

Cañeros and *Colonos*: Cane Planters in Tucumán, 1876–1895*

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Abstract. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century Tucumán's sugar industry experienced unprecedented growth. Tucumán's mills relied on their lands as well as on outside growers for the supply of the cane. By 1895 *cañeros* and *colonos* were cultivating two-thirds of the cane processed in the province. This practice resulted in the incorporation of thousands of small and medium farmers into sugar production, a rather exceptional case among Latin American sugar economies. This article sheds light on this peculiar aspect of Tucumán's sugar industry by focusing on the diversity that characterised the group of cane planters, the circumstances under which they were incorporated into cane agriculture, the tensions that materialised in sugar-growing areas, and the strategies developed by planters to settle their conflicts with mill owners.

In 1893 Tucumán's press followed a dispute between Abraham Medina, owner of Ingenio San Vicente, and twelve cane planters working in Medina's Colonia Sosa. *El Orden*, a provincial newspaper politically opposed to the mill owner, provided daily updates on the conflict and urged the authorities to intervene in favour of this 'Viracocha ... privileged and superior caste', which appeared as the engine behind the most active economic sector in the province, the sugar industry.¹ The newspaper's perception of the cane planters' contribution to Tucumán's sugar industry was justifiable. A year later, when Argentina achieved self sufficiency in sugar, Tucumán's mills were supplying more than 80 per cent of the sugar consumed in the country and outside growers were cultivating almost two thirds of the cane processed in the province. The group became a central factor in the growth of Tucumán's modern sugar industry during its early years and remained a permanent feature in sugar production until the twentieth century.

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¹ *El Orden*, 18 Nov. 1893.

Tucumán, a province located 1,300 kilometres northwest of Buenos Aires, represents a distinctive case that does not quite fit the pattern of other Latin American sugar economies. Sugar production in this area never achieved the magnitude of its Brazilian or Cuban counterparts.² Unlike Caribbean sugar, Tucumán's sugar catered exclusively to the needs of expanding domestic markets in urban areas in Argentina.³ The industry modernised with relative rapidity, following trends among other sugar producing regions such as Cuba and Puerto Rico after the arrival of foreign investment. In Tucumán's case, however, technological innovation was financed solely by domestic capital. In addition, in contrast to Peru and the two other sugar producing areas in Argentina, Salta and Jujuy, Tucumán's cane was not cultivated exclusively in large plantations.⁴ Mills took advantage of pre-existing patterns of land-ownership and relied on outside growers who owned small and mid-sized plantations for a large share of their raw material. The incorporation of outside suppliers had its counterparts in other sugar producing regions such as Brazil and Cuba. Nevertheless, Tucumán's mills resorted to a combination of supply arrangements.⁵ By 1895 outside growers were supplying almost

² Alan Dye, *Cuban Sugar in the Age of Mass Production* (Stanford, 1998); Peter Eisenberg, *The Sugar Industry in Pernambuco: Modernization without Change, 1840–1910* (Berkeley, 1974); Muriel McAvoy, *Sugar Baron: Manuel Rionda and the Fortunes of Pre-Castro Cuba* (Florida, 2003); Manuel Moreno Fragninals, *El ingenio: el complejo económico social cubano del azúcar*, 3 vols. (Havana, 1978); and Stuart Schwartz, *Sugar Plantations in the Formation of Brazilian Society: Bahia, 1550–1835* (Cambridge, 1985).

³ Cesar Ayala, *American Sugar Kingdom: The Plantation Economy of the Spanish Caribbean, 1898–1934* (Chapel Hill, 1999); Alan Dye, *Cuban Sugar*; J. H. Galloway, *The Sugar Cane Industry. An Historical Geography from its Origins to 1914* (Cambridge, 1989); and Teresita Martínez-Vergne, *Capitalism in Colonial Puerto Rico: Central San Vicente in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Florida, 1992).

⁴ Michael Gonzalez, *Plantation Agriculture and Social Control in Northern Perú, 1875–1933* (Austin, 1985); Peter Klaren, *Modernization, Dislocation, and Aprismo. Origins of the Peruvian Aprista Party, 1870–1932* (Austin, 1973); Marcelo Lagos, 'The Organization of Jujuy's Sugar Ingenios in a Regional Context (1970–1940),' in James P. Brennan and Ofelia Pianetto (eds.), *Region and Nation. Politics, Economy and Society in Twentieth-Century Argentina* (New York, 2000), pp. 103–28; Ian Rutledge, 'The Integration of the Highland Peasantry into the Sugar Cane Economy of Northern Argentina, 1930–43,' in Kenneth Duncan, Ian Rutledge, Colin Harding, *Land and Labour in Latin America: Essays on the Development of Agrarian Capitalism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1977), pp. 205–28; and Daniel J. Santamaría, 'Migración laboral y conflicto interétnico. El caso de los migrantes indígenas temporarios en los ingenios saltojujeños,' in Daniel Campi (ed.), *Estudios sobre la historia de la industria azucarera*, vol. 2 (Jujuy, 1992), pp. 91–113.

⁵ Other sugar economies in Latin America resorted to uniform supply arrangements. Brazil's *engenhos* and Cuba's *centrales* obtained most of their cane from outside growers. *Lavadores de cana* represented an essential component in the Bahian sugar economy. In Cuba, *centrales* depended heavily on the supplies provided by *colonos del central* and *colonos independientes*. In stark contrast in the sugar economies of Peru, the West Indies, and Jujuy and Salta, mill owners monopolised the lands and opted for a vertical integration of their cane cultivation and milling operations. Pernambuco represents an interesting case since *usineiros* relied initially on *fornecedores* for the provision of the raw material but gradually bought up

two thirds of the total cane processed in the province. The remaining third was planted on lands under the direct supervision of mills.⁶ Furthermore, while in other sugar economies independent planters were mostly large landowners with close personal and business ties to mill owners, in Tucumán not only large but also small and medium farmers switched to cane planting.⁷ The incorporation of thousands of *cañeros* (planters who owned plots of various sizes) and *colonos* (leaseholders of mill lands) into sugar production resulted in the emergence of a complex sugar society, another feature that makes Tucumán a rather exceptional case among Latin American sugar economies.

This essay explores *cañeros* and *colonos* between the formative years of the industry and the first crisis of overproduction in 1895. It adds to the existing literature on the group but delves into aspects that have been barely explored such as the diversity that characterised outside growers, the circumstances under which planters were incorporated into cane agriculture, the tensions that materialised in the sugar areas, and the strategies developed by cane growers to settle their conflicts with mill owners.⁸ The study utilises a variety of sources to avoid the partial conclusions that relying one type of evidence can lead to. Published and unpublished statistical records combined with reports left by contemporary travellers provide a wealth of information on the changes experienced by Tucumán's economy during the sugar boom.⁹

plantations and reduced their owners to the status of tenants. Richard Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves. The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624–1713* (Oxford, 1973); Alan Dye, *Cuban Sugar*; Peter Eisenberg, *The Sugar Industry in Pernambuco*; Michael Gonzalez, *Plantation Agriculture*; Ian Rutledge, 'The Integration of the Highland Peasantry into the Sugar Cane Economy of Northern Argentina,' pp. 205–28; and Stuart Schwartz, *Sugar Plantations*.

⁶ Congreso Nacional, *Investigación Parlamentaria sobre Agricultura, Ganadería, Industrias Derivadas y Colonización, Informe de Antonio Correa* (Buenos Aires, 1898), p. 38.

⁷ Bahian *lavradores da cana* socially 'remained an adjunct to the planter class, people of the same background but lacking the capital to achieve fully their goal of plantership'; Stuart Schwartz, *Sugar Plantations*, p. 304.

⁸ Jorge Balán, 'Migraciones, mano de obra y formación de un proletariado rural en Tucumán, Argentina, 1870–1914', *Demografía y Economía*, X:2 (1976) pp. 201–34; María Celia Bravo, 'Sector cañero y política en Tucumán 1895–1930', unpubl. PhD diss., Universidad Nacional de Tucumán, 2000; Daniel Greenberg, 'The Dictatorship of the Chimneys: Sugar, Politics and Agrarian Unrest in Tucumán, Argentina, 1914–1930,' unpubl. PhD diss., University of Washington, 1985; Donna Guy, *Argentine Sugar Politics. Tucumán and the Generation of Eighty* (Arizona, 1980); Carlos León, *El desarrollo agrario de Tucumán en el período de transición de la agricultura diversificada al monocultivo cañero* (Buenos Aires, 1999); Roberto Pucci, *La elite azucarera y la formación del sector cañero en Tucumán (1880–1920)* (Buenos Aires, 1984); Daniel Santamaría, *Azúcar y sociedad en el noroeste argentino* (Buenos Aires, 1986).

