

Constructing a New Body Politic: Institutional Design and Education in Simón Bolívar, Simón Rodríguez, and Andrés Bello

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1. New Footings

Santiago de Chile, September 18, 1845: General Diego José Benavente (1790-1867) read a speech about his involvement in the independence movement at the University of Chile. The attendants to his address included Manuel Bulnes, President of the Republic; Manuel Montt, Minister of Education; Andrés Bello, Rector of the University; and heads of the state institutions. In front of them, Benavente asserted that if independence heroes were alive, “cuánta ser[ía] su satisfacción y complacencia al ver la nación independiente [. . .] gozando profunda paz bajo la égida de sus instituciones [y marchando] hacia la realización de los altos fines que ellos se propusieron” (122-23). An independence figure himself, Benavente linked the emancipatory goals in the country to the consolidation of a republican state apparatus. With respect to the University of Chile, he stated that a specific aim of the founding fathers was “la erección de este templo para que sus hijos vinieran a iniciarse en los sublimes misterios de aquellas ciencias que forman, conservan, y enriquecen a los Estados” (123).

The university was established in 1843, and Benavente’s discourse was the keynote speech to commemorate its second anniversary. The university’s project was planned and executed by a pivotal figure of post-independence times, Venezuelan Andrés Bello (1781-1865). A mentor of *Libertador* Simón Bolívar, Bello migrated to Chile in 1829 and played a crucial role in Chilean education and politics for three decades. In the aftermath of their independence, most South American republics experienced bloody civil wars that delayed their institutional and state consolidation until the final decades of the 19th century. Before that, intellectuals focused on imagining homogenous national communities rather than building concrete state apparatuses (Uriarte 8). An important exception was Chile: its elite established a political consensus by the 1830s, which created a stable government and sound conditions for the early development of state machinery (Serrano 61-64). Thus, Chile was an attractive destination for intellectuals seeking political stability, like Bello (Jaksić 128-34).

Among Bello’s state-building plans in Chile, the university was a particularly original project. Unlike any university by that time, Bello’s academic establishment was meant to supervise the different government branches and provide state institutions with specialized knowledge

to inform their policies. As Rector Bello put it, “[e]l gobierno, la legislatura y todas las administraciones públicas necesitan llamar [a la universidad] en su auxilio y nada útil o importante puede emprenderse sin que primero sea sometido [. . .] y arreglado por ella” (*Obras completas* VIII: 279). Despite such an original institutional design, Benavente portrayed the university as realizing an already designed independence project. Influenced by the imaginary and homogenizing lens of nation-building, the General failed to acknowledge the institution’s specific features and its innovative character.¹ At the same time, and in less imaginary terms, Benavente’s words suggest concrete affinities among early attempts at institutional and state consolidation in postcolonial Spanish America.

First, the nation-building link between the independence goals and the university concealed the pervasive sense of historical contingency during the independence times. Indeed, amid the emancipatory movements, it was hard to glimpse the institutions and forms of government that would emerge in the following decades. Chile’s founding father, Bernardo O’Higgins (1778–1842), stated in an 1820 text that the independence struggle had been “una empresa que no se creía comprendida en la esfera de los posibles,” and that Chilean leaders “[habían] llegado con la realidad a donde no llegaba la verosimilitud” (1). For O’Higgins, the country’s independence had been an unexpected outcome exceeding any programmatic design. More broadly, Simón Bolívar (1783–1830) expressed the generalized sense of uncertainty in the aftermath of Spanish American independence movements, stating in his “Carta de Jamaica” that he could not foresee “la suerte futura del Nuevo Mundo, establecer principios sobre su política, [o] casi profetizar la naturaleza del gobierno que llegará a adoptar” (69). Stressing the unpredictable nature of these times, historian François-Xavier Guerra portrayed their inaugural event—Ferdinand VII’s abdication in 1808—as the point of departure of “una crisis inesperada e inédita” (122). This *vacatio regis* shattered the political foundations of the Hispanic monarchy, forcing its disjointed parts to imagine new sources of authority and legitimacy—like popular sovereignty.² In this new historical scenario, figures like O’Higgins and Bolívar could not predict the forms of government and institutions of post-revolutionary societies.

On the other hand, the fall of the colonial regime marked the beginning of an unprecedented period of political and institutional experimentation in which radical innovations coexisted with continuities and convergent projects.³ In that spirit, Venezuelan pedagogue and savant Simón Rodríguez (1769–1854)—another mentor of Simón Bolívar—depicted early republican attempts at institutional design as both original and collective endeavors: “[¿]Dónde iremos a buscar modelos? -La América Española es original = ORIGINALES han de ser sus Instituciones y su Gobierno [...] *O Inventamos o Erramos*” (*Sociedades americanas* 88). This article studies links and differences between the proposals for new institutions by three prominent statesmen of post-independence Spanish America: Simón Bolívar, Simón Rodríguez, and Andrés Bello. I explore the great emphasis these authors placed on education to develop concrete institutional means of forming a new body politic and establishing new republican stability in the region. In different ways, these authors proposed political and education arrangements to transform the *ancien régime*’s subjects into republican citizens. Specifically, I trace a genealogy of institutional experimentation that

began with early speculations on education and republican state-building by Bolívar and Rodríguez, and culminated in Bello's proposal for a university that would oversee education and the different branches of government in the republic.

