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Panel W076 Anxious sovereignties

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**Is federalism a threat to state sovereignty?  
The politics of new interprovincial regions in Argentina**

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**Introduction**

Federalism has been a powerful and quite controversial concept since the very origins of Argentine nation-state. From the bloody civil wars that followed the declaration of independence in the 19th century to the current macro-politics debates about federal taxes, federalism seems to be an omnipresent metaphor of the Argentine state imagination. Without a doubt, federalism is central to the imagination and realization of Argentine the State, for it connects in a symbolic and material form both past and present, and range of dramas and possibilities of the state's legitimacy and sovereignty. But federalism is also a political value that enacts specific –and sometimes controversial– policy making.

In this paper I focus on the relations between federalism and state sovereignty, using my ethnographic research among politicians –mainly identified with *Peronismo*<sup>1</sup> and other social actors engaged with the creation and bolstering of a new region, the Central Region Centro of Argentina (RC)<sup>2</sup>. I'd like to show that most of the debates conveyed in terms of federalism are not about political organization neither about distribution of resources, but about an ongoing project of nation-state building, marked by a specific language of consensus/ confrontation rather than an ideology of integration/cohesion, regarding the process of transforming space into territory inherent to modern state. This case, thus, calls for a particular anthropology of the state, contemplating the relations of its constituent others (namely, provincial states) and the heterogeneous dynamics of creative political actions conveyed by sovereignty.

The paper has four parts. In the first one, I describe the main axes of the interprovincial regional process considering how politicians engaged with the construction of Región Centro stress the importance of “federalism”. In the second part, I examine a particular feature of current regional policies concerning with international “commercial missions” of Región Centro, focusing on the ‘who, how and why’ underlying commercial missions regarded as a main achievement of the regional process. In the third part I look into some implications of the international setting of federalism considering the relations between “making business” and State’s sovereignty. Since the paper is the result of a research in-process, by the end a final section of ‘last words’ are intended as provisional conclusion.

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<sup>1</sup> Justicialista Party (PJ) is also called *Peronista Party* or *Movimiento* due to the name of its founder, Juan Domingo Perón (three times elected president of Argentina: 1946-1952, 1952-1955, and 1973-1974). However, since 2003 the Party has been fragmented into various political organizations and struggling over the control of the party dynamics. Hence, all of them claim they are peronistas although they can't use the name of PJ

<sup>2</sup> I will use the acronym RC and the subsequent denominations in Spanish (i.e. Región Centro) because *central* and *centro* have different connotations: while the former is rather geographic, the latter is geopolitical.

Inspired by Pierre Bourdieu's proposal of "to subject the State and the thought of the State to a sort of hyperbolic doubt" (1994:1), I will propose a particular way to examine federalism as a process and how it functions both interpellating and reinforcing categories of thought and practice produced and imposed by the State.

## 1. Región Centro and the importance of federalism

By mid 1990 the governments' officials of Córdoba, Santa Fe and Entre Ríos provinces started to set up a process of "sub-national regional integration". The governors of Córdoba and Santa Fe signed the Regional Integration Treaty in 1998, to which Entre Ríos joined in 1999.<sup>3</sup> Five years later, the newly elected governors jointly announced publically "the emergency of a new region". Whether is possible to grasp the ultimate interests of the politicians engaged with the creation of RC or not, it is significant they had connoted the regional process in terms of "creating real federalism".

A generalized assumption among political actors (from various political forces and local levels) and mass media reporters who attended the political event was that Región Centro had to do with political and economical negotiation/ opposition with national government. It was regarded as "the creation of an alternative economic and political block" given the combination of political affinity and personal friendship between the then governors, and the outstanding wealth of the territories they ruled, compared with other Argentine provinces. Indeed, Región Centro is located along the central and central-east of Argentina, and has a large importance within the national compound: a total population of almost 8 million people within 377,109 km<sup>2</sup>; producing 53% of the grains, 70% of the agricultural machinery, 90% of vegetable oils, 70% of milk, the whole production of peanuts, half of the poultry, and 34% of the cattle in Argentina. Currently, RC is not the only interprovincial region, but as my interlocutors highlight "is the most active one", due to the mentioned socioeconomic features –which evidently make RC very powerful – but also "politically" since it became a (provincial) state policy that had remained in spite of several election processes, political-party changes and conflictive socioeconomic conjunctures that had impacted the interprovincial relations.

I was introduced to RC when I was doing ethnographic fieldwork among *Peronist* politicians and party militants of Entre Ríos province. Some of them were actively engaged with the idea of regional integration, and participated in bilateral agreements with Brazilian states. At the same time, they were setting up meetings and personal encounters with their provincial partners of Córdoba and Santa Fe, and even announcing publically an *interest* in a near future project of establishing a regional alliance. They were also intensely working in favour of interprovincial road infrastructure and the subsequent material integration of provincial territories, and as a step forward to materialize a 'bi-oceanic corridor' connecting all the existing and future highways that would allow crossing the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans. One common aspect to all this process was that they appealed to *federalism* as the core value that organized their actions and interactions.

I have been conducting research amongst professional politicians identified with *Peronismo* within political processes of various local-levels since 1999, combining a 'multi-sited ethnography' and the 'extended case method'. I had the opportunity to follow the political trajectories of my interlocutors for long periods, including electoral victories and losses, and witnessing how they reshape personal expectations and disillusion, and ultimately

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<sup>3</sup> The governors who first signed were: for Córdoba, Ramón Mestre (Union Cívica Radical 1991-1995); for Entre Ríos, Jorge Pedro Busti (PJ, 1987-91, 1995-99, 2003-07), and for Santa Fe, Jorge Obeid (PJ, 1995-99 y 2003-07). Governors who launched it were: José Manuel De la Sota (PJ, 1999-2003, 2003-07, 2011-); and already mentioned Jorge Pedro Busti and Jorge Obeid. Current governors are José Manuel De la Sota (Unión por Córdoba), Sergio Urribarri (Frente para la Victoria 2007-11, re-elected in Entre Ríos), and Antonio Bonfatti (Partido Socialista, 2011) who was preceded by Hermes Binner (2007-11), the first Argentine Socialist governor.

their own life and death (real and symbolical, political one). My purpose was to understand how politicians manage to produce what they call ‘political works’ (*obras políticas*), whether material or immaterial such as promulgate new laws, or reforming the existing ones; building infrastructure, like roads, bridges and aqueducts; propitiating provincial constitutional reforms, and so on. I focused on political works developed out within conflictive contexts of hopeless or absence of social support, lack of political trust amongst other political forces, and problematic economical scenarios regarding economic issues. I arrived to an ethnographic answer by means of “political work” (*trabajo político*). Political work entails institutional and interpersonal ways of acting and interacting in politics, by which “politicians” (whether in office or not) imagine political projects transforming them into political constructs.<sup>4</sup>

It was the study of political work within the creation of Región Centro what conducted me to examine federalism. In fact, my interest regarding this concept stem out from a very basic question: in what sense politicians engaged with the regional process regard their work as “creating real federalism in Argentina”? Why is federalism so important for them?

