Article

Youth and Politics in Democratic Argentina: Inventing Traditions, Creating New Trends (1983–2008)

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Abstract

This article has three objectives. First, to present the trajectories of youth studies, in particular about youth and politics, in Argentina from 1983 to 2008. This section is the centre of the article and it is organized in three axes, we will first show the link between the historical context and the possibility of research on youth, both for their appearance as objects of study and for the development of social sciences in Argentina. Then we will detail this background that constitutes what we call 'the invention of tradition', and we will pass on to a characterization of current tendencies in the field of youth studies and politics. The second objective is to present through a case study (participation in secondary schools) some discussions regarding the link between youth and politics. Finally, we will discuss youth and politics as an academic and societal preoccupation in the light of the aforementioned processes.

Introduction[1]

The first mention to youth as a sector of the population in Argentina dates the beginning of the twentieth century. Before, references to young men involved in politics, wars and the building of the Nation (Clementi, 1982), were common, but usually refering to individuals or in some cases, as a group of conspicous characters. However, in 1918 members of a political action group appeared in public as 'The Argentinian Youth of Cordoba', to identify both the condition of being university students and their generational positioning. In their manifesto, they summoned 'the

South American Free Men' to join 'the heroic destiny of youth'. They proclaimed that 'the youth is no longer requesting, they are demanding the recognition of their right to express their own interests and concerns through direct representation in the university governing bodies. They are tired of standing tyrants' (Roca, 1918).

This political way of the young appearing in public life exclusively incarnated for half a century by university students, and later on, also by the youth sections of political parties, has left an indelible mark in the construction of the representation of the ´the political´ and the youth. Without appearing in the headlines for a while, but with an ongoing struggle through political parties and labour unions, the political action of Argentinean young men and women remained linked to other age groups in the class struggles, and some other times confronted with the adults in succession or cultural change struggles. From the earliest records available, (Brignardello, 1972; Portantiero, 1978; Manzano, 2010) there are references to the link between youth and politics, both as praised or denigrated action and by the accusation of inaction. However, understandings of both youth and politics have changed through time. This will be one of the axes of this paper: how categories, approaches and the interpretation of events around youth and politics have been co-produced, and how they emerged according to the historical-political processes and some international bonds.

Historical Context

In Argentine history, 10 December 1983, represents much more than the moment when a democratic government took office to replace the so-called 'Process of National Reorganization', which formally started on 24 March 1976.[2] That December Friday works as a constructor of temporality in the narratives about Argentinean life in general and political life in particular. It is a symbolic hinge between what was left behind and the expectations on what was to come, the expression of a disjunction between two stages in the history of a country. The State Terrorism used by the dictatorship left the task of constructing the tragic list of assassinated, missing, tortured, appropriated, exiled, persecuted and stolen people. There also remained intangible teachings on the forms, and above all the consequences, of establishing bonds among people, and between these and the state, to participate, organize, petition and occupy the public space as a political practice. It is also the mark of the starting period and the deepening of the process of decomposition of the integrationist matrix of the country, particularly visible in the changes of the socio-economic structure by the deindustrialization and the mutations in the occupational structure.

The young men and women were the favourite target of repressive politics organized from the State by the military government in those years.[3] Genocidal manoeuvres legitimized the formula young is equivalent to subversive is equivalent to terrorist. Two phrases well represent the State uses of the media to discourage any political involvement, not just among the youth, but the whole population. A common state funded advert was 'Madam, do you know where your child is right

now?' The other phrase was originated in the core of the families, 'Do not get involved' and it was repeated. 'Getting involved' is the political way of being there, being part, being included, implicated in 'politics', or in any meeting to plan actions of change. Getting politically involved meant appearing in political life. But in this context, there were sinister associations: getting involved meant disappearing, since it carried the almost certain consequence of the physical disappearance of the person and not only the political subject. In Argentina that lethal effect of 'the participation' impregnates the reading of the actions till present times, adding characteristics that were subsequently originated and which will be dealt with later on in this article. The social sciences, the people that were part of them, their institutions (universities, research centres), libraries and fieldwork spaces were another target of the repressive actions of the State: the death, disappearance, exile, dismissal and expulsion of teachers and researchers, burning of books and publications, lack of investment, destruction of sources, dismantling of academic networks and centres, closing down of courses of studies or the removal of their contents, are some of the pillars that supported the scientific policies of the military government.