By no means am I the first to propose comparisons between Bolívar, Rodríguez, and Bello—widely examined authors in nation-building studies. Alicia Ríos analyzed how the writings they penned down in Venezuela “construyeron una imagen muy similar del proceso [. . .] y los valores de la nueva nación” (“Bello, Bolívar y Rodríguez” 371). This focus on the imaginary construction of the nation conceals these authors' specific plans for early state consolidation and aligns them with a homogenizing national project, like Benavente's take on Bello's university. In contrast, I propose to study their plans through a state-building approach: while the nation is essentially an imagined community, the state can't remain an intangible entity but needs material forms of concretization, like its institutional machinery (Oszlak 17). I will thus examine concrete institutional means of developing early state apparatuses.

Moreover, beyond any national or homogenizing lens to link Bolívar, Rodríguez, and Bello, I examine their work outside Venezuela and approach their proposals through a genealogical lens. As Foucault argued, the genealogical method “must record the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality; [. . .] it must be sensitive to their recurrence, not in order to trace the gradual curve of their evolution, but to isolate the different scenes” (76). While the genealogy I propose ends in the University of Chile, I do not read Bolívar's, Rodríguez's, and Bello's projects as links in a uniform chain. Instead, I study them as experimental discourses that did not conceal the uncertainty of the early republican times but acknowledged and confronted it, performing its turbulence for their audiences and moving them towards constructing a new body politic.

My comparative reading contributes to current discussions on Spanish American republicanism. Recent studies have proposed to examine early postcolonial constitutional, political, and legal debates as the open-ended arena of republican experimentation (Rojas 105-39; Aguilar 9-26; Sabato 169-99).⁴ This article sheds light on the central role of education and institutional design in that sphere of republican experimental thinking. Moreover, my rendition of education and institution-building projects as forms of republican experimentation helps refashion how literary studies have depicted the political performance of postcolonial intellectuals. These studies have addressed the participation of savants in political institutions to unveil their dependence on state apparatuses that originated in colonial times and remained unaltered throughout the 19th century (Rama 1-28). However, I examine new institutional and education arrangements—like Bello's university—as forms of intellectual experimentation, which complicates the alleged monolithic character of republican lettered production.

The following pages also cast light on understudied aspects of each author's work. While Bolívar developed state-building projects for Gran Colombia, Bolivia, and Peru, he has been mostly studied as a military caudillo rather than a statesman (Ríos, *Nacionalismos banales* 37). Instead, by reading Bolívar's thoughts on education and republicanism alongside those of Rodríguez and Bello, I call attention to the intellectual nature of his contributions to

postcolonial institutional design. Given the teacher-pupil relationship between Rodríguez and Bolívar, Rodríguez's political thinking has been considered a source of inspiration for his pupil (Rumanzo 163). Still, I explore how Bolívar's thought also inspired his mentor, for it was by defending his pupil's political proposals in his *Defensa de Bolívar* (1828) that Rodríguez elaborated on his own plans for a foundational state bureaucracy. Andrés Bello, for his part, has been studied as the savant who solidified the order and stability of the Chilean republic (Jaksić 17-26). This emphasis on "order" has hindered the creativity of his institutional proposals; in contrast, I underline the innovative features of Bello's university.

2. Bolívar's Dilemma

In Bolívar's early texts, a central topic was the difficulty of imagining the political future of post-independence Spanish America. At the same time, in those texts, he began to explore the stable ground for his institutional and education arrangements: customs. First, in his *Carta de Jamaica* (1815), Bolívar compared the precarious state of affairs of the region to the human species when they first appeared on earth: "¿Se pudo prever cuando el género humano se hallaba en su infancia, rodeado de tanta incertidumbre, ignorancia y error, cuál sería el régimen que abrazaría para su conservación? [. . .] En mi concepto, esta es la imagen de nuestra situación" (69). Uncertainty, ignorance, and propensity to error: for him, these were the key features of the unprecedented political situation in the region after the fall of the colonial order. He insisted that, in such a state, "es una especie de adivinación indicar cuál será el resultado de la línea política [de] América," and depicted his conjectures on the political future of the region as "arbitrarias, dictadas por un deseo [. . .] y no por un raciocinio probable" (69-70). In addition to reflecting on the lack of stable political footing during the independence period, this rhetoric of uncertainty and speculation sets the tone for the grandiose intellectual task he undertook in the very act of enunciating novel institutional and political principles for the region.⁵

Yet Bolívar was far from entertaining wild ideas in his political proposals. Despite its speculative tone, the letter above quickly moved to establish firm criteria for determining which institutional arrangements were fit or unfit for Spanish American societies: customs and education. As Bolívar put it, "las instituciones perfectamente representativas no son adecuadas a nuestro carácter, costumbres y luces actuales" (75). Character, customs, and education—"luces"—should be the basis to set up the political arrangements of the region. Likewise, in his *Manifiesto de Cartagena* (1812), Bolívar affirmed that "todavía nuestros conciudadanos no se hallan en aptitud de ejercer por sí mismos y ampliamente sus derechos; porque carecen de las virtudes políticas que caracterizan al verdadero republicano: virtudes que no se adquieren en los Gobiernos absolutos" (51). Bolívar intensely displayed how the collapse of the colonial regime stroked Spanish American societies to the point that it was not likely to envisage new political principles. However, for him, there was a deep stratum of customs and traditions that the independence movements did not change: this was the standard to adopt new political systems in the region. In Bolívar's view, that stratum of social habits demonstrated that Spanish Americans were not ready for representative democracies, for they lacked the customs, education, and virtues that were instilled only in republics, not in absolutist governments.

