

While this book will no doubt not completely resolve the controversy over this relatively ineffectual conspiracy or series of conspiracies, it is a fine attempt to do so based carefully on what we can actually see in the documentation. It is an important reminder that when dealing with topics that intersect with current racial and binational concerns, it is best to stick closely to the evidence.

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Javier Salcedo, *Los Montoneros del barrio* (Buenos Aires: Editorial de la Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero, 2013), pp. 327, pb.

The history of the armed groups that flourished in Argentina in the 1960s and 1970s is receiving increasing attention. In the early 1990s, former participants in guerrilla groups published their memoirs, journalists produced factual – and sometimes anecdotal – reconstructions of key events and figures, and academics published studies on an array of specific topics, including the political socialisation of a generation of activists and militants who came of age in the late 1960s, the imaginaries and ideas that nurtured that politicisation and radicalisation, and the ways in which the logics of war subsumed the logics of politics. Historian Javier Salcedo's *Los Montoneros del barrio* adds an original approach to that burgeoning literature. Unlike most studies in this area, it focuses on one case: the development of the Peronist Montoneros in Moreno, a working-class neighbourhood in the Greater Buenos Aires area. Based primarily upon oral interviews, the book sheds new light on the social and generational 'origins' of the Montoneros and, more importantly, on the allure that the group initially had for some segments of the popular classes; on the ways in which class and cultural differences were negotiated at the local level; and on the contradictory meanings that Peronism – and the very figure of Juan Perón – acquired for the different Montonero constituencies in Moreno (and likely beyond).

The book is organised chronologically. The narrative starts in 1968, with the foundation of the Asociación Obrera Textil (Textile Workers' Union, AOT), the local chapter of the Textile Workers Federation, and ends in 1974, when the most prominent members of the AOT broke with the Montoneros to create the Juventud Peronista Lealtad (Loyal Peronist Youth, JP Lealtad). By looking closely at this local history, Salcedo discovered that the textile workers engaged with the Montoneros in early 1971 – that is, shortly after the group kidnapped and executed former president Pedro Eugenio Aramburu (in May of 1970) and when it was almost dismantled amidst increasing state repression. Hence, the workers from Moreno engaged with the Peronist guerrilla well before it grew among middle-class educated youth. Based on this finding, Salcedo's work is organised around two research questions: first, how and why Moreno's workers committed to participating in the Montoneros; and second, how class differences were codified and negotiated within the Montoneros. He shows that the relationships between the Montoneros' largely middle-class, educated leadership and Moreno's workers went from an early moment of companionship and empathy to a second moment of distrust and misunderstanding, centred on disputes about the exercise of the local leadership and on the ways in which the Montoneros' leadership confronted Perón.

After a first chapter in which he briefly synthesises the history of armed struggle in Latin America and discusses the extent to which the Peronist guerrillas of the late

1960s were connected to the history of Peronism, Salcedo's work focuses on Moreno. Chapters 2 to 5, the core of the book, deal with the particularities of the Montoneros' development at the local level. Chapter 2 introduces the reader to the main characters in this history by identifying four different groups that coalesced, locally, in the Montoneros: the workers within the AOT; the neighbourhood youth that joined in the Juventud Peronista de Combate (Fighting Peronist Youth, JPC); former Peronist militants from the Comandos de Organización Revolucionaria (Revolutionary Organization Commandos, COR, with origins in the late 1950s); and, finally, groups of 'outsiders', middle-class university youth who went to Moreno to do political work. Salcedo adopts an intensely fleshed-out approach to the dynamics of politicisation and radicalisation that unfolded in early 1970s Argentina, as is apparent in chapter 3, which studies the coalescence of the four groups. Not surprisingly, the young 'outsiders' acquire a stellar role. As other young people enrolled in other political groups, those who in 1970 and 1971 adhered to the Montoneros coveted the 'experience' of fighting alongside the Peronist workers. Salcedo shows that the 'outsiders' already engaged with the Montoneros initiated their politico-military work in Moreno through contacts with both the workers and the former members of the COR. The interesting question, at this point, is why Moreno's Peronist militants opted to engage with the Montoneros.

