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## Seeds that could not grow: Jeremy Bentham's unrealized botanical utopias

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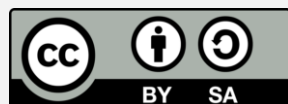
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## 5/ Seeds that could not grow: Jeremy Bentham's unrealized botanical utopias\*

Henry JACOB

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**ABSTRACT:** *This essay explores how Jeremy Bentham's desire to obtain botanical specimens intersected with his designs for utilitarian utopias across the world. Over decades, the philosopher tasked family, friends, and acquaintances with mailing him horticultural samples from, and knowledge of, foreign lands. Notably, Bentham's aspirations to curate gardens coalesced with his reformist goals. Just as Bentham intended to assemble seeds within his backyard, so did he seek to package governmental ideals within Russia, Central America, Africa, and Australia. Bentham sincerely believed that his programs would benefit environments and their inhabitants. Yet at the same time, he projected these universal ideals onto areas with little first-hand experience or deep understanding of local circumstances. Therefore, despite his benevolent intentions, these projects all failed. Even if Bentham mastered the art of botanical collecting, he planted the seeds of societies that could not grow.*

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**ABSTRACT:** *L'articolo esamina le intersezioni tra gli interessi botanici di Jeremy Bentham e le sue utopie utilitaristiche su scala globale. Per decenni egli richiese ad amici, parenti e conoscenti di inviargli specie vegetali provenienti da paesi diversi ed è ben noto come Bentham legasse questo interesse ai suoi scopi riformisti. Così come Bentham combinava nel proprio giardino specie diverse, allo stesso modo egli cercava di combinare ideali di governo in uso in Russia, America centrale, Africa e Australia. Secondo il filosofo questo programma avrebbe portato benefici all'ambiente e ai suoi abitanti. Al contempo, egli applicò questi modelli governativi ad aree geografiche di cui aveva poca, se non nessuna, conoscenza. In conclusione, nonostante le loro buone intenzioni, tali progetti fallirono. Sebbene Bentham fosse un buon collezionista e botanico, le sue idee di società non misero radici.*

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### 1. Introduction: a global «nursery of invention»<sup>1</sup>

Jeremy Bentham, an English philosopher who lived from 1748 to 1832, has garnered attention for founding the ethical doctrine of utilitarianism. However, scholars have concentrated much

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<sup>1</sup> BENTHAM, Jeremy, *The Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham: Of the Limits of the Penal Branch of Jurisprudence*, SCHOFIELD, Philip (edited by), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 231.

less on Bentham's lifelong attachment to nature. There is a need, then, to account for how the Englishman's views on the environment informed his efforts to disseminate his universally-framed ideals. I seek to fill this gap by tracing his utopian proposals for societies across the globe.

Piecing together fragments within 30,000 of Bentham's manuscripts reveals the evolution, as well as the continuity, of his outlook. In order to elucidate the progression of these plans, I chronicle them within a single narrative. This temporal synthesis also unveils the geographical reach of Bentham's ambitions; he sought to wield authority in Russia, Central America, Africa, and Australia. Before treated as disparate, these episodes highlight how Bentham's ecological pursuits coalesced with his universalism. Although each project proved to be unique, he continually tried to calibrate communities to his notions of goodness<sup>2</sup>. After a historiographical review, this article follows his undertakings over six sections.

Part III contends that he first tested his notions on agriculture, gardening, and society in Krichev, Russia. Academics have discussed Bentham's Russian experiences, but none have embraced my approach. During the 1780s, Bentham's brother Samuel, a naval inventor who worked on Prince Grigory Potemkin's estate in Krichev, enticed Bentham to join him there partially by mailing him Siberian seedlings. Intrigued, Bentham became even more excited by the prospect of enhancing the property. Among other reforms, he determined to introduce potatoes to augment harvests. Although Bentham could not transport tubers on a mass scale, he still left Krichev wanting to craft an agricultural utopia.

Part IV progresses to how Bentham, after returning to England from Russia and failing to establish his jail of constant surveillance, the panopticon, shifted his attention to Central America<sup>3</sup>. Distinguishing my interpretation from those who have written on the subject, I explain how Bentham viewed this area as a chance to remake himself and accomplish his goals. There, he hoped to create a community and canal called Junctiana. It would bind the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, thus opening the world to commerce and his theories. Yet Bentham wrote this outline – thorough it may have been – in London and based it on second-hand sources. In neglecting to consider if his longings matched Latin Americans' own, Bentham doomed Junctiana.

Next, Part V scrutinizes how, a few years later, an elderly Bentham concocted plans in Africa and Australia, which marked the physical expansion, as well as an intellectual broadening, of his utopianism. Even if a few scholars have looked into Bentham's interest in Australia, no one has studied it together with his proposals for Egypt. The octogenarian first concentrated on another isthmus, proposing a Suez Canal to Pasha Muhammad Ali. This venture resulted in nothing at

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<sup>2</sup> BENTHAM, Jeremy, *A Comment on the Commentaries and A Fragment on Government*, BURNS, James H., HART, Herbert L.A. (edited by), London, The Athlone Press, 1977, p. 393.

<sup>3</sup> For more on critical evaluations of the panopticon, see FOUCAULT, Michel, *Discipline and Punish*, SHERIDAN, Alan (translated by), New York, Vintage Books, 1995.

least to an extent because Bentham undervalued local opinion. Before dying, he grasped at turning his wishes into reality one last time. The Englishman reused his favored formulation on how to edify people through the earth for Australia.

To conclude, Part VI reflects on the consequences of Bentham's intentions to transplant his ideals into foreign terrains. To be fair, Bentham esteemed those with whom he corresponded. In equal measure, Bentham sincerely intended to better others' lives. That being said, he often did not grade them as his equals. As a result, Bentham judged the exportation of his expertise necessary; he alone was the consummate guide to his creations. Above all, then, this paper adds to the literature by exploring the environmental dimensions as well as the tensions within Bentham's global utopianism.

## 2. More than «real and lasting passions»<sup>4</sup>: A historiography

On a basic level, I have depended upon the Bentham Project housed at University College London. Currently led by Philip Schofield, Tim Causer, and Chris Riley, this initiative is in the process of publishing a new edition of Bentham's works as well as a series of monographs on his oeuvre<sup>5</sup>. Beyond this, a considerable amount of scholarship on Bentham's influences addresses four areas of concern to me: Bentham's ties to agriculture and gardening, his relationship with Samuel in Russia as well as with others in Latin America, and the ties between his universalism and colonialism. Over the next pages, I situate my work within these subfields.

But before doing so, I should stress what this paper does not try to achieve. First, I offer no in-depth interpretation of utilitarianism. Rather than delving into its particularities, I instead look into how Bentham's broader ideas on social goodness and botany fused. When I discuss utilitarianism, I use it only in a straightforward sense, namely to produce «the greatest happiness of the greatest number»<sup>6</sup>. Just as the minutiae of Bentham's philosophy lie beyond the purview of my study, so do the specifics of his legislation. Although interested in monographs such as *Bentham's Theory of Law and Public Opinion* and *Bentham on Democracy, Courts, and Codification*, I do not provide similarly detailed accounts of this subject<sup>7</sup>. Having addressed the subdisciplines of utilitarianism as well as legal and political philosophy I admire but do not interact with, I will now turn to those scholars with whom my work enters into dialogue.

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<sup>4</sup> SEMPLE, Janet, *Bentham's Prison: A Study of the Panopticon Penitentiary*, New York, Clarendon Press, 1993, p. 286.

<sup>5</sup> For more on Bentham, see SCHOFIELD, Philip, *Utility and Democracy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009; SCHOFIELD, Philip, *Bentham: A Guide for the Perplexed*, London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> BENTHAM, Jeremy, *A Comment on the Commentaries*, cit., p. 393.

<sup>7</sup> ZHAI, Xiaobo, QUINN, Michael, *Bentham's Theory of Law and Public Opinion*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014; SCHOFIELD, Philip, ZHAI, Xiaobo, *Bentham on Democracy, Courts, and Codification*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2022.