The announcement of elections in 1983 together with the retreat of the military from the government, seemed to bring an illusion to society: that the return of a democratic regimen would bring the solution to all problems, the demands would be attended for, freedom and equality would come true. The account of history was based on new conceptual coordinates, particularly on the axis of authoritarianism-democracy, transforming the elections of 1983 into a turning point that changed the logic of friend-foe present in the political violence that characterized Argentine society.[4] The trust or hopes in the achieved democracy neglected giving attention to other social life realms for a while. During the stage that the country was inaugurating, the social sciences researchers sought to investigate the continuities and ruptures of the Argentine politics tradition, as well as identifying the institutional weaknesses that the elected government had to face. Among the ruptures, one of the most significant was that the citizenship appealed to a novel legitimacy source to back its actions. The revaluation of rights and justice as a source and support was closely connected to the increased debate and elaboration around Human Rights issues, partly produced as an opposition to the vexations committed by the former dictatorship. All this brought about a notion of citizenship which basically referred to the sphere of individual and political rights, giving them such a character that valued the private sphere and the necessity of consolidating a Social State of Law which guaranteed human life but in turn corroded the ties of co-responsibility towards community life.

In 1985, the democratic governing bodies put on trial the leaders of the Military Juntas who held the 'de facto' government from 1976 to 1983.[5] This constituted a milestone event in political behaviour and brought about the modification of the meanings of justice which acquired an institutional character (Jelin, 1996). Smulovitz (2002) states that the sentence to the former military commanders implied a discovery of the benefits of law and led various actors to legitimise their actions with discourses invoking the law or denouncing its violation. However, trust in the state of the law ended up being somewhat delusive when some years later some laws put an end to the trials against the military repressors.[6]

It is now necessary to mention other issues on the way citizenship is constructed in this country. Argentine society was distinguished during most of the twentieth century in the Latin American context, together with other countries in the Southern Cone such as Chile and Uruguay, due to their extended middle classes and a more equalitarian social structure, compared to Brazil, Peru and Bolivia among others. This allowed for social integration, where the State had a determinant role. The Argentinean integrationist matrix was mainly supported by two pillars: the development of a homogeneous educational system for the whole country, which boasted about being an equalitarian institution where different social classes shared the same space and the extension of social rights by way of integrating into the labour market as a reference for the construction of the justice sphere (Jelin, 1996). This perception of equality had not only a symbolic but a concrete value in the social imaginary, made evident in the subjects' trajectory through social institutions and in the marks they left in the constitution of the subjectivity and collective identifications.

This description, which might sound nostalgic, must be accompanied by another page of the national course of events. In one of O'Donnell's papers (2004) on the early 1980s—which just recently became notorious—he stated that when compared to Brazil, Argentina is characterized by being both a relatively egalitarian and an authoritarian society at the same time, because of its high levels of upward social mobility and several decades of authoritarian regimes. After 1983, the value of these qualities started to reverse because Argentina achieved a substantial progress in the presence of institutionality and the performance of the formal mechanisms of democracy and, in turn social mobility reversed. As a result, ten years later in 1993, it was a more unequal and more democratic country and in 10 more years by 2003, there was more inequality and a more consolidated democracy. Thus, there was a map of inclusive imaginaries created during much of the twentieth century, which no longer agreed with the representation of a polarized and fragmented territory.

For much of contemporary Argentinean youth, the State no longer represented the body of institutions which through its actions linked its citizens as part of a whole, but instead many of the juvenile practices took place rather in opposition to the State's presence. The conception of the State as a dangerous other contributed to delineate new traces for the construction of juvenile identitarian narratives. The cases of 'trigger-happy' killings cases of use of firearms by the police or private security guards as an expression of institutional violence, that had increased considerably during the 1990s, and the inclusion of insecurity issues in the public agenda, restrict the guarantees provided by civilian rights, which results in the intensification of distrust of state institutions on the part of young men and women. This topic will be addressed later on.

Youth Studies: Inventing Traditions

The forms of inclusion and exclusion as objective and subjective conditions of the social experience were under privileged study in social sciences since the return of democracy in 1983. Most of the studies did not focus on the juvenile and the political

until the 1980s (Bonvillani et al., 2008). The exception was History (Brignardello, 1972; Clementi, 1982; Kleiner, 1964; Portantiero, 1978), which as a good memory keeper, always helps to remember that sometimes there is little novelty in what we believe to discover. Youth had not earned special attention, not only because the conditions of critical scientific production were extremely difficult during the dictatorial period, but basically because the sector had not been viewed as relevant for the understanding of society in general, and because it was not valued as a particular object of study either.

