J. Lat. Amer. Stud. **43** (2011). doi:10.1017/S0022216X11000617

Adriana Novoa and Alex Levine, *From Man to Ape: Darwinism in Argentina, 1870–1920* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp. xi + 281, $49.00; £31.50, pb.

Darwinism was one of the most influential systems of thought during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In Latin America, it was embedded into politics and used to legitimise the most diverse social theories and policies. *From Man to Ape*, a real goldmine of details and overlooked facts, is an outstanding book on the reception, rise and crisis of Darwinism in Argentina at the turn of the twentieth century. More generally, it also constitutes a model for the study of the reception of any system of ideas or beliefs, particularly in 'peripheral areas'. *From Man to Ape* is a major achievement in the field of intellectual history, especially in the subfield defined by the transnational circulation of ideas.

Of all the merits of this complex and rich book, however, I would like to point to three issues that I consider particularly relevant. First, Novoa and Levine demonstrate that the implantation of a given system of ideas does not take place in a vacuum, but in 'fertile terrains' defined by pre-existing intellectual traditions and ideas that shape its reception. For instance, the authors analyse the superimposition of Darwinism onto an already existing field of evolutionist ideas of French origin.

Second, *From Man to Ape* carefully analyses the 'creative reception' of Darwinism in Argentina. The reception of ideas is never a passive phenomenon, but rather a creative, dynamic and multiple process in which the content of ideas is appropriated and adapted to local intellectual and institutional traditions, political ideologies and social conditions. Particularly revealing is the focus on the role of French mediators in framing the local readings and interpretations of Darwinism. Novoa and Levine have written an excellent case study of the appropriation of Darwinism in Argentina, a country where the need for 'a philosophical system that tied scientific advances to social progress' (p. 13) forced intellectuals to make a synthesis of apparently incompatible forms of thought. Especially interesting is the discussion of the Argentines' combination of Darwin's theories with those of Ernst Haeckel and Herbert Spencer, whose ideas provided a philosophical framework for Darwin's evolutionism.

Finally, *From Man to Ape* also emphasises something that is crucial for the study of the circulation of ideas but has nonetheless usually been forgotten by scholars: that the history of the multiple reception of any system of thought or beliefs is a constitutive dimension of that system. If this is true (and I think that books like the one under review make the point clearly enough), then what happened to Darwinism in 'peripheral' areas like Latin America is as important as its diffusion in Europe or in the United States. If we add to this the presence in Argentina during the nineteenth century of highly respected European scientists like the anti-Darwinian German naturalist Hermann Burmeister, and the impact that discoveries made in Argentina (by Darwin himself, but also by Argentine scientists) had on the development of evolutionist ideas, then the whole 'centre–periphery' model should be revised. Of course, this is also true for other systems of thought and beliefs such as Marxism or psychoanalysis.

In spite of its many merits, however, the book also has some weaknesses. Although it is an excellent analysis of the circulation, reception and appropriation of Darwinism, *From Ape to Man* is less successful in connecting these dynamic processes to Argentina's social and political evolution. References to a 'project of modern nation building' that was determinant in the reception of Darwinism are sprinkled

throughout the book, but never discussed in depth. More serious is the almost total absence of references to the impact of what is recognised as one of the most important social phenomena that Argentina underwent in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth: the massive wave of European immigration (the word 'immigration' does not even appear in the index). Massive immigration had an enormous cultural impact that forced local elites to reconceptualise and revise accepted knowledge and to formulate new social policies, including a highly successful system of public education ('education' is also absent from the index). Immigration also had an important influence on ideas about evolution – for instance, the prominent alienist Dr. José María Ramos Mejía is presented in *From Man to Ape* as a committed Darwinian, but from his powerful position as president of the National Council of Education (1908–13) he took a series of measures to 'nationalise' the immigrants that recognise a clear neo-Lamarckian inspiration. He tried to turn immigrants, and particularly their children, into model citizens (or at least into an ambitious bourgeoisie) through an elaborate system of patriotic rituals. As he claimed in his influential book *Las multitudes argentinas* (1899) – which is hardly mentioned in *From Man to Ape* – it was the Argentine environment and educational system that would generate the conditions for an improvement in the lives of immigrants, an improvement that would be continued through a process of hereditary transmission of acquired characters. Immigration therefore forced Ramos Mejía, along with many others, to revise accepted ideas.

Finally, the book also suffers from a certain lack of order. Some of the protagonists' works – such as those of naturalists Florentino Ameghino and Francisco P. Moreno – are discussed before we know anything about their lives and trajectories, which are dealt with later in the volume.

Having said all this, I want to go back to my point of departure. This is an excellent piece of scholarship and a model for the analysis of the circulation and reception of ideas that should be appealing not only to those interested in Argentina and in Latin America, but also to all those interested in how ideas (and not only scientific ones) circulate and are appropriated in cultures different from those of origin.

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J. Lat. Amer. Stud. **43** (2011). doi:10.1017/S0022216X11000629

Federico Finchelstein, *Transatlantic Fascism: Ideology, Violence and the Sacred in Argentina and Italy, 1919–1945* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. xiii + 330, £65.00, £15.99 pb.

Federico Finchelstein's book constitutes a welcome contribution to a historiography engaged with the emergence and development of transnational fascism between 1919 and 1945. This study, a continuation of his previous book *Fascismo, liturgia e imaginario: el mito del General Uriburu y la Argentina nacionalista* (2004), goes one step further and analyses the role that 'transatlantic fascism' played in the emergence of a distinctive Argentine right-wing ideology, which the author considers a fascist one. As the author explains, unravelling the different historical paths of fascism might help us not only to understand this particular historical period but, equally importantly, to trace the origins of an ideology that for Finchelstein had a strong influence on the emergence of political violence in Argentina in the 1970s.