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Sociabilidad en Buenos Aires: Hombres, honor y cafes,
1862-1910 (review)

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another was determined by personal experience and not ideological frameworks. Thus, weak party loyalty also facilitated conflicts insofar as they could be detonated at any time. Whether conflicts were caused by systemic issues or occasioned by personal grievances, the consequences were similarly dangerous for social and political stability. Finally, in exploring the nexus between leaders and followers, de la Fuente notes that party inconsistency was likelier among urban elites, while rural caudillos maintained their clientelistic affiliations from within their own circles.

A second important contribution by de la Fuente rests on his analysis of the limitations that James C. Scott's model offers in explaining mechanisms for constructing states and national identities. The illiteracy in La Rioja was widespread, as it was for much of Latin America. In addition to the traditional historical data, de la Fuente mined rich records of the oral culture of riojanos who had lived during this period and related their stories as late as the 1920s. From such sources, it is clear that gauchos owed their sense of allegiance to a their version of the state and to their own experiences rather than to the printed media, as was typical of both the educated masses and the elites emphasized by Scott. Songs, folk tales and other popular forms of cultural transmission prolonged rural dwellers' resilience and strengthened their allegiance and sense of identity. In sum, de la Fuente addresses the question that has long been unasked among the seemingly endless consumers of Scott's basic principles: how does one explain identity among constituents of settings in which education, formal institutions and printed media were largely absent?

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Sociabilidad en Buenos Aires: Hombres, honor y cafés, 1862-1910. By Sandra Gayol. Buenos Aires: Ediciones del Signo, 2000. Pp. 284. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. No price.

Claims to Parisian status abound all over the world. Havana was often called the "Paris of the Caribbean;" Guatemala City, that of Central America; Beirut, that of the Middle East; Bangkok, that of East Asia; and proud, or Francophile, Argentines have long referred to their capital as the "Paris of the South." A dispassionate observer, however, would probably agree, at least in physical appearance, that the last claim holds the most water. The temperate climate is similar, so are the boulevards and architectural styles, the store facades, even the sidewalk tiles. Another common trait—and this one is both physical and cultural—is the omnipresent café. While studies of Paris's cafés seem as numerous as the coffee bars themselves, they are much less common in the *París austral*.

The book under review here, originally, and perhaps appropriately—a Parisian dissertation, is not the first on these ubiquitous porteño institutions. But it is the most scholarly and methodologically ambitious. Relying on police daily reports for a downtown district and for the Italian neighborhood of La Boca, and on summaries of trial verdicts, the author constructed a database with information on 1,114 inci-

dents and over 3,000 individuals. With this and other sources, she examines the location of the cafés within the city; municipal regulations and the discourses of social control; street life; clothing as social identifier; the social composition of owners, employees, and habitués; gambling and amusements; and the concept of honor, both as sexual politics and moral code.

By the outbreak of World War I, there were over one thousand cafés in the city. They could be found in all neighborhoods but concentrated in the central districts. The book includes two maps with their locations, but fails to explain how geography impacted the nature of the establishments. Anxieties about public order led local authorities to monitor potentially disruptive activities: alcoholic consumption, gambling, and prostitution. Gayol also includes a section on the “healthy” forms of public recreation promoted by city officials (picnics and promenades in parks, theater, a zoological garden). The streets of what by 1900 had become one of the most cosmopolitan metropolises in the world provided a more spontaneous and dynamic form of urban theater. And, according to the author, bars and cafés provided the principal sites of sociability (I imagine other than workplaces and homes). One indeed would be hard pressed to imagine a more inclusive type in certain respects. The clientele included natives and immigrants of all nationalities. In terms of class, it ranged from the oligarchy to the criminal underclass. In terms of gender, women appear sporadically but bars and cafés remained bastions of male sociability during the period. In terms of age, three-quarters of the clientele were between 20 and 40 years old. And in terms of liquids, wine and gin flowed more abundantly than beer.

The basis of this book’s originality (its sources and methodology) also poses a conceptual challenge. Police and judicial reports deal with fights and disorder in the cafés, not with quotidian realities. This surely produces a distorted, or at least partial, view of the topics discussed in the book. It will privilege boisterous establishments over quiet ones, unruly patrons over the mild-mannered clientele, the young and single over the middle-aged and married, inebriation over the consumption of non-alcoholic beverages, gambling over less conflictual diversions, and it privileges a particularly aggressive version of masculine “honor.” But the author is sensitive to some of the possible biases of the sources and makes an effort to balance them with other documents or alternative interpretations. Indeed, the Achilles’ heel of the book is not the abuse of the database mentioned above but its failure to exploit it fully, to use it more systematically. In the sections that make fuller use of this heuristic device, the author uncovers interesting patterns with perspicacity and imagination. In the others, the narrative becomes more descriptive than analytical (or even interpretive) and the attempt to capture the experiences of common folks at times degenerates into a string of vignettes whose purpose seems more ornamental than illuminating.

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