The Social Mobility and “Hidalguía” of the Villafañe y Guzmán Family Reflect the Intricacies of Social and Colonial Dynamics over Five Centuries

Jorge Hugo Villafañe

1. Introduction

The question of how an individual’s social background affects their life and position in society is a fundamental topic in sociology. Extensive research has shown that individuals from privileged social origins tend to have better educational outcomes and greater success in the labor market (Burmann 2023). Studies on social mobility have challenged the idea that ancient societies were static and have explored factors like inheritance, social class, education, and occupational opportunities that influence upward or downward mobility (Cantero-Mansilla and Williamson-Castro 2009). Understanding social mobility provides insights into social stratification, social change, and the factors that shape individual and collective opportunities. It also contributes to our understanding of the historical evolution of societies and informs efforts towards equality and social progress.

Intergenerational mobility examines the socioeconomic status transmission between parents and children (Jiménez 2018). Educational mobility is important for social development, innovation, and fairness. Assessing intergenerational mobility provides insights into equality of opportunities (Núñez and Risco 2004). Higher intergenerational mobility indicates reduced influence of socioeconomic background on opportunities, reflecting fairness (Sakamoto and Wang 2020). Latin America shows lower relative mobility despite increased education among youth, meaning those with less-educated parents are more likely to be the least educated in their generation (Becker and Tomes 1979). This unique pattern highlights specific dynamics in Latin America’s social mobility landscape.

Scholars studying intergenerational mobility often assume that the correlations within generations decrease geometrically, which aids in understanding the dynamics of social inequality across generations (Conconi et al. 2007). However, many field studies on social inequality tend to overlook the degree of social mobility within generations. Limited research examines social mobility in historical periods, such as the colonial era (Benedetti and Salizzi 2016), despite its relevance for understanding social stratification...
in modern societies (Herrala 2023). Exploring social mobility throughout history can provide valuable insights into the mechanisms and patterns of social stratification over time (Marks and O’Connell 2023).

Existing research on social mobility primarily focuses on the link between two consecutive generations, often indicating limited transmission of advantages or disadvantages. However, it is important to acknowledge that advantages enjoyed by affluent families can persist over many generations, even for centuries (Waicekawsky 1997). Barone and Mocetti’s study on Florence highlights the long-term intergenerational persistence in the socioeconomic status of families, suggesting that advantages or disadvantages can endure for extended periods of time (Barone and Mocetti 2016).

1.1. Methodology

This article contributes to the analysis of social mobility within the noble class in Latin America by examining the journey of the Villafañe y Guzmán family, a Castilian noble family, and their socioeconomic evolution in the American territories of the Spanish Monarchy over a span of five centuries. Furthermore, this research highlights two understudied elements that played a significant role in shaping nobility in the American territories of the Spanish Monarchy: emigration and the military. This study contributes to our understanding of how economic, educational, technological, and cultural factors shape social mobility over time. It underscores the complex interplay between individual agency and structural forces that determine the opportunities available to different generations within the noble class.

1.2. Data Collection and Sources

To conduct a historical analysis of social mobility within the noble class, a crucial requirement is access to a comprehensive set of sources spanning multiple generations (Mare and Song 2023). However, obtaining such an extensive dataset is often challenging for the noble class, particularly when considering different generations over centuries.

To overcome this challenge, we adopted a study model known as the dynastic model. This model incorporates the utility or well-being of parents, considering not only their consumption but also that of their heirs (Becker and Tomes 1979). We applied this model to analyze the evolution of the Villafañe y Guzmán lineage in Latin America. The genealogical and temporal scope of the study begins with Doña Elena de Villafañe y Flórez, who was born in Santiago del Molinillo, León, in the 16th century, and traces her descendants until Don Maximino Ramón Villafañe, born in El Salto, Córdoba, in the 20th century. The majority of the genealogical documentation used for this study was sourced from various sections of the Historical Archive of the Province of Córdoba, Argentina. The research also involved examining historical and diocesan archives in Valladolid, León, Seville, Córdoba, Villa María, and La Rioja (Argentina).

Before delving into the historical evolution of the lineage under study, it is important to clarify a fundamental concept in this work: the notion of nobility in Castile and America.

2. The “Hidalguía” in Castile and America

“Fijos de algo,” lower nobility, or untitled nobility are some of the terms that emerged in the 12th century to refer to the members of the lowest rank of nobility in Castile. However, this terminology fails to capture the immense complexity of the hidalgo collective in Spain, which exhibits significant geographical heterogeneity, as highlighted in recent years. This heterogeneity ranges from the universal hidalguía of Vizcaya and Guipúzcoa to the Aragonese fanzines and the honorable citizens of Catalonia (Pérez León 2015).

