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Republics of Knowledge: Interpreting the World from Latin America

Nicola Miller

Introduction

In 1882 the celebrated poet, José Hernández, was offered a generous sum of money by the government of Buenos Aires Province to spend a year in Europe and Australia investigating how to boost agricultural productivity. As the author of the bestselling poem *El gaucho Martín Fierro* (1872 and 1879), which had rapidly acquired the status of a national epic, he potentially lent a certain credibility to a government initiative based on the assumption that best practice could only be imported from overseas. The story goes that officials took his acceptance so much for granted that they did not even trouble to consult him before announcing it to the newspapers. Hernández, however, at once refused to go: such a trip would be a complete waste of money, he insisted, because European ways of doing things were not applicable to Argentina. He could write a far better book, far more quickly, if he stayed right where he was. That was exactly what he did: after several months travelling around local estates, collecting information from the people who worked on them, he produced 330 pages of astute and comprehensive advice on all aspects of livestock raising, which became known as *Instructions for the Rancher: A Complete Treatise on the Planning and Running of a Country Estate* (1884).¹ The government declined to purchase a single copy of it, and printed no fewer than 5,000 copies of a report produced, at great expense, by authors more in sympathy with the official view that Europe was the fount of all useful knowledge.² But their extensive survey – all ten volumes of it – of the state of the art in Europe could not begin to compete

with Hernández's short and serviceable *libro criollo* (creole book), which sold out in several editions and was still being reprinted in the 1940s.

This incident brings into sharp relief the two main themes of this chapter: i) the collectivity of knowledge; and ii) the recognition of knowledge.

On the collectivity of knowledge, the immediately striking point is that Hernández, as he acknowledged, was heavily reliant for information about best practice on the local experts he consulted. He had been born on a cattle ranch, where his father worked as a foreman, but his own career was in journalism, politics and literature. Less obviously, *Instructions for the Rancher* would probably not have made it into print at all had it not been for the courage of a certain bookseller-publisher, Carlos Casavalle, founder of the Imprenta y Librería de Mayo, whose distinguished reputation and networks of connections not only in Argentina but throughout South America gave him the invincibility necessary to incur government displeasure by publishing Hernández's book. Although much of the history of knowledge has consisted of studying the ideas of intellectual luminaries down the ages, the landscapes of knowledge were populated with a far wider range of people, all of whom made distinctive and often transformative contributions.

The extent to which such work was recognized (theme ii), either by contemporaries or historians, raises a series of questions about the status and legitimacy of knowledge. Categories of 'national' and 'foreign' knowledge coalesced at this specific conjuncture in Argentina, in the 1880s, when knowledge acquired locally succeeded in being recognized, by some if not all participants in public debates, as more valid than knowledge acquired elsewhere. Such developments point to the importance of thinking not only about how knowledge is produced or even how it is received but also how it acquires the necessary validation to be deemed worthy of being received. In turn, this relates to the importance of distinguishing between varying kinds of transnationalism: the near and the far; the experienced and the imagined. Hernández chose not to travel to Europe, but he did bring transnational experience to his treatise, having spent time in both Uruguay and Brazil. Moreover, his view that European agriculture was not applicable in South America was formed precisely through extensive reading about practices from Europe and elsewhere that had given him a comparative framework within which to operate. His rejection of one kind of transnationalism – going to Europe – for another – drawing comparisons closer to home – alerts us to the very different kinds of experience that can be covered by the umbrella term of transnationalism. Crossing continents is not the same as what I call localized transnationalism, that is, the multitude

of connections, exchanges and comparisons that occurred between countries in Latin America, affecting most levels of society. There is more than one type of reference culture: the stimulus of common endeavour in similar conditions may be as great a source of inspiration and ideas as success achieved under very different conditions. Latin American countries looked to each other at least as much as any of them looked to Europe.