Federalism is not an innocent descriptive concept at all. As I mentioned, is at the centre of Argentine state's imaginations, partaking its legitimacy and sovereignty. On the one hand, considering the historical connotation of federalism, its regional appealing is very significant for my interlocutors regard themselves as belonging to three provinces which share a memory of historically confronting the centralized policies of Buenos Aires. They consider themselves the “federal interior” in opposition to the “unitarism” epitomized in Buenos Aires. This sort of historical cultural framing of federalism is not exclusive of the provinces of RC. It has to do with the particular role federalism has historically played within the process of state formation and the ways in which it is remembered in the present times in Argentina.

Many scholars had called the attention to the fact that Argentina was born out of a lax union of different colonial landscapes and that this caused considerable delay regarding the consolidation of a national organization. Social actors engaged with RC are completely aware that federalism has historically functioned as a threat to the national sovereignty, and –as I will show shortly- they often emphasize in their public speeches variations of this formula: “is not our purpose to confront with the national government but to contribute to the general benefit”. Federalism symbolizes many decades of conflicts that followed the process of declaration of independence from the Spanish crown (1810-1816). Federalism even became a synonym of anarchism during the time Argentine regions and provinces struggled violently with regards to the constitution of a national government –in fact, from 1831 to 1852 the country’s name was not Argentina but ‘Argentine Confederation’ (according to the way the provinces organized themselves based on interprovincial pacts and treaties without a central head of state). The main antagonists of the internecine wars that took place from 1814 to 1876 were labelled Federal Party versus Unitarian Party (also spatially grounded as a confrontation between Buenos Aires Province, the city and the port, versus the rest of provinces and territories).<sup>5</sup> They fought over the monopoly on the use of the Port of Buenos Aires as the sole means for international commerce (among other centralizing policies), and for the defence of provincial interests –in this respect, while some provinces (i.e. littoral) sought free trade and

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<sup>4</sup> This led me to attend politics through social dynamics instead of cultural essentialist patterns related with political affiliation, since political work is at the centre of the relation between what Peronists call “political vocation” and “political decision” attached to the creation of both institutional and interpersonal obligations.

<sup>5</sup> The armed conflicts between *Federales* and *Unitarios* followed May Revolution (1810), and continued with intermittence until 1853, when the governor of Entre Rios province and afterward president of confederation, Justo José de Urquiza, nationalized customs receipts and allowed free flow of trade on the Parana and Uruguay rivers (after his defeat over the governor of Buenos Aires, Juan Manuel de Rosas at the Battle of Caseros in 1852). In 1859, Buenos Aires was forced to accept the federal constitution of 1853 after six years of secession; nevertheless, the federal constitution was amended to allow Buenos Aires greater influence (see for instance: Halperin Donghi, 1965; Luna, 1971; for a comparative work and good summarize see Carmagnani (comp.) 1993).

navigation of inland rivers instead of Buenos Aires's control, other favoured economic protectionism of their emerging economic production.

Historiography has also shown that in everyday political relations, the dynamic of confrontation based on a sharp dichotomy was more apparent than real, less spatially grounded, and often more fluid –i.e. federal leaders and followers would become Unitarians and vice versa. Local complexities of different kind such as economic features of each province, personal commitments between popular leaders (*caudillos*) and with local populations, juxtaposed government officials' competences, expansion of agrarian frontier, advance against aboriginal control of territories, violence, plunder, and even an incipient class struggle, were all features that shaped the disputes in terms of Federalism versus Unitarianism.

In sum, in spite of the diversity of elements which historically nurtured the disputes regarding Argentina's political organization, federalism (versus) centralism both shaped Argentine sovereign institutions with effects that remain today. This is how my interlocutors place federalism as pivotal to interprovincial policy making, and by laying a bridge between past and present according to their current regionalization process.

On the other hand, politicians and other social actors engaged with RC (mainly regional attorneys' associations but also producers and professionals) also refer to federalism in regards to a series of juridical-constitutionalist issues which emerged after the last amendment of Argentine National Constitution in 1994. This is significant to the relations between federalism and sovereignty because –as my interlocutors claim – the last process of constitutional reform opened up “a new juridical federal setting”.<sup>6</sup> The 1994 Constitution could be seen as a token of the convulsive return to constitutional rule after the last coup d'état in Argentina (1976-1983), for the amendment caused a great deal of conflicts between the main political forces of Argentina. However, and despite some controversial modifications<sup>7</sup>, it was generally considered a ‘federal reform’ for it introduced a new section allowing the provinces to set up interprovincial regions:

**Section 124.-** The provinces are empowered to set up regions for the economic and social development and to establish entities for the fulfilment of their purposes, and they are also empowered, with the knowledge of Congress, to enter into international agreements provided they are consistent with the national foreign policy and do not affect the powers delegated to the Federal Government or the public credit of the Nation. The City of Buenos Aires shall have the regime which is to be established to that effect.

The provinces have the original dominion over the natural resources existing in their territory.”

I have analysed somewhere else (Gaztañaga 2010, 2012) that it is possible to consider federalism as ‘concept-metaphor’ (Moore 2004) which, similarly to globalization, implies theoretical abstraction and processes, and which it is important not only to social scientists but most people's imagined and experienced worlds since its meaning is defined in practice and in context, rather than being previously specified. This approach helped me for a non-

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<sup>6</sup> The National Constitution sanctioned in 1853 was reformed in 1860, 1866, 1898, 1949, 1956, 1957, 1972, and 1994. Argentina had an interrupted democratic history since 1930. Military dictatorships ruled the country in 1930-1932, 1943-1946, 1955-1958, 1962-1963, 1966-1973, and 1976-1983.

<sup>7</sup> For instance, the length of the presidential term was shortened from 6 to 4 years, and was allowed the re-election of the president and the vice-president for one consecutive term; senator's terms were also shortened from 9 to 6 years, and every district elects three senators (previously were two) by direct elections instead of provincial legislatures (See: Rosatti et al 1994). In Argentina, the presidential form of government is combined with a bicameral legislature: a Chamber of Deputies and a Chamber of Senators. The formers are elected from 24 districts (23 provinces and the federal capital) for four-year terms (half of them renewed every two years), through the D'Hondt divisor form of proportional representation. While all the jurisdictions are represented in proportion to their populations, it is said that the Argentine system tends to strongly over-represent the smaller provinces because there is a minimum of five deputies for each jurisdiction.