Diego von Vacano has sustained that Bolívar's notion of virtue linked both martial and civic values, as it combined "the willingness to act with valor and force for the motherland" with the "respect and love [for] its laws" (72). For Bolívar, these two aspects of republican virtues were missing in the region, as Spanish Americans did not have the opportunity to develop them during colonial times. New republics could perish due to internal conflicts, for its citizens lacked the martial and political customs to display self-sacrifice for a greater good; instead, they would indulge in petty bids for personal advancement. In this, we find the *Libertador's* rendition of a classic dilemma of Western republicanism: the "Machiavellian moment," when a newly founded republic faces the problem of remaining morally and politically stable as its citizens succumb to chaos and internal conflicts that threaten to destroy all the structures of government (Simon 99).⁶ Yet, in the region, this dilemma would be the normal state of affairs: rather than succumb to that chaos, Spanish Americans would always live in that condition, as they had never developed the political customs that would uphold their republics. At first glance, this lack of civic traditions would deem the republican system inapplicable to the newly independent countries. However, this awareness of the political importance of customs led Bolívar to develop, in his later texts, institutional means of adapting republicanism to the region.

In his *Discurso de Angostura* (1819), Bolívar envisaged the creation of a *moral power* "para que vele por la educación de los niños, la instrucción nacional," and "cuyo dominio sea la infancia, [. . .] las buenas costumbres, y la moral Republicana" (117). An autonomous branch of government, this *moral power* would oversee that public instruction instills civic virtues and new customs in infants so as to create the new body politic of Spanish American republics. Bolívar posited that the institution would "corregir las costumbres con penas morales" (117), and that its jurisdiction "deberá ser efectiva con respecto a la educación y la instrucción, y de opinión solamente en las penas y los castigos." Though the *moral power's* effective influence was limited to public instruction, it would have consultative functions in other spheres. As the control over customs was essential to consolidate the republican system, this organism would have the moral authority to provide legal and penal systems with advisory opinions.

Later, in his proposal for the Bolivian Constitution (1826), Bolívar imagined a Chamber of Censors, an autonomous institution that would introduce reforms in the fields of "la moral, las ciencias, las artes, la instrucción y la imprenta" (130). The main functions of the censors were to produce "[t]odas las leyes de imprenta, economía, plan de estudios, y método de enseñanza pública," and to "proteger la libertad de imprenta, [. . .and] el fomento de las artes y las ciencias." Censors would be the leading authority in creating the legal and operational frameworks for the education system and the printing press, but would also determine "si la Constitución y los Tratados públicos se observan." While not being a separate government branch, censors would wield more authority than the *moral power*. Indeed, they would take control of the state in turbulent times and conduct impeachment trials to "condena[r] a oprobio eterno a los usurpadores de la autoridad soberana y a los insignes criminales." Bolívar gave censors a pivotal role in both establishing and conserving the moral and political stability of newly founded republics. In normal times, they would be a board of savants

overseeing education, customs, and the printing press—mechanisms for spreading republican values. Yet, in political crisis, censors would be the sole authority to decree emergency rule and seize control of the state.

In the *Discurso de Angostura* and the Bolivian Constitution, Bolívar replaced the rhetoric of uncertainty of his previous texts with original solutions to the threat of a Machiavellian moment in Spanish America. He designed institutions overseeing public instruction to ensure it would promote customs matching the values of the republican system. This notion that political arrangements should relate customs has deep roots in Western republicanism. Montesquieu argued that while laws and governmental bodies were “the particular and precise institutions of a legislator,” customs were “the institutions of a nation in general” (369). If Montesquieu sought to fit forms of government to established customs, the *Libertador* developed education and institutional arrangements to make manners fit the republican system. Anthony Padgen noted that Bolívar hoped that “men could be made into citizens by the force of constitutional arrangements alone” (151). Yet Padgen missed the point that Bolívar’s constitutional thought comprises not only legal arrangements, but also concrete proposals for education and moral institutions.

Rather than abstract constitutional measures, Bolívar’s *moral power* and censors were specific projects for creating the republic’s moral bearing. Thus, he projected a great deal of authority over those education and moral organisms. The *moral power* would advise other state agencies, while censors would have reserve powers to preserve the republic’s moral and political stability in moments of disarray. These proposals resemble boards of patricians that J. Necker, Madame de Staël, and B. Constant designed for a fourth branch of government controlling the balance of powers and upholding the stability of the republic (Barrón 244-82). Bolívar’s refashioned that state branch into an education and moral institution. Instead of overseeing the division of powers, his experimental institutions focused on the realm of customs and public instruction, while only wielding advisory and reserve powers for other spheres.

