

Presentation Volume 40, Issue 158



Presentation Volume 40, Issue 158. By Nemer E. Narchi This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License [Licence Creative Commons Atribución-NoComercial 4.0 International](#).

Presentation

Issue 158 of *Relaciones Estudios de Historia y Sociedad* presents an interesting collection of articles that, while mainly historical and geographical in nature, manage to interweave political economy, landscape analysis, studies of the State and society and the role of gender. This mixture of topics offers readers a broad spectrum of opinions and fields that, I trust, they will feel free to peruse as they see fit, and regarding which they can posit new questions.

In the first article, “The Medieval in the Conquest: the problem of indigenous vassalage”, German Luna Santiago presents a critical analysis that opens debate with perspectives that sustain that the chronicles of the Spanish Conquest are instruments of little use in reconstructing history, a view that emerges from the excessive rhetorical load that has been employed to describe vassalage. Luna Santiago explains that while a dense layer of rhetoric does, indeed, cloud those chronicles’ expositions on vassalage, a political context also exists, one that allows us to perceive the *raison d’être* of those documents. The author concludes that although chronicles of subjection bear this heavy rhetorical load, they offer a counterpoint to the *Historia verdadera* by Bernal Díaz del Castillo, who emphasized the true, voluntary character of those new vassals whose objective was to bring the power of the Mexicas to an end. The paradoxical though true richness of the article lies in the fact that both visions are objective according to the specific context supporting each one.

“The Department of the Treasury and the modernization of statistics, 1876-1910”, by Luz María Uhthoff López, examines the period in which the Mexican State found it necessary to technify the Department of the Treasury’s evaluating apparatus and adopted statistics as a means of comparing the nation’s economic growth to that of other countries. The text underscores the urgent need for both technical reform and immense amounts of political lobbying towards promoting the reform. In her conclusions, Uhthoff López refers to an aspect that was just as valid in the late 20th century as it is today; namely, that despite their supposed objectivity, statistics applied to simplify the tasks and plans of States are subject to political and personal interests, ideologies and a specific *zeitgeist* that configures the numbers and retransforms them in discourse.

Graciela Flores Flores presents a spatial reading of the exercise of justice in mid-19th century Mexico City. In her essay, “The judicial city and the criminal city: a statistical-cartographic approach to the administration of justice (Mexico City, 1824-1846)”, she reveals how much of

the city's juridical apparatus rested upon the shoulders of the judges and tribunals "of letters"; that is, the officials and courts that heard cases of crimes ranging from administrative failures to serious and malicious crimes. The cases brought before those judges emerged primarily from the central areas of the city that, logically, were the most populous and economically buoyant ones. Not surprisingly, then, these were also the zones where the largest number of crimes were committed.

The article "Supplications to the King by aspirants to positions as *subdelegados* in Yucatán, 1796-1818" is an interesting text that analyzes the strategies adopted by men who aspired to obtain positions as *subdelegados*. Based on archival research, Laura Olivia Machuca Gallegos brings to light the cases of 27 aspirants to this political office that give *prima facie* evidence of the exaggerated forms of imploration and excessive exaltation of their merits that those aspirants presented. It is amusing to see, however, that their flowery supplications did not exempt aspirants from the whole series of tortuous bureaucratic procedures -like all such procedures with which I am familiar- that were as unavoidable as they were well-established. We can, or perhaps should, see those implorations as a clear mirror of that society and its actors, including local elites, for as the document reveals they were the individuals who, in the end, were able to negotiate those appointments by making the process of selecting *subdelegados* one of meat and bone and not obedience to a totalitarian mandate.

Ernesto Priani Saisó's article, "Codification and good practices. A critique of the delimitation of Digital Humanities in Latin America", analyzes the development of Digital Humanities in Latin America. While examining this practice, Priani Saisó realized that the strategies involved privilege the general over the specific and disdain regional models in favor of one monolithic model of the production of Digital Humanities. As has occurred in other academic fields, and with the importation of models in general, this entails dependence, both technological and academic on, above all, the global north; a dependence that affects more the realization of central projects than the creation or strengthening of research communities under new schemes. This contribution is relevant to, and valuable for, not only the Digital Humanities, but the entire spectrum of the technological restructuring of academics in the broader sense.