My themes will be illustrated with evidence from Latin America, the history of which offers an illuminating perspective on the history of knowledge, especially its role in modern nation-making. As the region of the world which rejected colonial rule during the Age of Revolution to found a second wave of modern republics (1808–26), Latin America was foundational to nineteenth-century debates about culture and politics. These new political communities all made a founding commitment to promoting knowledge and its circulation as central to the formation of modern societies. This commitment was particularly strong in the republics of Spanish America, where a rhetorical embrace of popular sovereignty was widespread, even if it was limited in practice, but it was also evident in the independent monarchy of the Empire of Brazil, which became a republic in 1889. These new countries were the ultimate test cases of nation-statehood, because they were constituted without any obvious differences of race, language or culture to differentiate one from another, as Benedict Anderson long ago pointed out.³ What was meant by a ‘nation’ was debated throughout Europe and the Americas for much of the nineteenth century; it was not so much the idea itself that was European as the ‘one state, one culture’ model that acquired the status of ideal type there. The differently constituted nation states of Latin America have been grappling for two centuries with questions that have more recently become troubling throughout the world. To what extent could modern political systems based on secular rights and freedoms coexist with widespread religiosity and racially based social hierarchies? How could the defence of sovereignty be combined with openness to investment and ideas from elsewhere? What role could the circulation of knowledge play in fostering collective identities and participatory democratic life, especially in the context of the modern global hierarchies of knowledge established during the nineteenth century? The varied histories of nation-making in Latin America, with their interconnected experiences of colonialism, independence and neo-colonialism, provide a unique body of evidence about all of these matters. These histories therefore open up a range of questions about the methodologies historians adopt and the categories they employ.

The collectivity of knowledge: Drawing teachers in Latin America

In the spirit of recent scholarship in the history of science,⁴ I explore how the history of knowledge might look different if we saw beyond a minority of prominent figures. The celebrated individuals who tend to attract all the attention are of course worthy of interest, but so too are a host of other people: printers, editors, booksellers, librarians, trade unionists who ran night schools, compilers of almanacs and encyclopedias, lexicographers and bibliographers. In this chapter, I focus on drawing teachers, for two separate but, I argue, related reasons.

First, it is remarkable how many of the primary sources from the era of independence emphasized the pressing need to establish Schools of Drawing; the teaching of drawing was continually declared fundamental to popular education throughout the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century. Second, national histories of art, which began to be written around the time of the centennials of independence and continued into the 1960s, routinely highlighted the autodidacticism of nineteenth-century artists, elaborating the idea of the exceptional individual springing untutored from his – or very occasionally her – native land to express the spirit of the people.

On the first point, the need to found schools of drawing, some impressive claims were made for the contribution of drawing to nation-making. Father Francisco Castañeda, who campaigned in 1815 for a school of drawing in Buenos Aires, saw drawing as the source of all possible desirable qualities and capacities for the first generation of the new republic. It was the one great skill that would deliver the people from ignorance and barbarity, instilling a work ethic, creating receptivity to republican laws and cultivating good taste. By learning to draw squares and circles the students would begin to understand geometry; by drawing hands and eyes they would apprehend anatomy; by drawing buildings and forts and ships they would learn the principles of civil, military and naval architecture; and by drawing machines they would appreciate mechanics and glean the principles of invention. Their drawing practice would give them a good knowledge of ancient history and mythology, of the Bible, and of modern history, and it would lead them naturally to other desirable accomplishments in music, dance and theatre.⁵ More measured voices declared drawing to be not only indispensable to the development of industry and the professions, but also a virtuous outlet for the physical energies of artisans.⁶ Many of the prominent figures of

the time, across the continent, lent their support, financial and/or political, to the creation of drawing schools, not least the Liberator José de San Martín, who made drawing central to the curriculum of the school he founded in Mendoza.

Skills in drawing were indeed necessary to many of the activities of the new political communities that emerged from the wars of independence: the surveying of land and sea; map-making; natural history and science; architecture and town planning; civil and mechanical engineering; military strategy; and the dissemination of all kinds of information, including images of national heroes (and villains) and impressions of war. The art of the miniature, which flourished in the 1820s and 1830s, helped to make a divided social elite visible both to itself and to other sectors of the population, because the cameo portraits were published in the social columns of newsheets and on the death notices posted outside the local church or the town hall.⁷ Photography came early to Latin America and certainly played an important role in stimulating national consciousness from the 1840s onwards, but the camera lens could not so easily – or so cheaply – caricature or satirize as the cartoonist's swift pen; nor did the photograph lend itself so readily to the archetypes of nationalism. Thus, drawing was not an ornamental extra or something of interest only to art historians, but a skill that was fundamental to becoming modern societies and economies. Drawing teachers were highly prized and sought-after individuals, embedded in networks – both local and transnational – of engineers, geographers, scientists, artists, writers and politicians.

The best-known examples of drawing's contribution to national imaginings are the 'customs and costumes' collections of sketches and watercolours depicting the peoples and landscapes of various regions of a country. These were an international nineteenth-century publishing phenomenon, along with the records of scientific expeditions and the diaries of individual adventurers. Many of the early albums on Latin America were produced by artists visiting from Europe, who spent a few months following what quickly became well-established itineraries, and they were published in Europe for a well-heeled European audience.⁸ In most Latin American countries, however, there were local artists who became celebrated for their representations of scenes and people of the national territories, many of which were printed in cheap editions or on posters, pamphlets or flyers. It was these artists whose supposed auto-didacticism was later made so much of by nationalists.

