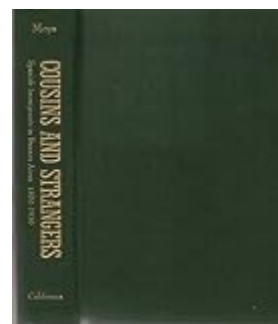


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in the Humanities & Social Sciences



José C. Moya. *Cousins and Strangers: Spanish Immigrants in Buenos Aires, 1850-1939.* Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1998. xviii + 567 pp. \$29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-520-21526-9; \$55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-520-07229-9.



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Published on H-Urban (November, 1998)

Dear Uncle, Remember Me?

Published with help from a Program for Cultural Cooperation between Spain's Ministry of Culture and United States' universities, José Moya's *Cousins and Strangers* fortunately reflects the backers' concerns admirably: it is liberally sprinkled with comparisons to U.S. immigration experiences and is suitably sympathetic towards the Spanish immigrants in Buenos Aires (although the impression one gets on reading the book is that they are more often seen by the author as emigrants from Spain). Sponsorship from the Argentine Ministry of Culture might have resulted in a more positive light being thrown on the receiving milieu. However, that said, the book is a remarkable testimony to the benefits to be gained from blue skies research and the grant support so vital in sustaining it. A five year publishing delay, constant revisions and additions and a sigh-of-relief introduction indicate the intellectual battle necessary to come to grips with the immigration issue. It is noteworthy that Dr. Moya spent fifteen years working in factories before finding his academic Holy Grail and I personally feel that only that kind of real world experience equips one to tackle this most controversial, misunderstood, and misused of fields, often involving genetic and social en-

gineering and naked ambition.

In the true spirit of social history research he sets out to map the juxtaposition of the global and the local which gave rise to the social phenomenon under investigation: mass emigration from Spain. Five global revolutions and the timing of their arrival helped create the environment for mass emigration in his chosen period of study (1850-1930) but no single one can claim full credit. This would seem to leave open the possibility of other reasons explaining both prior and subsequent emigration. Moya caters to the fascination, in the so-called post-modern era, with meeting-grounds, border lands, and hybridity by choosing as the focus of attention that least nationalistic of European countries, Spain, and the least Argentine city in Argentina, Buenos Aires. Nicholas Shumway has imaginatively demonstrated the cultural gulf between the port city and the rest of the country, a factor alluded to by Moya but played down due to the perceived preeminence of the capital.[1] It is clear that the author is a fan of Buenos Aires as it has been created, rather than of Argentina as a whole; of the imagined nation of Spain rather than the solid, regionalist reality;

of the hybrid rather than the national; of the transient rather than the communal; of the uncertain rather than the identifiable; and of change rather than continuity. He comes across as very comfortable with nineteenth-century liberal ideas of capitalism as dynamism, agricultural societies as static and seigniorial and freedom of movement as positive, bringing dynamic types to change a system (p. 24-25).

It is necessary to understand his viewpoint to be able to relate the author to his work and to fix his research firmly within the neo-liberal camp. I got the impression that I was being sold the idea of globalisation and the whole set of 1990s values which go with that. For example, there are uncomfortable occasions in the book when one senses the author is trying desperately to include a reference to women (such as their involvement in immigrant institutions), but realizes that the result is weak and therefore ridicules the macho culture of nineteenth-century immigrants for excluding women. It is the unspoken assumptions that a vastly expanded work force and population is automatically beneficial for the receiving society and that people have an unassailable right to freedom of international movement which set the philosophical tone of the book. The mere fact that immigration and national identity are such currently hot topics of academic research indicates an unease with these assumptions. The recent expulsion of migrant workers from Indonesia due to the Asian economic crisis and the German position towards their estimated 4.5 million guest workers from Turkey show the dangerous incomprehension of metropolitan political correctness. As the author has set out to produce a scientifically pure work free from the biases of qualitative research and opinionated propaganda, it NIGGLES that the traces of transiently fashionable ideology intrude.

