen, twelve, and thirty-three licenses, respectively, were granted to the Portuguese.⁵¹ (see Table 1). To issue immigration licenses, colonial authorities always required of the recipients that bonds be posted. This bureaucratic procedure entailed a kind of *compadrazgo* (godparenthood) relationship. The *fiadores* or *padrinos* (bondsmen) were in a cultural sense like bridges between Buenos Aires creole society and Portuguese newcomers. In order to deal with their creole or Spanish patrons, the Portuguese had to familiarize themselves with the customs and social institutions of Buenos Aires society. Creole and Spanish merchants often provided bonds in favor of the arriving Portuguese. Table 1 provides a list of sixty-four Portuguese newcomers who were imprisoned, as well as the names of those who posted bonds (worth 300 pesos each) for their freedom. Similarly, incoming foreign passengers were obliged to find bondsmen, many of whom posted bonds for more than one person. For example, Dionisio Fernández and Lucas Medrano, a notary, each deposited down payments or bonds for five different passengers.⁵² Finally, arriving foreigners sometimes could not procure bondsmen. In this case, they had to deposit something as a guarantee or face a stay in jail.⁵³ For example, Bartolomé Beloso, a shipowner, had to deposit as a guarantee two slaves, Domingo and Francisco, both from the Guinea coast.⁵⁴

The people who acted as "bridges" were not merely "cultural brokers", but also "power brokers", wielding power at two different levels (local and foreign communities) and "deriving their power at one level from their success at the other level".⁵⁵ Brokerage was made possible by a "discontinuity in the power and communication systems of majority and minority segments and by the possibility of resource allocations by a broker".⁵⁶ Of forty-eight power brokers, only seven, or 15 percent, held political positions. The most famous and most efficient "power broker" with such a

position was Juan de Vergara, the "organic intellectual" of the *Confederado* faction. In following an integrating policy, the *Confederados*, external market-oriented merchants, relied on men who could not boast of ancestors who had been masters of Indians and land, and favored the assimilation of foreign minorities, such as the Portuguese, by encouraging minority members to demand political and economic rights, so winning an important ally in their long-term struggle against the *benemérito* faction. For instance, Vergara was able to muster support for Juan Cardoso Pardo, a school teacher who had also been a valet to Francés de Beaumont y Navarra, a lieutenant governor, as well as to Juan de Vergara, was drastically challenged by the alguacil mayor Francisco González Pacheco as Defensor de la Real Hacienda. This challenge was made on the grounds that Cardoso was a Portuguese Jew who had escaped from jail after having been suspected of heresy. Juan de Vergara, the most popular and influential regidor in seventeenth century Buenos Aires, mustered support for Cardoso Pardo by denying the existence of any royal order that forbade foreigners from holding the office of Defensor de la Real Hacienda.⁵⁷ Likewise, in 1621, Manuel Cabral's candidacy for the Cabildo was challenged by the regidor Diego de Trigueros on similar grounds. Again, Juan de Vergara, breaking the *Confederado's* policy of not claiming ancestry in order to win an office, praised the contribution of Cabral's father, Amador Vázquez de Alpoin, to the city of Buenos Aires, managing to sway the opinions of the Cabildo members in his favor.⁵⁸ He also did his best in 1624 to defend Cristóbal de Torres, a candidate for a Cabildo office, against objections based on the fact that Torres had been a shoemaker and a pulpero.⁵⁹ In a similar fashion, whenever the *Confederado* faction ruled the municipal state, it tried to protect the Portuguese settlers against any *benemérito* encroachment. When Simón Madera, a Portuguese, suffered the destruction of his farm, because Captain Pedro Gutiérrez, a creole *benemérito*, left his horse and cattle to pasture freely, the Cabildo decided to accept the astronomical figure of a thousand pesos as compensation for the offense.⁶⁰ The strongest faction, in this particular case the *Confederados*, was the one able to maximize its bargaining strength, thanks to its having imposed higher moral, ideological, and political standards. On the contrary, the creoles were far less successful in trying to protect their interests. In 1618, at a time when the *Confederados'* external, market-oriented interests controlled the municipal state, Bernardo de León, the depositario general, who favored the *benemérito* faction, challenged the election to the municipal council of the Spaniard Francisco Muñóz on the grounds of the need to have one of the alcaldes' and half of the regidores' positions filled by creoles. The proposal failed to gain official support because many creoles were *beneméritos*.⁶¹