Nonetheless, certain common elements can be identified within this collective, which constituted the largest contingent of the noble estate in the Crown of Castile. Firstly, hidalguía is primarily associated with a rural collective whose main sphere of influence was local, being particularly prominent in the northern regions of Spain, such as Asturias, Cantabria, and the Basque Country. Secondly, from a legal perspective, hidalguía shared
with the titled nobility a privileged status in contrast to the plebeian or non-privileged estates (Soria Mesa 2007).

However, it is crucial to recognize that the term “hidalguía” has always been multifaceted. It could encompass moral virtues associated with nobility, signify nobility by default in the absence of other titles or dignities, or be interpreted as equivalent to nobility by blood, distinct from other forms of artificial ennoblement (de la Fuente 2012). Furthermore, social ascent was a prevalent theme in the lives of the noble estate during the Modern Age, including the hidalgo class, thanks to various means of concealing non-noble origins, particularly through matrimonial alliances. However, the extent to which this process affected the Hidalgo collective remains unclear due to a lack of sources on the lower nobility during this period (Soria Mesa 2007).

As our study demonstrates, the situation of hidalguía in America is closely connected to that of Castile, but it continues to raise numerous questions, primarily due to the limited dialogue between the historiographies on both sides of the Atlantic.

Nevertheless, there are areas where some academic consensus has been reached. These include the transplantation of Castilian hierarchies to America, including hidalguía, despite the establishment of a distinct social stratification during the Conquest; the different stages in the formation of the American elite, encompassing the conquest and colonization of the 16th century and the legal confirmation of privileges by the Crown from the 17th century onward; the emergence of the legal figure of the benemérito; the juridical foundations of the process of ennoblement “de iure”; and the existence of the distinction of estates, among others (Lira Montt 1976).

The precise connection between hidalguía and encomienda has been a subject of considerable debate. While encomenderos could sometimes be of noble descent, encomiendas were typically granted based on service to the Crown rather than hereditary noble status (Tell and Castro Olañeta 2011). The majority of scholars lean towards establishing a legal differentiation between encomenderos and nobles, asserting that being an encomendero did not inherently confer noble status. Encomiendas were more about economic and social control, whereas hidalguía was a recognition of hereditary nobility.

Another equally important aspect for this study is the significance of mechanisms based on local connections and kinship, particularly matrimonial alliances, in the construction of noble patrimonies. Genealogical research points to the existence of endogamous practices evidenced by the repetition of a limited number of names in marriage records (Boixadós 2001). This phenomenon may be linked to the practice of forging alliances with families distinguished by their social prestige and wealth.

3. The Social Rise of the Villafaña Family in Castile and America

The genealogical chart illustrating the kinship relationships of each member of the clan can be found in Figure 1.

![Genealogical Chart](image-url)
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ramiro de Villafañe y Guzmán</th>
<th>Domingo Antonio de Villafañe y Gavilanes</th>
<th>Isidro de Villafañe y Guzmán (Clerical)</th>
<th>Manuel de Villafañe y Guzmán</th>
<th>Isidro de Villafañe y Florencio</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ana de Gordejuela (I nuptials)</td>
<td>Isabel Barba Ossorio de Guzmán (II nuptials)</td>
<td>Petronila de la Cerda Villarroel (or Ávila Barrionuevo y Villarroel)</td>
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<td>Francisco de Vergara</td>
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<th>Baltasar de Villafañe y Guzmán</th>
<th>Francisco de Villafañe y Guzmán</th>
<th>Martín de Villafañe y Guzmán</th>
<th>Damián de Villafañe y Guzmán</th>
<th>Lázaro de Villafañe y Guzmán (Clerical)</th>
<th>Manuel de Villafañe y Guzmán (Clerical)</th>
<th>Gaspar de Villafañe y Guzmán</th>
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<td>Lorena de Vera y Aragón (I nuptials)</td>
<td>Lorena de Vera y Medina (II nuptials)</td>
<td>Juana de Soria Medrano</td>
<td>Petronila Navarrete y Velasco</td>
<td>(Clerical)</td>
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<th>José de Villafañe y Guzmán</th>
<th>Lorenzo de Villafañe y Guzmán</th>
<th>Petronila de Villafañe y Guzmán</th>
<th>María de Villafañe y Guzmán</th>
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<td>María Magdalena de Carranza y Argüello</td>
<td>María Ferreira de Aguiar</td>
<td>Antonio de Almonacid y Ávila</td>
<td>Pedro de Robledo de Torres</td>
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<tr>
<th>María Antonia de Villafañe y Carranza</th>
<th>Isidro de Villafañe y Carranza</th>
<th>Juan José de Villafañe y Carranza</th>
<th>María de Villafañe y Carranza</th>
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<tr>
<td>Juan Francisco de Urtubey y Paz</td>
<td>María Francisca de Acosta y Gonzalez</td>
<td>Catalina de Figueroa y Mendoza</td>
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<tr>
<th>Bartolomé Felipe de Villafañe</th>
<th>José de Villafañe</th>
<th>María Magdalena de Villafañe</th>
<th>Isidro de Villafañe</th>
<th>María Catalina de Villafañe</th>
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<tr>
<td>Catalina Gonzalez Carriaizo</td>
<td>José Ignacio Ceballos y Suarez</td>
<td>Josefa Gonzalez Carriaizo</td>
<td>Joaquin Dias</td>
<td>Antonio</td>
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| María Mercedes de Villafañe | | |
|-----------------------------| | |
| Antonio Domingo Pizarro | |