instrumental view of the regional process even when examining RC as a “strategic policy” –as politicians who created claim some of their motivations to be –and it was a rich way of approaching ethnographically the diversity of contexts where my interlocutors mobilized the term federalism. However, although it helped me to pay attention to interplays of political imagination, social creativity, personal engagement, and the creation of institutions within the regional process, in this paper, I’d like to change focus towards the relation between federalism and sovereignty, posing a question: why albeit there is no univocal meaning for *federalism* among my interlocutors they behave as if there was such? A provisional answer is because they actively sanction the importance of federalism as a political value by working towards its institutionalization within RC. I suspect this has to do with the fact they do share a certain meaning of sovereignty –which I hope to explain fully by the end of this paper – but for now I’d like to point out at least three ways in which politicians engaged with RC ‘value’ federalism. These three aspects are not just related with RC but with the Nation-State scale and dynamics, its sovereignty and the limitations and possibilities of political projects.

i) First, politicians engaged with RC consider that interprovincial regionalization is a *new* kind of federalism. The mentioned Section 124 was extensively considered –by all political parties – as a ‘federal input’. It was also the very first time the concept of *región* was introduced in our Magna Carta. For the politicians engaged with the creation of RC regionalization was a possibility for “real federalism” in contrast to what they consider an existing “just nominal” one since provinces could create regions by themselves, “just communicating it” to the Nation Congress. They often highlight this is by asserting how *unusual* regions are within federal countries. At the last RC institutional meeting, the governor of Córdoba pointed this out it very clearly: “This Region, as Sergio [Urribarri, governor of Entre Ríos] has accurately putted it, is really the most important institutional organization after the National Organization, because is the first attempt of regionalism within a federal country. Traditionally, regions belong to unitarian systems. A good example is our sister Chilean Republic (...).<sup>8</sup> In this regard, although interprovincial regions only have a certain degree of autonomy, my interlocutors consider it very different than prior the 1994 amendment. Before then, provinces were only allowed to set up mutual treaties and were all subject to the approval of federal government. Instead, after 1994, not only they could choose to create regions following their own political will, but also they were entailed with greater influence regarding their natural resources and the enactment of international agreements. In sum, regionalization is seen as a particular state policy concerning provincial states: it is their own ‘creation’. And even when regional actors are completely aware of regionalization’s legal constraints (i.e. not allowed to create a formal political unity), they consider them just as part of the possibilities and limitations at play within federalism

ii) Second, they assert RC is founded *after* the National Organization (i.e. the creation of Argentine Democratic Federal Republic) and the current state of Argentine institutions. Of course they recognize a tension between concentration and diversification of power as co-constitutive of any federal system, but from their perspectives federalism doesn’t mean secession. The same governor explained: “...setting up a region within a federal system means having the courage to think the future by three, and to channel that future both, into a strong homeland and another wonderful region which is our region, our bigger homeland, Mercosur. This fundamentally what all of us are looking for: growing wealth, justice, and their distribution”.<sup>9</sup> This observation is an example of how they conceive the legitimate

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<sup>8</sup> “Esta región, como muy bien ha dicho Sergio [Urribarri], es realmente la organización institucional más importante después de la organización nacional, porque es el primer intento del regionalismo en el marco de un país federal. Tradicionalmente las regiones son parte de los sistemas unitarios. Un buen ejemplo es nuestra hermana República de Chile (...).” (Personal fieldwork record)

<sup>9</sup> “... pero armar una región en un sistema federal significa animarnos a pensar el futuro de a tres y a encauzar ese futuro dentro de una patria fuerte y dentro de una región maravillosa que es nuestra región, nuestra patria

precedence of what they call National Organization over Regionalization. They often assert this both in a synchronic and diachronic perspective: justifying regional politics and policies as a way of improving not just their own provincial territories but also the national aggregate, and historically, highlighting the fact that Argentine provinces have precedence over the Nation since the creation of a Federal Republic. I will show how the former works in the next section, through examining certain economic policy of RC. As for the historical perspective, politicians engaged with RG stress federalism implies set of national government functions where provinces are granted residual powers over any matters not specified to be federal functions. In other words, the new federalism materialized by interprovincial regionalization cohabits with certain federal organization that remains in force today where provinces (and not regions) are the legitimate political and administrative units. Therefore, National Organization is not only seen as a previous condition but also as a way of securing certain type of federalism within interprovincial relationships. This was explained to me as feature of Argentine new regions: they are set up with purposes of economical and social development, and therefore with political limitations established by section 126 of Argentine Constitution:

**Section 126.**-The provinces do not exercise the power delegated to the Nation. Provinces shall in no case enter into any partial treaty of political nature; enact laws dealing with commerce, inland or foreign navigation; establish provincial Customs; coin money; establish banks with power to issue money without authorization from the Federal Congress; enact civil, commercial, criminal, or mining codes after Congress had enacted them; enact special laws regarding citizenship and naturalization, bankruptcy, counterfeiting of currency or State documents; lay any duty on tonnage; supply ships of war or raise armies, except in the event of foreign invasion or in such imminent danger that shall not admit a delay, notifying immediately to the Federal Government; appoint or receive foreign agents.

iii) Connected with the previous two ways in which politicians engaged with RC ‘value’ federalism, there is a third one, related with the acknowledgment of provincial diversity within the national compound. Diversity takes part in the regional dynamics of interprovincial relations, public speeches of its officials, formal and informal meetings they carry on, official documents they sign, and ritualized events they organize and attend with private and public actors. They function as opportunities to highlight how Argentine provinces considerably vary despite their formal equality. They tend to stress two main aspects: on the one hand, economic features related with production indexes; on the other hand, socio-demographic features which also impact into the political ones due to the Argentine representative system of government organization. I’ve mentioned the former at the beginning of this paper; as for the population, Córdoba is the 2<sup>nd</sup>, Santa Fe the 3<sup>rd</sup> (with more than 3 million people each), and Entre Ríos is the 7<sup>th</sup> of Argentina.<sup>10</sup> They consider provincial diversity as key to understand the impact of “fiscal federalism” due to the fact that Argentine provinces delegate to the national government large amounts of revenue raising responsibility (e.g. income, sales, excise, and fuel taxes).

The three ways of valuating federalism often meet when my interlocutors often differentiate *fiscal* and *political* federalism when they point out the large amount of wealth produced by the provinces of RC, and how little they receive in return, plus the growing deficits and the accumulation of provincial debt during the last decades. They stress a “federal fiscal imbalance” in what regards that provinces are very dependent on “common-pool” funds, due to the current system of intergovernmental transfers based on a co-participation regime (*Co-participación Federal de Impuestos*) by which the national government collects

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ampliada, que es el MERCOSUR. Fundamentalmente es lo que todos buscamos, que es hacer crecer la riqueza, la justicia y la distribución de las mismas” (ídem).

<sup>10</sup> Source: 2010 INDEC Census, Argentina. I’d like to note that Buenos Aires is the largest province, with almost 14 million people. This clearly shows a dramatic socioeconomic and demographic imbalance in Argentina

taxes and reallocates them to the provinces. This co-participation regime has received constitutional status in the reformed constitution of 1994, but the enactment of a new law has not been fulfilled and instead provinces and national government meet at what is commonly known as “the Argentine federal fiscal labyrinth” made of old tax regimes which are still law (N° 21548/88) and several other laws regulating the distribution and destination of some specific taxes according to specific activities.