My article supplements existing work on Bentham's Krichev experiences. For one, Ian Christie analyzed how the brothers intended to create a colony and implement their inventions in Krichev<sup>8</sup>. However, Christie concentrated mostly on Samuel over a few years; he does not discuss Bentham's environmental impulses or this experiment's wider significance. Recently, Roger Bartlett released a thorough study of this topic, chronicling how the two remained invested in Russia over decades<sup>9</sup>. Because the environment was not Bartlett's primary focus, he just noted in passing that «British agriculture also enjoyed great popularity»<sup>10</sup>. In contrast to Christie and Bartlett, I maintain that Bentham's Russian plans foreshadowed his exertions beyond England.

This essay does not survey Bentham's pauper reforms, but sympathies exist between my investigation and studies of Bentham's labor proposals. Barbara Arneil highlighted how Bentham hoped to ameliorate the environment and delinquents' lives with «solutions to pauperism rooted in the economic and ethical 'benefits'... in agrarian labor on waste land»<sup>11</sup>. Interestingly, J.R. Poynter observed that «The Pauper Plan grew into a Utopia... [striking] a delicate equilibrium between economic liberalism and public planning»<sup>12</sup>. Like Poynter, Gertrude Himmelfarb characterized the Englishman's system for poor houses as «Bentham's Utopia»<sup>13</sup>. Given that these specialists centered on other aspects of Bentham's life, they have not explored how the philosopher's love of plants contributed to his idealism.

In addition, my treatment of *Junctiana* complements the growing literature on the Englishman's presence in Latin America. For example, the special issue of *Revue d'études benthamiennes* in 2020 titled *Bentham et son influence en Amérique latine* encapsulates the richness of this subfield. In the words of this issue's editor, Andrés Botero Bernal, «los estudios sobre Bentham siguen vigentes, y lo seguirán por mucho tiempo más»<sup>14</sup>. To this point, Jacqueline Blanco Blanco has examined the reception of Bentham's self-preference principle<sup>15</sup>. As Blanco contends, this rationale appealed to Colombian decision-makers from 1821 to 1851, the period when emancipation became law there. Bentham's legislative tenets extended beyond Colombia.

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<sup>8</sup> CHRISTIE, Ian R., *Samuel Bentham and the Russian Dnieper Flotilla 1787-1788*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1972. For more, see WERRETT, Simon, «Potemkin and the Panopticon: Samuel Bentham and the Architecture of Absolutism in Eighteenth Century Russia», in *Journal of Bentham Studies*, 2, 1999, pp. 1-25.

<sup>9</sup> Based in new archival findings, Bartlett has also documented how Samuel managed to construct a panopticon in St. Petersburg in 1806. Intriguing as this revelation may be, delving into it lies outside the scope of my study.

<sup>10</sup> BARTLETT, Roger, *The Bentham Brothers and Russia: The Imperial Russian Constitution and the St Petersburg Panopticon*, London, UCL Press, 2022, p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> ARNEIL, Barbara, «Jeremy Bentham: Pauperism, Colonialism, and Imperialism», in *American Political Science Review*, 115, 4/2021, pp. 1147-1158, p. 1157.

<sup>12</sup> POYNTER, John R., *Society and Pauperism*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1969, p. 109.

<sup>13</sup> HIMMELFARB, Gertrude, «Bentham's Utopia: The National Charity Company», in *Journal of British Studies*, 10, 1/1970, pp. 80-125.

<sup>14</sup> BERNAL, Botero Andrés, «Editorial», in *Revue d'études benthamiennes*, 17, 2020, pp. 1-14, p. 7.

<sup>15</sup> BLANCO, Blanco Jacqueline, «La Liberación de Esclavos en Colombia Un Proceso que no Escapó a la Influencia Benthamista», in *Revue d'études benthamiennes*, 17, 2020, pp. 14-29, p. 15.

According to Aída Kemelmajer de Carlucci, Argentina especially as well as Venezuela and Chile adopted Bentham's principles to remake their societies in a manner altogether different from the Spanish colonial tradition<sup>16</sup>. Similarly, Juan Carlos Abreu y Abreu, Adrian J. Cabrera Bibilonia, and Alejandro Vergara Blanco have dissected Bentham's role in the development of Mexican parliamentary liberalism, Cuban legislative and criminal statutes, and Andrés Bello's career, respectively<sup>17</sup>. Also, Jonathan Harris, Alejandro Gómez, and others' essays on Bentham's kinship with Latin American Libertadores have shaped my understanding of his ties with Bolívar<sup>18</sup>.

Moreover, I hope to add to writings that have directly discussed *Junctiana*. Annie L. Cot has examined Bentham's «Spanish American Utopia», delving into his various proposals for the region<sup>19</sup>. Notably, Cot distilled Bentham's actions into two categories, that of an «expert» and of a «reformer», stances that coincided yet sometimes clashed<sup>20</sup>. Cot also discusses *Junctiana* briefly in the conclusion of her piece. Without a doubt, her comprehensive analysis of the philosopher's activities in Latin America and more specifically with *Junctiana* has provided my essay with a foundation. Finally, Miriam Williford, the scholar who has devoted the most energy to *Junctiana*, did not grasp its full extent. Evaluating Bentham's 1822 letters rather than the wider array of archival materials now more readily accessible, she omitted the story's longer history and lessons on the natural in his philosophy<sup>21</sup>. That being said, Williford wrote about *Junctiana* over forty years ago and her insights remain relevant today.

Transitioning from the Americas to imperialism at large, this piece supplements interpretations of Bentham by showing how he viewed himself as an actor independent of empire. For Jennifer Pitts, Bentham did not see British rule «as a convenient means of imposing his schemes on powerless or incompetent subjects»<sup>22</sup>. In line with Pitts's analysis of Bentham's questioning of British colonial policy, I explore how he aspired to impose his own legislative

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<sup>16</sup> DE CARLUCCI, Kemelmajer Aída, «Jeremy Bentham y su Influencia en el Derecho Privado de Algunos Países de América del Sur», in *Revue d'études benthamiennes*, 17, 2020, pp. 30-60, p. 32.

<sup>17</sup> ABREU Y ABREU, Juan Carlos, «La Metáfora de la Representación: Influencia Benthamiana en el Parlamentarismo Mexicano Decimonónico», in *Revue d'études benthamiennes*, 17, 2020, pp. 80-102; BIBILONIA, Adrian J. Cabrera, «La «Secta Benthamista» o el «Filántropo Ardiente»: Bentham en el Discurso Científico, Jurídico y Penal Cubano del Siglo XIX», in *Revue d'études benthamiennes*, 17, 2020, pp. 103-129; BLANCO, Alejandro Vergara, «La circulation des idées de Jeremy Bentham au Chili pendant la première moitié du XIXème siècle et Andrés Bello, leur divulgateur», in *Revue d'études benthamiennes*, 17, 2020, pp. 131-144.

<sup>18</sup> HARRIS, Jonathan, «An English utilitarian looks at Spanish-American independence: Jeremy Bentham's *Rid Yourselves of Ultramarina*», in *Americas*, 53, 2/1996, pp. 217-233; HARRIS, Jonathan, «Bernardino Rivadavia and Benthamite 'Discipleship'», in *Latin American Research Review*, 33, 1/1998, pp. 129-149; GÓMEZ, Alejandro, «José del Valle: a Benthamite in Central America», in *Journal of Bentham Studies*, 16, 2014, pp. 16-36.

<sup>19</sup> COT, Annie L., «Jeremy Bentham's Spanish American Utopia», in *Revue d'études benthamiennes*, 17, 2020, pp. 61-79.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 63.

<sup>21</sup> See WILLIFORD, Miriam, *Jeremy Bentham on Spanish America: An Account of His Letter and Proposals to the New World*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana University Press, 1980.

<sup>22</sup> PITTS, Jennifer, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2005, p. 224.

systems elsewhere. In a related vein, David Armitage asserted that Bentham's worldly legal designs developed in relation to local conflicts and through law. I concur with Armitage that Bentham «was engaged in a lifelong dialogue between universalism and particularism» that he never quite managed to conclude<sup>23</sup>.