It was in 1985, together with the declaration of United Nations as the International Youth Year, that research funding was available and made it possible for the national statistics bodies to write reports on demographic age groups. An example of the impact that the UN call produced is the response of the Argentine government which constituted the National Committee of Coordination for the International Youth Year (A.I.J. for the words in Spanish) under the jurisdiction of the Department of Human Development and Family, Ministry of Health and Social Services of the Nation (Special Act No. 42/84), which was successful in several provinces (Buenos Aires, Neuquén, Río Negro, Mendoza, San Juan, Tucumán and Misiones). At the domestic level, in 1986 a Youth Area was created under the Department of Human Development and Family, which was upgraded the following year by the creation of the Undersecretariat of Youth (Executive Order No. 280/1987) under the same Department. In 1988, also by Executive Order (PEN 1618/88) the Interdepartmental Youth Commission was created, as the first attempt to design and coordinate policies addressed to the youth from the various areas of the National State, thus following the example of comprehensive plans in Spain (Nuñez, 2004).

In the field of scientific research, that was a time that marked the start of a tradition of youth studies in Argentina (Braslavsky, 1986; Llomovate, 1988; Mekler, 1992; Vila, 1985;). The 'discovery' that the analysis of the youth sector allowed to anticipate characteristics of the conditions of life in the future was one of the drives, because it would be seen in the young men and women of the mid-eighties, how the integrationist matrix which had offered trajectories of inclusion to their parents and grandparents, no longer offered the same opportunities to these new cohorts.

Issue No. 29 of the CEPAL magazine of 1986 offers the summarized results of the research undertaken to make a situational diagnosis of some countries in Latin America (CEPAL, 1986). That same year 'La juventud argentina. Informe de situación'. (Braslavsky, 1986) was published. It was a piece of work that turned out to be founding of the sociological studies on youth for various reasons. It made a detailed analysis of the social situation of the segment, by comparing its situation to that of precedent generations. But also, it discussed the myth of Argentine youth as being homogeneous, by using colours as metaphors to describe the reality of the sector. Anticipating the structural reforms of the 1990s, the author showed the crystallization of the evolving new social structure and the corresponding growth of social inequality. The report includes descriptions of activities in political parties, labour unions or student associations, spontaneous or organized social demonstrations and armed movements, as ways of political participation for young men and women. In 1986, there were still latent the echoes of the experience of political-military

organizations of the sixties and seventies, to whom a great amount of young people had joined as a main road for political involvement.

The reflection on the political participation of youth from then on focused on more traditional forms of political involvement such as membership in political parties, high school student centres and above all, university student movements, thus continuing with the historical readings that had developed before 1983 (Berguier et al., 1986; Ceballos, 1985). A relevant exception is Vila's paper (1985) on national rock as a social movement which was part of a publication that collected the debates conducted in 1985 at the Seminar on Social Movements in Argentina, as part of the Work team of the Latin-American Council of Social Sciences.

The democratic context under the presidency of Raúl Alfonsín (1983–1989)— member of the *Unión Cívica Radical*—permitted the return of critical and systematic scientific research. Universities started to recover their normal life, and electoral processes brought back the university/student co-government. Scholars who had been removed regained their chairs, research centres and libraries gradually started going back to shape. The fruits of the possibility of studying and producing knowledge with state funding in a context of free thought would only show some years later because the periods of time of human resources formation are measured at least in decades.

In 1989, Carlos Menem (member of the Justicialist Party) took office and the country started to experience, not without some shaky periods,a democracy with a continuum of constitutional presidential elections. Menem occupied the presidency during a decade, for two periods (1989–1995 and 1995–1999). Those years are now called in Argentina 'the nineties' or 'the neoliberal era', except for some staunch supporters of that ideology, it has been agreed both in sciences and in the representations of many citizens, an explanation of the period characterized by the 'depletion of the State', 'big transformations which led a large amount of Argentineans into poverty', 'destruction of public education', 'privatization of State enterprises' and 'corruption' among other frequently repeated phrases.

Back in those years, O'Donnell (1993) described the ongoing sociocultural and political transformations as a crisis of the State that was reflected in three dimensions: (*a*) territorial, for not reaching the whole country; (*b*) functional, related to the efficiency of the law; (*c*) symbolic, because it diminished the perception that the State actions tend to common wellbeing. The crisis reinforced what O'Donnel branded a 'low intensity citizenship'. Facing that panorama, the reader can imagine that education, science and technology as strategic planning of a nation towards its own development were not a priority for the Menem regime. Nevertheless, research funding sources increased, compared to earlier periods. It is then a period of continuity in university education and scientific production.

