

this movement the working class for the first time shed its narrow economic demands and confronted the state for broader political gains.

The author has a deft and clear writing style which he punctuates with his wry sense of humour. Those who know Urdu will be amused by the pseudonyms he gives to various actors in trade-union politics, names that help describe the personality traits of these characters. Humour aside, the issue of pseudonyms, although justified by the author (an ethical social science practice) as protecting his informants, in this case may not have been the best strategy. As some decades have past, the memory of these events has been erased from public discourse. Having an awareness of who exactly acted in what capacity would have been beneficial for lay readers and academics alike, in order to understand the contribution of specific personalities in confronting the state machinery (or colluding with it). Further obscuring names of working-class informants, political actors, and even the names of factory managers and owners makes it more difficult for a new set of scholars to research that very important moment in Pakistan's history; an era that made imagining other political futures possible, yet remains under-researched to this day.

Finally, despite being attuned to the sociological language of the 1970s, the deterministic and sociological debates on working-class formation and the production of class-consciousness, the text's empirical evidence clearly points toward the splits within the working class itself that were present just beneath the surface. Regardless of the analytical orientation, Shaheed's text hints at the differences based on political affiliation, region, language, and ethnicity that were dividing the working class in this period, even as there were simultaneous efforts to consolidate a united front of working-class rights by some trade union leaders and radical political activists. It would have served some purpose if Shaheed had consulted works by Jacques Ranciere, Joan Scott, or Dipesh Chakrabarty, to name a few academics whose contributions in the 1980s helped theoretically rethink labour history, including the teleological paradigm that the author partly adheres to. This may have been a major undertaking for a person who earns his livelihood outside academia, perhaps further delaying the book's publication.

So, with this caveat, one must admit that the text in hand is a unique contribution not only for those interested in Pakistan's labour movement, but those who are interested in reading an excellent urban ethnography and social history of Karachi. As the author himself suggests, it will open up avenues for future research and hopefully many will take up the challenge.

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AUYERO, JAVIER. *Routine Politics and Violence in Argentina. The Gray Zone of State Power.* [Cambridge Studies in Contentious Politics.] Cambridge University Press, Cambridge [etc.] 2007. xviii, 190 pp. £38.00; \$70.00; doi:10.1017/S0020859008003830

In April 2002, then again in mid-2003, I spent some time in Argentina researching that country's mass experimentation with barter.¹ Like many, I had been inspired by the uprisings of December 2001, and the seeming mass repudiation of the doctrinaire prescriptions of the IMF. As De la Rúa was forced to flee the Casa Rosada in a helicopter, it seemed like the fall of the neo-liberal wall – and I was lucky enough to experience the aftermath. I was inspired by what I saw and heard, but I could also taste and feel, almost primevally, a background air of menace in the air. I began to understand that what I had

1. Peter North, *Money and Liberation: The Micropolitics of Alternative Currency Movements* (Minneapolis, MN, 2007), pp. 149–173.

been inspired by, from afar, was not always seen in the same way by those I spoke to. They spoke of the December events as “the disaster”, or “the calamity”. Some spoke of “dark forces” behind what was portrayed from outside as a people’s uprising. The press speculated about a Peronist coup – the protests seemed to subside immediately after Duhalde took power. Others said that the protests were so big, so widespread, so out of control, that it had to be more than a conspiracy. I couldn’t prove anything either way.

I’d read Javier Auyero’s masterly ethnographic studies of Peronist organizing,² and wondered at the time what his take on all this would be. Now we know, in what is another wonderfully rich study. Over a week in December 2001, just before and at the same time as the pickets and pot bangers protested in the capital, a wave of shop lootings spread, seemingly spontaneously, across much of urban Argentina – something generally exorcized from what Auyero calls the “mini industry” of analysis of the December 2001 events. It was “spontaneous”, yet expected well in advance, and for some, coordinated by the political bosses, the *punteros*. Auyero’s aim is to help us understand looting as an episode of collective violence. He points to what he calls the “grey zone” of politics: the clandestine connections between police, political organizers, shop-owners, and the looters themselves that explain how the lootings were organized, allowed to happen – and then stopped so abruptly.

The book begins with a review of the literature on collective violence, which points to the role of pre-existing relationships in constructing groups who then carry out selective collective violence. Looting is social, not individual. It is not random, mindless, anarchic violence, but selective. Looters select targets on the basis of a number of issues, like the shop-owner’s ethnicity, if the owner is known and liked, and what is in the shop. There is a morality in looters’ actions: hungry people taking food is understandable, while taking electronics is criminal theft. Analysis of food riots often point to their structural causes – structural adjustment. Auyero would rather focus on their internal dynamics. He argues that we need to understand the local political situation – the horizontal relationships and moral codes of rioters, and their relationships with local power elites, who often sit by if they agree that the local moral code has been broken. Riots can be planned by elites for political purposes. Auyero thinks that the role of elites matters, but he does not want to see rioters as mere pawns – what the rioters think also matters.