Figure 1. Cont.
The utilization of the surname Villafañe y Guzmán was of utmost importance to the majority of descendants, with the introduction of mixed surnames becoming evident only in the great-grandchildren generation of Manuel de Villafañe y Guzmán (Villafañe 2022b). This conscious decision to uphold the same surname played a pivotal role in cultivating a profound bond with their ancestral heritage and a deep sense of belonging.

There is a commonly held belief that the use of the preposition “de” before a surname indicates nobility or signifies a noble lineage. However, in the 18th century, a significant period in the formal ennoblement of American nobles, many noble dynasties that had traditionally utilized the preposition started to forgo its usage. This transition also affected the Villafañe family, with Don Bartolome de Villafañe being the last known individual to employ it in the signing of a notarial act in 1777 (AHPC 1777).

The title “don” can be traced back to the Latin word “dominus,” which originally denoted an owner or lord and was reserved for God, Jesus Christ, and the saints. In medieval Spain, it was initially reserved for kings and high-ranking ecclesiastical officials but gradually extended to encompass the upper nobility, eventually becoming hereditary. However, there are no explicit regulations known regarding its acquisition and usage. In Spain and its territories in the Indies, “don” was used to differentiate commoners from the nobility and the Creole population from the general populace. An illustrative example is seen in the case of Don Manuel de Villafañe y Guzmán, the second immigrant of the Villafañe lineage. During this period, individuals would include “don” in their signatures,
always alongside their names, indicating the widespread use of the title as a mark of respect. Thus, the usage of “don” is consistently found in all the documents signed by Manuel de Villafañe uncovered in this research (Villafañe 2022b).

In the 16th century, the García de Villafañe family were the lords of Santiago del Molinillo and Ribera de Orbigo in León. Like many regions in the northern subset, it was an area abundant in nobility, such as the neighboring towns of Llamas de la Ribera, San Román de los Caballeros, and Quintanilla, where the Quiñones Ossorio and Gavilanes families, relatives of the Counts of Luna and the Marquises of Astorga, owned their estates (Serrano-Redonnet 1967). Statements in the legal proceedings of Don Luis de Villafañe y Barba Guzmán suggest that the García de Villafañe family originally descended through the male line from the Torre de Santa María de Ordás (ARChV 1677).

Álvaro [Ares] García de Villafañe, a native of Santiago del Molinillo, adopted the surname Villafañe through his wife, abandoning the Ordás lineage. It was common for many descendants to use the names of the female branch due to their distinguished origin, sometimes overlooking other equally illustrious ones. As an old Christian and notable nobleman by blood, Álvaro García de Villafañe held council positions and enjoyed various privileges in Santiago del Molinillo (ARChV 1680). His wife was Doña Elena de Villafañe Floréz.

Prior to making the momentous decision to emigrate to America, their son Lázaro García de Villafañe was lord and resident of the town, as recorded in the septennial censuses for the foreign currency on 15 January 1608, as a notable nobleman of a known lineage:

“(Cross). And then, they testified that Lázaro García de Villafañe is a well-known nobleman from an established lineage, and they declare him as such. (Calderón). Furthermore, they testified that in the service of the aforementioned Lázaro García de Villafañe there are two hired men, one named Juan Martínez and the other Lope García, who are not natives of the said town and are declared to be of uncertain origin. (Calderón). Furthermore, they testified that in the service of the aforementioned Lázaro García de Villafañe there are two hired women, one named Inés and the other Catalina Fernández, the latter of whom, Catalina Fernández, is declared to be of noble birth, while the other is declared to be of uncertain origin due to the unknown identity of her father and grandparents” (ARChV 1677).

It is evident that Lázaro consolidated the use of the surname Villafañe, which his descendants would always combine with Guzmán, derived from his first wife, Doña María de Benavides y Gavilanes, belonging to the illustrious lineage of the lords of the Aveñilla or Aveclillas estate. Doña María was the daughter of Lope Rodríguez de Gavilanes and Doña Lucía Flores de Guzmán y Benavidez (ARChV 1591). This marriage would be the clearest evidence of the growing social ascent of the lineage in Castile.