Critical approaches to Bolívar’s republicanism have aligned his institution-building proposals with an authoritarian conception of government. Commenting on how a *moral power* was to control social practices, Víctor Belaúnde portrayed it as a “laicized Inquisition” (194). Likewise, Beatriz Pastor regarded the plan for a Chamber of Censors as an example of Bolívar’s “giro autoritario,” which culminated in the proposal for a life-long Presidency (224).⁷ However, Sibylle Fischer has argued that such approaches miss the point that Bolívar limited the authority of his institutional arrangements to specific spheres and deprived them of actual power in day-to-day politics (43). With regards to the life-long President, Bolívar affirmed that “[e]n él estriba todo nuestro orden, sin tener por esto acción. Se le ha cortado la cabeza para que nadie tema sus intenciones, y se le han ligado las manos para que a nadie dañe” (130-31). Likewise, it was only during a political crisis when censors would take on exceptional powers. Bolívar did not conceive the *moral power* and censors to secure the state’s authoritarian control over customs, but as creative means of establishing and maintaining the moral base of the republic. Like Bolívar, Rodríguez and Bello explored links between education and state-building to venture quite original institutional arrangements.

3. Rodríguez's Provisional Measures

In 1825, Bolívar put his mentor Simón Rodríguez in charge of designing the education system of the newly founded Republic of Bolivia and made the Congress of Chuquisaca approve Rodríguez's study plan. In his capacity as Director of Education of Bolivia (1826) and, then, as head of the education system of the Chilean province of Concepción (1834-1836), Rodríguez advanced education reforms for the republican system. In his curricula, writings, political reflections, and state-building proposals, he challenged established customs and introduced new ones to form republican citizens. First, his curricula refashioned learning habits: he combined literacy acquisition with craft workshops, as he expected his students to approach writing as an artisanal task. As Chilean José Victorino Lastarria (1817-1888) recalled, Rodríguez "enseñaba, juntamente con los rudimentos de instrucción primaria, la fábrica de ladrillos [. . .] y otras obras de economía doméstica" (56). The Venezuelan pedagogue believed writing was a physical task and should represent the bodily gestures of oral communication. To convey the embodied dimension of language in the printed word, he advanced a non-linear form of writing that displayed different typefaces on the same page, linked chunks of text through curly brackets, and changed the case of keywords. In his *Sociedades americanas* (1828), he regarded that both writing and speaking were forms of "painting" gestures:

Se puede PINTAR sin HABLAR
pero no HABLAR sin PINTAR

Los **GESTOS** son un **BOSQUEJO**
de lo que la *mano* } por falta { *de medios*
no puede dibujar } { o de tiempo

GESTICULAR es pintar **EN EL AIRE**

en el discurso *hablado* } { conexión de ideas
como } debe haber { y
en el *escrito* } { conexión de pensamientos

(*Sociedades* 218)

In Rodríguez's view, if gestures accompanying oral communication were the first outline of thoughts, writing needed to reproduce them again on the page. Along these lines, in his reading of Rodríguez's notion of gestures, Ronald Briggs noted that "if gesticulating is painting in the air, then typography is painting on the page" (93). Since gestures are an idiosyncratic manifestation of one's expression, they could not be broken down into a system of signs. Instead, writing needed to depict them through extemporized, non-linear arrangements scattered through the whole page. Seeking to recreate the unique mannerism of his bodily gestures to readers and students, Rodríguez developed a performative writing that was shocking to established reading and writing customs.⁸ In regards to the reception of Rodríguez's texts, Lastarria claimed that "[l]a claridad [. . .] casi desaparecía bajo las formas

plásticas de su escritura, que chocaba por su extrañeza” (54). Likewise, Chilean José Luis Amunátegui (1828–1888) asserted the Venezuelan’s visual and writing devices “confund[ían] en vez de ilustrar” (275).

Like the rhetoric of uncertainty in Bolívar’s early texts, Rodríguez’s unconventional writings bespeak the political and cultural instability in post-independence Spanish America. At that time, there was a pervasive sense of confusion about language and cultural codes. Rafael Rojas affirmed that, in the wake of the independence movements, there was a perception that “[e]l mayor descalabro de la Ilustración y la Revolución [era] la confusión de lenguas, la Babel doctrinal propiciada por el abandono del lenguaje de la monarquía” (80). In the same fashion, Susana Rotker argued that the lack of a shared semantic ground resulted in “una realidad en la que se abusa[ba] del lenguaje de tal modo que muchos vocablos se hallaban desgastados” (163). In that shaky context for social and language conventions, Rodríguez deployed his writing to create new customs for republican citizens. Thus, while he ironically dedicated his texts to those raised in the monarchical times, he asserted his texts were meant to educate younger readers and students who “necesitan formar costumbres de otra especie, para vivir bajo un Gobierno diferente del que tuvieron sus padres” (*Sociedades* 15). Like Bolívar, Rodríguez emphasized the crucial role of republican education in forming a new body polity, that is, in instilling new customs for a new generation of citizens:

El punto de partida indeciso

Sobre { si es el Gobierno el que influye } no lo será para quien piensa.
 { o si son las Costumbres }

y ya muchos lo han decidido.