An example from Peru: who taught Pancho Fierro?

Francisco Fierro (1807–79), usually known as Pancho, painted hundreds of watercolour vignettes of Lima and its people, which circulated widely both in Peru and beyond. They were used as illustrations for the emerging mid-nineteenth-century genre of urban guidebooks; they adorned the famous and popular books of stories, *Peruvian Traditions* (1872–1910), by Ricardo Palma, Peru's main nineteenth-century chronicler of social life.⁹ Fierro, who was Afro-Peruvian, has been described as 'the painter of the people' who spontaneously expressed 'Peruvian creole identity'. Such accounts acknowledged that he was highly daring and accomplished technically, yet still claimed that 'he never set foot in an academy',¹⁰ an apparent contradiction which has prompted several recent attempts to identify where and how he learned to draw and paint. Who taught Pancho Fierro? The detective challenge has yielded no conclusive documentary evidence so far, but these investigations have exposed as illusionary the romantic image of an inspired but isolated dabbler who unwittingly tapped into a latent essence of Peruvianness.¹¹

In order to understand the sources of Pancho's methods, it helps to think about a wide range of factors on various scales: local, national and transnational. The immediate context was the emergence of modern drawing teaching in late eighteenth-century Peru, when there was a marked switch from religious imagery to historical and social subjects. That development, in turn, has to be understood in the context of a changing political and administrative order in colonial government, manifested in the Bourbon Reforms, especially from the 1760s under Charles III. The Spanish Crown took steps to preserve its monopoly on trade and to preclude the emergence of industrial competition from its overseas possessions, but the reforms had only limited success, which prompted some creoles, especially those who had worked in Spain, to start planning for industrialization in the Americas. Such initiatives were boosted by the spread of Enlightenment ideas, including the Spanish Enlightenment, and by the increasing visibility of science and the possibilities for scientific exploration and exchange – of which Humboldt's journeys through the Americas (1799–1804) were the most famous among many.¹² By the early nineteenth century, i.e. before the imperative of republican citizenship, the conditions had been created for education to be made more widely available, and for it to be provided by the state instead of the religious orders. Changing local market conditions also have to be taken into account: the late eighteenth-century move away from the devotional art

commissioned by the Church or by wealthy lay families was also made possible by a growing internal market for portrait painting.

The context for understanding Pancho Fierro's work also includes the history of Peru as a major centre of cultural production during the colonial period. The renowned Cusco school of art had enjoyed 250 years of influence on the plastic arts throughout South America. Growing up in Lima, Fierro would have had models of sophisticated religious painting and sculpture to observe all around him. Peru's distinguished artistic tradition also meant that it was an attractive destination for the masters of drawing who came with foreign scientific expeditions. One relevant example was Francisco Javier Cortés (1775–1841), from Quito, a highly skilled botanical artist, who had travelled with the naturalist José Celestino Mutis. He became Professor of Drawing at the School of Medicine in Lima and gave free evening classes open to all. It is likely, although it cannot be confirmed, that Fierro was in touch with Cortés, if not actually taught by him.¹³

During the early nineteenth century, as a result of all these converging factors, drawing evolved from being a means of designing or recording (as in the colonial term *trazador*, derived from the verb *trazar*, literally 'to trace') to being a means of imagining or interpreting by the *dibujante* (someone who draws, from *dibujar*, to draw).¹⁴ Drawing, in a generic sense, was becoming a mode of apprehending the world, which in itself contributed to the conditions of possibility for new political communities.

With independence, new institutions were created to teach drawing; there was an influx of visitors, including itinerant artists from Europe; and international publishers began to export to Latin America, expanding the variety of images in circulation. Although Pancho Fierro supposedly 'lived and died in poverty, without fame or glory', there is evidence that he made a lot of money selling his watercolours to foreign visitors.¹⁵ All those contacts were part of the repertoire of knowledge that informed his creative practice; he sustained a successful career for five decades and clearly knew how to adapt and respond to market demands and how to fulfil the role expected of him. Investigations about who taught Pancho Fierro have also unearthed new international and transnational connections. The historian Natalia Majluf, who argues that the mythology of the popular artist both dehistoricizes culture and denies agency, searched customs records to find that there was a high volume of trade between Peru and China in the 1830s. She also found travel accounts indicating that images of Lima were sent to China, sold well there and were then re-exported, so

Fierro probably saw these Chinese images of Peru, signs of which can be detected in his own work.¹⁶

Nationalist histories of art from the mid-twentieth century tended to divide artists into two categories: ‘academic’, i.e. divorced from their roots; and ‘popular’, i.e. authentic expressions of purely local experience. Fierro was often contrasted with Ignacio Merino, who was sent to Paris very young and lived in Peru for only 12 years (1838–50) before returning to Europe. His work has been dismissed by cultural nationalists as ‘salon painting’,¹⁷ but his works have been analysed by later historians as illustrating a whole range of critiques of the methods he had been taught in Paris. The academic/popular divide, like so many other binaries, paints over so many other possibilities.