Chapter 2 revisits arguments in “poor people’s politics”, to show how clientelism works in the intersection between politics and everyday life. He shows how the *punteros* meet people’s needs in a desperate situation, and that being part of a machine is, in many ways, a rational way to access food and medicine. But the rope that the *puntero* throws you to support you can also be used to strangle you. Clientelism is both problem solving and naked domination.

In the third chapter we see how the grey zone operates: how everyone – prospective looters, *punteros*, shop owners – knew that “something was up” weeks before it happened. Auyero shows a strong connection between political bosses, corrupt police forces, and the machine of young street toughs employed for nefarious ends. I found this particularly interesting, as my respondents in 2002 and 2003 felt that clientelism might have received a major setback with the split of Peronism into left, centre, and right in the 2003 presidential elections. Auyero shows that it is alive and well, and that its impact on everyday life is, if anything, growing.

Auyero carried out fieldwork on two sites in the Buenos Aires conurbation, which he supplements with an analysis of newspaper and TV coverage of the looting and with previous fieldwork on clientelism in Argentina. Chapter 4 – the strongest part of the book – examines the creation of looting opportunities and the implicit validation of looting by

2. Javier Auyero, *Poor People’s Politics: Peronist Survival Networks and the Legacy of Evita* (London [etc.], 2000); *idem*, *Contentious Lives: Two Argentine Women, Two Protests, and the Quest for Recognition* (London [etc.], 2003).

political brokers and the police. He shows how looters rationalized their actions, and how shopkeepers suffered. Auyero's findings are that the police were often absent from small shops, but protected large foreign-owned ones. They created an unpoliced "liberated zone" which enabled crowds of looters to move from one target to the next. The number of looters had no impact on police presence. Clientelist brokers were present at small looting events when there were no police.

The chapter also provides the point of view of the police: the looters were very well organized and a decision was made that it would be better to "lose a can of tomatoes than a life", and that if the police were not equipped to confront rioters they should stay away. There were no liberated zones. The Peronist response is also given: the Peronists could see problems coming and tried to calm things down with food distribution. The network that some argued passed *down* the instruction to riot from above, for the Peronists, actually passed messages *up* the chain that "something was coming". They decided to avoid killings and repair the damage after it was done. If the *punteros* were so central to the events, they ask, why is there no film of them in action, given that there are hundreds of them, everyone knows who they are, and, it is claimed, they acted so obviously? They might have been there when things got out of hand, as neighbours, but they did not organize the mayhem. Elsewhere in chapters 4 and 5, others provide convincing opposite testimony – the *punteros* actively organized looting events and egged the crowds on. The police, it is claimed, were the most active looters. It is to Auyero's credit that he admits defeat in his detective story. He finds no smoking gun, but plenty of forcibly delivered testimony on the role of the *punteros*, such that this reader at least believed that we have got as far as we ever will.

The book concludes with a discussion of how people made sense of the looting after it happened. They all explain that it happened less because people were unemployed, under stress, and unable to either feed their children today or afford Christmas next week (although they were), but because of "politics". Elites caused mayhem for their own, nefarious ends. Chapter 6 movingly examines the cognitive dissonance on behalf of the looters. It describes well how awful the looting was, how poor people's livelihoods were destroyed by other poor people at the behest of the state, while large multinationals bought protection. Shopkeepers felt impotent as their neighbours took everything – the shelves, the cash register – while the police stood by or participated themselves. There was the shopkeeper who had a heart attack, one who shot himself; Businesses built up over years were destroyed. The problem for Auyero was that he was interviewing people under economic stress in a room which was full of much-needed goods stolen from someone equally needy, living as difficult a life, and as hard-working. Store owners did not really blame the looters, but asked why they had to pay for the hunger of others and for politicians' deals.

The book is a marvellous analysis of the lootings and a useful antidote to the more celebratory analyses of the *Argentinazo*. If I have one criticism, which is a little unfair (you should criticize a book for what it does say, not what it doesn't) it is that it could have been improved by more linkage to the more widely known protests elsewhere in Buenos Aires. The lootings seem to be completely disconnected from the wider picket and pot-banging protests that overthrew De la Rúa, yet they went on at the same time as the wider mobilizations in other parts of the conurbation. The wider protests are almost ignored – is there no connection? Isn't the phenomenon of looting part of a wider process of collective action? Auyero does not tell us either way. The result is that we do not get any sense of some of the more positive things that came out of the *Argentinazo*: the mobilizations of neighbourhood assemblies, the occupied factories, and the later more social democratic development model of Kirchner and now Fernandez. Things seem too bleak, too hopeless. If the book is read alongside other accounts, and as a marvellously written analysis of the dark side of the better known events in Argentina, this need not be a problem.

Peter North