We know that after the conquest and colonization of the Viceroyalty of Peru, elite families in La Rioja took three generations to consolidate (Boixadó 2003). The origins of wealth creation were similar, although the process of consolidating their patrimony varied in pace. In the case of the Villafañe y Guzmán family, the incorporations of assets through different marital alliances were much more significant, achieving their patrimonial consolidation between the second and third generations (Villafañe 2023).

Don Manuel de Villafañe y Guzmán, as we mentioned before, was born in Santiago del Molinillo and was still registered there as a notable nobleman of a known lineage in 1625. He experienced social ascent once he migrated to the Indies: he held positions as encomendero of Caustine and Pipanaco, ordinary mayor, lieutenant governor, owner regidor, Royal Standard Bearer, and captain:

“And then, it was further declared that Don Antonio de Villafañe Gabilanes, son of Lázaro García de Villafañe and Doña María de Gabilanes Guzmán, his deceased parents, corregidor of the town of Laguna de Negrillos and its jurisdiction by the excellence of the Count of Benavente and Luna, and Don Isidro de Gabilanes, cleric, absent, all three, and Don Manuel de Villafañe, brother of the aforementioned, absent, are all four recognized
as hijosdalgo (noblemen) of known lineage of the Garcías and Ordases, and thus they declared it in agreement” (ARCHV 1677).

His wife, Doña Petronila de la Cerda Villarroel, was a descendant of the ducal lineage of Medinaceli. More specifically, Doña Petronila was the daughter of Captain Baltasar de Ávila Barrionuevo, the second encomendero of the towns of Colpes, Siján, Paganso, Chumbicha, and Guasangasta, and Doña Felipa González de Villarroel.

Their son, Don Martín de Villafañe y Guzmán, held the positions of maestre de campo, feudal resident, and syndic procurator of the city of La Rioja. He served as captain of infantry in one of the companies of the Riojan number and battalion for the relief of the port of Buenos Aires in 1680, and he became captain of the reformed troops by appointment of Governor Don Tomás Félix de Argandoña (AGI 1694). As for his wife, Doña Juana de Soria Medrano, who descended from settlers of Córdoba, Santiago del Estero, and La Rioja, she was the eldest daughter of Captain Pedro de Soria Medrano (the younger) and Doña Jerónima Gómez de Tula y Bazán.

The son of Martín, Don José de Villafañe y Guzmán, born in the city of La Rioja but moved to Córdoba, adapted to the social, familial, and political transformations of the emerging liberal regime. He held the positions of captain, water mayor, and administrator of his maternal grandfather’s estate. His wife was Doña María Magdalena de Carranza y Argüello, the daughter of Captain Sebastián de Carranza y de la Cerda and Doña Antonia de Argüello y Moyano Cornejo.

The son of José, Don Juan José de Villafañe y Carranza, was a captain, mayor of the Holy Brotherhood, and steward of the Hospital de Santa Olalla. His wife, Doña Calatina de Figueroa y Cabrera, was the legitimate daughter of Maestre de Campo Don Francisco de Figueroa y Mendoza, the 24th regidor in Córdoba, and Doña Bartolina de Cabrera. Through both paternal and maternal lines, he descended from the first settlers of these lands, including the founders of Córdoba, La Rioja, San Miguel de Tucumán, Santa Fe, and Buenos Aires.

The eldest son of Juan José, Don Bartolomé Felipe de Villafañe, descended through both paternal and maternal lines from the founder of the city of Córdoba, being his sixth grandfather Don Jerónimo Luis de Cabrera. Thanks to his privileged status, he married his daughter, Doña Josefina Villafañe, to Don José Antonio del Busto, a native of the Principality of Asturias, in 1777 (AAC 1777), according to a testimony regarding the ownership of slaves in their service. His wife, Doña Catalina González Carriazo, was the daughter of Captain Don Francisco González Carriazo and Doña María José de Ávila.

Don Juan José Villafañe, son of Bartolomé, was entrusted by the first Constitutional Governor of the Province of Córdoba, Don Juan Bautista Bostos, to conduct a provincial census in 1822, which determined a population of 78,199 inhabitants. In the Curato del Tercero Arriba, we find Don Juan José registered as a “Noble” married man. His wife, Doña Catalina Díaz, was the legitimate daughter of Don José Díaz and Doña María Andrea Suárez. Through both paternal and maternal lines, he descended from families recorded as noble Spaniards. In the census, their son, Don Juan Francisco Villafañe, was recorded as a 23-year-old unmarried nobleman. His wife, Doña María Prudencia Prado, was the legitimate daughter of Don Félix Prado and Doña María Rosaura Fernández. However, it is not clear what privileged status the Villafañe family enjoyed at the time of the independence of the United Provinces of the Rio de la Plata, which ultimately marked the end of noble privileges.