⁹ Besides published materials, this study employs the manuscript schedules corresponding to the *Segundo Censo Nacional, Censo Económico y Social, Sección Agricultura*. The manuscripts contain disaggregated information on plantation size, tenure arrangements, crops cultivated, and tools owned. For this particular study, I have utilised the schedules from the

The provincial press reflects the larger social environment and the impact that planters' actions registered in society.¹⁰ Finally, notarial records as well as civil and criminal court cases have preserved the voices of those directly involved in cane planting, shedding light not only on the conditions under which contractual arrangements were established but also on the tensions and conflicts that materialised as a result of such arrangements.¹¹

Tucumán's economy: before and after the sugar boom

During the 1870s Tucumán was a thriving province with a dynamic economy unmatched among its neighbours. In his memoirs, the Argentine intellectual Vicente Quesada noted the absence of homeless people, and contrasted the cosmopolitan nature of San Miguel with 'Salta's green colour and mould of old things'.¹²

A combination of factors contributed to Tucumán's thriving economy. Throughout the late 1860s local authorities led progressive administrations that encouraged economic growth. The construction of new roads, tax incentives, and active support to private credit institutions were the most significant measures taken by the government. The province's fertile plains and widespread landownership added two important elements to the general prosperity of the time. In 1871 Arsenio Granillo observed that almost everybody in the province owned a piece of land.¹³ According to Juan Terán's 1874 report, these small family-operated units were devoted to the production of cereals and tropical

department of Cruz Alta. In 1895, Cruz Alta alone accounted for 40% of the area cultivated with cane, almost half of the sugar factories, and 35% of the total planters in Tucumán. Even though the department's land tenure patterns may not be representative of the province as a whole, the schedules shed light on planters' patterns of land use in what became the most important sugar area in the province.

¹⁰ *El Orden* was founded by Ernesto Colombres in 1883 and became the voice for anti-Roca sentiments in the province. In 1886 the newspaper changed ownership but maintained its political affiliations. The Colombres clan owned large landholdings planted with cane and had close political relationships with the Posse and Gallo families, both mill-owning families. The paper's unconditional endorsement of sugar interests reflected a more general support among *Tucumanos* for what was perceived as the province's principal industry. Other provincial newspapers from the period such as *La Opinión*, *La Razón* and later *La Gaceta* shared the same position regarding the sugar industry, despite different political affiliations. Tucumán's archives contain the complete collection of *El Orden* and incomplete runs of other newspapers. For the purpose of this research, *El Orden* provides invaluable information that has been cross-checked with other newspapers whenever possible.

¹¹ Notarial records employed in this article include a sample of 24 contracts between planters and mill owners as well as 14 wills from cane planters with holdings of various sizes.

¹² Vicente Quesada, *Memorias de un viejo* (Buenos Aires, 1889), p. 209.

¹³ Arsenio Granillo, *Provincia de Tucumán. Serie de artículos descriptivos y noticiosos* (Tucumán, 1872), p. 132.

crops.¹⁴ Small, medium and large plots of land produced wheat, maize, rice, tobacco, cane, and livestock not only for self consumption but also for local and regional markets.¹⁵ Using family labour these farmers worked plots of land no larger than a couple of hectares. They also possessed some cattle and agricultural tools. They lived in ranchos and their clothes, as noted by observers such as Quesada, revealed a certain degree of prosperity not found in other areas of the Argentine northwest.¹⁶ The group was described not only as relatively successful but also as fiercely independent.¹⁷ The significant number of holdings under production not only contributed an essential component to the province's diversified and prosperous agriculture but also played an important role in the consolidation of a group of small independent farmers interested in preserving their autonomy.

Related manufacturing activities complemented the provincial economy. Tucumán's textiles enjoyed great esteem with its needlework, knitted clothes, embroideries, tapestries, ponchos and saddle cloths reaching as far as Mendoza, Buenos Aires and Bolivia. Provincial leather goods had an excellent reputation in the rest of Argentina and neighbouring countries as well. Furthermore, the province specialised in the manufacture of strong and heavy ox-carts with spoke wheels which not only provided transportation in the region but also were exported, and represented an additional source of provincial income. Tucumán's geographical position provided significant advantages for the expansion of an active trade with other provinces and with neighbouring countries.

During this period, even though sugar did not hold a pre-eminent place, an expanding domestic market and a favourable tax policy for cane plantations stimulated investments in primitive milling technology. Even though the 1850s witnessed some investments in technology, the most significant wave of milling improvements did not start until the 1870s. Between 1872 and 1877 the number of mills almost doubled. In 1874 Tucumán's cane acreage totalled 2,297 hectares, a significant increase on the 191 hectares recorded in 1855. This figure included the lands worked by the 73 operating mills and the 303 hectares belonging to independent planters.¹⁸ Therefore, throughout the years of primitive technology and economic diversification, outside growers

¹⁴ Juan Manuel Terán, *Informe del Departamento Nacional de Agricultura* (Buenos Aires, 1875), n.p.

¹⁵ In 1855 Justo Maeso's annotated analysis of Woodbine Parish's work reported that almost half of the total provincial output was exported. Woodbine Parish, *Buenos Ayres y las provincias del Río de la Plata* (Buenos Aires, 1853), pp. 637–8.

¹⁶ Vicente Quesada, *Memorias*, p. 211.

¹⁷ Paul Groussac, *Memoria histórica y descriptiva de la provincia de Tucumán* (Buenos Aires, 1882), p. 441.

¹⁸ Juan Manuel Terán, *Informe*, n.p.

were already supplementing mills with cane, anticipating a pattern that would characterise Tucumán's sugar industry in the future.¹⁹

The last quarter of the nineteenth century inaugurated a period of fast-paced change in Tucumán's sugar economy. In less than two decades, Argentina achieved self-sufficiency in sugar and the province consolidated its role as the country's main producer. An essential component in this transformation was the official support given to the industry through infrastructure, especially railway construction. Even though political priorities accounted for the government's investments on railway lines to western and northern Argentina, as noted by Donna Guy, politics were soon subordinated to economic concerns and the railway 'became linked with agro-industrial development'.²⁰ In October 1876, President Nicolás Avellaneda officially inaugurated the Central Norte Railway. Extending over 300 miles of track, the state-funded project facilitated communications between Tucumán and the Argentine Littoral. By reducing transportation costs, the line enabled sugar producers to incorporate modern technology into their factories while at the same time broadening the market for Tucumán's sugar. Subsequent lines within Tucumán's boundaries responded exclusively to mills' and planters' needs and contributed to the industry's path to leadership in the provincial economy.²¹ By 1895, four railway companies provided improved transportation from cane plantations to mills and from mills to coastal markets at lower costs.²²

The industry's expansion took place within the context of a saturated, unstable, and extremely protected international market. Significant increases

¹⁹ There is no evidence of the type of arrangements established between independent planters and mills during the years of primitive sugar production. However, it is likely that arrangements were personal and informal in nature. The introduction of contractual agreements with the industry's modernization after 1876 caused significant and lasting changes in relations between the groups. ²⁰ Donna Guy, *Argentine Sugar Politics*, p. 4.

²¹ Since the amount of juice that can be extracted from the cane diminishes rapidly after it is cut, transportation improvements extended the potential area under cultivation.