Building upon Pitts and Armitage, this piece argues that Bentham considered himself a universal legislator because he did not attach himself to a single empire. He hoped to implement his agricultural empires of reason across the world. By studying Bentham's ecological interests, I hope to complement Pitts's work on Bentham's universalism. In equal measure, this piece hopes to «globaliz[e]» Bentham like Armitage but in relation to his botanical views<sup>24</sup>.

In a similar vein, my essay expands upon the lessons from Jennifer Pitts and Stephen Engelmann's recent interpretation of Bentham's *Essay on the Influence of Time and Place in Matters of Legislation*. In the words of Pitts and Engelmann, «we find a text that is remarkable for its skepticism about English and European customs and institutions and for its willingness to take its utilitarian bearings from indigenous practices»<sup>25</sup>. If examples of «bald prejudice» exist in Bentham's writings, I appreciate their point that the philosopher considered the dynamics between his codes and the circumstances of places he would transport them<sup>26</sup>. This reading of Bentham's intentions concludes that Bentham's most conspicuous imperial ties lay in himself: «Perhaps Bentham's real imperialism here is an all-too-familiar one: the imperialism of the liberal humanist scholarly imagination itself»<sup>27</sup>. In line with that interpretation, I supplement our knowledge of Bentham's influence as well as its limits.

On this point, I also benefit from recent works on the breadth of Bentham's sway. For one, my essay complements *Bentham Around the World*, an edited collection that analyzes the dissemination and adaptation of the philosopher's teachings across continents<sup>28</sup>. This attention to the ways that others have used and repurposed Bentham's philosophy informs my reading of his efforts and their aftermath.

Moreover, room for revision exists within debates on whether Bentham's universalism contained traces of colonialism. In 1984, Lea Boralevi remarked that «Bentham exhibits an attitude of generic solidarity towards the oppressed»<sup>29</sup>. In 2011, Peter Cain uttered a strikingly similar judgment: «Bentham made what is arguably the greatest single contribution to a radical

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<sup>23</sup> ARMITAGE, David R., «Globalizing Jeremy Bentham», in *History of Political Thought*, 32, 1/2011, pp. 63-82, p. 69.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, 63.

<sup>25</sup> ENGELMANN, Stephen G., PITTS, Jennifer, «Bentham's Place and Time», in *The Tocqueville Review/La Revue Tocqueville*, 32, 1/2011, pp. 43-66, p. 47.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 59.

<sup>28</sup> PALMER, Simon, ZHAI, Xiaobo, (edited by), *Bentham Around the World*, Austin, Talbot Publishing, 2021.

<sup>29</sup> CAMPOS BORALEVI, Lea, *Bentham and the Oppressed*, New York, de Gruyter, 1984, p. 1.

critique of colonialism that began to emerge in the mid-eighteenth century»<sup>30</sup>. Zoe Laidlaw questioned such beneficence, citing the «absence of the indigenous peoples of Australia, the Americas and Africa» in his writings<sup>31</sup>. I enter each side of this dialogue by tracking Bentham's programs for humans and environments. Doing so reveals his well-meaning yet problematic intentions. As Campos and Cain maintained, Bentham thought his projects would benefit their recipients. Yet he convinced himself of this success because he saw his doctrines as panaceas that others needed and wanted.

While discussing these qualities of the philosopher's plans, it remains vital to underscore the nuance of his goals. As Bentham aged, he developed his «Pannomion», a body of legal statutes based on utilitarian principles<sup>32</sup>. While formulating this project, he sought states willing to enlist him to devise their laws. To this end, *'Legislator of the World': Writings on Codification, Law, and Education* demonstrates Bentham's genuine concern for promoting good governance across various continents<sup>33</sup>. For lack of space, I do not engage with Bentham's sketches for his «Pannomion» or his attempts to draft legal codes for nations cataloged in *'Legislator of the World'*. That being said, my article could be read in conversation with them. After all, the industrious Englishman balanced many of these ideas during overlapping periods. For example, Bentham's «Codification Proposal», which explains why an outsider could make sage legislation for a foreign nation, relates to my analysis of his wide-ranging engagements; the Englishman's contention that «the hand of a foreigner is even preferable to that of a native» resonates throughout the writings I analyze<sup>34</sup>.

On a theoretical level, I also find inspiration from recent critical writings on landscape, colonialism, and empire. For one, Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes* includes insights germane to weighing Bentham's interchange with the peoples and spaces he sought to aid. Her analysis of how colonial travel discourses rendered unfamiliar cultures and spaces accessible and therefore governable shaped my stance on Bentham. In equal measure, I concur with Pratt's judgment that these engagements between differing cultures – if uneven – were not one-sided. Like the figures Pratt examines, Bentham shaped notions of himself and the world through his interactions with far-flung resources and correspondents. Beyond this, Jill Casid's *Sowing Empire* elucidates how

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<sup>30</sup> CAIN, Peter J., «Bentham and the Development of the British Critique of Colonialism», in *Utilitas*, 23, 1/2011, pp. 1-24, p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> LAIDLAW, Zoe, 'Peopling the Country by Unpeopling It': Jeremy Bentham's Silences on Indigenous Australia in CAUSER, Tim, FINN, Margaret, SCHOFIELD, Philip (edited by), *Jeremy Bentham and Australia: Convicts, Utility and Empire*, London, UCL Press, 2022, pp. 248-271, p. 249.

<sup>32</sup> See ZHAI, Xiaobo, «Bentham's Exposition of Common Law», in *Law and Philosophy*, 36, 5/2017, pp. 525-560; KAINO, Michihiro, *Bentham's Constitutional Code and His Pannomion*, in SCHOFIELD, Philip, ZHAI, Xiaobo (edited by), *op. cit.*, pp. 315-336.

<sup>33</sup> BENTHAM, Jeremy, *'Legislator of the World': Writings on Codification, Law, and Education*, SCHOFIELD, Philip, HARRIS, Jonathan (edited by), Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1998.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 289.



18th-century French and English imperialists perpetuated norms of race, gender, and power through landscaping. This exposition of how agriculture helped form European empires and identity suggests the ways Bentham embodied these trends. Although Beth Fowkes Tobin does not mention Bentham in *Colonizing Nature*, her commentary relates to my study of the philosopher's views on Central America. Tobin's assessment of British posture toward and actions in the tropics suggests the interplay between intellectual production and material extraction. Bentham's exertions to supervise Central American space through gardening and infrastructure resembles the labors of Britons in the Caribbean, South Pacific, and India that Tobin discusses.

On the whole, then, uniting Bentham's botanical and societal interests complicates dominant views on his objectives and their afterlives. His hopes to replicate miniature societies across the world paralleled his zeal to nourish greenery within his London hothouse.

### 3. «Philo-Botanist at last»<sup>35</sup>: Krichev

As Bentham sought to apply botany to social reform, he embraced naturalists' habits. He gravitated toward the Royal Society president and fellow Carl Linnaeus admirer, Joseph Banks. Bentham met Banks at a «philosophical club» founded by one of Linnaeus's pupils, Daniel Solander<sup>36</sup>. Fortuitously, Bentham's engagement with scientists coincided with his brother's stay in Krichev, Russia from 1779 to 1791. Sensing an opportunity, Society members urged Bentham to acquire specimens. Once Samuel left England, Bentham pestered him for information on, and seedlings from, Russia.

Bentham's environmental and societal objectives soon blended. In fact, Samuel asked Bentham to aid him in improving Potemkin's lands. During these years, Bentham transported his thought – like the seeds he exchanged through the post – so they might flourish on soil abroad. Indeed, the manicured environment of Potemkin's holdings encouraged Bentham to test his theories, developing his ecological vision and portending future exploits.