Furthermore, while pulperos were the main brokers between the masses and the elite, barbers and tailors were the main brokers within the elite.⁶² Mayordomos, foremen, and master artisans resorted to pulperos and barberos whenever they had a conflict to resolve. Pulperos, most of them of Portuguese origin, who worked in Buenos Aires could talk with a variety of neighbors while they managed their stores. Because they were always in one place, many people, including cart-drivers, could stop to talk, pass on gossip, catch up on the latest news, and ask them to transmit messages. They thus became, like Jeremy Boissevain's coffee-house owners, "key links in the information network" of colonial Buenos Aires.⁶³ For the same reason many Buenos Aires residents met in pulperias to catch up on the latest news. Moreover, cart-drivers, muleteers, cattle freighters, and itinerant peddlers were the main brokers between different geographic locations. Cart-drivers were prepared to receive, recode, and transmit the message or gossip along a path selected from their own networks.

The economic assimilation of Portuguese immigrants in the first half of the seventeenth century can be observed also by analyzing the behavior of a sample from the 1643 census, the only one available for that period.⁶⁴ This sample, illustrated in Table II, comprised twenty Portuguese merchants.⁶⁵ Some aspects of this Table need elucidation. First, it seems that the average time a merchant needed to become incorporated into mercantile activity fluctuated (according to column A) at around six years. This suggests that it was not easy to enter commerce. It is clear that in the presence of a highly organized illegal trade, incorporation into it required a detailed knowledge of the state bureaucracy, knowledge that took time to acquire. As is well known, the existence of an illegal trade

required a corrupt bureaucratic apparatus. Second, column B shows that the average time during which merchants registered some notarial activity fluctuated around nine and a half years. Finally, we can note that merchants who registered a large number of years between the last transaction and the 1643 census are, according to column E, those with heavy investments in farms and cattle. This might explain why they renounced their mercantile activities so early.

Finally, the granting of marriage licenses was the main mechanism for shifting the integration process from simple acculturation to real assimilation. Unlike Richard M. Bernard, who used the term marital assimilation to refer to "intermarriage" as the origin of a "melting pot" society, I plan to use the first term not only as a concept concerned with the development of new mixed family groups, but, also as suggested by Milton Gordon, as a by-product of structural assimilation.⁶⁶ Moreover, it is the contention here that, unlike internal enclaves, such as Tucumán and Charcas, where upward social mobility was attached to marriage to foreigners, in entrepôts such as Buenos Aires, settled by foreign migrants, upward social mobility was very often assigned to marriage to descendants from Spanish conquerors. This is still so today. Because of Spanish legislation, however, foreigners in Spanish America were forbidden to marry creole women. Yet, as an indirect result of Buenos Aires's incorporation into world trade, the Portuguese were finally allowed to marry Buenos Aires creole women. In 1606, Bishop Cristóbal de Loyola differed with Governor Hernandarias over the interpretation of the 1602 royal order. He considered the banishment of Portuguese detrimental to the city.⁶⁷ So Loyola persuaded Hernandarias to revoke the royal order. This was made possible by the intense political competition between the two contending economic interests.

After this controversy was won by Bishop Loyola, governors and Cabildos alike began to allow the intermarriage of creole women and Portuguese immigrants. In contrast to Cartagena, where creoles had strong prejudices against the Portuguese (only 32 of 184 Portuguese, or 17 percent, married creole brides), in Buenos Aires the Portuguese immigrants attained a much higher marital assimilation.⁶⁸ The lack of Portuguese females offset by the overwhelming number of creole women, obviously contributed to increased exogamy. Although the exogamy index for the creoles was also high, the reasons for this particular increase were different. A considerable number of creoles, especially women, were marrying foreigners.

Before the Portuguese rebellion of 1640, the percentage of creole brides who married creoles was lower than that of creole grooms who married creoles. Of 500 creole heads of households estimated by Besio Moreno for 1628, 413 creole residents, or 83 percent, chose creole spouses for their daughters.⁶⁹ A reverse pattern existed among the Portuguese. The percentage of Portuguese brides who married Portuguese was higher than that of Portuguese grooms who married Portuguese. Nineteen of 100 Portuguese grooms consistently chose Portuguese wives. If we review the ethnic and geographic origin of the women selected as wives by Portuguese settlers in seventeenth-century Buenos Aires, we conclude that while more than half of those 145 Portuguese settlers recorded in the Lafuente Machain list experienced a marital assimilation by marrying creole women, daughters of Spaniards, or descendants from conquerors, only a minority married Portuguese women (see Table III).