²² Railway construction fostered the development of the sugar industry in many other regions in Latin America. Scholars agree that in Cuba the construction of railways on the east side of the island resulted in the unprecedented growth of the industry at the turn of the century. However, there is disagreement on the social impact of railway lines. In his traditional study on Cuban sugar, Ramiro Guerra y Sánchez argues that railways encouraged the formation of latifundia and the disappearance of the independent *colono*. Alan Dye's analysis of the Cuban sugar contends that railway construction should be understood in the context of the adoption of continuous process technologies which created additional demands for cane thus encouraging the rise of the *colono* group. Oscar Zanetti and Alejandro García's analysis provides an extremely thorough picture of Cuban railway history and its relevance to the development of the sugar economy on the island. See Ramiro Guerra y Sánchez, *Azúcar y población en las Antillas* (Havana, 1944); Alan Dye, *Cuban Sugar* and Oscar Zanetti and Alejandro García, *Sugar and Railroads: A Cuban History, 1837–1959* (Chapel Hill, 1998).

in the output of beet sugar, labour supply dislocations after the abolition of slavery, and active protection of their nascent sugar industries by European states were among the most significant factors that resulted in constant fluctuations in sugar prices.²³ Therefore, international circumstances prompted additional government intervention to eliminate foreign competition in the domestic market. During the 1880s and first half of the 1890s, the national government's increased protection through tariffs invigorated the industry's growth, thus fostering cane acreage expansion.²⁴ Other government assistance to the industry came through tax exemptions, such as those granted to the first sugar refinery in Rosario, and the establishment of a banking system.²⁵

Encouraged by the existence of a growing domestic market and supportive national and provincial authorities, local businessmen undertook a wave of investment in such sugar-processing machinery as vacuum pans, centrifuges, and steam engines.²⁶ However, only those with access to large sums of capital could afford to invest in such technological innovations.²⁷ Smaller mills found it impossible to keep pace with the more expensive improvements. Between 1877 and 1881, the industry experienced a significant shake out and the number of operating mills dropped by more than half. Mill owners who could not afford the shift to improved technology joined the ranks of small planters and remained in the sugar business only as cane providers.

Specialisation in sugar production quickly replaced Tucumán's diversified productive structure and transformed the province's countryside. Rather

²³ Noel Deerr, *The History of Sugar* (London, 1949).

²⁴ In 1882, as part of an overall revision, sugar tariffs were modified to a specific duty of five cents per kilogramme. The most important change in terms of government protection occurred in 1889, when a new tariff revision established duties of seven and nine cents per kilogramme for unrefined and refined sugar respectively.

²⁵ Other Latin American sugar economies relied heavily on government protection for their growth. Pernambuco represents a paradigmatic case – state and federal authorities alike devised mechanisms to protect the industry ranging from official subsidies for the construction of *usinas* to schemes for immigration and a public banking system. See Peter Eisenberg, *The Sugar Industry in Pernambuco*.

²⁶ Local entrepreneurs accumulated capital from investments in livestock, commerce, and flour-mills, among other ventures. Some were members of Tucumán's old Hispanic landed elite. French immigrants who had arrived to the province between 1810 and 1850 formed another important group among the sugar producers. These immigrants established durable relationships with the Hispanic elite through marriage and business. Finally a group of merchants from Córdoba migrated to Tucumán and became deeply involved in the sugar economy. Donna Guy, *Argentine Sugar Politics*, pp. 47–51.

²⁷ The adoption of new technologies took place in different fashion depending upon each mill. Usually older mills such as Ingenio Concepción and Ingenio Esperanza proceeded gradually, bringing in new machinery over a period of several years. On the other hand, new mills such as Ingenio Lules and Ingenio La Florida adopted new technology all at once. By 1895 most of the province's mills had modernised their machinery.

than reflecting vertical integration, Tucumán's industrial concentration increased in conjunction with the division between the industrial and agricultural stages of production. Mills met higher cane demands through a combination of different strategies that guaranteed them adequate supplies of raw material. Sections of the mills' lands were either placed under direct production of salaried personnel hired by the mill, or managed by *colonos* who leased the property and agreed to supply cane to the mill. Similar arrangements were made with small, medium, and large independent planters or *cañeros* with plots, either owned or rented, located in close proximity to the mills.²⁸ Small and medium farmers, who had previously produced for self-consumption and the local market, adapted successfully to the requirements of the nascent industry and remained an essential component in the development of Tucumán's sugar economy. Between 1876 and 1895 the growth of this group created new sets of demands and expectations that in turn contributed to the complexity of Tucumán's rural society.

Cañeros and colonos

Faced with the possibility of high and rapid investment returns, thousands of farmers shifted to cane planting. The expansion of cane cultivation did not produce massive land dislocation among small farmers in Tucumán, in contrast to other sugar-producing regions in Latin America.²⁹ During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, *Tucumano* farmers successfully adjusted to the demands of the nascent industry and became a part of the expanding sugar economy as outside cane growers.³⁰ Throughout this period, the

²⁸ In certain cases, prospective planters had fewer resources and resorted to tenancy. The information on this group is fragmentary. Contemporary observers and official reports from the period placed this group in the *cañero* category. Farms were rented from individuals instead of mills. They varied widely in size although a significant number of the units worked by *arrendatarios* were smaller than 50 hectares. Clearly, the payment of rent represented an additional burden and source of distress for tenants. However, they must have shared anxieties and expectations with *cañeros*, which justifies their inclusion as part of this group.

²⁹ As Peter Klaren has demonstrated in his classic study, Northern Perú is a prototypical example of the concentration of land by the mills at the expense of the planter class. According to the author, capital intensive plantations took over the lands of small and medium haciendas, thus giving rise to the modern corporate sugar plantation and a process of dislocation among the region's population. Peter Klaren, *Modernization, Dislocation, and Aprismo*.

³⁰ Independent planters remained an essential component in Tucumán's sugar economy into the twentieth century. Their numbers increased from over two thousand in 1895 to 4,684 in 1914. However, their participation in sugar production should not obscure the fact that mill holdings increased rapidly in the province during the last decade of the nineteenth century and in the early twentieth century. It is difficult to gauge the growth of mill holdings in the province before 1888, since provincial reports such as those of Juan Manuel

total number of *cañeros* and *colonos* experienced a sevenfold increase.³¹ In January 1890 *El Orden* reported ‘the sugar fever has invaded everyone, poor and rich, big and small, smart or dumb, they have all started planting cane’.³²

The group of outside growers was characterised by significant disparities in origin, holding size, and land tenure arrangements. *Cañeros*’ participation in Tucumán’s sugar economy went back to the period of primitive milling technology. In his 1874 report Terán estimated that a total of 160 independent planters were supplying the existing mills with cane.³³ However, *cañeros*’ contribution to the total cane acreage was still marginal since mill plantations extended over 1,900 hectares whereas planters’ holdings accounted for only 300 hectares. Nevertheless, this evidence suggests that even during the period of primitive milling technology, mills were already resorting to outside sources for the supply of a share of their cane needs.

Mills’ technological innovations during the 1880s increased their processing capacity and, hence, their demands for raw materials. Throughout this period, the number of *cañeros* as well as their participation in the total cultivated area with cane grew steadily. By 1883, according to the *Boletín Nacional de Agricultura*, independent planters totalled 670, a fourfold increase compared to 1874 figures.³⁴ During the last years of the decade, the pace of growth intensified. By 1895 the number of *cañeros* in the province exceeded two thousand. Correspondingly, their participation in Tucumán’s area cultivated with cane also increased steadily. While in 1874 *cañeros* supplied 13 percent of the total cane in the province, by 1895 their participation had increased to almost 40 percent.

The origin of *cañeros* varied considerably.³⁵ Groussac pointed out that the modernisation of the industry had left behind several mill owners who could not afford to pay for the new technology. He suggested that rather than leaving sugar production, they had become outside cane suppliers for the

Terán and Eduardo Quintero are based on *patente* records that taxed only land under production – which was systematically underreported. In 1888, the mills owned 53,036 hectares. By 1895 the holdings had increased to 144,266 hectares. By 1914 mill lands extended over 223,517 hectares. These figures are consistent with other reports from the period that pointed to the expansion of mill plantations, in particular after the 1895 crisis of overproduction. In 1903 *El Orden* reported that 200 hundred small *cañeros* had lost their lands to the surrounding mills. In 1909 the same newspaper concluded that the CAT had expanded its plantations at the expense of small *cañeros* from the area. *El Orden*, 31 Aug. 1903 and 19 July 1909.

³¹ Emilio Schleh, *La industria azucarera en su primer centenario, 1821–1921* (Tucumán, 1921).

³² *El Orden*, 14 Jan. 1890. ³³ Juan Terán, *Informe*, n.p.

³⁴ *Boletín Nacional de Agricultura*, vol. 7 (Buenos Aires, 1883), p. 5.