Samuel's relocation intensified Bentham's penchant for collecting since it allowed him to procure seeds from afar. When Banks mentioned various Siberian species that had never been grown in England, the philosopher sprang into action. Posthaste, Bentham directed Samuel to ship him sixteen Siberian seeds. Because they «certainly proved most welcome to our Botanophiles», Bentham proceeded to list seven specimens he wanted<sup>37</sup>. Samuel reciprocated his

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<sup>35</sup> Letter from Jeremy Bentham to Nikolai Mordvinov, 16 August 1824 in O'SULLIVAN, Luke, FULLER, Catherine (edited by), *The Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham: The Correspondence of Jeremy Bentham*, Vol. 12, July 1824 to June 1828, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 15.

<sup>36</sup> BENTHAM, Jeremy, *Chrestomathia*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1983, p. 319.

<sup>37</sup> Letter from Jeremy Bentham to Mr. Klängen, June 1783, in CHRISTIE, Ian R. (edited by), *The Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham: The Correspondence of Jeremy Bentham*, Vol. 3: January 1781 to October 1788, London, Athlone

brother's sentiments, noting that «I hope [flowers] will be propagated in Queen's Square Place», Bentham's home<sup>38</sup>. In dreaming of transplanting Siberian blooms to London, the brothers inaugurated their Russian collaboration. The cooperation deepened in 1784 when Samuel started to nurture Potemkin's estate. Tasked «to develop... a center of industry and a source from which technical knowledge might be diffused to the relatively underdeveloped surrounding areas», he embarked on this civilizing mission with confidence<sup>39</sup>.

From the start, Samuel felt unequal to the taxing job and pleaded with Bentham for guidance. Samuel implored his brother to live with him and «make a new man of me»<sup>40</sup>. Unable to enact reforms alone, Samuel begged Bentham to «enable me to turn to account any ideas of improvement which at present lay perfectly useless»<sup>41</sup>. Underlining anew the opportunity for such «improvement», Samuel implored Bentham to try his «multitude proposals for improvement... which we have talked over and which are applicable to most countries»<sup>42</sup>. In essence, Samuel suggested that his sibling's theories could blossom in Russia.

With an eye to proliferating his notions on usefulness, Bentham agreed to assist. Potemkin's desire for the «efficient running of a small... complex» drew in the brothers who considered Krichev an opportune laboratory<sup>43</sup>. While Samuel engineered structures, Bentham would develop them with his ideals of agricultural utility and splendor. Thus, they turned their energies to a place where «whatever you sow there if it is not scratched up, flourishes»; they hoped their plans too would find fertile soil<sup>44</sup>. Even Potemkin shared this fondness for horticulture. Ever acquisitive, he set out to create a garden on the estate where «all the vegetable productions of the world are to be collected»<sup>45</sup>. The word «all» and the thought itself – if contained to a plot – suggest the extent of his ambition and its intersection with the Bentham brothers' own. Notably, Samuel deferred to Bentham on this subject, granting his brother «the commission» to find an English botanist who could oversee the garden<sup>46</sup>.

After aiding his brother from a distance for years, Bentham fulfilled Samuel's request and visited Krichev in 1786 equipped to cultivate the land. Rather than traveling alone, Bentham

Press, 1971, p. 173.

<sup>38</sup> Letter from Samuel Bentham to Jeremy Bentham, 31 January 1783, in CHRISTIE, Ian R. (edited by), *op. cit.*, p. 153.

<sup>39</sup> ANDERSON, Matthew S., «Samuel Bentham in Russia, 1779-1791», in *American Slavic and East European Review*, 15, 2/1956, pp. 157-172, p. 166.

<sup>40</sup> Letter from Samuel Bentham to Jeremy Bentham, 20/31 January 1784, in CHRISTIE, Ian R., (edited by), *op. cit.*, p. 241.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>43</sup> CHRISTIE, Ian R., «Samuel Bentham and the Western Colony at Krichev, 1784-1787», in *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 48, 111/1970, pp. 232-247, p. 239.

<sup>44</sup> BL, BP, Box 539, fol. 65.

<sup>45</sup> Letter from Samuel Bentham to Jeremy Bentham, 10/21 June 1784, in CHRISTIE, Ian R. (edited by), *op. cit.*, p. 269.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem.*

brought with him someone of marked horticultural «utility»<sup>47</sup>. He chose John Aiton, nephew of the royal gardener at Kew, to make the gardens on Potemkin's estate aesthetically pleasing and ordered. With national pride, Bentham also introduced a crop that he considered an epitome of utility, the English potato.

Bentham relied upon Aiton to arrange Potemkin's estate. Citing his «knowledge... for gardening and botany», Bentham judged Aiton «a compleat master of his business»<sup>48</sup>. The gardener classified seedlings into five categories, an exercise that delighted Bentham. In Aiton's schema, a letter related to a characteristic of the flora in question. For example, A corresponded to those «Plants growing in a very shady situation at the skirts of woods», while C indicated «Plants growing in a mossy swamp», and D to «Plants growing in a very dry soil and in sunny exposure»<sup>49</sup>. Moreover, each section designated specimens with their scientific names and physical descriptions. Beyond Aiton's adroit compilation, the philosopher relied upon agrarian treatises by Arthur Young, Philip Miller, and Robert Dossie<sup>50</sup>. Reading these texts alongside Aiton's reports deepened Bentham's passion for regimenting Krichev.

As a counterpart to Aiton's labors, the philosopher administered the farming of English potatoes; in doing so, he imposed his tenets of utility on Krichev. Thanks to reports he read about Joseph Banks and Daniel Solander's recent Iceland voyage, Bentham decided that potatoes would flourish in Russia. Bentham doubled his enthusiasm because of the crop's versatility. After hearing a paper on fermentation, Bentham rhapsodized about potato drinks as being «equal to French Brandy» and capable of producing ten times as much liquid as wheat – they promised to be a utilitarian harvest<sup>51</sup>. Armed with these accounts, Bentham promised that potatoes would be «an advantageous object of culture in many parts of the Russian Empire»<sup>52</sup>. As a testament to his commitment, Bentham planted some. Potemkin was «much pleased with some Potatoes of English race» and considered scattering them «upon a large scale» over a dozen acres<sup>53</sup>.

Although Potemkin sold his Krichev assets before long, this potato campaign typified Bentham's intention to ship his principles to foreign countries. More than produce items, potatoes resonated with Bentham's creed. As a hearty crop of the «English race» that could be

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>48</sup> Letter from Jeremy Bentham to Alleyne Fitzherbert, 14/25 September 1787, in CHRISTIE, Ian R., (edited by), *op. cit.*, p. 574.

<sup>49</sup> Letter from John Aiton to Jeremy Bentham, 22 October 1787, in CHRISTIE, Ian R., (edited by), *op. cit.*, p. 593.

<sup>50</sup> BENTHAM, George, FILIPIUK, Marion (edited by), *George Bentham: Autobiography, 1800-1834*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1997, p. xvi.

<sup>51</sup> Letter from Jeremy Bentham to Samuel Bentham, 10-16 May 1780, in SPRIGGE, Timothy L. S. (edited by), *The Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham: The Correspondence of Jeremy Bentham*, Vol. 2, 1777-80, London, Athlone Press, 1968, p. 447.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 448.

<sup>53</sup> Letter from Jeremy Bentham to Jeremiah Bentham, 14/25 June 1787, in CHRISTIE, Ian R. (edited by), *op. cit.*, pp. 552-553.

grown almost anywhere, they resembled the plans Bentham promulgated<sup>54</sup>. On this point, it is noteworthy that Bentham emphasized the preeminence of his vegetable due to its British provenance. This yoking of identity and utilitarianism exhibited how Bentham's estimation of his civilizing abilities grew in step with his position toward agriculture abroad. Keen to insert potatoes, and his principles, into the ground, Bentham endeavored to enhance through replacement.

While Bentham wrote at his desk in England, Samuel stayed in Russia contemplating global transit; though apart, the two continued their correspondence. Enthralled by the centuries-long dream of bridging Asian and European markets through the Northwest Passage, Samuel ruminated about «secret» voyage through the Bering Strait<sup>55</sup>. Pondering the possibility of encroaching upon the Hudson Bay Company's domain, he asked Bentham for the exact geographical location of the corporation's holdings. Samuel then disclosed that «I have concern with the Fur Trade from Kamchatka» and wanted to assemble twenty to thirty Russian soldiers and an English captain to travel on his behalf<sup>56</sup>. Experimenting via exploration, Samuel would complete these interoceanic trips with his «Amphibious carriage», a vehicle that traveled on land and water<sup>57</sup>. Bentham proved to be just as eager to implement Samuel's inventions. After all, these contraptions would aid Bentham in molding societies and environments.

