



Review of *The Poor's Struggle for Political Incorporation: The Piquetero Movement in Argentina* by Federico M. Rossi. 2017. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 314 pages, ISBN 978- 1316273180 Hardback (\$106)

Reviewed by Tomás Gold

University of Notre Dame

tgold@nd.edu

Despite the extensive academic debate generated by the so-called Pink Tide in Latin America over the last decade, few studies have aimed to provide a holistic analysis of how popular sectors organized to enter the political arena and reshape state-society relations during these governments' years in office. *The Poor's Struggle for Political Incorporation* is a promising attempt to fill this gap: it develops a stimulating theoretical framework for understanding patterns of interaction between social movements and the State after neoliberal reforms, and it highlights the importance of these dynamics in explaining the emergence and resilience of leftist governments at the dawn of the new century. Federico Rossi's book is devoted to studying the *Piquetero* movement in Argentina—arguably the most significant unemployed workers' movement in the world. Yet, the book, in fact, offers a wide array of theoretical arguments and concepts that appear to have been constructed with a view towards generating comparative analyses, an intuition that is confirmed by the appearance of a new volume co-edited by Rossi and Eduardo Silva (2018) that comprises several case studies from across the region.

The concept of political incorporation, which is central to Rossi's argument, draws on Collier and Collier's (1991) masterpiece "Shaping the Political Arena"—a work that analyzes the first wave of incorporation of the popular sectors in Latin America during the 1930s-1950s. Rossi



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argues that following the mid-century union-centered incorporation of the poor in the region, neoliberal reforms carried out between the 1970s and 1990s excluded and marginalized popular sectors from the socio-political arena, weakening earlier corporatist mediations and thereby reducing their power. Following the Colliers' scheme, the book contends that a second wave of political incorporation emerged during the 1990s, based on the struggle of popular sector social movements that demanded recognition and reincorporation within the State. Due to the weakness of corporatist-based arrangements after neoliberal reforms, this second wave of incorporation was centered on territorialized movements which combined a wide set of culturally-rooted strategies in order to achieve socio-political inclusion.

The core chapters of *The Poor's Struggle for Political Incorporation* present a fine-grained process-tracing of the *Piquetero* movement in Argentina, covering the years of its origin and legitimation (1996-2003), the process of its reincorporation (2003-2008), and the aftermath of this process (2009-2015). Although Rossi acknowledges the influence of the Colliers' work on his analysis, some theoretical and methodological differences in his approach should be noted. Rossi, distancing himself from path dependence and macro structural analysis, proposes a dynamic and cultural framework that rests upon foundations drawn from social movement studies. This shift away from an analytical focus centered on elite-level politics – of the kind found in “Shaping the Political Arena” – to a “bottom up” approach is fundamental for understanding the book's central claims. Instead of relying on a critical junctures argument, Rossi analyses the *Piquetero* movement from a historically grounded dynamic perspective. As he repeatedly mentions, neither historical institutionalism nor social movement studies can by themselves explain the reincorporation process. The book aims at promoting cross-fertilization among these diverse approaches and analytical tools. In this manner, instead of following what he calls a “theory-guided” narrative, Rossi successfully demonstrates the inherently dialogical and contingent dynamic that shapes the reincorporation process, basically by paying equal attention to both the *Piqueteros'* strategies and the reactions from State actors at both the national and subnational levels.

The main concepts used to construct this macro-historical narrative are presented in the second chapter of the book, which makes a remarkable contribution to social movement studies by defining the notions of “repertoire of strategies” and “stock of legacies.” Constructed around blind spots in Charles Tilly's traditional notion of repertoire, these concepts are presented as crucial means by which to avoid a teleological perspective when looking at reincorporation processes. The first concept aims at highlighting the complex repertoire of public, semi-public, and private actions that can be implemented by a social movement, developed through both contentious and non-contentious strategies. The discussion of the second concept, based on Alfred Schutz's concept of “stock of experience,” offers an explanation of stability and change in

available repertoires. By emphasizing the process whereby social movements rely on the sedimentation of past struggles and their results, Rossi manages to dissipate the structuralist foundation of Tilly's original concept.

Both notions are cautiously applied to the analysis of the *Piquetero* movement, as Rossi reconstructs the historical repertoires of strategies of the principal organizations (autonomist, *foquista*, NGO-ization, State colonization, etc.), and the stock of legacies that their members rely upon (*Zapatismo*, *Guevarismo*, transnational NGOs, multi-class popular fronts, etc.). Chapters 3, 4 and 5 trace the growth of the movement and its struggle to be recognized by the State as the representative of the poor, paying careful attention to multi-level disputes with local, provincial, and national political players between the years 1996 and 2003. This task proves to be particularly difficult due to the nature of the *Piquetero* movement itself: it consists of dozens of organizations, many of which are informally organized, with low levels of institutionalization. Although Rossi manages to reconstruct the strategies of the different organizations and State actors so carefully that the reader can easily get lost while exploring these passages, this is just one of the ways that he succeeds in revealing the complexity of the historically grounded analysis developed in this book. Instead of taking the easy path of simplifying the intricate organization of the movement, he carefully traces the movement's growth by following its strategic use of horizontal (intra-government) and vertical (multi-level) structures of opportunity, while at the same time analyzing how the outcomes generated by these strategies continuously shaped the future actions of the movement itself.

Although the historical narrative of the book can be somewhat difficult to follow due to certain particularities of the Argentinean political system (the informal nature of political parties, the federal distribution of power, the multi-level struggles within the Peronist party, etc.), Rossi is able to explain how the *Piqueteros* progressively achieved recognition by balancing contentious and non-contentious actions to engage with different players in the political arena. Seeking to reverse the rise of unemployment and labor market flexibilization as a key heritage of the neoliberal decades, the organizations manage to build a *Piquetero* political domain by negotiating with politicians, as well as with individual and informal "political operators," over the terms and extent of public policy implementation.

