Book Review/ Compte rendu

Jansen, Robert S. *Revolutionizing Repertoires: The Rise of Populist Mobilization in Peru*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017, pp. 246, $37.50 paper, (9780226487441).

According to Robert S. Jansen, the 1931 Peruvian presidential election, is an underappreciated event in Latin American history. It is underappreciated because, as the book argues, it is seldom recognized that the events of 1931 introduced populist mobilization into the repertoire of Latin American politics (203), or that their peculiarity makes the case a defining one for the broader study of Latin American populism and political repertoire change (69; 14). Thereupon, *Revolutionizing Repertoires* is a detailed historical sociological account of the factors which led and enabled the two leading candidates of the 1931 election to effectively resort to populist mobilization. In doing so, the book delivers a well-integrated combination of theoretical arguments and comparative empirical research, which explains how the 1931 election played out, how it should be understood, and how by the end of it all, populist mobilization had entered the repertoire of Latin American political practices.

Of the theoretical underpinnings which animate this work the reader is immediately struck by Jansen's critique of structural approaches to the study of populism, particularly as they were developed by Marxist and modernisation theorists. He contends that structural factors have wrongly been alleged to determine political action, and that, this has occurred the expense of other important variables (17). Relying on comparative analysis Jansen demonstrates that contrary to structural predictions, conditions for populist mobilization in 1931 were much more favourable in Argentina and Brazil even though it would be more than a decade until they would experience their first populist episode (71). Consequently, Jansen is on solid ground when he claims that structures create conditions of possibility but do not determine outcomes (75). The comparative analysis also reinforces his overall claim about the importance of this case study for the broader study of Latin American Populism. Moreover, while Jansen dedicates relatively few pages to macro-analysis, his critique is not solely deconstructive. Rather, he also contributes to a structural understanding of the event by delineating how the previously overlooked changes in infrastructure and social organisation made

populist mobilization a possibility (77). The manner in which Jansen here combines his empirical analysis of the historical situation with his methodological and theoretical arguments is representative of how the work proceeds. Notably, Jansen does not take anything for granted and substantiates even his most modest claims at times when other authors would simply profess them to be fact. As a result, the claims that are made, as well as the ground upon which they stand, are clear and open to debate.

Jansen's awareness of the shortcomings of structuralism propel him to dedicate most of the book to examining the social, political and cultural factors at the meso and micro levels, rather than at the macro level. The reader is taken through a variety of events which all shaped the course of the 1931 election in distinctive ways, and without which things may have unravelled quite differently. These include, but are not limited to: the preceding dictatorial rule of Augusto Leguia whose repressive tactics opened the political field in unusual ways (98), the timely democratization of the electoral process by the military junta (118), the widespread popularity of Sànchez Cerro's military coup (151), and the important impression made by fascist movements on Haya de la Torres' political thinking (148). While this analysis is in parts fueled by Jansen's desire to avoid the pitfalls of an overly structural analysis, his attention to detail is also animated by a second theoretical problem: the problem of contingency. Jansen correctly identifies, contingency is a residual category used to remedy the shortcomings of structural determinism (18). This is a problem because, as Jansen puts it: "this category is much too expansive, ignoring various other ways in which social life is patterned at the meso and micro level" (18). Thereupon, one important way in which Jansen attempts to remedy this problem is by having recourse to a pragmatist theory of social action.

The approach in question relies on the social and political context of action to identify how perceived problem situations can drive moments of political innovation by certain actors (21-22). Consequently, Jansen examines how the leaders who resorted to populism, Haya de la Torre and Sanchez Cerro, were led by their personal political experience and situational predicament to perceive a problem which in turn drove them to innovate and resort to populist mobilization; while others did not. Surely, this is an improvement upon simply chalking up political innovation to unspecified contingency. Indeed, Jansen's account strongly suggests the possibility that these actors' unique past experience and situation led them to innovate. However, determining whether or not the encountered problem translated into political innovation seems to be a more difficult matter. For example, in accounting for Cerro's innovation Jansen argues

that Cerro's military frustrations led him to innovate (138). Yet he also remarks that "the tools for political success were already before him in the form of popular support; and that neither the political establishment nor the traditional elite would be able to compete with this political resource" (138). The difficulty here lies in distinguishing between this account and the equally plausible argument that populist mobilization was contingent on the recognition of popular support, but that recognition of popular support was not contingent on Cerro encountering a problem. Adjudicating between these two possibilities strikes at the heart of the matter, one which does not appear to be easily resolved. Thus, while this section is innovative and addresses an important problem of historical sociology, it is also the most contentious. It raises the important problem of contingency and the question of whether it is adequately overcome. Nonetheless, irrespective of one's judgment concerning Jansen's ability to overcome this problem, his clear application of the method sets the stage for honest debate about its merit.

Revolutionizing Repertoire is a thoughtful study of Peruvian political history and of the practice of populist mobilization which holds value for a variety of scholars. First, Jansen's decision to treat populism as a political practice is in itself a valuable approach to a difficult conceptual problem and has already sparked some further literature which builds on his work in interesting ways (see Brubaker 2017). Secondly, Jansen also offers a clear theoretical framework which can be employed to approach other cases. The framework itself also offers an opportunity for theoretical discussions in the various fields which it draws upon including studies in political innovation, social movements, historical sociology and contentious politics. However, in the end, it is this reviewer's belief that the work distinguishes itself most by its sober and well balanced analysis of populism. Despite the polarizing nature of the subject at hand, Jansen's claims never exceed what the evidence allows for. The precision and analytic rigour which ensue are the valuable fruits of this measured approach. It is thus fitting that Jansen (2017) concludes the book with a humble call for precision and clear definitions in studies of populism (213). A call, which must be answered by anyone who hopes to contribute to our understanding of populism, past and present.

Carleton University Nicholas Favero

References

Brubaker, Rogers. 2017. "Why Populism?" *Theory and Society* 46 (5): 357–85.

Nicholas Favero obtained his undergraduate degree in sociology from St. Francis Xavier University and is currently pursuing his graduate studies at Carleton University. His research interests lie at the intersection of international political economy and the philosophy of the social sciences. In his current research he is examining the philosophical underpinnings of various methods in the social sciences.

Email: nicholas.favero@carleton.ca