Having dispensed with my rather esoteric criticism, I would openly acknowledge my admiration for the quantitative research undertaken. Carried out in both Spain and Buenos Aires and using largely official records in Spain and an interesting variety of archival material from Argentina, especially their excellent official statistics, it is a tribute to the author's personal tenacity as a historian and keyboard competence. His recurrent disparaging of qualitative research and oral history may be related to his reckless insistence on group interviews presumably with alcohol within easy reach! My own oral history research in Venezuela taught me that individual, unfuelled interviews work best. His approach to emigration as a regional and local rather than national affair would seem obvious with hindsight but it shows the paucity of good

large-scale research into emigration. Receiving countries have been generally those capable of sponsoring research and they have been more concerned with the migrants as immigrants and their attempts at assimilation. However, the awareness that the Welsh in Patagonia were from (certain parts of) North Wales, and wrestling with the effects of modernization, had set precedents.

Dealing with migrants as both emigrants and immigrants is a growing trend in the literature and I found the Spanish side of the equation enthralling, the research into local customs and practices hugely enlightening and the family connections across the Atlantic fascinating. I was left wanting a more detailed study of the family aspect, especially as the demonstration of the revitalization of long-dormant contacts with rich relatives was brilliantly done (p. 71). In this approach one divines the influence of the author's "mentor," Samuel Baily, who had carried out investigations previously on family correspondence with Italians in Argentina.[2] However, in the book under review, apart from some interesting family trees we have to make do with short, superficial vignettes of certain migrants, a technique which was not to my taste. On the other hand, the highlighting of the lesbian lovers who ran away from rural Spain to Buenos Aires gives an insight into the personal nature of emigration and encourages a consideration of emigration as the result of societal alienation at home. The question as to why some family members emigrate and siblings do not is not addressed in the book; we have a wonderful explanation as to how emigration spreads like a fever but nothing as to why some within a family are susceptible to contagion and others are not. The author has based his study on "comparative behavioural patterns" (p. 3) and these can take us so far, but it is my belief that the field of psychiatry has much to tell us about emigration (as the author hints at on p. 2 with references to escapism and otherness and their relevance to Western scholars' research targets), especially as regards the fight or flight dilemma. Family dynamics, defense mechanisms, the attempted recreation of the birth family environment in adulthood, and the transference of parental characteristics to the state or nation coupled with subsequent feelings of rejection when disappointed would all have an effect on individual action regardless of chains (or webs and networks) of contacts or global phenomena. The importance of draft dodging as a superficially given reason for emigration (p. 6) can be seen to reflect that alienation, but I agree with the author that short-term economic reasons are insufficient to explain emigration. For a psychiatrist, the desire for money is only masking deeply personal, unconscious

and well-defended real reasons. I think it is important to note the preeminence of peripheral regions and linguistic “minorities” in emigration waves and consider the exclusion and alienation felt by high achieving personalities in the context of comparative disadvantage and competition. The vehement opposition of many immigrants and their descendants worldwide to the competition caused by further waves of migrants is illustrative in that respect.

Dr. Moya shows, and my own research on Spanish and Canarian immigration in Venezuela confirms, that the poorest and most absolutely disadvantaged are not the emigrant type. Unfortunately, devising typologies of migrants (or anyone else for that matter), although attempted in the past even by the United Nations, is not acceptable practice in our politically correct days. The cynical would claim that is to avoid people in host societies, themselves (descendants of) immigrants, from having to confront some possibly unpleasant findings. Certainly the author avoids typologies, but his agreement with the nineteenth-century liberal view that emigrants take a certain entrepreneurial fire with them is palpable. This period of mass European emigration stimulated by modernizing revolutions by allowing so many discontented people to leave actually prevented the social revolution which we really needed to enable us to control the process of modernization and make it work in our favour. On the other hand the fragmented milieu in America and the individualism of many who went also prevented the now divided and weakened masses from controlling the process of modernization which spread to that side of the Atlantic. There are vivid descriptions in this book of the attempt by Anarchists to unite across the Ocean to strengthen their hand, but they were beaten by the logistics. Intra-European migrations at the same time (Irish and Lithuanians to the chemical industry of North-West England for example) allowed the Industrial Revolution its fix of cheap, pliable labour, and we are still living with the disastrous results today.

On the other side of the Atlantic, I felt his research was less successful. Although I found the sections on urban development in Buenos Aires and the comparisons made with other immigrant cities very interesting, and well supported by the relevant tables and plans, I felt there was not enough consideration of the effect on the creoles. Vivid descriptions of the Buenos Aires waterfront and the antagonism of the locals were not directly developed upon. The human aspects of the immigration experience were submerged under a welter of statistics on population clusters; as a result, the traumas suffered

by the creole population were not allowed to surface. Creoles were faced with what amounted to loudly announced “ethnic cleansing” by the Europeanising liberal elite in the name of civilization and modernization. In addition they experienced the arrival of foreigners who were seen as more desired citizens than themselves by their own government which only a few years previously had exhorted them to slaughter the Spaniards for the benefit of their own creole nation.