In any case, it appears clear that the Villafañe family was able to adapt to the political changes of the 19th century with their privileges more or less intact. Don Elpidio Villafañe, son of Juan Francisco, continued to be registered as a Spaniard with the status of a nobleman in his baptismal record, even after the establishment of the Argentine Confederation. We know that he was a rancher and actively participated in the local political life of Argentina at the time. His wife, Doña Francisca Caballero, was the legitimate daughter of rancher Don Manuel de los Reyes Caballero and Doña María del Tráncito Pereira. Through both paternal and maternal lines, he descended from families recorded as noble Spaniards.
Finally, their son, Don Maximino Ramón Villafañe, like his father, was a rancher and actively involved in the local political life of the Argentine Republic. His wife, Doña Juana Celina Carballo, was the legitimate daughter of Don Lisandro Carballo and Doña Carmen Carballo.

4. The Dynastic Model of the Villafañe Family

The Villafañe family’s application of the dynastic model can be observed for the first time in the late 16th century during the legal dispute led by Elena de Villafañe, mother, guardian, and curator of her son Lázaro de Villafañe (AHN 1577), regarding the possession of various real estate properties and inheritances in the area of Santiago del Molinillo (ARCHV 1575, 1576, 1577, 1580a, 1580b, 1582, 1594, 1612). However, its application in the Indies (referring to the Spanish colonies in America) was based on several theoretically differentiated elements that were often interconnected in practice: military service, matrimonial alliances, and encomiendas (land grants). We attempt to understand the significance of kinship within this elite family and reconstruct its meaning as a social group (Hernández-Franco and Rodríguez-Pérez 2015).

a. Military Service

As we have seen, military service was closely linked to the male members of the Villafañe lineage from the beginning, serving as a sphere of sociability and social advancement long before the 18th century. When Don Luis Quiñones Osorio, a close relative of María de Benavides (Lázaro’s first wife), was appointed governor and captain-general of the province of Tucumán in the Viceroyalty of Peru, Captain Lázaro García de Villafañe was among the first to accompany him.

They embarked from Lisbon on 10 October 1610, and arrived at the Port of Buenos Aires in January 1611. The newly appointed governor appointed Villafañe as his lieutenant and chief justice in the city of Todos los Santos de la Nueva Rioja and as a visitor in his district and in San Juan Bautista de la Ribera de Londres (AGI 1619, 1620). These settlements had extensive jurisdictions, and their territory was densely populated by Indigenous people, which, while advantageous for the work and prosperity of the encomiendas (land grants), posed a constant danger due to the resistance of the native populations, which would later ignite the bloody Calchaquí Wars.

Lázaro García de Villafañe performed numerous military services in what was a war-torn frontier, supporting and defending the settlers until his death. Due to his merits and qualifications, Quiñones Osorio granted him the encomienda of the Quilmitambo indigenous people, located in the Capayán and Guandacol valleys (in the present-day Argentine territory):

“And in accordance with the said choice and royal decrees of His Majesty regarding the aforementioned matters, they consider that the said Captain Lázaro de Villafañe is a nobleman, a very distinguished person who has served His Majesty in the kingdoms of Spain in positions and offices of great consideration, from which he has given a very good account. And after entering these provinces in my company, he has continued using the office and position of my lieutenant and captain at war and chief justice of the said city of Todos Santos de la Nueva Rioja and its jurisdiction at his own expense and maintenance without any salary, regularly attending to the occasions that arise in the Royal service. Furthermore, the said Captain Lázaro de Villafañe is lord of the town named Santiago del Molinillo, on the banks of the Órbigo River, kingdom of León” (AGI 1619).

A few years later, in 1646, Lázaro García de Villafañe’s son, Manuel de Villafañe y Guzmán, received the encomienda of Pisapanaco and Caustine in the jurisdictions of San Miguel de Tucumán and Londres, respectively, from Governor Gutiérre de Acosta y Padilla, in recognition of his role during the Calchaquí Wars (AHPC 1681). This grant of indigenous lands served to strengthen the family’s economic wealth and social status, which were essential conditions for occupying a prominent position within the local bureaucratic sphere and the administration of the cabildos (municipal councils) (Boixadós 2003).
b. Marital alliances

In the Villafañe family, the incorporation of wealth through various marriages was significant, highlighting the importance of matrimonial alliances and dowries as strategies and mechanisms that favored the construction and consolidation of patrimonies (Hernández-Franco and Rodríguez-Pérez 2015).