In Argentina national government is only exclusively competent on defense and foreign affairs; whereas the provinces are responsible of expenditure and tax decision. Both levels of government share responsibilities in economic and social infrastructure (although provinces are in charge of primary education and municipal organization and services). As Tommasi (et al. 2001) summarize, there is a constitutionally defined broad area of public services where both national and provincial authorities supply public goods, but the tendency since the ‘80s has been for the national government to “decentralize” the direct operation of these services to provinces. Thus provinces today are in charge of most of the social expenditure (basic education, health services, poverty programs, social security, and housing) and some economic infrastructure (roads, ports, environment, natural resources, etc.). In spite of provincial authorities’ faculties to collect “direct taxes” and to share with the national government the use of “indirect taxes”, in the former have delegated to the national government the task of collecting the most important ones (taxes on income, on consumption, and on wealth). Provinces directly control a tax on gross production, on real state and cars, together with a duty applied to contracts. This level of tax centralization together with the above-indicated level of expenditure decentralization has given origin to a high level of “fiscal imbalance”.

Many scholars had noted the negative effects of the current federalism in Argentina, paying attention to the differential aspects of fiscal and political federalism. For instance, that while all provinces have the same constitutional independence in fiscal and spending functions, Argentine electoral rules and party statutes and practices make provincial governors powerful actors in national politics, and often they behave like regional party leaders because they can exert substantial influence through national legislators.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, the fact that governors negotiate bilateral agreements with the president (for instance the so called “Fiscal Pacts”), is regarded by analysts as reflecting a lack of institutionalization of the mechanisms to carry out these agreements.

For my interlocutors this situation means that the ‘negative’ aspect of federalism – weaved with provincial diversity and inequality – cohabits with a ‘positive’ one given the political influence of the three governors who lead RC. In this respect, they also stress that RC has a strong political influence onto the national level of political decision due to the amount of members in the Deputy chamber (which, unlike the chamber of senators, is fully proportional to the total population of each province). However, other regional actors (mainly forum’s participants) stress this is only an “unfulfilled promise” or even worse a “lost opportunity”, because “the region never acted as a block at the national legislature”.

At this point, it is important to clarify that interprovincial relations are far from being harmoniously perfect. Each government has its own priorities, local concerns, and inner political dynamics which often lead to conflicts and disputes.<sup>12</sup> Although politicians are aware of this, they rarely express it publically; but it is different in private or informal speeches. For instance, a government official from Entre Ríos recently told me: “Región Centro has never

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<sup>11</sup>For instance, that the fiscal relationship across provincial governments and between them and the national authorities has been subject to opportunistic behavior and lack of coordination (Tommasi et al. 2001). Many scholars argue this creates incentives for exchanging votes for money to the provinces within the national congress (cf.: de Riz, 2010: 105, Leiras, 2010; Tomassi, 2002).

<sup>12</sup> For instance, between 2008 and 2009 took place sort of a regional schism caused by the different positioning of provincial governments regarding a project advanced by the national government which aimed to raise export taxes on agrarian commodities like soybeans –currently Argentina’s and RC’s main export (Gaztañaga 2010)

ceased to be a vacillating project, because it is about three very different provinces that find hard to agree among each other; and [because] they just meet once or twice a year to just talk”. Perceptions of this kind do not impede regional actors to see RC as a cooperative and shared project; both aspects coexist. And is from this perspective that I’ve proposed that regional actors behave as if there was a single meaning for federalism: considering how they politically value its importance in relation with new juridical settings, current national organization, and provincial diversity. It is possible to identify a mechanism underlying these associations through which federalism becomes a synonym of regionalization, and thus, becoming a device or a “tool”.

What I’d like to call a ‘heuristic perspective’ of federalism/ regionalization is very often expressed by politicians engaged with RC. This was the first definition of RC that gave me a government official from Entre Ríos when I commenced my research: “Región Centro is a geopolitical tool, seated on four areas: infrastructure, foreign trade, science and technology, and economic and productive development (...) its conformation has to do with the synergies and complementarities between the three provinces”.

On the one hand, federalism becomes a device in the broadest sense: for it allows provincial actors (not only politicians) to gain “certain level of independence” (sometimes alternatively referred as “autonomy”) in order to set up interprovincial relationships. During a recent regional meeting, the Santa Fe representative of RC suggested: “for us, integration has two axes: one is to give vitality to our federalism, the other is a scale concern. There are too many issues at stake, and if don’t approach them as three provincial states, they will not prosper. For us is very important to work together”. This explains why politicians often refer to a shared aim of “gaining more and stronger institutionalization for Región Centro” (which, apropos, it is significant that they have been utilizing the same expression since 2004). On the other hand, politicians also claim that they *act* federalism. As I already mentioned, this is the privileged setting for political work. In the broadest sense federalism functions as a device to frame and value certain aims (accomplished through regionalization), but it also becomes a particular device in regards of those aims. In recent years, politicians engaged with RC had been increasingly attached to two major regional aims: “developing regional infrastructure” – this is, to improve existing roads, highways and ports or to build new ones– and “increasing the international commercialization of the regional production”. Both have been privileged areas by which regional actors express and act federalism: “the engine of this process [RC] is to be strategically positioned in order to be competitive in production and trade” I was told in 2005 and again in 2012. The attention dispensed to infrastructure and international commerce as pathways to “materialize federalism” has been always a motto among the politicians engaged with RC. In turn, this explains why after politicians, social actors like businessmen and industrial and agricultural producers have been the next ones most and permanent engaged with the regional process, offering support to regional policies by making explicit their expectations of being able to expand and ameliorate their profits.

In the next section, I will focus on that second aim –international commercialization of regional production – examining “Región Centro’s commercial missions”. I believe this could make an interesting case to discuss the relations between federalism / regionalization and States’ sovereignty.

## **2. Commercial missions and international setting of federalism**

Eight years have passed since the “institutional launching” of RC. During this time, Cordobeses, Santafesinos and Entrerrianos vote twice in order to elect governors and vice-governors, and four times in order to renew their (provincial) legislative chambers. This also meant that while Region Centro was born as a “Peronist block” (*un bloque peronista*), since 2007 it became multi-party. Two of the current governors are identified with different political organizations within Peronismo (Córdoba and Entre Ríos) and one with Socialism

(Santa Fe).<sup>13</sup> Acknowledging this political heterogeneity, actual and previous government officials notice that –in contrast with the first four years of the region- political fragmentation carries a series of difficulties. However, although these changes had impacted the functioning of Region Centro (i.e. from loss of interpersonal communication between the main political personalities, to differential geopolitical effects according to their public support, or not, to national government's policies), regional actors also recognize that “Región Centro became a solid governmental policy”, and thus “none actual or future government would ever challenged its institutional continuity”.