In chapters 3 and 4 (which explore the enlargement of the Montonero constituency in Moreno in 1972), Salcedo offers a twofold answer to the question. On the one hand, he successfully shows that the workers and the local youth were already captivated by the Montoneros' allure after the *Aramburazo*, a 'fact' that attested to their Peronist identity and commitment to Perón's return. Some local groups, for example, painted graffiti displaying their identification with the Peronist guerrillas well before they were in touch with actual Montoneros, as if they were waiting to be contacted. In the same vein, Salcedo studies how the first Montonero cadres went to work together with the COR members to create, locally, events of 'armed propaganda'. In Moreno, they planted a bomb in the headquarters of a natural gas provider who failed to comply in a timely fashion with the provision of gas; an 'armed act' that generated solidarity and enthusiasm among workers and neighbours alike. On the other hand, Salcedo effectively demonstrates how, in contrast to other vanguard parties, the Montoneros did not focus on ideological discussions and formation. The incorporation of new members followed a well-established methodology but, ideologically, it merely required the vague acceptance of the three Montonero premises: the construction of socialism as an objective, the adoption of Peronism as a political identity, and the agreement on armed struggle as a methodology. Already identified with Peronism and apparently captivated by the possibilities of armed struggle, the local militants 'delegated' – in Salcedo's terms – their political representation to the Montonero leadership, a delegation that was also based upon bonds of personal trust and empathy. At the end of 1972, however, tensions between the Montonero leaders and the local militants emerged, revolving around the local problematisation of some acts of 'armed propaganda'; the system of promotions and sanctions used by the organisation; and, most fundamentally, the Montoneros' refusal to accept a local leadership. As chapter 5 shows, those tensions escalated even at the pinnacle of political mobilisation in 1973, when Perón's delegate Héctor Cámpora won the presidential elections that opened up a short 'democratic spring' and then paved the way for Perón's definitive return to the country. The members of the AOT and the JPC had been active in affiliating new members to the Peronist Party even

before the Montonero leaders decided to do so, thus expressing a level of agency that the leadership conceived of as 'indiscipline'. The same concept was applied in June of 1973 when, right after Cámpora was sworn in, the local militants carried out the 'seizures' of one meat-packing plant and one hospital. Unfortunately, at this point Salcedo explores more the tensions between the rank-and-file members and the leaders than the experiences of the 'seizures' per se, which could have constituted a vantage point from which to reconstruct the possible meanings that the Moreno militants constructed about democracy, participation and eventually popular power.

In the last three chapters, the book looks at more familiar terrain: the disputes between the Montonero leadership and Juan Perón, which ended with the militants of Moreno abandoning the Montoneros. Unlike other scholars who emphasise some particular moments that, in their view, marked the fracture between the Montoneros and Perón, Salcedo explains that the potential break was already a possibility from the very inception of the Montoneros and their three banners – a possibility that crystallised throughout 1973, when the Montoneros and Perón not only had different political agendas (rather than merely different time frames to pursue the same agenda) but also used a mutually conditioning logic of *apriete* (applying pressure). Salcedo severely questions the common belief that the convergence between the Montoneros and the Marxist Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias (Revolutionary Armed Forces, FAR), negotiated throughout 1973 and made public in September of that year, had produced substantial shifts in the Montoneros' strategy. However, while that convergence might not have been as significant theoretically and strategically speaking, the ways in which it was interpreted and enforced at the time did have profound effects, at least in Moreno. There, the months-long tensions about who had the right to exercise the local leadership escalated when the Montoneros assigned a new political representative to the district who was a FAR militant. The local militancy reacted promptly, organising mass assemblies to protest against what they viewed as an 'intrusion'. Moreover, appropriating a belief that circulated among other Peronist circles at the time – notably those belonging to the right-wing sectors, and Perón himself – the AOP and JPC militants accused the FAR of being 'not Peronist enough'. The discontent grew even more when the local militants realised that the Montonero leadership was questioning Perón's power. As Salcedo shows through close analysis of the founding document of the JP Lealtad, this group reacted against the way in which the Montonero leaders positioned themselves vis-à-vis Perón. Salcedo reconstructs a series of meetings that Perón held with youth groups in February 1974: at the same time that he overtly expelled the Montonero-oriented groups from his movement, he welcomed the AOP and JCP militants, now part of the JP Lealtad, whose loyalty to Perón was their only banner.

There are some unfortunate decisions in Salcedo's book, such as devoting two long chapters to the discussion of two (admittedly important) documents. However, the book is generally well written and argued. It will become required reading for anyone interested in the links between working-class history, Peronism and the Montoneros.

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