
RESEÑAS DE LIBROS / BOOK REVIEWS

FEDERICO FINCHELSTEIN, *The Ideological Origins of the Dirty War: Fascism, Populism, and Dictatorship in Twentieth-Century Argentina*. NY: Oxford University Press, 2014.

This book joins a large body of scholarship exploring the origins and legacies of the Argentine military dictatorship of 1976-1983, a watershed in contemporary Argentine history. Federico Finchelstein approaches this topic by analyzing the influence of fascism as a central component of the regime's ideology and practices. Building upon his previous works on Argentine rightist groups and trans-Atlantic fascism, he argues that the military regime should be understood within the long-term evolution of a distinct form of Argentine fascism.

Finchelstein traces the precedents of Argentine fascism to the period of liberal rule in 1853-1916 in relation to ideas and practices such as ethnic cleansing against Indigenous groups and anti-Semitism (chapter 1). However, it came together in the 1930s, in the wake of the 1930 military coup, when extreme, right-wing nationalist (*nacionalista*) groups forged strong bonds with a mobilized antiliberal Catholic Church and the armed forces. They coincided in key points such as opposition to liberalism and democracy, anti-communism, anti-Semitism, and admiration for European fascist regimes. Indeed, Finchelstein argues that the Argentine fascist version was distinct in its "sacred" element, in the peculiar influence of an extreme version of traditional Catholicism. Christianity and fascism became intrinsically related, through shared ideas of violence against internal enemies expressed in anti-Semitic and gender-based images and metaphors (chapters 2 and 3).

The trajectory of Argentine fascism was not linear but rather sinuous, as shown by Juan Peron's ideas and government in 1943-1955 (chapter 4). Perón was not a fascist but revealed fascist influences that he translated into his movement and regime, for example, in his vision of an "organized community" and the emphasis on a charismatic leadership with religious undertones. On the other hand, he broke with the previous Argentine fascist stream in his conflict with the Catholic Church, his lack of anti-Semitism, and his rejection of extreme right-wing *nacionalistas*. After Perón's overthrow in 1955, however, the Argentine fascist stream reappeared with a vengeance, in a polarized environment punctuated by military interventions in politics and the rise of armed factions (chapter 5). By analyzing the complex trajectory of extreme right-wing *nacionalista* and para-

military groups in the 1960s and early 1970s such as Tacuara and the Triple A, Finchelstein concluded that they embodied and radicalized the fascist ideology coined in the 1930s and early 1940s; the difference is that fascist violence was no longer merely rhetorical but became increasingly explicit. Tacuara and the Triple A thus served as conduits to the military dictatorship of 1976-1983, in which the ideas and practices of Argentine fascism regarding an internal enemy, military-Catholic collaboration, anti-Semitism, and violence reached both their climax and logical conclusion (chapter 6).

Written in a clear and persuasive manner and supported by solid research, this excellent book provides a new angle of analysis while establishing a dialog with several bodies of Argentine historiography. It is an important addition to the scholarship on right-wing nationalist groups and ideologies and, particularly, on the influence of the Catholic Church and related groups in Argentine politics expressed by authors such as Daniel Lvovich, Alberto Spectorowsky, Loris Zanatta, and José Zanca. Indeed, cross-fertilization with the military and the Catholic Church explains, according to Finchelstein, the survival of Argentine fascism after the defeat of European fascism in 1945 and its role in shaping exclusionary visions and politics in post-dictatorship Argentina. Finchelstein's analysis also highlights the value of comparative transnational frameworks for analyzing Argentine ideologies that also informs the developing literature on Argentine antifascist groups as presented by Sandra McGee Deutsch, Andrés Bisso, and Nerina Visacovsky. The qualified interpretation regarding the extent of fascist influence on Peronism provides yet another perspective on Peronism's ambiguous ideology, structures, and policies, between its more democratic and more repressive elements, that informs works by Eduardo Elena, Daniel James, Natalia Milanese, Matthew Karush, and Oscar Chamosa. Finally, the book is connected to recent works by Sebastián Carassai, David Sheinin, Alejandra Oberti, and Vera Carnovale that focus on violence and militarization of Argentine politics in the 1960s and the military dictatorship.

Some topics merit further clarification and discussion. Neutrality in the Second World War cannot be equated with pro-Nazi support. Not everyone who supported neutrality in 1943-1944 was a right-wing *nacionalista* tied to the military coup and regime and fascism (p. 68), as it was rooted in traditional Argentine foreign policy and defended by many actors across the political spectrum. The idea that all conservatives who supported the military dictatorship in 1976-1983 were anti-Semites (p. 147) seems excessive; some conservatives were motivated by other factors such as economics and might not have necessarily shared that attitude.

Regarding the survival of nationalist and fascist ideas in post-dictatorship Argentina, Finchelstein correctly notes that the Catholic Church still plays a central role in Argentine society and politics. However, the approval of laws

regarding same-sex marriage and gender equality in recent years despite the furious opposition of the Church shows that this influence is not what it used to be. Finally, Finchelstein provocatively argues that the concept of a society led by powerful leaders and divided between a “true” nation and internal enemies, central to Argentine fascist and nationalist traditions, also surfaces in the human rights discourse expressed by the *kirchnerista* national administrations of 2003-2015. By arguing that there was still a war in the 1970s between “heroes” and “villains,” this discourse only inverted the roles assigned to each side by the former military rulers without questioning the central premises. This polemical argument, presented in a manner that carefully avoids restoring legitimacy to the military’s claims, is at the center of ongoing political and historiographical struggles regarding memory, politics, and human rights in Argentina.

In summary, Finchelstein offers a valuable new perspective on one of the most dramatic periods of Argentine history. The book’s sophisticated theoretical framework, transnational dimension, and dialog with several bodies of historiography make it recommended reading for anyone interested in this topic in Argentina and elsewhere.

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ROBERT M. BUFFINGTON: *A Sentimental Education for the Working Man: The Mexico City Penny Press, 1900-1910*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015.

It is painfully difficult to write about working class folk in any time or at any place. Mexico is no exception, for the documentation is scarce. Robert M. Buffington has discovered in the penny press of Mexico City what he believes is a passageway into the minds of urban workers. Buffington examines in detail three penny press newspapers in Mexico City over the course of the first decade of the twentieth century. He also references another eight such newspapers at least once. This is fascinating material.

There are questions that arise immediately. It is not clear just how representative the penny press was of the sentiments of the popular classes. The author does not discuss how often these periodicals appeared (daily, weekly, monthly), how many issues are extant, how many issues the author examined, or how large the circulation or readership. We have no figures for literacy or anecdotes about poor *capitalinos* passing on the newspapers to others, so as to gauge the size of the audience and thus assess the impact of the penny press. The author admits the

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