One event in that decade deserves to be commented on because it would influence the development of the field. Argentina experienced, especially since the second half of the 1990s, the start of the expansion of postgraduate studies. The impact of this transformation can be taken as an example in the area we are dealing with: the eight first doctoral theses known, whose theme and authors are centred in youth studies from the social sciences correspond to people trained in public

universities postgraduate programmes, with doctoral studies funded in five cases by the CONICET (National Council of Technical and Scientific Research), in two cases by national universities and one case of unknown source. This by no means implies that there were no other productions on the topic during that period. The graduation with the highest rank and the funding sources and institutions that made it possible are aspects to be considered in order to comprehend the weaving that underlies the constitution of a field of studies.

Youth Studies: Creating New Tendencies

The success achieved by the government in applying policies that redefined the role of the State and the market made the country lose its state-centred matrix which had characterized it in earlier decades (Cavarozzi, 2002). This led researchers to turn their investigations towards other topics. In the mid-90s the research on youth slowly started to consolidate as a renown sphere partly due to the intensification of socio-logical studies on education and work, the dedication to the sector of well-known researchers of Sociology of Culture particularly the group directed by Mario Margulis (1994 till present) and also the one coordinated by Ana Wortman (1991 till present), both from the IIGG, UBA (Gino Germani Research Institute, University of Buenos Aires), the creation in 1994 of the Youth Programme in FLACSO—successively directed in this order by René Bendit, Sergio Balardini and Ana Miranda—and the eruption of academic production from other fields such as communications educa-tion, anthropology, social work and political sciences (in a decreasing order).

As it occurred in other countries (Machado, 1993), in Argentina it is also possible to show the articulation between the definition of social problems and research prob-lems. There seems to be an amalgam between the way societies define their social problems and the election of research problems. The growing interest of research in social sciences to understand the ways youths experience social phenomena is con-comitant with the increment of societal preoccupation on youth.

The first endeavour to compile the diversity of scientific papers in the field of youth studies was made by Diego Fraga and Ignacio Samaca from FLACSO when they published a listing of 'Bibliography on Youth in Argentina' (1994). Twelve years later, while preparing a National Study Project on Youth in Argentina, Chaves (2009) wrote a report, comprising the period 1983–2006 and including papers from various disciplines. It was organized by approaches constructed from the question: what are the notions from which the topic is read? And recurring coincidences were found among the topics and the way to approach them. The writer states that the privileged approach for the analysis of the political among young people is that of participation in terms of 'he/she is involved by doing or he/she is not' and almost exclusively in relation to the axis state/political organizations such as the parties or the vote. In turn, she stresses certain changes in the way researchers analyze the situation of youths.

Proceeding with the analysis of that report until the present time and by dealing with the studies on youth and politics, it is possible to distinguish three streams that

developed after the decade of the 1980s. The new tendencies take as a substrate the previous production, but are different in terms of thematic specialization and, above all, the approach; and the social space is delimited for the search of the 'political' in young men and women, or of the 'juvenile' in politics. Although we believe it is still early days for a categorization, it is possible to distinguish studies centred in (*a*) the political organized (*b*) the politicity of juvenile practices and (*c*) the juvenile in the political.

The first group comprise studies that account for the politics associated to organizations and the State. This tendency is further subdivided into two groups. The first includes mainly quantitative studies accounting for degrees of youth participation, adscription, acceptance or denial of political organizations or State institutions. The second group comprises qualitative research describing and interpreting the meaning that youths give to the State and to the more classic organizations of the democratic functioning: institutionalized power, the political party system, the labour union organizations and student organizations (students centres); and the other possibility, the social movements.

The studies present a diagnosis of the youth situation where it is observed that since the early 1990s juvenile unemployment tripled that of the other age groups, but also that labour instability and precarious employment affected them more than unemployment in the long run. The increase in educational coverage that the new generations experienced was not correlative to an improvement in working opportunities (Salvia and Lépore, 2004). All this hindered youngsters' chances for constructing their citizenship through access to work, a sphere that, as we stated before, had been substantial as a space for the exercise of rights in the country.[7] Just as young people, and the rest of the society, lost interest in political parties as a means for channelling demands, the labour unions stopped being referents for identitarian adscription for most of the population, and the State faded away or it became a synonym for corruption, whereby it was better to move apart and not support political involvement in that instance (Sidicaro and Tenti Fanfani, 1998).