At the same time, Bentham's Russian excursion primed him to step beyond renovating another's agricultural estate and to fabricate his own. In leading Samuel «in the right path», Bentham found his one for himself, distinct even from naturalists he admired<sup>58</sup>. Reflecting, Bentham recognized that Krichev led him on the path to becoming a «Philo-Botanist», someone who structured global societies and plants alike<sup>59</sup>.

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 552.

<sup>55</sup> Letter from Samuel Bentham to Jeremy Bentham, 18/29 September 1790, in MILNE, Taylor Alexander (edited by), *The Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham: The Correspondence of Jeremy Bentham*, Vol. 4, October 1788 to December 1793, London, Athlone Press, 1981, p. 203.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>57</sup> Transcript of Box 539, fol. 189, Bentham Papers, British Museum, accessed via Transcribe Bentham. 26 May 2023, URL: < [http://transcribe-bentham.ucl.ac.uk/td/Transcribe\\_Bentham](http://transcribe-bentham.ucl.ac.uk/td/Transcribe_Bentham) > [accessed on 4 May 2023]. Hereafter, Bentham Papers will be referred to as BP.

<sup>58</sup> Letter from Samuel Bentham to Jeremy Bentham, 18/29 June 1784, in CHRISTIE, Ian R. (edited by), *op. cit.*, p. 264.

<sup>59</sup> Letter from Jeremy Bentham to Nikolai Mordvinov, 16 August 1824 in O'SULLIVAN, Luke, FULLER, Catherine (edited by), *The Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham: The Correspondence of Jeremy Bentham*, Vol. 12: July 1824 to June 1828, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 15.

#### 4. «[Much] more than a conservatory»<sup>60</sup>: *Junctiana*

Upon the rejection of the panopticon around 1800, Bentham forsook England for thwarting his genius. Blaming politicians who «murdered my best days», he determined to emigrate to a place where others would applaud his talent, Latin America<sup>61</sup>. Persuaded by Spanish diplomat Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos to declare «the object of your journey [to be] something connected with researches or studies in natural history»<sup>62</sup>. Unfortunately, the Peninsular War slashed Bentham's efforts to travel to Mexico in 1808 and Venezuela in 1811<sup>63</sup>.

To reinvigorate Bentham's spirits, Samuel employed his engineering expertise and built a greenhouse in his brother's yard. It served as «much more than a conservatory to [his] comfort and recreation» because Bentham used it to entertain revolutionaries; in exchange for his hospitality, leaders such as Simón Bolívar proffered Bentham seeds and insights during the 1810s<sup>64</sup>. During this period, Bentham relied on Bolívar as he had on Samuel, asking for information and specimens. Before long, Bolívar became a close acquaintance, with whom Bentham felt at ease asking for seeds and offering his theories. While filling his conservatory, Bentham conceived of *Junctiana*, a Central American community and canal.

Bentham's epistles to Thomas Foley, a doctor in Bolívar's army, show how sharing seeds overlapped with his preparations for *Junctiana*. For example, an 1822 note to Foley provides insights into how Bentham's natural inclinations coincided with his Central American proposal. Bentham wanted Foley to send specimens and placed an «order for a Botanical forage»<sup>65</sup>. The philosopher then shifted directions, and employed bombastic praise, to depict «the supremely glorious idea of the *Junction*», *Junctiana*<sup>66</sup>. Bentham's diction for *Junctiana* and plants differed little, especially when it came to his favored crop: the root vegetable. Now, he swooned over the Arracacha, a starchy potato-like food. Like the English spud he hoped to bring to Russia, this plant served as a botanical embodiment of his views. Bentham described the Arracacha as a «hyper-

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<sup>60</sup> Letter from Jeremy Bentham to Aaron Burr, 19 January 1811, in DAVIS, Matthew L. (edited by), *The Private Journal of Aaron Burr*, New York, Harper, 1838, pp. 435-439.

<sup>61</sup> Transcript of Box 115, fol. 145, BP, UCL Special Collections, accessed via Transcribe Bentham. 26 May 2023, URL: < [http://transcribe-bentham.ucl.ac.uk/td/Transcribe\\_Bentham](http://transcribe-bentham.ucl.ac.uk/td/Transcribe_Bentham) > [accessed on 4 May 2023].

<sup>62</sup> Letter from Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos to Jeremy Bentham, 27 June 1809, in *Biblioteca de Autores Españoles*, Madrid, Atlas, 1859, pp. 319-20,

<sup>63</sup> Interestingly, Bentham tried visiting Latin America during the 1770s for his own version of a natural history expedition. However, he needed to cancel these arrangements as well, in this case due to his fragile constitution.

<sup>64</sup> Letter from Jeremy Bentham to Aaron Burr, 19 January 1811, in DAVIS, Matthew L. (edited by), *op. cit.*, pp. 435-439.

<sup>65</sup> Letter from Jeremy Bentham to Thomas Foley, 5 June 1822, in FULLER, Catherine, *The Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham: The Correspondence of Jeremy Bentham*, Vol. 11, January 1822 to June 1824, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 92.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibidem*.

potatoe» – so nutritious and delicious that he wondered if it were a «fabulous» myth<sup>67</sup>. Coaxing Foley, he promised that if he could obtain the specimen, Foley's reputation would become eternal: «We will denominate [the species] *Foleyixa* and your name shall live as long as Botany lives»<sup>68</sup>. Again, Bentham interwove his encomiums about plants, and those who procured them, with praise of his society. He spoke of *Junctiana* as being «inexpressibly useful»<sup>69</sup>. It is salient that Bentham later used similar diction to describe the superior utility of the Arracacha, enmeshing utilitarianism and crops<sup>70</sup>.

Bentham also requested practical seeds from Bolívar. As with Foley, Bentham urged Bolívar to secure potatoes for him. He giddily reminded his recipient that Colombia was «the country of potatoes», unparalleled for its bounty<sup>71</sup>. In the same note, he acknowledged that the grand Bolívar need not «stoop to pick up seeds for Britain, as the Emperor Claudius did»; nonetheless, Bentham hoped that the revolutionary could find someone, «Botanist or no-Botanist», to carry out this task<sup>72</sup>. Bentham's use of italics implies the importance of the seed's destination – his greenhouse in England. Beyond his request for a set of instructions for cultivation, Bentham repeated his tactic with Foley, promising honor through science: «glory might be worthy the name of Bolivar, and the Royal Society of London would, with pride, insert that name on the list of its Associates»<sup>73</sup>. By sending these specimens and obtaining this esteem, according to Bentham, Bolívar would meet the wishes of the recently passed President of the Society, Joseph Banks. If in a coincidental manner, Bentham would revive his earlier efforts in Krichev that Banks inspired through the accumulation of seeds.

In line with his curiosity for Central American plants, Bentham digested reports on the region's geography. Buoyed by Scottish cartographer John Pinkerton's 1816 *Atlas*, Bentham boasted that he had found the lone suitable pathway: one from the San Juan River, through Lake Nicaragua, and then to the Pacific. Bentham asserted that «Neither in Humboldt's Work, nor in any other as yet published, is any considerable part of the above information (it is believed) to be found»<sup>74</sup>. In laying claim to knowledge that outranked travelers', Bentham averred his fitness to lead this enterprise. That being said, he depended upon «information... derived from a number of persons of different descriptions (names not mentioned)»<sup>75</sup>. Though he promised that «the tract

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 93.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 92.

<sup>70</sup> Letter from Jeremy Bentham to Simón Bolívar, 24 December 1820, in CONWAY, Stephen, *The Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham: The Correspondence of Jeremy Bentham, Vol. 10: July 1820 to January 1821*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 249.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 250.