One reason, then, why it is so important to ask about possible teachers is in order to differentiate history and myth in relation to autodidacticism. A claim that somebody was self-taught is a key for unlocking information about the opportunities a society offers to acquire cultural capital. Instead of thinking in terms of what is lacking – formal education – it is worth exploring what made it possible for certain individuals to learn informally. Was there a familial or other social context in which learning was valued? What other routes were available for gaining access to knowledge? There are many possibilities to consider, including bookshops, libraries, the informal circulation of printed matter, reading aloud from newspapers or other ephemeral materials, talks or lectures, contacts with more educated individuals prepared to act as guides and mentors, and opportunities to do a variety of jobs and to travel. Thus autodidacticism, which is portrayed as a celebration of individualism, actually reveals the significance of the social structures and networks – both local and transnational – that made the creative work of autodidacts possible.

Perhaps the greatest problem for anyone trying to learn without formal guidance is how to select – what to read, what to look at, what to study. As Carlos Fuentes put it, it is difficult to know how to know. This brings us to my second theme, namely the question of the status, legitimacy and recognition of knowledge. It was no coincidence that José Hernández’s ringing denial of the applicability of European knowledge to Argentina happened during the 1880s. In most countries of Latin America there was greater political stability in this decade than hitherto, combined with an upturn in international trade, which stimulated economic growth. There was an expansion in the capacities of the state and an array of nation-building initiatives. In this section, I will illustrate the corresponding emergence of a conception of ‘national’ knowledge, as distinct from ‘foreign’ knowledge.

The emergence of ‘national’ knowledge in the late nineteenth century: Art

In the same way that nations emerged in reciprocal interaction with trans-national processes, so was the scope for knowledge production shaped by the potential for recognition. During the 1880s several Latin American states began to offer scholarships to study art in Europe. Although budding artists in Lima or Buenos Aires could then receive formal training in drawing, painting and sculpture, the problem remained that there were still very few opportunities to see the works of art deemed to be canonical: art galleries, museums of fine art, even printed images in newspapers, all came at least a decade later. Students knew all about European art from written accounts, but they could not actually see it, beyond the few isolated prints or sculptures to be found at random in bookshops or dioramas. The glossy art books produced in Europe were deemed too expensive for Latin American markets, although the emerging international trade in artefacts began to target its wares at the newly rich of Latin America, selling them paintings and sculptures, often of indifferent quality, made especially for export. During this specific transitional period, lasting no more than a couple of decades, a visit to Europe, especially Italy and Paris, became a rite of passage for any aspiring artist, just as the Grand Tour had earlier been for the young adults of wealthy families. These artists were mostly from immigrant families of modest means, and dependent upon government grants to travel. Although the scholarships were not generous, they imposed significant expectations on their recipients. Artists from Latin America eking out an existence in Paris or Rome felt that in order to justify their state funding they needed not only to be successful – by getting their work into the French Salon or the Venice exhibition and winning European prizes – but also somehow to be representative of their native country. They were caught between two courts of public opinion: if they were intentionally and obviously ‘national’ in terms of content, they would go unrecognized in Europe, but if they avoided ‘national’ subjects they ran the very real risk of being accused of having cut themselves off from their roots in their native land.¹⁸

In the midst of these multiple pressures, however, artists from Latin America carved out plenty of scope for debating what ‘national’ art might mean. One interesting case is Martín Malharro (1865–1911), who was born in a small town in Buenos Aires province. Living in Europe from 1895 to 1901, without either a scholarship or family resources, he earned his living as an illustrator for *Le Figaro* and other publications.