³⁵ For thorough and contrasting analyses of the group’s origins see Maria Celia Bravo, Roberto Pucci and Carlos León. This article provides further evidence that supports Bravo’s insistence on the diverse origins of the group.

modernised mills.³⁶ This was likely the case of Leoncio Herrera who, according to Granillo's report, owned six *cuadras* planted with cane and a small wooden mill in 1871.³⁷ By 1893 Leoncio Herrera had abandoned the milling business and was supplying cane to Ingenio El Manantial.³⁸ In his 1902 report on the sugar industry, Pedro Alurralde observed that lawyers and doctors had become involved in the profitable business of cane cultivation.³⁹ This must have been the case of Doctor Exequiel Colombres, who died in 1883 and bequeathed a large cane plantation to his heirs, among other possessions.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the 1895 census manuscript schedules report some names associated with liberal professions such as Alurralde, Rodríguez Marquina and Sal as cane planters.⁴¹

The preceding analysis provides an explanation for the origin of only a small segment of *cañeros*. The group must have had additions from outside the sector of former mill owners and urban professionals. The small *cañero*, who predominated in the industry, came from a different pool. Attracted by quick returns in their initial investment, small farmers who had previously devoted their land to cereals or tobacco switched to cane.⁴² In his 1884 report of the sugar industry in Argentina, Henry Wileman observed that 'no other branch of agriculture offers the small capitalist so safe and large a return for his capital and labour'.⁴³ Other observers concurred that planters could recover the initial investment after two years, which made the investment in cane highly popular and explains the shift of so many farmers.⁴⁴

Small and medium landholders who had previously devoted their lands to the production of food staples made the shift to cane planting. However, the analysis of the manuscript schedules reveals that rather than placing all their available lands into cane production, these farmers reserved part of their lands for other crops. They maintained their commitment to subsistence on

³⁶ Paul Groussac, *Memoria histórica y descriptiva*, p. 522.

³⁷ Arsenio Granillo, *Provincia de Tucumán*, p. 99. One cuadra equals 2,066 hectares.

³⁸ Archivo Histórico Tucumán (herein AHT), Protocolos, Serie C, Folios 346–9.

³⁹ Pedro Alurralde, 'La crisis azucarera,' in *Anales de la Facultad de Derecho y Ciencias Sociales*, vol. 1 (Buenos Aires, 1902), p. 360. ⁴⁰ AHT, Protocolos, Serie A, Folio 139.

⁴¹ República Argentina, *Segundo Censo Nacional, Censo Económico y Social, Boletín de Agricultura*, Boletín 27, Tomos 3–4, Folios 46–133.

⁴² Census data confirm that between the 1880s and 1890s Tucumán's total area under cultivation increased by 172%. Over the same period, the share of different crops in the province's agriculture production changed dramatically. Whereas cane increased 411%, maize and alfalfa experienced 75% and 85% increases respectively and wheat underwent a 35% reduction in the total area cultivated.

⁴³ Henry St. John Wileman, *The Growth and Manufacture of Cane Sugar in the Argentine Republic* (London, 1884), p. 6.

⁴⁴ Arsenio Granillo, *Provincia de Tucumán*, p. 110; Ramón Cordeiro et al. (eds.), *Compilación ordenada*, vol. 7. For a modern study on the costs of cane planting see Daniel Santamaria, *Azúcar y sociedad*, pp. 43–65.

the land while attempting to achieve a surplus through the production of the cash crop.⁴⁵ For example, in the case of Cruz Alta, 57 per cent of the holdings smaller than ten hectares cultivated cane in conjunction with maize and alfalfa. In this case, while 51 per cent of the total land was planted with cane, 19 per cent was dedicated to other crops. A similar pattern is verified in holdings between 11 and 50 hectares. However, in this case a slightly higher 53 per cent of land was planted with cane and that used for other crops reached only 11 per cent. The tendency to specialise in cane at the expense of other crops intensifies in holdings over 50 hectares. In this segment, only two per cent of the lands were used for crops other than cane.⁴⁶ This analysis indicates that while specialisation occurred among large planters, small and medium farmers behaved as rural capitalists who made the rational choice to shift to the investment with the highest return without abandoning other more traditional crops, mostly those for their self-subsistence, thus guaranteeing a certain degree of independence for themselves and their families.

Disparities in origin and land use among *cañeros*' mirrored the extreme diversity that characterised the sizes of their holdings. Contemporary observers and statistical records verify this peculiar aspect of Tucumán's *cañero* group. Antonio Correa observed that 'cane was cultivated by individuals from all social classes, from the rich landowner to the modest farmer who owned or rented his small piece of land'.⁴⁷ Even as early as 1874 Terán's report revealed the existence of large cane holdings as well as a group of very small planters whose plots did not exceed five hectares. Unfortunately, the report does not provide information on the size of individual holdings. Paulino Rodríguez Marquina's 1888 analysis of the sugar industry presents a similar problem. Even though the author recorded the number of planters by category, the report provides the total hectares cultivated without distinguishing individually by planter.⁴⁸ Furthermore, Marquina's report is based on *patente* records, and therefore accounts only for the land under cultivation instead of the total extension of the property. The

⁴⁵ For a dissenting view, see Carlos León, *El desarrollo agrario*.

⁴⁶ A rather similar pattern is found in another important sugar area: Capital. In this department the number of holdings up to 10 hectares devoted to other crops was even larger (72%). The percentage of land under cane cultivation was 47% and under other crops 26%. Specialisation in cane also occurred in holdings larger than 50 hectares. In this case the land devoted to crops other than cane reached 5%. Even though more research needs to be done on the entire province, the sample could be considered as indicative of patterns of land use in sugar areas since the two departments accounted for 52% of the total acreage cultivated with cane and 40% of the province's independent planters. República Argentina, *Segundo Censo Nacional, Censo Económico y Social*, Boletín 27, Tomos 3–4, Folios 46–133.

⁴⁷ Congreso Nacional, *Investigación Parlamentaria*, p. 49.

⁴⁸ Paulino Rodríguez Marquina, *Memoria descriptiva de Tucumán. La industria azucarera. Su presente, pasado y porvenir* (Tucumán, 1888), pp. 168–77.

1895 manuscript schedules yield a fuller picture of patterns of land use in sugar areas since census takers were asked to record the total extension of the property as well as the area under cultivation.⁴⁹ The data reveal that 62 per cent of the holdings were under 10 hectares. Their participation in the total cane acreage was rather small, only eight per cent. Plots ranging from 11 to 50 hectares accounted for 24.5 per cent of the holdings and contributed 17 per cent of the cane planted in the department. Just 11 per cent of the properties, between 51 and 200 hectares in size, were responsible for 26 per cent of the cane cultivated in the department. Finally, only two and a half per cent of the holdings were larger than 200 hectares but cultivated almost half of the cane produced in the department. The data reveal two important aspects of Tucumán's sugar economy. On the one hand, they show great disparity among the planter class in terms of the size of their holdings and their share in the total cane cultivated in the department. On the other hand, they indicate the existence of a number of small and middle-sized plantations with a rather significant share in the department's total cane acreage.

The group of outside growers did not consist of *cañeros* alone. Some individuals who lacked the lands but not the capital assets to invest in sugar turned to alternative arrangements with mills as *colonos*. Correa observed that *colonias* represented the response of mill owners to the increase in cane prices during the 1880s. During the 1890s the group contributed more than 30 per cent of the cane processed in the province.⁵⁰ Mills divided their lands and distributed them among *colonos* who were obliged to plant, tend and sell the cane to the mill.⁵¹ By dividing their lands into several mid-sized holdings, mills could exercise quality control and guarantee a steady supply of cane without incurring additional planting expenses. This mechanism provided a solution to the problem of labour shortages as well, since *colonos* were expected to supply their own peons and, in many cases, loan them to the mill to perform certain tasks. Finally, *colonias* allowed mills to spread the risks of investment without losing complete control over the production of the raw material.

The *colonos* ranged from small capitalists who worked on the land with the assistance of some labourers to those whose function was mostly

⁴⁹ República Argentina, *Segundo Censo Nacional, Censo Económico y Social*, Boletín 27, Tomos 3–4, Folios 46–133.

⁵⁰ Congreso Nacional, *Investigación Parlamentaria*, p. 38.