The representations of impunity for the powerful, the 'filth' in politics, the lack of social justice, the absence of the State, the little transparency in the state's agencies and the violent and illegal behaviour of some state agents generated negative associations between the state and the creation of political practices that intend to distance themselves from the realm of traditional politics (Chaves, 2003, 2009; Elizalde, 2003, 2005). These actions that oppose the militant tradition privileged by earlier generations at the same time produce new political sensibilities from their daily experiences (Bonvillani, 2009; Elizalde, 2003; Nuñez, 2003). We have already stated that the context of interaction in which young people learn the meanings of doing politics, is organized around different spatial and temporal coordinates from the ones that structured the modes of political involvement protagonized by their parents or grandparents. Some other articles dealing with this are the ones that analyze the juvenile representations and practices about and in state institutional spaces (Kriger, 2007; Mayer, 2009) or organizations anchored in the student condition (Aringoli and Cerros Jaramillo, 2010; Zaffaroni, 2007).

For example, the social movements of the 1990s were basically constituted around two issues: human rights and labour. Human rights were visible for the actions of bodies and organizations of the civil society (OSC for the words in Spanish) dedicated to struggles against the repression during the dictatorship and the search of justice during democracy (Blanco, 2004; Bonaldi, 2006), and/or repression in democracy (Gingold, 1996; Smulovitz, 2008). Access to work was the agglutinative axis of the movements of the unemployed—many of which were named as 'picketeers' for their road blockades—who became one of the political phenomena of greater impact (Svampa and Pereyra, 2003). Although recent research reports the presence of youths in such organizations, their allegiance and motivation were not generational (Otero, 2003; Quirós, 2006; Vommaro, 2007; Zibechi, 2003).

The crisis of 2001 aroused the interest of social sciences for exploring novel phenomena which emerged—in different manners—in such political moment, expressed in new actors such as the assemblymen, the savers, barter clubs or the territorial organizations, which joined the picketeer phenomenon that had called the interest of the academy since the events in Cultral Có in Neuquén and Tartagal in Salta.[8] In spite of the smaller scale and impact, we could also include the women's movement, and the movement for the rights of sexual minorities, as movements that have recruited young people, but where no juvenile agendas have been identified.

In a context in which the analyses of political behaviours generally made emphasis on the crisis of political representation (Balardini, 2000; Kozel, 1996; Urresti, 2000), the second tendency in youth and politics studies was taking shape, shifting the interrogation on juvenile participation in modern institutions towards the inquiry in new participative experiences where the performative has a special relevance (Kropff and Nuñez, 2010).

The second tendency is composed of studies centered in the search of politicity in juvenile practices that are not usually called political—many times not even by the youths who perform them. The disciplines that approached this topic from this perspective with greatest interest were Sociology of Culture, Anthropology and Communication Sciences. And for the case of subjectivity we should add Psychology. Most of these projects inquire into the production made by youths in spaces that were classically considered 'recreational'. Among the studies that incorporate this analytical character, we find the ones that explore the production in juvenile aesthetic-musical practices like rock (Seman and Vila, 1999; Vila, 1985), uses of public spaces (Chaves, 2003; Saraví, 2004), football (Alabarces and Rodriguez, 1996; Garriga Zucal, 2007), circus groups (Infantino, 2005), concerts (Citro, 2000), cybercafés (Remondino, 2005), cultural styles (Chaves, 2009; García, 2007). These instants of identitarian construction far from implying 'doing nothing', acquire centrality as a meeting and production space; this 'hanging around' for many youths is the setting where they assembly and disassembly identity strategies and in some cases, they imply cultural transformations in a broader scale.

The investigations that account for the constitution of the political subjectivity in youths are envisioned as a very fertile space to understand the complexity of political interaction. By innovating when they break away from the search of the political from pre-established loci, they place the eye on the learning of the political

in daily life thus imbricating the individual trajectories in collective and histori-
cal experiences (Bonvillani, 2009; Fernández and López, 2005). The third tendency
deals with the analysis of the construction of the juvenile in politics and in the politi-
cal. They are studies from the perspective of the construction of the age, centered in
the question on how the people of different ages and ages themselves are generated
(Bourdieu, 1998). Whence it is studied which is the incidence of the etarian in politi-
cal struggles and how the juvenile condition plays a role inside organizations, move-
ments and political institutions, either as maker of differentiations or as a condition
from which to be constituted as a political subject (Kropff, 2007). This is the most
recent tendency and studies are still very few.