When Lázaro married Agustina Florencio, a wealthy landowner from La Rioja and the young widow of Valeriano Cornejo, he also inherited the prosperous encomienda of Agustina’s first husband, located in the Andalgálá region (AHPC 1681). However, according to the laws of the Spanish colonial period, individuals were not allowed to hold two encomiendas simultaneously. Therefore, on 15 July 1614, the governor offered Lázaro a choice between his own estate and Agustina’s. Agustina’s encomienda included the towns of Yotaba, Andalgálá, Malfín, and their surroundings. On August 19 of the same year, Lázaro decided to relinquish his own encomienda and chose Agustina’s, allowing his former encomienda to be reassigned. As a condition, he requested to be re-endowed with the encomienda in his own lifetime, a privilege granted to him due to his well-known noble status:

“Captain Lázaro de Villafañe, resident and encomendero of the city of Todos Santos de la Nueva Rioja in the governance of Tucumán: states that having married Doña Augustina Florencio, widow of Captain Valeriano Cornejo, upon whose death she succeeded in the Repartimiento of the towns and factions of Indians and all that was attached to it that he had held and possessed, for having left no children nor other successor, in accordance with a decree provided by the governor of the said province, he renounced the Repartimiento of Indians that he held for two lives and chose the one in which the said wife succeeded him, and by virtue of that land he was given the encomienda for two lives in accordance with the law of succession as is fully documented by the title of the said encomienda that he presents” (AGI 1619).

The situation of Lázaro de Villafañe improved in the following years, and he managed to settle his children from his first marriage, Ramiro, Manuel, and Isidro—the latter being a priest—in La Rioja. Upon Lázaro’s death in 1625, the encomiendas passed to his son Ramiro in the second generation, who died in combat during the major Calchaquí uprising. Therefore, in 1633, the encomienda was granted to Lázaro’s youngest son, Isidro de Villafañe y Florencio, in the first generation (AGI 1654).

On the other hand, Manuel, upon marrying the only daughter and heiress of Baltasar de Ávila Barrionuevo, gained control over the encomienda of his father-in-law upon his death, as well as joint ownership with his wife of the Chumbicha estate. This prosperous property, located on the road from La Rioja to the Catamarca valley, had considerable extent. The possession of these encomiendas thus favored the positioning of this family within the local elite, the production of the Chumbicha estate, and their accumulated merits. Upon Manuel’s death in 1683, his encomiendas passed to his second son (6 January 1684) by renunciation of the firstborn (who already enjoyed other fiefs), and then to his grandson (AHPC 1739).

c. The encomiendas

Throughout the 17th century, the descendants of the Villafañe y Guzmán family monopolized the institution of the encomienda, which encompassed the most productive lands. They also managed to access military positions and chapter offices, which allowed them to control the threads of local life through the exercise of governance, administration, and justice functions (AHPC 1699). In parallel, they actively participated in the commercial networks that connected the economic circuit of colonial Tucumán with the Peruvian space. They managed credit and exchange networks, had agents and representatives in various cities, and often acted on behalf of their own personal or family interests. The kilometers that separated the Crown from the colony meant that positions within the Cabildo granted families almost unlimited power, providing the councilors with the possibility of being both judge and party in conflicts and even forgiving debts (AGI 1690).
Don Martín de Villafañé y Guzmán, son of Manuel, remained in his hometown as the second person of his brother Baltasar, the Royal Ensign. Martin can be found in the visit of Luján de Vargas in 1693 and in the visit of Governor Juan Zamudio in 1700, where he is mentioned as the owner of vineyards and as the administrator of some Calchaquí and Toba families, inherited through his wife. She inherited the encomienda, located five leagues from the city of La Rioja, from her father in the second generation:

"From La Rioja on the twenty-third of March of the year one thousand seven hundred, Don Juan de Zamudio, knight of the Order of Santiago, governor and captain general of this province of Tucumán, having reviewed this encomienda enjoyed by Captain Don Martín de Villafañé y Guzmán, and having determined that he enjoys it with just title and right, stated that he acknowledges and validated it as visited, and by its virtue, he may freely enjoy its tributes. He orders and commands the chief and ordinary justices of this said city not to impede it, under penalty of one hundred pesos to the royal treasury. Thus he commanded and signed. Juan de Zamudio. Before me, Don Agustín Corvalán y Castilla, chief scribe of governance" (AHPC 1730).

d. The evolution of the Villafañé family in the eighteenth century

The decline of illustrious houses and families was a serious concern for the majority of the colonial elite in La Rioja at the beginning of the 18th century. It seemed as if these elite families were already on the verge of extinction, and that a political blow would be enough to make them disappear (Fernández-Franco and Precioso-Izquierdo 2020). The loss of prestige and decline were due to the inevitable impoverishment caused by the distribution of inheritance (Boixadós 2001). In 1718, following the death of Baltasar, the inventories reflect that the brothers Martín and Damián had to sell their shares to Baltasar in order to prevent the fragmentation of the Chumbicha estate. The documents of the time indicate that Baltasar was listed as the sole owner of the estate, although Francisco, who had refused to agree to this arrangement, owned a small portion of it:

“(Calderón signature). A document in testimony of sale made to Don Baltasar Villafañé, deceased, by Captain Damián de Villafañé, concerning the part of the inheritance he received in this estate of Chumbicha, in two sheets. (Calderón/signature). Another document in favor of the said Don Baltasar, deceased, made by Don Martín de Villafañé regarding the sale of the part of the inheritance he received in this estate of Chumbicha, in one sheet” (AHPC 1739).

