

GABRIEL KESSLER: *Controversias sobre la desigualdad: Argentina 2003-2013*. Buenos Aires, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2014.

After the crisis of 2001, Argentina experienced a rapid recuperation; nevertheless, analysts discuss to what extent this process accelerated the country's poverty and despair. Some experts proclaim that the material asymmetries among classes have been substantially reduced. In this discussion, a more than interesting question arises. Was Kirchnerismo (as a leading project) conducive to a decade of wealth and prosperity or was it simply a fake that led the country to a desperate state of underdevelopment? Far from being simple, the answer to this question still remains unresolved.

Gabriel Kessler's *Controversias sobre la Desigualdad* combines the empirical indicators of the periods 2001-2003, 2004-2008, and 2009 up to now. Kessler is a well known Argentine sociologist who emphasizes the need for understanding poverty's acceleration as a key factor in delinquency. Although the nature of politics involves a struggle to impose one particular meaning over others, today two contrasting voices coexist causing ontological confusion in the citizenry. One wave interprets "kirchnerismo" as a process of radical substantial changes that narrowed the wide economic asymmetries of capitalism, while others consider it a continuation of former neoliberalism that led the country to the worst economic crisis in its history. Reconciling both tendencies, Kessler understands that both voices are right. Is that possible?

The paradoxical fact is that development and underdevelopment went through diverse directions in Argentina during all this time. Kessler's thesis, based on rich empirical research, shows that the growth of certain indicators in the fields of economy activated big problems in others. Kessler's insight explores how the citizenry experienced real relief brought about by Kirchnerismo, but the perdurability of other inequalities were never eradicated. It is important for any social scientist to avoid falling into "epistemological realism," Kessler adds. This engenders the risk of interpreting reality by means of indicators. To put this bluntly, indicators of GINI coefficient may not be enough to determine that a country is less or more unequal in respect to others, nor that the economy has reached the development or necessary maturation for the whole population to have their basic needs met. The rise

of GDP does not indicate that production is channeled in equal forms to all classes. Besides, income and mass-consumption fail to predict the tenets of development in the modern economy. In comparison with 2001, a lot of families receive higher incomes but they are absorbed by the increasing inflation. The second point of entry in this discussion depends on the lens through which the data is scrutinized. To some extent, the contrast of decades may be illustrative in some fields but confusing in others. Underpinned in the proposition that neoliberalism (dated 1990-2001) was widely accepted as the epicenter of the crisis and chaos, from these days on, the economy was substantially improved and sanitized. Nonetheless, if analysts delve into the periods between 2001 and 2004 and between 2005 and 2010, they will find a clear stagnation of the economic engine. Not surprisingly, Argentina's growth has headed back. The information produced by INDEC, the official organ of statistics and census, is another problem.

Last but not least, social inequality prompted the rise of delinquency and crime in densely populated towns. Distributed unevenly, the official resources do not suffice to deter local crime simply because the government does not implement an all-encompassing program. The results of inequalities are inextricably intertwined with victimization and crime. Paradoxically, as soon as the current discourse (according to the paradigm of securitization) asks for more police activity on the street, its power is limited by civil law. Kessler argues convincingly that some studies show a correlation between GINI indicator and delinquency reduction. The inequality would be a key factor in the young offenders. The improvement brought by governments in Argentina, Bolivia, and Paraguay (like many other Latin American nations) paved the way for controlling crime and delinquency; in some towns the rates even dropped.

However, uneven development has fabricated spaces of ghettoization where lower classes are subject to a "presumption of danger" subordinating the interest of society to the status quo. Far from being reduced, delinquency seems to be circumscribed to some peripheral boroughs, which are labeled as sanctuaries for offenders. The imposition of disciplinary mechanisms to control "undesired guests" is based on what Kessler calls, "the authoritarian voice." It corresponds to an increasing demand of further securitization that not only affects the stability in the world but also over-valorizes the efficacy of the private market in fixing security issues over the State. In common parlance, from 2003 onwards, the rate of offences was slightly reduced but never to the levels registered earlier than 2001. Beyond this, Kessler reminds us that more vulnerable classes are at greatest risk because of delinquency and crime.

Every chapter addresses the evolution of demographic, economic and social indicators and its respective effects on daily life. Given this argument, the urgency in defining what is equality and development orchestrates the argument of the first chapter, which is a common thread throughout the book. The second section explores the income factor that boosted the conditions of some classes who were pauperized during neoliberalism; the third discusses to what extent these monetary benefits allowed fairer access to land and decent housing. In our view, the fourth is the best chapter of the book, in which rural and urban development is studied. It is important not to lose sight of the fact that rural issues have been ignored by classical Argentine sociology. Kessler saves the best for last. The current problems of delinquency and victimization are evidence of the uneven development Argentina has recently reached. Readers of this book will find a text that criticizes the current political discourse in a polished style combining methodological rigor with finely grained prose.

Maximiliano E. Korstanje

University of Palermo, Argentina