Case Study: Secondary Schools, Politics and Youth

After accounting for the preoccupations addressed by studies on youth and politics
in the 1980s and introducing the three tendencies that developed after that period, in
this section we discuss the juvenile political practices in schools of neighbouring
cities, La Plata (capital of the Province of Buenos Aires) and Ensenada.[9] During the
last months of 2010 when more than 30 secondary schools were taken by students
for several days in demand of better building facilities, the City of Buenos Aires and
in a similar way the City of Cordoba, seemed to relive the heyday of student political
mobilization reminding us of earlier times. The pictures contrasted with the sup-
posed 'apathy' of youth and, perhaps for that same reason, they surprised many
observers and aroused impassioned debates. The surprise evidenced the estrange-
ment at the juvenile; this is why the postures before this phenomenon could be clas-
sified, in a rather schematic fashion, in two types of discourse. On one hand, the
transgressor and rebellious character of the youths—'inherently' transformers of
reality—was saluted, on the other, they were labelled as 'bums' who had better be
concerned with just studying without making 'political' demands.

    The measures adopted by the students replicated central features of Argentinean
political culture. Such as we stated before, during the last years, political life was
nurtured by a repertoire of actions (street blockades, pickets, popular assemblies,
'escraches' and political paintings) which were also appropriated and re-signified by
the young people. Although the field work developed some years before the mobili-
zation of 2010, we believe that the findings allow asking about the forms that politi-
cal participation acquires at present and how they account for the continuities and
mutations of the way contemporary youths assume their condition of citizens. It is an
opportunity to examine the characteristics that political identities adopt, the signifi-
cance that spaces like a 'Centro de Estudiantes'—Student Centre—and the 'piquete'
acquire as well as to observe cultural transformations of a broader scope.

    For that purpose, we will briefly present the stories of Gabriela and Nora; two
young women with different biographies. Nora attends one of the most valued and
renowned educational institutions of the city of La Plataand Gabriela attends the
only secondary school there is in the city of Ensenada. Both identify themselves as
political activists, Nora in a 'traditional' space of juvenile militancy of the Students

Centre at her school and Gabriela in a novel instance, since she participates in pickets organized by the social organization she belongs to.

It is neccessary to highlight that this finding contradicts the most extended representations on juvenile political action. In general, in the broadcasting of pictures of youths making claims in the public scene, the male faces prevail. The mobilizations, the marches, street or road blockades appear to require the strength of males. The public space is established as mainly masculine, thus rendering the place of women invisible. During our research we found—as these two stories reflect—that women are more active both in neighbourhood organizations (which became a place staged by women as guarantors of family reproduction) and in the students centres at school (partly because of the transmission of experiences of compromise with education as a sphere of action specific of women).

Their stories offer other lessons. The case of Gabriela is paradigmatic, since—as she was known as the 'picketeer'—the teachers wanted her to boost the formation of a Student Center, which she declined. In our interview with her, she argued that she felt free to express any problems she found at school and for that reason, it was not necessary to create a specific space. Probably being known as a picketeer gave her an acknowledgement that amply exceeded the one she would have as a student representative. While 'picketeer' is a term used by some of her classmates as a stigmatizing mark, Gabriela gives it other meanings allowing her to see herself as equal to her teachers in the public arena, for instance when meeting a teacher at a march against environmental contamination. On the other hand, Nora participates in the Students Centre of her school but it is questioned by the school authorities and a few teachers for its conflictive profile. This situation results in a devaluation of politics that delegitimizes its functions. The opposition young—adult does not manifest openly but from the construction of a negative stereotype of the profile of the student who participates, also shared by many of Nora's partners. This operation apart from reaffirming the sense of ownership of a 'we'—an eminently juvenile student grouping, identified not only by their political ideas but principally by aesthetics—it constructs distances with the political sensibilities of the adults and those of other youths as well. On the one hand, some adults refer to them as 'these shitty leftists' and their partners contemptuously call them 'hippies'. But for the same reason, on the other hand the Centre becomes a space of political identification, as well as one in which the students who come by intend to identify themselves with certain aesthetics of their clothes, thus transforming a social marker which is negative for adults into a positive one. Paradoxically, while in public discourse the participation in politics is valued as characteristic of those who go along this institution, there is a hidden revaluation, which places it back as the privileged adult sphere.

