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Wandering Paysanos: State and Subaltern Experience in Buenos Aires during the Rosas Era (review)

Marixa Lasso

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(Review)

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fortunately, because of Finnegan's narrow focus, and because she presents her bias at the very outset, her book at times reads like little more than a personal vendetta against the Good Shepherd Sisters.

University of Arkansas Little Rock

Moira Maguire

Wandering Paysanos: State and Subaltern Experience in Buenos Aires during the Rosas Era. By Ricardo D. Salvatore (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003. 544 pp. \$59.95).

This detailed and provocative analysis of the Rosas Era questions engrained assumptions about the nature of Caudillo politics in post-independence Argentina and, one might add, Latin America. The stated purpose of this book is to reevaluate the nature of subaltern politics during the Rosas Era. Building on the theoretical insights of peasant and subaltern studies, Ricardo Salvatore successfully challenges the notion that subalterns were passively subjected either to a harsh feudal-like system or to a totalitarian regime that manipulated and fooled them with a populist language.

Through a meticulous analysis of military and judicial records, Salvatore brings to the light different facets of the subaltern experience during the Rosas Era. Linking wandering to resistance, he presents a rich portrait of the various ways in which the subaltern used mobility to improve their labor and military situation. He proves that wages and mobility, not serf-like attachment to haciendas, characterized labor relations during the Rosas Era. According to Salvatore, peons' mobility in a labor scarce economy allowed them to bargain for better salaries and working conditions. Wandering helped the subaltern in other ways. Salvatore shows how soldiers deserted—or threatened to—to bargain for better military conditions. He also shows how peons sought to escape military demands and to redefine their relationship with the state by migrating, changing identity, and reinventing a new political and military persona.

Salvatore also invites the reader to take the political ideology of the Rosas regime seriously. Going beyond facile assessment of Rosas as a tyrannical seducer and manipulator of the masses, Salvatore analyzes the complex ways in which the Rosas state and the subaltern engaged each other. He replaces seduction and manipulation with hegemony and bargaining. There is more at stake than a mere change of terminology; imbedded in this new language is an understanding of politics and ideology as a two way process between the subaltern and the state. Through the analysis of laws, dress codes, and state ceremonies, he provides a nuanced analysis of politics, showing the connection between Rosas egalitarian rhetoric and the republican ideology of the Age of Revolution. He also shows that if, on the one hand, state laws and ceremonies served the state's didactic and hegemonic projects, on the other hand, subalterns became knowledgeable and invested in Rosas' republican egalitarian rhetoric, which they used to push for their rights and to emphasize the contractual nature of their relationship with the state.

In spite of its relevance for the entire Latin American field, this book is intended for the Argentinean historian. The non-Argentinean specialist might have wished for more background information about the pre-Rosas period, the definitions of terms such as the “Year of Anarchy,” and a brief explanation of the relevance of the battles and politicians mentioned throughout the book. More substantial is Salvatore’s lack of engagement with the historiography on nineteenth-century Latin America. The author seems more concerned about bringing the theoretical insights of the non-Argentinean scholarship to the analysis of Argentinean history, than in using his analysis of Argentinean history to expand our general understanding of nineteenth century politics. It is a pity. Given that he is analyzing one of the most important nineteenth-century “caudillos”, the reader might have welcomed an explicit invitation to rethink our view of caudillo politics in nineteenth-century Latin America. Indeed, Salvatore’s book suggests that it is time to reevaluate the nature of caudillo politics in the post-independence era and to link them to the Atlantic world of republican and revolutionary politics to which they belong.

Case Western Reserve University

Marixa Lasso

Citizen Hobo: How a Century of Homelessness Shaped America. By Todd DePastino (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003. xxv + 325 pp. Photographs, illustrations, notes, index. Cloth \$32.50/Paper \$20.00).

Citizen Hobo makes a significant contribution to our understanding of homelessness and domesticity in the century after the Civil War. In this rich cultural history, Todd DePastino explains how out of the Civil War and industrial capitalism an army of footloose hoboes constructed a countercultural movement grounded in migratory work, mutual aid, masculinity, and whiteness. Reformers, intellectuals, and elites feared the subversive effects of such workers. How these two groups interacted and understood each other (and themselves) drives the narrative of this story. From the Gilded Age to the present, DePastino argues, private and public repression of the “homeless” was sparked by cultural crisis around home, sexuality, and citizenship.

Citizen Hobo is organized into four parts. Parts one and two, the most detailed of the four, draws on hobo newspapers, song, and autobiographies as well as ethnographies, dime novels, and the mainstream and labor press to reconstruct the lives of Progressive Era hobos. Mostly young, single, and male, these hobos by necessity and choice hopped the rails in search of seasonal jobs and relief, using their wits, each other, and their labor as their primary means of survival. Many were skilled workers and included famous figures such as Jacob Riis, Ben Reitman, and Jack London. Women and nonwhites were by and large excluded from this hobo community. Hobos divided their time between the road and the urban “main stems” that offered cheap rooms and leisure activities. Whether in the jungles (hobo camps on the road) or in urban lodging districts, the lives of these migratory workers challenged mainstream “beliefs in private nuclear families, moderate domestic consumption, and steady work”(91).