

ing up this micro-universe. Locating dozens of institutions linked to the Jewish book on a city map, Dujovne observes that they all coexisted within a range of a few blocks in the neighborhood of Once, the very nodal point of the Jewish presence in Buenos Aires.

The importance of the multiple mediators' roles is illustrated by the analysis of Jewish Book Month in the seventh chapter. This yearly book fair, a central event in Jewish life for two decades starting in 1947, showed the extent to which availability and consumption of books were promoted by the *Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina*. Moreover, the AMIA effectively decided what could be considered a "Jewish book" and what should remain outside this definition.

The author reminds us in the end that Argentine Jews' great willingness to invest in the book was a direct function of their viewing it as a vehicle for embodying and disseminating political and cultural values. A final rhetorical question posed by Dujovne—whether this statement would still be valid today—warns us about the precariousness of Jewish cultural life in Argentina today, and the subsidiary place granted to culture as opposed to entertainment.

Alejandro Dujovne's book came out in 2014, the same year as Emmanuel Kahan's *Recuerdos que mienten un poco. Vida y memoria de la experiencia judía durante la última dictadura militar*. Both publications received honorable mention in the most recent book competition of the Latin American Jewish Studies Association. This cannot be considered mere coincidence. Thanks to Dujovne's methodological approach, we can conclude that the geographical locus of Jewish studies is widening, and that Buenos Aires is in the process of becoming an internationally recognized center for innovative academic production within this field.

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SEBASTIÁN CARASSAI: *The Argentine Silent Majority: Middle Classes, Politics, Violence and Memory in the Seventies*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014.

Sebastián Carassai's *The Argentine Silent Majority* is an insightful account of the attitudes, perceptions and forms of self-understanding held by the Argentine middle classes with respect to the social and political environment of the 1970s. Through an examination of what he calls "middle class sensibilities," the author develops a multi-layered analysis of the middle classes as a ubiquitous (and yet always difficult to grasp) political subject. He explores the sources of alleged

indifference or unresponsiveness to politics, the rationalization of such indifference as a form of non-activist politics, and, more forcefully, how these ways of understanding a volatile economic and political environment were shaped by, and projected onto, mass cultural production. The author proposes a methodology that turns traditional interviews into a rich engagement with personal and collective memory by probing the interviewees' own disposition to reflect on the past and present meanings of their recollections. By combining processes of remembrance and self-reflexivity, Carassai showcases different accounts and rationalizations of the social and political conflicts that the country underwent after the fall of Juan Perón in 1955. He provides an important nuance to the standard narrative about the period, particularly regarding the deep imprint left by the Peronist/anti-Peronist divide, and he shows how the middle sectors positioned themselves with respect to this divide.

To overcome the shadow cast by this demarcation, Carassai focuses, then, on a non-Peronist sensibility that shaped middle class assessments about the nature of political conflict (and politics in general) made by those who recognized themselves as belonging to these middle classes, and thus as possessing the ability to keep their distance from "politics," that is, from publicly visible, traditional forms of political engagement. Far from suggesting that these perceptions and self-understandings were homogeneous, stable and uniformly distributed throughout the country, the author focuses on the contradictions and ambiguities brought about by his informants' testimonies. These recollections become captivating entry points into the dilemmas faced, for instance, by non-activist university students, professionals, small entrepreneurs and housewives. Carassai interweaves these testimonies with an analysis of other "non-political" forms of engaging, understanding and shaping the political. In these accounts, cynicism, humor, apathy and indifference coexist with, and in fact constitute, the core of middle-class sensibilities, which, Carassai argues, are deeply marked by the constraints and frustrations of a polarized political sphere, and the omnipresence (both experiential and historiographic) of an activist youth that was, in fact, a minority amongst a "silent majority" that understood its non-activism (even if retrospectively) as a way of rationalizing and creating its own sphere of political action/inaction.