The political and administrative structure of RC remained intact since 2004, as well as the annual regional meetings which have been taking place uninterruptedly. The latter are two-day ritualized events where the regional actors meet at a previously accorded city –the location varies, once province at a time – with a similar organization of activities where regional actors have the opportunity to express their evaluations and expectations regarding the interprovincial integration process. These meeting also function as a supra-local scenario to sanction and write down their mutual agreements (not only among governments but also between matching social sectors). Somehow these events emulate Mercosur meetings<sup>14</sup>, but they also have their particularities, like a particular orchestration dividing regional actors into political and civil society ones. The formers are: the Executive Committee (formed by one representative of each province), and the three Governors' Committee plus the Federal Council of Investments (CFI) <sup>15</sup>representatives. They have their own private meetings and are in charge of the opening and closing public speeches of each event. Other political actors also attend the meetings, like provincial ministers and legislators (who are also members of the Regional Joint Parliamentary Commission). Civil society actors deliberate apart, in several forums organized according to sectorial interests: entrepreneurs, workers, universities, and professional organizations. They reunite separately and elaborate their own proposals to be passed to the government officials in order to integrate them into the political regional agenda.

At the last annual meeting (March 2012 in Paraná city, capital of Entre Ríos province) I was struck by the fact that every person I interacted with seem to be agree with the fact that “commercial missions” are the greatest –if not the only one – regional achievement. The three governors, the three vice-governors, and the CFI representatives also highlighted them in their public speeches. For instance, Santa Fe Governor enumerated the achievement of the past years stressing “the more markets we open, the more trust we gain to maximize our worldwide insertion. The joint commercial missions that we have been organizing reveal the benefits of coordination”. In turn, Entre Ríos governor cheerfully said “let’s keep on going out into the world, together, with the representation that gives us the fact that we rule our provinces and thus allowing our businessmen to sell world-wide, both more and better”. After him, Córdoba governor emphatically claimed “fostering our domestic market, making it growing, because indeed it is the foundation of the productive development of Argentina, but also by looking at the Region and the world with comprehensiveness, with interest and with desire of selling without waiting for others to come to us. The world is giving wonderful opportunities and more than ever to this Region”. And similarly did the general secretary of CFI, who also directly interpellate the regional entrepreneurs: “overall, success has been achieved in production and service areas, allowing the Region to compete successfully in markets that previously were unthinkable. There are countless examples of this, and it is something that all of you, and especially you, the entrepreneurs, know very well”.

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<sup>13</sup> Another aspect of the regional political heterogeneity had to do with fragmentations within Peronismo since 2003. This was analyzed in Gaztañaga (2010).

<sup>14</sup> For an analysis of ritualized events related with integration process, see Balbi, Boivin and Rosato (2009)

<sup>15</sup> CFI was created in 1959 by an agreement between the Argentine provinces, the Municipality of Buenos Aires and the –then – National Territory of Tierra del Fuego, Antártida e Islas del Atlántico Sur

The undeniable ‘reality’ of commercial missions is also referred within the debates of the Regional Civil Society Forums. Some of their participants see this aspect as relatively problematic for it evidences a commercial bias of the interprovincial integration; others consider it sort of step-forward a comprehensive or more complete *regional integration* which ought to be complemented with other type of public policies (e.g., technology transfer, infrastructural development, employment policies, etc.). Of course differential positioning regarding the pros and cons of the centrality of commercial missions have to do with an inner imbalance and unequal powers of different social actors. However, surprisingly (or not?) the members of entrepreneur’s regional forum vigorously debated around this topic connoting it rather negatively: most of them agreed that “regional integration shouldn’t be reduced to commercial missions”; instead, and in spite of their different immediate interests, they claimed it was “more important to debate the current tax system and to homologate legislation rather than commercial missions because they are too specific, too much attached to specific production sectors”.

China was the first destination for commercial missions –which are alternatively called “institutional and commercial missions”. From April, 8<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> 2005, the (then) governors travelled half world accompanied with almost 60 companies of the three provinces and universities’ authorities. This was the first Argentine official foreign mission in China after the two countries signed several bilateral agreements in 2004. It was also one of the few rare occasions where the three governors travelled together. Succeeding destinations have been: Centro America (20<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> July 2005); South Africa (4<sup>th</sup>- 10<sup>th</sup> April 2006); Russia (26<sup>th</sup> August - 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2006); India (4<sup>th</sup>- 13<sup>th</sup> May 2007); Malaysia and Singapore (10<sup>th</sup> -17<sup>th</sup> November 2009), Hong Kong and Southeast Asia (7<sup>th</sup> -17<sup>th</sup> October 2010), and Arab Emirates (27<sup>th</sup> February- 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2011).<sup>16</sup>

Government officials characterize commercial missions as “joint actions towards an international anchoring of the strength of the interprovincial coordination”. This is, from their point of view, “an *actual* realization of federalism”. “We practice federalism as a matter of facts, not of speeches” politicians and government officials have been asserting repeatedly since 2004, by putting forward commercial missions as a major “example”. Indeed, commercial missions are connoted –not only by social actors engaged with the regionalization but also by mass media reporters – as a matter of ‘facts’. They represent series of fait accompli and/or projects subjected to become so. Within these representations, Region Centro becomes and actor through prosopopoeia: “Región Centro went to China”, “Región Centro signed cooperation agreements in Central America”, “Región Centro looks forward to commercialize its production in South Africa”, and so on. Facts are also given as proof: how many companies travelled, amount of government officials who met with local counterparts, detailed enumeration of activities that took place, number of documents signed, etc. It’s all about ‘facts’. This is their fulcrum: to testify the reality of RC.

A fait accompli logic doesn’t tell much about the process whereby Region Centro missions are produced, and therefore very little can be acknowledge about the motivations and relationships between social actors engaged in what they claim to be a “scenario of opportunity towards social an economical regional development”. I haven’t been able to find any agenda or public record of regional meetings –prior or posterior to each mission – neither a particular institution in charge of their organization. The governments’ reports prior to the commercial missions are quite rare, and when do they exist –made by each province, and not regionally – they tend to follow the same enumerative logic than media reports: enumerating activities to be developed and a brief and general description of the local conditions of each destination, also explicitly labelled as ‘markets’ (i.e. general socioeconomic data, and current and potential imports).

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<sup>16</sup> As a co-constitutive aspect of commercial missions, the three provinces have been receiving ‘reverse’ or ‘inverse’ ones: companies coming from some of the mentioned countries to “make business in Región Centro”

I didn't have the opportunity of joining any of these journeys –too expensive for the anthropologist– but I interviewed some of the politicians and government officials who promote and organized them, as well as some entrepreneurs who travelled and participated of them. After talking with them, I started to wonder if commercial missions could have an intended 'informal' logic of production, and thus impossible to grasp by focusing on public discourses and/or media reports. To explore the 'who', 'how' and 'why' underlying commercial missions is not only important to deconstruct their 'fait accompli' façade, but also for it provides a case to examine the relations between federalism and state sovereignty.

