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Sebastián Carassai, *The Argentine Silent Majority: Middle Classes, Politics, Violence, and Memory in the Seventies* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2014), pp. xii + 357, £60.00, £15.99 pb.

'Member of a violent society – without being violent himself', wrote *Panorama* magazine when declaring the 'average Argentine' person of the year in 1971 (p. 109). The reference is indicative of contemporaneous perceptions of the Argentine middle classes as mere observers to the escalating violence of the late 1960s and early 1970s, a silent majority caught between noisy – or, more appropriately, violent – minorities. Whilst previous studies on memory and the dictatorship have tended to focus on the middle-class activists, there is a paucity of scholarly work on the broader role of the middle classes as a social group during this period. Sebastián Carassai's work is undoubtedly a welcome contribution to the scholarly literature due to the author's exhaustive examination of the complex and shifting relationship between the 'average' Argentine and violence. The study abounds with neglected and new empirical data, ranging from opinion polls to newspaper articles and adverts. Particularly valuable are the interviews with middle-class Argentines, for which the author compiled a documentary of historic images and clips that was shown to participants as a sort of visual aide-memoire, with a view to fostering spontaneous discussion and remembering. The meticulous methodological approach and detailed analysis of a range of data thus contributes to a nuanced understanding of the 'non-activist' majority of the middle class, who constitute heterogeneous protagonists rather than monolithic spectators.

Carassai's work should also be commended for its ambitious geographical and chronological scope. As well as the Argentine capital Buenos Aires, the author expands his analysis of the middle classes to encompass two contrasting places: San Miguel de Tucumán, the capital of the north-western province of Tucumán, and the small town of Correa in the province of Santa Fe. These two case studies, the former characterised by political violence and the latter less so, are a welcome inclusion. Moreover, Carassai does not limit his discussion to the dictatorship period, nor to the 1970s, as the title suggests; rather, he explores the evolution of the middle classes in relation to political upheaval and violence from the mid-twentieth century onwards, setting the scene for analysis of the 1970s and, to a lesser extent, beyond.

The book begins by elucidating middle-class political culture from the 1940s and dispelling a number of common misconceptions about the middle classes vis-à-vis Peronism. Carassai characterises middle-class political identity as embodying 'non-Peronism', a stance neither staunchly opposed nor outwardly supportive of Perón and the movement he founded. Far from actively endorsing military rule, the middle classes supported the overthrow of Peronist rule in 1955 and again in 1976, precisely because of the plotters' anti-Peronist nature. Although Carassai acknowledges that the majority of the revolutionary Left was of middle-class origin, he urges caution in overstating this fact, since it tends to obscure the beliefs and opinions of the majority, non-activist members of the middle class. Carassai thus critiques the perceived 'Peronisation' of the Argentine middle class during the late 1960s and the first half of the 1970s.

The three subsequent chapters, somewhat overlapping in chronology, scrutinise different aspects of the violence of the late 1960s and 1970s, revealing a myriad of responses from the middle classes to escalating violence. Focusing on social violence, particularly student radicalisation, chapter 2 argues that although the 'average

Argentine' grew increasingly weary of the various military regimes that ruled Argentina from 1966 to 1974, the middle classes stopped short of forging any sort of solidarity with students and activists. In spite of this, Carassai does identify a perceptible sympathy towards the protagonists of this era, particularly from younger members of the middle classes and those linked to the universities. In places like Tucumán where student uprisings were more frequent than in smaller towns like Correa, student mobilisation appears to have remained in collective memory and had a stronger and long-lasting impact. In chapter 3 Carassai turns to middle-class perspectives of armed violence, finding that the revolutionary Left enjoyed even less support than the student activists from a social class which tended to view itself as disassociated from violence undertaken by a minority. The middle classes' lack of approval for the revolutionary project helps to account for their predisposition towards a radical solution from the armed forces to end the violence. State violence is the topic of chapter 4, which examines the installation of the terrorist state from 1974 onwards and the dictatorship that followed. Although the middle classes' acceptance of the 1976 coup has been widely documented, this chapter revisits, in original fashion, the commonplace justification of state violence by examining its initial emergence. Carassai uses this analysis to dissect an important paradox: the endurance of such narratives in the current context in which dictatorship-era state violence is more commonly viewed with disapproval. Drawing on interviews with members of the middle classes, Carassai shows that rather than actively supporting military action, the middle classes tended to place their faith in the state's ability to protect them and restore order.

The final chapter marks a change in approach and pace from the previous ones, as the author turns to representations of violent cultural products consumed by the middle classes. Incorporating cartoons, adverts, magazine features and, to a lesser extent, film and literature, Carassai argues that violence became an integral and banal feature of marketing discourse and can be viewed as a social bond that united the middle classes, who became increasingly accepting of violence in the 1960s and 1970s.

The level of detail and close analysis of interviews, cultural products and opinion-polls undertaken by the author assumes a certain amount of prior knowledge of Argentine history from the reader, as there is limited space dedicated tohistorical contextualisation. However, given the growing body of texts in both English and Spanish dealing with twentieth-century Argentina and, in particular,the dictatorship period, this is not a weakness of Carassai's study, but ratherpermits the author to adopt a broader scope and deeper discussion than issuggested by the book's title. As well as offering a nuanced and complexunderstanding of the middle classes, Carassai avoids evaluating the middleclasses in terms of what they 'should' be or what they 'failed' to do, apersistent issue in analysis of this social sector; instead, he examines whatthey actually were and how they evolved. In doing so, the book helps readers tounderstand how middle-class disapproval of armed violence perpetrated by therevolutionary Left was not mirrored in the middle-class response to theterrorist state and in the ways in which collective memories of Peronism andviolence continue to shape Argentina even today.

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