The stories of Nora and Gabriela are just two among many, but knowing them allows us to glimpse the way new generations relate to politics. Their biographies teach us that the study of the juvenile political formation and action at secondary school must pay attention to the specific spaces and actions where their practices take place. Sometimes it is about institutional mechanisms of juvenile political participation that—although they are under the process of revision and discussion—are still present and other times we find different manners in which the political is

displayed at school. The diverse ways of youth's political intervention is composed of sit-down strikes, occupations (*tomas)*, participation in Student Centres, political parties, assemblies, picketeer groups or informal organizations as much as graffiti, the use of certain clothes, writing on the margins, backpacks, toilet walls, desks and classrooms, the search of dialogue with some teachers or claims for mediation.

The findings allow us to articulate the need of changing the observation lens in order to question less whom these youngsters are and more about the places where they circulate and the spaces where they meet with other young men and women. The unusual, chance and many times family histories are the traces that explain juvenile political participation. Their actions are closely related to the biographies of young people as Gabriela and Nora and to the characteristics of each institution; both the former and the latter become the indispensable keynotes of analysis in order to understand their political behaviour.

Conclusions

More than 25 years have elapsed since that day of December we use as a landmark to tell the history in Argentina, one mark among others, but one which gives continuity to a form of political action, both that of the rulers and that of the governed, based on the 'democratic principles'. When the stability of democratic governments has been achieved in a context of progression of social inequalities? And what does this mean? That there are no more weapons? That there are no more dead people? That people just vote and nobody protests? That we are all represented? That the exercise of politics has been concentrated in the hands of the politicians; men who have made that exercise their profession? That politics is badly seen? That there is depoliticization? That with democracy not all the people eat, live or are educated?

The narration of history, the revision of literature and the presentation of situations embody an explanation that combines the suspense of the integrationist matrix—for the increase of inequalities—and a participative society, involved in political actions that question some authoritarian traits it has. It is demonstrated that instead of a setting made up of apathetic actors, we have multiple channels of denunciation expressed in ways of civic activism which may differ on their claims, but in many cases share the methodology used. Given the complexity and heterogeneity of the groups to be represented, the political parties no longer represent the principal vehicle for the constitution of political identities. Juvenile identity narratives make use of other supports to construct their schemes of public intervention and, as we have characterized before, it is in other coordinates that the meanings of 'doing politics' can be learnt.

'Protest is possible' would be a merited title for the relation between youth and politics in democratic Argentina. The groups, collectives or movements reinvent the tactics and strategies at every step: piquetes and escraches are good examples of innovation. The limits of the forms of protest and the definition of that which becomes protestable (the objects of protest), contend for each situation that can be historicized : there are trajectories of protests, accumulated resources, sectors, factions

and repressions in the memory. The definition of the possible as a contested arena has not found its limits in the democracy of Argentina.

The mosaic of participative forms led, not exclusively but principally, by young activists shows pieces that combine traditional forms of protest together with novel traits, in such a way that more than opposing they amalgamate, producing new manifestations comprising old and new forms of social actions. While the earlier generations were interpellated in a transversal way for some macro-social questions, they shared a core of convictions which tied them (Cattaruzza, 1997). The youths of that time were the protagonists of a series of cultural transformations that stress the demand of respect for particularity. In a more complex and more unequal social setting, the actions of the youths redefine the frontiers between the particular and the universal.

Scientific production on youth and politics got strenghthened in the academic and scientific institutions in parallel to the emergence of the aforementioned forms of political action. This must be read as part of the process of gaining institutionality of democracy in Argentina. The results obtained until this moment provide elements to attempt answering the question about links between the various historical cohorts sharing the society they live in, its institutions and political practices.

Facing the weakening of the mechanisms of traditional social integration, young men and women recreate bonds of co-responsibility which take on a selective character. In a society used to thinking citizenship as related to nationality, the juvenile practices speak to us both about the importance of biographical and territorial proximity and about the difficulties for the construction of a common horizon of justice. The relation with the political and politics is more transient, unstable, plagued with uncertainties. Their behaviour many times alternate violent and intolerant attitudes with other solidarity and egalitarian practices. They learn and practice politics somewhat in the dark, far from referents of certainty that bygone juvenile political collectives thought they had. They count on the learning of what the political experience in non-democratic Argentina meant and on the Argentina of democracy with shakes, corruption, impunity, clientelism, particracy and gerontocracy. With all that raw material they make political expressions that bet on a nearer, fairer democracy with more rights: parties, movements, reorganized student centres, marches and protests with rhythm and colour, artistic intervention as a commotion of the public, unconformity writing at the margin, on the wall, on the body.

