
RESEÑAS DE LIBROS / BOOK REVIEWS

RICARDO D. SALVATORE: *Los lugares del saber. Contextos locales y redes transnacionales en la formación del conocimiento moderno*. Rosario: Beatriz Viterbo Editora, 2007.

The collection of essays, *Los lugares del saber. Contextos locales y redes transnacionales en la formación del conocimiento moderno* (*Places of Learning: Local Contexts and Transnational Networks in the Formation of Modern Knowledge*) edited by Ricardo D. Salvatore, is a praiseworthy attempt to break new ground in comparative work and move away from the dichotomies of center/periphery, metropolis/periphery that inevitably stress the uneven production of knowledge and scant contributions of the local. Another merit of this collection is that it covers the production of knowledge beyond what the editor terms the philosophical in order to concentrate on architecture, paleontology, demographics, and law, as well as on the connections established by diplomacy, translation, expeditions, and letters. In the introduction, “The Places of Knowledge,” Salvatore emphasizes the two-way transmission of knowledge, on the one hand, local knowledge that seeks international validation, and on the other hand, the use of this local knowledge by metropolitan intellectuals. Employing a soccer analogy, the editor argues that the local team seeks recognition for its achievements whilst the visitors try to win the trophy. However, he then finds this analogy too simplistic given the complexity and historical scope of the studies that range from Spain at the time of the Inquisition to popular culture in the era of globalization.

Generally speaking, the essays deal with particular encounters between the transnational and the local and they avoid sweeping conclusions and the restrictions of historical corsetry. As a result, the editor sacrifices a certain coherence, especially as his analysis embraces dissimilar phenomena—the ingredients of a scientific culture, forms that define “an intellectual figure,” currents of thought, ideas in translation, and intellectuals in a time of change. The guiding idea is the fluidity of knowledge and the modifications that occur as knowledge travels through different locations and cultures. Although the editor is anxious to get beyond the simplistic notion of a one-way street in the transmission of knowledge, he ends his introduction by asking why there are no great university libraries

such as Sterling Memorial (Yale), Widener (Harvard), or Firestone (Princeton) in Cuzco, Manaos, or Córdoba, a question that seems to me either naive or ironic. Nor does he mention another factor in the distribution of knowledge, namely the brain drain, accelerated by grants, that brings hundreds of researchers to the United States. The essays included in the book are less concerned with such broad questions and more concerned with particular fields: nineteenth-century paleontology, population studies, international law, medicine, a scientific exploration to Patagonia, and intellectual cooperation. These are worthy topics although often they are sleep-inducing thanks to the writing styles that tend towards the ultra academic.

As a literary critic I was most taken by the essay on sixteenth-century Spanish culture and the translations of the Inca Garcilaso, the Peruvian intellectual, and Jorge de Montemayor, the converso Portuguese poet. The Inca Garcilaso translated the “Love Dialogues” by the converso, León Hebreo, who wrote in Italian; Jorge de Montemayor translated the Catalan Poet, Ausiàs March. In Karina Galperin’s essay on the translations, she argues that at a moment of Spanish national consolidation, these two poets are able to challenge the hegemony of Castilian, infiltrating the mestizo and converso cultures. While this is an interesting conclusion, one wonders how many readers of the time were aware of this subtle subversion.

In an unusual approach to the sciences, Irina Podgorny describes how fossils were transmitted from Argentina in the nineteenth century to be classified by European museums without totally destroying the local mythologies surrounding them. Along with the contribution of Argentine fossils to scientific data, however, she stresses that there was also an economic interest so that “being up to date with scientific discussions and publications was a fundamental resource for discussing prices and seeking a place in which to negotiate the local findings.”

The essay that most directly confronts the supremacy claimed by the center is Grant Farred’s “Pensando en vernáculo” (Thinking in the Vernacular), which takes up the question of popular culture as a form of ideological resistance by focusing on four “vernacular intellectuals,” C.L.R. James, Stuart Hall, Muhammad Ali, and Bob Marley. Clearly, by including Muhammad Ali and Bob Marley in the group, he intends to challenge traditional thinking by representing them as “vernacular intellectuals” who either created popular culture or recognized in popular culture the challenge to tradition. The essay summarizes and describes Farred’s book *What’s My Name?* Without having read it, I find it difficult to assess the usefulness of the term “vernacular culture” which he describes in the case of Marley and Muhammad Ali as the deployment of their celebrity to represent their communities in the public sphere, while using an idiom foreign to the dominant culture. But the essay also reflects a problem with the collection as

a whole, since its historical scope does not include the present-day transformation of the relationship between cultures brought about through a combination of technology, the neo-liberal wrecking ball, and globalization. Instead of Bob Marley we have Bill Gates, reality T.V., and Twitter.

Although, *Los lugares del saber* is, in many respects, a praiseworthy attempt to think outside the box, the essays are too disparate to add up to a new paradigm.

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ARMANDO RAZO: *Social Foundations of Limited Dictatorship: Networks and Private Protection during Mexico's Early Industrialization*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008.

Porfirio Díaz was once thought to be the most powerful ruler in the Americas. In 1910, as the nation celebrated the centenary of its independence, Díaz surrendered his thirty-five year dictatorship to a scattered rebellion led by the wealthy, eccentric landowner Francisco I. Madero. Until that time Díaz had presided over an era of unprecedented peace and prosperity. We now know, of course, that he had never been omnipotent, but rather had brilliantly constructed a system that relied on occasional, selective coercion, the dictator's personal prestige, and a variety of arrangements with regional elites. This combination of factors resulted in an era of relative political tranquility and steady, if not spectacular, economic growth. Although in the long term, it appears, perhaps, that Díaz had built a house of cards, Armando Razo argues persuasively that Díaz's system, carefully put together by himself and his finance minister José Yves Limantour, was the foundation of the country's impressive economic growth. Razo maintains that limited dictatorship provided the "credible commitment" that facilitated the expansion of the economy.

Razo seeks to explain why dictatorships produce economic growth when the "extant theory of institutions and growth asserts that formal political institutions as found in advanced democracies provide the necessary incentives for economic growth." The fact that since the 1960s many so-called authoritarian regimes, such as the East Asian Tigers, generated rapid expansion has undermined this notion and poses the central question: what explains growth and development in nondemocratic settings? According to Razo, we need to explain first why private actors trust their governments in the absence of democratic constraint