**Who?** Provinces don't finance regional commercial missions. The institution in charge of providing material and technical support –including research and studies – is CFI (Federal Council of Investment); whose assistance is crucial due to the fact that Argentine interprovincial regions cannot have a budget of their own (due to the constitutional limitations imposed to their potential scope of political autonomy). However, although regional activities are on behalf of this federal organism, some politicians “cooperate” in an *informal* and *personal* manner. As for the businessmen and companies who participate, “each pays its own journey”. The price varies according to the destination and length of the trip (usually between 2 and 5 days). Although there is no actual record of it this precise information, I was told the price can fluctuate between 3000 or 5000 American dollars. Most of missions have a diverse composition, ranging from local companies “travelling for the first time” to more experienced ones, with bigger backgrounds of international commerce and exporting performance. Why do these entrepreneurs join RC's commercial missions? CFI and provincial government officials explain me they do it because “they are interested”, and that “this is natural” given the fact regional missions are all about “consolidating the economic and social promotion of provinces, by means of internationalization of their production and their positioning within international markets”. However I wondered if this is sufficient, for there are numbers of other opportunities of accessing international markets, most of them promoted and organized by national state agencies and private institutions. Región Centro is without a doubt the most dynamic interprovincial region of Argentina but is not the only alternative that regional businessmen have. Where is the continuous and growing participation in commercial missions coming from? To answer this we have to examine the how and why commercial missions are of interest.

**How?** Commercial missions imply an interpersonal web of contacts and commitments produced and maintained by regional actors. This is connected with what government officials explain in terms of “entrepreneurs they take their own risk”. To take risk seems obvious when commercial missions are oriented to “peripheral markets” or “emerging markets”. Government officials claim that they put forward “strategic moves in seeking for alternative markets given the current crisis of Eurozone and NAFTA”, calling this “to diversify the risk”. Some entrepreneurs coincide with this type of positive evaluation of ‘investing in peripheral markets’, but they also put forward a lack of trust on the capacities of Argentine economic institutions, both to keep up with the developing of domestic economy and to confront international crisis. However, risk also functions as the counterpart of another term, widely use in their explanations: *trust*. Trust is not only oriented to develop interest in alternative –to consolidated – markets, but specially between social actors within the regional compound. Politicians and their ministerial officials stress they work towards “creating interest on commercial missions” amongst businessmen and producers. They phone and email them, and arrange individual appointments to dialogue about upcoming missions; sometimes they also organize briefings (small meetings, often sectorial) to inform the generalities of the journey and to debate particularities of commercial opportunities at specific foreign markets. As a parallel work, they also contact the local Argentine embassies and diplomatic representations, who are in charge of gathering and sharing “information” about local potential buyers for regional production. Argentine chancellery also provides several statistics and foreign trade studies, which are produced within the national level of government;

provincial government officials use these reports to prepare their agendas and to inform the entrepreneurs about the markets they choose “to visit”.

**Why?** To fully understand why commercial missions have become so important within the regional process, it is important to address their orchestration and the state’s role within them. There are different types of commercial missions: national, provincial, regional and even municipal ones. Región Centro missions are officially *regional* but they are provincially orchestrated. In each province, government officials contact *their* businessmen and producers. Sometimes there is also a slight division of labour between provinces, in accordance to which province has firstly shown interests or proposed a mission to a particular destination. The latter aspect is reflected in the amount of local companies who travel to particular destinations.<sup>17</sup> If this may sound a great deal of organization, it is of a special kind. Usually there are no written records of these meetings (if any, the very little written information is dispersed) other than the personal memory and its colloquial way of existence. This entails to notice another aspect of commercial missions: they are experientially interconnected, thus contributing to create a stock of knowledge and contacts that can be reutilized. Businessmen and producers may also contact politicians to propose new journeys based on previous contacts and shared experiences. This has to do with the various meanings of trust above mentioned: for it also means the foundation of personal relations embedding economic interest among social actors. Politicians claim proudly “for any company is not the same if they travel by themselves than having official accompaniment”. The crucial role of the state (provincial and national) is recognized by entrepreneurs as well. On the one hand, there is a logistic aspect: “saving time and energy that otherwise will have to expend building up contacts and gathering information”. Although this is not always a real need for them – some companies already have local contacts – they generally recognize that the local potential buyers feel more *secure* if they hold “official support”. On the other hand, *trust* is connected with the interpersonal knowledge and a certain degree of mutual confidence among the participants, both local, within the regional setting, and beyond it, internationally. Commercial missions are presented as “delicate business” because they involve governments. Official representation within commercialization implies for them, expectations, of “being well represented by the local companies that travel.”<sup>18</sup>

### **3. Federalism as making business or stressing the State’s sovereignty**

Commercial missions are just one –although salient – aspect of the broader regional process involved in the creation of Región Centro. They represent a palpable regional policy where different actors participate and interact, with their own purposes, pressures and commitments. Entrepreneurs are, of course, central to this picture, since without their participation commercial missions wouldn’t exist. However, although both parties need each other (balancing risk and trust), they don’t participate equally in the symbolic production by which federalism “works out” through commercial missions. This is why I’m privileging the perspective of politicians in order to understand what does it mean that commercial missions realize federalism. I gather this is central to understand the effect –if any – of bolstering

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<sup>17</sup> However, one shall bethink that the three provinces have differential producing capacities and this *always* reflected in the amount of companies mobilized in each commercial missions.

Los productos sobre los cuales han venido estableciendo acuerdos comerciales son agroalimentos, carnes, lácteos, citrus, aceites, productos veterinarios, medicamentos, maquinaria agrícola, autopartes, máquinas de refrigeración y de envasado de alimentos, indumentaria, manufacturas en madera y software.

<sup>18</sup> It is important to mention that no commercial agreements can be endorsed by Región Centro (related with the constitutional limitations mentioned before). However government officials often sign bilateral acts, cooperation agreements, intention letters, and other documents of this kind, with local authorities during commercial missions. This has to do with the constitutional limitations mentioned before (See: sections 124 and 126 of Argentine Constitution)

federalism as making business, and how this relates with States' (provincial and national) sovereignty.

The –rather schematic – ‘who’, ‘how’ and ‘why’ of commercial missions previously depicted may not reveal all the complexities involved in each commercial missions, but helps to advert a certain point of intersection between them. Regional commercial missions are regarded as “real federalism” not just because they imply palpable acts (“to make real and serious business”) but since they are evaluated thorough and for their outcomes. In order to develop further this idea, I’d like to return briefly to the three ways in which politicians stress the importance of federalism: constitutionally (new juridical possibilities of economic and social autonomy for provinces), institutionally (regions are founded after the creation of Argentine Democratic Federal Republic) and contextually (the acknowledgment of provincial diversity within the national compound working towards creating regional policies, mainly promoting infrastructure and production).