The modes of involvement of the life in common with the youth of the new century bare one of the decisive components of the democratic practice in the age of the 'right to have rights': uncertainty (Lefort, 2004).

Notes

1. Translated from the Spanish original version by María Virginia Ferro.
2. The last military dictatorship started on 24 March 1976 with the overthrow of President María Estela Martinez de Perón, who had succeeded her husband after his death. The pretension of establishing itself as a stage of 'national reorganization' gives this coup d´etat certain characteristics which notoriously differentiate it from earlier ones, both for the violence exerted through the state terrorism and for the socio-economical transformations

impelled. In October 1983, more than a year and a half after the military defeat in the Malvinas War that confronted the country with Great Britain between April and June of 1982, free elections were held. The elected government took office on 10 December of the same year.

3. The legal and Social Studies Centre wrote two specific reports on confinement and dis-appearance of minors **Centre for Legal and Social** (CELS, 1998, 2002). For the period before 1966–1973 of General Onganía's dictatorship and his linkage with youth, see Cousins (2008).

4. It is necessary to clarify that this logic of the political space organization is still present in the political life of the country. According to Mouffe (2005), we distinguish between 'politics' as the set of practices and institutions through which a certain order is created and 'the political' as the dimension of antagonism that the former must organize. Likewise, the construction of a 'we-them' structured in terms of enemies conspires against the possibility of consolidation of a common civic space (Mouffe, 2005).

5. At the same time, a lawsuit is filed against the leaders of the political organizations Montoneros and Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo who had developed some forms of armed guerrilla in that same period. This lawsuit finishes with the amnesty granted by President Carlos Menem in 1989. The judicial action directed in 1983 by President Raúl Alfonsín towards 'two bands', military and guerrillas, supported the interpretation of the recent past from the perspective known as 'theory of the two demons' (Vezzetti, 2003).

6. The progress in the trial of the military hierarchy and the restoration of the Rule of Law revived the trust of broad strata of society in the Law and the State as a guarantor of it. Years later, after the Ley de Obediencia Debida (Law of Due Obedience) and the Ley de Punto Final (Full stop Law) were passed (which established limits in the judging of repres-sors since they were 'carrying out orders they could not disobey' and a deadline to start the trials) many crimes were left unsanctioned. Finally, the presidential amnesty decreed by Menem in 1990 with the aim of 'pacifying the country' permitted to discharge the military leaders. Recently, both laws were repealed and the crimes such as appropriation of chil-dren born in captivity were acknowledged as crimes against humanity. This allowed for the re-opening of cases.

7. For the popular sectors and broad strata of society, the sphere of justice started to voice such rights which did not level everybody as equals but granted egalitarian guarantees of justice (Jelin, 1996). For his part, James (1999) in his study on peronism points to the process of reconfiguration of citizenship that takes place during those years, a process by which the social acquires greater preponderance than the civil and political dimensions.

8. Both cities became points of reference for the country of the new repertoire of actions of protest, where pickets became central although the self definition of the citizens oscillated between calling themselves 'picketeers' and 'stokers (fogoneros)'.

9. This article is part of the doctoral thesis 'Politics and power in high school. The juvenile political socialization in the school space' by Pedro Nuñez, directed by Inés Dussel and co-directed by Gabriel Kessler, defended in June, 2010 in the Doctorate in Social Sciences Program UNGS/IDES.

Glossary

Piquetes/Piquetero/a (pickets, picketeers): The *piquetes* as a form of protest appeared in Argentina in the 1990s and their repertoire of actions privileged road and street blockades. A number of movements took shape in those years (self) identified as

piqueteros, with heterogenous characteristics but as a common trait they used similar forms of action. Their members were called, and sometimes they want to identify themselves as *piqueteros/as*.

Escraches: Demonstrations that publicize the wrongdoings of a person. The *escrache* was the methodology employed by the group HIJOS (a human rights organization mainly formed by daughters and sons of missing people, who disappeared during the military dictatorship 1976–1983, exiled and activists) in order to denounce the address of people related to the repression and who were not convicted for their crimes. Apart from the denuncition, the demonstration included *murgas* (street carnival bands), musical bands, costumes and puppets with amazing originality that called the attention of many young people because it lacked solemnity.

Centros de Estudiantes: Student Centres are formal spaces of youth participation, where the various juvenile political groups express themselves–some are related to political parties or organizations and others are called 'independent'—whose authorities are annually renewed with the students' vote. Although there are official norms that promote their creation, their presence is diffused along the country.

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