

Daniel Ozarow, *The Mobilization and Demobilization of Middle-Class Revolt: Comparative Insights from Argentina*

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Looking at the Argentine middle class and questioning its practices and behaviour is challenging for any academic. Daniel Ozarow takes up the challenge of analysing why non-politically active middle-class citizens engage in radical protest movements and why they eventually demobilise.

To answer these questions, Ozarow summarises the Argentine case and then establishes counterpoints with experiences in the United States, Syria, Greece, the United Kingdom, etc. Based on the analysis of the mobilisation processes of the middle classes in Argentina, from the events that took place in the context of the 2001 crisis, Ozarow examines how the middle class responds to collective economic and political crisis by moving beyond economic reaction in the direction of political revolt. At this point, a question inevitably arises. Is the Argentine case effectively comparable to the other cases mentioned by Ozarow? I do not have a conclusive answer, but we must remember that the economic crises in Argentina did not start in the global capitalist phase. Rather, they have been recurrent phenomena in national history since the middle of the twentieth century.

The hypothesis that underlies the book is that the mobilisation of the middle classes constitutes a response to the processes of impoverishment experienced in the local context and driven by global capitalism. Within this framework, the author undertakes a comparative analysis of the Argentine case with the effects of the 2008 financial crisis on different countries and the mobilisation processes of the middle classes that have accompanied the cycles of economic crisis in global capitalism. In the analysis of the Argentine case, Ozarow makes an enormous and remarkable effort to reconstruct the different moments and contexts of mobilisation of the middle classes in Argentina in the last 20 years. The book leaves suggestive ideas that show the importance of the middle class as an actor with the capacity to influence the political scenario. Although the middle classes do not constitute a politically organised and cohesive actor, they do have an ability to drive the process of social change, provided that their demands resonate with broader sections of society. Likewise, Ozarow visualises the middle class as a sector whose capacity for self-organisation is sustained in a relationship of tension with the political forces in power. However, he points out that recognising the self-organising capacity of the middle classes is far from thinking that ‘these movements were entirely “spontaneous” ... Instead, citizens can be better understood as having joined the protests while either consciously or unconsciously pursuing learned collective repertoires of action’ (p. 235).

As David Hojman suggests in his review (*Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 39: 2 (2020)), Ozarow’s book is fascinating because of the object it is encouraged

to investigate. Indeed, studies dedicated exclusively to the middle classes in Argentina and Latin America are surprisingly scarce. Ozarow's book takes up the gauntlet but does so at the expense of providing an exhaustive definition of the middle classes. In a way, the book equates the middle classes with the impoverished sectors that, hit by the economic debacle, mobilised at the end of 2001, and it leaves pending a more exhaustive discussion about what the middle classes are and which behaviours and practices characterise them.

In an article published in *Nueva Sociedad* ('Rebelión, progresismo y economía moral: La clase media argentina en las últimas dos décadas', vol. 285, 2020), Tobias Boos points out that, during the last decades, studies facing the problems of defining the middle class are part of a line of work that abandons attempts at an objective (economic) delimitation of this social group. Instead, they focus mainly on the subjectivity and self-perception of those who define themselves as middle class. This constructivist perspective emphasises everyday practices, primarily focusing on the middle class as identity. Ozarow's book gives us valuable tools for the analysis of the daily practices of the middle classes – especially their political practices; these allow us to engage with the question of their political identity.

The book argues that some responses of the middle classes to impoverishment in the twenty-first century may be right-wing or reactionary, using the European Union, Donald Trump and Jair Bolsonaro as examples. However, to a certain extent, Ozarow is unaware that the Argentine case is an example of the middle classes, at certain times in history – in their fraternisation with military dictatorships, for example – destroying the myth of their being the bearers of democratic values.

Likewise, the book sometimes equates the mobilised middle classes and the impoverished sectors. However, the events of December 2001 were the result of the articulation of protests in which different social groups converged. These were the disadvantaged middle classes and unemployed sectors – the so-called *piqueteros* groups. Noelia Monge Vega's Ph.D. thesis ('Que se vayan todos: El eco de las cacerolas en los barrios porteños: Asambleas populares en Argentina, perspectiva espacial de la acción colectiva', Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2008) suggests that the meeting point between the different groups and social sectors was that the protagonists of the 2001 mobilisations were non-traditional socio-political actors – actors who, as Ozarow acknowledges, did not invent a new repertoire of collective action but rather drew on social practices experienced years before.

Finally, it is worth noting that, among the impoverished middle classes at the beginning of the twenty-first century, many of the downward social mobility paths could currently be interpreted as unstable trajectories. For example, Gabriel Kessler and Vicente Espinoza have written about social mobility, showing how certain impoverished individuals, at the beginning of the decade, improved their situation in later growth phases ('Movilidad social y trayectorias ocupacionales en Buenos Aires. Continuidades, rupturas y paradojas', Copublicaciones, Naciones Unidas, Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (CEPAL), no. 1965 (2007)). Although some of these individuals fell back into poverty during a new crisis phase, they followed a different trajectory from those who lost all possibility of return. It is therefore worth asking whether the mobilisation of the middle

classes is exclusively due to the reduction in benefits and welfare levels associated with their jobs or, rather, to the fact of experiencing a general destabilisation. As Kessler and I pointed out in a previous paper ('Impoverishment of the Middle Class in Argentina: The "New Poor" in Latin America', *Laboratorium*, 2 (2010)), by affecting almost all dimensions of daily life impoverishment is a constant engine of change.

Ozarow's book is a stimulating work not only because of the contributions and evidence it sets forth to good effect but also because of the discussions it raises, even if it does not exhaust them. Undoubtedly, with all the material at his disposal, the author can resume his future research on the middle classes and on Argentina.

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