<sup>74</sup> BENTHAM, Jeremy, *The Works of Jeremy Bentham*, vol. 2, Edinburgh, William Tait, 1843, p. 562.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibidem*.

of country in question had been visited» by these unknown individuals, such vague assurance carried scant credibility<sup>76</sup>. Despite his paucity of experience, Bentham felt sanguine: based on «the present state of our knowledge here built in Europe», he would succeed<sup>77</sup>.

Thanks to bonds with like-minded British soldiers in Latin America, Bentham inflated his sense of his ability to shape the area. Beyond being one of Bentham's backers, Francis Hall, a colonel, shared the philosopher's belief in the need for foreign expertise to guide post-independence Latin America. In one missive, Hall criticized the culture and fortitude of his comrades in arms. Their «Energy, public spirit, and individual strength of character are still lamentably deficient in all classes» and need refinement<sup>78</sup>. Extrapolating his low opinions, Hall deemed that «The mass of the people is ignorant, timid, and superstitious, and their chiefs too rarely form exceptions to the general rule»<sup>79</sup>. In denigrating Latin Americans, Hall stressed the necessity for outsiders to instill order. As evidenced by a dedicatory note to Bentham, Hall believed that the Englishman would assume the undertaking. He volunteered Bentham to amend «defective social institutions»; Hall «gladly anticipate[d] in the New World such improved forms of political existence»<sup>80</sup>. Bentham, who had previously entered Krichev excited about similar notions of «improvement», agreed that he would deliver this novel age.

In the same laudatory message, Hall employed botanical verbiage that echoed and amplified Bentham's appetite to make an Arcadia. Hall exclaimed that it behooved Britain «to plant» governments that match «the fertility of their soil and superior value of its productions»<sup>81</sup>. Hall regarded Latin America as a paradox, a place with fecund resources but impoverished societies. He implied that only Bentham could ameliorate the poor state of Latin American lives and laws. Thus, if comprehensive, Bentham's preparations confirmed his preconceptions.

Notwithstanding this, Bentham framed *Junctiana* as a globally-oriented project whose participants would share its benefits. He chose a «Joint Stock Company» composition not only to gain more capital and autonomy but also so it could be a beacon of fair business and society<sup>82</sup>. To ensure that states derive equal financial benefit, all would enter the passage «on the same footing»<sup>83</sup>. This motive for the greatest good in a globalized market blended with his vision for *Junctiana* as a nexus of the Americas. Just as Krichev would have opened methods of social management, so would *Junctiana* embody Bentham's values within its realm.

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>78</sup> Letter from Francis Hall to Jeremy Bentham 17 October 1824, in FULLER, Catherine, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>80</sup> HALL, Francis, *Colombia*, London, Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1827, p. iii.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>82</sup> BENTHAM, Jeremy, *The Works*, p. 561.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 563.

Bentham pictured *Junctiana* as a neatly arranged microcosm of the planet and an incarnation of utilitarianism. Much like the flora he gathered, Bentham wanted to recruit a diverse population. Calling for «multitudes [of] labour», he planned to welcome citizens from the Americas, Asia, and Europe<sup>84</sup>. He preferred locating *Junctiana* at the «narrower... spot» possible, reasoning that members could cooperate better in a small area<sup>85</sup>. As a center of utilitarian mores, the site would «present to every eye the civilized world in miniature», encouraging settlement and emulation<sup>86</sup>. This image echoed the garden filled with plants from across the globe that Bentham would have decorated in Krichev.

Keen to inculcate his values into future generations, Bentham contemplated cultivating youth by exposing them to his theories. Placing utility as the foremost lesson and method of instruction, students would train in «everything that is useful in art and science»<sup>87</sup>. With this pedagogical base, «mental improvement in every line, intellectual and moral together» would compound each other<sup>88</sup>. Rather than a limit, «the frontier on each side» invited possibility<sup>89</sup>. Thus «marked by a flowing tide» of people and prosperity in and out of *Junctiana*, his archetype would multiply<sup>90</sup>.

In this regard, *Junctiana* promised to be a conduit for the transportation of his ideas and goods. Bentham bragged that *Junctiana* would ensure «the greatest happiness of the greatest number of the people»<sup>91</sup>. It would «stand[...] highest... in the nature of things», occupying the perch of this metaphorical civilizational taxonomy<sup>92</sup>. *Junctiana*, then, would not only prove the genius of its creator but also deliver a template for others to copy.

Though *Junctiana* would nominally embody hemispheric egalitarianism, Bentham's governance arrangements betrayed an inequitable reality. Rather than Mexico or Colombia, another country would act on the company's behalf to guarantee «security to the capitalists»: the United States<sup>93</sup>. Bentham confessed that «sacrifices [would be] eventually requisite» for Mexico and Colombia because he mistrusted the newborn countries' capacities<sup>94</sup>. Vulnerable to relapse, the two «stand exposed... so lately emancipated from so bad a form of government»<sup>95</sup>. Placed «on so unfavourable a footing», their hopes lay in him<sup>96</sup>. Such assumptions informed Bentham's suggestion to deprive Mexican and Colombian sovereignty: both would have «a territory», but

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<sup>84</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 567.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 569.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 571.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 564.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 563.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibidem*.



«dominion» would «be ceded to the company»<sup>97</sup>. Invoking safety, he called the measure imperative «for their security»<sup>98</sup>. In this syntactical arrangement, Bentham warranted the forfeiture of jurisdiction as a measure to protect them from themselves.

Therefore, Bentham counseled that the US rectify Mexico and Colombia's backwardness by incorporating Junctioniana into its sphere. In fact, he envisioned Junctioniana as an outlying American colony with a path to statehood and a capital named Washingtonia. Even more, Bentham pictured when «the *representatives of Junctioniana...* [would sail to the District of Columbia and] sit in congress»<sup>99</sup>. Praising «how excellent the system of *nursing* is – how admirable a dry nurse the President has always been», Bentham argued that Mexico and Colombia would grow on US milk<sup>100</sup>. This language of childcare characterized Latin Americans as toddlers that would mature under Anglo-Saxon rearing. Alongside Junctioniana, these offspring would advance from «infants [to being] of an age to go alone»<sup>101</sup>. In due time, «the leading strings would be taken off» and they could assume more responsibilities over their domestic affairs<sup>102</sup>. Some future day, Mexico and Colombia might become «parents as they are to her... the little Republic of *Junctioniana*»<sup>103</sup>. Like a child uniting a household, Junctioniana would bind the Americas together by water and with bonds thick as blood.

Anticipating critics of Junctioniana's imperialist undertones, Bentham drew an equivalence between US and world ownership. Rather than acting out of opportunism, the US would assume supremacy over the land 'for the benefit and satisfaction of all other nations interested'<sup>104</sup>. Indeed, a seemingly altruistic America would stand in for «all the other nations of the earth»<sup>105</sup>. In contrast, Bentham praised Mexico and Colombia solely if they would cede their rights. Although the pair viewed «this jewel with a proprietary eye», he trusted they would renounce their wishes for the greater good<sup>106</sup>. Bentham continued his reasoning in gendered terms by feminizing the two nations: each would become «a common, universal, and unexampled benefactress»<sup>107</sup>. If not financial, «the sensation of gain» would ensure amity; revenue in political capital would outweigh losses in actual capital<sup>108</sup>.

In his quest for harmony, Bentham misunderstood how his steps for protection disadvantaged its supposed benefactors. Fashioning the trio as equals, Bentham assured that Junctioniana would

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<sup>97</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>98</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>99</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 569.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>101</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>102</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>103</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>104</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 563.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 565.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>107</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 566.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibidem.*

rest «in the conjunct hands of three nations»<sup>109</sup>. He emphasized that this partnership would «preserve it [the isthmus] from becoming a bone of contention to all nations»<sup>110</sup>. Bentham waxed lyrical, but he could not escape the fact that Mexico and Colombia would relinquish more than their northern neighbor. In this way, his aspirations for progress buttressed a utopia with an unequal framework.