⁵¹ Sugar *colonias* in Tucumán were not comparable to those established in Santa Fe, Entre Ríos, and Corrientes. In these areas, European immigrants and their families were granted plots to cultivate cereals, mostly wheat. However, more importantly, colonists eventually gained title to the land. Tucumán's *colonias* are comparable to those established in eastern Cuba during the process of centralisation that took place after the war for independence. Ezequiel Gallo, *La pampa gringa* (Buenos Aires, 1984) and James Scobie, *Revolution on the Pampas. A Social History of Argentine Wheat, 1860–1910* (Texas, 1968).

managerial.⁵² However, census schedules reveal a more balanced landholding pattern among *colonos* than among *cañeros*. The evidence shows that the majority of *colonos* tended holdings between 51 and 200 hectares, which totalled 90 percent of cane planted in *colonias*.⁵³ Only three holdings under *colonato* arrangements extended over more than 200 hectares and their share of the cane cultivated by the group was only six per cent. A *colonia's* share in the mill's cane supply varied over time and depended on the size and number of *colonias* owned by mills.⁵⁴ In 1895 the province had a total of 240 *colonias*. *Colonos* were recruited in various ways. For instance, between November 1890 and February 1891 Ingenio La Florida resorted to newspaper advertisements to recruit *colonos*, who were only expected to provide workers for their part in the arrangement.⁵⁵ Prospective *colonos* used newspapers to offer their services as well. In 1893 *El Orden* published a personal announcement from a family offering to tend plots planted with cane or tobacco.⁵⁶ Finally, it is also possible that *colonos* presented themselves directly to the mill around the time of the year when preparations for the next harvest season were starting.⁵⁷

The sugar boom affected the lives of those involved in its production in different ways. Large planters' living conditions experienced changes that were more significant than those experienced by small and medium planters.⁵⁸ Large *cañeros* and *colonos* resided most of the year in San Miguel de Tucumán. Pedro Alurralde observed that the expansion of railway lines facilitated the daily travel of many planters between the plantation and the city. To this category must have belonged planters such as Rafael Amaya and Nicanor Posse. Amaya was a wealthy *colono* who drove his car to the colony but did not 'evade the hard tasks of cane planting', according to a contemporary observer.⁵⁹ Posse was a *cañero*, a member of the provincial elite with close family ties to the Ingenio Esperanza and a property that extended over 290 hectares in Cruz Alta. His material possessions guaranteed a comfortable existence, on a par with that enjoyed by elites in other areas in

⁵² In 1892 the inventory of one *colono* in Colonia Sosa totalled \$1,300 whereas his neighbour's amounted to \$7,200. *El Orden*, 7 Jan. 1893 and *La Opinión*, 4 Jan. 1893.

⁵³ República Argentina, *Segundo Censo Nacional, Censo Económico y Social*, Boletín 27, Tomos 3–4, Folios 46–133.

⁵⁴ In 1889 Ingenio Los Ralos obtained only half of its cane from *colonos*; by 1904 all the cane processed by the mill came from its *colonias*.

⁵⁵ *El Orden*, Nov. 1890 to Feb. 1891. ⁵⁶ *El Orden*, 4 Feb. 1893.

⁵⁷ This was the case for two Chilean citizens who entered a *colonato* arrangement in 1892 with Abraham Medina, owner of Ingenio San Vicente.

⁵⁸ Despite the limitations presented by fragmentary evidence it is still possible to reconstruct planters' lives by piecing together information from census manuscript schedules, newspapers, contracts, wills, and the valuable photographs included in Manuel Bernardez's 1904 report of his visit to the province.

⁵⁹ Manuel Bernárdez, *La nación en marcha* (Buenos Aires, 1904), p. 15.

Argentina.⁶⁰ Large two-storey houses made of brick and lime-mortar, with several rooms, patios and colonnades provided the residences for this privileged group of planters. Their daily routines consisted of visits to the church and the market, walks in the plaza after sunset to avoid the rigours of the weather, drinks with friends at any of the many downtown cafes to discuss the economy and politics, and the weekly performances offered at one of the city's theatres.

However, only five per cent of planters enjoyed the way of life described above. The great majority of farmers lived a completely different life. Furthermore, census manuscripts indicate significant disparities among small and medium cane planters as well, which makes it difficult to strike an average. For example the wills of Rafael Escobar and Ramón Rosa Juárez clearly reveal a disparity in material goods that must have had a direct impact on living conditions. Rafael Escobar, a middling *cañero*, died in 1888 and bequeathed two houses, two plantations in Cruz Alta totalling 85 hectares, ten of which were planted with cane, and a large number of silver utensils, furniture, clothes, and some jewellery.⁶¹ In contrast, Ramón Rosa Juárez's assets consisted of one ten-hectare plot planted with fruit trees, and only five hectares of cane. After his death in 1887 the *cañero* left his heirs a house, some furniture, a few clothes, and one piece of silver. In his case, many goods were described as 'old' and 'broken', a reflection of the planter's less privileged position.⁶² Nevertheless, there were some common elements among small and medium *cañeros* and *colonos*. The evidence suggests that most of them owned horses, farm animals, farming tools and some personal possessions such as furniture and durable household supplies.⁶³ In general, they lived in the countryside close to the plantation.⁶⁴ Even though they lived in close proximity to field workers, they enjoyed stronger and more comfortable dwellings than peons.⁶⁵ Contemporaries referred to planters' residences as *casa habitación*, a term that suggests a clear difference with workers' *ranchos*, and additional evidence seems to indicate that there were indeed material differences. For example, Manuel Bernardez's photographs

⁶⁰ Wills from Dr Exequiel Colombres and Luis Dode, AHT, Sección Judicial, Serie A, Caja 228, Expte. 3 and Sección Judicial, Serie A, Caja 187, Expte. 3.

⁶¹ AHT, Sección Judicial, Serie A, Caja 228, Expte. 23.

⁶² AHT, Sección Judicial, Serie A, Caja 203, Expte. 7.

⁶³ República Argentina, *Segundo Censo Nacional, Censo Económico y Social*, Boletín 27, Tomos 3–4, Folios 46–133.

⁶⁴ Ingenio Esperanza had 250 houses surrounding the plantation for its *colonos* and workers. A rather different arrangement existed at Ingenio San Pablo, where 600 houses accommodated 5,800 people including *colonos* and workers. Exposición Nacional, *Album Argentino. Provincia de Tucumán. Su vida, su trabajo, su progreso* (Tucumán, 1910).

⁶⁵ In Ingenio La Providencia, *colonos'* houses were bigger and located in the middle of the housing complex, whereas workers lived in smaller apartments surrounding the *colonos'* living area. Vicente Padilla, *El Norte Argentino* (Buenos Aires, 1922).

of *cañeros*' dwellings depict one-storey solid white spaces with an arched gallery, several rooms, and high tiled roofs.⁶⁶ Cane contracts also described the houses as having two or more rooms and a gallery, marking a clear distinction with the descriptions left by contemporary observers of peons' single room cells.⁶⁷ However, even though land ownership placed them in a more privileged position, it is likely that living conditions for cane planters with one-hectare plots remained close to those of permanent field or mill workers.⁶⁸

In sum, the sugar boom reinforced the existence of a socially differentiated and heterogeneous planter group. Their heterogeneity was reflected in their origin, patterns of land use, and living conditions. The incorporation of thousands of small and medium cane planters into Tucumán's sugar economy represents a distinctive case in Latin America. Mills took advantage of pre-existing patterns of landownership and resorted to outside growers to supply a significant share of their cane needs. Small, medium and large farmers responded to the changing needs of the sugar economy and shifted to cane planting. Specialisation in cane was more apparent among large planters. Conversely, small planters maintained their commitment to subsistence on the land while attempting to obtain a surplus from the cash crop. Regardless of property size, the planter group entered the sugar economy through contractual arrangements. Contracts provide a window onto the conditions under which these planters participated in the sugar business and shed light on the process of change that affected Tucumán's countryside during the last quarter of the 19th century.

Getting into the business: contractual arrangements

Accompanying the incorporation of *cañeros* and *colonos* into the sugar economy was the establishment of contractual arrangements. Rather than being transitional, the use of contractual arrangements became the norm in Tucumán. The terms varied depending on economic factors such as the type

⁶⁶ Manuel Bernárdez, *La nación en marcha*, pp. 1–50.

⁶⁷ As late as 1911 Georges Clemenceau described workers' dwellings as temporary encampments with huts made of cane trash. Georges Clemenceau, *South America Today* (New York, 1911).