The three mentioned aspects are present in commercial missions: regional actors can “go out to the world” which is a symbolic and material gesture of provincial autonomy; they go on behalf of federal and national institutions (CFI and Argentine chancellery) that support them, and they act out provincial diversity by promoting their own regional production performing international commerce in a regional fashion. The three aspects also reinforce a heuristic association between regionalization, federalism and international business, which is familiar with a common diagnosis of the ‘90s: the modern state loosing its centrality due to the so called ‘globalization’ –the well known predicament about a current crisis of Nation-State sovereignty and its loss of political control over its territory, resources, and the legitimacy of its decisions in the fostering of a political project.

To what extent are RC’s commercial missions picturing a post-modern sovereignty constructed on the basis of a World Empire that ignores Nation-States and national affirmation? (cf.: Negri and Hart, 2000). Although apparently this could be the case, when my interlocutors regard federalism as a device they are also taking into account they own political positioning and thus stressing a particular way of making business, this is though, with and by the state. In fact, taking into account how commercial missions are conceived, orchestrated and accomplished, I would suggest that they seem to be reinforcing the current organization of the state both, provincial and national states.

A government official who has been participating in organizing commercial missions since 2007, explained me:

“We are not an embassy, like a parallel chancellery. We are a provincial entity leaning on national organisms; we have autonomy, freedom, to make our own decisions, to go to the place we choose, and we have support from national entities. In this sense, federalism works, it works for us” (...) Going to a commercial mission with the State is to enter by the door, the big door. Going by your own is like entering through the window. We open ways, we are on the mass media, we say: we are coming with the Argentine state, with the provincial state, and we are bringing this number of companies from our province, they are serious and they come to make real business. This the underlying message: seriousness. A businessman who goes by himself doesn’t have this. He hast to takes his luggage, and upon destination has to knock the door: Hi, is the sales manager available? It is different”.

Entrepreneurs agree that “going with the State to a commercial mission” is entering by the big door. However, they regard regional commercial missions also as major opportunities of “being close to politicians” and/or “to make lobby” beyond a particular instance of trade agreements with an international partner. They put forward “this is how things really work” because they considering commercial missions are, foremost, political, and secondly, opportunities for sectorial benefits (proven by the fact that most of the companies don’t actually sale anything after these journeys). Entrepreneurs often refer they participate in the regional process to help bettering their provinces’ socioeconomic development. As I

witnessed during regional meetings within the Entrepreneurs Forum, they also support interprovincial policies and stress the importance of federalism. But they also highlight their major concern is to achieve a re-examination of the tax system, contemplating the particularities of each province, an interprovincial tax homologation, and a new fiscal setting for the region as a whole. This is, from their point of view, the “missing” regional policy, and they advance “political reasons” are the cause for its absence.

In what concerns to commercial missions politicians often present them as international settings for interprovincial regionalization; hence federalism seems to be functioning as a device for multiple purposes: ranging from make business to gain certain autonomy considering the different levels of political decision of the Nation-State. This implies a different direction –or to be more accurate, a more encompassing one – when taking into account the relations between regionalization and current conditions of Argentine domestic economy. I’d propose that even when regional actors might agree with the picture of a world economically unified by globalization, this picture doesn’t mean a politically fragmented world that challenges nation-states as formed by territory, people and sovereignty. What lies behind their representations of commercial missions is an idea of the importance of federalism which partakes that of the (current) state of Nation State.<sup>19</sup>

It is necessary to explain that if commercial missions became an outstanding feature of the regional dynamics, it has to do –at least partially – with the current macroeconomic politics of Argentina. After a steep recession followed by 2001 economic crash and sovereign debt default, the relative recovering of domestic economy was connected with the ‘pesificación’ of economy: the formal abandonment of 90’s convertibility regime based on a fixed parity between the Argentine peso and the U.S. dollar. In 2003 Néstor Kirchner continued ex president Duhalde’s measures and added some heterodox economics to the so called neo Keynesian approach. Devaluation of Argentine peso –which declined sharply against the dollar, from parity (to a range of 1.4 to 3.7 pesos per dollar in 2002 – gave boost to exporters, and increased the impact of exports on the national economy. At the same time the national government sanctioned policies oriented to boost import-competing industries, along with exchange controls created in order to stabilize the exchange rate. However, the government started to buy dollars to slow the appreciation of the peso, and the following years disposed heavy taxes on exports to keep local prices of valuable commodities in check, and thus collecting bigger revenues (especially from agricultural exports like soybeans).

The current Argentine Central Bank’s policy of maintaining a stable and competitive exchange rate is significative considering the role of commercial missions within Región Centro. A stable exchange rate is not only said to contribute to the predictability of prices in favour of investments, but also for it allows domestic producers of tradable goods and services “to compete in world markets”. Is not by coincidence them that commercial missions are a major regional achievement; neither is coincidental that while the first four years of the regional process its main political actors (the governors) described it as a *block* in relation with the national government –whose relation was also marked by a confronting meaning of federalism – this positioning started to loose strength after 2007.

Has federalism become a provincial language to support national policies? At the press conferences after institutional regional meetings I’ve experienced situations where media reporters would protest over governors’ attitudes complaining in terms of: “they forgot what federalism means”. And what is more, this regional approach is also inscribed within the “Strategic Plan of Región Centro towards year 2020”, considered by regional actors the document (properly a study conformed by many volumes) that re-actualized the scope and nature of RC. The latter was published by March 2007, and clearly stresses a connection

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<sup>19</sup> Could federalism be taken as a primordial political belief, what Bourdieu calls a doxa, an orthodoxy which has very often been imposed through struggles against competing vision is something that needs further research. (1994: 15)

between the three ways of considering the importance of federalism above mentioned: for instance: “Región Centro has achieved a fiscal federalism scheme that made possible to harmonize the distribution of common-pool funds. Common Criteria have been established in the region to manage budgets”. In other words, the main political actors of Región Centro seem to be supporting current state of political economy of Argentine State, or at least they are not openly challenging it (whether discursively, or through regional policies). As for the relations between federalism and commercial missions, the corner stone of this very relation remains strong and healthy: in other words, they are not challenging the current national tax system.

The apparent domestication of provincial major political actors (where ‘autonomy’ seem to be their own way of enacting the National will) is rather a puzzling question and probably unfair, for it is necessary to place regionalization, federalism and commercial missions in its proper context where long term process are also reshaped by the importance of the conjuncture. Of course I can’t answer this in detail a single paper. At the same time, for explanation of this sort should also take into account other elements as political party dynamics within Peronismo, personal loyalties or enmities that have several impacts over the way social actors mobilize terms like federalism. Nonetheless this neither would be enough, not only because regional interpersonal relationships are not fixed –they change indeed (Gaztañaga, 2012) – but mainly because no actual process like RC could be deduce from interpersonal interactions and/or subjective affinities. This is a real problem for an anthropological analysis: how to overcome the scalar complexities of the relationships between provincial, regional and national levels, processes, and actors (both institutions and persons) that interact and shape Región Centro? Is it ethnographically possible at all?<sup>20</sup>

One way to start solving –if so, partially – this problem could be reversing the assumptions underlying those questions. Instead of seeing federalism as a matter of ‘facts’, both in particular (as an outcome of commercial missions) and in general (in terms of negotiation or opposition kind of provincial governments vis-à-vis national government), it is possible to regard how social actors place it towards the process where political decisions and distribution of resources take place. This is, to see federalism as a *process*. From this perspective, it is also possible to see federalism in relation with another process that concerns sovereignty: the state’s process.