On his return to Argentina he had a successful exhibition of his paintings. Often described as a ‘self-made man’, whose ‘independent spirit rebelled against any influences, making him a true original’,¹⁹ he was actually trained in Buenos Aires printing workshops and then at the free classes run since 1879 by the private Society for the Promotion of Fine Art. In Paris, as his own letters show, he spent his whole time exploring museums and galleries, endlessly looking, studying and comparing.²⁰

Back in Buenos Aires in 1903, by which time a Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes had been founded (1896), albeit not yet opened to the public, Malharro inveighed against what he called ‘patrioterismo’ (chauvinism or jingoism) in art, arguing that ‘Art is a unity, without flags or pennants’.²¹ Any art ‘had to be national’, he argued, in the sense that it was bound to be a reflection of a specific cultural environment: ‘if we take into account that the conception of feeling and of action is not the same in our land as it is in Europe, just as it is not the same in Europe as in Japan or China, we will find that there cannot be any universal ideal of beauty in an absolute sense’. Yet those nations conventionally associated with great art were those whose artists were deemed to have transcended their national context, painting ‘without *patrioterismo*, without any ideal other than Art’. Thus, those cultural gatekeepers who lauded ‘Italian’ art or ‘French’ art were trying to have it both ways, enthroning ‘absolutes that had no more value than the sly artifice’ behind them. But given the established recognition of Italian and French art as both national and universal, any artist born in Argentina was obliged to forget – which meant first having to learn – ‘all the best from the European schools of art’. Thus, for an artist from anywhere deemed to be peripheral, winning recognition even as national, let alone universal, entailed challenging global hierarchies of knowledge that excluded all but the most culturally confident societies from the possibility of transcending local specifics.

The knowledge hierarchies woven into the connections between centres and peripheries have had major consequences in the fields of economics and politics as well as culture. Elsewhere, I have analysed a series of major infrastructure projects in Latin America in the light of the tensions between science and sovereignty.²² My findings suggest that the oft-reiterated claims that Latin American countries ‘needed’ foreign technical expertise in order to develop – because they lacked sufficient home-grown expertise – are almost wholly unfounded. In the ‘century of engineers’, as Jürgen Osterhammel has characterized the 1800s,²³ these case studies vividly convey that it was not so much a question of local expertise being lacking as of its being undervalued. Here, I will explore the example of port facilities at Buenos Aires.

Argentina's 'first engineer' and the port of Buenos Aires

Buenos Aires is a famous and significant port, but it is not a natural one. Shallowness, silting, sand banks drifting in wayward winds and tides – all make for major engineering challenges. As late as the 1980s, when the Argentine government defied the United States by selling grain to the Soviet Union, not the least of the problems involved in this act of Cold War brinkmanship was that the huge Soviet grain tankers could not dock at Buenos Aires. Even today, there is a constant need for dredging. It is hardly surprising, then, that its nineteenth-century development was fraught with difficulties. By 1870 all that there was to show for repeated attempts to build a modern wharf was a heap of discarded plans. These frustrations were caused partly by political factors – a series of costly wars, both internal and external, and the uncertain constitutional status of the City of Buenos Aires in relation to the rest of the country – but also by a lack of consensus about the best technical solution and the consequent difficulty of securing finance for a project fraught with risk.

In the late nineteenth century, the building of a new port caused the first public controversy in Argentina that could meaningfully be described as national. It was played out in the two recently founded national newspapers, *La Nación* and *La Prensa*, which took opposite sides. The protagonists were Luis Huergo (1837–1913), the man known as 'the first Argentine engineer' because he was the first to graduate, in 1870, from the engineering degree newly established at the University of Buenos Aires, and Eduardo Madero (1823–94), a wealthy businessman and international trader. Huergo was already a public figure, elected to Congress while still a student. He was a founder and first president of the Argentine Scientific Society (1872). Unusually for an Argentine at that time, he had been educated in the United States, at a Jesuit college in Maryland, where he learned English. Back in Buenos Aires, he trained first as a surveyor, then from 1865 as an engineer. In contrast, Madero, who had inherited a role in his family's business, had no technical training. However, after spending several years in Montevideo, he returned to Argentina preoccupied, some said obsessed, with ensuring that Buenos Aires had the modern facilities that would enable it to trump Montevideo's natural advantages. By 1870 he had already presented two plans for the development of Buenos Aires, both drawn up in collaboration with British engineers, neither of which had garnered sufficient political support.

There was a long-established practice, dating back to the 1820s, of inviting European – mostly British – engineers to tender for the modernization of Buenos Aires port. In 1870, President Domingo Sarmiento commissioned yet another foreign expert to find a solution: John F. Bateman, whose plan – drawn up after spending less than a month in Buenos Aires – involved cutting a long canal in order to build the docks close to the heart of the city. It attracted ‘a deluge of criticism’ from locals, who argued that Bateman had completely underestimated the problems and the costs involved in such extensive dredging.²⁴ A government-appointed Commission made up mainly of other ‘foreign engineers’ concluded that it would cost at least seven times what Bateman had estimated.²⁵