However, not all descendants of the Villafañé y Guzmán family found themselves in the same situation in the 18th century. Despite the continued kinship ties between the two sectors, an internal differentiation had emerged within the elite. Don José de Villafañé y Guzmán, seeking a place for himself, established himself in the city of Córdoba and became the owner of the San Cristóbal estate in the Calamuchita Valley, which belonged to his wife’s family (Bixio et al. 2009). It was there that the Santa Rosa estate was established, named in recognition of the saint from Lima, as the Cabrera family originated from Lima:

“The estate called San Cristóbal, which remained after the death of the said deceased, with all buildings, plantations, and a mill along with some instruments annexed to the said mill, duplicated with more. The Potrero that belongs to the said estate, with its length, width, and the entrances and exits that belong to it by right, use, and servitude according to its instruments to which we refer as necessary. We value and appraise all the aforementioned at one thousand three hundred pesos, that is to say, eight hundred (for) the value of the referred estate with all buildings, plantations, and mill with all the lands of length and width that belong to it according to its instruments, excepting the lands given as dowry to Captain Don Joseph de Villafañé with Doña Madalena de Carranza his wife, as evidenced by the said dowry deed, and the remaining five hundred pesos for the total value of the mentioned Potrero” (AHPC 1723).

José, in turn, served as the administrator of the encomienda in La Rioja, which was inherited from his mother and passed down to him in the second generation:
“Captain Don Joseph de Villafañe y Guzman, as administrator of the feudal encomienda and families of registered Indian men and women, enjoyed and possessed by Doña Juana de Soria y Medrano, my legitimate mother, widow of Maestre de Campo Don Martín de Villafañe y Guzman, recommended by special decrees of our Lord the King…” (AHPC 1730).

In the 18th century, significant additions were also made through various marriages. Juan José de Villafañe y Carranza was granted the power to make a will by his mother-in-law, doña Bartolina de Cabrera y Celis de Burgos, in Caminiaga on 12 May 1743 (AHPC 1743): In this will, his wife, Catalina de Figueroa y Mendoza, was endowed with 2009 pesos, plus an additional 200 pesos given by her father, don Francisco, as a dowry. Juan José passed away at the young age of 29, and his wife remarried Don Pedro de Argañarás, both of whom became guardians of the two minors (María Mercedes and Catalina) on 6 July 1755 (AHPC 1755). Additionally, Catalina, as a widow, acquired a plot of land in the city of Córdoba on 15 April 1747, and inherited part of the Sinsacate estate, owning fields in Calamuchita and Traslasierra in Córdoba.

Despite being the firstborn son of Juan José, no information about the properties of don Bartolomé Felipe de Villafañe has been found. It is estimated that Bartolomé spent his life between the city of Córdoba and the curacy of Tercero Arriba since his wife was from Tercero Arriba and was buried in the Chapel of the Immaculate Conception of the Tercero River (also known as the Rodríguez Chapel). He only appears alongside his wife in some notarial records from the year 1777, where he donates a 12-year-old slave on behalf of his wife to their daughter Josefa, as a domestic help upon her marriage to don José Antonio del Busto:

“In the city of Córdova on the thirteenth day of the month of November of the year one thousand seven hundred and seventy-seven, before me, the present public and municipal notary, and the witnesses who will be named in due course, appeared in person on one side Don Bartholomé Villafañe, resident, and Doña Cathalina González, his legitimate wife, and on the other, Don Joseph del Busto, whom I affirm I know, and the aforementioned Doña Cathalina requested permission and license from her said husband for this granting, which was granted, and they said that having contracted marriage the said Don Joseph del Busto, according to the order of our Holy Mother Church, with Doña Josepha Villafañe, legitimate daughter of the already named, they give for the help of the marriage a black female slave named María, aged twelve years, more or less, of whose delivery I attest…” (AAC 1777).

In the late 18th century, Don Juan José Villafañe and his descendants (Juan Francisco, Elpido, and Maximino Ramón Villafañe) settled in the El Salto area, no longer holding military positions but as landowners. They began organizing civic and educational institutions together with the Díaz, Prado, Caballero, and Carballo families, their respective spouses. Like their ancestors, they maintained their social status and properties by marrying members of the local elite. Throughout various censuses (1778, 1796, 1813, 1822, 1840, 1869, and 1895), they are found residing in the lands of the region (Villafañe 2022a).