Following in the steps of another classic on this subject, *Entre la ruta y el barrio* (Svampa & Pereyra 2003), Rossi traces the increased coordination of the movement, but also takes into account its internal divisions, reflecting varied legacies and strategic choices. He particularly emphasizes some specific moments during which the State legitimated the *Piqueteros* as representative of the unemployed. The 2001-2002 crisis and the failed attempt at State reincorporation during Eduardo Duhalde's interim presidency are analyzed in such careful detail

that the subsequent party incorporation of the movement under the Kirchner government appears as a logical consequence of the previous contentious period. In contrast to prevailing interpretations of the leftward turn that emphasize the central role of charismatic leaders (i.e. studies of populism or presidentialism in Latin American democracies), Rossi stresses the historical struggle of the popular sectors to achieve recognition from the emergent government, and the hidden patterns that underlie popular support for these new left leaderships.

Subsequent chapters include an analysis of the movement's party-territorial incorporation in the socio-political arena between 2003 and 2009 (chapter 6), and the aftermath of this second incorporation process up through 2015 (chapter 7). Highlighting differences with the first wave of incorporation, Rossi underlines the importance of the territorialized inclusion of the popular sectors and the alteration of previous corporatist patterns. In fact, the analysis of the struggle between the actors of the first and second waves of incorporation represents one of the most interesting contributions of the book. Claiming that the second incorporation implied the end of the hegemonic role of Peronism and the CGT (the main union actor) as representatives of the popular sectors' claims, Rossi illuminates the division between union-incorporated workers and the rest of the labor force, as well as the different channels through which the popular sectors are selectively included in the socio-political arena. While traditional Peronist unions remained in control of the Ministry of Labor (the main institution created to address the first incorporation), the newer Ministries of Social Development and Federal Planning were formalized to address issues that concerned the new *Piquetero* policy domain; these bodies included *piquetero* leaders in their formal structure and provided them with political leverage from within the structure of the State.

In this sense, the book interestingly highlights both the movement's autonomy from, and dependence on, the State. While the *Piqueteros* struggle to capture the State's attention and manage to achieve both recognition and agency within the policy-making process, the movement is also a fragmented and low-institutionalized actor that does not resemble the structured character of its corporatist predecessor. In fact, a major division emerged during the Kirchner presidencies between more autonomous—and autonomis—organizations and those movements that relied on strategies of state colonization. Rossi does not take a normative stand regarding these strategic directions, and he maintains a rich dialogue with historical institutionalism that translates into a complex analysis of the limits of the incorporation itself. Showing the influence of the *Piquetero* movement on several government policies, he also manages to trace its internal struggles, as well as the competition with Peronist unions inside the ministries devoted to labor-related issues.

The book argues that the end of this second wave of incorporation in Argentina followed upon the strong conflict opened by the rural lockout against the Kirchner administration in 2008. Rossi

understands that this clash deepened the internal divisions within the *Piquetero* movement and delineated the limits of the neo-developmental model implemented by the government since 2003. The results and the aftermath of the reincorporation process are therefore analyzed in chapter 7, which presents the main evolution of the *Piquetero* policy domain, the influence of the movement on the neo-development model, and the consequences of this process after 2008.

Although the arguments posed by Rossi throughout the book are well-constructed, they leave some questions unanswered, and the reader is left with the impression that the decline of the reincorporation wave is not reconstructed as well as its emergence. For example, although he mentions the tense relationship between the *Piquetero* movement and the Governor of Buenos Aires province, Daniel Scioli, Rossi does not reconstruct its relationship with Scioli's political operators and the provincial government's main policy domains as carefully as in the previous chapters of the book. Furthermore, given Scioli's defeat as the presidential candidate of the *Frente para la Victoria* (the Kirchner's party) in the 2015 elections, the decline of Kirchner's networks of support within the *Piquetero* movement in this key district emerges as an important topic that remains mostly unexplored. Consequently, the author leaves unaddressed questions about the *Piqueteros'* relations not only with union-based actors, but also with the main party organizations within the Kirchner administration. Consequently, while Rossi's political economic hypothesis that the end of the second incorporation process is attributable to the failure of the neo-developmental model seems compelling, arguably this account underplays a more political explanation stressing the (absence of) interactions between the *Piqueteros* and other State actors over the final years of the Kirchner administration. The reader expects to be confronted with a "bottom-up" type of narrative, but Rossi draws upon a macro structural argument that does not pay full tribute to the framework presented during the first chapters of the book.

Finally, the third and last part of the book presents a brief comparison with the waves of reincorporation in Bolivia and Brazil, thus illustrating the flexibility of the theoretical framework and making the case for further analysis of intra-regional variations. Paying attention to four key variables that attempt to explain such differences—the nature of democratic transitions, changes in party systems during neoliberalism, the modeling of the union system during the first incorporation, and their levels of erosion after neoliberalism—Rossi successfully reconstructs the different nature and influence of reincorporation movements in Bolivia and Brazil. This chapter is crucial for the argument of the book because it deploys the carefully constructed nature of the concepts and theoretical framework developed along the first chapters to other cases. The brief comparison with the Bolivian and Brazilian trajectories makes clear that although the book presents a meticulously process-traced case study, it aims at generating comparative tools with which to understand waves of reincorporation in several countries of the region.

The Poor's Struggle for Political Incorporation is an outstanding model of scholarship for how to understand the complex interactions between social movements and the State in Latin America, and its insights extend far beyond the cases analyzed in this particular volume.

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