The vision that Raquel Concepción Sánchez Rosas and Othón Baños Ramírez offer in "The urban landscape of small cities. The central square of Hunucmá, Yucatán" is well-known in the field of urban geography, but the specificities of their case study add a special component: the fact that the town squares of small cities have a social life that may be less diverse, but is more fundamental for residents. In addition to analyzing the tangible and intangible components that give life to the town square during both daily life and in times of significant events, the authors develop an interesting geographic analysis that takes into account the changes and evolution of the surrounding urban features as the central axis whence they propose to salvage the landscape and identity.

Paula Ermila Rivasplata Varillas' "The role of doormen and doorwomen in two hospitals in Seville during Castille's *Ancién Régime*", examines the role that those actors played in controlling access to hospitals, and how that function generated a small domain of power, though one

accompanied by great responsibilities; that is, to protect the institution's good name and the honor of the women hospitalized therein. Especially interesting is the way in which the study breaks down the role of gender and the division of labor inside hospitals in the 16th to 18th centuries.

The study that Rodolfo Ramírez Rodríguez presents on Manuel Payno, a writer and Secretary of the Treasury during an effervescent period of railway concessions, in the article "Manuel Payno and his polemical participation in concessions by *Ferrocarril Mexicano*". reveals the character of the man behind the functionary by analyzing his postures that begin with a primordial interest in supporting the construction of the Mexico-Veracruz train but end with a reconversion that led him to constantly criticize and question that very same project. Upon reading this text, it is easy to detect the ambitions, tensions and contradictions suffered by Payno and a good number of public servants worldwide that, as in this case, interwove their personal goals with public finances and the reactivation of megaprojects, comparable in scale to the railway construction of that epoch.

In analyzing the document "The *Fourth Pastoral Letter* of Francisco Orozco and Jiménez: a detonator of the persecution of the Catholic Clergy in Jalisco (1917-1918)", Juan González Morfín links the promulgation of the 1917 Constitution and the subsequent protests of some Mexican bishops in exile to the pastoral letter penned by the then Archbishop of Guadalajara, Francisco Orozco and Jiménez, which sharply criticized certain aspects of the nation's new *Carta Magna*. González Morfín points out that it was the publication, first, of the opinions of exiled bishops and, second, of the pastoral letter, that triggered the closings of temples and the persecution of the bishop, though it is up to the reader to decide whether Orozco and Jiménez was, in reality, one of the fiercest representatives of intransigency towards religious freedom.

To conclude, we present four book reviews that illustrate the complexity and diversity of the social sciences. The review of the book *Por allí pasó Rondé. Representaciones europeas del siglo XIX*, by José Arturo Aguilar Ochoa, speaks of Chantal Cramaussel's work on the traveling artist Philippe Rondé on a plane that the reviewer defines as personal and familiar, thanks to its thorough examination of the data. The second review, by Ana E. Cervera Molina, evaluates *Neoliberalismo: treinta años de migración en América Latina, México y Michoacán*. Here, the reviewer shows how Ricardo Domínguez' piece offers readers an accessible version of the Mexican government's role in, and posture towards, migration and migrants affected, no doubt, by a long neoliberal administration. Víctor M. González Esparza, in turn, presents his impressions of the book *El virrey y el capellán. Revilla Gigedo, Alzate y el censo de 1790*, by Antonio Saborit. After a detailed profile of the author, Saborit rescues a history of power that emerges from the tensions and discussions between Vice-regal dogma and the critical spirit of Alzate's astute mind. Finally, the edited volume by Tomás Pérez Viejo and Pablo Yankelevich, *Raza y política en Hispanoamérica*, is analyzed by Elizabeth Martínez Buenabad, who offers a breakdown by author and chapter that concludes, in concert with the coordinators, with a commentary on how race has been treated as a fundamental variable for justifying the obstacles that the construction of mestizo nations in Spanish-speaking America confronts.

Our hope is that this miscellanea, together with others that will surely follow, will, first, serve to celebrate the diversity of topics and points of view present in the social sciences and humanities and, second, will invite *Relaciones'* audience to ponder this medley of fields and disciplines as an encounter that should give rise to new paradigms in transdisciplinary research. There is much to do before disembarking, but with a fixed route in sight -the transdisciplinary approach- the port of arrival is clear.

Nemer E. Narchi