It was in this context that Luis Huergo successfully argued for the development of the existing facilities at the alternative site of Riachuelo, just south of the city centre, in the area now known as Boca. As a reformist politician, recently elected as senator for the Province of Buenos Aires, one of his main concerns was to avoid the exorbitant costs he anticipated from pursuing any version of Bateman’s idea.²⁶ He sought a realistic proposal not a prestige project. Huergo’s plan was supported by both politicians and engineers. It received state funding in 1876 and by 1883 works had progressed so well that one of the new transatlantic steamers, *L’Italia*, was able to dock at Buenos Aires for the first time. This event was hailed in the press, both in Italy and Argentina, as a vindication of the plan devised by ‘a creole engineer, without authority in the scientific world and in opposition to the powerful opinions of an expert of European fame like Mr Bateman’.²⁷

In light of this success, in 1882 Huergo submitted detailed plans to extend the docks northwards. The next thing he knew, apparently from reading it in the press, was that the government had decided instead to back a third plan championed by Eduardo Madero, drawn up by the British company of Hawkshaw, Son & Hayter, with the promise of finance from Barings. Madero had returned from a visit to London, sought an urgent meeting with President Roca (which he obtained through the good offices of his uncle, the Vice-President), and persuaded Roca to support a plan supposedly designed by the great engineer Sir John Hawkshaw. In fact, Sir John had handed the project over to his son, who in turn passed it on to someone else. In general, the company specialized in railways, rather than port works. The plans were very sketchy and had been drawn up without even the briefest of visits to Buenos Aires; they ignored Riachuelo and all the existing facilities; they were very similar, with the same problems, to those of Bateman’s plan rejected in 1871.

Yet Madero's proposal was forced through Congress by President Roca, without consulting the Argentine Department of Engineers.

The Congress did, however, stipulate that the final version of the plans had to be endorsed by the Department of Engineers. The government first tried to circumvent this requirement by establishing a Commission of Experts, two out of the five of whom were English and US engineers. This Commission reported that the drawings Madero had supplied were too sketchy to evaluate. What happened then, it later emerged, was that the President simply summoned the head of the Department of Engineers and ordered him to ensure that a set of suitable drawings was made, along the lines indicated by Hawkshaw, Son & Hayter.²⁸ When these supposedly 'definitive' plans were presented in 1884, they were approved by decree and Roca summoned three former presidents, no less – Mitre, Avellaneda and Sarmiento – to sign the contract with Madero.²⁹ This public display of official preference for British over Argentine expertise unleashed a storm of criticism. The Argentine Assembly of Engineers of 1886 was unequivocal in concluding that 1) Hawkshaw, Son & Hayter's plan would not result in a good port for Buenos Aires (on the contrary, the high costs of its construction and operation would 'impose a burden incompatible with the general interests of trade'); and 2) Huergo's far more detailed design not only met 'the technical, general and commercial demands of a port for Buenos Aires', but also would cost only a third of Madero's plan.³⁰ Nevertheless, the government went ahead with the Madero-negotiated contract. Huergo and the head of the Department of Engineers both resigned and were supported not only by their colleagues, but also by thousands of people who turned out to cheer the awarding of a medal to Huergo in Boca del Riachuelo.³¹ Work on what became known as Puerto Madero began in 1887 and was completed a decade later. The project ran way over budget: even the supportive *La Nación* (19 January 1919), estimated, conservatively, that it had cost at least twice the amount originally specified; French engineers dubbed it 'the most expensive port in the world'.³² It was already congested by 1902 and ceased functioning altogether in 1925. In 1909 the government decided to build a new port, along the lines of what Huergo had envisaged back in 1882.

There are two key points in this story. The response of the English engineers to any of the specific criticisms set out by locally based engineers was to claim that their proposals were 'as advised by modern science and practice'.³³ Yet the experienced and distinguished Luis Huergo had actually done more than most individuals anywhere to modernize engineering. He carried out many other inventive projects including sanitation and irrigation works throughout Argentina and in Paraguay,

always undertaking extensive research into human health and nutrition to inform his engineering.³⁴ Despite all of these pioneering scientific endeavours, Huergo was denied the mantle of modern expertise.

The second point – which is perhaps even more telling – is that President Roca could not have secured the drawings he needed to force this project through Congress had it not been for the fact that an engineering degree had been started at the University of Buenos Aires in 1865, creating a cohort of trained, capable staff at the government Department of Engineering. Roca was reliant upon home-grown expertise to rectify the technical defects in the work done by the foreign company he wished to impose.

