


Chapter 11

Joaquín Costa on Peruvian Influence in Spanish Agrarian Collectivism

Manuel López Forjas

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2797-1515>

Sapienza University of Rome, Italy

ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the political organization and concepts of territorial property as proposed by Polo de Ondegardo, José de Acosta, and Francisco Murcia de la Llana, within the framework of Joaquín Costa's notion of “Peruvian collectivism”. By examining these authors’ reflections on governance within the context of the Hispanic monarchy in Peru, this study highlights their contributions to agrarian collectivism as a response to 19th-century economic challenges. It situates their ideas alongside Costa's reinterpretation of land tenure and labor organization, revealing how he sought to reconcile individual rights with collective ownership, drawing inspiration from both historical traditions and contemporary liberal thought. The analysis concludes by considering the implications of these ideas for social reform and the complex interplay between liberalism and imperialism in shaping modern national identities.

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter seeks to analyze the key ideas on political organization and territorial property put forth by Polo de Ondegardo, José de Acosta, and Francisco Murcia de la Llana, within the framework of what Joaquín Costa (1846–1911) termed “agrarian collectivism”, and more specifically, “Peruvian collectivism.” For Costa, a central figure of Spanish regenerationism, the contributions of these three authors—who reflected on the administration of the Hispanic monarchy in Peru—represent a variant of the Roman-Byzantine work system inherited and reshaped during the Renaissance. This study aims to examine their proposals through the lens of a renewed liberal theoretical framework, following a critical exploration of key political-philosophical debates concerning sovereignty, land ownership, and the collective organization of labor in colonial contexts.

In his efforts to regenerate Spain against the oligarchy and *caciquismo* of the 19th century, Joaquín Costa reconstructed the history of agrarian collectivist doctrines in Spain and Latin America from the Modern Age onward, placing them on par with the theories of Henry George and, in the Spanish case, tracing their development to the thought of Álvaro Flórez Estrada. He also found inspiration in Peru’s social organization for his vision of land nationalization.

Costa drew on the work of French anthropologist and ethnologist Charles Létourneau, who, from his disciplinary perspective, viewed the “ancient Inca Empire” as a society where neither private property nor poverty existed.

At the end of the 19th century, Joaquín Costa defined the concept of agrarian collectivism as an alternative to the dominant *laissez-faire* approach and the competition fostered by the capitalist system of industrial production. Rather than advocating for the abolition of large estates or the end of exploitation by landowners and rentiers, his vision focused on the reorganization of labor and the redistribution of land.

Nevertheless, Costa acknowledged that his ideas aligned, to some extent, with the collectivist proposals known up to 1897, as put forth by Marx and Lassalle. He believed it was possible to achieve the same objectives these thinkers pursued without fully socializing capital. Although he initially upheld private property in all its forms, he made a crucial distinction: the primary means of production—land—should remain outside the realm of privatization (Costa, 1915, p. 3).

One of the key influences that prompted Costa to moderate his proposal for radical collectivism was his familiarity with Henry George’s *Progress and Poverty*, which he began in 1877 and published in 1879¹. The book’s subtitle, *An Inquiry into the Cause of Industrial Depressions and of the Increase of Want with Increase of Wealth: The Remedy*, raises a fundamental question: how is it that poverty continues to rise for the majority of society, even as wealth accumulates in the hands of a small sector, particularly factory owners, despite ongoing industrial crises? This

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