A notable example of the Villafañe family’s social influence in the region after independence was the establishment of the first local educational institution, “La escuelita de los Villafañe” (officially known as the Fiscal El Salto School), in the late 19th century (AHPC 1900a). The school was established to function within the residence of Don Elpidio Villafañe (AHPC 1899, 1900b), who donated the land for that purpose. The Provincial Directorate of Schools in Córdoba sent an inspector to examine the area, and a month later (on 19 September 1897), Don Severo Prado, a gentleman of these lands who had pursued his studies in the city of Rosario de Santa Fe, received the appointment and mandate to inaugurate the school, (see Figure 2):

“[…] The neighborhood extends mostly over the north side of the Rio Tercero, and the school can only be in the central part, in the place and house called Don Elpidio’s” (Córdoba 1897).
His studies in the city of Rosario de Santa Fe, received the appointment and mandate to inaugurate the school, (see Figure 2):

"[...] The neighborhood extends mostly over the north side of the Rio Tercero, and the school can only be in the central part, in the place and house called Don Elpidio’s" (Córdoba 1897).

Figure 2. Location of the Villafañe school, 1900.

As the first pedagogue in the area, he encountered the challenge of cultivating naturally robust yet primitive intellects. The school comprised a spacious hall with adobe walls, plastered with lime and sand on the interior, a brick floor, and a gable roof with a large door facing east. Within, on the southern side, there stood a modest desk adorned with a green tablecloth, an armchair, a glass inkwell with a metal lid, a globe, and a loud bell to summon the students’ attention for orders or admonitions. Apart from a blackboard and two maps hanging on one of the lateral walls, these were the sole furnishings aside from the benches and desks constituting the school’s equipment.

This school and its teacher became the primary nucleus of civilization and culture that radiated over a vast area, disseminating rudimentary knowledge of arithmetic, reading, penmanship, along with basic notions of history and geography. It served a dispersed student population from what are now the towns of Almafuerte, Corralito, and the city of Río Tercero. In those days, these regions were untamed pampas and dense, unexplored forests. The pathways were narrow and confining, providing access to the school, which boasted an attendance of more than fifty students in each of the boys’ and girls’ shifts.

The school’s establishment marked a significant step in the Villafañe family’s contribution to the social and educational development of the area. The move into education was likely driven by a combination of philanthropic desire and practical necessity, as educating the local population was essential for the community’s progress.

Upon inaugurating the school, Don Prado delivered a speech published in “The Liberty” on Monday, 25 October 1897. In one of the principal paragraphs, referring to the foundation of the school, he stated: “I firmly believe that you, as parents, will receive with the greatest possible joy such pleasant news: since it fulfills your desires to possess the sacred temple where your children will receive the daily bread of the soul, consecrated in education” (Diario Los Principios 1942).
5. Conclusions

The article challenges the assumption that intergenerational transmission of human capital has a one-period memory. It suggests that grandparents can directly transmit their cultural capital and wealth to their grandchildren, indicating the presence of a multi-period memory in the intergenerational transmission process. However, even a two-period memory alone cannot fully explain the phenomenon of long-term social mobility.

The analysis of the Villafañe y Guzmán family indicates that their social position did not significantly change over the five centuries studied. The family members were recognized as prominent hidalgo descendants with a known lineage in Spanish records. Marital alliances played a crucial role in maintaining their social status, allowing them to gain access to the best encomiendas (grants of indigenous labor and tribute) in the region and hold various positions in the colonial cabildo (municipal council). Other factors, such as family cohesion, military service in support of colonial rule, and privilege, also contributed to their social standing and prevented social descent.

It is particularly noteworthy that the migration of the Villafañe y Guzmán family to the Viceroyalty of Peru in the early 17th century was instrumental in maintaining their privileged status for centuries. Although the family did not participate in the conquest of the New World, their valuable military services in the adopted land helped them access public offices and encomiendas, securing their social position.

Furthermore, it should be emphasized that the Villafañe y Guzmán family not only utilized the military sphere to their advantage but were also closely interlaced with political groups that had their own self-interests. This interlacing with military and political power was fundamental in preserving their privileged position. These groups, although distinct in their interests, mutually benefited from each other, reinforcing their social dominance and preventing downward mobility.

This study suggests that migration, exemplifying the social ties between Castile and America, is an essential factor that deserves more attention when studying social mobility in Latin America. It acknowledges that a deep understanding of the underlying mechanisms of long-term persistence goes beyond the scope of the article but highlights it as a promising area for future research. The passage also mentions the existence of a “virtual floor” that prevented the Villafañe y Guzmán family from experiencing downward social mobility, emphasizing the difficulty of descending while being born at the top in Argentine society.

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