Conclusion

The examples above illustrate what can be gained by thinking about the history of knowledge as a collective endeavour, involving a wide variety of people beyond the famous intellectuals who are often at the centre of historians' attention. Switching the focus to other, apparently marginal figures, may light up the shadowy configurations of power that shape the possibilities for knowledge creation in any particular time and place. As research from many fields has shown, the margin can be a place of creativity, empowerment and renewal, but my evidence supports the argument that it is nonetheless crucial not to lose sight of the wider asymmetries that embed the marginal. The framework of centres and peripheries runs the risk of reifying these distinctions and imbalances, but if flexibly conceived as a spectrum of relational possibilities it can be helpful in enabling historians to bring together big-picture analysis and fine-grained interpretation of historical shifts in distributions of power.

The evidence from this chapter also draws attention to the importance of thinking not only about cognition but also about recognition. The scholarly literature still tends to emphasize either the creation of knowledge and how that is shaped by coloniality, or networks of knowledge circulation and how they decentre hierarchies of material power. Yet far less work has been done on fundamental processes of legitimization, which are equally subject to power relations both within and beyond sites of production or routes of dissemination. It is one thing to control access to knowledge, but who decides what actually counts as knowledge? Everybody has always borrowed ideas and techniques from elsewhere, as Voltaire neatly conceded when he defined originality as judicious imitation. Over the course of the nineteenth century, however, various

forces combined to create hierarchies of knowledge in which some acts of imitation were celebrated as of universal interest and others were dismissed as only of local relevance. As postcolonial scholars have shown, concepts, classification systems and disciplines specific to the local contexts of Europe were gradually projected, through imperial power, as being of universal validity. The independent countries of Latin America, evolving both after colonialism and during the rise of neo-colonialism, carried out nation-state-making in the midst of the coalescing global hierarchies of knowledge of the nineteenth century. Knowledge practitioners from elsewhere were increasingly denied universal reach, instead being expected – both abroad and at home – to be authentic expressions of their local culture. The poet César Vallejo, living in Paris in the 1930s, eloquently evoked the anguish it caused him. ‘Why do I always have to be “Peruvian” when I write?’ he demanded. Even Lorca, from Spain, the metropolitan status of which had long been undermined by Black Legend stereotypes of backwardness and superstition, had succeeded in being accepted as a poet with a universal message. Yet Vallejo felt condemned to be national, denied the possibility that anything he said or thought could be deemed of interest beyond its relevance to the country where he happened to have been born; that is, he felt – and he was – denied the possibility of being fully human. Anyone who has read Vallejo’s poetry will know that he spoke fully to the human condition. Nearly a century later, thanks in part to the work of scholars committed to thinking about transnationalism in all its varieties, this is beginning to be recognized. In this context, the centre–periphery framework helps to interpret the processes by which some kinds of knowledge, produced in certain places, at specific times, came to be recognized as generalizable to other places. It was not just the theft of history, to borrow Jack Goody’s vivid phrase,³⁵ but the theft of the right even to think about what ‘history’ might be.

Notes

1. José Hernández, *Instrucción del estanciero: tratado completo para la plantación y manejo de un establecimiento de campo*. Buenos Aires: Imprenta y Librería de Mayo, 1884; republished Buenos Aires: Claridad, 2008. The insistence on local conditions of agricultural development shows striking similarities to the examples discussed by Marta Petrusewicz in her contribution to this book.
2. Ricardo Newton and Juan Llerena, *Viajes y estudios de la Comisión argentina sobre la agricultura, ganadería, organización y economía rural en Inglaterra, Estados Unidos y Australia*. Buenos Aires: Imprenta La República, 10 vols, 1882–4.
3. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1983.