⁶⁸ The will of José Avila verifies this observation. He was a very small planter who owned five hectares of land with less than a quarter of a hectare planted with cane. The inventory listed very few material possessions that, according to the notary 'did not exist anymore since his sister had already taken care of them'. The will makes no mention of a house. A few *fanegas* of maize and the plot of land account for almost a third of the total value of Avila's goods, which totalled only \$127.12. AHT, Sección Judicial, Serie A, Caja 187, Expte. 8. According to Groussac, a peon's monthly salary at the time of Avila's death was \$12. Paul Groussac, *Memoria histórica y descriptiva*.

of agreement, size of the plantation, and financial capability of the cane grower as well as on non economic factors such as family connections and political ties. The relatively limited number of contracts located in the archives makes it difficult to frame generalisations, although they reflect a variety of situations, thus providing key information on the nature of the partnerships established between the parties.

A contract consisted of a mutual agreement between a cane planter and a mill to sell a determinate quantity of cane for a specific price over a certain period of time. The length of partnerships varied widely among contracts, ranging from one to ten years. During the industry's early years, contracts were usually signed more than six months prior to harvest time. These early arrangements applied especially to small planters who depended on mills as capital providers to meet planting and harvesting expenses.⁶⁹ By means of early contracts small planters secured a market for their cane but at a fixed price, which generally did not reflect changes in market conditions, especially after the first year of the contract. One way to avoid this problem was through share payments.⁷⁰ For example in his 1893 contract with Ingenio El Manantial, Dalmiro Mur established a five-year commitment to deliver 200,000 arrobas of cane to the mill. In the first year the mill guaranteed the planter a fixed price of 18 cents per arroba. For subsequent years, the mill agreed to pay on the basis of a share of the sugar produced from the cane delivered by the planter, either in sugar or its cash equivalent.⁷¹ Share payment was a common type of arrangement, especially among *colonos*. In 1894 the *Revista Azucarera* observed that *colonos* received almost three arrobas of sugar per 100 arrobas of cane delivered.⁷² There is no evidence of the share payment received by *cañeros* although the same report observed that they obtained higher prices than *colonos*.⁷³ It is likely that share payments were more popular among small and medium planters. Large planters were in a much better position to negotiate more favourable terms, so they not only obtained cash for their crop but could also afford to wait longer to sign their contracts. However, this strategy did not always prove successful. In September 1884 *El Orden* reported that factories were not accepting cane at prices higher than six cents per arroba, whereas a month before the

⁶⁹ During the last quarter of the nineteenth century Tucumán's government joined the national trend to modernise its banking system, as the creation of the Banco Nacional, Banco Provincial, and Banco Hipotecario clearly demonstrates. However, only big planters and mills had access to institutional sources of credit. José Antonio Sánchez Román, 'La dulce crisis: finanzas, estado, e industria azucarera en Tucumán (1853–1914),' unpubl. PhD diss., Instituto Universitario de Investigación Ortega y Gasset, 2001.

⁷⁰ Since share payments consisted of payments in sugar for the cane delivered to the mill, they required the planters to pay more attention to cane quality in order to guarantee high sucrose content.

⁷¹ AHT, Protocolos, Serie C 8, Folios 409–11v.

⁷² 1 arroba equals 25 pounds.

⁷³ *Revista Azucarera*, 1 Sept. 1894, pp. 201–5.

price paid was eight cents. The paper observed that several large planters, especially in the southern parts of the province, had been deeply affected by the situation.⁷⁴

Contracts included very specific clauses dealing with delivery conditions. As cane deteriorates rapidly after cutting, delays in delivery have an adverse impact on the cane's sucrose content. Delivery stipulations enabled mills to maintain control over such matters. For example, Dalmiro Mur's 1893 contract determined that the mill would schedule harvest and delivery times.⁷⁵ In this case, the mill assumed the responsibility for transporting the cane. Usually this practice affected smaller planters who depended on the mill's Decauville system or railway branches in the area.⁷⁶ Large plantations enjoyed direct access to railway transportation, which enabled them to engage in contracts with more distant mills. In these cases, mills were required to notify the milling schedule in advance, as shown by the contract signed in 1883 between Ingenio San Vicente and Arturo Romero, which guaranteed a ten-day prior delivery notice to the planter.⁷⁷

Contracts established an exclusive relationship between partners. Only under exceptional circumstances could planters sell their cane to other mills. The contract between Ingenio San Vicente and Arturo Romero determined that the mill could interrupt milling for 20 days for routine maintenance or machinery problems. The contract enabled Romero to sell his cane to another plant only if the mill failed to start milling after that period, yet the planter still required authorisation to do so.⁷⁸ To guarantee quality, contracts included stipulations on cane freshness and the preparation of the land. The contract signed in 1888 between Justino Posse and Ismael Gutierrez included specific instructions on how to clean and prepare the fields for planting.⁷⁹ Contracts contained stipulations on price reductions proportional to reductions in the cane's sucrose content. Additional clauses enabled mills to reject cane of inferior quality, although contracts did not establish clear mechanisms for the determination of cane quality. According to *El Orden*, refusal to accept the cane was a common practice among mills, especially during periods of overproduction.⁸⁰

Since many planters depended on mills for money up front to finance their expenditures, contracts contained provisions on cash advances.⁸¹ Credit

⁷⁴ *El Orden*, 4 Sept. 1884.

⁷⁵ AHT, Protocolos, Serie C, Folios 409–11v.

⁷⁶ Pierre Denis, 'Tucumán y el azúcar', in Daniel Campi (ed.), *Estudios sobre la historia*, p. 19.

⁷⁷ Contemporary observers noted that lack of wagons to transport cane was a source of conflict among cane planters and mill owners, in particular during the 1880s.

⁷⁸ AHT, Protocolos, Serie D, Folios 448–53.

⁷⁹ AHT, Protocolos, Serie A, Folios 1520–2.

⁸⁰ *El Orden*, 7 Aug. 1895.

⁸¹ Planters' limited access to institutionalised sources of credit put them in a very vulnerable position, especially during harvest time. The evidence indicates however, that planters managed to find alternative sources of capital, such as pooling financial resources. For

stipulations were similar in most cases although interest rates varied widely. Planters received cash advances in several instalments before harvest time and reimbursement was not expected until the harvest was over. Interest rates fluctuated depending upon the length of the contract, ranging from six to 12 per cent annually.⁸² Dalmiro Mur's long-term contract included an interest rate of nine per cent annually, whereas Leoncio Herrera's one-year contract established an annual interest of 12 per cent, both contracts signed in the same year. Credit was an important part of the arrangement between mills and *colonos* as well, with interest rates always above ten per cent.⁸³ Antonio Correa pointed out that high interest rates coupled with additional abuses committed by mills severely affected *colonos*, who after settling their debts had to look for other jobs to survive during the slack season.⁸⁴

Additional clauses with specific planting and harvesting requirements were included in contracts with *colonos*. The contract between Ingenio San Vicente and Arturo Romero granted the *colono* 160 hectares of land. It required that Romero plant a minimum of 80 hectares with cane, leaving the rest of the land to be planted with other crops. Over the total eight-year period of the contract, Romero was granted four years to plant the cane. In certain cases, *colonos* received land already under production. Contracts contained detailed instructions for the maintenance of quality such as soil fertilisation and irrigation. Water rights were included in all the contracts as well. *Colonos* had

example, in 1883 planters Narcisca Villafañe and Ramón de la Vega established a six-year partnership to plant cane. Villafañe contributed 100 hectares of land planted with cane and supplied with fences and a feeder canal. She also contributed 1,000 pesos to the partnership. De la Vega provided 3,000 pesos, labour and his administrative services, for which he received a 500-peso annual salary. AHT, Protocolos, Serie D, Folios 736–9.

⁸² Interest rates varied depending on whether they came from formal or informal sources as well as in accordance with the total amount loaned. Other causes for disparities in interest rates were likely related to the contract's stipulations such as length and type of arrangement (partnership or simple contract to supply cane) as well as the situation of the industry at the time. According to Sánchez Román's analysis, between 1880 and 1890 Tucumán's bank interest rates oscillated between 7% and 9% per annum. Rates paid in the informal sector showed larger fluctuations ranging from 10.7% to 16.3%. The author also points to the existence of 'professional lenders' who charged up to 48% per annum. José Antonio Sánchez Román, 'La dulce crisis'.

