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Juan Luis Martirén, *La transformación farmer. Colonización agrícola y crecimiento económico en la provincia de Santa Fe durante la segunda mitad del siglo XIX*. Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2016, 266 pp. ISBN: 978-987-81-6075-7.

Crop farming is typically taken for granted by people passing by in cars on rural roads. But one day, these crop regions may prompt a curious onlooker to ask, “What was the transition to crop farming? How did wheat farming begin in Argentina?” Juan Luis Martirén in *La transformación farmer* answers these questions for the crop farming region of Santa Fe Province during the nineteenth century. In six chapters, he traces the beginnings of the real estate markets that attracted European immigrants to settle and raise wheat for export to global markets. The book begins with two chapters surveying the diversification of the Santafecina economy, use of public lands, expansion of the land frontier, and the agricultural colonization (settler) programs. The aim of the latter was primarily to populate Santa Fe’s hinterland, with the cooperation of the provincial government and use of emerging real estate brokers. Initially, these brokers mapped *las colonias* and limited their promise to the new residents, the *colonos*. The remaining four chapters explain the professionalization of the brokers and real estate markets, and what made these programs a relative success for the long-term social and economic aims of the colonos.

Martirén supports his arguments through a rigorous study of land markets, specifically the rising land values and real estate expansion. Overall, the book competently dissects the evolution of the real estate markets that were responsible for the agricultural colonization that helped develop agrarian capitalism. It also shows how, perhaps by historical accident, the settlement program brought social mobility and land ownership opportunities to the agricultural colonies of Santa Fe province.

Drawing on exhaustive archival research in national, provincial, and municipal archives, as well as local museums in Santa Fe and Buenos Aires provinces, Martirén charts Santa Fe province’s transition from an undeveloped region that in 1856 had not yet grown wheat commercially, to a major global producer of cereals by the 1890s. Using notarial public land records, the personal and professional papers of the Empresa Colonizadora Guillermo Lehmann, archival maps, statistical and census data, and travel accounts, he reveals the rapid social and economic changes of the Santafecina countryside. In 1856, the state established the first agricultural colony of Esperanza and this was followed by the settlements of San Carlos and San

Gerónimo. These three colonies had hard times in the beginning. Eventually, however, they became the models for furthering the agricultural colonization program. By 1895, there were over 400,000 residents in nearly 400 colonies, with crops raised on 1.7 million hectares. Martirén argues that Santa Fe's transformation is among the most interesting conversions of land use and productivity in the global history of modern capitalism. The speed and scale of the transformation of the countryside --without direct state intervention-- from hinterland to a major player in the nation's economic growth is impressive.

Martirén has a brilliant narration style. He offers a grand picture of this highly profitable agricultural scheme and reveals the rampage of agrarian capitalism within the colonization program --immigrants driven by profit, exploitative land tenure systems, and immense regional wealth held in a few hands. I expected this story to end on a sad note, with colonos perhaps losing out on their dreams to own land. However, Martirén demonstrates that the wealth generated by the farmer transition did not remain in a few hands. A major contribution of this work is to reveal how some colono-farmers became landowners through complex processes, in ways that were unintended and perhaps unanticipated by the creators of the settler programs. Rising land values changed the socioeconomic and land-owning structure of the province in favor of colonos. Martirén sheds light on how this occurred by analyzing the internal workings of the real estate markets and the actions of entrepreneurs that supported the agricultural colonization program, the professionalization of the real estate business, and the dynamics of a social experiment that placed diverse immigrants in a colonia.

Similar Argentine studies examining the agrarian capitalist charge include Hilda Sabato (1990) and Samuel Amaral (2002). These authors focused on Buenos Aires province, with Sabato examining the wealth made from the sheep and wool industries from 1860-1880 and Amaral analyzing capital markets during the cattle ranching period beginning in the eighteenth century. Martirén's work does not delve into the lives of the colonos. However, many previous Argentine works examine immigrant farmers, including Ezequiel Gallo (1983) and Julio Djenderedjian (2008). Martirén's research is valuable to historians of agriculture, economy, environment, labor relations, and rural Latin America. A major contribution includes the discussion on the transition from old (*criollo*) landowning systems to bureaucratized real estate markets (Chapters 3 and 5). The analysis of land values and real estate includes a thoughtful study of the social relations and intergenerational social mobility that such markets entailed. Under the agricultural colonization program, colonos had equal-sized land parcels, so felt community with one another. They also held the elite landowner accountable for the wider inequality in land ownership, which in turn led to pressures to end the leasing or colonization program as tenants and colonos sought to become landowners.

In the sixth chapter, Martirén estimates the total factor productivity (TFP) of wheat production in the region using Bringas Gutiérrez's TFP measurement. Gutiérrez's model suggests several modifications to adjust wheat output data so we can measure wheat output over time. He estimates Spanish crop farming output (Q) and inputs Land, Labor, Capital (TFI). Martirén uses this model and the calculation $PTF = Q/TFI^{236}$ to determine wheat productivity from 1865 to 1882. Overall, these wheat productivity estimates support his arguments, but he

also reveals another puzzle for rural and economic historians to share: although production was high overall, productivity did not grow consistently at the same rate as production, and sometimes productivity dipped.

Martirén does not clearly define *farmer* or explain why he italicizes it throughout the book. Since his book is not about farmers, perhaps he could have briefly explained his use of the term. Whatever meaning he intended, it could have been better defined for this reader. The best part of this work is that it opens important new avenues for future research. With respect to the final chapter, a future historian could pick up where Martirén left off and seek to explain the dips in productivity. Also, Martirén mentions the expansion in technical knowledge and *know how* on agriculture and the environment, climate and soil changes, and more than once refers to the environmental destruction of the Santa Fe crop region. Future works may consider research questions on the environmental loss, climate changes, and machinery associated with the transition to crop farming, especially in light of current climate changes and the ongoing struggles of santafecina farmers.

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