4. For two inspiring examples, see Irina Podgorny and María Margaret Lopes, *El desierto en una vitrina: Museos e Historia Natural en la Argentina*. Rosario: Prohistoria Ediciones, 2014; and Máximo Farro, *La formación del Museo de La Plata: Coleccionistas, comerciantes, estudiosos y naturalistas viajeros a fines del siglo xix*. Rosario: Prohistoria Ediciones, 2009.
5. Francisco Castañeda, 'Alocución o arenga patriótica', 10 August 1815. Buenos Aires: Imprenta de Los Niños Expósitos, 1815.
6. For example, Camilo Henríquez, 'Escuela gratuita para la práctica del dibujo', 1815, in Juan María Gutiérrez, *Origen y desarrollo de la Enseñanza Pública Superior en Buenos Aires [1868]*, edition by Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, 1998, 218–20.
7. Mary Takahashi Huamancaja, *La pintura de miniatura en Lima durante la primera mitad del siglo xix: El caso de doña Francisca Zubiaga de Gamarra*. Lima: Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, 2006.
8. For example, Emeric Essex Vidal, *Picturesque Illustrations of Buenos Ayres and Monte Video*. London: Ackermann, 1820.
9. M. A. Fuentes, *Lima: apuntes históricos, descriptivos, estadísticos y de costumbres*. Paris: Librería de Firmin Didot, 1866. Ricardo Palma, *Tradiciones peruanas, con láminas inéditas [...] de Pancho Fierro*. Barcelona: Oceana, 1982.
10. Francisco Stastny, *Breve historia del arte en el Perú*. Lima: n. p., 1967, 50–51.
11. The main work, on which this section draws substantially, is Natalia Majluf, 'Pancho Fierro, entre el mito y la historia', in Marcus Burke and Natalia Majluf, *Tipos del Perú, La Lima criolla de Pancho Fierro*. Madrid: Ediciones El Viso y The Hispanic Society of America, 2008, 17–50.
12. Alexander von Humboldt, *Personal Narrative of a Journey to the Equinoctial Regions of the New Continent [1814–25]*, trans. and abridged by Jason Wilson. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995. Humboldt's scientific findings from his time in the Americas ran to thirty volumes (1807–34). On other expeditions, see Tim Fulford and Peter J. Kitson, eds, *Travels, Explorations and Empires: Writings from the Era of Imperial Expansion 1770–1835*, vol. 7, *Latin America and the Caribbean*. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2001.
13. Majluf, 'Pancho Fierro', 25–7.
14. There are no easy equivalents for the Spanish terms. *Dibujante* is usually translated 'draughts-woman or draughtsman', but that is to introduce a distinction between technical and artistic drawing that did not emerge clearly in Latin America until the mid-nineteenth century.
15. Quotation from Stastny, *Breve historia*, 51; on Fierro's entrepreneurship, Majluf, 'Pancho Fierro', 28.
16. Majluf, 'Pancho Fierro', 33–4.
17. Stastny, *Historia breve*, 52.
18. Laura Malosetti Costa, ed., *Cuadros de viaje: artistas argentinos en Europa y Estados Unidos, 1880–1910*. Buenos Aires: FCE, 2008; see her introduction, 'Artistas viajeros en la belle époque', 13–49.
19. Ricardo Olivera, cited by Malosetti Costa, *Cuadros de viaje*, 245–6.
20. Martín Malharro, 'Carta a Eduardo Schiaffino', Paris, 14 November 1895, in Malosetti Costa, *Cuadros de viaje*, 239–43.
21. Martín Malharro, 'Del patrioterismo en el arte', 1903, in Malosetti Costa, *Cuadros de viaje*, 252–6.
22. Nicola Miller, *Republics of Knowledge*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, forthcoming, 2019.
23. Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014.
24. On the reaction to Bateman's plans, see Hernán Huergo, *Luis A. Huergo y la cuestión Puerto*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Dunker, 2013, 33–4.
25. Huergo, *Luis A. Huergo y la cuestión Puerto*, 33–4. For primary materials, see *Documentos relativos a la Cuestión Obras del Puerto de Buenos Aires e Informe del Ingeniero J. F. Bateman*. Buenos Aires, 1870.
26. Luis A. Huergo, *Los intereses argentinos en el Puerto de Buenos Aires*. Buenos Aires : n. p., 1873.
27. Quotation from *La Prensa*, cited in Hernán Huergo, *Luis A. Huergo*, 37.
28. Martha Mayorano, *Un ingeniero, un puerto: Luis A. Huergo: primer ingeniero argentino*. Buenos Aires: Editorial COGTAL, 1992, 208.
29. Hernán Huergo, *Luis A. Huergo*, 55.

30. Asamblea de Ingenieros, 'Informe de la Comisión y Resolución de la Asamblea', 30 March 1886, in Luis A. Huergo, *Examen de la propuesta y proyecto del puerto del Sr Eduardo Madero, discusión franca*. Buenos Aires: Imp. de M. Biedma, 1886, 189–91. For an indication of Madero's perspective, see his *Historia del Puerto de Buenos Aires [1892, 1902]*, 3rd edn. Buenos Aires: n. p., 1939.
31. Hernán Huergo, *Luis A. Huergo*, 61.
32. Hernán Huergo, *Luis A. Huergo*, 76–7.
33. Hernán Huergo, *Luis A. Huergo*, 42.
34. Hernán Huergo, *Luis A. Huergo*, 67–8; see also José Isaacson, *Luis Augusto Huergo: Primer ingeniero argentino. Ciencia y técnica en el proceso cultural del Río de la Plata*. Buenos Aires: Academia Nacional de Ingeniería, 1993.
35. Jack Goody, *The Theft of History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.