⁸³ Annual interest rates above 10% were quite common not only in Tucumán but in other regions in Argentina and Latin America as well. For example in Santa Fe, Gallo argues that rates fluctuated around 12% during the 1880s. In Buenos Aires Adelman's analysis confirms that borrowers were paying between 6% and 12% per annum in 1895. In Pernambuco, Eisenberg found that rates oscillated between 8% and 11% during the 1880s. In Cuba Bergad observed that planters were paying interest rates as high as one per cent per month in the 1850s. Santiago Gallo, *La pampa gringa*, p. 240; Jeremy Adelman, 'Agricultural Credit in the Province of Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1890–1914', *JLAS*, vol. 22, no. 1 (Feb. 1990), p. 83; Peter Eisenberg, *The Sugar Industry*, p. 64. Laird Bergad, *Cuban Rural Society in the Nineteenth Century* (New Jersey, 1990), p. 174.

⁸⁴ Congreso Nacional, *Investigación Parlamentaria*, p. 47.

rights to a proportional share of the mill's water. In most cases, however, water rights were limited to certain periods of the year and always contingent upon the mill's authorisation, leaving *colonos* in a very vulnerable position.⁸⁵ For example, the 1883 contract between Ingenio Amalia and Gustavo Malhberg included a clause that required the *colono* to share his quota of water should the mill run out.⁸⁶ *Colonos* were expected to provide other services for the mill as well as share their workers with the mill owner, and in certain cases contracts stipulated the tasks and the associated payments. Such was the case of Ismael Gutierrez whose contract contained specific instructions on how to maintain fences and clean the mill's aqueducts. Improvements made on the land or buildings always reverted to the mill without any compensation to the *colono*, regardless of who had paid for them. In cases of negligence or non-compliance, contracts enabled mills to terminate the agreement and evict the *colono* without any right to compensation. The *colonos'* landless condition subjected them to the whim of the mills and limited their bargaining power, as is clearly reflected by the additional stipulations included in their contracts.

Cañeros and *colonos* were able to participate in the sugar business through these agreements, which established individual and personal relationships between mill owners and planters. The contracts extended capitalist relationships in Tucumán's countryside. By means of contracts, planters secured a market for their cane, albeit at the expense of surrendering some control over the productive process. On the other hand, contracts enabled mills not only to guarantee a steady supply of cane without incurring large expenses but also accorded them more control over specific aspects of production. Even small planters resorted to contracts since they constituted a legal instrument that protected them against abuse and guaranteed them a market for their cane. Mill owners and planters were engaged in a mutually dependent relationship that was reinforced by the personal ties created through contracts. However, this should not obscure the existence of conflicts born of their relationship. In 1897 Antonio Correa observed that in their relationship with the planters 'the mill owner ... is indeed a cruel tyrant who sometimes does not even consider norms of reciprocity and culture'.⁸⁷ The inspector was not the only one to notice the tensions that characterised the relationship between outside growers and mill owners. Innumerable periodical and official reports and even contemporary fiction suggest that antagonism and conflict were at the centre of the relationship between both groups.

⁸⁵ AHT, Protocolos, Serie D, Folios 1729v–33v.

⁸⁶ AHT, Protocolos, Serie D, Folio 1277.

⁸⁷ Congreso Nacional, *Investigación Parlamentaria*, p. 231.

Cane planters and mill owners: a conflictive relationship

In 1909 the public and the media acclaimed the play *Cañas y Trapiches*, in which a mill owner cheated a *cañero* out of his savings to finally seize his plantation. Penniless and heartbroken because his daughter had been dishonoured by the mill owner's son, the planter was left with no other recourse than to leave to the city in search of a better future.⁸⁸ This fictionalised account portrays a regular occurrence in sugar areas although it does not reflect in its entirety important features of the relationships between planters and mill owners. The evidence reveals that planters did not accept abuses from mill owners passively. Whenever there was confrontation, they reacted quickly and resorted to different strategies to minimise threats to their survival.

Disagreements revolved around a wide array of circumstances ranging from failure to fulfil contract provisions to disputes over water rights, and scales, just to name a few.⁸⁹ Contracts were legally binding agreements that protected the rights of both parties involved in the relationship. In instances of violations, planters could and did resort to the civil court. For example in 1886, planter Benedicto Robles sued Ingenio Bella Vista for failing to pay for the cane delivered. In this case, the dispute was settled in a friendly manner.⁹⁰ However, when courts failed to provide remedies, cane growers did not hesitate to engage the media, which proved very receptive to planters' pleas and advocated for the prompt resolution of contractual violations.⁹¹ Finally, when these mechanisms failed planters resorted to violent means to assert their rights, as was the case of Luis Barbarino who set fire to the cane he had sold to Ingenio Mercedes.⁹²

In certain cases, conflicts resulted from the intensification of problems that had plagued the province prior to the sugar boom. This was the case with disputes over water rights.⁹³ The province of Tucumán is crossed by the Salí River, which divides the sugar area into two sections. The region located

⁸⁸ The author of the play was Alberto García Hamilton, a member of Tucumán's sugar elite. A synopsis of the play was published along with reviews in *El Orden* in April 1909.

⁸⁹ Other problems affecting sugar areas that resulted in increasing tensions between the two groups were labour shortages, competition for railway cargo space, inadequate road systems, and unmarked property boundaries.

⁹⁰ AHT, Sección Judicial, Serie A, Caja 196, Expte. 32. The mill paid the planter the amount owed immediately after the case was taken to court.

⁹¹ As part of a campaign in defence of the planters, in August 1895 *El Orden* published a series of articles entitled '*En defensa del cañero*', encouraging the government to participate more actively and the group to form a union to defend their interests.

⁹² AHT, Sección Judicial del Crimen, Caja 99, Expte. 12. The planter and peons involved in the incident were acquitted for lack of evidence.

⁹³ In 1875, in his annual message to the legislature, the governor observed the need to regulate water resources to avoid more conflicts. Ramon Cordeiro, *Compilación ordenada*, vol. 6, p. 357.

east of the river, where a large number of mills and cane plantations were located, required artificial irrigation since rainfall did not compensate for lack of natural streams. Cane has important water demands and requires good drainage systems as well. Mill owners made significant investments in irrigation yet without much co-ordination. As a result, a very unsystematic irrigation system gave rise to an extremely unequal distribution of water that brought confrontations between planters and mill owners.⁹⁴

Until the 1880s the government intervened indirectly in water regulation by appointing landowners to ad hoc commissions in charge of water distribution. Since these commissions were not guided by specific regulations on water, their decisions were based more on personal interests than on legal rights. To prevent abuses and fill the void left by the lack of legislation, contracts included specific stipulations on water use.⁹⁵ Yet such stipulations could not prevent the monopolisation of water resources by the mills, or abuses on the part of the commissions. Therefore, disputes over water abounded. When the mills failed to honour their contractual obligations with regard to water, planters resorted to litigation. For example, in 1882 Hilario Iramain took Abraham Medina to court, accusing him of destroying part of his property during the construction of an aqueduct.⁹⁶ In other instances, planters resorted to more direct means in order to guarantee the provision of water. Contemporary observers noted that mills protected their water sources with armed guards, which gives an indication of the pervasiveness of encroachment on water sources in sugar areas.⁹⁷

Whenever direct strategies proved inefficient, cane planters engaged the authorities and the media to protect their water rights. In 1896 *El Orden* responded to planters' grievances with the observation that 'disorder, confusion and injustice' characterised water distribution in the province, and demanded immediate measures.⁹⁸ In 1897 the provincial government attempted to put an end to the water monopoly practised by mills through the Irrigation Code. The rationale behind the law was simple: water belonged to the public and the government should be the only authority in charge of its distribution. The provincial government perceived that the lack of uniform legislation resulted in its unequal distribution. Therefore, the law's main purpose was to provide equal access to water rights for all the groups

⁹⁴ In his 1883 report on the Salí River, *ingeniero* Lana y Sarto observed that as a result of uncoordinated irrigation, the river was losing 10% of its volume through evaporation. Ramón Cordeiro, *Compilación ordenada*, vol. 9, p. 82.