En el Sistema Republicano { El Gobierno forma las Costumbres
 { porque enseña a formarlas

En los demás, sean cuales fueren { las Costumbres forman al Gobierno
 { porque cada uno hace de sus hijos lo que quiere

(*Sociedades* 113)

Like Bolívar did in his early texts, Rodríguez began the previous passage by acknowledging the lack of a stable starting point to venture an accurate political judgment—this time, defining the exact nature of the relationship between customs and forms of government. Yet, he immediately moved to claim that the republican system had a particular way of relating to customs. In a republic, the government would continuously educate citizens to shape their habits and accommodate them to their government. In other political systems, education would not play that transformative role in the social realm, for these systems were shaped by established traditions rather than to shape them. Bolívar had already proposed that republics should mold the customs of their citizens through education and institutional arrangements. Rodríguez made this point more explicit by affirming that republics should not passively reproduce established customs, but dynamically shape them through an education system.

The Venezuelan pedagogue also explored the transformative potential of the republican system by designing institutional arrangements for a foundational Spanish American bureaucracy in his *Defensa de Bolívar* (1829), a text vindicating his pupil's republican principles. As Bolívar had taken on dictatorial powers in Venezuela, Colombia, and Peru, his figure spurred much criticism in Spanish America and Europe (Filippi 321-23). Rodríguez challenged such critiques by offering an original interpretation of Bolívar's proposal for a life-term presidency. The Venezuelan pedagogue argued that “[e]l Gobierno vitalicio no es la obra final de la República—[sino] su necesidad provisional: considérese como el sistema de puntuales, con que se sostiene un edificio que se va a cimentar bajo la obra” (*Defensa* 157). For Rodríguez, Bolívar's proposal was a propaedeutic measure to establish the foundations of the republican edifice and ensure the stability of new states in their first years of existence. Therefore, the life-term presidency would be discontinued once the republic consolidated its political footing.

Surprisingly, the 1826 Bolivian Constitution never states that the life-term executive was a temporary arrangement. In fact, the “provisionality” that Rodríguez projected onto his pupil's proposal was an entirely new, experimental formulation. Furthermore, Rodríguez claimed that not only the president, but all the first holders of state offices in the new republics, needed to be life-appointed officials: “es menester convenir que todo debe ser VITALICIO, Jueces, Tribunos, Senadores, Censores, Ministros, Vice-Presidente” (156). Bolívar never imagined something like that. Yet, for Rodríguez, Bolívar's life-term presidency was only one of the necessary means of ensuring the stability of the nascent republic. In his view, to avoid the threat of chaos and destruction of a Machiavellian moment, it was also a must that all state officials of the foundational government enjoy life-term appointments. The executive and legislative members, the magistrates of the judiciary, the savants of the Chamber of Censors—all of them needed to enjoy permanent positions so the foundational bureaucracy could successfully establish the new political footing of the republican edifice.

Rodríguez emphasized that “[s]olo bajo un Régimen Vitalicio podrán los hombres públicos ocuparse, con suceso, en la creación de una sociedad perfecta—en continuas mudanzas se desvanece la autoridad, todo se hace ilusorio” (163). He claimed this preliminary measure would allow time and stability for implementing the education reforms to produce republican citizens: “Sosténgase of gobierno por una representación NACIONAL bien entendida y VITALICIA, instruyendo al Pueblo entretanto, para que su Representación ascienda al verdadero tono POPULAR” (158). While statesmen and legislators would create the new legal and institutional arrangements of the republic, censors and educators would instruct the new generations in republican customs and virtues. In that way, state institutions would be bound to a republican stratum of education and social habits. In his early writings, Bolívar had concluded that Spanish Americans were not ready for fully representative governments due to the educational level and customs these systems required. For Rodríguez, to speed up Spanish Americans' aptness for fully functional republics, they needed an inaugural permanent government that would provide educators with stability to form new republican citizens.

Rodríguez's study plan, writing, and institutional proposals came about from an unstable context for social conventions, in which Spanish American societies lacked new political

principles for their postcolonial future. However, like Bolívar, he truly believed in the republic's transformational power to spread civic customs and virtues through education and institutional arrangements. In his proposal, he refashioned his pupil's political thought to demand that all the members of the foundational bureaucracy be granted permanent offices, so they could have the time and support to accomplish the reform of customs and politics.