Unlike elite Portuguese residents, who, thanks to common social values, enjoyed the possibility of achieving rapid marital assimilation by the elite creole society, plebeian Portuguese were automatically excluded from it. Marital assimilation of plebeian Portuguese settlers occurred only through marriage to Black, mulatto, and Indian women. Only four Portuguese settlers, or 3 percent, were in this category. Thus, we may conclude that 110 Portuguese men out of 145, or 76 percent, experienced marital assimilation by marrying elite creole women.⁷⁰

Apart from the role played by ethnicity in discriminating marriages, politics played a very important role in reducing heterogamy. *Benemérito* grooms married exclusively women of that group.

As the *Beneméritos* favored a high kinship awareness and a lineage descent, they encouraged cross-cousin and parallel-cousin marriage. For instance, Gonzalo de Carbajal, a *benemérito* councilman, married the daughter of Francisco de Salas Videla, another *benemérito* leader of high prestige. Likewise, Cristóbal Remón, an important *benemérito* leader, married the daughter of Cristóbal Naharro, one of the first *beneméritos*. In a like manner, as *Confederado* grooms found it impossible to court *benemérito* daughters, they ended up marrying exclusively *Confederado* brides. Juan Cardoso Pardo, a controversial Portuguese school teacher, married the daughter of Hernán Suárez Maldonado, a famous *Confederado*. Captains Francisco Pérez de Burgos and Alonso Guerrero de Ayala, both *Confederados*, married the daughters of Mateo Leal de Ayala, the man who orchestrated most of the smuggling transactions. Finally, Francisco de Manzanares, another *Confederado* militant, married Pérez de Burgos's daughter, and General Sebastián de Horduña married Manzanares's daughter.⁷¹

Marriages of Portuguese men with Spanish or creole women were arranged by means of the socioeconomic institution of the arras, a kind of dowry, which implied only a tenth of the groom's assets. Many of these Portuguese were merchants fleeing the persecution of the Inquisition, which had been installed in Oporto and Bahia during the 1620s to root out all heretical elements. According to a sample of thirteen cases, the value of arras increased at this time to 30 percent of the value of dowries.⁷² Obviously, the fact that creole families were economically modest, and the Portuguese wealthy, made the marital contribution of the latter bigger than that of the former. There were creole families, however, who disliked the idea of improving their economic status by marrying their daughters to prosperous foreigners, and tried to counterbalance this situation by marrying them with creole mates.

On the other hand, whenever Buenos Aires became isolated from the world trade, it was hard for a creole settler, a member of the elite, to find wealthy foreign husbands for his daughters. Creole fathers gave up their ethnic and national prejudices and antipathies, and consented in some few cases to marry their daughters to "exceptional" mulattoes.⁷³

In spite of the intense assimilation that took place in the early seventeenth century, xenophobic prejudices and feelings remained alive in the Buenos Aires ruling elite. For instance, there were exceptional cases of young women who went against the will of their fathers (constituting a severe breach of custom) in refusing to marry elite Portuguese men and choosing, instead, creoles. In one case, in 1633, Ana Hernández y Rojas, daughter of Juan Martín de Amorín and Magdalena Hernández de Rojas, resorted to an ecclesiastical court to oppose her father, who wished to marry her to Francisco Alvarez, a wealthy Portuguese man, against her will. Instead, she chose to marry Francisco Ramos Cabral, a creole of Portuguese and Paraguayan origin, son of Sebastián Ramos, a Portuguese, and Gerónima Méndez, a creole descendant of conquerors. Francisco Ramos, despite his Portuguese origin, was a poor vecino feudatario (feudatory resident, or in political terms, a *benemérito*).⁷⁴ In this particular case, the population became divided between those who were Portuguese, who took the side of Ana's father, and those who were creoles, who took the side of Ana Hernández. Although the surviving summary of the ecclesiastical record does not reveal to us the church's decision, according to Ana Hernández's will, she finally married her creole sweetheart, Ramos Cabral, and not the Portuguese Alvarez.⁷⁵ This suggests that prejudices about seniority, and ancestry sometimes overrode economic interests in these matters. But how divided was the host society? Did it simply perpetuate the schism between creoles and Spaniards, or did its members celebrate new alliances in order to reinforce their unstable social position? Cases involving severe conflicts between creole and Spanish merchants and between *beneméritos* and *Confederados* arose from the very beginning of the history of the Rio de la Plata.