⁹⁵ To avoid their extreme dependence on mill water resources, planters contracted water from other farmers, as was the case of planters Romualdo Mora and Zacarías de la Zerda, who agreed to build an aqueduct and share irrigation rights. AHT, Protocolos, Serie D, Folios 1377–8. ⁹⁶ AHT, Sección Judicial, Serie A, Caja 262, Expte. 19.

⁹⁷ Ramón Cordeiro, *Compilación ordenada*, vol. 9, pp. 79 and 119.

⁹⁸ *El Orden*, 4 May 1896.

involved in agricultural production in general, and cane production in particular. The law established the obligation to register the number of hectares under irrigation, created a quota system for the distribution of water, granted permanent and temporary water concessions, limited the size for new concessions, established rules for cleaning and maintaining the canals and aqueducts, and imposed a new tax to improve the provincial irrigation system. The code did not eliminate the tensions between both groups in matters of irrigation. Its passage, however, allowed for a more balanced distribution of water among planters and mill owners in the province. It was in Tucumán's authorities' interest to secure a harmonious relation between the groups responsible for the growth and development of the province's mother industry.

The government could intervene more easily in those areas that were considered of public utility such as water rights than in other aspects of the sugar business. Planters were in a much more vulnerable position when dealing directly with the mill owner. For example at the time of delivery, *basculeros* hired by the mills were responsible for weighing the cane. Once the cane was weighed, quantities were recorded in the mill's ledger. Dubious weighing procedures set off countless disputes between planters and mill owners. Contemporary sources agreed that scales were set to under-weigh the load by around 30 to 50 per cent.⁹⁹ In 1885, as part of its campaign to protect planters' rights, *El Orden* demanded more government control to prevent further abuses through the 'evil scales'.¹⁰⁰ However, the authorities did not intervene until the early twentieth century, leaving planters with no option but litigation or more direct action.¹⁰¹ For example, in 1894 Ernesto Bazet was taken to court accused of fraudulent manipulation of the scale. According to the complainants, the *basculero* purposely set the scale to under-weigh their cane loads. After a long trial, involving an extraordinary number of witnesses, Ernesto Bazet was indicted and sentenced to eight months in prison, thus striking an important victory for planters' rights.¹⁰² Planters also mixed stones, sticks and iron pieces with the cane to increase the total weight. Even though it is difficult to assess its regularity, the evidence seems to indicate this was a very common occurrence. For example, in the trial against Pedro Suárez for damage to Ingenio San Pablo,

⁹⁹ In his 1897 report Antonio Correa mentioned that lack of trust permeated the transaction since it was a common occurrence for 1,000 kilograms of cane to be weighed as low as 500 to 600 kilogrammes.

¹⁰⁰ *El Orden*, 5 June 1885.

¹⁰¹ In 1903 Lucas Córdoba decreed that two inspectors of weights should supervise cane weighing. The real motivation for the government's intervention was to prevent tax evasion. In 1908 inspectors were replaced by public officials who visited mills to monitor the accuracy of the scales used.

¹⁰² AHT, Sección Judicial del Crimen, Caja 168, Expte. 6.

the peon argued in his defence that ‘it is not the first time that the cane has arrived in the mill with stones and sticks that, he believes, are added to increase the weight of the load’.¹⁰³

Therefore, despite mutual dependence, the relations between planters and mill owners were plagued by conflict and antagonism.¹⁰⁴ The 1893 dispute between Abraham Medina and his *colonos* that opened this essay illustrates some of the problems faced by planters in Tucumán, thus providing a pertinent case to conclude the study.¹⁰⁵ In December 1892 Medina and his henchmen assaulted twelve of his *colonos* and forced them off their land. The mill owner claimed that the *colonos* had failed to fulfil their contracts, neglected to pay the workers, and squandered cash advances.¹⁰⁶ In January Medina proceeded to evict the *colonos* by force. The planters appealed their case to the authorities and accused the mill owner of using physical violence, failing to supply sufficient water, and failing to pay for delivered cane and labour. The group launched a relentless media campaign against Medina.¹⁰⁷ As a result of their efforts, the authorities persuaded the mill owner to recognise *colonos*’ right to arbitration, thus marking a significant turning point in the case.¹⁰⁸ On 15 May 1893, in the case of Abraham Medina versus *colono* Alejandro San Martín, the mill owner was required to return the planter’s belongings as well as to indemnify him for the damage to his property. A year later, the civil justice endorsed the verdict, thus giving legal sanction to the ruling and awarding a very important victory to this group of *colonos* in particular and to the entire group of cane planters in general.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰³ AHT, Sección Judicial del Crimen, Caja 235, Expte. 24.

¹⁰⁴ It is worth noting that when confronting workers or the national authorities, planters and mill owners presented a unified front.

¹⁰⁵ The conflict has been reconstructed using *El Orden*, *La Opinión* and criminal court records.

¹⁰⁶ The real reason behind the conflict is unclear, although it is likely that changes in tax policies might have played a significant role. When the problems started the provincial legislature was discussing a bill that proposed additional taxes on sugar. The new taxes, characterised as extraordinary, affected the final product and not the raw material. The contracts between Medina and his *colonos* had been signed before the bill had been drafted. Since the arrangement had stipulated a ten-year commitment, the new taxes would have fallen upon the mill owner. Therefore, by revoking the contracts, Abraham Medina could renegotiate new deals that included any possible change in sugar taxes.

¹⁰⁷ *El Orden* reported daily updates on the *colonos*’ situation. Moreover, the paper included editorials discussing the miserable living and working conditions of the farmers and urged the provincial authorities to intervene. *La Opinión*, a paper politically aligned with Medina, reported the mill owner’s side of the conflict.

¹⁰⁸ Violent events in Santa Fe’s agricultural colonies must have convinced the authorities to be receptive to the *colonos*’ pleas in order to prevent further violence.

¹⁰⁹ It is likely that the entire group settled their disputes along the same lines as San Martín, although lack of evidence prevents a case by case analysis.

In sum, when confronted with abuses planters proved to be extremely resourceful. They fought back and engaged in different strategies to minimise threats to their survival. Planters knew their contractual rights and invoked them in the courts. In addition, they actively sought the support of the provincial press and the authorities. The press offered cane planters an important venue to voice their demands while Tucumán's government responded to their pleas by passing legislation that tried to secure a balanced development of the most important source of provincial income. Finally, when these actions failed, planters did not hesitate to employ more direct and violent strategies to protect their rights or just to express their frustration.

Conclusion

Between 1876 and 1895 Tucumán's sugar industry experienced unprecedented growth. In less than two decades, the province reversed its diversified productive pattern and became specialised in sugar production. Besides the cane obtained directly from mill lands, thousands of farmers shifted to cane cultivation and became a central factor in the growth of Tucumán's sugar industry.

As this study has revealed, the sugar boom yielded a very different outcome in Tucumán to that in some other Latin American sugar economies. Rather than massive land dispossession as was the case in other regions, pre-existing patterns of landownership shaped the mills' strategies for securing their raw material. A large share of the cane was produced by outside growers who either owned or rented the land and became incorporated in Tucumán's sugar economy through contractual arrangements. Tucumán's growers successfully adapted to the new economic reality and managed to remain an essential force in sugar production into the twentieth century. However, unlike Cuban *colonos* or Bahian *lavradores da cana*, the group of outside growers was rather heterogeneous, with plantations ranging from one to thousands of hectares. Therefore, sugar specialisation did not cause the disappearance of small and medium farmers but rather reinforced the existence of a socially differentiated planter group, an exceptional case for a Latin American sugar economy.

Conflict plagued the relations between planters and mills. In their disputes with mill owners, planters challenged abuses, though without questioning the lines along which the system was founded. *Cañeros* and *colonos* carefully evaluated their options and resorted to different strategies to reassert their rights. The court system became one arena to settle disputes with mill owners. In other instances, planters actively engaged the support of the media and the government. Finally, on some occasions, planters

resorted to more direct and violent means to contest the abuses of mill owners.

The twentieth century would see the inauguration of a new period in the relations between cane planters and mill owners. *Cañeros* and *colonos* adopted new strategies to settle their conflicts with mill owners, such as the violent collective outbreaks of 1927 that paralysed the industry and prompted the direct intervention of Argentina's president. These later strategies can only be understood in the context of structural weaknesses which became apparent after 1895, when a series of crises of overproduction drastically altered the relationships between the agricultural and industrial sectors in the industry.