4. Bello's University

Like Bolívar and Rodríguez, Andrés Bello believed that education was a primary means of establishing the new republics' moral and political foundations. In an 1836 article, he affirmed that while all the political regimes needed to provide their citizens with some form of education, “en ningún[o] pesa más la obligación de proteger este ramo de la prosperidad nacional que en los gobiernos republicanos” (*Obras completas* VIII: 213-14). Bello played a significant role in developing the education and political systems in the Chilean republic since his arrival in the country in 1829. After a period of political turbulence in the aftermath of the independence, the Chilean elite joined ranks with Diego Portales in establishing a conservative regime, the so called “orden portaliano” (1830-1841). Portales commissioned Bello with the drafting of the 1833 Constitution and the overhaul of colonial laws and institutions. Like Rodríguez's take on foundational bureaucracy, Portales described his regime as “[u]n gobierno fuerte, centralizador, cuyos hombres se[rán] verdaderos modelos de virtud y patriotismo, y así endere[zarán] a los ciudadanos por el camino del orden y las virtudes. Cuando se hayan moralizado, venga el Gobierno completamente liberal” (177). Bello was a central figure in establishing that strong but provisional government in the decade of the 1830s, while being a moderating force against its most authoritarian tendencies. He later advanced the gradual opening of the political system in the less conservative regime of the 1840s (Jaksić 125-54). In his moderate take on politics, Bello linked temperate speeches and gradual political change to the design of sound institutional arrangements.⁹ We shall see that, in the University of Chile, Bello's sober approach to language and politics developed into a quite experimental plan.

First, from the early post-independence times, Bello developed a notion of proper verbal expression that combined tradition and innovation, stability and adaptation to variations. With Juan García del Río, he coauthored *Indicaciones sobre la conveniencia de simplificar y uniformar la ortografía en América* (1823), which proposed eliminating mute letters, like “h,” and reducing the alphabet to 26 letters. These changes sought to accommodate writing to pronunciation, so it would be easier to teach literacy to Spanish Americans and, thus, to educate them. His proposals did not imply a break with writing and reading conventions but a subtle accommodation to reflect long-existing pronunciation uses. Unlike Rodríguez, Bello did not propose writing reforms to challenge customs and introduce new ones; instead, his innovations advanced “[un] cambio gradual dentro del orden” (Jaksić 156).

In Bello's logic, if writing would reflect orderly transitions in oral patterns, texts needed to depict oral expression with moderation. This had not been the case of official documents and political speeches before Bello's arrival to Chile. During the independence and early foundational years, decrees were penned with an excessive rhetorical flair derived from religious sermons so as to mobilize the population in favor of the nascent republic (Feliú

190). In that unstable scenario for textual and cultural protocols, political discourses appropriated sacred oratory to combine religious fervor with patriotism. Against this inflated rhetoric, Bello proposed to mold the rhetorical flair of the times to produce political discourse with a sober but robust tone. As he put it in his *Principios de derecho de gentes* (1832), in political speeches,

[e]l estilo debe ser [. . .] sencillo, claro y correcto, sin excluir la fuerza y vigor, cuando el asunto lo exija. Nada afearía más los escritos de este género, que un tono jactancioso y sarcástico. Las hipérboles, las apóstrofes [. . .] deben desterrarse del lenguaje de los gobiernos y sus ministros, y reservarse únicamente a las proclamas [. . .] que permiten y aún reclaman todo el calor y el ornato de la elocuencia. (254)

Bello elaborated more on how to balance restraint and eloquence in political speeches in his portrayal of Lucio Licinio Craso in his *Compendio de la historia literaria* (1850). He described the Roman orator as exhibiting “[u]na gravedad suma en el estilo serio, mucha gracia y urbanidad en el jocoso, gran lucidez en la exposición del derecho” (*Obras completas* VI: 126). In his account of Craso’s speeches, Bello also added performative elements: “sabía captarse desde el principio la atención; era parco en las inflexiones de la voz y el gesto; vehemente, airado a veces [. . .] y al mismo tiempo conciso.” For Bello, eloquence and moderation were not at odds but required a delicate combination for orators to convince their audiences through performative gestures and, at the same time, convey the equanimity of stable politics. Bolívar’s rhetoric of uncertainty and Rodríguez’s performative writing reflected the anxiety and struggles for creating a new body politic in post-independence times. Instead, by molding the agitated flair of early republican speeches, Bello constructed a more stable linguistic and political framework for crafting the policies that would affect the body politic.

In addition to shaping his prescriptions for republican oratory, Bello’s moderate politics informed his proposals for the Chilean education system. In the 1833 Constitution that he wrote, he added a clause for creating “una superintendencia de educación pública, a cuyo cargo estará la inspección de la enseñanza nacional, y su dirección, bajo la autoridad del Gobierno” (*Constitución* 194). Like the state agencies projected by Bolívar and Rodríguez, this organism was in charge of aligning public instruction with the values of the foundational government of the early republic. However, in an 1835 work on writing reforms, Bello asserted that any institution regulating the fields of education and letters would be “una autoridad inconciliable con los fueros de la república literaria” (*Obras completas* V: 4). This institution would do more harm than good because “en las letras, como en las artes y la política, la verdadera fuente de todos los adelantamientos y mejoras es la libertad” (4-5). While Bello penned the design of a state organism overseeing education, he opposed its immediate creation, probably having in mind the thought that, under the authoritarian tendencies of the Portales regime, said institution would limit rather than promote education, arts, and politics.

