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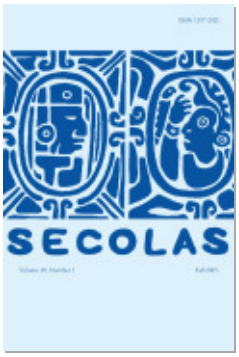
Wandering Paysanos: State Order and Subaltern Experience in Buenos Aires During the Rosas Era by Ricardo D. Salvatore (review)



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The Latin Americanist, Volume 49, Number 1, Fall 2005, pp. 192-194 (Review)

Published by The University of North Carolina Press

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***Wandering Paysanos: State Order and Subaltern Experience in Buenos Aires During the Rosas Era.* By Ricardo D. Salvatore. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003, p. 523, $59.95.**

In *Wandering Paysanos*, Ricardo Salvatore has given us an entirely new way to understand the Rosas Era (1829–1852) in Argentine history. Most previous interpretations of this period focused on the caudillo nature of Rosas's rule over Buenos Aires and the other Argentine provinces. Indeed, Rosas himself is one of the prime examples of nineteenth-century *caudillismo* in most textbooks. Salvatore focuses instead on the deliberate expansion of the provincial state under Rosas and its collision with a class of rural, male, mobile *peones* and peasants who called themselves "*paysanos*." In the process he touches several major areas of social life in the post-independence Buenos Aires province: life in and around the ranches and slaughter houses, life in the courthouses and prisons, life (and death) in the barracks and on the battlefields of wartime. Salvatore, a Professor of Modern History at the *Universidad Torcuato de Tella* in Buenos Aires, is extremely careful to point out that the collision between freedom-seeking paysanos and order-seeking state authorities produced complex results.

Salvatore sees the *Rosista* regime primarily as an experiment in state building. The opening chapters of the book describe the pampa of Buenos Aires province as a contested terrain of fragmented small-holdings and unpatrolled borders. It was a region not easily controlled by the state (even a state as obsessed with restoring order to the countryside as the Rosista state). Indeed, given the dynamic expansion of the province's export economy in the era and the constant demand for agricultural labor and military conscripts, the mobile paysanos often found themselves in positions of strength relative to the ranch owners and village *vecinos* or "neighbors" who dominated local politics. According to Salvatore, this situation complicated the implementation of Rosas's personal vision of order and required the deployment of a vast array of state institutions to bring the paysanos under control—from the federalist armies and militias to the offices of the local judges and magistrates. This is what Salvatore means by state order.

In its wide ranging attempt to bring the countryside under its control, the Rosista regime came directly into contact with the paysanos. In many cases these interactions produced documentation in the form of *filiaciones* (records) and *clasificaciones* (classifications). Salvatore used these state-generated investigation files

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(541 of them to be exact) as the evidenciary backbone of his book, along with more traditional reports issued by rural judges and military officers. Building on James C. Scott's work on peasant-state relations in Southeast Asia, he calls his method of reading these incredibly rich but problematic documents a "double interrogation," which means looking at them from both the state's and the paysanos' perspectives. When he looked at these files from the perspective of the state, he found an intense desire (bordering on obsession) with discipline and order. State agents involved in the "classification" of wayward paysanos recorded everything about them in these files, including even minute details about their clothing (the subject of one of the book's many fascinating chapters). In this way, the agents of the Rosista state turned the country peons and itinerant peasants into "subaltern" subjects, subjects onto whom the state would attempt to project its vision of order.

But the state was not the only factor present in these primary sources. Equally important to Salvatore is the way the paysanos responded to the Rosista state's attempts to impose order and "talked back" to the state, even from positions of vulnerability and weakness. When he "interrogated" the investigation files from the paysano perspective, Salvatore found that the paysanos, like other groups studied from the "subalternist perspective," found myriad ways to negotiate with and contest the rulings of the agents of the state. One way they did so was by appropriating Rosismo's "radical egalitarian" language, which was a product of the democratizing political ethos of a regime that granted universal male suffrage and required universal male enlistment in the federalist militia. Other ways the paysanos, as subaltern subjects, managed to modify and moderate the state's disciplinary project were by exploiting the state's desperate need for their labor, and by recognizing their crucial role in defending the federalist homeland. Service in the militia, in particular, represented a path to paysano dignity and citizenship that would-be provincial state builders simply could not get around in their dealings with them. By restoring this aspect of subaltern "agency" to the history of Rosismo, Salvatore has challenged the traditional caudillismo school of interpretation.

One area I felt was lacking in Salvatore's study of the Rosas Era was a proper accounting of the role of paysano masculinity in the articulation of the rights and responsibilities that went along with republican citizenship. I write this with the knowledge that Salvatore himself makes some suggestive comments in the area, even commenting in an endnote about the "blending of egalitari-

anism and machismo" (p. 470). In my view, this is an area that needs further examination, particularly given the intertwining of the processes of democratization and militarization (and, by extension, masculinization) evident in Salvatore's otherwise brilliant exposition.

In closing, I should say that, while *Wandering Paysanos* is destined to change the way specialists in nineteenth-century Argentine and Spanish American history think about the Rosas Era and the broader problems of caudillismo and peasant politics, it is definitely not an easy read. The book is so richly documented and theoretically sophisticated that it simply would not work in an undergraduate course. Instructors of graduate seminars may want to consider assigning individual chapters or the book's introduction, which will expose their students to several well-explained layers of critical theory and problems of methodology. Specialists need to give this book the serious consideration it deserves.

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***Che's Chevrolet, Fidel's Oldsmobile: On the Road in Cuba.* By Richard Schweid, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004, p.256, $27.50.**

Transportation in Cuba seems an eternal theme, at least since the 1959 Revolution that changed life on the island in countless ways. Much of the visible U.S. presence vanished after ties with the United States were broken in 1960. But even today, vintage American cars are a reminder of days when the U.S. held sway in Havana and other cities and are surely a testament to Cuban ingenuity in keeping them running.

Richard Schweid's book captures this anomaly, giving an historical overview of motor vehicles in Cuba. His book takes readers on a road trip mentioning places, events, and personages along the way, and while the book will be of interest to academics who work on Cuba it will also appeal to car buffs of all persuasions. Schweid frames his car talk within the dismal state of public transport in contemporary Cuba—long waits for overcrowded buses under trying conditions, and a reliance on bicycles, motorcycles, scooters, and carts of every description pulled by donkeys, horses—whatever means possible. In sum, cars—especially the