Following Lefebvre (1991: 38-9), social relations of production are projected and inscribed into a space, which is also the process producing that space. Struggles over territorialized space include a spatial practice of production and reproduction, representation(s) of space, productive definitions of its 'order', and relations across territories; space is thus produced, conceived and lived. Lefebvre developed the importance of the State within this process in *De l'Etat* (1978), where he argues about the production of capitalist spatialization accomplished through the activities of the State.

### **Last words: federalism as a process and the spatial process of the State**

In a recent paper (Gaztañaga 2012a) I examined ethnographically the foundational moments and documents of RC, proposing that politicians engaged with this sub-national integration process are creating regional space as territory and thus as a value - considered as the importance of actions (Graeber 2001; cf: Turner 1984). From this perspective, Región Centro could be regarded as a process of institutional creation in which politicians put forward the term federalism to value provincial space, and thus, to construct, a regional

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<sup>20</sup> Somehow I’d like to think this paper is an effort against what Da Col and Graber (2011:x) –among others – identify as problematic in current ethnography: “Anthropologists take their concepts not from ethnography but largely from European philosophy—our terms are deterritorialization or governmentality—and no one outside anthropology really cares what we have to say about them. As a result, we have become a discipline spiraling into parochial irrelevance. Meanwhile, older anthropological debates are treated as if they never happened”.

territory. Creating an interprovincial region can be seen as a form of social power since it implies territorial dynamics driven by the state and also animating heterogeneity within the state. This occurs not only via the creation of laws (legally, constitutionally) but through political decision, made upon political capacity of decide over territory –which I believe challenges the idea of the legal had substituted the political (cf.: Comaroff and Comaroff 2009).

In the light of this paper, I would suggest that politicians engaged with RC conceive and dwell federalism as a political exercise of domination according to the State's domination. In this sense, federalism doesn't function as a device for building alternative sovereignty upon the existing territorial order, but as an effect of the latter. Framing things in this manner, and considering the centrality of commercial missions within the regional process, I'd go a step forward to propose that my interlocutors are not just creating institutions under the rubric of federalism but also creating a commodification of the territorial provincial space. In sum, I'd suggest Región Centro is not only a political construction but also one increasingly commodified.<sup>21</sup>

The transformation of space into territory, which is central to state formations, is an ongoing process that implies a permanent work of sustaining the legitimacy of its enclosure and measurement. This is of course based on physical force and the establishment of an efficient fiscal system, which proceeds in tandem with the unification of economic space (Bourdieu, 1994:7; cf.: Abrams, 1988). But these crucial elements to the construction of the state as a unitary territory, unified by its submission to the same obligations imposed historically by the primary imperative of territorial defense, are not fixed; neither States are completed projects since sovereignty is also based on utopian projects of domination (cf.: Graber, 2011). Hence is the importance of visual devices like maps, as suggested by Malkki (1992) in her analysis of nationalism (i.e. the map as a visual device that configures the nation as limited, sovereign and continuous).

Within our case, commercial missions and federalism could be regarded as different devices, the former connected with the material and economic aspects of production (provincial natural resources transformed into regional production for export), and the latter with an abstract or symbolic aspect of political federal dynamics regarded by politicians as gaining autonomy as provinces within the national compound. Commodification of space transformed into territory is at play within commercial missions based upon the idea of federalism/ regionalization. What is interesting, though, is that from the perspectives of politicians engaged with RC, ends and means seem to interchange within the dynamics of regionalization, and thus federalism also becomes an outcome of 'making business'. In other words, federalism and commercial missions interact both as devices and products within the regional process. But although commercial missions are promoted and organized by regional actors and within the regional policies of RC, they are entirely based upon the primacy of Argentine State. Here, the coactive state's fiscal unification is not only evidenced without disguises but also remains unchallenged in spite of how regional actors bolster federalism as a device to gain provincial autonomy. This is due to the logic upon which regional commercial missions operate: they are foster though inter-provincial relations and political will, but without economic independence. Thus, they also vindicate and legitimize the role of the central state in the organization of space, which is key for the reconciliation between the absolute perspective of place and the shifting perspectives of relative space engendered by capitalist globalization (David Harvey, cited in Alonso 1994:382)

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<sup>21</sup> I don't have enough space to develop a consistent use of this concept, although I'd like to stress I'm using 'commodification' as a social process, and not 'commoditization' in the market-oriented sense. I find it appealing to analyze the process by which politicians engaged with RC bolster commercial missions as the internationalization of their production and therefore objectifying the space they politically rule (Of course other analysis might be plausible concerning to the way that politics actually commoditize federalism through promoting exportation of regional production, which also relevant for my analysis).

A further detailed examination of the future development of commercial missions might alter this articulation of federalism and regionalization as both goals and outcomes of interprovincial integration. However, this is a relevant aspect to start gathering the multidimensional process by which every society is built upon space through domination and labour. "Space becomes the principal site and area of struggles and actions towards a goal. It has never ceased to be the site of resources, the milieu where strategies are deployed, but it becomes something more than the theatre, the indifferent scene or the framework of action" (Lefebvre: 1991: 471). Federalism then, is more than a social historically produced discourse of space, but also a particular production of territorial work place in which politicians work politically towards its production and reproduction. To which point this approach would add to the existing analysis about the modern State is a matter of question. But it stresses the complementary aspects of political domination and economical unification –long time ago analyzed by Max Weber, and critically denounced as illegitimate by Karl Marx – where states seem to be continually promoting creative material and symbolic actions of sovereignty, reshaping and reinventing its legitimacy.

To see federalism as a process that partake the state's also means to regard the state as an ongoing project. Philip Abrams has stated some time ago that the state as a unitary process or message of domination is a mask that produces their very message of domination around the idea of a single state/ power (cf.: Abrams 1988). Is interesting though, how state agencies and actors also identify and act this heterogeneity. In other words, even when they are not challenging the mechanisms of unification of the state, they acknowledge concrete relations between homogeneous-heterogenous ways of dominations. This is why I believe Región Centro makes an interesting case for the anthropology of the state, because it pays attention to the state's constituent others (namely, provincial states), not only assuming heterogeneity is a matter of struggle between the state and oppositional cultures, but also the fulcrum of its very dominance.

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