However, during the less conservative regime of Manuel Bulnes (1841–1851), Bello materialized that institution by founding the University of Chile in 1843. With the country’s

political liberalization in the 1840s, the centralization of education did not risk falling into the hands of an authoritarian regime. Instead, as Bello stated in an 1842 article, the university would “adelantar [la] enseñanza de un modo fijo y sistemado, que permita, sin embargo, la adopción progresiva de los nuevos métodos y los progresivos adelantamientos que hagan las ciencias” (*Obras completas* VII: 278). More than an institution for higher instruction, the university was initially conceived as the superintendence of education (Serrano 69-72). Besides, in his 1841 address to Congress, President Bulnes affirmed that the university should play a more utilitarian role in the state apparatus. He asserted that, in addition to its role as superintendence of education, the university should be “un poderoso auxiliar a los trabajos que se emprendan por los diversos departamentos de la administración [pública]” (121).

Given the functions that the institution was called to play in government affairs, university members needed to be careful with the political implications of their discourses. As Bello put it in his inauguration speech (1843), the university “no sería digna de ocupar un lugar en nuestras instituciones sociales, si [. . .] el cultivo de las ciencias y las letras pudiese mirarse como peligroso bajo un punto de vista moral, o bajo un punto de vista político” (*Obras completas* VII: 304). Like Bello’s model of an ideal republican orator (Craso), university discourses needed to refrain from polemical tones and flairy speeches. The rhetorical and political moderation that he expected from university members was due to the specific roles that, following Bulnes, Bello envisioned them playing in the republican order.

In an 1843 article about the university, Bello proposed that the different university departments serve as state agencies that would guide and oversee all state and civic institutions. For instance, he suggested that the department of social sciences advise the government about “la economía política y las ciencias financieras, la política propiamente dicha, las ciencias legales y administrativas, el derecho público e internacional y las ciencias morales en general” (*Obras completas* VI: 270). Likewise, the theology department, “suministrará frecuentemente al gobierno y a los prelados de la iglesia chilena las bases de las mejoras o reformas que convenga introducir en ella” (279). Moreover, “no ser[ía] menos frecuente el recurso de casi todos los poderes y autoridades del estado a la facultad de ciencias físicas y matemáticas: el movimiento industrial del país debe apoyarse en ella” (280). Finally, when commenting on the functions of the humanities department, Bello linked “el estudio de la lengua nacional y el cultivo de las letras” to “el encargo de la enseñanza primaria y secundaria en toda la república” (280).

While the university was first conceived as the superintendence of education, its design evolved into a board of patricians that would oversee all state agencies. Indeed, if each university department were to advise on a specific area of policymaking, the university as a whole would serve as the institution guiding the works of all branches of government. Bello did not detail the logistics of how each department would guide specific government agencies, and there is no historical evidence that the university oversaw all the state institutions. However, the general political duties that Bello envisioned for the academic establishment are telling of the experimental institutional design of the university.

The university's government role can be compared to the political functions of Bolívar's and Rodríguez's institutional arrangements. On this point, Grínor Rojo has loosely proposed that Bello's university resembles the education proposals of "un cierto Bolívar [. . .] que inventa en Angostura el poder moral, ese dispositivo jurídico mediante cuyas actividades reguladoras el Libertador esperaba darle a la gestión educativa una dignidad equivalente a la de una rama soberana del Estado" (159). Yet, the parallelism with Bolívar's institutional thinking is more precise. The *Libertador* conceived the *moral power* as a separate state branch with effective power over education and customs, and with an advisory role in the legal and penal systems. Likewise, Bello's university was initially conceived as the superintendence of education with effective authority over public instruction, yet the rector extended its advisory functions over the whole state apparatus. Bello's proposal went beyond Bolívar's because the Bulnes government had demanded of the university an active participation in government affairs.

However, the vast auxiliary functions of the university are in tandem with its lack of effective authority. Unlike Bolívar's censors, the university would not declare emergency rule and safeguard the republican system during a political crisis. As the Chilean government already enjoyed stability by the early 1840s, it was unnecessary to imagine possible solutions to a Machiavellian moment. In the 1830s, the Portales regime had already functioned as the founding government that, according to Rodríguez, required permanency to create new political foundations for the republic. In the 1840s, once a more liberal government replaced that foundational system, the university was to take on more concrete advisory functions in the state apparatus.

Nonetheless, there are also parallels between Rodríguez's and Bello's proposals. During the uncertain times of the early postcolonial experience, Rodríguez demanded stability for statesmen and educators to implement political and moral reforms and solidify the republican order. In the Bulnes regime, Bello envisaged the political roles that a board of scholars could play in an already stable republic. Then, while Rodríguez's plan for a foundational bureaucracy was meant to create the foundations of a new political system, Bello focused on how to contribute to an existing government. In different ways, both authors developed means of strengthening the role of savants in the republic. Rodríguez proposed that state officials and educators like him enjoy a great deal of stability and power in their positions in the foundational government. For his part, Bello complied with Bulnes' request for a utilitarian university, empowering the institution in the state apparatus. Julio Ramos has argued that "ya en Bello opera una crítica del pragmatismo que resulta importante en función de la voluntad de autonomía del campo intelectual" (96-7). Yet, instead of seeking intellectual autonomy, Bello advanced an experimental, but pragmatic, project for projecting prime roles for scholars within the state administration: university scholars would not be dependent on the government, but state agencies would depend on scholars' advice.