To sum up, I conclude from the evidence incorporated in this article that, unlike dominant and oppressed minorities, who faced deep religious barriers that prevented them from experiencing any kind of assimilation, a middleman minority, such as the Portuguese immigrants in early seventeenth-

century Buenos Aires, did learn the native language (Spanish), did invest in the land market, did marry local creole women, and did involve themselves in the local politics. Moreover, unlike the Portuguese in Veracruz, Cartagena, and Lima, the Portuguese migrants to Buenos Aires did not experience any kind of religious persecution. Given this economic and social mobility, we can understand why the Portuguese minority in seventeenth-century Buenos Aires was assimilated so rapidly, shifting from a middleman to a dominant position, as well as why they have always avoided a strategy of national differentiation.

Footnotes

¹ Solórzano y Pereira, 1648, libro 4, c.19, ns.39-58.

² Spengler, 1965, 188.

³ Echeverría, 1847, 409; Discurso de Introducción a una serie de lecturas pronunciadas en el Salón Literario en septiembre de 1837, p.284, quoted by Popescu, 1954; and Alberdi, 1886-87, III, 15, 31, 32.

⁴ González, 1913, 86; and Cané 1864, 601; quoted by Rodríguez Molas, 1982, 241 and 245.

⁵ Ingenieros, 1918, I, 139-140.

⁶ Garretón, 1933.

⁷ Canabrava, 1944; and Garzón Maceda, 1968.

⁸ Sierra, 1956-72; Palacio, 1954; Tiscornia, 1973; and Tiscornia, 1983, chapter 14.

⁹ Torres, 1984, 71.

¹⁰ Bonacich, 1973, 583-594.

¹¹ Alsina, 1910, 42; Chueco, 1910; y Germani, 1966. Sobre las ideas de Germani acerca de la inmigración, ver Halperín Donghi, 1975, 765-781.

¹² Baily, 1980, 32-48; y Szuchman, 1977, 24-50.

¹³ On the concept of integration and desegregation, see Clark, 1960, 16-17; and Kolb, 1965, 656-657. On the concept of assimilation and nationalization, see Price, 1969, 185-189; and Deutsch, 1966, 120-150.

¹⁴ Medina, 1900; Torre Revello, 1930; and Lewin, 1939.

¹⁵ Lewin, 1958; citado en Israel, 1975, 129.

¹⁶ Boxer, 1963, 81.

¹⁷ On the role played by Flemish and French Canadians in Belgium and Quebec, see Loh, 1975, 217-247.

¹⁸ Bonacich, 1973, 583-594.

¹⁹ Sancho de Sipranis, 1960.

²⁰ For a contrast between assimilation and acculturation, see Teske y Nelson, 1974, 351-368; Dupront, 1965, 7-36; and Wachtel, 1979, 135-136.

²¹ Wagley and Harris, 1958; and Wong, 1978, 337.

²² Gordon, 1964, 70-71.

²³ Baily, 1983.

²⁴ Zelin, 1979, 66-69.

²⁵ Rosa, 1974, 35-36.

²⁶ Rosa, 1974, 35; and Gelman, 1983, 280.

²⁷ Lafuente Machain, 1944, 183.

²⁸ Lima, 1980, 20.

²⁹ Cope, 1981, 39.

³⁰ Firth, 1965; and Wells, 1979, 399-415.

³¹ Olaechea Labayén, 1977, 501.

³² Peña, 1916, 55-60.

³³ Madero, 1939, 297, 344.

³⁴ Acuerdos, Municip., X, 342.

³⁵ Once the encomienda became vacant, Gonzalez Cabezas, his spurious origin notwithstanding, was assigned to it after paying the tributes that had not been collected for one year. His son-in-law, Anonio Martínez Pantoja, who inherited this old encomienda, became also Protector de Naturales. Later, in 1715, the same Martínez Pantoja administered an encomienda of Pampa Indians that belonged to Ana Rendón, widow of Captain Diego López Camelo. See Fernández de Burzaco y Barrios, 1977, 77; and AGN, Protocolos, Registro 2, 1714-16, f.317.

³⁶ Cohen, 1977, 1008.

³⁷ Peña, 1916, 9; and AGN, v.11, f.523.

³⁸ Adams, 1970, 316.

³⁹ Boxer, 1974, 70.

⁴⁰ Zorraquín Becú, 1952, 139; Molina, 1948, 160; and Israel, 1975, 124.