At first, Bentham believed that *Junctiana* would flourish and be replicated across the globe. He boasted that «the *junction of the two seas*’, or *Junctiana*, ‘had not passed unheeded by his [Bolívar’s] government»<sup>111</sup>. Bentham singled out Bolívar’s support as «a very considerable ground for the requisite sort of confidence» that investors needed<sup>112</sup>. Yet the philosopher’s confidence soon eroded as *Junctiana* fell apart. Still in the midst of a bloody war with Spain and rife with internal crises, Gran Colombia, the recently formed republic Bolívar led, was unprepared to concede its gains to a stock company, much less to the US. Bolívar was indisposed to forfeit land and resources his armies spent years fighting to reclaim. Frustrated, Bentham vented that «In answer to some hints of mine [about *Junctiana*] he said the desire was to accomplish the matter in their own territory with their own capital»; in other words, the revolutionary would pursue development on his terms, rather than on Bentham’s<sup>113</sup>.

The Englishman never found anyone willing to embrace *Junctiana*, but his faith in its merits signifies the progression of his universalist beliefs<sup>114</sup>. Although unique from the Russian estate, *Junctiana* extended Bentham’s line of thought. Similar to Krichev, *Junctiana* would render a resource-rich area into a commercial hub and social model. *Junctiana*’s physical constriction and metaphorical openness made it an administrative paradigm.

Therefore, *Junctiana* denoted another development in the evolution of Bentham’s thought. Unlike earlier plots, this would be a joint-stock company and tropical paradise. He selected Central America because an isthmus would be conducive to a canal. Even more, this gateway would allow him to propagate his doctrines and engender global amity. However, *Junctiana* also

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<sup>109</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 565.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 564.

<sup>111</sup> Letter from Jeremy Bentham to Bernardino Rivadavia, 13-15 June 1822, in FULLER, Catherine, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

<sup>112</sup> Transcript of Box 106, fol. 287, BP, UCL Special Collections, accessed via Transcribe Bentham. 26 May 2023, URL: < [http://transcribe-bentham.ucl.ac.uk/td/Transcribe\\_Bentham](http://transcribe-bentham.ucl.ac.uk/td/Transcribe_Bentham) > [accessed on 4 May 2023].

<sup>113</sup> Transcript of Box 12, fol. 388, BP, UCL Special Collections, accessed via Transcribe Bentham. 26 May 2023, URL: < [http://transcribe-bentham.ucl.ac.uk/td/Transcribe\\_Bentham](http://transcribe-bentham.ucl.ac.uk/td/Transcribe_Bentham) > [accessed on 4 May 2023].

<sup>114</sup> Granted, Bentham found a more receptive audience in José María del Barrio, a leader of Guatemalan independence. Del Barrio graciously received Bentham’s sketch in November 1823. In an ebullient missive, the Guatemalan stroked Bentham’s ego. Del Barrio «read [the plan] with the greatest pleasure», he «highly approve[d] of it in all its», and became «quite convinced you have found the only means of putting in execution a project from which all the [sic] humankind will derive every kind of advantage». Validating Bentham’s perception of himself, Del Barrio thanked him for such «useful works in favour of all humankind and particularly of America». Such a fawning tone appealed to Bentham, but it did not ensure that *Junctiana* would actually come to fruition. Letter from José María del Barrio to Jeremy Bentham, 18 November 1823, in FULLER, Catherine, *op. cit.*, pp. 315-316.

betrayed colonialist aspects, evidencing a consequence of Bentham's inclination to distribute his social paradigms. After all, Bentham relied upon accounts from fellow Britons, intended to take land from sovereign nations, displace its inhabitants, and then insert a burgeoning power as its overseer. Despite his friendship with Bolívar, Bentham doubted that Latin Americans could rule themselves. Given that *Junctiana* also was a clear formulation for Bentham's global principles, it indicates how his universalism intertwined with his yearning to rule from afar. He believed that terrestrial restriction and maritime openness would be an excellent home for *Junctiana*, a belief which turned out to be misplaced.

## 5. From «a state of perfect desolation [to] regular cultivation»<sup>115</sup>: Bentham's Final Efforts in Africa and Australia

Industrious until death, Bentham extended his sights to Africa. In 1828, the eighty-year-old Bentham endeavored to transport his ideas to Egypt. Even though Bentham had endured a lifetime of failed schemes, he held out hope for success in Suez. In an exchange with one of Samuel's engineering peers, Bentham pontificated with enthusiasm that he was «building castles in the air upon that site: that is to say, drawing plans» in Egypt<sup>116</sup>. Perhaps learning from his mistakes, the octogenarian no longer demanded a *carte blanche*. Rather than being a director of an estate or the chief of a joint-stock company, he wanted to be an advisor to Pasha Muhammad Ali – together, they would connect the seas.

As he had done before, Bentham acquired information on Africa's environment while ideas gestated in his mind. Bentham not only read naturalists' tomes but also corresponded with them to acquaint himself with Africa. He even tried to enlist English naturalist William Burchell, who brought thousands of horticultural samples from South Africa to Kew and Oxford, to go on a voyage for him<sup>117</sup>. Burchell declined this entreaty but nonetheless advised him on the qualities necessary for a traveler. He deemed «an acquaintance with the different branches of Natural History, (zoölogy, botany, and mineralogy)» as «essentials»<sup>118</sup>. Bentham imbibed these suggestions on knowing nature. However, he ignored Burchell's tips on gaining proficiency in foreigners' languages as well as «their manners and customs», steps fundamental to appreciating the needs

<sup>115</sup> Transcript of Box 550, fol. 17, BP, British Library, accessed via Transcribe Bentham. 26 May 2023, URL: <[http://transcribe-bentham.ucl.ac.uk/td/Transcribe\\_Bentham](http://transcribe-bentham.ucl.ac.uk/td/Transcribe_Bentham) > [accessed on 4 May 2023].

<sup>116</sup> Letter from Jeremy Bentham to Alexander Galloway, 6 March 1828, in Galloway Family Papers, Collection 753, Box 1, University of California, Los Angeles.

<sup>117</sup> For more on science in South Africa, see BEINART, William, DUBOW, Saul, *The Scientific Imagination in South Africa: 1700 to the Present*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2021.

<sup>118</sup> Letter from William Burchell to Jeremy Bentham, 2 October 1822, in FULLER, Catherine, *The Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham: The Correspondence of Jeremy Bentham*, Vol. 11, January 1822 to June 1824, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 157.

of those in another culture<sup>119</sup>. Although he learned about the continent's flora, he neglected insights on how to recalibrate his assumptions about nature and peoples.

In April 1828, Bentham tendered his blueprint to Ali, insisting that a canal would provide him geopolitical clout and a place in posterity. By creating a shortcut that would circumvent Cape Horn, Ali could unite European and Asian markets. Thus, Bentham assured Ali of the 'immediate and certain good' a canal would bring to Egypt<sup>120</sup>. Just as importantly, it would foster «International equality»<sup>121</sup>. Like *Junctiana*, the Suez could unlock oceanic routes and disperse utilitarianism. By revolutionizing shipping networks, the canal would reduce travel costs and times, augmenting profits and strengthening intercontinental links. Revisiting earlier points on fair maritime transport, Bentham positioned Suez as an equitable commercial hub. Soon, «Glory would come from England, France, Russia, Austria» and others<sup>122</sup>. Echoing *Junctiana*, the Suez would allow Egyptians and travelers to maximize profits and happiness. In over a hundred notes on how to execute the project, Bentham stressed that only through his notions about utility could the pathway thrive. The philosopher became even more sanguine upon discovering that «The Pacha is a 'perfect "Utilitarian"»<sup>123</sup>. Armed with this assurance, Bentham regarded the Suez as a means to fulfill his and Ali's ambitions.

