

*Inmigración y redes sociales en la Argentina moderna*. Edited by MARÍA BJERG and HERNÁN OTERO. Buenos Aires: Graffit SRL, 1995. Graphs. Bibliography. 241 pp. Paper.

The editors of this impressive collection of essays put forth a compelling argument in favor of using microhistories to analyze the complex history of Argentine immigration. As the title suggests, all 12 of the essays deal with aspects of social networks as major determinants in the lives of individuals who moved from Europe to Argentina during the late nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth century. In using this approach, the authors challenge the traditional structuralists, such as Gino Germani, who emphasize the rapid integration of Europeans into the Argentine body and use broad-based census and demographic data for evidence. In contrast, these scholars present a far more complex and diverse pattern of immigrant behavior. For them, the classic picture of acculturation and assimilation does not ring true.

Building on the pioneer studies of Italian immigration by Samuel Baily and Fernando Devoto, the scholars included in this work turn to new sources of information about the immigrant population. They do not identify Argentina's diverse immigrant groups by simple categories, such as skilled or unskilled labor, place of origin, or gender. Instead, they replace work, origin, and family with records indicating reasons for emigrating, marriage patterns, membership in ethnic societies, degrees of social mobility, and participation in politics.

From their microanalysis of small samples of immigrant groups, the authors reveal much about the strategies used by immigrants as actors, not as passive participants. In particular, they show how all immigrant groups used ethnic organizations, kinship relationships, and immigration agents to move from Europe to Argentina. To this are added patterns of social mobility, including marriage, that give a far richer and more detailed image of immigrant behavior. Not only did Italian, Spanish, and Danish groups have decidedly different economic and social patterns, for example, but patterns of gender, generations, and social mobility differed widely within each of these groups. As might be expected, the sum of the work adds up to more than the whole presented previously by the structuralists.

Readers of these well-thought-out and well-written essays will appreciate the rich texture of Argentine immigration. Between 1880 and 1920, individuals in clearly different immigrant groups used their unique social networks to obtain and maintain their identities. Rather than create the Argentina of Germani, who argues that immigrants were quickly absorbed into an Argentine identity, these essays effectively argue that no such pattern of integration occurred. Immigrants' social networks, more than anything, determined demographic swings in Argentina.

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