⁴¹ Medina, 1887, 1899 and 1905. Also see Lea, 1908; Lewin, 1950; Wiznitzer, 1961; Liebman, 1970; and Tejado Fernández, 1954, chapter 6.

⁴² Caro Baroja, 1963, 40-48, quoted by Hordes, 1982, 29-30. Antisemitism was an old prejudice among Spaniards that goes back to the Middle Ages. See Neuman, 1948; Márquez Villanueva, 1956 and 1957; Caro Baroja, 1961; Baer, 1961-66; Valdeón Baruque, 1968; Leon, 1970; Domínguez Ortiz, 1971.

⁴³ Besio Moreno, 1939; and Slicher van Bath, 1979.

⁴⁴ Lafuente Machain, 1931.

⁴⁵ Ots Capdequí, 1931; y Domínguez Compañy, 1955, 114.

⁴⁶ Some of these cultural boundaries were not static. Whenever the internal market-oriented producers prevailed, as in the 1590s and 1610s, the Buenos Aires fanega (about 1.60 bushels) and arroba (about 16 pounds) were standardized with those of Asunción. This standardization served the interests of an easier expanded internal trade. On the other hand, when the external market-oriented interests took control, as in 1620, the Buenos Aires fanega was equated with the corresponding measure of Tucuman (six arrobas and six libras), a city that served as a link between Upper Peru and Buenos Aires (Acuerdos, IV, 88).

⁴⁷ Sierra, 1956-72, 148.

⁴⁸ Allport, 1954, 38.

⁴⁹ Labougle, 1941, 135-139; and Marfany, 1940, 22.

⁵⁰ ver Siu, 1952, 34-45.

⁵¹ Acuerdos, V, 16, 286.

⁵² AGN, Sala IX, Escr. Ant., v.23, f.58; v.17, f.483, v.23, f.382, 59, and 64; v.19, f.298, 277, and 276; v.23, f.165; and v.9, f.517.

⁵³ For further information on the role played by the passenger's bond on Spanish colonial trade, see Lorenzo Sanz, 1979-80, I, 123.

⁵⁴ AGN, v.23, f.200.

⁵⁵ Adams, 1970, 315-327.

⁵⁶ Wells, 1979, 399-415.

⁵⁷ AGN, III, 633; and Cordero, 1939, 138-141.

⁵⁸ Acuerdos, IV, 131.

⁵⁹ Peña, 1916, 9.

⁶⁰ AGN, v.10, f. 188.

⁶¹ Acuerdos, III, 356.

⁶² About pulperos and pulperías, see Bossio, 1972.

⁶³ borrowed from Boissevain, 1974, 156.

⁶⁴ This census is not valid for larger generalizations. For in that particular year the slave trade had already collapsed and itinerant Portuguese merchants might have fled to more prosperous cities.

⁶⁵ Table II includes two types of columns, one headed with numbers and another with letters. The column headed with numbers consist of raw data. They include the following: the dates of birth and arrival of the merchant, the occupation declared upon arrival, the amount of dowry, the years of mercantile activity, the number and amount of the credit transactions notarially registered with regard to slave advancements, the

number of slaves fiscally and censused, and finally, the amount of assets declared in the 1643 census. The columns headed with letters consist of calculations based on the previous columns. Column A depicts the number of years between the merchant's arrival and the first notarial transaction registered; B depicts the number of years between the first and the last notarial transaction registered; C and D include the age of merchants at the time of the census and the time of the last transaction registered and the census date.

⁶⁶ Gordon, 1964, 80.

⁶⁷ Carbia, 1914, 60; and Garretón, 1933, 332-333.

⁶⁸ Vila Vilar, 1979, 183-185, Tables 1 and 2.

⁶⁹ Besio Moreno, 1939, 383.

⁷⁰ Lafuente Machain, 1931.

⁷¹ Gammalsson, 1980.

⁷² Data Bank.

⁷³ This was the case in 1705, when Pascual Slavatierra and María Montalvo, a couple of small farmers in Monte Grande county, agreed to marry their daughter María to Marcos, a mulatto 21 years old, son of Isabel mulata, who was "almost white, of nice face and features, of quite long hair that almost covers his shoulders, of well made-body, and straight of feet and leg", recently freed by Magdalena Valero (AGN, v.65, f.467f.).

⁷⁴ Molina, 1956, 177-178.

⁷⁵ Once widowed from Ramos, Doña Ana remarried for the second time Luis García Señoero and died in 1697 at the age of 84 years (AGN, v.31, f.225; v.54, f.300; and v.56, f.345).