Despite its originality and links to previous Spanish American proposals for state-building, Bello's university was first considered an imitation of European university systems. On July 18, 1842, an anonymous article published in *El Semanario de Chile* stated that the university was "una imitación de la que organizó Napoleón en Francia [. . .] para someter hasta la educación al gran sistema de unidad militar que le sirvió para elevarse" (ctd. in Serrano 18). The Napoleonic university, as a centralized state agency controlling the education system,

influenced many postcolonial Latin American universities (Subercaseaux 125-36). However, the centralization of the education system was not exclusive to the Napoleonic model, but a common task of German, English, and French universities of the time period (Osterhammel 804). Besides, the singular most distinctive feature of Bello's university was not the centralization of education, but its ample advisory functions in the state apparatus, which responded to the state-building needs of postcolonial Chile.¹⁰ It was due to the utilitarian role that the government expected of the university that Bello proposed consultative functions for each university department.

* * *

Rather than mimic the Napoleonic university model, Bello's university is part of a genealogy of institutional experimentation that also includes Bolívar's and Rodríguez's proposals for education and state-building in the early republican system. In the uncertain times after the fall of the colonial order, Bolívar and Rodríguez conceived education and institutional arrangements to spread republican customs and safeguard the stability and continuity of the republican order. In 1840s Chile, Bello imagined how that sort of institution was to function in more stable times. In that context, the reform of customs was not as important as advancing more moderate means for robust policymaking.

Despite their differences, Bolívar's, Rodríguez's, and Bello's plans for education and state-building acknowledged and confronted the uncertain pathos of the post-independence time period and ventured experimental means to establish new republican foundations in the region. Bolívar's rhetoric of uncertainty and speculation, Rodríguez's performative writing, and Bello's take on moderate speeches: these rhetorical devices set the tone for quite ambitious institutional projects. I began this article by discussing the teleologic national connection that General Diego José Benavente established between the goals of independence and the University of Chile. The proposals for republican institutions I have analyzed have several links, yet they did not follow such a programmatic nation-building path leading to Bello's university. Instead, they were experimental and concrete state-building responses to the early republican experience in Spanish America. Thus, the links among them do not conceal their singular and creative ways to respond to the political needs of the post-independence era. As Rodríguez put it, "*O Inventamos o Erramos*" (Sociedades 88). These authors were determined to invent the concrete institutional means of building a new body politic for republican societies.

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Notes

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¹ For a discussion of the imaginary nature of the modern idea of the nation, see Anderson (1-8).

² Concerning the adoption of popular sovereignty as a source of political legitimacy, Hilda Sabato notes it did not provide a unique answer to the question of what form of government to establish, nor to the problem of how to create, validate, and reproduce legitimate power (37).

³ In early republican Spanish America, institutional innovation coexisted with continuities. More broadly, Barreneche claims that, in the aftermath of the independence, “institutional experimentation and adaptation of colonial state forms occurred simultaneously” (86).

⁴ Sabato affirms that 19th-century Latin American republicanism incessantly reconfigured “the relationship between people and government that developed after the adoption of popular sovereignty as a principle of power” (9). Rojas and Aguilar focus on the creative ways postcolonial thinkers translated the republican language of equality and freedom to postcolonial realities marked by asymmetrical power structures.

⁵ Bolívar’s rhetoric is key to understanding his political thinking. Von Vacano notes that Bolívar’s strategy to address the problem of social order “was grounded on rhetoric rather than on deliberation” (66-7). Likewise, Abreu points out that Bolívar’s messianic prose “set the ground for the religiosity that shapes the development of his cult since the nineteenth century” (292).

⁶ Pocock defined the “Machiavellian moment” as “[t]he moment in conceptualized time in which the republic was seen as confronting its own temporal finitude, as attempting to remain morally and politically stable in a stream of irrational events conceived as essentially destructive to all systems of secular stability” (viii).

⁷ Simon argues that the Bolivian constitution captured an essential feature of Bolívar’s political thinking: “being overtly authoritarian in its design [. . .] but intended at the same time to eventually bring about its own obsolescence, after Spanish Americans had acquired the requisite virtues to rule themselves” (103).

⁸ Arroyo highlights this performative dimension of Rodríguez’s texts by comparing them to avant-garde publications (36). Likewise, Rozitchner posits that Rodríguez’s gestural take on writing was not only an intellectual task but also a sentient operation (87).

⁹ Concha notes the similarities between Bello’s reflections about grammar and law, and observes that both language and laws function as abstract codes that follow rules (147-48). I prefer to link Bello’s reflections on speeches to his institutional proposals. Unlike the abstract character of grammar and laws, speeches and institutions have a more concrete and dynamic nature.

¹⁰ Sol Serrano claims that, in the University of Chile, “hubo en su concepción y en su puesta en marcha un serio intento de adaptarla a la realidad chilena” (72).

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