In his Acknowledgments, Dr. Moya points out that he is against “the airy academic notion that reality and common sense are ‘bourgeois inventions’” (p. xvii-xviii). This must surely have told him that the creoles knew exactly what they were up against yet were powerless to prevent it. The impact of this realization must have been horrendous yet there is no expression of sympathy for their plight. Likewise, there is no attention to what must be the central question in studies of (especially contested) immigration, involving the question of when an immigrant becomes a creole. Moya does show the search for Argentine national identity, by the Generation of 1910, as a form of hispanophilia aimed towards the original conquerors and pre-independence colonists and their Hapsburg society (“cousins”) while the mass immigrants from Spain were treated with disdain and contempt (“strangers”). Within this context lies the question of the transition from immigrant to creole but no attempt is made to answer it. >From my own research it would appear that immigrants are prepared to do jobs that they would never dream of doing in their own society and that are beneath the dignity of creoles, hinting that a clear distinction exists but that definition is difficult and much more than simply linguistic or racial. The work brilliantly traces the influence of Old World modernization but then transfers that modernization along with the flora and fauna to the New World to justify the immigration.

There is little serious attempt at an appreciation of creole culture and absolutely no admission of their right to live unmolested by millions of Europeans looking for an easy way out of having to change their own society. As a self-confessed lover of Buenos Aires the huge cosmopolitan city rather than of Buenos Aires the small, idiosyncratic creole “village,” the author once again allows bias to intrude, implicitly justifying ethnic cleansing in the name of modernization. European emigration carried with it an enormous opportunity cost: the price has been to lose the chance to control our destiny and rationalize our society. We are at the mercy of forces we do not understand and cannot control so we resort to religion,

drugs and tourism to escape from having to confront reality in the form of Governments and political classes ever more antagonistic and violent in defense of their own position. This opportunity cost applies to both sides of the Atlantic as the creole populations were denied the chance to control and rationalize their own societies. The resulting turmoil and mayhem, our alienation and lack of identity, have been the direct result of mass emigration and immigration. Perhaps for that reason serious studies are so thin on the ground that political correctness constrains us from criticizing migratory movements and "asylum-seeking."

With so-called democracy undergoing a crisis of legitimacy due to the construction of the political class and the loss of control over our lives, the theory of divide and rule takes the form of plural societies backed up by an antagonistic state giving us major quotidian problems to keep us occupied and therefore unable to attack its position. Economic stability and social chaos will combine to maintain the status quo of position and privilege. I agree wholeheartedly with the author's linking of global revolutions with local decisions to migrate but would urge that the return journey be made: we must study the effect of decisions to emigrate on the global revolutions that have (or would have) shaped our present.

Nothing I have said in this review should be seen to detract from the value of the work for the field of international migration studies as it stands. I have criticized the work philosophically for the perceived intrusion of personal bias, but the quantitative research is marvelous

and well tabulated. A bit dense and sometimes contradictory for light reading, the qualitative research does not stand up as well, a fact the author recognizes but blames on qualitative research per se. Short vignettes of actual emigrants often seem out of place and unconnected, but certain of them could have been developed to advantage. Typographical errors are rare in the body of the text and the odd occurrence jars all the more as a result. I found two such errors in the Appendix, but the Notes section was edited less thoroughly, especially at the beginning. A long book, it could actually have been much longer were it to include everything I would like to have found. Aimed at a certain period of mass emigration, it explains the process brilliantly. I do not feel that basic questions regarding personal decisions to emigrate were taken up nor was the problem for immigration studies of when and how an immigrant becomes a creole. He aims to put his research in the context of global revolutions: I feel those global revolutions should then be put into context themselves and the return journey.

Notes

[1]. Nicholas Shumway, *The Invention of Argentina*. London: University of California Press, 1991.

[2]. Samuel Bailey and Ramella, F., *One Family, Two Worlds*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988.

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Citation: Michael Derham. Review of Moya, Jos#233 C., *Cousins and Strangers: Spanish Immigrants in Buenos Aires, 1850-1939*. H-Urban, H-Net Reviews. November, 1998.

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