The philosopher relied upon his favored agrarian metaphors to justify modernization. Looking back over the *longue durée*, Bentham believed that Africa was not kept «under a state of regular cultivation»<sup>124</sup>. In his eyes, denizens haphazardly tended their grounds and societies. As a result, the region was now «in a state of perfect desolation», a desert in want of crops and institutions.<sup>125</sup> For this reason, Bentham considered his intervention necessary and beneficial. Similarly, Egypt would blossom economically by ceding rights in exchange for «Money procurable from foreign States»<sup>126</sup>. Although he did not envision an infrastructure company as he had in Central America, Bentham insinuated that Egyptians should still rely on outsiders. Ali could call upon «working hands from Egypt» but not their minds or pockets<sup>127</sup>.

In turn, Bentham advocated uplifting Egyptians through educational and criminal reforms, again indicating the proximity of his progressive and colonialist leanings. Unsatisfied with the

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<sup>119</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>120</sup> Transcript of Box 10, fol. 198, BP, UCL Special Collections, accessed via Transcribe Bentham. 26 May 2023, URL: < [http://transcribe-bentham.ucl.ac.uk/td/Transcribe\\_Bentham](http://transcribe-bentham.ucl.ac.uk/td/Transcribe_Bentham) > [accessed on 4 May 2023].

<sup>121</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>123</sup> Transcript of Box 10, fol. 192, BP, UCL Special Collections, accessed via Transcribe Bentham. 26 May 2023, URL: < [http://transcribe-bentham.ucl.ac.uk/td/Transcribe\\_Bentham](http://transcribe-bentham.ucl.ac.uk/td/Transcribe_Bentham) > [accessed on 4 May 2023].

<sup>124</sup> Transcript of Box 550, fol. 17, BP, British Library, accessed via Transcribe Bentham. 26 May 2023, URL: < [http://transcribe-bentham.ucl.ac.uk/td/Transcribe\\_Bentham](http://transcribe-bentham.ucl.ac.uk/td/Transcribe_Bentham) > [accessed on 4 May 2023].

<sup>125</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>126</sup> Transcript of Box 10, fol. 199, BP, UCL Special Collections, accessed via Transcribe Bentham. 26 May 2023, URL: < [http://transcribe-bentham.ucl.ac.uk/td/Transcribe\\_Bentham](http://transcribe-bentham.ucl.ac.uk/td/Transcribe_Bentham) > [accessed on 4 May 2023].

<sup>127</sup> *Ibidem*.

Turkish, Arabic, or French instruction, Bentham suggested replacing Egypt's educational system with his. Britons could teach classes in «Botany», «Geology and Mineralogy», and other «useful» subjects that would raise children to be upright utilitarian naturalists<sup>128</sup>. These pupils would then advance science and Bentham's tenets within and beyond their homeland. Rummaging through past plans, Bentham even revived the panopticon. In fact, he volunteered «whatever the purposes or my labour wanted» for a jail<sup>129</sup>. Although the elderly Bentham lacked the constitution to become a watchman, his volunteering marked the seriousness of his offer.

At the same time, these modernizing measures exemplified Bentham's tendency to consider his programs as enhancements of existing local options. In devaluing local educational and penal systems in favor of his, Bentham missed how these impositions could be unwanted. Thus, if Bentham granted more authority to Ali than to Bolívar, he still did not trust the Pasha's abilities. For these reasons, Ali did not accept Bentham's proposal.

In an addendum of sorts to his earlier efforts, Bentham wrote a colonization proposal for Australia during his last months. Although not as thorough as his other projects, it contains plenty of his *idée fixes*. Similar to Junctioniana, a «Joint Stock-Company» would assume command of this venture<sup>130</sup>. In addition, Bentham circled back to his idealistic tenor and governance propositions for Central America. He wondered about implementing his own legislation as well as parts from the US Constitution to this «Utopia»<sup>131</sup>. Perhaps most importantly, Bentham upheld his longtime purpose of bettering people and places. Beyond «improvements» to the land through canals and other infrastructure, there would be profitable plots «kept in cultivation by the labour of the Settlers without Capital»<sup>132</sup>. These emigrants from humble backgrounds would transform themselves «from a state of indigence to a state of affluence» by tending to their own land<sup>133</sup>. As in his other plans, inhabitants would become the best versions of themselves through nature.

Edward Gibbon Wakefield, a leader in the colonization movement, alleged to have led Bentham to these positive views on antipodean settlement. Commenting on Bentham's reflections, Wakefield agreed that «the acquisition of waste land... should be a profitable employment of capital», crucial to the overall relationship between settlers and space<sup>134</sup>. Although signing only as «a Benthamite», it seems that Wakefield testified further to Bentham's belief in Australia in an 1834 letter: Bentham «declared his unqualified approbation» of colonization, «wrote in favour of

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<sup>128</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>130</sup> CAUSER, Tim, SCHOFIELD, Philip (edited by), *Panopticon versus New South Wales and other writings on Australia*, London, UCL Press, 2022, p. 403.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 423.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 415-416.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 407

<sup>134</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 435

it at some length», and «made a sketch» for a volume on the subject<sup>135</sup>. Thus, Bentham's impulse to exercise authority through categorization guided his agricultural and societal endeavors up to his death.

## 6. «The Globe is the field of Dominion»<sup>136</sup>: A Conclusion

As evidenced, the exchange of seeds suggested to Bentham that his ideals could too be transplanted abroad. Plants drew his attention to foreign lands; in turn, he resolved to export his thought to these areas. Details and locations changed, but the same target remained: to find a place where his precepts could regulate inhabitants' surroundings for peak efficiency. This fantasy for a spot calibrated according to his botanical, utilitarian, and universal principles constituted Bentham's utopianism yet also led to his failures.

Again and again, Bentham tried to marry his intellectual and agricultural ideas, intending to save «the never failing fruits of the most barren» landscapes<sup>137</sup>. Bentham tested his viewpoints at Krichev during the 1780s by modifying an agricultural community and maritime trade network. In that case and after, he privileged ecological order and human supervision as a means to bridge the local to the global. After the rejection of his jail, Bentham redirected himself to Central America. Bentham conceived a utilitarian utopia and isthmian canal that would encapsulate and disseminate his tenets. Upon Junctiana's collapse, Bentham, near death and still searching for success, proposed to construct a Suez canal and society to Pasha Muhammad Ali and then a colony in Australia, grasping to connect people and tame nature.

In trying to spread his vision, Bentham viewed his mind as an imperium. Referring to himself in the third person in 1786, Bentham boasted that «The Globe is the field of Dominion to which the author aspires»<sup>138</sup>. Nearly half a century later, he boasted his objectives in a strikingly similar tone, admitting that he was «the most ambitious of the ambitious. His empire – the empire he aspires to – extending to and comprehending the whole human race, in all places, – in all habitable places of the earth, at all future time»<sup>139</sup>. Notable for their bombastic register and removed point of view, these statements are even more remarkable because they reveal the continuity of Bentham's mentality. He sought to instruct Russians in the 1780s with the same assurance as he would Australians in 1831.

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<sup>135</sup> WAKEFIELD, Edward Gibbon, in *The Spectator*, 1 November 1834, 331, pp. 1038-1039, cit. in CAUSER, Tim, SCHOFIELD, Philip (edited by), *op. cit.*, p. xcix.

<sup>136</sup> BENTHAM, Jeremy, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 546.

<sup>137</sup> Transcript of Box 116, fol. 185, BP, UCL Special Collections, accessed via Transcribe Bentham. 26 May 2023, URL: < [http://transcribe-bentham.ucl.ac.uk/td/Transcribe\\_Bentham](http://transcribe-bentham.ucl.ac.uk/td/Transcribe_Bentham) > [accessed on 4 May 2023].

<sup>138</sup> BENTHAM, Jeremy, *The Works*, vol. II, cit., p. 546. For more on this passage, see ARMITAGE, David R., *op. cit.*

<sup>139</sup> BENTHAM, Jeremy, *The Works*, vol. XI, cit., p. 72.

Viewing Bentham's programs from this environmental perspective and based on non-British landscapes adds to our understanding of his life. His rhetoric of civilization and yearning for organization drew him to spaces that he presumed needed his mind. Thus, the philosopher's blueprints, if sketched on universal terms, bore the markings of his own idiosyncrasies and contradictions. Even if Bentham mastered the art of botanical collecting, he sowed the seeds of societies that could not grow.

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