The author seems to be invested in debunking certain historiographical and political myths of an activist, mobilized and militant middle-class by accounting for those that, for a variety of reasons, expressed their distrust, disenchantment or skepticism towards party-centered or militant politics and found other forms to build their own sense of place and the possibilities (or impossibilities) of action in dire economic and political conditions. Rather than just discrediting the dissident or revolutionary youth activism that shaped much of the political landscape of

the period, Carassai problematizes the way in which militant memories have flattened out the complexities of this rugged past. He thus questions the image of the heroic revolutionary youth that claims all the space of middle-class politics and leaves out the textures, contradictions, and shifts in actors' perceptions of the present in relation to their lived experience and their expectations for the future. This critical drive is more evident in the author's treatment of his informants' perplexities vis-à-vis political violence, their anxieties regarding the instability brought about by polarization, and their changing views regarding the motives, legitimacy and plausibility of the revolutionary Left. In this regard, the author emphasizes the shifts in middle class perceptions about the legitimacy of violent dissent, between the repression of the 1969 uprising in the city of Córdoba and the spread of political violence by guerrilla groups and state-sponsored death squads in the early to mid-1970s. For Carassai, this is a particularly intriguing and paradoxical period given the omnipresence of certain cultural motifs related to violence (in soap operas, press and TV advertising, and in cinema), the increasing cynicism with regard to political polarization, and the ways in which judgments on "extremism" were often formulated in moral rather than strictly political or ideological terms.

The author's detailed analysis of how references to violence permeated the mass media of the period points to an important aspect of the normalization of violence and its connection to notions of masculinity and national identity. Carassai suggests that the non-activist (and more often, non-Peronist) middle classes found themselves increasingly alienated from politics and yet increasingly attracted to the type of moral judgments made, for instance, by television comedians with respect to the general state of disorder and uncertainty, and by soap opera scripts that located issues of activism or militancy in the everyday lives of "common people." The contents analyzed by Carassai provide material that explains the process by which these cultural products "translated" and shaped middle class anxieties. However, at times, the lengthy transcriptions and close interpretation of soap opera scripts and comedy skits feel repetitive and leave no room for a more critical engagement with the entertainment industry as a site of cultural-political production. The reader is thus left wondering whether the author takes for granted a certain transparency of these cultural products in "reflecting" the sensibilities of the middle classes that they appeal to or intend to portray, raising questions about the extent to which this type of cultural history based on discourse/content analysis can actually account for broader social and political aspects of production and mediation.

Nonetheless, *The Argentine Silent Majority* is an important book that offers a fresh and elaborate analytical lens and rich empirical engagement with these understudied aspects of Argentina's history, one that will surely also be of inter-

est for non-Latin Americanist readers interested in middle-class politics and the links between memory, remembrance and violence.

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REBECCA J. ATENCIO: *Memory's Turn: Reckoning with Dictatorship in Brazil*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014.

What are the connections between cultural works and the shared process of dealing with the memory of tragic events, such as those associated with the repressive military regimes of South America in the 1960s and 70s? This is one of the many important questions that the insightful and creatively organized new book by Rebecca J. Atencio, Assistant Professor of Cultural Studies at Tulane University, invites one to consider. Centered on the experiences of Brazil, Atencio's work not only offers a well-researched examination of events pertaining to official and unofficial memory politics during the last 35 years, but also suggestively advances a promising frame of analysis for study of the multifaceted connections between artistic production and institutional mechanisms in postconflict societies.

Atencio convincingly argues that given the country's constrained arena for formal redress – a context constructed on the basis of the Amnesty Law of 1979, which prevented any effort towards legal individual culpability of the systematic repression committed by agents of the state – artistic expression became central in pushing for new ways of thinking about the established narratives of the years under authoritarian rule. This innovative claim is appropriately nuanced with the notion that, though resourceful in fostering new conversations about the experience of political repression, these same cultural artifacts (e.g. personal memoirs, novels, plays, TV soap-operas, and theatrical performances) have nonetheless been limited in their ability to move beyond the widely shared frame of *reconciliation by memory* wherein most Brazilians agreed to revisit these same traumatic experiences as long as they were to remain in the past, thus pushing aside any more ambitious, let alone restorative proposition for dealing with them.

The introductory chapter of the book suggests some of the complex reasons for the prevalence of this collective tendency to try to move beyond the authoritarian past largely by not actually revisiting the past in any substantive or legally binding way. It would have been useful though to reflect a bit further on how the Amnesty Law gained support from different segments of Brazilian society. The military regime lasted for 21 years and political assassinations were more constrained in scale in Brazil, compared to its neighbors in the region; one should